

Once united by nuclear defiance, Iran and India now diverge over ideology – and Israel

Opinion **Khinraj Jangid**

Iran's nuclear program, or what's left of it following the 12-day Israel-Iran war, is a tragedy of international politics. The program itself reflects the modern game of power in which nations profess commitment to ideals like disarmament and non-proliferation, while simultaneously seeking technological mastery, and, where possible, nuclear

weapons. Every nuclear power today, from the U.S. to India, has walked this path of strategic ambiguity or outright defiance. Iran, however, has been categorically denied this path, cast as a pariah in a system it once tried to engage diplomatically.

As an Indian, I can relate to much of Iran's predicament. My country, too, re-

sisted the nuclear apartheid enshrined in the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which came into force in 1970 and froze global nuclear privilege in the hands of five countries, inherently denying all others the same. India rejected this inequity, and eventually conducted nuclear tests under international sanctions in 1998, asserting its sovereign right to security and strategic autonomy.

Then-Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee called the treaty discrimi-

natory in 1998, because it gave "the right to five countries to proliferate vertically in disregard of universal opinion against the very existence of nuclear weapons." This echoed earlier principled opposition against this globally institutionalized double standard by Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, under whom the country's first nuclear tests were carried out in 1974.

Iran, a member of the Non-Aligned Movement

since 1979, found support in India – not just in principle, but occasionally in practice with regard to nuclear proliferation. During the early 1990s, when Iran was exploring avenues to develop its civil nuclear infrastructure, India signed an agreement to provide a 10-megawatt research reactor to Tehran. That agreement was later canceled under pressure from Washington, but not before several Iranian scientists were trained in Indian institutions.

Former Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh said even as recently as 2003 that India "has and would continue to help Iran in its controversial bid to generate nuclear energy." For many in India's strategic community, Iran's civil nuclear ambitions – like India's – were about asserting sovereign will, not proliferation.

Iran's argument was straightforward and, to many, legitimate: Having signed the NPT, it deserved the right to develop peaceful nuclear energy, just like any other member-state. It called out the double standards of the U.S. and its allies, who tolerated Israel, India and Pakistan's undeclared nuclear arsenals and never even signed on to the NPT, while at the same time sanctioning Iran for its civilian enrichment.

Iran thus tapped into a broader grievance across the Global South: that international institutions serve Western interests and apply rules selectively.

But this is where the tragedy deepens. Unlike India,



India's Defense Minister in Shanghai, in June. *Pedro Pardo/APP*

the Islamic Republic of Iran is not merely challenging global injustice, but rather advancing an ideological vision of regional order. Whereas during the Shah's reign, from 1953-1979, Tehran was closely allied with both Washington and Jerusalem, and received nuclear training, technology and

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even a nuclear reactor from the U.S. and France, today it is not a pluralistic democracy. It suppresses domestic dissent, violates international norms and seeks to export its Islamist revolution across the Middle East through armed proxies like Hamas, Hezbollah and

the Houthis. Indeed, while Iran may have once been a leader in the fight for equality for the Global South, it no longer can claim to be a part of this endeavor.

Yet still, when Israel struck Iranian nuclear sites in June, Tehran sought to portray itself as the victim of Western and Israeli aggression – a classic nod to the anti-imperialist stance of non-aligned countries. But that narrative ignored Iran's own escalation and regional interference. Iran wasn't on the receiving end of an "unprovoked attack" by Israel, as some in India argued, but an involved party in the Israel-Hamas War since October 2023.

This month, New Delhi refused to endorse the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's statement that condemned Israel's actions as violations of international law. This distancing wasn't new or unexpected, but it does represent a significant geopolitical shift.

Ever since the 2005-2007 negotiations of the Indo-U.S. civil nuclear agreement, India has made a pragmatic departure from its previous non-aligned movement rhetoric toward strategic

engagement with the United States. One reason is India's growing security and military collaboration with Israel. Another is that many of the non-aligned states and actors, including Iran and Hamas, have closely aligned themselves with Pakistan, and therefore, against India.

India has transitioned to recognize that when considering Iran's desire for nuclear power, the question cannot be whether or not the non-proliferation treaty is fair, but rather what the Islamic Republic's ideological goals are.

The issue is not that Iran, like India, sought nuclear capability – but that it wrapped that goal in a violent ideological package that undermines the very principles of peace and mutual respect, according to which the non-proliferation treaty was designed. India, once sympathetic to Iran's claims, is no longer willing to overlook this duplicity. And that means that Iran stands to lose a regional friend and partner, from their joint Chabahar port project, to being left by the wayside in the India-Middle East-Europe corridor.

Iran lost more than just a case for its nuclear program. It lost a valuable friend. India still stands for a fairer international system – but not at the cost of empowering regimes that reject democracy, endorse terrorism and threaten regional peace. That is the final irony: In resisting one form of injustice, Iran embraced another. And in doing so, it lost India.

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sudoku

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The game board is divided into 81 squares, with nine horizontal rows and nine vertical columns. A few numbers already appear in some of the squares. The aim is to fill in numerals 1 to 9 in each of the empty squares, so that every row and column and every box (a group of nine squares outlined in boldface) contains all of the numerals 1 to 9. None of the numerals may recur in the same row, column or box.

3	1	8	6	5	7	4	2	9
9	6	2	4	8	3	1	5	7
4	5	7	2	1	9	6	8	3
7	3	4	1	6	5	8	9	2
6	8	5	7	9	2	3	4	1
1	2	9	8	3	4	7	6	5
8	7	1	9	2	6	5	3	4
2	4	3	5	7	8	9	1	6
5	9	6	3	4	1	2	7	8

		4		6	9			
	1	2		7				5
						2	9	
3		8	9		4			
		5		2				1
	7	6		8		4	3	
			3					
5					8	6		

Difficulty: Hard

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