

The Twilight War: A Case of US-Iran Conflict

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Abstract

The early phase of the Cold War (1945-89) experienced the politics of alliances. The capitalists and the communists both were striving for maintaining hegemony and to manipulate the global political arena through facilitating their allies in different regions. If one was trying to influence any region the other was ready to restrict it. When the Soviet advance in South Asia and the Middle East threatened the Americans, they moved to the major states of the regions i.e. Pakistan and Iran respectively. Particularly, the United States (US) had found a reliable ally in Iran's Muhammad Reza Pehlvi popularly known as the Shah of Iran. The US-Iran collaboration had been working smoothly till the late 1970s. But the occurrence of the Iranian Revolution (1979) and disagreements on some points turned these friends into permanent enemies. Onward they would never look back to develop cordial relations. This research study has attempted to discover the major factors and areas which have drawn a diversion line between Iran and the US and pushed them into a twilight war. The US had enjoyed good relations with the Shah to secure geostrategic interests in the Middle East. After the Revolution, Ayatullah Ali Khomeini, an Islamic reformist, adopted an antagonistic approach to deal with the Americans who wanted to spread their influence throughout the Middle East. The Shah did make the right use of US friendship and enabled Iran to attain nuclear capability until his rule was over. The US, which had been a major facilitator to Iran's nuclear

development, later on, smelled Iranian threat for his allies, particularly Israel, in the region. The US demonstrated that Iran's nuclear advancement would destroy peace in the Middle East and until today they are holding these arguments just for the sake of Israel. The recent involvement of the Americans in the civil war in Syria since 2011 has infuriated Iranians who are supporting the regime of Basharul Asad. On the other hand, Washington has decided to erect the democratic system of government in Syria without estimating the severity and impact of its aggressive measures.

Keywords: Iran, United States, Conflict, Nuclear Development, Interests and Sanctions.

Roots of the Conflict

A bird's eye view of American history reflects that it had been involved with the Islamic world from the very start. Morocco was the first country in the world which recognized the United States (US) as an independent state; it belonged to the Muslim world (Kidwai, 2010, p. ix). With the growing role of the US in global affairs, its conflict with Islamic bloc was also growing. The post-World War II scenario saw the US break out onto the world stage when the discovery of the Middle East oil brought America and its companies to the region. Additionally, the US recognition and support of Israel aired its conflict with the Muslim countries that has got the worst shape with time. Since 9/11, the US had invaded two Muslim countries Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. At the same time, the Americans are trying to "win hearts and minds" in the Muslim world. There are some misconceptions and misinterpretations which have propelled the US and the Muslim world into unending war. According to the National Security Strategy (NSS):

"This is not a global war against a tactic—terrorism or a religion—Islam. Negative Muslim perceptions of the U.S. need to be understood if there is any hope of reversing the trend" (Barrette, 2014, p. x).

Before discussing the American clash with the Muslim world particularly with Iran it is necessary to peep into historical roots

of this conflict that got the shape of 'twilight war'. It was the Cold War era when the Americans tilted towards the Muslim states with a hope to stop the Soviet effect in South Asia and the Middle East. They tried their level best to alter the world order and supported the rulers who could work according to the US interests. For example, the US welcomed the regime of Jamal Abdul Nasser in Egypt in 1952, the same year when they opposed British proposal to overthrow the nationalist government in Iran. Soon the decisions were changed and the US altered its strategies regarding its foreign policy towards the Middle East. The capitalists were afraid of losing allies in the region and Nasser's decision to align with the communists increased that fear to a larger extent. New regimes in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Iraq also became friendly to Moscow. In addition to that, there was a possible fear of Iranian Prime Minister Muhammad Moassadaq to be taken over by the Soviets, the US helped overthrow him in 1953 and returned Muhammad Reza Pehlvi-the Shah to Power (Rubin and Jodith, 2002, p. 82). The Shah had been so much support for the Americans throughout his rule for the security of their interests in the region until revolution would change the regional order.

