

EMERGING POST NUCLEAR DEAL SCENARIOS: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES IN MIDDLE EAST

Qurat-ul-Ain & Khurram Abbas*

Abstract

Will the cooperation between Iran and the US prevail for a longer period of time in Middle Eastern strategic issues? The answer may not be simply: 'Yes or No'. The answer may have various dimensions such as Syrian crisis, where both countries have a divergence of interests, Yemen's political turmoil, which again a point of divergence for the US and Iran. Role of Hezbollah and Iran's support to such kind of organizations in the region, which has been declared as a terrorist organization by the international community may not allow both countries to cooperate in the region. This study tries to focus on the nature of convergences and divergences between the two states over these regional issues in near future. Moreover, the study discusses the term 'new détente' in the Middle East.

Keywords: US, Iran, Regional Security, Nuclear Deal, Regional Peace.

Introduction

The nuclear negotiation process provided ample time to both sides for revisiting respective foreign policies of US and the Iran. Furthermore, the threat of Islamic State (IS) has provided both sides broader prospects for cooperation in the region. Since the comprehensive nuclear accord, the US and Iran may have come into an informal agreed period of détente. The top leadership of Iran including its Supreme Leader, President and Foreign Minister publicly adopted softer approach for several months towards Western countries. President Hassan Rouhani had supported nuclear talks over the nuclear issue and expressed its support for broader regional cooperation not only with the US but with Arab countries too.¹ The high level comfortable environment coupled with internal top level assertive decisions by Hassan Rouhani would have long term impact on not only nuclear deal but also on broader regional issues with the US. Moreover, this shows that there is likely to be a shift in the regional politics, but many scholars consider it a drastic effect on the balance of power in the Middle East.

* Qurat-ul-Ain is currently working as Research Associate in NDU Islamabad. Khurram Abbas is PhD scholar at National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), Islamabad. He is also working as Assistant Research Officer at Islamabad Policy Research Institute, Islamabad.

This shift can manifest negative impact over Arab countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (UAE) who are involved in supporting the militant groups of Syria (Al-Nusra Front), Al-Qaeda in Yemen.² The sectarian divide has overshadowed the human rights, socio-economic development and security of states in the region. Therefore, every state perceives its relations either bilateral or multilateral through the lenses of sectarianism. This divide has provided a great deal of benefits to the US in particular and Israeli in general.

The consensus of Iran and the US over the replacement of Iraqi former Prime Minister Maliki shows a sign of informal détente between the two states.³ The sustainability of cooperation between the US and Iran seems difficult, however, if it sustains for some time than there are chances that this cooperation would further improve the security situation in the region. Iranians had pegged regional or broader cooperation with the US to the nuclear deal. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and President Rouhani have categorically said that the regional cooperation with the US, particularly against Islamic State (IS) is only possible if there would be permanent nuclear agreement pen down.⁴ This shows that after the comprehensive nuclear deal the chances of cooperation on regional issues have become more brighten.

Iraq has remained the main victim of the US and Iran's power struggle in the Middle East. Since the US invasion in Iraq, various episodes of cooperation and competition trembled the Iraqi security, political and economic structure. The Shiite paramilitaries were established and trained in modern fighting techniques by the Quds force in Iraq⁵ over the last one decade which increasingly became an effective instrument of Iran in bargaining with the extra regional forces. During the seizure of Najaf city in 2005, Muqtada Al-Sadar⁶ had evacuated the city and Iran played its role as mediator in the conflict between the US security forces and local Shiite paramilitary and demonstrated its political and strategic influence on Iraqi politics. But once again here, one can see some sort of informal understanding. Iraqi Shiite militias had not targeted the US interest in the country for few months.⁷ In response, the US has provided full air support in every operation against the Islamic State (IS), which, though some scholars believe is the coincident while some believe that all these attacks were pre-planned and with the consent of Iraqi Shiite militias, particularly by the Al-Badar.⁸

Moreover, the US air force has stopped its operations against the forces who were loyal to Syrian president Bashar-Al-Asad which is again a sign of détente in the region between the two countries. The Syrian militias who are loyal to Syrian president were targeted by the US Air Force when they were fighting against the Al-Nusra front. They were targeted by the US in the name of fight against the extremists.⁹ Hence, they had lost various small battles against the Islamic State (IS) on various fronts due to the US intervention. But now the table has turned to other side, the US has not targeted these Shiite militias which some scholars believe have relations with Hezbollah.¹⁰ This support to Shiite militias who are fighting against those who want to change the regime in Syria is indirectly helping the Iranian interest, i.e., strengthening Bashar-Al-Asad's rule in Syria. Though, the US official stance against the Syrian government is clear, i.e., it wants to change the ruler's face in Syria but the actions of the US are quite different to its official stance as these actions are helping Syrian forces to further diminish the threat against the Syrian regime.

