

Roles at Odds: The Roots of Increased Iran-U.S. Tension in the Post-9/11 Middle East

Kayhan Barzegar*

Abstract

This article investigates the main roots of tension between Iran and the United States in the post-9/11 Middle East. Since 9/11 and especially after the 2003 Iraqi crisis, Iran's role has sharply risen in the region. The evolution of Iran's role and power in the regional system has led Iran to seek a bigger weight and role more in tune with its acquired stature and capabilities. The conflict between Iran and the United States has been generally attributed to either a political-ideological clash and mutual hatred, or to a simple aggregation of a number of distinct policy disputes including: Iran's nuclear program, Iran's state support for organizations that Washington regards as terrorist groups, human rights issues, and Iranian involvement in the new Iraq, the Levant, and Afghanistan. While accepting these explanations, the author takes a step further and argues that the conflict, especially since 2003, has been essentially focused on a dispute over the growth of the two sides' role in Middle Eastern politics which both regard against each other's national interests and security. The author concludes that complex and interdependent nature of regional security necessitates, on the one hand, Iran's cooperation in the wake of the end of the U.S. combat role in Iraq in Summer 2010, and on the other, that the United States recognize and respect Iran's legitimate security concerns and accept the evolution of Iran's role in the region.

Keywords: Iran-US Relations, Middle East, Persian Gulf, Iraq Crisis, Afghanistan Crisis, Nuclear Program

* **Kayhan Barzegar**, PhD in International Relations, is a faculty member at the Department of International Relations at Science and Research Campus, Islamic Azad University, Tehran. He is a Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Strategic Research – CSR (Expediency Council) as well as at the Center for Middle East Strategic Studies. He is also an Associate at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, and a Research Affiliate at the MIT International Security Program. His major areas of research and scholarly work include Iran's foreign policy, Iran-U.S. relations, Iran-Arab relations, and the politics of Iran's nuclear program. He is the editor of *Discourse*, an Iranian English-language quarterly.

Introduction

What is the root cause of the increased level of conflict between Iran and the United States in the post-9/11 Middle East? The conflict has been generally attributed to either a political-ideological clash and mutual hatred,⁽¹⁾ or to a simple aggregation of a number of distinct policy disputes including Iran's nuclear program, Iran's state support for organizations that Washington regards as terrorist groups, human rights issues, and Iranian involvement in the new Iraq, the Levant, and Afghanistan.⁽²⁾ While accepting such arguments, I maintain that the conflict, especially in post-invasion Iraq, has been essentially focused on a dispute over the growth of the two sides' role in Middle Eastern politics which both regard against each other's national interests and security. With the geopolitical shifts in the region, Iran seeks a bigger weight and role commensurate with its acquired stature and capabilities. Iran's increased role is due to its geo-strategic position in proximity with regional hot spots such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine, along with its dynamic Shia ideology; elements that have accorded actual manifestation and meaning to Iran's regional role. At the same time, the United States, as the sole remaining power with global hegemonic reach, and vast engagement in the affairs of the Middle East – and the Persian Gulf – continues a dogged policy of refusing to recognize Iran's regional power status; a policy geared in action to containing and constraining Iran's role and influence in the region.

The confrontational outlook and policies of the Bush administration, especially in post-invasion Iraq, did as a matter of fact create a new level of political-strategic discrepancy in the Iran-U.S. relations, which accordingly, the two countries now regard the growth of each other's role in the region contrary to their national interests and security. All indications are that the Obama administration, contrary to initial positive gestures and pronouncements, is threading along the same path and



continues the same approach and policy for all practical purposes. The United States' determination on minimizing Iran's regional role has led in actuality to the adoption and pursuit of an oppositional posture and role on the part of Iran. This dichotomous situation and role-playing has important implications for foreign policymakers in Tehran and Washington. If the United States continues to ignore Iran's increased role in the region, Washington risks disrupting the natural power equations, potentially exacerbating the conflict. If, however, the United States can accept Iran's role in the region's new security architecture, especially in the Persian Gulf area, and change its policy of castigating Iran as the main source of threat for the region, Washington and Tehran can ultimately reach a practical rapprochement and find an accommodation that will advance the interests of both states in the region.

In this article, I seek to examine how Iran's current quest for a role in the region is to firstly tackle the new security challenges, and secondly to create economic, cultural and political opportunities in the course of the region's transformation into a new political-security order. The security challenges are caused either by the United States' presence in the immediate proximity of Iran's borders as a new external "balancer" or the region's geopolitical changes. The new changing political-security environment that has emerged in the wake of the regional crises in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Lebanon has simultaneously enabled Iran to increasingly influence the political climate of the Middle East. Dealing with security challenges and creating opportunities have led Iran to seek a proper role in the regional issues. Iran currently perceives the region's existing political-security architecture disproportionate, aiming at excluding Iran and only serving the interests of the United States, its traditional allies in the Arab world, and Israel. Living in an unstable neighborhood has been costly in the past, without appropriate gain and opportunity for Iran. The most prominent examples are the empowerment of the Taliban in Afghanistan, and new security challenges posed by the presence of foreign powers, especially the United States, across Iran's national boundaries.

In light of the political developments in post-invasion Iraq, Iran desires to define a new role for itself aiming at integrating into the regional political-security system, building a coalition of friendly states to preempt future security challenges, and establishing mutual economic cooperation with its neighbors commensurate



with its sources of power and geo-political posture. The major source of difficulty, however, appears to emanate from the Iran-U.S. hostile relations and its negative impact on Iran's regional role and interaction which have, among others, sapped Iran's political-security energy for the sake of tackling U.S. threats as well as dealing with a host of other smaller difficulties. Perceiving – and recognizing - Iran as a regional power seem to have been considered contrary to the United States' long time strategy of maintaining a balance of power in the region, particularly in the Persian Gulf. Likewise, the growth of the U.S. active military presence and role in Iran's immediate borders, combined with its long term strategy of establishing military bases in and around the neighborhood, is perceived by Iran as a matter of national security threat. In the course of the new political-security developments, therefore, the two sides envisage each other's increase of role, influence, and opportunities in the region as a source of threat and thus attempt to prevent and thwart it. The current challenges then become: can the United States overcome its traditional policy of labeling Iran as the main source of threat in the region? And how can the two parties reach a compromise regarding each other's new regional role?

The Balance Shifts

Analysts tend to agree that Iran, and to some degree Turkey, are the "relative power winners" of the United States' wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.⁽³⁾ It is certainly true that it was a great relief for Iran to see the removal of the Taliban and Saddam regimes,⁽⁴⁾ yet, a sense of frustration developed soon afterwards as an even greater threat replaced them: the presence of U.S. troops determined and prepared to follow the Bush administration's confrontational policy for outweighing Iran in its geopolitical sphere, building unfriendly alliances in its immediate borders, and threatening Iran with military attack.⁽⁵⁾ Following Iran's official expression of sympathy on the 9/11 terrorist acts, active logistical cooperation in the ousting of the Taliban, and subsequent diplomatic engagement in negotiations in Bonn on the formation of the new Afghan government, the most negative turn in the relations happened, to almost everybody's surprise, including some U.S. officials, when in the State of the Union address in late January 2002 George W. Bush included Iran in the "Axis of Evil" along with Iraq and North Korea. With the new hostile outlook, the United



States itself became the "new balancer" of Iran's power in the region, and the short-lived sentiments of appreciation were replaced with concerns and anxieties.

