

The Diverse Approaches towards Iran's Nuclear Issue among Muslim World and the Great Powers

Sakhanan Rattananungsun

International Relations, Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand
Email: kuang2525@hotmail.com

Abstract

The Iran's Nuclear Program is one of the most significant subjects of contemporary International Relations that significantly impact our world today. Whether its Nuclear Program is a potential source of energy for civilian or a move towards the development of Nuclear Weapons, the one series of the Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD), depends on the inherent political and economic (Politico-economic Power) benefits and the purposes of individual actors. The study illustrates the Muslim World and the Great Power approaches toward Iran's Nuclear Program in order to understand their incentives in the context of international relations. The qualitative research methodology is used in this study. The results are from the secondary sources of information like the news, reports, articles, journals, press release and other official government documents on various websites. The study, which is based on Realist and Balance of Power perspective together with Muslim Ummah and Intergovernmentalism school of thoughts, reveals that the Muslim World approach to the issue is to gain solidarity among Islamic countries and the survival of the regime in an international system, and to deter the Great Power's influence in the region. The Balance of Power study confirms that there is concealed power matching move and the Nuke capabilities are employed as a means to become a formidable voice in the international platform even to an inferior state. The Great Power may seem to approach Iran's Nuclear Issue to avert terrorism but in the region with large power resource located in the main marine route, there are proofs that individual countries of the Great Power want to stretch their power over the region for its own political and economic benefits.

Keywords: *Iran's nuclear program, Muslim World, The Great Powers*

บทคัดย่อ

วิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้มุ่งศึกษานโยบายระหว่างประเทศของโลกมุสลิมและมหาอำนาจต่อการพัฒนานิวเคลียร์ในประเทศอิหร่าน ซึ่งทั่วโลกให้ความสนใจขณะนี้ โดยมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาถึงเหตุผลและวาระซ่อนเร้นของแนวนโยบายระหว่างประเทศที่มหาอำนาจและกลุ่มมุสลิมเลือกใช้ในการจัดการกับประเด็นการพัฒนานิวเคลียร์ในประเทศอิหร่าน โดยใช้วิธีการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ จากแหล่งข้อมูลทุติยภูมิเช่นข่าว รายงาน บทความ นิตยสาร สื่อสิ่งพิมพ์และเอกสารของรัฐที่ปรากฏบนหน้าเว็บไซต์ต่างๆ กรอบแนวคิดที่ใช้ในการศึกษาคือทฤษฎีการถ่วงดุลอำนาจและสันนิษฐานถึงแนวคิดความเป็นองค์กรระหว่างรัฐและความเป็นปึกแผ่นของประชาชาติมุสลิม ผลการศึกษาพบว่าประชาชาติมุสลิมใช้ประเด็นการพัฒนา นิวเคลียร์ของอิหร่านเพื่อจะได้มาซึ่งความเป็นปึกแผ่นระหว่างประเทศมุสลิมและความอยู่รอดของอาณาจักรในระบบระหว่างประเทศและหยุดยั้งอิทธิพลของมหาอำนาจในภูมิภาค การศึกษาในมุมมองของทฤษฎีการถ่วงดุลอำนาจยืนยันว่าการขับเคลื่อนวาระซ่อนเร้นในการแข่งขันทางอำนาจอยู่ โดยเอาเรื่องการพัฒนานิวเคลียร์เป็นข้อต่อรองให้เวทีนานาชาติยอมรับเสียงของตน หากวิเคราะห์โดยสันนิษฐานจากมุมมองมหาอำนาจจัดการปัญหาการพัฒนา นิวเคลียร์เพื่อกำจัดผู้ก่อการร้ายแต่ถ้าพิจารณาให้ดีจะเห็นว่าในพื้นที่ที่อุดมด้วยแหล่งพลังงานขนาดใหญ่และอยู่ในเส้นทางเดินเรือหลักนั้น มหาอำนาจเข้ามาจัดการประเด็นนิวเคลียร์เพื่อผลประโยชน์ทางการเมืองและเศรษฐกิจเป็นสำคัญ บทสรุปคือ ความสัมพันธ์เชิงซ้อนของอิหร่านในภูมิภาคใน ๓ ระดับทำให้การตอบโต้ประเด็นนิวเคลียร์ของอิหร่านนั้นซับซ้อนกว่าที่เห็น การเป็นปึกแผ่นของประชาชาติมุสลิมไม่อาจถ่วงดุลเพราะแนวโน้มของอารยธรรมตะวันตกและการเรียกร้องเสรีภาพทำให้ชาวมุสลิมอ่อนแอ ทุกอย่างจึงเป็นเรื่องของการเมืองมากกว่าศาสนาแม้แต่ความเป็นอิสลาม