The Islamic revolution of 1979 in Iran ushered in a new era in its foreign policy. The revolution ended the millennia-old US-backed monarchy that had a tremendous impact on the region. It drastically upset the balance of power in the Persian Gulf by sweeping away the pro-western government in Iran. The US had lost an important ally in the Gulf. At the time of the revolution, Iran experienced the hostage of crisis among *Shi'ite* minorities and the seizer of Grand Mosque in Mecca. These circumstances brought another challenge for the US ally in the region. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 added fuel to the fire as Iran aligned itself to the Soviets. The newly formed pro-Soviet government in Tehran displayed an antagonistic approach to the Israeli and the western interests in the Gulf (Ahmadi, 2008, p. 116). There was an end to Iran's cooperation with the United States. There was a parting of the ways as the US and Iran could not be able to restore the relationship afterwards they had enjoyed during the Shah Regime. Kourosh Ahmadi, an expert on strategic studies

concludes the impact of the Iranian Revolution on the American foreign policy in the following words.

“The collapse of the Shah’s regime meant, therefore, the simultaneous collapse of the most important pillar of US foreign policy in the region. The Islamic Revolution in Iran resulted in the breakdown of the ‘twin pillars’ policy pursued by Washington, and the regional power structure underwent a major shift. The Revolution not only cost the United States the pillar it had relied upon since 1971 to safeguard its interests in the Persian Gulf, it also set Tehran and Washington on a collision course in the area for many ensuing years” (Ahmadi, 2008, p.116).

Similarly, the episode of US embassy hostage of 1979 further deteriorated the relationship between Iran and the US. An inspired group of students, called themselves as “Muslim Student Followers of the Imam’s Line”, launched a coordinated takeover of the US embassy. Inspired by the statements of Ayatullah Khomeini railing against the Americans the students decided to strike a blow against the ‘Great Satan’. Marine security guards tried to halt the mob with prodigious use of tear gas but failed. Even Iranian security forces could not cope with the hostages. In short order, ‘the embassy staff was rounded up and paraded, bound and blindfolded before a stunned world media’ (Crist, 2012, p. 22). Overtake of the embassy created chances for Khomeini to consolidate power. He reversed all his policies towards the US. When the Foreign Minister Ebrahim Yazdi advised him to negotiate with the students he declined without assessing the results of students’ action. He considered all the liberals and nationalists as the chief rival to his vision of the Islamic state. Khomeini publically endorsed the action of the students that was more than a shock for Yazdi and other moderates; they resigned in protest next day (Crist, 2012, p. 22).

Now, Revolutionary Council was in sole power and over the next year supporters of Khomeini moved to expunge the

remaining moderates and secularists from the prestigious positions. The hostage of fifty-two Americans by the Iranian radical students forced Jimmy Carter, then US President, to freeze financial assets of Iran. He served diplomatic relations and tried various means to settle the crisis peacefully. His security advisor advocated the use of force but he was worried about its consequences. For almost six months, Carter remained in the opposition of the use of force and repeatedly tried to negotiate with Iran but to no avail (Crist, 2012, p. 23). According to some sources, Carter used back-door diplomacy towards Iran for the releases of the hostages for which he emerged as a controversial leader in the US.

Ronald Reagan (r. 1981-1989) assumed the Presidency in 1981 with a hope to bring improvements in the American foreign policy and to assure cent per cent performance of National Security Council (NSC). But Iran's Contra affair of 1985 led him no way but disappointment. This time, some Americans were taken into hostage by the Iranian-Sponsored Hezbollah of Lebanon. Reagan selected some civilian officials to assist 'Nicaraguan Contras' in their armed opposition to the Sandinistas and to supply Iran so that Tehran could pressurise Hezbollah to free the American hostages. In this case, Reagan had bypassed the Defence and State Departments while relying on NSC. A notorious foreign policy fiasco of the late twentieth century, Iran Contra, represented a massive fracture of national security apparatus in the US. Reagan Administration spent several million dollars but could not achieve a satisfactory success because Hezbollah freed only three American hostages. Now Reagan had decided to adopt aggressive policies to deal both with Hezbollah and Iran (Douvile, 2012, p. 88-90). But at the same time, the affair revealed that ideologically charged rhetoric could be overridden by power politics in Washington and Tehran and it became even more necessary after 9/11 (Kandil, 2016, p. 127).

In July 1988, the USS *Vincennes* fired two missiles at Iran Air Flight 655 that just had taken off from Bandar Abbas *en route* to Dubai. 290 passengers, including 66 children, were killed. *Vincennes'* captain believed that 'his radar was showing an

attacking military aircraft. On the other hand, the Iranians believed that the American destruction of the packed civilian aeroplane was a deliberate one. Ray Takeyh, an Iranian strategic expert, argued that the downing of the passenger plane was the catalyst to convince Khomeini for ending the war with the Americans (Allin and Simon, 2010, p. 26). On the part of Iran, revolutionaries decided to take revenge for the particular event. More recently, the formation of “Axis of Evil” by George Walker Bush in 2002, nuclear fears of the 2000s, the tension in the Gulf in 2019 and the assassination of Iranian general Qasem Suleimani in January 2020 all have flamed the conflict between Iran and the US.

