

Iran's nuclear program in the 1970s and US policy

Lasha Bazhunaishvili

Abstract: *The focus of the paper is to clarify the main reasons of Iranian Nuclear Program development in the 1970s and the US policy toward this program. Paper describes the top reasons of "Nuclear Syndrome" of Tehran. The creation of the project constantly and strictly was being rejected by the Iranian political elite (the situation is very similar to actual Iranian nuclear politics). The paper examines Iran-US close relationships in the 1970s. By that time Iran was the ally country and defender of US interests in the Middle East. The methodology of the paper is based on empirical sources published in USA by National Security Archive.*

Key words: *Nuclear program of Iran in the 1970s, "Nuclear Syndrome", Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD), the US policy*

INTRODUCTION

"The principal determinant of the extent of nuclear weapons proliferation will, however, be political considerations – including the policies of the superpowers with regard to proliferation, the policies of suppliers of nuclear materials and technology, and the regional ambitions and tensions."

CIA Estimate, 23 August, 1974

In 1974 Iran announced intention for nuclear program development in order to seek alternative energy sources. In August 1975, the Shah of Iran stated, "Petroleum is a noble material, much too valuable to burn... We envision to producing, as soon as possible, 23 000 megawatts (MW) electricity using nuclear plants". During the 1970s Shah of Iran argued, like current Iranian leaders today, for the capability of a peaceful nuclear energy on the basis of national rights [1]. What were the reasons of starting such a huge nuclear program and what was the attitude of the US?

MAIN REASONS OF IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM

In the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s in the Southern Rim of Asia the turbulent political events had laid the basis for nuclear proliferation. These were new challenges which the US and all its ally countries, especially Iran, were faced for.

During the 1960s the turmoil political and military events (Sino-Indian military conflict from 1962 to 1967, India-Pakistan war from 1965 to 1971) forced China, India and Pakistan embarking nuclear program such as "chain reaction". On October 16 of 1964 China realized first nuclear weapon test. After the Chinese nuclear test, hence from India's national security and strategic interests, New Delhi began actively working in order to acquire nuclear weapon. In the 1967 India started its nuclear program and on May 18, 1974 India detonated his first experimental nuclear devise. Soon after India for the same reasons and interests Pakistan began developing its nuclear program in order to produce WMD. Since Israel already had Nuclear Weapon, Iraq, Syria and Egypt also tried to start their nuclear programs for the same purposes.

In the Middle Eastern balance of power main line was drawn to hold nuclear capability. One of the challenges was Iranian security issue. It was important to acquire WMD to keep its position in the Persian Gulf. On August 23, 1974 CIA, in his Special National Intelligence Estimate (Top Secret) titled "Prospects for Further proliferation of Nuclear Weapons" stated that "Iran's course will be strongly influenced by Indian Nuclear programs" [2].

On July 29, 1975 the staff of the Hudson Institute Lewis A. Dunn and staff of the Pentagon (Office of Director, Near East/South Asia Region, ISA) Major General Gordon Semner, Jr. published research about "Iran and Nuclear Weapon". In this research the authors discuss the main points and reasons why Iran might acquire weapon of mass destruction. Major factors might dictate to produce WMD by Iran in the in the mid-1980s was:

1. Dismemberment of the Pakistan Buffer-State, leading to direct confrontation with a nuclear-armed India;
2. Traditional fears of the Soviet Union, reinforced by Gallois-type arguments in favor of an undefended Nuclear-weapon capability;
3. Quest to be recognized as "the Fifth Great Power"
4. A decision by its fellow Muslim States, Pakistan, to develop nuclear weapon;
5. Iranian desire for political-military hegemony within the Persian Gulf;
6. Weakened constraint of foreign dependence. [3]

Thus, from the 1950 up to the end of the 1970s "Nuclear Syndrome" was extended over the South line of Eurasia and North Africa, from China till Morocco. This political situation which threatened Iran's national security and Interests dictated to start and develop nuclear program. In addition, Iran had arrogance to become great power of Persian Gulf and be hegemony force in region. Therefore, it was a significant issue for this country.

THE REAL PURPOSES OF IRANIAN NUCLEAR PROJECT

It was evident that besides the peaceful purposes officials of Tehran and His imperial Majesty had a strong desire to acquire WMD by the means of Peaceful Nuclear Explosion (PNE), like India. When a journalist asked (correspondent of journal *La Monde*) whether Iran would have nuclear weapons: "without any doubt, and sooner than one would think" - responded Reza Pahlavi. When the Washington meet this statement with big concern, Shah interpreted its statement as follow: „If in this region (Middle East) each little country tries to arm itself with armaments that are precarious, even elementary, but nuclear, then perhaps the national interests of any country at all would demand that it do the same... [4]. The same statement was made officially by the Iranian Government Spokesmen and Minister of Information and Tourism Gholam Reza Kianpour on June 24, 1974. „Iran could not stand idly if other nations like Israel and Egypt should go nuclear" [5].

This was hidden term (or promise) toward the world community that Iran would not develop its WMD until the other regional countries did not obtain WMD. Nevertheless, development the WMD by Tehran was inevitable for the following processes which developed around the nuclear weapon in the Middle East. In the middle of 1970s, not officially but actually in the 1970s Israel held nuclear weapon already. According to the CIA Special National Intelligence Estimate, under the title „Prospect for Further Proliferation of Nuclear Weapon," Israel in the 1970s produces a certain number of nuclear warheads. "We believe that Israel already has produced and stockpiled small number of fission weapons" stated in CIA estimate [2]. India held WMD also; Egypt and Libya announced intention to develop a bomb in the basement. In this case Tehran would nullify its "conditional obligation" and its aspirations in the nuclear field has been appeared "fair base", because of the other regional countries such as Israel acquired WMD and abrogated power of balance in the Middle East.