คำสำคัญ: *โครงการนิวเคลียร์ในประเทศอิหร่าน โลกมุสลิม มหาอำนาจ*

1. Introduction

The Iran's Nuclear Issue has been the subject of international political disputes for many decades, which concerns whether its proliferation is for the purpose of equipping the country with a powerful weapon or for civilian benefits. It started in 1950's when Iran and the US were allies and the US supported

Iran's Nuclear through "Atoms for Peace" program. After Shah, Iran became an enemy to the Great Powers, when it was more independent and more Islamic through Islamic Revolutionary government establishment. In the 1970s, the U.S. very strongly supported the development of nuclear energy in Iran. Kissinger, (former deputy Defense Secretary Paul) thought it was wonderful. Kissinger's argument was that Iran should not use up oil for energy; it should save it. Nuclear power should be used as another source of energy. Later, the same people made the opposite argument. Stating that Iran had plenty of oil and natural gas, they tried to convince the world that if Iran was trying to enrich uranium, it must have been for weapons. Kissinger was asked by the Washington Post why he changed his argument. He responded that Iran and US had been allies then, so nuclear energy had been necessary. However, as they were now enemies, nuclear energy would no longer be needed (Linzer, 2005).

Whether Iran can build Nuclear Weapon has not quite been determined, but the issue has been seriously raised among the Great Power countries in the international stage. Most international relations scholars assume that there is a set of countries called "*Great Powers*" that have greater effects on world politics than many other countries combined. Gilpin (1981, p. 30) stated that the countries are named as the Great Power, known today as superpowers, establishes and enforces the basic rules and rights influencing their own countries and others. Great Powers are presumed to enjoy certain advantages while most other states are denied. For this research, the Great Power refers to EU-3 (France, Germany, United Kingdom), the United States of America (USA), and China. There have been many studies from the Western scholars attempting to elevate the Iran's Nuclear Program to the weaponized stage. The achievement of Iranian scientists on indigenous nuclear capability development, the existing Iranian nuclear infrastructure, the uranium enrichment, nuclear arms race and its non-cooperative effort to the enhanced safeguards system contained in the IAEA's were used to justify the concern. However, for more than 30 years since 1983, their theories have not been prominent proof of nuclear weaponization. The study in this paper will prove that Iran's Nuclear Issue is only a political excuse for the Great Power to gain advantage in the resource-rich region and for the Muslim World to obtain security and international influence.

2. Objectives

The objectives of this study is to understand the political events in Muslim World and the Great Powers. The paper does not only focus on the events but also compares the approaches of both Muslim World and Great Powers towards Iran's Nuclear Program. The study will shed light on what changes the Iran's Nuclear Issue will generate in the domestic dynamics of the individual actors, and in the international and regional balance of power.

3. Materials and Methods

The study employs a qualitative approach by reviewing the information on the internet (or secondary sources) as data collection. Secondary sources such as news websites, reports, articles, journals, press release and other official government websites are used for data collection. According to Bryman and Bell (2007), qualitative method is flexible and more adaptable during the data collecting process. Meanwhile, Perren and Ram (2004) suggested that the advantage of qualitative research would allow the researcher to understand the complexity of the whole process.

In order to answer the research questions, in-depth analysis of secondary data is necessary. However, the major analysis part would be the connection and comparison between the theories and the related political as well as nuclear situation presented in the reports and news on Muslim World and Great Powers in their approaches toward the Iran's Nuclear Program.

4. Results and Discussion

So far, this work has provided a brief theoretical discussion on Muslim World's and the Great Power's approaches toward the Iran's Nuclear Program by using two frameworks, the realist and the balance of power, where different school of thoughts of 'Muslim Ummah', and 'Intergovernmentalism Approach' are taken into consideration for the Muslim World. Now, this conclusion will answer the three questions raised in the introduction: first, what is/are the Muslim World's approach(es) towards the Iran's Nuclear Issue?; second, what is/are the Great Power's approach(es) towards the Iran's Nuclear Issue?; and

third, what is/are the different approaches between the Muslim World and the Great Powers towards the Iran's Nuclear Issue?

