

Russian, Chinese and Indian Ambivalence Policies on Iranian Nuclear Question

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Abstract: *The Iran policy of Russia, China and India is one of ambivalence. While going along with the US-sponsored resolution in the United Nations to end the alleged Iranian nuclear weapon program, the three nations have been opposed to any “crippling sanctions” against Iran. The current paper analyzes this policy of ambivalence and attributes it to a curious mix of convergence and divergence of their interests with the Persian nation. It also recommends how Tehran could mould this policy in its favor.*

Key Words: *Iranian Nuclear Problem; Russian, Chinese and Indian Policy of Ambivalence; Interest Convergence and Divergence; Persian Imperialism and Middle East Security; Jehadi Terrorism; Israel and the World*

There has been some sort of consensus across the international community against Iran’s alleged nuclear weapon program. In tune with this dominant perception United Nations Secretary General Ban ki Moon and Chairman of International Atomic Energy Agency Yukiya Amano have consistently urged Iran to allay all the related fears of the world community. Speaking at the start of the month- long conference

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reviewing the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in New York this year, the UN Secretary-General said that the “onus” is on Iran to clear up suspicions that its nuclear program is aimed at building atomic weapons. Tehran must comply fully with UN Security Council resolutions demanding that it halt its uranium enrichment program. (Kuwait News Agency, 2010: May 3)

I. Ambivalence of Russia & China

Sharing such genuine international concerns over the Iranian program, Russia and China have come to vote in favor of all the US-led resolutions in the United Nations Security Council urging Tehran to cooperate with IAEA. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev is on record having said that Moscow is expecting "appropriate" explanations from Iran on its nuclear program. Emphasizing that Russia cannot be "indifferent to how it is developing its nuclear program and how the military components of this program look like," Medvedev has said : "Iran should face up to beginning full-scale cooperation with the international community, even though it might not like some questions it is being asked...Iran is not acting in the best way.." (RIA Novosti, 2010: July 16)

But while going along with the US-sponsored resolution in the United Nations on the Iranian nuclear question, Russia has opposed any “crippling sanctions” against Tehran. An analysis of the statements made by Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, President Medvedev, Kremlin's top foreign policy aide Sergei Prikhodko, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his Deputy Sergey Ryabkov over the last one year reveals best Moscow’s disinclination in this regard.

The essence of their statements, sometimes seemingly contradictory, goes that Moscow is "alarmed ", for Tehran is refusing to co-operate with the IAEA and has for about 20 years "carried out its clandestine nuclear program." However, "sanctions are seldom

productive" and thus the world community could still think of measures "to stimulate political and diplomatic solutions to the problem." In January this year Russian Foreign Ministry Deputy Sergei Ryabkov said, "the effectiveness of [additional] sanctions is highly doubtful." (RIA Novosti, 2010: July 16). Earlier, in December 2009, Russia's foreign ministry spokesman Andrei Nesterenko said: "This language of sanctions...is not our language." (News.AZ, 2009: December 11)

The Chinese stance on the Iranian nuclear issue is more or less the same. Foreign Minister of China Yang Jiechi reinforced at a press conference on the sidelines of China's National People's Congress in March this year, "... pressure and sanctions are not the fundamental way forward to resolving the Iran nuclear problem. " (Bloomberg Businessweek, 2010: March 3). The essence of the statements issued by Chinese foreign minister and others goes that Beijing "is against Iran developing and owning nuclear weapons [and] stands for safeguarding the international non-proliferation system and maintenance of peace and stability in the Middle East." It is "willing, together with the international community, to continue playing a constructive role in pushing for a resolution of the Iran nuclear issue." But the need is "to try and find a solution as quickly as possible through negotiations... there's still room for diplomatic settlement of the Iranian nuclear issue."

A. Diluting Sanctions

One finds that Russia and China have even influenced in making the latest round of sanctions much weaker than what the United States had originally proposed. The new resolution does not block the sale of Russian anti-aircraft missiles to Iran (though Russia has so far not supplied the systems citing the new sanctions as its reason). It does call for the Iran Sanctions Committee to "intensify its efforts" covering compliance, investigations, dialogue, assistance and cooperation. The resolution also restates its authority to target additional individuals

and entities, "who have assisted designated persons or entities in evading sanctions" under such resolutions. Besides, it calls for the UN Secretary General to appoint a panel of experts to "gather, examine and analyze information from States, relevant United Nations bodies and other interested parties" and "make recommendations" for actions to the Council, or the [Sanctions] Committee or [individual member] State." But, given the way such panels function, not much can be expected from them.

