

# Strategic Trajectories

*Indicators of emerging patterns of global significance*

## Strategic Realities in the Post-Iran-Deal World

**The tentative Iran “nuclear” deal does not stop Iran gaining nuclear weapons. But it does have unintended consequences of global significance.**

Much hand-wringing by international commentators accompanied the revelation that a deal had been agreed on April 2, 2015, between the Five-plus-One (P5+1) nations<sup>1</sup> and Iran, ostensibly to limit the ability of Iran to build nuclear weapons. But what are the realities? Firstly, with regard to nuclear weapons and strategic military capabilities:

- ▶ Iran already has a small stockpile of externally-acquired nuclear weapons (from Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea: DPRK).<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ Iran, working with its key ally, the DPRK, has already built and detonated (on February 12, 2013) a nuclear weapon of Iranian design and manufacture.<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ Iran has sufficient technology and knowledge to build nuclear weapons, regardless of the new treaty; ramp-up time to production is zero, the only question, for sustained production of weapons, is the volume of enriched material available.
- ▶ Iran, like the DPRK, has developed ballistic missiles and command and control systems to deploy nuclear weapons through to a second-strike capability.

But, equally, the reality is that Iran has placed its strategic hopes on nuclear weapons for deterrence and prestige purposes (and these purposes are interrelated). The warfighting aspects of its nuclear weapons are limited, but exist, particularly if Iran acts in a manner which would be perceived as irrational: that is, if Iran initiated a nuclear attack in the knowledge of like retaliation. That is the stated fear of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, but the real prospect of an Iranian nuclear strike against Israel — knowing Israel’s response — is considered almost non-existent by Iranian military planners.

Iran’s real strategic capabilities lie in cyber warfare, and fluid semi-conventional and indirect warfare capabilities.

The “deal” to curb Iranian nuclear weapons production was essentially meaningless from the standpoint of the stated exercise. Tehran has a strategic rationale for acquiring nuclear weapons which it was unlikely to relinquish as long as nuclear weapons were in the grand strategy (primarily psycho-political) matrix of the region.<sup>4</sup> In any event, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said that Tehran surrendered nothing in the deal; in substantive terms, he was correct.

But what the April 2, 2015, agreement achieved was the prospect of Iran having greater freedom of movement from Russia, on which Tehran depends, but which also is in a strategic alliance with Turkey, Iran’s most significant adversary. Moreover, by reducing US-led trade sanctions on Iran, the Iranian economy and society will open up dramatically, coming at a time when the clerical governance structure is already transitioning (as “Supreme Leader” “*Ayatollah*” Ali Hoseini-Khamene’i’s era is coming to an end). Iran will emerge as a key Indian Ocean-Northern Tier power, and political power inside Iran will gradually — because of the power of the private sector — move away from the clerics.

Will this cause Moscow to bolster Ankara as a back-up to ensure its southward access? The US almost certainly will not be able — as it did during the Nixon era (1969-74) — to create a balance between Iran and Saudi Arabia. So Washington’s next step will be to attempt to prise Egypt away from its new alliance with Israel, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the UAE. Will Turkey, then, finally break with Washington, and possibly NATO?

All actions have consequences. This time, the cat is among the pigeons. ★



Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif. Primary victor.



US Secretary of State John Kerry. Got a deal with unforeseen ramifications.

1 P5+1: People’s Republic of China, France, Russia, UK, and US, as the Permanent Members of the UN Security Council, plus Germany.

2 See: “Iran Acquires Nuclear Weapons And Moves To Provide Cover to Syria”, in *Defense & Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy*, 2-1992, and later reports by *Defense & Foreign Affairs*.

3 See: “DPRK Nuclear Detonation Was Almost Certainly For Iran”, in *Defense & Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy*, 2-2013.

4 See, Homayoun, Assad: “The Indian Ocean Shapes Up as the Dynamic Nexus of the 21st Century”, in *Defense & Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy*, 2-2015, noting that “Any deal short of leaving Iran a potential nuclear state will not be accepted by Iran.”