Major Areas of the Conflict

(1) US Interests in the Middle East

A deep study of the US foreign policy, regarding the Middle East, shows that the US interest centre on three considerations. First, the Americans desire to have access to the energy resources for global markets. Second, the US wants to ensure freedom of navigation that has allowed it to export millions of barrel of oil from the Arab world. Third, it wishes the security of Israel which has been a major facilitator for the US in the region. All three objectives have driven the United States to stick to an active balancing approach to the Middle East. It is building a network of naval and air bases through “Defence Cooperation Agreements” and “Facilities Access Agreements”. Through this security architecture, the US has made it almost possible to protect the mentioned interests while supporting a regional status quo favourable for Washington’s partners and allies in the region (Fulton, 2019, p. 14).

During the Cold War, the Middle East, to a larger degree, took on the shape of a bipolar world order and was bifurcated into the capitalist and communist camps. Until the Iranian Revolution, there was a little focus on the question of regional order. In addition to that, there was no focus on the regional security, the security of individual countries, lest country instability was exploited by the Soviets. The Central Investigating Agency CIA) orchestrated a coup against

Mossadaq in 1953 which reflects the US fears about the Soviet advance in the region. Even in the last phase of the Cold War, the Americans believed if they could not strengthen their allies in the Middle East to contain the communist influence the weakness would directly imperil US interests in the region (Harrison, 2019, p. 03). After the Cold War especially with the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2011, there could be seen a largely recognized shift in US interests from states to broader region. It does not mean that alliance with states had lost its importance rather the US went for broader approaches to secure its interests as well as of its allies in this region. The US supported Saudi Arab to protect the free flow of oil and to advance counter-terrorism and facilitated Israel to ensure its survival (Harrison, 2019, p. 03). Measures like that have been significant pillars of the US foreign policy for decades and are supposed to be tenable even today.

More strategically, during the 2010s, an inclination of various states like China and Russia towards navigation and the transportation of the Gulf energy supplies forced the United States to garnish significant influence in the Middle East by using its diplomatic and military clout. All these states were exporting or importing energy products from the Gulf States in general and Iran in particular. The circumstances caused a revision in the US policies and approaches for the security to the respective interests. In case the US relinquished this position, the strategic vacuum would have been created in the region. China and Russia might become more interested in expanding their roles but they could not replace the United States in any reasonable short or medium-term scenario (Terril, 2015, p. 03). China, which had already expanded diplomatic and commercial relations with Saudi Arabia, influenced Pacific Ocean region and grown blue water navy in Asian waters. This Chinese advancement created doubts among the American policy-makers who perceived if China's geopolitical concerns would not restrain it would not only have been threatening the US interests but would also be alarming India, a US ally in South Asia. All the Arab states, which had invited China and Russia in the region, were concerned about Tehran's ties with

Beijing and Moscow, especially Moscow's strong support for the Basharul Asad Regime in Syria (Terril, 2015, p. 03).

When Donald Trump succeeded Obama in 2017 he criticised the policies of the previous administration regarding Iran nuclear deal, the handling of American-Israel relations and the fight against the Islamic extremism. Trump tended to formulate the American foreign policy addressed by 'semi-isolation' and 'anti-globalization' posture. But to "Make America Great Again", he had to be involved in foreign affairs that could lead him to define a brand-new vision for the American global leadership (Gilbao, 2016, p. 02). At the same time, Trump had to face many serious challenges in the Middle East. He was afraid that the Americans had to struggle hard for the restoration of their credibility and leadership in the region. He had many doubts about the abilities of his policy-makers who could not provide Obama with a solution to civil war in Syria. He had no strong and productive idea to destroy Islamic State (IS). He was disappointed with the policies of Obama towards Iran and lacked in directions to conclude a nuclear deal with it. He found a difficulty in repairing relations with the Egyptian President Abdel Fath al-Sisi. He had to think about how to improve relations with Israel and how to bring Israel and Palestine on the table of negotiations. Even he had to search for the strategies to strengthen the Arab allies (Gilbao, 2016, p. 02).