All in all, in the 1970s Government of Iran argued that Iran's nuclear program was peaceful, but some facts asserted opposite. Iran had a great aspiration to held WMD. During the 1970s Tehran tried to acquire full domestic fuel reprocessing cycle and other nuclear facilities. Moreover, Iran tried to purchase from Israel surface-to-surface nuclear missiles capable to carry nuclear warhead [6]. There evidently seems as well as from the latest statements of Iranian key political figures which were involved in this process. According to Dr. Etamad, who was the founder and first President of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran from 1974 to 1978, the Tehran Nuclear Research Center (TNRC) carried out experiments in which plutonium was extracted from spent fuel using chemical agents. It was also believed that the Shah assembled at the TNRC a nuclear weapon design team. Asadollah Alam, the long-time Imperial Court Minister and the Shah's close confident, rote in his memoirs that the Shah had envisioned Iran having nuclear weapons [7]. The foreign Minister and later ambassador in the US Ardeshir Zahedi in the interview

with Wall Street Journal (June 25, 2004) stated that the "Iranian strategy at the time was aimed at creating what is known as a „surge capacity, that is to say to have the know-how, the infrastructure and the personnel needed to develop a nuclear military capacity within a short time without actually doing so. ...The assumption within the policy-making elite was that Iran should be in a position to develop and test a nuclear device within 18 month" [8].

THE ALLIED COUNTRIES (US-IRAN) RELATIONSHIP IN THE FRAME OF NUCLEAR COLLABORATION

The Washington supported Iran's Nuclear Program only for peaceful uses. The R. Nixon's, J. Ford's and J. Carter's administrations supported Iran for the following reasons:

First, restore balance in trade between Iran and US after the 1973-1974 energy crises. During the energy crises Western developed democratic countries, including the US, lost their position in the balance of trade with oil production countries. Results were catastrophic. OPEC countries increased oil price up to \$11.65 per barrel (for 276%). It was astronomical price for that time; The New York Stock Exchange lost \$97 billion in value in six weeks (the equivalents of more then \$400 billion), [9] Arabian countries and Iran as well fully completed the nationalization of oil companies that operated the oil industry in those countries.

To restore balance the US government used the most effective instrument for its ally Middle Eastern oil producing countries, exactly for Iran. Washington opened market of military sales and peaceful nuclear capability (Washington was planning to sell to Iran 9 reactors), both were most expensive projects.

Second, save Iran's oil resources like reliable source for the Western industrial developed democratic countries. The US expected that if Iran developed its peaceful nuclear capability to satisfy the growing requirement of internal energy market, there was great chance that Iran would save its oil for trade under profitable conditions with western countries. Tehran was really reliable partner for the Western industrial democratic countries. During the Arabian oil producing countries embargo in the 1974 and followed by embargo the energy crisis Shah of Iran made significant steps. He offered to sell the US and its ally countries oil beyond the OPEC quota at a hidden discount.

Thus, we can assume that the coincidence of interests create such a condition that the US was forced to support Iran's nuclear ambitions only for peaceful uses and strongly excluded production of WMD by Iran. To avoid PNE of Iran (like India) the American policymakers chose contribution policy, which considered as a strict control and influence on the process of development of Iran nuclear program through close collaboration. As a Washington's reliable ally, Iranian Shah's requirements were satisfied by the US presidents of 1970s. American nuclear technologies were purchased by Iranian side, although all radio-active elements and purpose of using technologies, given by Americans, were under a strict control.

When Iranian Government decided to launch a nuclear power program, it became necessary to negotiate a new, more inclusive bilateral agreement with the US government - signing enrichment services contracts with the AEC and contemplating purchase of nuclear power plants from the US industry.

The US government presented to the Iranian side an agreement which offered to construct multinational reprocessing facilities out of Iran's territory, „Bay Back" reprocessing fuel (Plutonium), and had a right of veto over the reprocessing, fabrication and storage of US materials and plutonium produced through the using of material or equipment supplied by the US. This was a "New Standard" of agreement in the nuclear cooperation.

Tehran met this draft with great concern. Shah of Iran told the US officials "In atomic energy you are asking as for safeguards that are incompatible with our sovereignty, things that French or Germans would never dream of doing... Such safeguards are absolutely unnecessary because Iran is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty." No

country has a right dictate nuclear policy to another said the Chief of AEOI Dr. Akbar Eatemad [1].

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in the 1970s Iran tried to develop its nuclear program and acquire WMD under the PNE for the following reasons: 1) ambitions of regional hegemony, 2) extension of "nuclear syndrome" over the Middle East 3) seeking resources of alternative energy.

The US was forced to support only peaceful nuclear project through the close and strict control over the use of supplied nuclear materials by Iran. Moreover, Washington worked hard for a tacit veto by acquiring „a voice in management decisions" in a reprocessing plant to avoid the surprising PNE from Iran.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lasha Bazhunaishvili, PhD student, Department of History, Archeology and Ethnology, Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi Georgia. Participant of Erasmus Mundus Project, (ECW lot 6) ATEL, Thessaloniki, Greece. +30 6999 44 97 99; e-mail: lasha.lucky@yahoo.com

Reviewer:

Assoc. Prof. Irakli Gorgiladze, Department of History, Archeology and Ethnology, Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi Georgia.

Докладът е рецензиран.