
POST 9/11 CRISES IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND AFGHANISTAN: IRAN'S PERCEPTIONS AND ROLE

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INTRODUCTION

Middle East is indeed a challenging area. No single power has ever been able to exercise a direct governance. With particular focus on Iraq and Lebanon as Karven Barkey has mentioned the Ottomans exercised an indirect governance. Thus local power is more often incorporated in the political center. There is an urgency to recognise the diversity of contexts and the resultant implications for the outcomes. The study is divided into five parts. Introduction is followed by the theoretical framework. Part three covers the empirical substantive issues created by neo-realist assumptions that shaped US foreign policy in the Post-Cold War era. The impact of US

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intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan. Part four is Iran's perceptions and role. Finally conclusion deals with the future trajectory of Iran's foreign policy behaviour and the implications of the study for theory and practice of I.R.⁽¹⁾

The US-led war in Iraq and Afghanistan forms the center piece of international political debate. The study focuses on neocons ideology that has a profound impact on the US formulation of foreign policy in the contemporary era. "The defining characteristic of the Bush administrations foreign policy, in fact, has been the way the neocons in and out of office have been able to win so many of the key battles.... particularly so in the case of Iraq", as mentioned by Joshua Micah Marshall. The Vice President Dick Cheney, a believer in hard power engaged scholars such as Bernard Lewis and Fouad Ajami (the architect of twin containment policy). Thus toppling Saddam to enhance America's credibility and strength in the Middle East became the agenda of US foreign policy under the Bush administration.⁽²⁾

The assumptions of neoconservatives were based on unipolarity, unilateralism, jacksonianism (military might), evangeticalism, marginalising the UN and elimination of rogue powers. The neocon's ideology of taking unilateral actions is reflected in this statement of the US President: "(we) will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defenlse by acting preemptively against such terrorists, to prevent them from doing harm against our people and our country....."⁽³⁾

Neocons vision is based on an essential military superiority to effectuate US policy with the use of force as the means to achieve freedom and security.⁽⁴⁾ Likewise evangelicalism character of the neocons is reflected where 'neo' is considered short for Jewish and 'cons' short of conservative. "George W. Bush has come under the control of a collection of Jewish advisors whose true purpose is not the defense of US but furtherance of Israel's security interests. US foreign policy is their means and the security of Israel is their end", thus argues Irvin Stelzer.⁽⁵⁾

In addition, a 'core principle' of conservatism is to 'Preserve US

Sovereignty and freedom of action by marginalising the United Nations'.⁽⁶⁾ The core theme of Wilsonianism as promoted by neocons is to reject US reliance on international organisations and treaties and accomplish its objective of democracy promotion, ideals of economics, government and culture directly.⁽⁷⁾

For rebuilding America's defenses and to re-establish America's preeminence most of the neocons in PNAC (Project for the New American Century) were the members of the Bush administration.⁽⁸⁾ The use of military force to achieve foreign policy goals proved counterproductive in the case of both Iraq and Afghanistan. The war results have put to question the neocons premise of unipolarity and unilateral actions. The 'you are with us or against us' rhetoric has cost the US dearly.⁽⁹⁾

Three great problems were added to the complexity of US foreign policy in the Middle East. After the fall of Taliban regime in Afghanistan 2001 and the destruction of Saddam's statues in April 2003 in Iraq the US intervention faced i) criminal anarchy, ii) protracted insurgency and iii) societies divided on ethnic, sectarian lines. US image further received severe damages owing to the findings of Iraq Study Group and revelations of US excesses in the prisons of Abu Gharib, Bagram and Quantanomo Bay. Thus states Amitai Etzioni, the Professor of International Relations at George Washington University, U.S.A.