In the current scenario Donald Trump has to discover the answer for another question, where does the imperative of regional stability leave the issue of US interests towards Iran which has been policy conundrum for the Americans. Iran's presence in Syria, accompanied by Hezbollah, has challenged the security of Israel and Saudi Arab's interests in the broader Arab world while influencing the Arab capitals of Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut and Sana'a. Furthermore, Trump's provocative withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) in 2018 has made Iran more adversarial towards the United States (Harrison, 2019, p. 04). But, according to the American researchers and policy-makers, Iran is not the new Soviet Union than can represent a global threat. Instead, Iran is a

destabilizing influence in the current disorder in the Middle East. They argue that Iran takes strategic advantages due to its effectiveness in operating within those Arab states which have been trapped by the civil war; state failure creates chances for Iran to garnish its strategic goals. Under all these considerations and assumptions, the US has decided to test a cleverer strategy of 'regional stability' that would reduce the opportunities and temptations for Iran to meddle in this way. On the contrary, Iran, a stakeholder in the Middle East and necessary for stabilizing the region, would benefit from the particular American approach. This American policy of "pushing back against Iran" has generated an extra question, whether it 'supports or undermines the overarching US interest in regional stability and security' (Harrison, 2019, p. 05).

(2) Nuclear Fears

Cold War alliance between Iran and the United States was totally in favour of Iran. It launched its nuclear programme under the Shah of Iran, Muhammad Reza Pahlvi who was sponsored by the US and UK to replace Mossadegh in August 1953. Personal interests of the Shah to develop Iran's nuclear capability and his cordial relations with the Americans had paved the way to develop the programme. The US offered nuclear facilities and training to its Cold War allies for "Atoms for Peace" programme. Iran was one of them. In exchange, the US was expecting commitments from these allies not to develop nuclear weapons which would destroy the global peace. The Shah came under such a commitment that Iran and the US signed a nuclear cooperation agreement in 1957 "which eventually led to the supply of a basic five megawatt (MW) light-water research reactor and related laboratories, commissioned at the Tehran Nuclear Research Centre (TNRC) in 1967" (IISS, 2005, p. 10).

The following year Iran signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and ratified it in 1970. By 1974, Iran had signed full-scope safeguard agreement with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) under which the agency could inspect on all the sources of fissionable material. The Atomic Exchange of

Information (AEOI) was established in 1974 with the particular objectives to generate 23,000 MW of energy in next twenty years and to acquire full nuclear cycle containing the facilities 'to enrich uranium, fabricate fuel and reprocess spent fuel to obtain plutonium for civil fuel purposes' (Khan, 2010, p. 48). As part of this plan, Iran signed agreements with Germany, France and the US and obtained 22 reactors to produce 23,000 MW of electric power. Cold War alliance politics worked for Iran in a way that it earned the support of the western allies to develop a comprehensive nuclear programme. Meanwhile, the western allies were quite optimistic that Iran would never desire to develop nuclear weapons. As early as 1975, a problem emerged between Iran and the US with concerning where the plutonium could be reprocessed. Iran considered Tehran as a favourable location for reprocessing facilities 'while the US had apprehensions about that' (Khan, 2010, p. 48). It made the Iranian nuclear programme suspicious and the US was trying to curse Iran if found culprit; through enforcing economic sanctions.

Further, an increase in the budget of Atomic Energy Organization (AEO) from 30.8 million dollars to more than one billion dollars in the fiscal year 1976 showed Iran's serious interests in acquiring uranium enrichment technology. In the same year, South Africa concluded a pact with Iran to supply \$ 700 million worth of yellowcake to Iran. In return, Iran was supposed to finance an enrichment plant in South Africa (Spector, 1990, p. 205). Tehran's investment schemes of the 1970s became a hot topic of discussion among the comity of nations. The year 1976 was noticed especially as Iran had decided to purchase an experimental laser system during this year that would make Iran capable of enriching uranium. Iran bought four gas lasers from Lisichen, an American company, and showed an inclination to invest and conduct more research on this area. James Kratz, head of the US Department of Energy, commented and reported on the sale of these lasers that they didn't think it was a viable process for uranium" (Kessler, 1987, p. 02)