Why this Strategic Policy Shift Occured?

The western scholars claim that Obama administration was keen to have cordial relationship with Iran since 2009 but it was fault at Iran's side that dispelled a peaceful co-existence of two powers in the region. The political rhetoric of the then President Ahmadinejad and his blistering statements against the US and its top ally Israel in the region were considered the main constraint in normalization of relations between the US and Iran. However, the election of Hassan Rouhani had encouraged the Obama administration to once again extend its hand for normalization of relationship between the two countries.

The world has witnessed a strategic shift in the US policies towards Iran in 2011, when the drawdown of US forces was in process from Iraq. It was considered the failure of US policies in Middle East as after fighting an endless war for eight years from 2003-11; the US could not maintain the law and order in the country due to various types of insurgencies by ethnic and sectarian factions of society. The main hurdle in establishing peace in Iraq was considered to be the sectarian conflict which often the US alleged its origins to Iran.¹¹ Therefore, the US decided to change its policy towards Iran for better cooperation in Iraq, particularly to control the Shiite militias through Iranian religious leaders. Though, Obama had faced serious criticism from the US Congress but he repelled all allegations by presenting a comparatively better and stable government in Iraq. Even his critics accept that the idea of seeking help to solve

Iraq's political crisis had paved the way for better understanding of two countries, therefore, later the nuclear bargaining got immense speed towards its conclusion.

Syrian Crisis

Syrian crisis has two dimensions, i.e., positive as well as challenging for bilateral cooperation in the region for Iran and the US. Since the start of civil war in Syria, the US has supported various militias who were trying to overthrow President of Syria, Bashar Al-Assad.¹² The overwhelming support to these militias later caused a menace for the US itself as these militias turned towards the US as hostilities. However, the US policy towards Syria which changed dramatically after the disposal of Syrian chemical weapons led towards another informal acceptance of Iranian influence in Syria. Despite Saudi Arabia's consistent efforts, the US did not invade in Syria which served the greater interests of Iran in the region.¹³ Though, this action had affected the bilateral relations of Saudi Arabia and the US but the same policy helped Iran and the US to negotiate over nuclear controversy with more trust and hope.

If the US had invaded Syria, than the situation would have had drastic impacts on the region as well as on nuclear bargaining process between Iran and P5+1. Iran had signed mutual defence treaty in 2005 with Assad regime.¹⁴ This treaty assures Syrian government that in case of any aggression, the Islamic Republic will support Syrian government through direct and indirect military assistance. Moreover, Syrian security forces were also trained and equipped with Iranian made weapons since 2005. Though, Iran had signed that agreement in order to protect Syria from Israeli aggression but the civil war in Syria had changed whole dynamics.

Yet, some scholars believe that it was coincidence rather a long term strategy to cooperate on Syrian crisis. The critics believe that Obama administration was compelled to refrain from any kind of escalation after the United Kingdom (UK) parliament's decision to avoid war against Syria. The decision of diplomatic resolve of issue was more appropriate by the Obama administration. The secretary of state John Kerry, who first time positively responded to Syrian regime by saying that 'the US is agreed to not intervene in Syria if the Assad regime roll back its chemical weapons programme'.¹⁵ John Kerry, who was personally involved in dialogue process with Iran over nuclear

controversy had provided fair amount of leverage to its counterpart Javed Zarif and Iranian allies to solve this menace which responded positively by Iran.

Iranian top leadership relatively remained calm during the Syrian crisis. They did not use their usual political rhetoric coupled with their provoking statements which often Israel wants to use as an opportunity to invade in Iran. Moreover, President of Iran had provided humanitarian assistance, i.e., helping Syrian civilians with food items and medicines¹⁶ which compelled European community to refrain from any intervention in Syrian territory.

But sanity prevailed when the US decided after the greater diplomatic efforts by President of Iran Rouhani, in order to calm down the escalation.¹⁷ Iranian officials met regularly with western community, particularly with European counterparts¹⁸ and told them the consequences of US invasion in Syria which had sent a clear signal to the Obama administration that Iranian nuclear talks were much more important as compared to invasion in Syria. Therefore, the US had accepted Putin's plan, i.e., dismantling chemical weapons of Syria.¹⁹ Interestingly, Rouhani had used clerics or hardliners to solve this issue diplomatically. He advised Supreme Leader of Iran, who subsequently sent the Head of National Security and Foreign Policy of Majlis (Parliament of Iran), Ayatollah Alaeddin Boroujerdi who met with Syrian President and asked for peaceful resolve of the issue.²⁰ This kind of political resolve helped the US and Islamic Republic to further find such kind of convergent points for more cooperation despite the severe criticism by hardliners of both sides.