Pertinently, the resolution authorizes states to inspect ships and planes bound for Iran "if there is information that provides reasonable grounds to believe the vessel is carrying" prohibited items. But here too little action can be expected against Iran as the new resolution requires the much difficult "consent of the flag State," (the government whose flag is flown on the vessel) and the cooperation of a country into whose port the suspect ship can be brought.

B. Indian Ambiguity

More or less similar has been the approach of New Delhi towards Tehran's nuclear program. At the International Atomic Energy Agency, India has always voted to refer Iran to the United Nations Security Council. During his visit to Saudi Arabia this year Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh joined host King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz in asking Tehran to "remove regional and international doubts about its nuclear weapons program". (Pant, 2010: March 17). But at the same time New Delhi has been against tougher sanctions.

At its meeting in Vienna in February this year, the Non-Aligned Movement stated that there should be no "undue pressure or interference in the International Atomic Energy Agency's activities." It said that the right of every country, including Iran, "in the field of peaceful uses of nuclear technology and its fuel cycle policies must be respected." Echoing the NAM mind on the nuclear issue, Indian Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao said at the Woodrow Wilson Centre, Washington on March 15 this year: "It continues to be

our view that sanctions that target Iranian people and cause difficulties to the ordinary man; woman and child would not be conducive to a resolution of this [Iran] question.”(India Today, 2010: March 16). Recently, Rao has even branded the American sanctions as “unilateral” which “have direct and adverse impact on Indian companies and more importantly, on our energy sector and our attempts to meet the development needs of our people.” (Hindu, 2010: July 6).

II. Interest Convergence

This policy of ambivalence adopted by Russia, China and India towards Iran’s nuclear question can be attributed to a curious mix of convergence and divergence of their interests with the Persian nation.

A. Russo-Iranian Cooperation

Knowledgeable sources say Russo-Iranian interests converge in a number of areas today. Russia needs Iran for its arms sales and southern borders’ security. Iran needs Russia for its defense equipment modernization and energy security. The sales of state-owned arms exporter Rosoboron export to Iran amounted to \$7.4 billion in 2009 alone. Russo-Iranian cooperation in economic and military areas looks all set to deepen in the future. In December 2005, Russia had signed a contract to sell at least five S-300 advanced air defense missiles systems to Iran. This is yet to be honoured. Iranian Petroleum Minister Masoud Mir Kazemi and Russian Energy Minister Sergei Shmatko are discussing a road map on cooperation in the energy sector.

B. Sino-Iranian Cooperation

Beijing is Tehran’s largest trading partner today. China receives 15 percent of its oil from Iran, importing about 540,000 barrels a day. China has left the EU behind as Iran’s main trade partner with its exchanges surpassing the group’s \$35 billion. This is likely to increase in the coming years. Beijing has provided Iran with advanced military technology, including in the field of ballistic missile capability. An

Iranian research firm linked to its atomic energy organization has recently acquired special equipment for enriching uranium from a Chinese company. Beijing has signed more than \$120 billion in oil industry deals in recent years in Iran. In May 2009 alone Chinese interests signed nearly \$17 billion of investment in Iran. The Chinese National Petroleum Corporation has recently pumped in \$ 2 billion in an Iranian oilfield.

China also sees in Iran a strategic partnership. Today China is the world's second biggest energy consumer after the United States. The latter controls sea lanes of communications (SLOC). It controls the west bank of the oil-rich Persian Gulf through allies such as Saudi Arabia and smaller Gulf states. Beijing fears that America might choose to cut off China's current crucial oil imports flow through the Strait of Hormuz over a potential Taiwan clash. In order to meet any such contingency Beijing probably feels that it (and Russia) must align with Iran and control the Gulf's east bank. With this in calculus in 2001, China has already formed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). It is also working on its proposed land-based energy silk road connecting the Persian Gulf, Caspian Sea and Central Asia to China to bypass the Strait of Malacca routes patrolled by the powerful American Navy.

