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## A STUDY ON IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

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### ABSTRACT:

*Iran is a very important country in Middle East politics in the pre-modern era as well as in modern times. Even though, Iran has experienced a great loss of its Influence over the region due to immense pressure from imperialist Britain and the Soviet Union from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century onwards which has come an extreme level in 1941 when World War II was going on. Despite Iran's Neutrality in the II world war, Allied powers Britain and Soviet Russia occupied Iran on 25 August 1941 to get control over the supply lines from the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea through Iran. Allied powers have given assurance to Iran on its Sovereignty on some conditions. Which were very painful to the Iranian's to implement the demands. After the II*

*world war, Soviet Russia reluctant to withdraw its forces from the Iranian territory and following incidents like Azerbaijan crisis and Oil Nationalization by Mossadeq Influenced newly ascended throne Prince Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi to have and frame suitable foreign policy that protects the Integrity and Sovereignty of Iran and Iran's Foreign Policy refrained after Iranian Revolution under the Ayotullah Rouhalla Khomeini. Once again, Iran foreign policy followed the different path after the death of Khomeini and the end of the cold war period. This article examines the evolution of Iranian Foreign policies from 1941 to till to date in different stages and its consequences on the Iranian relations on the other countries should be analyzed and what are the policy options are available to encounter the current problems in the region before Iran is discussed.*

**KEYWORDS:** Azerbaijan crisis and Oil Nationalization.

### INTRODUCTION

Every country tries to fulfill its national Interest by having good relations with other countries. The country's relations with other countries depend upon how that country is balancing its foreign policy perspectives towards the different countries in different ways. And also the foreign policy of a country is influenced by so many factors i.e., historical perspectives of a country, Location of a country

(geography), type of boundaries and economy of that country.

Iran is a very important country in the west Asian region, geographically, Iran is located in the middle of the region having land boundaries with Pakistan (909) and Afghanistan (936) in the East, Turkmenistan (992) in the North-East, Azerbaijan (611), Armenia (35) and Turkey (499) in the North-West and Iraq (1458) in the west and Iran lies between Caspian sea (460 m) and the Persian Gulf (1516 m). Iran covers an area of 1.65 million square km with

approximately 8 millions of people are living in the country<sup>1</sup>.

Historically, Iran is the "one country" (one in the two) has been continuing as an independent country from the ancient times, unlike other countries in the region, this had given it a psychological advance of thinking that it is different from the other states of the region. Today Iran doesn't enjoy a similar position has it enjoyed in the past

due to the overarching changes that have been evolved in the global power structure and the consequent behavior of superpowers both at a global and regional level.

Iran foreign policy could be analyzed and understood by dividing it's into three broad different phases: 1) Cold war phase (1941-1979), 2) Post-revolution phase (1979-1991), 3) Post-cold war phase (1991-Till to date).

### **Iran's Foreign Policy Perspectives in the Cold War Phase**

Second World War and immediate incidents of the Second World War were important in the history of modern Iran's foreign policy. Integrity and sovereignty, stability and sustainability of the Pahlavi regime in Iran are the influential driving forces of foreign policies in this phase. To counter all these forces, Iran followed different policy perspectives, which are; pro-American perspectives and anti-communist perspectives and maintained cordial relations with neighbors in the region are the leading Iranian foreign policy perspectives in this phase.

Iran took a neutral stand in the ongoing Second World War, despite the fact that the shah of Iran maintained a close relationship with the Germans who established colonies in Iran. In this situation, German's attack on Russia directly resulted in the Iranian occupation in August 1941 by allied powers. Because, Iran was strategically very important for the allied powers to have the supply line to send military aid from Britain to USSR<sup>2</sup>. Allied powers gave assurance to Iran over its sovereignty and demanded Iran that the Iranian's have to take necessary steps to send out German's from the Iranian territory and also declare war against the Axis powers. To fulfill this demands some internal changes in Iran needed for avoiding the popular resistance. For this, Reza Khan abdicated in favor of his son Mohammad Reza Shah who became the new king on September 17, 1941, and declared war against axis powers in 1942 (Axis powers- Germany, Italy, and Japan).