In the balance of power perspective, to maintain a relatively powerful state among Middle East countries, the research has to focus on Israel, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. These countries were chosen because they share mutual interest in nuclear power. However, these countries have shown their interests in nuclear at the different periods of time within half the century (Acton & Bowen, 2008). Looking back to historical records and circumstances of Iran and Israel in a nuclear competition, it was not "absurd risks" as others believe. There are various evidences that show the miscalculation between these rivals of nuclear competition. According to Krepinevich (2013), "There is no compelling evidence that Iranian and Israeli leaders have a clear sense of how the other side calculates cost, benefit, and risk". Israel and Iran has been long-term enemies. It is hard to predict when the nuclear competition will end, since both countries have their own reasons to acquire the nuclear weapons. However, it is very clear that Iran has attempted to use nuclear to attack Israel for territories and power in the Middle East area. On the other hand, Israel was allied with Iraq first to create wars against Iran for power as well. They both are afraid of another side gaining more power and taking revenge. This is an interesting point that supports the idea of "their competition will hardly end".

According to Acton and Bowen (2008) and Shihab-Eldin (2012), Saudi Arabia is the major motivator of the announcement made by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in December 2006. Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is an organization that launched a joint programme in nuclear technology for the purpose of world peace and developed a first joint NPP in 2009, according to international standards and arrangements. Moreover, Saudi Arabia has shown an interest in developing a nuclear power capability since the 1970s. Its main purpose is to apply it in the field of desalination (Acton & Bowen, 2008). The major countries that assist Saudi Arabia to develop a nuclear program are: Russia, France and the United States. It is apparent that Saudi Arabia and Iran have no power balancing relations in the Middle East since both of them have different objectives towards the nuclear program. Iran has been perceived as having a hidden agenda on acquiring nuclear program while Saudi Arabia, on the contrary, wanted to use nuclear technologies under peaceful and environmental friendly intention to obtain water resources from nuclear desalination. Saudi Arabia has no intention to fight against Iran on any purpose. Therefore, these countries have no need to balance their power against each other.

Egypt had an interest in nuclear power development since the 1960s (Acton & Bowen, 2008); "It entered into numerous sets of negotiations and even signed contracts for the provision of nuclear reactors with, among others, Siemens and Westinghouse, but without any significant results". However, the government of Egypt has planned for nuclear power plants to develop electricity generation and water desalination since the 1980's (Windsor & Kessler, 2007). The rational for a nuclear program is in line with the expectations of economic development. However, Egypt's future of nuclear program depends on newly empowered public opinion and the availability of financial resource, possibly via the partnering policies with Russia and China in Turkey and Jordan (Shihab-Eldin, 2012). There is few evidences show the relationship of the balance of power between Egypt and Iran. They have no direct relationship regarding nuclear issue since both of them have different objectives toward the requirement of nuclear program. Iran has always tried to acquire nuclear weapon for wars against other countries in this region as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. On the other hand, the intention of acquiring nuclear for Egypt is for nuclear power plant construction to develop electricity generation and water desalination. Egypt has a purpose to increase its economic and energy growth rate.

After reviewing all the literatures and evidences on the balance of power in the Middle East, it was found that Iran is the active country that needs to gain power through nuclear program and use it against other conflicting countries. The case of Israel and Iran is a good example of high nuclear competition per above discussion. Obviously, Israel attempted to fight Iran back and protect the country and balance the power against Iran. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia and Egypt have less interest in balancing the power against Iran since all of them need nuclear program for the state energy resource purpose.

Considering the realist theory, which emphasizes the state's self-interest towards responding to the issue on a relative-gain basis, Muslim Ummah in the form of OIC illustrates that Iran's Nuclear Issue to the Muslim World concerns collective defense and its mission to invoke solidarity within the Muslim Ummah.