C. Indo-Iranian Cooperation

New Delhi has had its own set of national interests in Iran. India today is on fast track of industrialization and globalization. Its energy needs are expected to grow by eight to ten percent in the near future. Iran is close by and has the world's third largest oil and second largest gas reserves. New Delhi wants to tap them to its own advantage. Every year India already imports over 18 million tons of oil from Iran. In the recent past some of the leading Indian firms doing business with Iran's oil and gas sector have included Indian Oil Corporation, Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, ONGC Videsh (OVL), Oil India Limited and the government-sponsored private company,

Petronet LNG and the U.K.-based Hinduja group. IOC, OVL, OIL and ONGC have been engaged in the development of the Farzad-B natural gasfield in the Farsi block and South Pars assets with an estimated investment of \$5 billion. The Hindujas are also part of one of the South Pars projects with ONGC. India's famous Reliance Industries had been one of Iran's main suppliers of petrol and diesel till 2009.

New Delhi is interested in advancing such Iranian linkages further. Recently, India has decided to make an attempt to get an exemption for its shipping company Iran-o-Hind from the UN sanctions. A consortium of three Indian energy companies has got into action to develop a gas field in Iran. New Delhi has signed an air-services agreement with Iran enhancing the number of flights between the two nations. The two sides have inked a memorandum of understanding aimed at increasing bilateral trade to \$30 billion from \$15 billion.

Besides, India and Iran have had deep historical and cultural links. India's national language Hindi and Iran's Persian share a lot with each other in their origins. Elites in certain parts of India have long been well conversant in Persian which during Mughal rule in India happened to be its court language. India has the world's second largest population of Shia (about 30 million people). No regime in democratic India can afford to overlook the sentimental attachment of such a large group with Iran. Also, India and Iran have had a shared strategic interest in taming Afghanistan's Taliban--and the brand of Sunni fundamentalism it represents. A recent fear in New Delhi seems to be that Taliban might stage a comeback in Afghanistan. The Pakistani army does not want to bring its campaign against Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan in its Federally Administered Tribal Areas to its logical conclusion. Pak army Chief Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani has to survive in the predominantly Sunni Muslim society. Also he can do little, for since Pak dictator Zia-ul Haq started recruiting communal elements in the army, the influence of political Islam has been on the rise in the force and Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI).

The New Delhi fear goes that even Washington might now be thinking of using the militants of North Waziristan to roll back the growing influence of Shia Iran in the Muslim world. Resupplying widely scattered troop contingents from 42 countries has of late become a logistical nightmare. The United States now has 87,000 troops in Afghanistan alongside 47,000 soldiers from other countries. American President Barack Obama is committed to start bringing troops home from Afghanistan by July 2011. Canada, the Netherlands, Germany and others have also indicated not staying longer there. Against this background, Americans might already be working with Pakistan Army Chief Kayani, Saudi King Abdullah, Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai's representatives, and a former foreign minister of the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan for a rule of reformed Taliban in the land locked nation.

Washington, New Delhi fears, might be thinking that Pakistan could play a very important role in this, for the latter has been very close to Taliban. Pakistan, along with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, had recognized the Taliban regime until toppled in 2001. The hard-core in the Pak establishment have had a strong connection with the top leadership of TTP which can be used to install the kind of Taliban regime Washington wants to.

New Delhi calculates that if America quits Afghanistan, the region could pass under Pakistan-guided Taliban and in that case Iran alone could offer India access to Afghanistan and Central Asia to protect its interests there. Iran's proximity to Baluchistan could be very helpful to India. With this in mind New Delhi has already moved towards greater maritime cooperation with Tehran. Iran has recently joined the Indian navy's annual Indian Ocean Naval Symposium forum that would engage the navies of the Indian Ocean littoral states with each other. India and Iran have also decided to hold "structured and regular consultations" on Afghanistan.

Pertinently, New Delhi is aware that Iran has been very close to

Pakistan, a nation with which India's relations have never been cordial after the two split out of British India in 1947. Tehran and Islamabad signed a friendship treaty in 1950. During the cold war Pakistan partnered with Iran as India chose to support Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser ideology of pan Arab nationalism that threatened many Arab monarchies" (Pant, 2009: Spring). Iran and Pakistan were pro-West and original members of the 1955 Baghdad Alliance aimed at containing the Soviets and Nasser of Egypt. In the recent past Pakistan has been a major driving force behind Iran's nuclear ambitions. (Shah, 2010: August 29). Abdul Qadeer Khan, the father of the Pakistani nuclear program and the bomb, has already admitted selling centrifuges and designs for advanced weapons components to Iran in the 1990s. He said Pakistan gave Iran "bomb-related drawings, charts for centrifuges to purify uranium and a secret worldwide list of suppliers". Iran's centrifuges are largely based on models and designs obtained from Pakistan (Smith & Warrick, 2010: March 14).