### **Pro-American Foreign Policy**

Iran's war declaration on-axis power was the turning point in Iranian history as well as for foreign policy. Since then, Iran does not look back and continued its friendly relations with the western countries, especially, Britain and America. Not only that, Shah of Iran fascinated towards the USA because he was studied in the USA. Initially, he had good relations with the Americans before he came to the throne. Allied forces attended the Tehran conference in 1943 in Iran and assured that friendly relations would be continued in the future. Finally, allied powers won the war and Britain withdrew its military forces from Iran as per the agreement<sup>3</sup>. But, Russians were unwilling to withdraw its forces and the occupation continued. Iran went to the UN Security Council on the problem, despite many a time the council demanded USSR to withdraw from Iranian territory and the USSR did not relent. Finally, USSR withdrew its military forces from Iran. USA and UK helped to strengthen the Shah regime through the removal of Dr. Mossadeq on his nationalization of oil in the country in 1953.

Shah strongly believed that the country should be modernized on a secular basis, and also his country should be equipped with Modern arsenal and for complete development, for this, Shah wanted to go with the USA. That's why Iran along with its neighbor's Turkey and Pakistan went to join US-backed CENTO in 1955<sup>4</sup>. It was established to stop USSR communism in the region. Iran used this as to protect its borders from the USSR invasion. USA and Iran signed an agreement concerning civil uses of Atomic Energy at Washington on 5 March 1957<sup>5</sup> which came into force on 27 April 1959. According to this agreement, the USA and Iran desire to cooperate with each other in the development of such peaceful uses of atomic energy and the design and development of several types of research reactors are well advanced.

### **Anti-Communist Policy**

Iran and USSR have been maintaining hostile relations ever since the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries onwards. Once again in 1946 Russian military forces did not withdraw from Iranian territory. USSR provoking Tudeh party workers to over through the regime and to form communist government<sup>6</sup>. So, Iran was suspicious about the USSR extension policy towards its boundaries. Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan

joined in the USA sponsored CENTO mainly because of USSR hostile relations with the countries. Iran had maintained hostile relations throughout this period. In 1963, to some extent, Iran assured USSR that we did not allow foreign countries to use and establish a military base in its territory against the USSR, which came in the light of USA negligence towards Iran about fund allocation which was cut off gradually. Iran took indigenous steps to change the social structure in the name of the white revolution and also taken actions to have moderate and divergent foreign policy perspectives.

### Iran's Relations with the Region

Iran wanted to maintain friendly relations with the border sharing countries. Moreover, Iran does not have territory disputes or boundary problems with most of the neighbor countries except Iraq over the Shatt-al- Arab waterway. It was a long-standing dispute between Iran and Iraq that came to end by way of abandoning of Iraq's claims over the waterway as per the Algiers Agreement signed both parties in 1975<sup>7</sup>. And USSR also another challenger to Iran, USSR and Iraq have concluded a treaty in 1972 against Iran. Even though Iraq entered into a 1975's Algiers agreement with Iran due to Iran's Good relations with the countries of the Arabian peninsula.

Iran and Saudi Arabia enjoyed close relations with each other as members of OPEC. Iran and Saudi Arabia had contention with Egypt over the active role of Nasser in the Non-Aligned movement by his claiming as leader of the Islam world. That's why; these countries had worked to oppose UAR actions under Egypt. That could be observed in the North-Yemen war (1961-1962) where both countries helped Yemenis against Egypt<sup>8</sup>.

In the cold war politics. Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan stood on the USA side and joined in CENTO in 1955. It was a security and defense pact formed to contend USSR in the region. While the United States has committed approximately \$ 33 million to the CENTO economic programs Britain provided 850000 pounds each year for its technical assistance projects. In spite of that, they have proceeded to enter into "Regional Cooperation Development" (RCD) for the economic collaboration in 1963 outside CENTO.

### Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Revolution Period

The year 1979 a watershed year in the history of Iran. The foreign policy of Iran was taken a reversible stand when it was followed by the overthrown Shah Regime. Who was ousted by the popular Imam Ayatolla Rouhulla Khomeini by his miss deeds to the country under the control of the USA. This revolution has led to a change in the nature of the state in order to impose Islamic ideology on society. Islam became the fundamental duty of the government and follows the Islamic law "Sharia" in social engineering. Islamic ideologies, Iran exportation of the revolution are the leading influential factors of the foreign policy during this period<sup>9</sup>. By following this ideology,

With the domestic Politics and geopolitics of Iran could directly impact on overall foreign policy perspective that has a confrontational foreign policy with the superpowers and the neighbor countries in the region in this period.