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have activated two substantial elements of Iran's influence in the region, namely its efficient geopolitics and dynamic Shia ideology. Since 9/11 and especially after the 2003 Iraqi crisis, Iran has become a significant player in two significant aspects of regional and international security at present: the regional crisis in Afghanistan, Iraq and Lebanon and the war against Al Qaeda terrorism. The new significance gave Iran new opportunities to seek a revision in its relations with the United States and seek a proper role in the region proportionate to its power and regional status. Characterized by dramatic political-security shifts, the Middle East is a competitive region that Iran, as any other major regional actor, plays its role within the framework of its national interests: tackling the security threats alongside its national borders as well as creating economic opportunities to advance its national goals. Despite the effective role Iran played in the region following 9/11 in battling Al Qaeda terrorism and removing its sponsor, the Taliban, in Afghanistan, it was not appreciated appropriately by the United States.⁽⁶⁾ To make matters worse, the United States as the protagonist foreign actor in the region,⁽⁷⁾ continued to threaten Iran's security through its confrontational policies.⁽⁸⁾

At the same time, Iran, given its significant sources of power such as big size and population, efficient geopolitics, energy resources, dynamic society, and thriving economic potentials on the one hand and its advancing nuclear program on the other, has been experiencing a steady rise in its national power. Yet, despite this rising power, its foreign policy role and expectations in the region still remain unfulfilled. The Islamic Republic of Iran perceives itself a regional power,⁽⁹⁾ yet believes that mainly due to the active opposition of the United States in minimizing or thwarting its role in the region, Iran is not fully benefiting from regional opportunities.⁽¹⁰⁾ The George W. Bush administration viewed Iran as a threatening and opposing force to the prevalent regional order and international security. As stated in 2003 by George W., "Iran does not act in congruence with the existing regional orders and global norms."⁽¹¹⁾ That negative outlook was further accentuated in the words of the U.S. Vice-President: "[n]ot only Iran is meddling in Iraq and is a great impediment to Israeli-Palestinian peace process, but by pursuing a nuclear



program is endangering the entire regional and global security.”⁽¹²⁾ From this perspective, therefore, not only should Iran’s role in the region’s different political, cultural, and economic domains be opposed and or diminished, but also it must be pressured through direct threats and various other instruments – such as international economic, political, and cultural institutions and even United Nations sanctions – to revise its approach and conduct. Even as a last resort, the Bush administration kept asserting on various occasions that force should be employed if Iran would not be willing to reconsider its policies. This threat description of Iran, which continues to lie at the root of the conflict between the two sides, certainly goes beyond the current levels of mutual rhetoric. It is rather suggesting a long-term strategy designed to deny Iran’s regional role and relative power.

9/11: Divergence or Convergence?

Although the roots of the on-going conflict between Iran and the United States date back to decades ago, starting with the August 1953 coup and reaching its peak with the advent of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the 9/11 event is a turning point in the continuity of mutual threat-based relations. With the presence of the U.S. forces flanking Iran as well as their strategic goal to establish military bases alongside Iran’s immediate borders in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Persian Gulf, the United States became an imminent threat to Iran’s national security. Having removed Iran’s regional enemies in its eastern and western borders, the United States came to replace them and act as a new balancer and security threat. At the same time, the 9/11 episode and the subsequent regional crises in Afghanistan and Iraq made it clear to both sides that they have common strategic and geopolitical interests in the region: the climax of those common interests converged firstly through the removal of the Taliban and Ba’athist regimes and secondly through cooperation towards the formation of post-invasion situations to restore stability and security in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Iran’s role in shaping the new Afghanistan

Iran’s cooperation with the United States in the Afghanistan crisis was aimed at resolving its strategic issues with the United States so as to acquire a proper political-security role in the region. Iran played a key role in toppling the Taliban



regime and the war against Al Qaeda -- domestically, regionally, and internationally.⁽¹³⁾ At the domestic level, Iran had supported the Afghan Northern Alliance for quite a long period – politically, financially and militarily. It would be unfair to say that the Taliban left Kabul simply because of American aerial bombardments. Fact of the matter is that the land operations conducted on the ground by the Northern Alliance was very much instrumental to that end.⁽¹⁴⁾ At the regional level, Iran, through its political, economic, and cultural pressures against the Taliban on the one side, and its coordination with other regional players such as Russia and the Central Asia states on the other, contributed significantly to the gradual weakening of the Taliban. Despite the fact that the Taliban had been recognized by Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the United Arab Emirates, and appeared to enjoy tacit endorsement from their original sponsor -- the United States⁽¹⁵⁾ -- Iran never endorsed them, and in fact, challenged their regional and international legitimacy through actively supporting Borhanoddin Rabbani and the Afghan government-in-exile. Iran even paid a heavy price for this policy. The murder of Iranian diplomats in 1998 in Mazar-e Sharif and the subsequent increase in tension, insecurity and abductions along the country's borders with Afghanistan are only examples of this heavy price.

Iran also engaged with the international coalition against the Taliban. Although the presence of American combat forces in the vicinity of Iran's eastern borders was a direct threat against the country, Iran chose to extend intelligence and logistical support to these forces in their anti-Taliban operations on certain occasions. Likewise, the Bonn Conference which served as the basis for the formation of the new Afghan government would most probably not have succeeded without Iran's constructive role. The critical and decisive role that Iran played in convincing the Northern Alliance and the Mujahedin as the actual victors of the war with the Taliban to sit at the negotiating table was key to bringing the conference to an actual result.⁽¹⁶⁾ Even once the war was over and the new government took shape, Iran collaborated with the central Afghan government in order to eradicate Al-Qaeda and the remnants of the Taliban. Most importantly, quite early on Iran agreed with the United States on the presidency of Hamed Karzai, a US-designated candidate,⁽¹⁷⁾ and lent every support towards the establishment of a powerful central government in Kabul. It also facilitated the



repatriation process of the large Afghan refugee community in Iran.⁽¹⁸⁾ Furthermore, it gave generous financial and logistical support⁽¹⁹⁾ to the new government in its state-building efforts and implemented several development projects, especially in the Herat region, such as building the strategic Herat-Dogharoon road. In the past nine years, Iran has supported all attempts directed at political development and state-building in Afghanistan, such as the formation of the Loya Jirga, constitutional elections, and presidential elections.⁽²⁰⁾

Iran and the New Iraq

The successful cooperation between the U.S. and Iran in Afghanistan occurred because of the United States' acceptance of Iran's role, demands, and security concerns in the new Afghanistan.⁽²¹⁾ Meanwhile, Iran hoped that this cooperation could be a good start for comprehensive talks on other regional and strategic issues between the two sides. Direct negotiations on the Afghan crisis appeared at the time to reflect a certain degree of optimism inside the Iranian government to pursue a similar approach and policy as well in Iraq. Iran's cooperating role in the formation of the new power structure in Iraq can be approached from a number of angles. Primarily, Iran assisted with the goal of surrounding the Baathist regime regionally,⁽²²⁾ and also adopted – and declared – a policy of positive neutrality based on cooperating when necessary with the coalition forces.⁽²³⁾

Secondly, through its natural and extended influence among the Shia population of Iraq, Iran helped significantly in stabilizing security and balance of power in the new Iraq. Iraq's political and power structure during the pre-2003 period was such that the Shias, comprising at least 60% of the population, had no role in the power structure.⁽²⁴⁾ The new circumstances following the collapse of the Ba'athist regime afforded the various Shia factions, as well as the Kurdish forces in the north, a golden opportunity for the first time since the establishment of the Iraqi state (1921) to assert their existence and identity, and claim a political role commensurate with their size and weight in the country. In this regard, Iran's settling role in calming the radical Shia movement led by Muqtada Al-Sadr and their eventual voluntary disarmament during the early years of the crisis is noteworthy. I have argued elsewhere that this positive role definitely removed the grounds for civil war in Iraq at that juncture.⁽²⁵⁾ Iran's successful mediation in late March 2008



between the Al-Maliki government and Shia militias in Sadr City in Baghdad was another sign of Iran's official supportive policy, especially given the actual support Muqtada Al-Sadr and his Mahdi Army enjoy among certain powerful religious and political quarters in Iran. Iran's open support for the Iraqi government and against the Mahdi Army and Sadr neighborhood militias in Baghdad could perhaps explain the Movement's harsh statements issued on occasions decrying Iranian influence in Iraq.⁽²⁶⁾