Moderates in Iran are more inclined towards talks with the US not only for acquisition of nuclear technology but for broader cooperation in the region. Rouhani had won the elections on the basis of this notion coupled with economic development in Iran, which is linked with cooperation with international community.

Yemen's Instability

Middle East has witnessed various insurgencies or revolutions in recent years. The Houthi insurgency has also threatened the US interests in the region. Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi,²¹ the former president of Yemen was very close to the US and Obama administration. He was protecting American interests in the region particularly by fighting with Al-Qaeda outfit. Moreover, he was friendlier towards Saudi regime. On the contrary, people were feeling resentment against

the US; hence, there was a wider gap between the Yemeni president and its public. Therefore, people supported the group known as 'Houthis' who were struggling to get rid of Al Mansoor.

The group Houthis is not a new group in Yemeni politics. It was originated in 1990 under the name of 'Shabab al-Momineen (the Youth Believers).²² It was a group of students who decided to provoke anti US sentiments among masses. Various scholars believe that these young students were inspired by the Iranian revolution and *Khomeinian* thoughts.²³ Later, they got public support particularly by Shiite Zaidis which helped them to consolidate power in western Yemen in early 2000s decade.²⁴ However, they were not as powerful and assertive as they are now in recent years. According to Houthis, the government had targeted their top leadership since 2004 to 2011. Hundreds of Houthis were either killed or perished by government security forces which kept Houthis contained in western parts of the country.²⁵

The struggle of Houthis is also different as compared to other fractions of Yemen. Houthis mostly remain non-violent until and unless they put along the wall by their opponent. Larger protests, streets and road blockade are their main weapons which they use through public's support. Since 2014, Houthis has used these non-violent means for various times in order to accumulate power. Interestingly, thousands of people gather in their rallies within very short span of time,²⁶ which some scholars believe is the major source of power. The US invasion in Iraq provided strong argument to Houthis which they manipulated publically and augmented strong support of public.²⁷ Hussain al-Houthi was the first leader who publically protested against the former president who was dearer to the US. Though, he was killed by the security forces but he had set tone for unprecedented replacement of regime in Yemen.

The government of Yemen had also unintentionally supported Houthis movement which toppled the regime.²⁸ Later, Arab spring had set momentum which supported Houthis interests and former president resigned from presidency in 2012 which left a vacuum in Yemeni political process. Abdul Hadi, who was elected as president of Yemen after a fragile peace deal between various fractions of Yemeni political forces could not sustain pressure from rebel forces for more than 2 years.²⁹ He remained unable to either vanish the opposition forces or to solve their problems which often associated with the sectarian rift,

lack of economic opportunities and most importantly the interference of the US which ignites the common citizens of the Yemen.³⁰

Yemeni politics is now no more a struggle of words; it has become a heaven for the stronger that could protect itself from intruders. Numerous groups are fighting with each other in order to consolidate their power in the capital Sanaa, Yemen.³¹ In this context, Houthis had started their offensive operation against security forces in September 2014 and astonishingly captured vast part of Yemen's territory.³² The sudden and successful operation of Houthis had raised various questions such as whether these Houthis were backed by Iran or not? How much they have capability? Whether they will only confine themselves to Yemen? How much the US and its ally Saudi Arabian interests are on stakes? These all questions had not only raised American concerns but also the Saudi regime is looking it as threat to its national security.

The Iranian role in the Houthi insurgency is very complicated. Arab states mostly Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar have accused Iran for its support to Houthi Shiites.³³ These accusations have sparked a rift between Sunni Arabs and Shiite Arabs.³⁴ Therefore, the Houthis has denied these accusations³⁵ as the support from Iran would diminish their support by common Yemeni citizen. Interestingly, Iran has not denied such allegations and categorically said that its Quds forces are supporting Houthi armed members.³⁶ Quds forces are active in training and equipping weapons to the Houthis which increase their capabilities against their rivals, particularly the security forces for Yemen.³⁷ In this regard, the US has also alleged Iranian role, while the Middle Eastern security advisor of Obama administration has said that the sudden move from western parts of Yemen to capital Sanaa by Houthis could not possible without external support which linked with Iran.³⁸ However, the Houthis has increased the value of Iran in the region which the US had accepted during the nuclear bargaining process by saying that 'Iran can play much important role in the region as it is playing for many years'. Therefore, some scholars believe that Houthi insurgency in 2014 when Iran was engaged in negotiation process with the US led P5+1 was a move to assert Iranian value in the region and they used Yemen as bargaining chip for nuclear negotiations process.³⁹

