

Islamic Republic's Two-Tier Foreign Policy towards the US From Suspicious in the Mid-term to Proactive in the Long-term

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Abstract

Hopes for changes in Iran's foreign policy towards the United States (US from now) have been dashed times and again. It is argued in this article that ideational and situational factors are responsible for this. Ideationally speaking, the lagging dialectical gap between otherwise two complementary factors of the Islamic Republic's ideological disposition and perspective and Iran's mutually strategic interests with the US is the single most contributing factor in this respect. As long as the prospects for striking a "correspondence discourse" out of this "dialectical components" (ideological and strategic outlooks) remain uncertain and opaque, realistic hopes for change in Iran-US relations would remain unfulfilled. Situationally speaking, the US also needs to reconsider its anachronistic approach as well as the previous patron-client paradigm in its relation with Iran. Moreover, circumstantial events also play a significant role in tilting the weight in favor of one or the other factor.

Notwithstanding the on-and-off aggravating ideological confrontation, the mutually-shared strategic interests of both countries have times and again served to ease and mitigate the post-1979 relations between them within the limits of a practically reigning "cold war."

Based upon both mutually-shared strategic interests between Iran and US and the content analysis of Iranian officials' positions and pronouncements, it is argued here that the future foreign policy of the Islamic Republic vs. the US will unfold in a two-tiered manner; a mid-term suspicious and a long-term proactive foreign policy.

Considering the high costs of lost opportunities emanating from the gap just mentioned, change in bilateral relations seems a necessity – and for both sides. That said, the main contribution of this article is to attempt a workable conceptual framework whereby the necessity of change from a mid-term "suspicious outlook" to a long-term "proactive cooperation" towards the US is portrayed.

Keywords: Iran, United States, Philosophical Disposition, Mutual Strategic Interests, Pragmatic Foreign Policy

Introduction

In the most recent analysis of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's address to the UN Conference on Non-proliferation on 3 May 2010, Ray Takeyh argues that his "claim may have some attraction for some non-aligned members, ... concerned about (the veto power) of the five nuclear weapons states.... But overall, I'm not quite sure if Iran manages to convince the great powers, regarding its nuclear program."⁽¹⁾ Such an analysis, while correct in a certain respect, misses the Islamic Republic's Westophobia in general and US-phobia in particular. Takeyeh is right, however, in his contention that both countries have considerable shared strategic interests. Against this shared strategic interests, post-revolutionary US-Iran relations are stuck in a transitional stage whereby the hostile ideological confrontation uneasily coexists with mutually-shared high strategic interests. Nonetheless, against minor strategic differences, the extent and volume of shared strategic interests have been high enough to maintain the ideological confrontation at low political level and soft-power face-offs. Notwithstanding, the ideological fervor has been so strong to render the efforts of pragmatist Rafsanjani and reformist Khatami in easing the ideological confrontation simply fail.

When this domestic dissonance was somewhat eased in the wake of Ahmadinejad's election in 2005, George W. Bush's recalcitrant policy hindered the normalization of relations from the American side. While President Obama's initial positive gesture appeared to have paved the way for some sort of mutual appeasement, the fall-out from post-2009 presidential elections in Iran turned out to abet the ideological confrontation anew. The United States was accused, among others, of meddling in the post-election protests.

Analytically speaking, it is argued in this article that the lagging dialectical discourse arising from antithetical conflict between ideological differences and strong bonds in mutually-shared strategic interests has been responsible for the perpetuation of the "cold war" between the two countries. Since this dialectical conflict has not been transformed into a "correspondence discourse," the relations between them have failed to reach a state of normalcy. In the meantime, the stakes for strategic interests have remained so high that the "cold war" could not turn into a full-fledged "hot" war as was the case in Afghanistan and Iraq. Needless to say, the perpetuation of this state of cold war has been so costly for the strategic interests of both countries. Despite the adverse facts on the ground, it is argued here that a positive strategic relationship between the two countries/states is achievable, which, hinges, first and foremost, on an ideational change on both sides. On the US part, American officials need to see Iran as a strategic regional partner, not a dependent, unequal power. From the other side, neither Iran as a nation-state nor the Islamic Republic as a



system of governance can afford to go back to the pre-revolutionary patron-client relationship between Iran and the US. Therefore, the US approach towards Iran -- post-1979 new Iran -- needs to be modified in terms of mutual comparative advantages, rather than a favorable power balance in its own favor.