Thirdly, Iran has extended its support to political decisions and developments in the course of the Iraqi state-building process. One of Iran's early constructive measures was to endorse the Iraqi Provisional Government led by Ayad Alavi, despite his extremely close relations with the United States, his known secular outlook, and even not-so-concealed unfriendly sentiments towards Iran. This support came at a time when the United States desperately needed to see stability and security in Iraq and to counter terrorist acts and sources of instability. Iran further supported the process of general elections, including the election of the Transitional National Assembly, which was responsible for the preparation and adoption of Iraq's new Constitution.⁽²⁷⁾

Due to the ethno-religious mixture of the population, and hence, dispersion of power in Iraq, the active political forces and elite in the new Iraq appear to have realized the inevitability of coalition-building. Moreover, experiences gained during the recent years have shown that the success of a coalition government is dependent on the consent and actual cooperation among the dominant political forces and currents, especially the Shias. The results of the March 2010 parliamentary elections once again revealed the sectarian nature of power and political structure in Iraq.⁽²⁸⁾ The quite complex political-religious mosaic in Iraq is further complicated by the involvement and impact of the concerns, interests, and policies of neighboring countries, whether it be Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Syria, or others, each supporting the concerns and interests of various, rival ethnic or religious forces. Given the size and weight of the Iraqi Shia community and also the long-standing and close relationships with all the major Iraqi Shia and Kurdish political factions, Iran has been – and continues to be – in a privileged position to play a vital role in the viability and longevity of coalition governments in Baghdad. An example of this close relationship in action was the invitation of the



representatives of major Iraqi Shia factions to Tehran immediately after the 7 March 2010, elections.⁽²⁹⁾ A delegation from Al-Iraqiya, led by Alavi, also later visited Tehran. At the conclusion of these visits, Iran announced its support for a coalition government, comprising all major Shia, Sunni and Kurdish factions.⁽³⁰⁾ At the same time, Iran has also participated actively in all regional and international conferences on the future of Iraq.⁽³¹⁾

Roles at Odds

Iran, like any other state, has legitimate security concerns which are impacted by the situation in its neighborhood, especially in the vicinity of its immediate borders; enjoys a natural domain of cultural, political, and economic influence in the region; pursues independent national security strategies to protect and preserve itself and tackle foreign threats; and advances its own way of political and socio-economic development.

As discussed previously, while there exist a range of outstanding tension-ridden issues and situations between Iran and the U.S. which need to be addressed, tackled, and finally resolved, the present article argues that the current roots of the on-going, seemingly irresolvable impasse between the two countries is to be traced in the heightened state of mutual distrust of each other's increased regional role in the Middle East. The discussion in the previous pages has made it amply clear that the two countries, acting on common (or at least similar) geopolitical concerns and interests in the region, did in fact cooperate in 2001 towards toppling the Taliban and in 2003 in eliminating the Ba'athist regime in Iraq. They have also shared common concern in militating against terrorism, especially the Al-Qaeda. Notwithstanding these positive developments which could have helped ameliorate the relations towards a less-charged situation, the relations between the two countries since 9/11 did as a matter of fact move in the other direction, and became much more confrontational than even the early days of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The net outcome being that the cooperation between the two countries on regional crises proved short-lived. Indications are that the evolution of Iran's role in the region served to warn Washington's policy-makers of the emergence of a new shift in the region's power structure in which Iran would be the main actor.⁽³²⁾ Such a shift was deemed to collide with the strategic interests of Washington and its



allies in the region. That explains why Washington's policies shifted from cooperation to confrontation, aiming at curtailing Iran's regional role and power. Simultaneously, on the other side, Iran has viewed the policies and measures by Washington since 2003 geared towards enhancing the U.S. position and role in the region with suspicion and damaging to her own position and role. From a strategic vantage point, the expanded and intense presence of the United States in the region will inevitably engage Iran's political and security stamina and further unleash another level of regional rivalry -- this time between Iran and the United States.⁽³³⁾

Under such circumstances of rivalry and consequent tension, actualization of Iran's [relative] regional power becomes dependent on and proportional to the lessening of the U.S. presence – especially active military presence – in the immediate neighborhood of Iran. Concurrently, advancing cooperation with the United States towards settling Iraq's insecurity indicates, in practical terms, Iran's desire and determination to undergird its regional role, as best reflected in the direct talks between the two sides on Iraq in 2006-2007. These talks, which again proved short-lived and inconclusive, carried the implicit message that Iran appeared to have accepted the U.S. role in Iraq and also pointed to Iran's actual readiness – beyond rhetoric – for cooperation and engagement. From the Iranian perspective, therefore, undergirding the regional role aims at two simultaneous goals; tackling the United States' security threats on the one hand, and preempting the new security challenges stemming from the recent geopolitical changes on the other.

Iran enjoys a natural domain of political, cultural, and economic influence in the greater region surrounding it. For a host of reasons, the Persian Gulf region and Iraq are deemed by Iran to be of particular vital strategic significance. The Persian Gulf has been – and will continue to be – of critical significance for Iran in a number of ways; as the main route for Iran's oil exports⁽³⁴⁾; also as the main route for the country's international trade and communications with the West and the East, and generally a starting point for Iran's international relations. And from a strategic perspective, the area presents a set of critical sources of both opportunity and vulnerability for Iran's national security and interests. Likewise, Iraq, for the reasons already discussed, occupies a special place in Iran's national security. And for better or for worse, the Persian Gulf and Iraq also happen to be considered by the U.S. as areas of critical interest, hence, offering a point of active challenge



between Iran as a regional country and the United States as a powerful outsider.

As discussed previously, Iran's quest for a regional role commensurate with its actual and potential capabilities aims at tackling new security threats caused by the new geopolitical changes in the surrounding region, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as to promote economic and cultural opportunities. Such a national quest, however, has had to militate against the U.S. confrontational approach and policies towards Iran, bolstered by increased American direct presence and engagement in the political, military, and economic affairs of the region. The decades-old tussle, heightened since 2003, has practically constrained Iran's role in its vital domains of national interest and deprived it of playing its due regional role. This has led, in turn, to a similarly unaccommodating posture by Iran that insecurity for Iran is equivalent to insecurity for the region.⁽³⁵⁾ In other words, "security for all or for none." From this perspective, as pronounced recently by a Revolutionary Guards commander, the region cannot be secured at the expense of Iran's insecurity.⁽³⁶⁾ The U.S. pursuit of a balance of power policy in the Persian Gulf since the end of the Iran-Iraq War, as best manifested in the "Dual Containment" policy, has fostered tension and distrust among the regional countries, with special emphasis on thwarting and ostracizing Iran. With the benefit of hindsight and looking to a future without debilitating local distrust and rivalry, and also free from outside interference and intrigue, the unfolding political-security system in the region, reflecting the new realities on the ground, should be based on the region's internal security requirements and inter-regional economic and cultural cooperation⁽³⁷⁾ rather than geared to the preservation of the status quo ante and focusing on the interests of outside powers. To this end, Iran – and for that matter, others in the region - need to opt for and pursue a decisive policy of active engagement in the regional political-security architecture.