Though, the US has lost its friend in Yemen as it had lost in Iran in 1979,⁴⁰ but still there are hopes of cooperation between Iran and the US in Yemen, particularly against Al-Qaeda. Houthis are fighting severe war against Al-

Qaeda and allegedly, Iranian forces are supporting them.⁴¹ In this case, the US would get benefit by witnessing of elimination of Al-Qaeda in the country. In this regard, US can support financially and militarily in order to get rid of Al-Qaeda menace as it is doing in Iraq against Islamic State (IS).⁴² Moreover, this point of convergence may open new doors of cooperation between Houthis and the US. However, Sunni Arab states, particularly Saudi Arabia would not welcome such kind of cooperation which would be a testing point of foreign policy of the US. However, if Houthis do not cooperate with the US as they have slogan of non-interference in Yemen might hurt American interests not only in Yemen but also in the region. Moreover, it would become a stronghold or a check post of Iran which can launch attack on Saudi Arabia in order to assert more pressure on Saudi regime.

Hezbollah

Since 1981, Iran has been time and again remained under severe criticism by western community due to its support for Hezbollah.⁴³ It has been remained a source of concern for the US allies in the region while it has proved as an asset for Iran on many occasions. Though, Syrian government has also supported Hezbollah, but the main assistance, training, intelligence sharing and political support remained by Iran. The supporting tactics to Hezbollah by Iran has been changed dramatically after 9/11 incident. Therefore, the cooperation between Hezbollah and Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) has become complicated process. The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) claims that various Iranian businessmen support the terrorist organization financially.⁴⁴ Moreover, they claim that the members of Hezbollah organization get training from Iran when they go for pilgrimage in Iranian holy cities.⁴⁵ The weapons which are used against Israel mostly found Iranian made.⁴⁶ This covert support has always been denied by Iran and rejected Israeli allegations.⁴⁷

Iran can increase the intensity of conflicts as well as decrease the level of conflict in the region through this organization. However, in past it has used Hezbollah in order to detract the attention of the western community over Iran's nuclear activities. Moreover, it has used Hezbollah as a source of power in areas where Iran cannot launch missile attacks. The old tradition of enmity between Arabs and Persians limited Iran from any provoking incident against Arab states. Even Saudi Arabia has time and again highlighted this factor that a Persian state cannot rule on Arabs.⁴⁸ However, due to Arab origin of Hezbollah, Iran can use it against Arab countries particularly during any crisis where Arabs would support

Iranian rivals. Hence, any attack on Iran can open new fronts in Middle East, particularly from Hezbollah. Therefore, the US would not try to directly attack on Iran in near future. However, it may ask Iran for cooperation and de-escalation of conflict from Hezbollah to Israeli borders. The first episode of this example can be witnessed as amid negotiations process

US-Iran Convergence of Interests against ISIS

The Islamic State (IS) has provided unprecedented opportunity of cooperation between the US and Iran in Iraq. War against terrorism which often Iran associated as 'war against Islam', has eventually become Iran's war due to presence of 'radical Islamists' in its neighbouring country.

However, many scholars believe that if the cooperation between Iran and the US takes place officially, than this cooperation should not overwhelmingly strike Islamic State rather it needs to counter Islamic State through counter-narrative, compensating Iraqi Sunni citizens politically and economically. Otherwise, Islamic State's narrative, i.e., 'Rome (Europe) is supporting the infidels (Shiites)'⁴⁹ would be strengthened in Arabs' minds. Therefore, this cooperation should not cross the limits in countering Islamic State. However, the US should be keener towards balancing between Gulf States hence, the cooperation between Iran and the US would remain fragile.