"Rarely have more profound changes in American foreign policy been called for than today....global respect for American power was dwindled....there are strong principled and pragmatic reasons to turn US foreign policy 180 degrees.....we must understand that rogue states will not surrender their nuclear weapons....until we pledge not to topple their governments."⁽¹⁰⁾

As against this, the US war in Middle East and Afghanistan made Iran the single-most strategic beneficiary of the war. The Taliban and Saddam being negative targets of Iran's foreign policy, the fall of both was viewed

positively in Iran. The Shi'a empowerment in Iraq after 2003 and the emergence of a Shi'a crescent stretching from Iran to Type on the coasts of Mediterranean opened a new opportunity for a 'second phase' in Iranian revolution making it resilient and vibrant in the region and beyond.⁽¹¹⁾

Independent foreign policy behaviour pursued by Tehran since 1979 challenges the traditional notions of relations between developing countries and the core states.⁽¹²⁾ The tough stance of Iran against Israel and the US, increased its popularity among the majority of Muslims in the Middle East. It also enabled Iran to carve out a sphere of influence in the Middle East extending from Iraq to Palestine and from Syria to Lebanon. Accusing Iran on the basis of its hostility as a tough challenger, us equally categorised it as an axis of evil. Iran was charged in 2002 as 'sponsoring terrorism', human rights abuses, pursuing weapons of mass destruction and probably harbouring Al-Qaeda fugitives.

To understand role of Iran in Middle East and Afghanistan the theoretical assumptions of 'incipient political entities is essential. The salience and relevance of this framework emerged in the theoretical scholarship of IR due to the increase in non-state actors in the Post-Cold War era. The central argument is that with the crumbling of one form of political order it has given to a new or incipient kind of political order.⁽¹³⁾

Historically as well as on the basis of societal composition there exist deep-rooted and recurring patterns of conflict in Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan.⁽¹⁴⁾ Prolonged civil war, the end of Cold War, emergence of powerful transnational economic forces weaken the existing states in the developing world. This create conditions for the emergence of social and political movements from below, having links in the region and beyond. The socio-cultural networks, un-mediated by the state are facilitated by trans-border trading systems. Such transnational networks exist in the case of both Iraq and Afghanistan with which Iran shares 800 and 600 miles long borders respectively.⁽¹⁵⁾

In addition, it has been argued by Mary Kaldar that the low intensity of

prolonged conflicts in ‘globalised wars’ are dependent on external support. This has given rise to a new kind of violence. By far one of the most significant reasons that has increased the number of civilian victims and a rise in interpersonal violence in case of both Iraq and Afghanistan. This has created impediments to the consolidation of authority at the center in Middle East and Afghanistan.⁽¹⁶⁾

Perhaps the realization of this essential factor compelled the think tanks in Washington to advocate the review of policy of isolating Iran. There is a growing tendency in the US to obtain Tehran’s assistance in countering resistance in Iraq and Afghanistan with its effective role among the *Shi’ite* forces in both the countries. The same trend is visible in the Obama administration’s emerging contours of foreign policy for Iran.⁽¹⁷⁾

However, many of these incipient political entities become ‘survival strategies’ as is the case of Hezbollah in the aftermath of July 2006 Israeli attack on Lebanon. The same holds true to some extent in the case of Hamas after the Israeli attack in Ghaza strip in December 2009. Such political entities despite controlling pieces of territory as is the case with Hamas and Hezbollah nevertheless do not possess coercive capabilities of the state above them. This has resulted in a kind of uneasy co-existence between state and the “sub-state”.

This further elaborates the justification of theoretical assumptions of incipient political entities that support continued Iranian presence and role in the Middle East and Afghanistan. This also stresses the need to incorporate greater plurality in the theory and practice of IR to understand issues of peace and conflict.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF POST 9/11 CRISES IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND AFGHANISTAN

Keeping in view the theoretical framework of this study, Hezbollah emerged in the context of Lebanese civil war and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. It was the invasion of Lebanon that radicalized Lebanese *Shias* and

made it a force of regional and even international importance.⁽¹⁸⁾

According to an estimate *Shi'ites* constitute 40% of Lebanese population and live over there for over a millennium.⁽¹⁹⁾ In accordance with the Lebanese National Pact of 1946 there are 18 recognised religious groups in government. In Lebanese parliamentary democracy with its confessionalism to recognize the demographic distribution the president has to be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of the Parliament *Shi'ite* Muslim.⁽²⁰⁾