But New Delhi calculates Pakistan and Iran have inbuilt tensions which it can use to its advantage. Iran is a mostly Shia state and Pakistan Sunni. Currently Pakistani Taliban are fighting a terror campaign against Pakistani Shia much to the anger of Iran (Shah, 2010: August 29). The Sunni Baluchis, adversaries of the Islamic regime in Iran, live on both sides of the Pak-Iran border. In the Baluchistan province Sunnis and Shia are fighting bloody battles.

III. Interest Divergence

As for the divergence of interests confronting Russia, China and India with Iran, it can be discerned in Tehran blessing Hamas and lately Taliban. According to knowledgeable sources, Russia, China and India might fear that a nuclear Iran would not but embolden them to intensify their activities against Moscow, New Delhi and Beijing. Hamas has been very close to Russia's Chechen terrorists.

They are united in their ideology of 'defending' Islam. Chechen jihadist Shamil Basayev has long declared, "The Sharia (Islamic law) requires us to assist those Muslims who are struggling to free the sacred places of Islam—the city of al-Quds [Jerusalem] and the al-Aqsa Mosque. Those belong to all Muslims." (Riebling & Eddy, 2002: October 24). While addressing a Hamas rally in Gaza in 2000, then-Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin also likened the goals of Chechen separatists to his men. The two groups have at times shared common sources of funding too. In 2001, for instance, a popular Egyptian Muslim cleric was said to have raised about \$1 million to be distributed to various terrorist groups, including Hamas as well as Chechen fighters.

One could see the linkage of the two in a Hamas poster juxtaposing headshots of former Chechen terrorist leaders Ibn al-Khattab and Shamil Basayev alongside those of former Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden. Another Hamas poster has an image of Chechen terrorist leader Al-Khattab, killed by Russian authorities in 2002. The poster reads, "Oh hero, who disappeared from the land of jihad, your eyes covered with a tearful veil of dreams. Allah relieved you of [life in] a time when everything is upside down..." (Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2008: October 22).

A CD titled "The Russian Hell" shows footage of fighting in Chechnya and a jihadist sermon, "fire awaits [the Russian soldiers] in the next world, and the Chechens in this world." (Nahmias, 2006: February 10). Besides, in 2005 the Israel Defense Forces found a brochure supporting Chechen separatism. It is titled "Chechnya: an excellent people and their hopes," inside a Hamas "Islamic club" in the West Bank. The back of the brochure displays an image of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem above a picture of Chechen fighters, along with text that states, "From Al-Aqsa to Grozny, darkness disperses and dawn rises." (Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2006: July

19).

Jehadis based in India's Kashmir and China's Xinjiang have a lot in common with Taliban style dressed Salafi groupings, such as Jund Anwar Allah fighters, Jaish al-Islam (army of Islam), al-Saif al-Haq Islamiya (Swords of Islamic Righteousness), Jaish al-Umma (Army of the Nation) and the Jaljalat (thunder group), either formed by disaffected Hamas fighters or supported by Hamas's al-Kassam brigades in Gaza. Reports are that Iran's Revolutionary Guards have of late provided even overt training and equipment to the Taliban in the Afghan conflict. Afghan officials have seized Iranian weapons, including roadside bomb-making components that have been smuggled across the border. Iranian Guards have provided training to certain groups of Afghan militants at a camp near the Iranian town of Zahedan to attack checkpoints, mountain bases and convoys as well as to plant deadly roadside bombs. Iran might explain its strategy as being aimed at cornering NATO troops. But neither New Delhi nor Beijing could gloss over its moral boosting impact upon secessionists within their territories. There is some sort of agreement between the two capitals that the growth of no version of Taliban would be good in the region.

IV. Mutuality of Interests with Other Nations

The ambivalent Iran policy of Russia, China and India can be attributed also to the mutuality of their interests with the United States, the European Union and a majority of Middle East states. A dominant strategic perception in these states is that Tehran poses a threat to peace and stability in the world in general and the Middle East in particular. Washington has been so upset over the Iranian program that American Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen has recently confirmed even of a possible American military option to sabotage the alleged Iranian nuclear weaponization program (Tyson, 2008: April

26).