US-Iran Cooperation and Israeli Factor

The most important and influential ally of the US in Middle East has unprecedented concerns over the US foreign policy towards Middle East which now various scholars are calling 'Re-balancing of Middle East policy'.⁵⁰ The US is supporting Israel since its inception. Israel remained largest aid recipient of the US. However, this relationship has taken new dimension since comprehensive nuclear deal has signed by Iran and P5+1. Israel had criticized the negotiations process between Iran and P5+1 and now extensively criticizing this nuclear deal. It has raised various concerns over the developments of negotiations process. Obama time and again has assured to Israel and the US public that the deal with Iran would not threaten Israel or the US security. In this context, he said that 'nuclear deal which is in double digits will be benefited to refrain Iran from nuclear weapons capability'.⁵¹ Moreover, he has denied the concerns of Netanyahu and appealed for better understanding of time and constraints which the US is facing in the region.⁵²

Hence, the cooperation between Iran and the US over regional security issues would face severe challenges due to Israeli proactive reaction not only in the region but within the US also. Jewish lobby may try its level best to counter the emerging cooperation between the two countries. The Netanyahu's speech in Congress is the first active effort of Israel and may be more to come. Therefore, any security incident in the region in general and against Israel in particular might affect the cooperation or informal *détente* between the two countries.

US-Iran Cooperation and Saudi Factor

Saudi Arabia and Iran were allies of US since the second world war. After Iranian revolution 1979 these relations became strained. It is fear of not only a different sect but a different race [Arab vs Persian] which compelled Saudi Arabia to bandwagon with the US. The cooperation was at its epic when both nations found their interests beyond the region particularly in Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia had tried to launch a war of narratives in Middle East and in some parts of South Asia which was supported by the US for more than two decades. At that particular time, it was in the interest of the US to support the narrative of 'Jihad' in order to contain former Soviet Union (USSR) in Middle East. Hence, the Saudi Arabia and Salafi ideology was the sole anti-communist community in Middle East who declared communism against the spirit of Islam.

Saudi Arabia had not supported the US nuclear negotiation process with Iran due to various factors. Firstly, the re-balancing Middle East would undermine the status of Saudi Arabia in the region. This status is pre-requisite for the monopoly over Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in order to fix the price and quantity of oil production. If Saudi monopoly affects due to any sort of cooperation between the US and Iran, it would be impossible that Saudi regime accept this cooperation. Moreover, it would not be in the interest of the US also, because the oil prices are often used as weapon against adversaries by the US.⁵³ Moreover, the cooperation between the US and Iran would undermine the US support in security affairs of Middle East, where Saudi Arabia and Iran are indulged with their respective proxies.⁵⁴ Both countries want to see each other economically weak and strategically susceptible. Hence, Saudi Arabia recently has offered Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) its cooperation against any attack over Iran.⁵⁵ The Saudi Arabian cooperation is more important which would encourage Israel to attack on Iranian nuclear facilities. Israel can use Saudi space for any attack against Iran which would hold Israel to be more accurate against Iranian nuclear facilities,

because, it may be perceived that after Saddam Hussain, new Iraqi government would not allow Israel to use its space for any potential attack against Iran.

The US will lose its main ally in the region.⁵⁶ The Saudi regime is a time tested friend of the US who always helped the later in protecting its interests through proxies and funding in numerous places and among various state and non-state actors. Saudi Arabia has more than once indicated that the Iranian nuclear programme can start nuclear arms race in the region.⁵⁷ This perspective is a kind of threat that if world will fail to prevent Iran from acquisition of nuclear weapons than Saudi Arabia and its Arab allies⁵⁸ would do their best to acquire the same weapons in order to balance the power in the region. Therefore, it would be difficult issue for the US to convince Saudi authorities over any possible deal between Iran and P5+1. Saudi Arabia as compared to last 36 years is now more vocal since one year in criticizing the US policies towards Iran. Saudi authorities had criticized interim deal between Iran and six major powers and now also criticizing nuclear agreement.⁵⁹ The foreign ministry of Saudi Arabia said that 'the objective of both sides is same as both want to contain Iran from nuclear arsenals acquisition but the approaches are different'.⁶⁰ Saudi Arabian criticism over ongoing negotiation process was not a sign of distrust over the US but over the Iranian authorities and their active engagement in Middle East, therefore, Saudi Arabia was conscious to back any permanent deal between the major power of the world and Iran. This opposition would affect the ongoing process as both nations cannot abandon their long term relationship on a single matter. The Saudi opposition to this deal and negotiation process over regional issues would limit the prospects of cooperation between the US and Iran on regional issues.

Conclusion

The cooperation of the US and Iran over regional issues as well as over bilateral relations is still bleak but the hostility would not be witnessed in years to come. The differences of interests between the countries in region particularly due to more active engagement of Israel and Saudi Arabia would not allow both countries to think about cordial relationship. But the escalation of conflicts, every option is on the table, nuclear facilities will be destroyed and the US is great 'Satan' will no longer be parts of news in world media. After more than 36 years of rift, the US and Iran have realized that the hostility between the two countries is not solving regional issues, rather this hostility is creating more instability in the region. Therefore, both countries need to revisit their policies.