The establishment of state of Israel and 400,000 Palestinian refugees who came to South Lebanon changed the demography. According to one estimate about 7,11,000 Palestinian Arabs fled their original lands.⁽²¹⁾ The conflict flared into open hostilities in 1948, 1956, June 1967, 1973 war and 1982 after Israeli invasion of Sabra and Shatila camps much of Beirut lay in ruins with Israel occupying Southern Lebanon.⁽²²⁾ Thus the failure of the juridical state resulted in the creation of cantons in Lebanese plural society. During the civil war Lebanon turned to be the world's largest narcotics producers with the hashish production centered in the Bekaa Valley. This further weakened the writ of the government.⁽²³⁾

Iran's revolution had its greatest impact in Lebanon. Leaders had known each other in the Shi'ite holy city of Najaf since 1963 when Khomeini went there in exile.⁽²⁴⁾

Hezbollah has proclaimed Rouhollah Khomeini and later Ali Khamenei, as official *Marja e Taqlid* (authority of spiritual emulation). However, Hezbollah do not intend to build an Islamic state or a theocratic state in Lebanon. Hezbollah's forces were trained and organized by a contingent of Iranian Revolutionary Guards. Hezbollah leaders have made numerous statements calling for the destruction of Israel:⁽²⁵⁾ the Zionist entity, built on lands wrested from their owners. After the 33-days military conflict with Israel the Lebanese Cabinet under President Michael Sulaiman and Prime Minister Fuad Siniora stated that Hezbollah enjoyed the right to liberate occupied lands.

Immediately following the 2006 Israeli attack on Lebanon, Hezbollah was granted veto power in Lebanese Parliament. In national unity government it controls 11 out of 30 seats. Since 1992, it is headed by Sayyed Hassan Nasrullah who gained a surge of support from Lebanon's broader populations; Sunni, Christian, Druze Maronites following the 2006 Israeli attack on Lebanon. In Lebanese political protest of 2007 – 8 following Prime Minister Fouad Sinoria's decision to shut down Hezbollah's telecommunication network and to remove Beirut airport security chief the country plunged into violence. However, Hezbollah emerged successful after the Doha agreement of May 2008.⁽²⁶⁾

Iran obtained physical access to Lebanese *Shias* through Syria. Lebanon and Syria share a border of 375 kilometers and *Shahrahe Lebanon* connects Damascus with Beirut. Lebanese border with Israel stretches to 79 kilometers and disputed in a small area of Golan Heights known as Sheba farms.⁽²⁷⁾ Though it is difficult to obtain empirical proofs but it is generally believed that Iran provides some \$200 million or perhaps more to Hezbollah. In Lebanon Iran found a large Shi'a community which fully understand the symbolism of Iran's revolution.

There exist centuries of cultural, intellectual, historical empirical and political ties that connect communities in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Iran.⁽²⁸⁾

Israel's devastating attack on Lebanon has extended Iran's reach more than ever in the last 27 years. Hezbollah is the key in Iran's vision of the Middle East. Not only an ideological factor by increasingly defined in terms of Iran's national interest. It is a para military organization major provider of social services, which operates schools, hospitals, and agricultural services. Vast network of social services as well as the satellite channel al-Minarch has been created with Iranian help. It is understood that 3 out of 4 institution that are independent of Hezbollah's Central Unit of Social Services are actually the branches of the Iranian Associations.⁽²⁹⁾ Hezbollah had been able to do what no other Arab army had been able to do it ousted Israel from Lebanon without committing any concession. This has directly connected

Hezbollah to Palestinian resistance. Even if Israel withdrew from Southern Lebanon it remained an occupier and duty to liberate Palestine being incumbent upon Hezbollah.⁽³⁰⁾

Hezbollah is a source of inspiration and material support to Palestinian resistance movement, in West Bank and Gaza Strip Particularly Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The Palestinian authority's minister Faysal al Hussaini told a gathering of lawyers in Lebanon that blessed be the resistance of Hezbollah which gave us hope that future is in our hands.⁽³¹⁾