The basic argument is that a Muslim World will probably consider Iran's Nuclear Issue as a measure to counter Israel's alleged nuclear capability and the US threat. It is a sign of opposition towards the Zionist regime and the pride in its resistance against the bullying of the most insolent and arrogant power in the world while preserving unity and solidarity. The Muslim World believes that, with its OIC strength and the closer cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia, it can assume a paramount historical role in shaping the new world order, making an impact in the international community (Nasseri, 2014). Whether the Unity and solidarity of Muslim Ummah is warranted depends largely on the OIC's international weight (Richey, 1997). Hence, OIC engaged Iran in all-out cooperation with other member states of the OIC for the implementation of major developmental projects among member countries through Islamic Development Bank support. Muslim World through OIC, approaches Iran's Nuclear Issue as significant in regional political equations.

OIC, in the balance of power perspective, revealed to the World that Iran's nuclear program was her own domestic affairs that the OIC would not interfere. The Muslim World or OIC's support of the Iran Nuclear Program was to utilize the threat of military power as a lever against the Israel's secret nuclear power (Banerji, 2012), and to call on the cooperation of international regimes on nuclear issues. Their stance was to deter the interference over the Middle East region and influenced outcome of the Israel suspicious nuclear programs. However, if Iran wanted to develop nuclear weapons, it would cause an imbalance of power in the region of the Greater Middle East and a change of the status quo, which increased the risk of preemptive strikes, and additional nuclear weapon programs in the region, which might lead to the danger of nuclear arms races. In this case, in order to manage the member states on the issue of nuclear proliferation and stabilize the region, the OIC approached the Iran's nuclear program through IAEA regulation and a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in the Middle East of NPT's treaty (Krasner, 1982). In reaching Muslim Ummah's solidity and unity, OIC can attain firm and influential stand against tyranny regime in the Political world with its Iranian Nuclear Program issue. This is the prestige OIC and the Muslim World can enjoy from supporting Iran's Nuclear Program for Civil purpose.

To the realist, states act to promote maximum security in order to survive. Economic and military strategies are measures of the states to be self-sustaining and powerful. For the U.S. foreign policy, the US relations with Iran largely depends on the status of the U.S. economy and political power, and the geopolitics is mostly dictated by energy security. In the military field, the U.S. needs to remain being a big brother to stop terrorism. Hence, its action toward Iran's Nuclear Issue would be to preserve the credibility of U.S.'s action in the Middle East. However, to the Great Power, military strike is not an option as it may cause a disruption to the oil flow from the Persian Gulf and price increases which can spark another global economic crisis (Greenwald, 2012).

The individual states of the Great Powers are not really in harmony in their policy towards Iran's Nuclear Issue. All states engaged their foreign policies towards Iran's nuclear issue merely for their own benefit and survival. Whether China's policy on Iran's Nuclear Program is favourable to the US or not reflects its relationship with the US on Taiwan Issue and its economic ties with the US, since US is the leading importer of Chinese products. EU on the other hand, with its desire to be a Global Player, has been acting as a mediator on the Iran Nuclear issue shaping the negotiation framework. On the contrary, Russia policy towards Iran's Nuclear Issue is to gain leverage in relations with the US taking its sales of its S-300 air defence system missile from Russia to Iran as an example and to maintain its relation with Iran for Oil.

The balance of power held to maintain a relatively powerful state among competitors; states are constantly trying to increase their relative power with the aim of achieving regional or even world hegemony or trying to keep the status quo of power balance. In this case, states have to be very sensitive for relative gains. For a long time, the US has been trying to reduce the balance of power of Iran's through sanctions. However, the intensity and frequency of sanction bills affected the US economic benefits. Iran senses the power threat from the Super Power to invade Iran's administration, pausing the development of the Nuclear deal between Iran and the US. Seeing China and Russia as the Global Power Balance threat, US prefers to strengthen its Iran relation. China, on the contrary, would prefer Iran-US relation to tense over its nuclear projects and the Iran sanction remains put to keep Iran weak against China's Pakistan interest to gain Asia's hegemony status. In fact, Russia also sees that keeping the unresolved Iranian-Western dispute over nuclear and other regional issues is beneficial. It would leverage Russia's power balance with EU.

Russia is less sensitive to any change in the balance of power system in the Middle East and can adapt much better than China. The difference between China and Russia on Iran's Nuclear Issue is China prefers to continue its traditional role as an emerging power in hiding while Russia confronts.

In summary, The Great Power's approaches towards Iran's Nuclear Issue are well proved that they are to leverage their power among the states calling The Great Power globally and in the region for economic benefits. Even in the recent Obama's deal signed on July 14th, 2015, with Iran to lift the sanction on the "Implementation Day", the Obama's motive was the economic interests over security interests and the political pressure for its deteriorated relationship with Israel.