NOTES

- ¹ "Iran's President-elect Rohani to hold first press conference", Press TV, June 16, 2013, available at <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2013/06/16/309283/presidentelect-rohani-to-hold-1st-presser/> [Accessed February 17, 2015]
- ² Rouzbeh Parsi, "The Elusive Project of Common Security in the Persian Gulf", *Vision of Gulf Security*, March 25, 2014. pp. 13-16. http://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/POMEPS_Studies7_GulfSecurity.pdf [Accessed March 02, 2015]
- ³ Kayhan Barzegar, 'Iran's Foreign Policy in Post-Invasion Iraq', *Middle East Policy Council*, Winter 2008, Volume XV, Number 4, pp. 48-67; Ahmad Naghibzadeh, "Rectification of Iran's Foreign Policy Shortcomings during Khatami's Presidency," *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 3, Winter 2002, pp. 85-100. <http://mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/irans-foreign-policy-post-invasion-iraq?print> [Accessed March 02, 2015]
- ⁴ Pushing Iran Sanctions May Close the Door on Diplomacy, "Tehran Times", January 11, 2014. <http://tehrantimes.com/images/pdfs/11896.pdf> [Accessed March February 26, 2015]
- ⁵ Dexter Filkins, "The Shadow Commander", *The New Yorker*, September 30, 2013. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/09/30/the-shadow-commander> [Accessed February 26, 2015]
- ⁶ Anthony H. Cordesman and Sam Khazai, 'Iraq in Crisis', *Centre for Strategic and International Studies*, January 06, 2014, pp.11-24. http://csis.org/files/publication/130106_Iraq_Book_AHC-sm.pdf [Accessed March 01, 2015]
- ⁷ Juan Cole, "The Fall of Mosul and the False Promises of Modern History", *Middle East History*, June 11, 2014. <http://www.juancole.com/2014/06/promises-modern-history.html> [Accessed February 26, 2015]
- ⁸ Barbara Slavin, 'Shiite Militias Mixed blessing in Iraq', *Al-Monitor*, February 02, 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/02/shiite-militias-mixed-blessing-iraq-syria.html> [Accessed February 24, 2015]
- ⁹ The Rise of the Islamic State and the Dirty War in the Muslim World, *Cerebral Paragraphs*, October 21, 2014. <http://cerebralparagraphs.com/2014/10/21/the-rise-of-the-islamic-state-and-the-dirty-war-in-the-muslim-world/comment-page-1/> [Accessed February 26, 2015]
- ¹⁰ Dexter Filkins, "The Shadow Commander", *The New Yorker*, September 30, 2013. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/09/30/the-shadow-commander> [Accessed February 26, 2015]
- ¹¹ David Bloomfield and Teresa Barnes, 'Reconciliation after Violent Conflict', *Handbook 2003*, <http://www.un.org/en/peacebuilding/pbso/pdf/Reconciliation-After-Violent-Conflict-A-Handbook-Full-English-PDF.pdf> [Accessed February 22, 2015]
- ¹² Sunni-Shia Divide, *Council on Foreign Relations*, <http://www.cfr.org/peace-conflict-and-human-rights/sunni-shia-divide/p33176#!/> [Accessed March 03, 2015]
- ¹³ Imad Mansour, 'Washington and Hezbollah: A Rare Convergence of Interests', *Middle East Policy*, Summer 2010, Volume XVII, Number 2.
- ¹⁴ Shashank Joshi and Michael Stephens, 'AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE: Regional Responses to Iran's Nuclear Programme', *Royal United Services Institute, White Hall Report 4-13*,