Sayyed Hassan Nasrullah admitted during a press conference that his organization was helping the intifada by training Hamas members.⁽³²⁾ Though Hamas and Hezbollah are not organizationally linked but their sufferings created a unity against a common enemy.⁽³³⁾

In 2007 elections Hamas won a decisive victory. Humanitarian crisis for Palestinians were created in Gaza Strip on 27 December 2008. Israel not only targeted Hamas leadership but intense bombardment destroyed civilian infrastructure, schools, hospitals, mosques, churches. Israel being accused by human rights groups of war crimes when attack came to an end on 18 January 2009. The role of Hamas can not be ignored in the Gaza where it has consolidated its power.⁽³⁴⁾

The vast power of Hezbollah similarly has given Iran a strategic depth and a significant gateway to the Arab world. Iran in the context of Arab politics has already made significant inroads by positioning itself as the ultimate player in Iraq. Iranian goods flooded Iraqi markets after the fall of Saddam's regime. Iraqi Prime Minister, Ibrahim al Jaffri visited Iran in mid 2005 and negotiated trade and security agreements and a \$1 billion aid package. Iran – Iraq trade surpassed \$400 billion in 2009. Several trade terminals and new roads were constructed along 800 – mile long border between Iran and Iraq. In 2009 Iran also started building houses in Basra. A window of opportunity since then has been opened for Iran that off-sets US imposed sanctions and isolation.⁽³⁵⁾

Radhila the dominant party of Basra whose members include Basra's

governor and the Chairman of the provincial council has close ties to Shi'ite cleric Moqtada al Sadr. Large numbers of recruits in the police about 37,000 of them being loyal to Moqtada al Sadr. There is a huge section of Iraqis who are attached with Iranians.⁽³⁶⁾

The US government nevertheless would like to do everything to keep the Iranians out. In an interview, Thomas Houlahan, the Director of the Military Assessment programme of the Washington D.C. based centre for Security and Science on 26 October 2008 stated that "I do not think we can solve the problem without the Iranians".⁽³⁷⁾ Similarly, according to the findings of Iraq Study Group released on 6 December 2006, a major recommendation for security in Iraq requires US to take into confidence both Syria and Iran and to work for the settlement of Arab – Israeli dispute.

Iran has committed massive resources in Iraq. However, these assets have not yet been ordered to attack the Americans or to massively destabilize the government. Some factions in Iran believe that if Iraq is destabilized then chaos could spread to Iran. According to an analysis of a top CIA specialist on Iraq and Iran "many problems in Iraq are due to American mistakes and could not be blamed on Iran".⁽³⁸⁾ King Abdullah ibn Abdulaziz invited Iraqi Shia and Sunni clerics to Mecca in October 2006 to condemn and stop sectarian violence in Iraq. He explicitly stated to the Kuwaiti newspaper on 27 January 2007 that Saudi Arabia was committed not to aid any foreign power to interfere in Iranian affairs. It could be a recognition not to alienate large segments of Shia populations in Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia being loyal to Sistani in Najaf and Shia clerics in Qum and Mashhad in Iran. In the parliamentary elections of March 2010, none of the Iraqi leading parties won a decisive victory. Prime Minister Nuri-al Maliki's State of Law coalition has already contacted the leading Kurdish parties, the leaders of Iraqi National Alliance a fellow Shi'ite bloc that has close ties to Iran and the former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi's secular party Iraqiya.⁽³⁹⁾

Iran opposes formation of an American client government in Baghdad.

Without support from Alawites Iran has succeeded in creating gradually a Baghdad – Tehran – Shia axis. Seen one way Iran is a Middle Eastern country and viewed another South and South West Asian. South Asia and Middle East are contiguous regions. Iran lies astride these two areas and is therefore neither indifferent nor impervious to events in either”.⁽⁴⁰⁾ Iran shares a 600 miles long border with Afghanistan. Thus has a genuine interest in the stability and peace in neighbouring Afghanistan. *Shi’a* community comprises only 15% of Afghan population. Though Iran initially supported the Shi’a factions but gradually enlarged the sphere of influence by courting leadership of Northern Alliance, particularly Ahmed Shah Masoud.

