**Iran, The Designated Threat**

**Why and how has Iran escaped a fate similar to some other Muslim countries in the GMER?**

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The Greater Middle East Region (GMER) is of core, vital interest to the US-led West. It is sustaining its iron grip on it through widespread military deployments (USCENTCOM), proactive, coercive diplomacy, and maintaining the regional strategic balance outrageously in Israel’s favour.

Israel’s overwhelming position has been secured by systematically reducing all possible threats to it, dynamic and/or potential. In the near distances, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon etc have been mauled militarily and further neutralized through lop-sided peace deals, and economic and military inducements superimposed by ruthless, imperious diplomacy. In the middle distances, the Gulf Arab states have been neutralized too through rank peremptory diplomacy, exploiting the ominous regional Sunni-Shiite sectarian divide, projecting a fearsome spectre of democracy in Arab societies/monarchies and persistently reiterating “the existential threat from a potentially nuclear weapon toting Iran”. The Arab Spring and later on the Abraham Accords were efforts in this direction. Hamas summarily scuttled the progress of the latter through its pre-emptive strike on 7 October 2023. In the far distances, Iraq and Iran, two of the most formidable military powers of the Muslim world, were induced into a debilitating, self-destructive war (1980-88) which left both severely enfeebled politically, militarily, and economically. Consequently, the quantum of threat they ostensibly posed to Israel waned and faded drastically. The coup de main was administered to Iraq by physically invading and destroying it twice, (1991 & 2003). Regime change was practiced pitilessly; Egypt’s President Morsi, Iraq’s President Saddam Hussain, and Libya’s President Qaddafi all paid with their lives as they resisted this odious policy. Even Yemen was not spared. Afghanistan’s Taliban and Syria’s President Asaad survived through sheer grit, determination, and unyielding defiance.

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All ostensible threats to Israel have thus apparently been neutralized, less Iran, which the US literally encircles. It has its USCENTCOM forces arrayed against it just across the Perian Gulf - in Qatar, UAE, KSA, Bahrain and Kuwait. It was physically present in Iraq, Afghanistan, and for some time in Pakistan too. Then why did it not exploit this strategically advantageous position against it? Why and how has Iran escaped a fate similar to some other Muslim countries in the GMER?

The reasons could be many, not least being the fact that the Iranians have been a large, proud, strong nation for millennia; are well-knit, self-respecting, dignified, defiant, and do not collapse easily. At the geopolitical level, Iran has shown remarkable resilience in the face of crippling economic, diplomatic, and military sanctions by the US-led West and continues to survive in what would ordinarily amount to diplomatic isolation. Furthermore, it has consistently maintained viable diplomatic, economic, and military relations with Russia, China, and some lesser powers. The former two provide critical support in the UN/UNSC and other international fora. At the geostrategic level, Iran’s military might has dwindled massively due to the manifold sanctions imposed on it. Deprived of the latest cutting-edge military technologies by the West, it has predictably adopted the strategy of an indirect approach preferring asymmetric warfare. It relies heavily on its formidable missile and drone power. It has proxies all over the GMER including the Hizbollah in Lebanon and Syria, the Hamas in Gaza, and the Houthis in Yemen. Its strategic reach thus covers the entire GMER. Any physical attack on Iran could thus rapidly engulf the whole region. Furthermore, it would instigate Shiite populations in the region to start gravitating towards Iran to fight the “Jihad” there - reminiscent of Mujahideen congregating from all over the Muslim world against the erstwhile Soviets in Afghanistan. Mass movements from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and elsewhere could materialize instantaneously, plunging the whole region into unmitigated unrest, upheaval, and conflict. Indigenous Shiite populations in the Gulf states could become very restless too. At the geoeconomic level, Iran retains the capacity to block the Hormuz Straits and sever the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) at will. That could seriously disrupt all global oil, gas, and trade routes to and from the Persian Gulf. Furthermore, Iran could easily target the Gulf States’ major oil and gas infrastructure including ports, oil and gas fields and pipelines, refineries, shipping, and other related installations. This could send the world economies into an irreversible tailspin!

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The US-led West has other reasons for not attacking Iran. One, the US-led West ostensibly needs a perpetual “designated threat/bogey” in the GMER; quite akin to Russia in Europe and China in the Indo-Pacific. Two, Iran, as the persistent threat/bogey, thus becomes the raison d’eter for its continuing military presence in the region. Three, Iran’s intransigence, defiance and military-nuclear potential “compel” it to maintain Israel as the sole nuclear power and de facto hegemon of the region. The US-Israel Combine perhaps expects to deter Iran. Four, the critical world oil, gas, and trade routes/SLOCs through the Hormuz Straits remain crucially within Iran’s strategic reach and oversight. Any conflict would disrupt world and regional trade. Five, the Iranian bogey/threat keeps the Gulf Arabs under pressure, dependent upon and indebted to the US for their security. Six, Iran’s ongoing nuclear program, regardless of the strangely ineffectual JCPOA, adds to the severity and urgency of the threat.

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Iran’s retention, as the designated threat/bogey, thus becomes a geopolitical, geostrategic and geoeconomic compulsion for the US and its allies. It is the only ostensible, surviving, live threat to Israel and thus to the US-led West’s vital interests in the region. It has thus become inevitable for the successful pursuance of US’ strategic aims and objectives and its continuing military presence in the GMER. Hypothetically speaking, were Iran to cease being a threat to Israel and the US-led West’s vital interests in the GMER today, the latter will feel compelled to reincarnate the threat/bogey immediately!

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