Aside from political, military and security weight in the region, Iran's size and tremendous economic potential can also help the region's economy – both as an exporter of a wide range of goods and products as well as a huge and expanding market. Further promotion of economic opportunities for Iranian manufacturing, and construction and trading companies in the surrounding countries would help strengthen Iran's regional economic reach and position. That would further buttress the country's long-standing and solid position at the crossroad of the world's main



energy production, export, and transit routes, where Iran's economy connects with the region and the world economy. Besides the growing potentials of expanding economic transactions with the countries in the surrounding region, inclusive of the Persian Gulf area, Iraq, Afghanistan, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Levant, Iran enjoys the unique position of serving as the crossroad of east-west and north-south energy transit routes. The realization of such potentials, especially given the peculiar complications involved in the geopolitics of pipelines, would require, first and foremost, establishment and/or strengthening of close political-strategic relationships with the neighboring countries.

Diverging Perspectives on Roles

The discussion thus far has endeavored to show that the Iran-U.S. conflict on the growth of their respective role in the region is more centered on the consequences of a new shift in the region's power structure,⁽³⁸⁾ which collides with their strategic interests. The main bone of contention relates to their diverging standpoints on what they perceive as challenge and opportunity. While the United States takes Iran's increased engagement in the region's affairs; i.e. in the Persian Gulf, Iraq, Afghanistan, and in a general sense, in the greater Middle East, or Iran's advancing nuclear program, as a threat, Iran perceives them as windows of opportunity towards increasing its regional role geared to promoting national interests.

Chief among the US current concerns is Iran's nuclear program, considering and depicting it as a major threat for regional and international security.⁽³⁹⁾ From Iran's standpoint, pursuit of a nuclear program for peaceful purposes as recognized in Article 4 of the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT)⁽⁴⁰⁾ constitutes an inalienable right, and that the U.S. opposition is, in fact, challenging Iran's legitimate rights and sources of relative power and role. From the American perspective, as argued by the U.S. administrations, a nuclear Iran will unbalance the regional power structure, triggers nuclear rivalry and arms race in the region, and will threaten the US strategic ally - Israel.⁽⁴¹⁾

For Iran, conversely, pursuit of the peaceful nuclear program is an opportunity, serves as a source of expressing national pride, is a sign of progress, and also enhances the country's regional and global status.⁽⁴²⁾ While other countries in the region have pursued their national programs and projects in technological



advancement without outside opposition, Iranian leaders find the U.S. opposition to Iran's quest for peaceful nuclear capability objectionable and unacceptable.⁽⁴³⁾ According to the Iranian perspective, the nuclear program finds its provenance in two main goals: the "peaceful" use of nuclear energy and gradual global nuclear disarmament, with emphasis on the Middle East. Iran's political pronouncements and diplomatic efforts in support of an all-out nuclear disarmament are meant to underline that Iran does not include the concept of deterrence in its nuclear program. Tehran has argued that nuclear weaponization will not bring security and cannot be used as a means of deterrence. The Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, in a message addressed to the Tehran Nuclear Disarmament Conference (17-18 April 2010, Tehran),⁽⁴⁴⁾ declared the use of nuclear weapons *haram* (religiously banned) - a position that had been taken and announced previously. Also at the same conference, Mahmood Ahmadinejad reiterated that Iran does not envisage nuclear weapons as a source of deterrence.⁽⁴⁵⁾

From the Iranian vantage point, in spite of Iran's transparent activities, the United States continues its policy of denying Iran's legitimate nuclear rights and regional role, and pushed for a fourth sanctions resolution against Iran in the UN Security Council.⁽⁴⁶⁾ According to U.S. official pronouncements, the Obama administration believes that sanctions are necessary in order to negotiate from a position of strength and thus ought to be considered diplomacy by other means. The Americans seem to believe that coercive and meaningful sanctions will change Iran's nuclear policy, and also deem these sanctions essential for preventing a possible war, especially on the Israeli side. To make these multilateral sanctions more effective, the U.S. and other supporters of the UN resolution, mainly Western and European countries, have resorted to further unilateral sanctions. Accordingly, Barack Obama signed the gasoline sanctions adopted by the U.S. Congress.⁽⁴⁷⁾

Iran's increasing role in the affairs of the Arab Middle East is another significant bone of contention related to Iran-U.S. conflict on the evolution of Iran's foreign policy role and regional stature and power. Iran's role in post-invasion Iraq, its established policy of alliance with Syria and Hezbollah, as well as its prominent position in what has been labeled as the creation of a supposed "Shia Crescent", are among the important areas of contention for influence in the region. As already discussed, the United States eliminated Iraq's traditional order in 2003,



hoping to replace it with a new order tailored to serve and promote Washington's strategy and interests in Iraq and in the greater region. The new order, however, came to be dominated by the emergence of the Shia-Kurdish coalition – a development in the new governing system that served to increase Iran's role in Iraq, and as a consequence, in the greater region.

In this regard – and in retrospect - it is interesting to note that in early 2006 the U.S. came close to recognizing Iran's regional role. The Baker-Hamilton Plan, as prepared by the Iraq Study Group, appeared to have arrived at a relatively objective understanding of the regional situation, including the role of Iran (and also Syria), and proposed to utilize such a role towards contributing to the promotion of peace, security and stability in the Middle East. Instead of denying Iran's role in Iraq's political-security issues, the Plan focused on engaging Iran and its positive role towards settling the Iraq crisis. It even went so far as to address Iran's security concerns in the region⁽⁴⁸⁾ - in fact, the first time ever since the Islamic Revolution that the U.S. would acknowledge Iran's geo-political significance. In Iran, many analysts viewed the Plan as the best way for the U.S. to engage Iran's role in helping secure Iraq. Moreover, the Plan also came to be seen as a good opportunity for Iran-U.S. relations to enter a new phase – a possible, propitious opportunity for both sides to find an exit from the on-going conflict on regional role. As it turned out, unfortunately though, the Plan was rejected by the Bush administration and a momentous opportunity came to naught.

The nature of and the rationale behind the close relations between Iran and Iraq, inclusive of the wide-ranging commonalities between them, and hence, Iraq's special place in Iran's national security, have been discussed in the previous pages. That notwithstanding and beyond the close ideological-cultural between Tehran and the Shia-Kurdish ruling coalition in Baghdad, there still exist a number of unresolved outstanding issues between the two countries, mainly related to and remaining from the 1980-1988 War period, including the issues pertaining to the provisions of the 1975 Iran-Iraq Treaty and their implementation⁽⁴⁹⁾ and the question of War compensation. These outstanding issues, it should be reckoned, portend strategic importance for the long-term future relations between the two countries. Meanwhile, the characteristics of the power structure, politics, culture, and religion in Iraq are such that they all point in the direction of an inevitably close



and friendly relationship with Iran. Viewed in the context of the two countries' long-standing commonalities and strategic interests, the Shia groups in Iraq, for instance, have shown a strong propensity to maintaining close fraternal relations with their co-religionists across the border, especially given the clerical rule in Iran. Having been on the margins of the Iraqi society and out of the power structure for all practical purposes since the Iraqi state was established, and also feeling encircled by a not-so-sympathetic Sunni-dominated neighborhood in the Arab world, it may not be too difficult to fathom the reasons and rationale for the Iraqi Shia interest – if not enthusiasm – in welcoming Iranian engagement in Iraq.⁽⁵⁰⁾

Over and above the considerations already cited, Iran also has other serious security concerns emanating mainly from the United States' strategies in the region as well as long-term goals for the future of Iraq. Given Iran's quite painful experiences during the past century with hostile outside powers, including the exploitation of neighboring countries' territories against Iranian national interests, regional stature and role, and even territorial integrity,⁽⁵¹⁾ Iran and Iranians harbor strong sensitivities in this regard. Iran's initial opposition to the U.S. security agreements with Iraq (2008) could therefore be understood in light of the concerns emanating from the growth and deepening of the U.S. presence and active engagement in Iran's political-security backyard. From Iran's viewpoint, the long presence of a hegemonic power like the U.S. across Iran's national boundaries will not only bring national security challenges, but also create political-security and cultural discrepancies in the country's relations with Iraq and other Arab states in the region. As expressed by Iranian officials, Iran's main concerns regarding the agreement at the time was related to firstly, setting a timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. troops, secondly, the U.S. troops conducted missions and the possible use of Iraqi soil for attacking a third country (Iran), and thirdly, the US efforts to confront the "so-called" terrorists groups.⁽⁵²⁾ Such factors could increase the United States political-security role in Iraq - and in the region – to the clear detriment of Iran's security and interests and regional role.