Khomeini appointed Mehdi Bazargan as a provisional prime minister on February 5, 1979. Bazargan had perceived cordial relations with America and the west. Further, in October 1979, Shah Admission into the USA led widespread Protests and Seizure of the US embassy, captured the 52 diplomats by the students caused to the Resignation of Bazargan, immediately Khomeini appointed Bani-Sadr as a first president of Islamic Republic of Iran. Followed the same foreign policy of the Bazargan<sup>10</sup>.

### Iran's Confrontational Foreign Policy

**A) Hostage Crisis -1979:** the seizure of the US embassy on 4 November 1979 and 444 days long continued hostage crisis had created a long gap between the USA and Iran. Khomeini offered his support to the student by saying " I have said repeatedly that the taking of hostages by our militant, committed Muslim students was a natural reaction to the blows our nation suffered at the hands of America." while Khomeini genuinely hated "The Great Satan" and also Khomeini used the slogan

“neither east nor west”<sup>11</sup> to advocate that Iran should not have relations with either the USSR or the US governments nor with the governments closely associated with the superpowers.

The US strongly reacted to Iran's war of words by freezing of \$12 billion Iranian assets and varying degrees of economic sanctions by some other western countries exerted significant pressure on Iran. And also the US provoked the allied powers to come unite against Iran. That's why Gulf countries in the region came together to establish the gulf cooperation council (GCC) in 1981 under the leadership of Saudi Arabia<sup>12</sup>. This was formed to curb the exportation of the Iranian revolution in addition to the other objectives of the council.

Iran -Iraq war-(1980-88): Iraq invaded Iran in September 1980 by violating the 1975 Algiers agreement over the Shatt-al-Arab<sup>13</sup>. Iraq was backed by Saudi Arabia and the USA, especially the US helped Iraq by providing satellite photos of Iran's army position which helped it to have control over Iran. Iranian clerics did not have previous experience in the war. Moreover, two superpowers are supplying arms to Iraq. The survival of the Islamic Republic of Iran is fundamental to the countries interests. So Iran used the hostage crisis to obtain arms and spare parts of the equipment from Israel to continue the war against Iraq. This is a controversial and realistic foreign policy formulated to survive the regime at that time. Iran continuously opposed Israel and expressed strong concern over the existence of Israel. Even though Israel supplied arms to Iran for releasing the hostages.

As per the agreement between USSR-Iraq 1972<sup>14</sup>, Soviet Russia supported and supplied large quantities of arms to Iraq. In addition to this, European countries like France, Britain, and Germany supported Iraq in the war. Finally, Iran became isolated in this situation. The only country supported Iran is Syria at the same time Iran severely affected by the immediate downfall of the oil prices in 1986-87. Iran has lost the lives of the soldiers and Iraq used Chemical weapons over the Iranian army personnel. Thousands of soldiers have lost their lives in the war. This is a brutal activity no one commented on these killings.

Iraq's aggression unified all Iranians behind Ayatollah Khomeini. Because of the war, all the power was consolidated in the hands of Khomeini and this led to the establishment of the Islamized nature of the state i.e. Islamic Republic of Iran, but in the revolution, two fractions were dominant to influence the countries foreign policy. They are Conservatives and Reformists. Khomeini thought that two divergent fractions are very important to balance the people opinion not to take extreme steps against the republic.

### **Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Period**

Iran and Iraq came out from their differences and concluded a ceasefire to stop eight years of war in 1988. Iran's economy and military were seriously damaged and weakened. Iran concentrated on the reconstruction of its devastated economy by the eight years long war. Contrast to this, Iraq was under pressure to repay its debts have taken from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia emerged with the best-equipped armed forces in the region.

Facing these new realities, Iran followed the pragmatic foreign policy to overcome the present bad situation<sup>15</sup>. It has taken conciliatory steps to forge friendly relations with the western countries especially with the United States of America and with the regional countries mainly with Saudi Arabia. After the demise of Ayatollah Rhoulla Khomeini, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani became the most influential political leader in Iran. As a president of Iran, Rafsanjani pursued a four-pronged strategy. Firstly, Iran committed to regional stability by saying no export of revolution goals. Second, Iran tried to contain by convincing the other countries of the region that Iraq posed the greatest threat to their rule. Third, Iran began a dialogue with Saudi Arabia, hoping to reduce tension and develop friendly relations even the oppositions from the hardliners in the country. Finally, Iran also maintains friendly relations with the littoral countries of the Persian Gulf.