After the fall of *Taliban* in 2001 Kamal Kharazi the then Iranian Foreign Minister visited Pakistan and his Pakistani counterpart Abdul Sattar stated: “we have got rid of the shadow of Taliban. The sun is shining and we will take full advantage of the situation to develop bilateral relations. In addition Iran also offered assistance to the US to capture any Al-Qaeda fugitives and declared Iranian borders to be closed and under control of Iranian armed forces.”⁽⁴¹⁾ According to the basic assumptions of the theoretical framework of states-within-states, the incipient political entity Taliban also emerged in the context of prolonged ethnic and tribal conflict at the end of Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan 1988 – 89. In the aftermath of US intervention in Afghanistan under American Operation Inducing Freedom, Pakistan took a U-turn in its policy towards Afghanistan.⁽⁴²⁾

Two crucial aspects of Afghan conflict that are major concern for Iran:

- i. Drug trafficking
- ii. Jundollah, an alleged offshoot of TTP (*Tehreek e Taliban* Pakistan) based in North Waziristan and *Sipah e Sihaba* that carry out suicide bombings in Iran.

According to UN office on Drug and Crime (UNODC) 95% of the world’s opium is produced in Afghanistan and accounts for half of the country’s total GDP. Both Iran and Pakistan have trouble in controlling drug trafficking and illicit arms trade that goes on among the non-state actors and

groups in the tri-junctional border that connects Iranian Sistan Balochistan with Pakistan and Afghanistan's Helmand Province. Iran alleges Pakistan for Jundollah having safe havens in area bordering Afghanistan and Pakistan along Durand Line. Jundollah an off-shoot of *Lashkar e Jhangvi* increased its anti-Iran activities after the extradition of Abdul Hamid Rigi, the brother of Jundollah Chief to Iran in June 2008.

Jundollah carried out deadly suicide bombing inside Masjid-e-Amir ul Momineen in Zahidan, Sistan Balochistan that borders Pakistan, Balochistan on 28 May 2009. In another suicide attack in a conference hall in Iranian city Sarba, Balochistan the top commander of Iranian elite Revolutionary Guards, Gen. Mohammad Zadeh and Nur Ali Shoustri were martyred.⁽⁴³⁾

Iranian agents freed a diplomat Hashmatollah Attarzadeh, who was abducted in Peshawar on 13 November 2008. Iranian intelligence minister Heydar Moslehi confirmed the release of Attarzadeh on 30 March 2010, in what appeared to be a cross-border operation located in Afghan territory. The Afghan authorities from Afghanistan also assisted in the operation. Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Ramin Mehman Parast said the location where Attarzadeh was held was identified by Iranian intelligence agents. Moreover the Iranian intelligence minister charged that Attarzadeh's abductors were supported by Israeli and US intelligence agents. The envoy's release was made possible after Iranian intelligence agency had captured Abdomelek Rigi the Jundollah leader.⁽⁴⁴⁾

IRAN'S PERCEPTIONS AND ROLE

The theocratic nature of the Iranian state based on Khomeini's concept of guardianship of the jurist-consult (*Velayat e faqih*); the use of Quranic verses by the officials of the Islamic regime to rationalise their policies provide a clue to Iran's perceptions of external world. However, interpretation of ideology is pragmatic in the case of Iran. Is Islamic Iran's foreign policy in the Post-revolutionary phase always being inspired by religious motives is a

pertinent question. The literature in the field of comparative foreign policy explains the role of culture religion and ideology in foreign policy decision-making.⁽⁴⁵⁾

QURANIC INSPIRED INTERPRETATION OF THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

The down-trodden must triumph over the dominant elements. (bayed mostazafin ber mostakberin ghalabeh konand) since the conference of the down-trodden in 1982 – Iran has consistently condemned the economic, cultural social and political oppression in the Middle East and in the world at large. At the international level this comprises super powers, large cartels, capitalist imperialist powers. It also challenges the disciplinary technologies of the super powers i.e., the veto power at the United Nations.⁽⁴⁶⁾ From President Rafsanjani’s neither East nor west to introduction of pragmatism and Khomeini’s insistence in 1984 that no state can live in isolation thus both East and West finally found its expression in Khatami’s dialogue among civilisations.