Later on, Iran's intention not to accept safeguards of its nuclear programme at the initial stage of development suspected her in the eyes of the American policy-makers. This disagreement on nuclear safeguards in 1976 suspended the talks on nuclear cooperation between Iran and the US. By the late 1970s, US intelligence reports indicated that the Shah had established a clandestine nuclear weapons development programme. The reports also indicated that all these developments in the nuclear field in Iran had aimed at negating the threat emanating from Iraq and the Americans were the major facilitators for that (Khan, 2010, p. 49). Almost during the last phase of the Shah's rule, the US-Iran relationship was not so smooth as compared to the earlier days. In 1975, the US used a Veto power over Iran's desire to reprocess nuclear materials but in 1977, Jimmy Carter refused to offer assistance to Iran for the enrichment and reprocessing of uranium and forced it to accept comprehensive IAEA safeguards (IISS, 2005, p. 11). Onward, the US and Iran could not experience friendly relations. Khomeini legitimised the nuclear programme established by the Shah and threatened the American presence in the Middle East.

Barack Obama assumed the Presidency in 2009 and tried to handle Iran through his double standards. On the one hand, he was pretending to conclude a nuclear deal with Iran while targeting the Iranian nuclear plants on the other. In 2010, the first-ever state-sponsored cyber-attack was committed to achieving the geopolitical effect that is; slowing the entry of Iran in the nuclear club. The attack was named as "Stuxnet" that caused direct physical damage. On June 1, 2012, *The New York Times* exposed the story behind the Stuxnet, the lead from the story read:

"From his first months in office, President Obama secretly ordered increasingly sophisticated attacks on the computer systems that run Iran's main nuclear enrichment facilities, significantly expanding America's first sustained use of cyberweapons, according to participants in the program" (Green, 2015, p. 20).

A newfound diplomatic momentum of 2013 ended the protracted impasse between Iran and the US over Tehran's steadily expanding nuclear programme. Almost a decade of negotiations could not restrain Iranian nuclear ambition. Washington, alongside its allies, had managed to wreak unprecedented havoc on the economy of Iran with innovative financial sanctions. On the opposite end, the Iranian leaders insisted they would not bend (Maloney, 2017, p. 01). Suddenly, tectonic plates of the US-Iran stalemate began to shift when the President Muhammad Ahmadinijad was replaced by a power broker Hassan Rouhani, who launched a campaign to end the nuclear standoff. As a lead negotiator of Iran, he considered nuclear talks 'as a forum for expounding on the diplomacy of the Holy Prophet (PBUH)'. The newcomer was totally in favour of Obama administration that engaged in back-channel dialogue with Iran for hammering a formula to resolve the nuclear issue (Maloney, 2017, p. 01).

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), a nuclear deal, was concluded on October 18 2015 between five permanent members of the Security Council, Germany and Iran. In the deal, Iran promised that it would not enrich uranium beyond 4 per cent level and would not hold the stocks of more than 300 kg of low-enriched uranium. In 2018, Trump walked away from the agreement and imposed old economic sanctions on Iran while adding spate new ones too. Now, Iran and the parties that might trade with it may face more than 1000 sanctions (*The Economist*, June 29, 2019). The former American president Barack Obama called JCPOA "the strongest non-proliferation agreement ever negotiated" and Trump has derided it as "one of the worst deals ever". Because of this attitude of Trump, Iran is abandoning the deal's restrictions on nuclear activity gradually. After the assassination of Iranian general Qasem Suleimani Iran has become the second state after North Korea to abandon nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). As a result, Trump's walk away from the treaty has increased the prospects of war between the US and Iran (*The Economist*, January 28, 2020).

(3) The Security for Israel

In the 1950s and the 1960s, common vulnerabilities of Iran and Israel paved the way for an inevitable alliance to curb the mutual threats in the region. The logic behind this Israeli-Iranian entente was to maintain a balance of power in the Middle East. Tehran and Tel Aviv agreed upon the common point 'if either country overcame its differences with its neighbours and if one gained enough power to deal with the threats on its own, would cause colossal damage to the alliance'. The Middle East saw significant geopolitical changes in the late 1960s and the 1970s. Israel had inflicted a defeat on the Arabs in the Arab-Israel War of 1967 (Parsi, 2007, p. 29). Iraq's altered strategic choices posed a great threat to Iran and Israel. Additionally, 'superpowers' strategic relationship shifted from containment to detente'. Egypt had joined the western camp while deserting the Soviet Union after Yom Kippur War of 1973. Meanwhile, Iran experienced a rapid and unprecedented economic growth and began to influence regional politics to a greater extent. The British, also, had decided to withdraw its fleet from the Persian Gulf which created the chances for the Shah to play a dominant role in affairs of the region and beyond. Hence, 'these factors challenged the equilibrium on which Israeli-Iranian entente was founded' (Parsi, 2007, p. 30). Leadership that emerged from the revolution observed a staunch Muslim approach towards territorial nationalism and did not allow Iran to be sided with the non-Muslims. The revolutionaries thought that any kind of alliance with Israel could derail their interests in the region as it would invite the American who had had got annoyed at the nuclear progress of Iran. So, during almost a couple of decades Iran, neither went for the US nor for Israel and tried to build a comprehensive nuclear setup.