The strategic assessment in the West goes that the current Iranian regime has to be reined in. The essence of the speeches of Iran's religious as well political leaders is that America is the great Satan, the root cause of the evil of all kinds in today's world and hence its elimination is the supreme goal for a just world to arrive in our times. With this ideology Tehran has already been doing everything it can –against America, allies and neutrals all. Recently, Iran has allowed al-Qaida fundraisers and attack planners to use its territory as a safe haven.

Prominent al-Qaida figures who have resided at some or the other point of time in Iran include Abu Hafs , Laden adviser who helped form the modern al-Qaida by merging bin Laden's operation with Ayman al-Zawahiri's Islamic Jihad; al-Qaida's longtime financier Abu Saeed al-Masri; Laden's spokesman Suleiman Abu Ghaith; and brutal al-Qaida trainer Mustafa Hamid.

Recently, head of the US Central Command General David Petraeus has also publicly revealed the Iran connection of al-Qaeda. The Commander has complained that Iran provides "a key facilitation hub" to connect al Qaida's senior leadership with its regional affiliates. Tehran is letting some of the al-Qaida leaders long held in Iran travel freely back and forth to Pakistan and Afghanistan. Tehran is permitting them to hold meetings to plan attacking US targets and citizens the world over (Gertz, 2010: March 17).

Concerned over Iran's nuclear program, leaders of Saudi Arabia and Egypt seem to want to go even beyond sanctions to contain Iran's growing nuclear-missile program. At a joint press conference with American Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on February 16 this year Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal said, "Sanctions are a long-term solution. We see the issue in the shorter term because we are closer to the threat ... We need an immediate resolution...Iran, if it continues on the line that is continuing, will provide the impetus for further

proliferation and, God forbid, see the region full of atomic weapons.” (BBC World News, 2010: February 16). Earlier, at a meeting of Arab foreign ministers in Cairo (March 3, 2009), Saudi Foreign Minister called for a joint Arab strategy, a common vision to deal with the "Iranian challenge" including its nuclear drive (AFP, 2009: March 3).

Expressing similar sentiments, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak warned in March 2009: “A nuclear armed Iran with hegemonic ambitions is the greatest threat to Arab nations today.” Earlier, in December 2008, Mubarak said in an address to the members of his own ruling National Democratic Party. "The Persians are trying to devour the Arab states." (Wall Street Journal, 2008: December 20).

Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE and other Gulf states seem to think that, given its past background, a nuclear-armed Shia Iran would come to pose a great threat to their political existence. With an eye on its futuristic imperial ambition the current regime in Tehran has already cultivated powerful allies, whether states or organizations in the region. The Qods Force, an elite group within the Islamic Revolutionary Guards, is helping Shia militia groups in Iraq, Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Jordan and Islamist groups in Syria, Lebanon, Morocco, Algeria, Yemen, Somalia, Bahrain, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and so on.

The assessment of the Gulf states goes that Iran has huge oil and gas reserves that can last long. Tehran wants a nuclear weapon not for the liberation of Palestine but to dictate its regional and international oil agenda. The Gulf States are within the range of its missiles. Besides, Iran's nuclear armament poses a threat to the ecological existence of the Gulf States as well, for the Iranian nuclear reactor is not on the Caspian Sea but near the Gulf.

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and other Sunni countries on the southern side of the Gulf seem to be so sleepless over Iran's nuclear ambition and its implications that they have already decided to increase their annual defense spending from \$68 billion to \$83 billion

by 2015. They are building up their naval capacity and missile defense systems to "steel themselves against Iran's military buildup". GCC military forces have conducted exercises with the US navy in preparation for a military confrontation with Iran (Warrick, 2010: February 3 & Foley, 2010: February 8). UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar have agreed to have US anti-missile batteries placed on their territory.

King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz has begun to see Iran as an existential threat to his country. In June Saudi Arabia opened its air space to Israeli planes, to shorten the distance for an Israeli air strike on Iran's nuclear facilities. UAE Ambassador to the US, Yousef al-Otaiba spoke out bluntly about Iran recently. "We cannot live with a nuclear Iran... Small, rich, vulnerable countries do not want to stick their finger in the big boy's eye if they do not have the backing of the United States...The United States may be able to live with it [a nuclear Iran]..."We can't." (Atlantic, 2010 : July 6).