The Islamic Republic also needs, on its part, change both in its “ideational disposition” as well as its diplomatic capability to work out a “correspondent discourse” out of the existing “dialectical discourse” between two the countries. Ideationally, the Islamic Republic needs to formulate a foreign policy beyond the existing strategy geared to “work against US hegemony across the board.” Instead, it needs its foreign policy towards the US to be defined in terms of its own national interests, albeit with due consideration for differences arising from major legitimate ideological and minor strategic interests involved. That is to say that both countries need to formulate their respective foreign policy in terms of both shared strategic interests and different moral values. In other words, they need to modify their current confrontational policies so that “taking advantage from working with each other” would shape the dominant discourse.

The assumption of the author here is that it is possible to work-out such a conceptual framework for strategic cooperation between Iran and the US. In fact, he deems it highly probable that this will come to pass, albeit in the long-term. The imperatives of situational facts, arising from the mutual high strategic interests of both countries, most probably will modify

the ideational context in both countries and a corresponding discourse will emerge out of the existing dialectical discourse. Ironically, the high frequency of mutual criticisms leveled by Iran and the United States against one another demonstrates – if nothing else – at least the attentiveness of the leaders in both countries to the inappropriateness of this residual dialectical discourse between the ideological differences on the one hand, and the mutually-shared strategic interests on the other. The author, while in the process of editing the article, found it a hopeful sign, even if of marginal impact, that the Century Foundation in the US held a seminar in mid-April 2010 to find a mid-way for better interactions with Iran.⁽²⁾

Against this requirement, due to domestic developments in Iran, it is argued here that the mid-term relations between Iran and the US will remain confrontational. The following ideological differences will – most probably - impede the “roadmap” to a proactive, consensual relations between them: Liberalism vs. cultural moralism as regards the less well-to-dos; secularism vs. religious base of culture; Iran’s obsession with independence vs. interdependent global politics; and also differences on strategic interests related to Iran’s need to deepen Islamic solidarity within the bigger Islamic community (Ummah), as best manifested in its radical pro-Palestinian stand.

It appears that given the pending ideological confrontation and minor strategic differences, the Islamic Republic has improvised a mid-term policy geared to thwarting the American threat arising from current confrontational stands. It also appears that due to mutually-shared high strategic interests, the



Islamic Republic's leaders tend to think it highly probable that US will abide by the Iranian expectation for change. Of course, a similar expectation on the part of the US has contributed – simultaneously – to the delay in the emergence of a workable solution. Consequently, the Islamic Republic's mid-term approach towards the US seems to resonate well with the dominant paradigm in the US foreign policy realm – “let's wait and see.”

It goes without saying that situational factors will be influential in the change of attitudes in both countries. Other factors given, it seems that the thrust of Iran's “limbo” foreign policy vs. the US would remain unchanged in the mid-term. This mid-term outlook will be defined in terms of a suspicious foreign policy. And the mid-term, suspicious foreign policy will alternate between what I term alternatively as “preventive realism” and preemptive surrealism.” Preventive realism, as I use it here in this article, was represented by both pragmatist Rafsanjani and reformist Khatami. Their US foreign policies were rather conservative in nature and direct in method. They were determined to remove or ameliorate situational causes invoking the US to engage in military action against Iran. Preemptive surrealism, as I use it here, is the outlook and policy espoused and pursued by fundamentalists – the conservative bloc. Currently the cultural, mercantile and radical conservatives/fundamentalists are generally united on this approach. According to them, the conservative – “reactive” – strategies of the previous four administrations [1989-2005] have

backfired. From their vantage point, the appropriate foreign policy is to be more aggressive, and engage in a campaign to undercut US influence across the board.

Beyond this difference in style – which is important – it could be argued that almost all leaders and factions in the Islamic Republic generally share the same overall outlook on the substance of relations between Iran and the US. US intentions are generally perceived in suspicious terms. Rafsanjani's openly critical description of the U.S. as “the main enemy” in late 2008 and referring to the threat emanating from the US deployed armed forces at the borders of Iran was quite indicative in this regard.⁽³⁾ Similar positions have frequently been expressed by conservatives/fundamentalists – who prefer to call themselves “principalists.” Their dominant foreign policy discourse is often expressed in harsh, aggressive words, even by such moderate figures as the Speaker of Majlis, Ali Larijani.⁽⁴⁾

Moreover, as is fully known, these two stylish strategies compete against one another in Iran. Once one gets the upper-hand as the official favorite, the other is pushed – even inadvertently - into the position of the underdog playing the role of critical opposition. While this pattern of political behavior rejects the notion of “monolithicism” in Iran, it is unfortunate, however, that neither side/bloc is seems to be predisposed to a proactive compromise with the other.