While Iran was adjusting to these new conditions, Iraq invaded Kuwait, forcing Tehran to reformulate its policy once more.

The region witnessed another war in 1991 i.e. Gulf War. Iraq started an invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 by rejecting the debts payments to Kuwait. Iran was the first Persian Gulf country to



condemn Iraq and demand its withdrawal from Kuwait immediately. The introduction of thousands of United States troops into the region, however, placed Rafsanjani in a delicate position. Suggestions have come from both sides about Iran's stand over the ongoing war. Some of them said to support the USA, others said to support Iraq, but Rafsanjani pragmatism saved Iran from pursuing such suicidal policies. He opted "active neutral policy"<sup>16</sup> that not supporting either; Iran would be acting to promote its national interests.

The end of the gulf war did not bring peace to the region. The post-Gulf war in Iraq was turbulence with the Kurds rebellion for the separate statehood leads to the mass execution of Kurds and Shi's by Saddam Husain. Iran demanded Saddam Husain resignation on this regard. During the war and after Iran gained huge benefit from the increasing oil prices between US\$3 and US\$5 billion in additional revenue. This boom helped Iran to take the initiation of nuclear installation through the assistance of Russia and China. Meanwhile, the USSR dissolution in 1991 and the number of US military create fears in the makers of the Iranian foreign policy that needs to reshape the entire policy once again.

Iran needs to tackle so many issues in the post-cold war period. The dissolution of the USSR created instability in the northern frontier as a result of emerging new countries like Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan. Iran successfully overcame from this instability by mediating between Christian Armenia and Muslim Azerbaijan in the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh. Another piece of evidence and this is important to Russia, is that, in the civil conflict in Tajikistan between the government and the Islamist opposition groups, Iran did not tilt towards the Islamic fractions, in fact, tried to act as an 'honest' broker between the two factions. As per Iran's foreign policy towards central Asia is concerned evolved through constructive and non-ideological<sup>17</sup>. This is very much contrast with Tehran's policy with other than central Asia. Because Iran wants to be close with Russia to counter American dominance in the Persian Gulf and It is also important for Russia to enter the region to restart the game again. Since then Russia became the closest partner of Iran and this partnership is being helped to overcome recent nuclear agreement with the P5+1 and Russian aid to protect the Assad regime in Syria is very important for Iran's national interests.

Iran established good relations with the East Asian countries as per its "look east" strategy. India and China also became close to Iran to realize its national interest by import oil to boost its economic growth vice-versa. And Iran's growing influence in the region by active participation in resolving the Afghan crisis and Central Asia's instability. In the meantime, US presidents Bill Clinton & George Bush followed the "dual containment" policy against Iran and Iraq but it was mostly directed to Iran. So, the Clinton administration has imposed sanctions on Iran on May 6, 1995, on Executive order of 12957, which banned all trade between US and Iran by claiming allegation on Iran covert nuclear rapprochement with Russia and China. US urged G7 group countries to impose same sanctions as what it is done. But Germany and Japan establish good economic bondage with Iran for their oil dependence. Clinton's second term presidency was softer toward Iran, in the Mohammad Khatami's presidency who is a moderate and reformist candidate actively working to improve relations with the US. Same to this Clinton Administration agreed to compensate the Iranian government for the death of 254 Iranians in a 1988 Iranian commercial passenger plane incident was shot down by US Vincennes and apologized to the Iranian people on 1953 CIA coup on P.M Mohammed Mossadeq in 1997 which led to a friendly rapprochement between two nations. Finally Clinton accepted to lift the ban on Iran but Congress did not accept the Ayatollah Ali Khomeini demands that withdrawal of its support to Israel, lifting of 95's sanctions, stop accusing Tehran attempts to develop nuclear weapons and stop accusing Iran as a "rogue state"<sup>18</sup>

After the 9/11 incident, the US and Iran became close partners to work on "war on terror" US invaded Afghanistan to bring down Al-Qaeda backed Taliban government in Afghanistan to punish the culprits in the 9/11 incidents. In which Iran played a key role by giving strategic information about the Taliban army to the US and its direct participation to guide US troops in the land helped to control the Taliban's posts in Afghanistan. But in the year 2002, Georg Bush became president, announced that Iran, Iraq and North Korea were the "axis of evils" and also news about Iran's covert nuclear program

came out and by the pressures from the western countries Mohammad Khatami was accepted negotiations with the EU-3 consisting the UK, France, and Germany, discussions were held in several times and prepared proposals from both sides rejected each other<sup>19</sup>.