Another bone of contention between Iran and the U.S. on regional engagement and influence concerns the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah alliance. While the principal motive behind the triangular cooperation relates to the U.S.-Israeli axis and their military threat, the Iran-Syria coalition appears to aim at achieving a more



strategic goal in the post-2003 situation; that is, coalition-making in times of political-security uncertainty and threat – in the Persian Gulf for Iran and in the Levant for Syria. As I have argued elsewhere, as long as this mutual need continues to apply to both countries, the Iran-Syria alliance will persevere.⁽⁵³⁾ Viewed from an Iranian perspective, depicting and denouncing Iran and Syria as the region's primary sources of threat is myopic, and should be redressed. Judging from actual practice over the past few years, Iran is convinced that the United States is not prepared to genuinely engage Iran in its own immediate security backyard; that is, in Iraq. In retrospect, the Bush administration appeared to be interested in seeking Iranian assistance and utilizing its privileged position and role in Iraq for tackling daily security challenges. The same approach and motive seems to apply again, this time around, aiming to use Iran's stature and role to help bring stability in the aftermath of the U.S. troops withdrawal at the end of August 2011. While Iran is also concerned about and interested in security in Iraq, for its own national security reasons, Iran is simultaneously keen about serious talks on long-term future security and strategic arrangements, including on such critical issues as the composition of governance in Baghdad – whether overtly anti-Iranian elements and currents; e.g., remnants of the Ba'athist regime, will be allowed to play a part for sheer Realpolitik reasons. In light of the foregoing, the main bone of contention will revolve around how the new political-security order of the region should be redefined by the main regional and trans-regional actors; in my view, Iran and the United States.

And lastly, the Shia revival in the politics of the region has emerged as another point of conflict between Iran and the United States in their respective regional role. As for the emergence of the so-called Shia Crescent, it can be argued that Iran's outlook and policy in supporting the Shia communities has been generally of a pragmatic nature and more oriented towards establishing a strategic linkage between friendly states and political factions in the region,⁽⁵⁴⁾ rather than pursuing purely ideological/doctrinal ulterior motives, as alleged by some of Iran's detractors among the Arab Sunni elites. Viewed from the vantage point of such quarters, a so-called Shia Crescent is seen as an attempt by the "Shia" Iran to firstly engage the masses in the region,⁽⁵⁵⁾ secondly, to build an ideological belt of sympathetic Shia-based governments or political factions in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon,⁽⁵⁶⁾ and thirdly, to expand its regional role and power.⁽⁵⁷⁾ Aside from how



Iran's outlook and policies are analyzed or judged by others in the region, fact of the matter is that recent shifts since 2003 in the political architecture of the region has moved in a direction favoring Iran and in a general sense, the Shia communities in the Sunni-dominated Arab world. It could as well be argued that the key concern among the ruling elites in the Arab world relates to the somehow natural orientation of the Arab Shia communities toward Iran, rather than Iran's attempts to build the alleged "Shia Crescent."⁽⁵⁸⁾ As once lamented by Hosni Mubarak: "The Shias in the region are more loyal to Iran than their own countries."⁽⁵⁹⁾ As things stand now, the prospects of Iran's growing role in the affairs of the Arab Middle East will run counter to the United States' long-term goals and strategies in the greater region.

Iran and Obama: Challenges on Roles

As discussed, the United States confrontational outlook – and policies - towards Iran, especially since 2003, has created a new level of "political-strategic discrepancy" in Iran-U.S. relations. The two countries have regarded the growth of each other's role in the region running counter to their national interests and security. The wide range of U.S. policies under the Bush administration aiming at diminishing Iran's role; whether in promoting the position of political currents with anti-Iranian tendencies in post-2003 Iraq, closer alliance with Sunni Arab regimes, and also systematic opposition to Iran's nuclear program, have been discussed in relative detail in previous sections of the present article. Iran, also as discussed previously, has perceived these policies as damaging to its national security and interests and has, as a consequence, pursued its own policies to safeguard its interests and security and promote its position and role. Looking at the on-going tussle, Iran and the U.S. could, therefore, be seen as two "strategic adversaries", bent on balancing the greater regional situation against each other.

The end of the Bush era and Barack Obama's victory on a platform of change, including with respect to Iran, appeared to herald the beginning of a new page in U.S.-Iran tenuous relations. Obama's positive pronouncements prior to and in the early months after election – willingness to negotiate with Iran on all outstanding issues without preconditions – did in fact create a generally hopeful political ambience in Iran, and even received similar positive vibes from Tehran. As reported in the press in the spring of 2009, even a couple of letters were exchanged



between Obama and Iran's Supreme Leader which strengthened the hopes in both countries for a breakthrough. However, the June 2009 presidential elections in Iran and its aftermath changed the situation altogether. Despite Obama's obvious hesitancy during the early months of the post-election crisis in Iran to make clear statements in one direction or another – which seemed to indicate that he still cherished hopes to come to a deal with Iran on the nuclear issue – the political atmosphere suffered a major blow as of late September following the open, heated controversy over Iran's construction of a new nuclear site at Fordou. From then onwards, notwithstanding brief, transient episodes of hope and prospects for active engagement and talks on the nuclear issue (e.g., the Geneva meeting in October 2009 and its follow-up talks on the enriched uranium swap, and also the Iran-Turkey-Brazil Tehran Declaration in May 2010), the actual situation has moved from bad to worse. The seeming impasse in the process finally came to a head with the passage of the UN Security Council resolution 1929 as a result of the U.S. active, months-long political-diplomatic campaign. Expansion of the range and depth of sanctions, by the U.S., Europeans, and a number of other like-minded countries, beyond the UN sanctions, since June this year has further muddied the atmosphere between the two sides.

Aside from the nuclear issue as the most pressing item on the Obama administration's agenda with respect to Iran, the political discourse on Iran in the United States has also suffered in the meantime. While the Republicans in general and the NewCons in particular have been pushing Obama and his administration to adopt a harsher approach and policy vis-à-vis Iran, the outlook among other political constituencies, including some Democrats, has also stiffened – best reflected in the shift in Richard Haas' position. As an almost lonely voice in the State Department under George W. Bush who consistently argued for engagement with Iran and counseled against confrontational policies, the retired veteran diplomat and new Chairman of the Council on Foreign Relations made a full turnabout a few months back and considered “regime change” as the only right policy towards Iran.⁽⁶⁰⁾ The net outcome of such a trend in the States in tandem with a more critical outlook with regard to Iran's domestic situation and political developments, coupled with the toughened sanctions policy, has been to completely shatter all hopes in Iran for negotiations with the Obama administration across the



board. What appeared to look like hopeful prospects for a "Grand Bargain" back in late 2008 and early 2009 has all but disappeared and given way to total disappointment and ever-increasing venomous mutual acrimony, the prevailing view in Iran – both in official quarters as well as across the wide spectrum of political currents and in the society at large – seem to have settled for the conclusion that no fundamental change could be expected to happen in Iran-U.S. relations in the short-term; i.e., during Obama's administration. The U.S. push for the new UN resolution, resort to and support for further unilateral sanctions, and active pursuit of a generally more hostile approach in recent months, inclusive of a renewed emphasis on the possibility of military option in case of the failure of diplomacy (reminiscent of the oft-repeated line under Bush of keeping "all options on the table") have made it amply clear that any meaningful rapprochement between the two countries is practically out of sight.