Over and above this mid-term outlook, as reflected in the 20-year Vision for long-term national development, the Islamic Republic seems to have considered the possibility of long-term cooperation with the US - which needs a new paradigm in



bilateral relations. Ahmadinejad's direct call for better bilateral relations with the US back in 2008, was further emphasized in November the same year by his maverick deputy, Rahim Mash-Shaee, on "open negotiations in the presence of media."⁽⁵⁾ Around the same time, Larijani also expressed his viewpoint regarding the possibility of direct contact with the members of the US Congress.⁽⁶⁾ Most recently in mid-April this year, Ahmadinejad publicly announced that he had written a letter to Obama [March 2010] – which he promised would be published soon.⁽⁷⁾ In spite of such open calls from the Iranian side, it would not be difficult to expect that the long-term rapprochement between the two sides is in need of some substantial fixation on the part of the US – as also clearly reflected in a recent reiteration by the Spokesman of Iran's Foreign Ministry: "Our advice to all countries has always been that, instead of resorting to incorrect methods such as sanctions and pressure, they should move towards respecting the rights of other independent countries in compliance with the internationally recognized rights of all states, especially within the framework of NPT (Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty), and take the [necessary] steps for the peaceful use of nuclear energy".⁽⁸⁾ Kayhan, the well-known, authoritative representative of the official outlook and discourse, paraphrasing a recent position by Brzezinski⁽⁹⁾, appears to be hopeful as recent as early April 2010 that the US will ultimately recognize Iran's rights under NPT. In this article, I undertake to elaborate on the Islamic Republic's two-tier foreign policy towards the US.

1. Ebb and Flow in US-Iran Relations

Thanks to US pressure on the Soviet Union to respect Iran's territorial integrity and retreat from the occupied territories [Azerbaijan], back in the post-WW2 days, the US appeared to have an image of an admired – impartial - third foreign power in Iran. That positive image was drastically tarnished in Iranian politics in the aftermath of the 1953 coup against the legitimate government of liberal-democrat Mohammed Mossadeq. That episode, as is well known, has created a sour – and enduring - picture of the US in the mindset of the wide gamut of patriotic forces in Iran with regard to US-Iran relationship. The US full-fledged support in the post-1953 period for the Shah's repressive regime sullied the United States' image and reputation among the Iranian opposition forces and currents. By 1963, US-Israeli collaboration to help the Shah's SAVAK to crush dissenting traditional [Islamic] groups politicized them into various cultural, mercantile and militant currents and forces - all sharing a strong anti-US outlook and platform.

With the advent of the Islamic Republic in 1979, the militant clerical currents ascended to the dominant position in the new post-revolutionary power structure, which led, among others, to the emergence of splits in the ranks of the previous revolutionary coalition. Notwithstanding the success of the Islamic Republic in the effective suppression of opposition guerrilla organizations in a bid to consolidate power and promote its own security, the threat of externally-supported domestic opposition remained at the forefront of the Islamic



Republic's security perceptions. In the early days of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini – Leader of the Revolution – had warned: “Once again I emphasize that all those in power and the people of Iran need to know that both West and East will endeavor – although naively - to eradicate your Islamic identity ...Beware of your enemies with diligence, ...”⁽¹⁰⁾ This general perception, over time and along the process, turned into an anti-US campaign while Ayatollah Khomeini was alive and at the helm.⁽¹¹⁾ That ideological perception and outlook came to be shared by his successor - Ayatollah Khamenei - and even in large measure by moderate Islamists, inclusive of both pragmatists and reformists - at least in the mid-term. According to Ayatollah Khamenei - "The objective of the Americans is to deprive Iran of its independence and dignity, cause it to regret the Islamic Revolution, and make it dependent on and obedient to America – once again."⁽¹²⁾

During the 1990s, Iranian politics witnessed a gradual emergence of a relatively positive mood towards the relations with the US, mostly among dissident intellectuals. This growing disposition was accompanied by a policy change in favor of detente with the US, first during the Rafsanjani period (1989-1997) and subsequently during the Khatami years (1997-2005). Khatami's doctrine of “Dialogue among Civilizations” led, in its actual pursuit, to active cooperation with the United States against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and later against Saddam Hussein in Iraq. That outlook and policy, however, came to be criticized in Iran, by Ahmadinejad and his administration, in light of George W. Bush's lumping of Iran as



part of the “Axis of Evil” along with North Korea and Iraq.”⁽¹³⁾ In retrospect, one could lament that the “Dual Containment” policy under Bill Clinton and the subsequent hostile approach by the Bush administration effectively counteracted the emerging positive feelings in Iran toward the United States.