Once again Iran tries to follow confrontational foreign policy with the western countries by suspending the negotiations with the western countries as well as IAEA. It began with the hard-line conservative candidate President Mahmud Ahmadinejad elected in 2005 elections. By saying Israel should be "wiped out from the map", then China, Russia and USA joined with EU 3 termed as a P5+1, IAEA passed resolutions thrice in Sept 2005, February 2006 and in November 2009 against Iran's non-compliance of the safeguard obligation under the NPT, refer Iran to the UN security council and suspend construction of its newly revealed uranium enrichment plant at Qom. But Iran did not come to the negotiations with the western countries as its confrontational policy. In contrast to this, most of the countries expressed their great anxiety over Iran clandestine nuclear program. Especially Israel, which insists Ariel attack on Iran's nuclear sites under the USA, but it was rejected under the Barak Obama presidency. He wanted to settle the issue through negotiations.

In 2011-12, Iran became isolated in the world through the western countries by asking the world countries not to import oil from Iran and also imposed sanctions on the international banks which are following transactions with Iran. US exercised successfully through convincing the major oil importers of Iran i.e. China, India and Japan. Because of this, the Iran economy severely affected and foreign reserves decreased, high Inflation and Un-employment. Due to this, Iran can't survive its allies in the region from the opponents grown as part of the Arab spring. This situation leads to peaceful settlement for its decade long controversial nuclear program.

### Iran Nuclear Deal- 2015 & its Controversies

Under the reformist, moderate president Hassan Rouhani, newly elected in 2013 Elections, Iran went to conclude its controversial nuclear programme through conciliatory steps. Iran signed on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on July 14, 2015, was prepared by the P5+1 in Lausanne in Switzerland on April 2015. Iran reached out from 13 years of its controversial nuclear programme which assured Iran that Sanctions would be left after six months from the agreement date<sup>20</sup>. Meanwhile, Iran fulfills all its JCOPA commitments. By January of this year sanctions left off, Iran now free for doing its business with the world countries. This was welcomed by the GCC countries and the world countries except for Israel, which claimed that the deal is "Historical Mistake" for the region as well as the world.

For Iran, it's very important to make an agreement with the P5+1 to overcome its Isolation in the world. This helps in the flow of foreign funds into the Iran Economy. Then it can survive as well as it can frame a foreign policy for protecting its national interests in the region. But, the announcement of withdrawal from JCPOA by the US president Donald Trump on May 2018 and the imposition of sanctions on Iran from November 2018 are the contending factors for the Iran foreign relations.<sup>21</sup> US warships toward the Persian Gulf are making to growing tensions between Iran and the US. Iran also threatening that the Strait Hormuz would be closed if at all attacked Iran. This type of war of words between both sides creating a cold war in the West Asian region.

### CONCLUSION

Iran foreign policy did not unique in the different stages. Which got an implement divergent foreign policy trends in the different stages. Iran in the Shah period maintained close relations with the United States of America and the US allies and it has not good relations with the USSR and its allies in the Cold war Period. In the Post-Revolution period, Iran has relations neither with the USA nor with USSR, not with the regional countries as well. Iran tried to establish friendly relations with the third world countries by joining in Non-Aligned Movement. In the Post cold war period, Iran foreign policy mixed with the Cooperative foreign policy and Confrontational foreign policy. Iran and Russia came to close after the USSR dissolution. Russia and China became the trusty partners that have built nuclear reactors and assisted in nuclear technology. Concealed nuclear activities of Iran came to light in 2002. Since then Iran economy struggled with the sanctions imposed by the UN and the US. Iran successfully

reached an agreement with the P5+1 countries to end sanctions on its economy on July 14, 2015. But the tensions between the US and Iran are started once again by US President Donald Trump announcement of withdrawal from JCPOA and the imposition of sanctions on Iran in November 2018. Now, Iran Foreign Policy is under pressure to maintain relations with world countries.

## NOTES

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