According to President Ahmadi Nejad the dominant seeking countries want to destroy justice and international security to understand President Ahmadi Nejad’s world view there are three significant speeches delivered by him which reveal his perception of the international system.⁽⁴⁷⁾ First, 26 October 2005 World without Zionism conference in Tehran. Second, 7 March 2007 addresses to the students and faculty members at Columbia University, New York and third President Ahmadi Nejad’s speech in Sept. 2007 delivered at UN General Assembly. A clear and defined perception based on his i) ideological conception of *haq* (right) and *batil* (wrong) ii) concept of justice, iii) condemnation of the state of Israel as the most cruel and criminal regime.⁽⁴⁸⁾ Creation of state of Israel being a 60-years old wound. Why should Palestinians suffer for what was done against Jews in Europe.

When Lee Bolinga the Chancellor Columbia University gave insulting

comments as an introduction, then the Iranian president smiled and asked that being an academician if he raised concerns should those be met with insult? Why research being allowed in Physics and Chemistry or ‘Democracy’ and not allowed on the theme of holocaust?⁽⁴⁹⁾ His condemnation provoked the American students who considered him to be equally repressive towards Jews. He exclaimed that Jews evolved the privilege of a permanent seat in Iranian *Majlis*.

Iran’s perceptions are shaped by such empirical events like the revelations of the SFIL students (students following Iranian’s Line) who published the recent documents of the US embassy which revealed the US plan SD Lure 1 to topple Mehdi Bazargan’s provisional government in 1979.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Then, 1982 bomb explosion at IRP headquarters in Tehran that killed 72 members of the revolutionary government. Furthermore shooting down of Iranian civil aircraft by US that killed 290 passengers over the Gulf. Iran – Iraq war 1980 – 88 and imposition of sanctions to scuttle Iranian nuclear programme which Iran proclaims is for peaceful purposes.⁽⁵¹⁾

IRAN’S ROLE

The objectives of the revolution were further oriented as highlighted by article 9 of the Constitution of Islamic Republic. Independence, freedom and Islamic republic, being the slogans of the 1979 revolution. Foreign policy behaviour in the last three decades has been increasingly moving towards national pragmatism and a reassessment of its foreign policy agendas and goals. No doubt goals are shaped by such enduring determinants like history, culture, ideology and geo-political location of a state. However IRI’s foreign policy objectives are likely to be constrained by domestic economic performance of the regime and changed socio-political world in the Post-Cold War period.

The history of a glorious civilisation since the achaemenian period, with a 615 miles of Gulf coastline and a population 70 million twice the size of all Gulf States combined together, and fierce nationalism strengthened by ethnic

and religions homogeneity.⁽⁵²⁾ Iran's objectives are:

- i. Political independence
- ii. Territorial integrity
- iii. Leadership in Gulf region and the Muslim World
- iv. Non-interference by outside power.⁽⁵³⁾

The foreign relations with GCC and Saudi Arabia have improved since 1991. The notion of *amniyat e dast e fami'i* (collective security) in the Persian Gulf was accepted and the objective of '*Chatriye – amniyat*' (umbrella of security: with umbrella in Iran's hand) was revised. This seems to be based on Iran's pragmatic realization of American power projection capability in the Gulf region. Furthermore constrained by demands of economic development (*Irane iqtisadi*) Government foundations or bonyads that are based on subsidies and exempted from taxes strain economy. Governmental controls over consumer goods, pricing added by corruption drains Iran's economy. Iran's GDP growth rate is 4.8% as compared to India which has 8.9% GDP.⁽⁵⁴⁾