As indicated earlier, the US policies under Clinton and Bush administrations have left a frustrating impact on otherwise moderate-pragmatist political figures and currents in Iran, inclusive of both Rafsanjani and Khatami. On the eve of Barack Obama’s inauguration in January 2009, Rafsanjani said: “The truth of the matter is that the US has been opposing the Islamic and revolutionary thinking of Iran from the outset... human rights, terrorism and the nuclear issue are just excuses and scapegoats.”⁽¹⁴⁾ On another occasion around the same time, he even accused the US of having been satisfied with Saddam’s invasion of Iran in 1980.”⁽¹⁵⁾ Reflecting the same perception and attitude, Foreign Minister Mottaki described in late 2008 the entire 30 years of US policy towards the Islamic Republic as “acrimonious”, and yet emphasized the need for change.⁽¹⁶⁾ The pronouncement around the same time by a student activist warning Ahmadinejad and the “Principalists” against wishful thinking with regard to the US was noteworthy in this regard. According to this activist, “In Khatami’s administration, those in favor of negotiations with the US were ultimately frustrated.”⁽¹⁷⁾

Against all these considerations, in retrospect, one traces a highly visible hostile mood in the US-Iran relationship in recent months. The suspicions on both sides are on the rise, as reflected, among others, in the report of the vice chairman of the U.S. Joint



Chiefs of Staff on 14 April 2010 to the US Senate Armed Services Committee. He warned that Iran could make enough highly enriched uranium for a nuclear bomb in one year but would likely not have the know-how to build such a weapon for between three and five years.⁽¹⁸⁾ Countering such statements, Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman rejected the idea altogether. While emphasizing the strict peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program, and with respect to the needed fuel for the Tehran nuclear reactor, he said that Iran has always been ready for talks on providing the needed fuel for this research reactor through purchase or swap deals. He went on to add, however, that Tehran had already taken practical steps to produce the needed fuel domestically.⁽¹⁹⁾ Expressing the same uncompromising attitude, on April 15 the head of the Iranian Atomic Organization announced that Iran had already produced 5 kilogram of 20% enriched uranium.⁽²⁰⁾ In emphasizing Iran's continued readiness for the swap deal on low enriched uranium for high enriched fuel for the Tehran reactor in case of tangible guarantees, he incriminated the US of short changing Iran and added that "lack of trust has prompted Iran to call for tangible guarantees"⁽²¹⁾ According to the official discourse in Tehran, as best manifested in the pronouncements by Ahmadinejad, "Nuclear issue is actually an excuse....we have progressed in nuclear technology so much that we are at an irreversible point."⁽²²⁾

The nuclear issue, however, is not the only reason for ideological differences between Iran and the US. They continue accusing one another of being involved in supporting terrorism. As recent as mid-April 2010, Mr. Ahmadinejad urged the UN to

condemn NATO's support for terrorism in Afghanistan and Iraq. In the official discourse, Iran also looks for a more just international system, as opposed to the US globalist, hegemonic liberalism. The real conflict with the US, in his words, is on other critical issues, including what he terms as the emergence of "new power which is neither arrogant, nor economic, nor military but a cultural one." While assessing the US power and position as "collapsing", he goes on to boast that "they want to dominate the world, but Iran doesn't let them." In this vein, in the same statement, he challenged the UN and addressed the Secretary-General in the following words: "Who or what other organizations have the responsibility to support the rights, security and independence of nations in the region... what is the philosophy behind the establishment of the United Nations?"⁽²³⁾

Notwithstanding the fiery, dismissive statements just alluded to, the Islamic Republic is quite attentive to the costs and benefits of its radical-sounding "pre-emptive surrealism." Following the release of the latest US Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) on 13 April 2010 – and President Obama's statement on it, the Islamic Republic initiated a comprehensive campaign to criticize the US strategy. The Supreme Leader called on all nations to "withstand" the American nuclear threat and simultaneously asked the armed forces to be alert.⁽²⁴⁾ The same line was pursued by others further down in the hierarchy.⁽²⁵⁾ The letter from Iran's envoy to the UN to Secretary-General on 14 April 2010 decrying US "inflammatory statements" as being "tantamount to nuclear blackmail against a non-nuclear-weapons state signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation



of Nuclear Weapons”⁽²⁶⁾ should also be seen as part of the diplomatic efforts geared to reducing the risk of possible US military adventurism against Iran.