In late 2005, there was a turning point in the foreign policy of Iran when Muhammad Ahmadinijad won the elections and took the world by surprise. He was a contrast to his reformist predecessor, who ratcheted up the revolutionary rhetoric against the US imperialism and called for Israel to be wiped off the map. He vehemently asserted Iran's right to develop nuclear

capabilities in the face of international condemnation (Panah, 2007, p. 01). In late January 2007, political and security establishments of Israel and America attended a conference in Tel Aviv under the banner “The Balance of Israel’s National Security”. After the second Palestinian Intifada of 2000, the conference established itself as a premier event in the political calendar of Israel. Hundreds of politicians, diplomats, generals, journalists, academics and policy-makers were there to discuss the most pressing issues Israel has been facing (Cook, 2008, p. 36). The focus of the earlier conferences had been revolving around the national agenda for Israel’s majority and security concerns from the growing Palestinian population. But the conference of 2007, also named as Herzliya, was different in scope. Herzliya looked like a joint Israeli and American production for the first time that ignored the Palestinian question rather planned the things to cope with the threat from *Shia* ‘arc of extremism in the regional arena. Therefore, ‘the words Iran and Hezbollah’ featured prominently in the titles of many of the debates. Yonatan Mendel, an Israeli left-wing journalist, revealed that “the panel was entitled ‘The Changing Paradigm of Israeli-Palestinian Relations in the Shadow of Iran and the War against the Hizbullah’” (Cook, 2008, p. 37).

Obama assumed the power in 2009 and conducted a series of talks with Tehran, especially about the nuclear issue. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu was neither happy with these talks nor satisfied with the statements of Obama which clearly showed President’s tilt towards Iran. He stated explicitly that Iran must stop all enrichment of nuclear material. Netanyahu emphasized on dismantling Iran’s underground nuclear enrichment plant at Qom (Shalom, 2012, p. 02). In recent global political and strategic scenario, Israel cannot deny the importance of the US’s friendship in the diplomatic realm. Without the American support in the international arena, particularly in the UN Security Council, Israel could have fallen prey to diplomatic and economic isolation. The American support provided Israel with a shield of defence as US annulled the UN resolution equating Zionism with racism and strived off the world’s criticism of Israel’s nuclear programme. The United States also has understood that Israel,

the only democratic country in the region, has been and will be a reliable ally in a time of crisis. History reveals that Israel has been cooperating with the US in the fields of intelligence and counter-terrorism. Most importantly, both nations share common values and people of both harbour warm feelings toward the other (Amidror, 2014, p. 03). The US would not let Israel down as it has become partial and participant of the American diplomacy against the Muslim world generally and Iran particularly.

(4) The Syrian Question

History informs that in the 1960s when Egypt intervened in the civil war in Yemen Israel assisted Egypt's enemies in Yemen. In 1970, Israel indirectly got involved in the civil war in Jordan just to deter Syria 'causing it to discontinue its invasion into Jordan'. Then Israel's heavy involvement in the civil war in Lebanon, to contain the operations of PLO and Syria, entangled it to Lebanese quagmire for eighteen years. Similarly, Israel has been involved in Syrian civil war at several scenarios as there "has been a tension between the temptation for Israel to take advantage of the chaos wrought by the civil war to try to influence the outcome and the sobering realization that Israel's track record in such efforts has been dismal" (Eilam, 2018, p. 68). By and large, the US-backed Israel had been exploiting the deteriorated situation in the Middle East that would pave the way for it to dominate the politics of the region. It enjoyed very good relations with the Shah of Iran but afterwards it could not convince Iran for playing its role in the region. A series of disagreements and conflicts restrained the development of cordial relations between Iran and Israel. America, with a biased approach, always stood with Israel to negate the Iranian significance in the Middle East.