Placing the above in the bigger context of the strategic relations between the two countries; their respective approach to engagement and role in the region, one cannot but come to the conclusion that the current impasse will continue – at least in the short-term. Contrary to an initial positive outlook, the current Obama policy towards Iran does not seem to augur well for a meaningful change and actual rapprochement. The on-going U.S. focus on substantial economic and political pressure through a much expanded sanctions regime and simultaneous lip service to diplomacy and talks can hardly convince Iranians of changing gear. Worse still, frequent allusions by various American high-ranking officials, both civilian and military, inclusive of Obama himself, on the possibility of ultimate resort to the military option to "prevent Iran from acquiring military nuclear capability" – whether directly by the U.S. or through the Israeli proxy, or jointly – have served to further complicate the picture and render any possible diplomatic solution all the more difficult and out of reach.

Beyond political pronouncements, gestures and measures of a transient nature in response to changing situations and/or short-term developments – whether necessitating a more accommodating or alternatively a more hostile posture and approach – the crux of the long-term, strategic conflict between the two sides will continue to revolve, in the final analysis, around regional influence. The question then becomes, will the U.S., whether under a democratic or republican



administration, eventually choose to recognize Iran's stature, weight and role as a dominant actor in the Persian Gulf and also a major player in the greater Middle East or not. Thus far, since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, and except for short-lived, abortive initiatives, the U.S. strategy has for the main part been geared to pressuring Iran through a combination of political-diplomatic, economic, and even military policies and measures, and to constrain Iran's areas of natural influence in its neighborhood and proximity – as discussed previously, even in its immediate political-security backyard such as in Iraq, Afghanistan or the Persian Gulf. The consistent U.S. policy of castigating Iran as the major source of security threat against the region – be it the oil-rich sheikhdoms in the Persian Gulf, other pro-West Arab allies, Israel, or for that matter, Palestinian-Israeli peace talk – and simultaneously supporting and assisting Iran's rivals or enemies has been part and parcel of the above overall strategic objective.

Since it takes two to tango, an eventual rapprochement between Iran and the U.S. -- which will one day become reality despite all odds and regardless of short-term or current mutual nay-saying – will inevitably need an equally accommodating outlook from both sides. Both Tehran and Washington will have to come to terms with each other's reality and recognize, at long last, that neither side is or will ever be in a position to totally neglect the other side, nor can cherish the hope of eliminating the other from the area of vital national and security interests and desired role and influence. Such a mutual recognition, while needed, would not necessarily lead to engagement and cooperation; the latter requires recognition of "mutual strategic needs." It has already been discussed in previous sections of the article that the U.S., as an outside force to the Middle East and the Persian Gulf albeit a power with global hegemony, has as a matter of fact found itself in need of concrete Iranian assistance to overcome its self-inflicted predicament in Afghanistan and Iraq, and in a larger sense, in the greater Middle East. That realization has yet to be translated into a positive, engaging strategy and concrete target-oriented policies and measures; needless to say, a strategy and policy quite of a different nature and discourse than the current focus on pressure and ostracism. That is for the American side of the coin. The Iranian side also needs to move beyond the self-constraining discourse, policies and measures of the past – thus far – and search for and define the "strategic needs" with regard to the U.S., be it in the



area of assisting provision and maintenance of security in the Persian Gulf, stability and security in Iraq and Afghanistan after the U.S. combat troops withdraw, or to contributing to the cause of peace and security in the larger Middle East in one form or another.

Considering the long catalogue of conflictive issues and situations between the two countries and looking for a possible exit from the current impasse, one might be tempted to speculate that the Iranian nuclear dossier, despite all the complexities involved, could in fact contain the essential elements for a compromise, and a breakthrough towards some sort of rapprochement. On the one hand, if past practice is any indication, the U.S. and the like-minded countries should realize that mere economic sanctions – while damaging to the Iranian economy and hurting Iranian people – would not necessarily lead to the Iranian government's change in the course of the current nuclear policy, which is jealously considered by the Iranian polity as a matter of national pride and dignity. In fact, foreign pressures on this particular issue have proved quite beneficial to the Iranian state's position, at both national and international levels. On the other hand, a more realistic approach on the part of the U.S. towards the nuclear program, anchored on a different, accommodating approach and premised on genuine dialogue free from pressure and coercion, would most probably serve as a practical, tangible encouragement for Tehran, leading to a practical thaw away from the so-called "clenched fist." In the author's estimation, a possible mutually face-saving formula on Iran's nuclear program, while there is still time, could indeed serve to undo the seemingly irresolvable impasse between Iran and the U.S. Such an eventuality, albeit appearing distant and beyond reach under the circumstances, could pave the way for the ultimate unfolding of a process of rapprochement – inevitably gradual, piecemeal and even painstaking - that would convince both sides to move away from decades of animosity and tussle and settle for mutual recognition of each other's presence, weight and role in the Persian Gulf and the greater Middle East.

Conclusions

Almost 32 years after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the U.S.-Iran relations continue to be tenuous and conflictive. Besides a political-ideological clash and associated mutual resentment and an equally important aggregation of a number of distinct



policy disputes, mostly prominently Iran's disputed nuclear program, the on-going, active strife between the two countries appears to be mainly emanating from competition and struggle over regional influence and role. As argued in detail in this article, the post-9/11 developments, particularly the situation in the aftermath of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, have coalesced, even if inadvertently, to boost Iran's regional actual weight, influence and role, not only in Iran's immediate neighborhood but also on a larger scale in the greater Middle East. The removal of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Ba'athist regime in Iraq – as irreplaceable enemies of Iran and the emergence of pro-Iran political and ideological forces in both countries – served to boost Iran's regional position. Iran's actual cooperation with the U.S. in both cases appeared at the time to turn a new page in the state of relations between them and place them on a different course that could have opened the way for a process of rapprochement and – gradual – resolution of outstanding differences. The expected change failed to materialize, and the tussle moved instead to a higher “strategic” level; each side endeavoring, in their own peculiar ways, to create difficulty for the other and contain and constrain the other's role and domain of influence in the region – both in the Persian Gulf and the greater Middle East.

Given the crux of the conflict between the two countries on a wide gamut of issues, situations and policies, and recognizing what each side considers as its national interests and security concerns, the article has argued that the way out of the current impasse lies in mutual recognition of the reality on the ground. Iran, as the dominant state in the Persian Gulf region and also as a major player in the greater Middle East, enjoys a certain stature, weight and role, that can simply not be ignored - whether by the countries in the region or others, inclusive of and in particular, the U.S. More importantly, though, Iran's regional position and influence, once recognized and respected, can indeed be brought to bear to contribute, in mutually-reassuring-reinforcing interactive processes, to the promotion and consolidation of peace and stability in the region instead of the current mutually-damaging and corrosive conflict with all its associated negative repercussions for both sides and for the region at large. As for the other side of the coin, the article has likewise argued that since it takes two to tango Iran also needs to bring itself to opt for a different approach and outlook towards the seemingly inevitable



engagement and role of the U.S. as a supra-regional hegemonic power with global reach and aspirations – even if objecting to the U.S. direct military presence and engagement in its immediate neighborhood and traditional national security backyards.