Differences in approach between the Muslim World and the Great Powers towards Iran's Nuclear Issue are studied in three dimensions: domestic conflicts, transnational affinities and regional state ambitions. The OIC in the international level approaches the Iran Nuclear program as a measure to illustrate solidarity of the Islamic nations to deal with the challenges but the Great Power approaches it for the global security in the international level by having a hegemonic power that is able to enforce certain rules of behaviour in international relations, because the hegemon in that case can afford the short-run costs of achieving the long-run gains. Geostrategic and Geopolitical Implications of Iran Nuclear Issue of the Great Powers are, therefore, to control energy-rich regions as well as vibrant and dynamic economies. However, the Global Power shift to Asia finds the US seeking the Nuclear Issue to confront multiple challenges to its global hegemony. The current JCPOA (The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) enables the US relations with the world's major powers, who are its principal competitors including China and Japan, to be advantageous by preventing Iran from being drawn into closer partnership with China and Russia. The Great Power's need to control the strategic marine route is vital in gaining a Global Power. Between the Great Power and the Muslim World, the former sees the latter as economically powerful because their power resources can be used as a lever to impose their views on others and the OIC's ability to mobilize Muslim populations to support them in international issues. Hence, internationally, the Iran's Nuclear Issue provides the Muslim World the solidarity and leverage in international consequences while it offers the Great Powers hegemony and money.

Regionally, the study showed that the Middle East has no single dominant and acknowledged power. There is still turbulence in the region due to intra-regional power struggles and economic conflict. There is no consensus in the Muslim World towards Iran's Nuclear Issue. In fact, there is a potential for arms race in case of Iran's Nuclear proliferation. However, Iran seems to be the only country that can play a leading role in shaping the new Middle East. The Muslim World's sentiments towards Western culture are the key to counter the fragmentation in the Muslim World by emphasizing on religious structure, the sectarian element. Iran, in this case, with a highly sophisticated clergy, whose power was placed in their hands after Islamic Revolution, in a well-developed, strong, and cultured state, is proved to be strong and will influence the new ends of Muslim World similar to that of high ranking Catholic clergy in Italy. Hence the Muslim World and the Great Power approach towards the Iran's Nuclear Issue will be on the same page in the meantime in a desert of weak states of Muslim World.

Considering the different approaches between the Muslim World and the Great Powers towards the Iran's Nuclear Issue in the domestic level will reveal that they depend largely on the political condition of each Islamic countries in the region. Dig into the root, Islamic countries are in trouble of controlling their own societies and local players, and sought regional allies against their own domestic opponents. The religious, economic and political discrimination makes it difficult for OIC or Muslim World to have absolute stance but variation towards Iran's Nuclear Issue. In fact, domestically, loyalty is often as much to what people are paid and/or the new status they acquire as sect, ethnicity, or tribe. Therefore, power of the major protagonists in the region was measured in their ability to affect domestic political struggles in neighboring states and divided into two camps, Islamic group and Arab World. Iran seems to be the regime that can turn the political challenges in the region to their advantage. Therefore the Muslim World approach in this level is for political and security interests, while the Great Powers, influenced by the US, approach is for basic interests related to economic reason.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the responses to the Iran Nuclear Power from the Muslim World and the Great Power are complicated by Iran's complex relationship in the region at those 3 different levels. Solidarity in the Islamic World never held up. The trend in Westernization and increased liberalism will not stop and will weaken the Islamists. Islamism is a political rather than a religious phenomenon. The response to the Iran Nuclear Power internationally for the Muslim World is to gain recognition in Ummah while for the Great Power is to prove their hegemony. Regionally, it is not all about resources and economic benefits to the Great Power, but about regime and power to the Muslim World. The response of the Muslim World to the domestic then needs to exhibit solidarity for the good of internal stability. The Great Power needs to also go along this route to really gain benefits regionally and internationally at the end.

6. Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deep gratitude to my advisor, Professor Dr. Jaran Maluleem, for his support and insightful guidance on writing of my paper. I am also thankful for my committees: Assistant Professor Dr. Pisanu Sunthraraks and Dr. Pichai Israbhakdi, for their valuable guidance and advice.

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