Most importantly, Syria's tussle with Israel on the Golan Heights is another factor behind the US-Iran conflict. Three states are involved directly; Israel, Syria and Lebanon and claim the disputed area. Since 1974, there has been a complete peace on the issue. With the civil war in Syria since 2011, the area has suffered several violent incidents and most of these

occurred on the borders of Syria and Israel except the one in March 2014 that took place between the borders of Israel and Lebanon. Two big rivals in the current scenario of the world politics are supporters of these states; Iran is supporting Syria and the United States is facilitating Israel (Eilam, 2018, p. 65). History witnesses that US-backed Israel, by and large, have been intervening in the domestic affairs of the Arab states. The Israelis are well aware of the fact that the Arabs have been divided due to various disputes that sometimes have deteriorated into wars among them. These intra-Arab confrontations created many chances for Israel to intervene (Eilam, 2018, p. 68).

In case of civil war in Syria, the US is playing a more active role than Israel. The rapid growth of ISIS in the Middle East has created chances for the Americans to interfere with the regional polity. Its major focus was the civil war haunted Syria. Threats to the security of the American allies in the region in 2015 prompted Obama to send several thousand US troops and a small detachment of 50 US Special Forces to Syria who would train Syrian Kurdish forces to fight against ISIS (Aftandilian, 2018, p. 06). In 2018, a sudden decision of the American President Donald Trump to withdraw the US forces from Syria surprised its political elite who argued that the withdrawal could eclipse the American interests in the region and could heighten Iran's motivation to strengthen its grip and influence in the Middle East. The US had left Israel alone in the campaign against the Iranian entrenchment in Syria. The reasons behind this immediate decision are still undiscovered but some rumours reflected that Trump was trying to advance with the Turkish President Recep Tayyab Erdogan which would link the sale of "Patriot" air defence systems as a substitute for S-400 that Ankara wants to purchase from Russia and the further sale of F-35 planes to Turkey" (Shavit and Dekel, 2018, p. 02). So, it appears that the US withdrawal from Syria was to prevent friction between the US and the Turkish forces in the north-eastern part of the country. The particular decision was not a component of a broader agreement in Syria that involved Russia as well. Trump's decision and the current political scenario shows that with the withdrawal from Syria

the Americans will achieve their objective to assure a change in the policies regarding the most threatening Iran in the region; to reinforce and renew sanctions on Iran (Shavit and Dekel, 2018, p. 02).

Conclusion

In a nutshell, the US-Iran conflict has created a blend of problems for the Middle East, the US and the remaining Muslim world. The US is putting all of its resources and energies to secure its interests in the Middle East either through facilitating its allies against Iran or imposing different economic sanctions to destroy Iranian nuclear plants. Now, mutual disagreement on the production of the Iranian Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) has led these rivals to adopt aggressive strategies to take revenge from each other. The assassination of Iran's Maj. General Qasem Soleimani in January 2020 and Iranian response belong to this chain of aggression. Third-party US-backed Israel is the major beneficiary of US-Iran clash. The US support has earned a territorial legitimacy for Israel as US hegemony on international organizations like the United Nations (UN) has helped Israel declared as a nation with the possession of territory snatched from the Palestinians. Whenever Iran talks about the dismal state of Human rights in Palestine, the Americans exaggerated the facts and make excuses to receive the global attention that Israel is posing threat to Israel's territorial integrity. Resultantly, the encouraged Israeli forces make the human rights situation in Palestine from bad to worse that has infuriated the whole Muslim world. Last but not the least; the US is sponsoring the rebel forces in Syria against Basharul Asad, a natural ally of Iran on a sectarian basis. The nature of US-Iran tussle, regarding the Syrian civil war, is not so much complicated. The US has created opponents of Asad and wants to end his rule in the name of the promotion of democracy in Syria. On the opposite front, Iran is religiously as well as politically bound to be sided with Asad, not to speak of the major areas of disagreement; both Iran and the US are finding ways to cause an irreversible loss to the geostrategic, political and economic interests of each other. As an effect, the

US economy has suffered a lot which has been spent on restraining Iran's nuclear development whereas the Middle East has been trapped by political chaos, economic turmoil, illiteracy, religious extremism and social unrest.

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