As a final point, the article has argued for interaction and engagement, for in the final analysis and at the end of the day, rivals and adversaries sit down at the negotiating table to resolve disputes and conflicts and smooth out their differences. In the author's analysis and reckoning, notwithstanding the current conflictive relations, including the toughened sanctions, impasse in the nuclear dossier, and on-going and even daily high-wire mutual propaganda spin, these very conflictive issues and situations carry the unique potential opportunity for both sides to seize the moment and move forward towards a meaningful dialogue on national security issues, interests and concerns; a strategic dialogue. Significant regional strategic stakes for both sides call for a bold step forward while there is still time to avoid – and in fact, prevent – a potentially dangerous regional situation from spiraling into a military face-off with catastrophic consequences for all.

Notes

1. See for example, James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the lion: The Tragedy of American Iranian Relations*, 1989; R.K. Ramazani, *The United States and Iran: The Patterns of Influence*, 1982; Graham E. Fuller, *The Center of the Universe*, 1991; Mark J. Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Shah: Building a Client State in Iran*, 1991; Nikki R. Keddie and Mark J. Gasiorowski, eds., *Neither East nor West: Iran, The Soviet Union, and the United States*, 1990; Shireen T. Hunter, *Iran and the World: Continuity in a Revolutionary Decade*, 1990; Geoffrey Kemp, *Forever Enemies? American Policy and the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 1994; Hooshang Amirahmadi and Eric Hoolglund, *US-Iran Relation's: Areas of Tension and Mutual Interest*, 1994; Gary Sick, *All Fall Down*, 1985.
2. See for example, Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 2004; Ray Takeyh, *Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 2006; Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 2006; Flynt Leverett, *Dealing with Tehran: Assessing U.S. Diplomatic Options toward Iran*, 2006; Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States*, 2007; Donette Murray, *US Foreign Policy and Iran: American-Iranian Relations since the Islamic Revolution*, 2009; Saan Fayamanesh, *The United States and Iran: Sanctions, War and the Policy of Dual Containment*, 2008.
3. Owen Matthews and Christopher Dickey, "Triumph of the Turks," *Newsweek*, 7 December 2009, pp. 31-33. Many analyses in the West, particularly in the United States, and in the Arab world tend to perceive that Iran is the only beneficiary of the Bush administration's wars in the region. See, for instance, Gary G. Sick, "Alliance against Iran," An interview with Gary Sick by Bernard Gwertzman, *Council on Foreign Relations*, 23 January 2007; Mohsen M. Milani, "Iran, Status Quo Power," *Current History*, Vol. 104, No. 678 (January 2005), pp. 30-36; Ibrahim Nawar, "Iran's Expanding Influence," November 2007, [http:// weekly.ahram.org.eg/print/2007/872/focus.htm](http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/print/2007/872/focus.htm).
4. Referring to Zalmay Khalilzad's remarks at Columbia University. See "Iran Should be Thankful to U.S." 2 February 2008, <http://www.panarmenian.net/news/eng/?nid=24729>.
5. Vali Nasr and Ray Takeyh, "The Costs of Containing Iran," *Foreign Affairs*,



January/February 2008.

6. See James Dobbins, "A Slap in the Face from America," *Showdown with Iran*, November 2007; and "Time to Deal With Iran," *Washington Post*, 6 May 2004.
7. See Vali Nasr and Ray Takeyh, "The Costs of Containing Iran," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2008.
8. Ray Takeyh and Vali Nasr, "Get Tehran inside the Tent," *Council of Foreign Relations*, 6 December 2007, www.cfr.org
9. See for example the remarks made by President Ahmadinejad, "President Says Iran Major Regional Power," <http://www.president.ir/en/?ArtID=13950>.
10. Manuchehr Mottaki, "Respect Iran's Independence," *The Miami Herald*, 13 November 2007.
11. See George W Bush's speech at the National Endowment for Democracy at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html.
12. See "Vice President's Remarks to the Washington institute for Near East Policy," 21 October 2007, www.whitehouse.gov; Michael Rubin, "Iranian Strategy in Iraq," *American Enterprise Institute*, 16 July 2007.
13. Mohammad Javad Zarif, "Tackling the Iran-U.S. Crisis: The Need for a Paradigm Shift," *Journal of International Affairs*, Spring/Summer 2007, Vol. 60, No. 2, p. 75.
14. Speech by Mohsen Aminzadeh, Iran's former deputy foreign minister in the Khatami administration at Center for Strategic Research, Tehran 2006; see also Mohsen Milani, "Iran's Policy Towards Afghanistan," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 60, No. 2, Spring 2006, pp. 246-247; and Kaveh Afrasibi and Abbas Maleki, "Iran's Foreign Policy After 11 September," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Vol. IX, Issue. 2, winter/spring 2003.
15. See William O. Beeman, 'Follow the Oil Trail - Mess in Afghanistan Partly Our Government's Fault', *Jinn Magazine* (online), Pacific News Service, San Francisco, 24 August 1998, web-site at <http://www.pacificnews.org/jinn>.
16. Mohsen Milani, Op. Cit., pp. 246-248.
17. Mohsen Aminzadeh, Op. Cit..
18. After the removal of the Taliban, Iran facilitated the return of Afghan refugees to their homeland. Some two million Afghans lived in Iran before 2001. It is interesting to note that the number of Afghan refugees in Iran has increased again during the intervening period due to deteriorating security conditions in Afghanistan.
19. Iran at the time pledged some 550 million dollars of financial aid to the new Afghan government, most of which have already been spent on development and construction projects.
20. Ahmadinejad was among the first heads of state who congratulated Hamed Karzi's victory in the 2009 presidential elections. See Robert Maier, "Ahmadinejad Congratulates Karzi on Successful Elections," 19 September 2009, <http://kabulpress.org/my/spip.php?article4068>.
21. Aminzadeh, Op. Cit.



22. See Kayhan Barzegar, "Understanding the Roots of Iranian Foreign Policy in the New Iraq," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 12, No. 2, summer 2005; and "The New Iraqi Challenge to Iran", *Heartland, the Iranian Hub*, No. 10, 2004. p. 79.
23. Ibid.
24. Graham E. Fuller and Rend Rahim Francke, *The Arab Shi'a : The Forgotten Muslims*(in Persian) Translated by Khadijeh Tabrizi, Tehran-Qom: Center for Shia Studies, 2005, p. 230.
25. See Kayhan Barzegar, "Iran's Security Challenges in New Iraq," *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 5, No.3, Fall 2006, p. 80.
26. See Juan Cole, "Iran Supported al-Maliki against Militias: OSC; Is the Baker Plan Back? Did Iran Expel Muqtada?" Informed Comment Blog, 13 April 2008, <http://www.juancole.com/2008/04/iran-supported-al-maliki-against.html>.
27. Leila Fadel, "Iranian General Played Key Role in Iraq Cease-Fire," McClatchy Newspapers, 30 March 2008, <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/227/story/32055.html>.
28. See Deborah Amos, "Iraq's Political Chess Game," *Khaleej Times (online)*, 21 March 2010.
29. Rod Nordland, "Iran Plays Host to Delegations after Iraq Elections," *The New York Times*, 1 April 2010.
30. Reza Amiri-Moghaddam, "Only with a Coalition Government Iraq Can Pass through the Current Situation" (in Persian), *Fars News Agency*, 26 April 2010 (6 Ordibehesht 1389).
31. For example, Iran has hosted and participated in most of the regional conferences at the different levels of foreign and interior ministers held on Iraq's security during 2004—2008: May and November 2004 in Sharm el-Sheikh, November 2004 and July 2005 in Tehran, August 2007 in Damascus, November 2007 in Istanbul, and April 2008 in Kuwait (See "Kuwait Conference: 20 Regional, Int'l Events but did they Bring Security, Stability to Iraq?" Iraqi News, 23 April 2008, http://www.iraqinews.com/conferences/kuwait-conference-20-regional-intl-events-but-did-they-bring-security-stability-toiraq.html?Itemid_126). Iran also actively participated in the Doha conference in May 2008 on the situation in Lebanon. Iran's active involvement in these regional processes has been, however, an issue of concern to Arab countries in the Middle East.
32. See Noam Chomsky "The Iranian Threat," 29 June 2010, <http://www.zcommunications.org/the-iranian-threat-by-noam-chomsky>.
33. Kaveh L Afrasiabi, "Iran Tries to Make Up Lost Ground," *Asia Times*, 4 February 2008.
34. See "Iran Energy Data, Statistics and Analysis-Oil, Gas, Electricity, Coal," www.eia.doe.gov.
35. Iran's high-ranking officials, both political and military, inclusive of the Supreme Leader, have on various occasions emphasized on the interdependency of Iran's security with the region's security, and that the US interests would be attacked if Iran were to become the subject of any military operation. See Persian website www.rajanews.com; www.aftabnews.com; see also "Iran: Middle East Security at Risk,"