-
- December 2013. <https://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/WHR-4-13.pdf> [Accessed February 23, 2015]
- ¹⁵ Richard JavadHeydarian, 'How Syria Brought the U.S. and Iran Together', Foreign Policy Focus, October 01, 2013. <http://fpif.org/syria-brought-u-s-iran-together/> [Accessed March 01, 2015]
- ¹⁶ MnarMuhawesh, 'What The Media's Getting Wrong About Israel And Palestine and Why It Matters', July 10, 2014. <http://www.mintpressnews.com/what-the-medias-getting-wrong-about-israel-and-palestine-and-why-it-matters/193607/> [Accessed March 03, 2015]
- ¹⁷ Anthony H. Cordesman, 'The Gulf Military Balance: Conventional and Asymmetric Dimensions', Centre for Strategic and International Studies, January 2014. http://csis.org/files/publication/140131_Cordeman_GulfMilitaryBalance_VolumeI_Web.pdf [Accessed February 24, 2015]
- ¹⁸ Shashank Joshi and Michael Stephens, 'AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE: Regional Responses to Iran's Nuclear Programme', Royal United Services Institute, White Hall Report 4-13, December 2013. <https://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/WHR-4-13.pdf>[Accessed February 23, 2015]
- ¹⁹ John W. Parker, 'Russia and the Iranian Nuclear Program: Replay or Breakthrough?', Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS), Strategic Perspective 9, National Defence University, Washington, October 2013. <http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/inss/Strategic-Perspectives-9.pdf> [Accessed March 02, 2015]
- ²⁰ Garrett Nada, 'Iran's Evolving Policy on Syria', The Iran Primer, United States Institute of Peace: July 30, 2013. <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2012/jul/30/iran%E2%80%99s-evolving-policy-syria> [Accessed March 02, 2015]
- ²¹ Ali Al-Mujahed, 'Yemeni president, cabinet resign, deepening turmoil for a key U.S. ally', The Washington Post, January 22, 2014. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/aden-ports-reopened-but-rebels-still-outside-presidential-palace-and-residence/2015/01/22/d3563d88-a1ba-11e4-91fc-7dff95a14458_story.html [Accessed February 28, 2015]
- ²² Huthi al-Shabab al-Mum'en / Shabab al-Moumineen (Believing Youth), Global Security Organization, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/shabab-al-moumineen.htm> [Accessed March 05, 2015]
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Philip Barrett Holzapfel, 'Yemen's Transition Process: Between Fragmentation and Transformation', United States Institute for Peace, 2014. <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW95-Yemen%20in%20Transition-Between%20Fragmentation%20and%20Transformation.pdf> [Accessed March 05, 2015]
- ²⁵ Jeremy M. Sharp, 'Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations', Congressional Research Review, February 11, 2015. <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34170.pdf> [Accessed March 06, 2015]
- ²⁶ Philip Barrett Holzapfel, 'Yemen's Transition Process: Between Fragmentation and Transformation', United States Institute for Peace, 2014.

- <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW95-Yemen%20in%20Transition-Between%20Fragmentation%20and%20Transformation.pdf> [Accessed March 05, 2015]
- ²⁷ Jeremy M. Sharp, 'Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations', Congressional Research Review, February 11, 2015. <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34170.pdf> [Accessed March 06, 2015]
- ²⁸ Zack Beauchamp, 'What the hell just happened in Yemen, explained', World of Defence, January 21, 2015. <http://www.vox.com/2014/9/22/6827383/the-crisis-in-yemen-explained> [Accessed March 01, 2015]
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Gulf Times, Friday, September 26, 2014. http://www.gulf-times.com/PDFLinks/PDFs/2014/9/26/Daily%20newspaper_2014_09_26_000000.pdf [Accessed March 06, 2015]
- ³¹ Ahmed Al-Kohlani, 'Arab Spring left army in disarray, soldiers sympathetic to rebels', Television Interview, February 20, 2015. <http://rt.com/shows/sophieco/233967-yemen-arab-spring-aftermath/> [Accessed March 08, 2015]
- ³² Jeremy M. Sharp, 'Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations', Congressional Research Review, February 11, 2015. <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34170.pdf> [Accessed March 06, 2015]
- ³³ James M. Dorsey, 'Wahhabism vs. Wahhabism: Qatar challenges Saudi Arabia', Middle East Institute, July 10, 2014. <https://meisingapore.wordpress.com/publications/> [Accessed February 23, 2015]
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Huthi al-Shabab al-Mum'en / Shabab al-Moumineen (Believing Youth), Global Security Organization, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/shabab-al-moumineen.htm> [Accessed March 05, 2015]
- ³⁶ ShahirshahidSaless, 'Does Iran Really Control Yemen', Iran Pulse-Al Monitor: January 22, 2015. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/02/iran-yemen-houthis-axis-of-resistance.html> [Accessed February 28, 2015]
- ³⁷ Zack Beauchamp, 'What the hell just happened in Yemen, explained', World of Defence, January 21, 2015. <http://www.vox.com/2014/9/22/6827383/the-crisis-in-yemen-explained> [Accessed March 01, 2015]
- ³⁸ Juan Cole, 'Yemen: Saudi backs Sunni revolution against Shiite Houthi Rebels linked to Iran', Middle East History, February 22, 2015. <http://www.juancole.com/2015/02/encourages-counter-revolution.html> [Accessed March 07, 2015]
- ³⁹ VivekChadha, 'Asian Strategic Review', Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis, 2013, pp.183-215.http://www.academia.edu/3571213/Asian_Strategic_Review [Accessed March 07, 2015]; Emanuel A. Winston, 'Gaza War Archives', March 9, 2015.
- ⁴⁰ ParastouHassouri, 'Losing Hope in Iran and Egypt', Middle East Research and Information Project, November 10, 2014. <http://merip.org/losing-hope-iran-egypt> [Accessed March 01, 2015]
- ⁴¹ Bruce Riedel, 'Yemen Falls Apart', Gulf Pulse-Al Monitor, January 21, 2015. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/01/yemen-hadi-resignation-houthi-al-qaeda-us-saudi.html#> [Accessed March 04, 2015]
- ⁴² RamzyBaroud, 'Obama's admission not enough: US spin on Middle East violence must change', Uncommon thought Journal, March 04, 2015. http://www.uncommonthought.com/mtblog/archives/cat_lies_damn_lies.php [Accessed March 11, 2015]