Even Syria and Turkey, known as Iran's allies today, seem to have lost their sleep over the Iranian plans. The two have a shared interest with Iran in keeping their sizable Kurdish population suppressed. For that as well as for their Muslim card they have kept themselves close to Iran. Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan has even said e a good bye to Israel and the West. But at the same time they would never like Iran to be a nuclear power. Syrian President Assad has of late come closer to Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz as seen during their travel together to Beirut in the same plane in July this year.

According to knowledgeable sources, the fear of a rising Iran has led in the recent past to a rapid improvement in relations between Turkey and the Arab world—especially the six Gulf Cooperation Council states (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates). Ankara and GCC governments have also synthesized their approaches toward many foreign policy challenges in the Middle East (Foley, 2010: September). Iran's decision to pursue

nuclear power (and potentially nuclear weapons) along with the perception that Washington might not be really strict with Iran has even added to the desire of some in the Gulf that Ankara revive the Ottoman Empire's role as the Sunni state that would check Iranian and Shi'a power in Iraq (Foley, 2010: September). Gulf Arabs view Iran, its nuclear power program, and regional influence as alarming and potentially apocalyptic. In their perception, Iran has helped to humiliate Sunni Arabs in Iraq, seeks to influence Shi'a Muslims in Gulf states, and ultimately aims to expel Sunnis from the Arabian Peninsula (Abu Nasr, 2009: November 24 & Fleishman, 2009: December 6).

Moscow, Beijing and New Delhi cannot afford to overlook the perception of the afore-mentioned nations, with which they have had their own linkages of interests. Also, the three capitals do not seem to have liked Iranian President Ahmadinejad's call for the annihilation of Israel. History bears out Hindus and Hans have never been burdened by any anti-Semitic baggage. Guided by their national interests, relations of New Delhi and Beijing with Jerusalem have come to move from strength to strength over the years. It would only be natural for responsible powers such as Russia, China and India to advance their ties with Israel further.

Besides, the three nations must be fully aware of the fast growing value of Israel in the contemporary world. Ever since it has been founded, the Jewish state has established itself as one of the most successful, responsible powers in the world. This has increasingly earned it a place of pride in the comity of nations. The level of American public and congressional support for Israel has always been massive (about 65% Americans are pro- Israel). In the post-cold war landscape Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, former Yugoslavia as well as most African and Asian states have opted for diplomatic relations with Israel. Most of the states facing the challenges of terrorism or radical Islam have sought cooperation with Israel in the area of intelligence and tactical and doctrinal

counter-terrorism. Israel's relations with the Muslim world have also improved a lot after its famous peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan.

South Korea and Australia have been usually being pro-Israel. In "Old Europe---"the part comprising Belgium, Ireland, Norway, and Sweden, in particular----which has had its naïve strategic culture devoid of any threat perception and today considers the use of force as anachronistic--- one may still find anti-Israeli positions bordering on anti-Semitism. But that is not the case with entire old Europe. France, Germany, and Italy have had their publics as well as leaders with a soft spot for Israel. In "New Europe," the Eastern European strategic culture is dominated by a historic threat perception from Russia and is hence more understanding of the dilemmas associated with the necessary use of force by Israel. So is the case with small Finland.

Aware of the importance of the Jewish state today, the UN has long rescinded the 1975 UN General Assembly Resolution terming Zionism - the Jewish national movement - racist. This year Israel has been accepted into the exclusive OECD club of the 33 most developed countries committed to democracy and the market economy (Inbar, 2010: September 14). Russia, China and India would not but be finding it wiser to deepen their ties with such a Jewish nation today.

V. Conclusion

What clearly follows from the preceding observations is that the policy of ambivalence adopted by Russia, China and India towards Iran is grounded in their convergence and divergence of national interests. This is the demand of what is called pragmatism as well in international politics. Iran could mould the current policy course of the three nations and improve its ties with them much further only by allaying the genuine fears of the international community in regard to its alleged nuclear weapon programme and withdrawing its call for

the annihilation of Israel. Will Tehran begin a new path in this direction? The choice obviously would be Iran's and Iran's alone in the contemporary international system based on the principle of the equality among all its sovereign nation-states.

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