- www.cnn.com/2007/world/meast/11/22/iran.nuclear/index.html; "Iran's Khamenei Warns U.S. of Retaliation if Attacked," US Today, 8 February 2007. "IRGC Commander Gen. Mohammad Ja'fari: If Attacked, Iran Will Target U.S. Forces in Neighboring Countries," MEMRI Special Dispatch, no. 1833, 8 February 2008, http://www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page_archives&Area_sd&ID_SP183308.
36. Remarks by Yadollah Javani, Political Deputy of the Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC), August 2010, <http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/pages/?cid=111698>.
 37. Emphasis on enhancing bilateral and mutual economic and political-security cooperation with the countries in the region, in particular in the Persian Gulf, has been pursued by Iran as a matter of policy. See, for instance, President Ahmadinejad's 12-Point initiative presented at 28th Summit of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Doha, Qatar, December 2007), Payvand's Iran News, 4 December 2007, <http://www.payvand.com/news/07/dec/1029.html>. Also see the 10-Point Initiative presented by Hassan Rohani, former secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council at the regional meeting of the World Economic Forum (Doha, Qatar, April 2007). Also see Kaveh L. Afrasiabi, "Iran unveils a Persian Gulf security plan," Asia Times, 14 April 2007, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/ID14Ak04.html.
 38. See Alastair Crooke, "The Shifting Sands of State Power in the Middle East," *The Washington Quarterly*, July 2010, pp. 13-15.
 39. See Massimo Calabresi, "To Obama's Pile of Woes, Add a Failing Iran Policy," Time, 25 January 2010, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1956075,00.html#ixzz0yduLOELM>; Kayhan Barzegar, "Nuclear Terrorism, Iran, and the NPR," *World Bulletin*, 26 April 2010, http://www.worldbulletin.net/news_detail.php?id=57644.
 40. Article 4 stipulates "the inalienable right of all the Parties to the Treaty to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes."
 41. See Kenneth Pollack and Ray Takeyh, "Taking on Tehran", *Foreign Affairs*, March-April 2005, pp. 24-5.
 42. For a comprehensive discussion on the roots and politics of Iran's nuclear program see Kayhan Barzegar, "The Paradox of Iran's Nuclear Consensus," *World Policy Journal*, Fall 2009.
 43. Ali Larjani, former secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, www.aftabnews.ir, expressed amazement in an interview in December 2007 at "why Iran should not be allowed to proceed with its own national path for advancement."
 44. Available at <http://www.mfa.gov.ir/cms/cms/Tehranicd/en/Files/SupremeLeader>.
 45. Available at <http://www.mfa.gov.ir/cms/cms/Tehranicd/en/Files/Ahmadinejad>
 46. See Ali-Akbar Salehi's remarks at the International Conference on Disarmament and Non Proliferation, Tehran, 17-18 April 2010, available at <http://www.mfa.gov.ir/cms/cms/Tehranicd/en/Files/Salehi>.
 47. Kayhan Barzegar, "Sanctions to Spur Negotiations: Mostly a Bad Strategy," 22 July 2010, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/20270/sanctions_to_spur_negotiation



s.html.

48. See "The Iraq Study Group Report," 15 March 2006, www.usip.org
49. The remarks by Jalal Talebani, Iraq's President, in January 2008 indicating Iraq's displeasure with the 1975 Treaty were met in Iran with intense reactions from a wide range of political quarters and currents. The uproar, as reflected in the means of mass media, showed the degree of public opinion's extreme sensitivity to the issue. On this, see Bahamn Aghai Diba, "Iran and Iraq: 1975 Treaty and Talebani," 1 January 2008, http://www.iranian.ws/iran_news/; "Iran Warns Iraq about Violation of Border Accord," 4 February 2008, www.englishfarsnews.com.
50. On the need for engaging Iran in Iraq's issues, especially in the wake of the withdrawal of the U.S. combat troops from Iraq, see Robert Dreyfuss, "Obama, Iran and Iraq," *The Nation*, 5 March 2010; and also Ben Katcher, "Iraq Needs a US-Iran Deal," [www.raceforiran](http://www.raceforiran.com), 5 March 2010.
51. 20th-century historical examples in this regard include the Soviet Union's machinations in the early days of the post-Constitutional Revolution in the Gilan Province and the establishment of the Kurdish Republic in 1940s; occupation of parts of the country by the Allied Forces during World War II; and the war imposed on Iran by the Ba'athist Iraq in 1980. The most recent case in this respect relates to the violent, terrorist activities of Pakistan-based Jondollah Group, led by Abdol Malek Rigi, in Iran's Baluchistan Province. Currently Iranians are seriously concerned about the Americans' possible use of their military bases in Iraq and Afghanistan to attack Iran.
52. "Larijani's Opposition to the US Security Agreements with Iraq," Tabnak (in Persian), 24 November 2008, <http://www.tabnak.ir/pages/print.php?cid=26698>; also Mashaallah Shamsolvaezin, "The Security Agreement Under the Shadow of Iran-US Differences," 20 November 2008, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/index.php>.
53. Kayhan Barzegar, "Syria will Stick with Iran," 6 November 2008, <http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/18657>.
54. Kayhan Barzegar, "The Shia Factor," *Limes, Eurasian Review of Geopolitics* (The Pakistani Boomerang Issue) No. 1, 2008, pp. 78-79.
55. A reference to the remarks made by Hosni Mobark in April 2006 which caused anxiety among Shia communities in the Arab world and Iran, Baztab, 21 Farvardin 1385/10 April 2006, www.baztab.ir (in Persian).
56. Robin Wright and Peter Baker, "Iraq, Jordan See Threat to Election From Iran: Leaders Warn Against Forming Religious State," *The Washington Post*, 8 December 2004.
57. Saud al-Feisal voiced Saudi Arabia's concern about Iran's increased role in Iraq by saying that, "all Arab countries assisted Iraq to not be occupied by Iran (in the Iran-Iraq War) but now we are handing the whole country (Iraq) over to Iran without reason." For an analysis on Saud al Faisal's remarks see Edward Gnehem, "Iraq: A View from the Neighborhood," 23 February 2006, available at: <http://www.gwu.edu/elliott/news/transcript/shapiro5.html>.
58. See Vali Nasr, "Behind the Rise of the Shias," *Time.com*, 19 December 2006.



59. *Baztab Site*, 21 Farvardin 1385/ 10 April 2006.
60. Richard Haass, "Enough is Enough," *Newsweek*, 22 January 2010, <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/01/21/enough-is-enough.html>.