- ⁴³ Myths and Facts: A Guide to Arab-Israel Conflict, 'Jewish Virtual Library', <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/myths3/MFexclusives.html> [Accessed March 06, 2015]
- ⁴⁴ US Department of State, 'Country Reports on Terrorism 2011', July 31, 2012. <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2011/195553.htm> [Accessed February 25, 2015]
- ⁴⁵ Myths and Facts: A Guide to Arab-Israel Conflict, 'Jewish Virtual Library', <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/myths3/MFexclusives.html> [Accessed March 06, 2015]
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Jack Khoury, 'Iran denies Israeli claims it sent Syria-made arms to Gaza', Haaretz, March 06, 2014. <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/1.578243> [Accessed March 05, 2015]
- ⁴⁸ Frederic Wehrey, 'Saudi-Iranian Relations Since the Fall of Saddam Rivalry, Cooperation, and Implications for U.S. Policy', National Security Research Division, 2009. http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG840.pdf [Accessed February 27, 2015]
- ⁴⁹ Muhammad Saleem Mazhar and Naheed S. Goraya, 'Geneva Deal: Beginning of a New Era between Iran-US Relations', Research Journal of South Asian Studies, Vol. 29, No.1, January – July 2014, pp. 73-89.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid. pp. 73-89.
- ⁵¹ Suzanne Maloney, 'Sanctioning Iran: If Only it were So Simple', The Washington Quarterly, January 2015, pp. 131-147. http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/articles/2009/12/01-iran-sanctions-maloney/01_iran_sanctions_maloney.pdf [Accessed January 21, 2015]
- ⁵² Ibid.
- ⁵³ David Ignatius, 'Learning from the Oil Market', The Washington Post, January 06, 2015. http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/david-ignatius-learning-from-the-oil-market/2015/01/06/80of4d00-95e3-1e4-aabd-d0b93ff613d5_story.html [Accessed February 10, 2015]
- ⁵⁴ Avner Golov and Amos Yadlin, 'A Nuclear Iran: The Spur to a Regional Arms Race?', Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), April 05, 2014. <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Special-Feature/Detail/?lng=en&id=162351&contextid774=162351&contextid775=162349&tabid=1454238763> [Accessed February 24, 2015]
- ⁵⁵ The Jerusalem Post, 'The Channel 2 report said the Saudi ministers have relayed this message in private to European sources', February 25, 2015. <http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Report-Saudis-might-help-Israel-attack-Iran-attack-in-exchange-for-progress-in-peace-process-392094> [Accessed February 28, 2015]
- ⁵⁶ America mostly used Saudi Arabia for funding the non-state actors including Taliban in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989. Therefore, the term ATM has been used by many scholars about Saudi Arabia. Nasser Hadian, Professor of Tehran University coined this term in 2014 at an international conference in Moscow.
- ⁵⁷ Rizwan Ladha, 'A Regional Arms Race? Testing the Nuclear Domino Theory in the Middle East', Fletcher School, Tuft University, Spring 2012. http://www.academia.edu/9624927/A_Regional_Arms_Race_Testing_the_Nuclear_Domino_Theory_in_the_Middle_East [Accessed February 19, 2015]
- ⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Muhammad Saleem Mazhar and Naheed S. Goraya, 'Geneva Deal: Beginning of a New Era between Iran-US Relations', *Research Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 29, No.1, January – July 2014, pp. 73-89.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*