More significant are Iran's natural resources. With additional reserves discovered in Khuzestan and South Pars gas field since 2000, Iran panenes 95 billion barrels of oil, out sized by 260 billion barrels of Saudi oil reserves. Similarly 940 trillion cubic ft. of gas reserves were aided by 2 new natural gas fields discovered in June 2004 at Balal and natural gas fields discovered in June 2004 at Balal and Lavan Islands in the Persian Gulf. Tabnak a super grant gas field is being developed by Chinese assistance. According to a recent study China's economic expansion has alone accounted for one-third global growth in the demand of oil.⁽⁵⁵⁾ By 2025 there will be a 40% of increase in global demand of oil. The new centres of economic grwoth like China and India would compete for Gulf oil and pose threat to Western oil interests by further escalations in the prices of oil and gas.⁽⁵⁶⁾

China and Iran share commonality of objectives in their opposition to American hegemony and unipolarity, both are critical of Israeli killings and believe that the peace in Middle East is not possible without the liberation of

Israeli occupied territories.⁽⁵⁷⁾ Bilateral trade is projected to touch \$10 billion mark in 2010.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Since Khatami's visit to China 2000 and Russia 2001, Iran has developed extensive networks of socio-economic and political relations with both the states that possess veto power in the Security Council of United Nations..

CONCLUSION

US is still hard put to engage Iran in a way that could counter its influence and potential to challenge American interests in Middle East and Afghanistan. To counter the growing popularity of Iran "American policy makers tried to build regional support against Iran by presenting it as a *Shi'a* Persian threat to the *Sunni* Arab rulers".⁽⁵⁹⁾ Thus failed badly with Iran's participation in December 2007 Gulf cooperation Council's summit in Doha and the initiation of dialogue between Iranian and Saudi Ulemas under Alliance of Civilisations.

"Civil society in all its diversity, according to national characteristics" is the definition of non-state actors according to article 6 of the Cotonou Agreement between European Union and the African Union.⁽⁶⁰⁾ This agreement is substantiated by the increasing political role of Hezbollah in Lebanon a process named as Lebanization of Hezbollah. Similarly Hamas has claimed its foremost objective being the liberation of occupied territories and restoration of the rights of Palestinian people. However, when Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon attained power through electoral process these remained a negative target of US Middle East Policy, whereas the autocratic rulers of the Middle East continued to enjoy US support.

Thus, the 'reasonable approach' suggested by analysts for EU be:

"to assess the situation wisely, without giving unnecessary heed to the reports from those 'intelligence agencies' that produced the evidence of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) stockpiles. But for that matter, European countries will have to come out of the trance of the US policy goals and provide a genuine and alternate leadership."⁽⁶¹⁾

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad visited Syria on 25 February 2010. In a joint press conference, the Syrian President Basharal Asad categorically mentioned “we do not want others to give us lessons on our region our history”..... when they (US) raise the issue of stability and peace in the Middle East I am surprised by their call to keep a distance”. It was a clear rejection of Hillary Clinton’s advice to the Syrian President to move away from Iran.⁽⁶²⁾

There is a German proverb: “was ich nicht weiss, macht mich nicht heiss” (what I do not know, does not upset me). However, in the present days. Com times it is difficult to remain immune from the impact of tran national happenings that are flashed around the world instantly. Thus, the future direction of Iran’s foreign policy is crucially dependent on three significant factors:

- i. The demands of the system for domestic economic rehabilitation
- ii. Domestic fight for pluratism human rights, freedom of expression and freedom from theocracy
- iii. The conflict between the clerical factions.

Today, the dominant discourse in Iran remains *tajadod* (modernity) and liberalism. As put forth by the Iranian dissident Ramin Jahanbegloo in an interview four months prior to his arrest on changes of fomenting ‘relevant revolution’ (i.e. non-violent transition to democracy): we have to look for a universalism which is founded on all human experiences of history rather than on Western values. This is only possible through large-scale cultural encounters”.⁽⁶³⁾ Thus the international correlation of forces would influence the future direction of Iran’s role in the international system the US and Europeans would reach a comprehensive arrangement with the Iranian regime. It is in one significant way the realization that despite being domestically repressive, due to state’s possession of oil and gas resources and its putative secret nuclear weapons programme, Iran in the foreseeable future remains resonant and vibrant in the Middle East, Afghanistan and beyond. ❖

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