It is also noteworthy that more than military threat, the “Principalists” in Tehran appear to express serious misgivings about the US campaign against Iran unfolding in terms of “software” onslaught.⁽²⁷⁾ Around the same time in late 2008, a group of top US scholars, experts, and diplomats with years of experience studying and dealing with Iran reported that “Within Iran, a looming sense of external threat” is felt and as a result it “has empowered hard-liners.” According to these experts, the domestic ramifications of such a policy were grave in Iran; giving the Islamic Republic “both motive and pretext to curb civil liberties and further restrict democracy”⁽²⁸⁾ – which seems to have created the impression in certain US quarters that the emergent government-society rift in Iran might prove a blessing for its strategic goals vis-à-vis the Islamic Republic. It should be added, in passing, that ample experiences during the past three decades indicate that, for a host of reasons (which I find beyond the immediate purview of the present essay) such foreign calculations and the policies and measures emanating from them have proved, time and again, futile and in fact counterproductive. To use the familiar parlance, “interventionist” policies from abroad have not even succeeded in changing the “regime’s behavior”, let alone “change the regime” itself.

Another aspect of the Iranian foreign policy under Ahmadinejad relevant to the discussion at hand concerns his

regional posture. Given the US tarnished image in the region, particularly in the Arab world, in the aftermath of military occupation of Iraq in 2003, Ahmadinejad has tried since his election in June 2005 to portray himself as an anti-American/anti-imperialist crusader. His vitriolic pronouncements, especially in his early days in office, had earned him much popularity in the Arab street. According to a 2007 survey by *Le Temp* (Switzerland), he used to be seen as a leader with the courage to challenge “US and Israel.” Ironically, though, his popularity among the masses in much of the Arab world – concomitant with strong resentment in most Arab capitals – was offset to some considerable measure with the growing dissatisfaction in Iran over his confrontational foreign policy style; he was increasingly blamed for “disserving the interests of the nation by systematically provoking the adversaries.”⁽²⁹⁾

To conclude this part, it is to be added, however, that aside from circumstantial ebb and flow in the Islamic Republic's policy towards the US – as manifested in the wide range of statements and pronouncements mentioned in the preceding lines - the dominant militant posture hitherto pursued by Iran finds its rationale in the system's ideological dispossession and convictions. I will turn to the constituent elements of this ideological dispossession in the next section.

2. The Context of Iran's Foreign Policy toward the US

It has been speculated, in an ex-post facto manner, that “had



there not been an American election in 2000,” “had Bill Clinton stayed in office,” or “had the Supreme Court decided its outcome differently,” and Al Gore become the 43rd president, Iran and the United States might have found a way toward normalization of relations.⁽³⁰⁾ Beyond such a speculation, The former US Ambassador to Afghanistan – Zalmay Khalilzad – is also reported to have criticized President Bush’s untimely rigidity as a disservice to US interests. Gary Sick, a Carter administration official and current Columbia University professor, has also fielded similar criticism.⁽³¹⁾

Fact of the matter, as analyzed here, is that the impact of the above factors has been circumstantial at best, and certainly not substantial. Times and again Iranian leaders, inclusive of the Supreme Leaders, have addressed the substantial ideological differences which stumble-block the normalization of relations between the two countries. For example, in November 2008 and close to the end of the Bush administration, Ayatollah Khamenei cast this substantial difference in terms of cost-benefit analysis: “Iran has not cut off its relations with the US forever, and whenever this relationship shall be beneficial for Iran, it shall be re-established.” Further emphasizing that once the relations are judged to be beneficial, “he would be the first to approve of it.”⁽³²⁾

Theoretically speaking, the conceptual framework put forward by the Ayatollah quite some time ago provides for a possible compromise between the otherwise dialectical gap between the ideological aspirations of the Islamic Republic and Iran’s strategic interests. In his address to the annual conference

of Iranian diplomats in early 2010, he reiterated the three concepts of “dignity, wisdom and expediency”⁽³³⁾ as the overarching principles guiding the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic, especially in its anti-domination. For him, dignity means proactive assertiveness instead of pacifism; expediency means to protect the “family of the revolution” and the Islamic Republic; and wisdom means the political-diplomatic skill to implement the above two principles.

It is to be noted, however, that under the overall umbrella of such a framework, there exists a wide spectrum of views within the Iranian body politic. At one end, for example, one could look at the outlook espoused by Kayhan daily – drawing on a recent analysis by Brzezinski - that the Iranian foreign policy defined and implemented on the basis of the above framework will force the US to ultimately change course and even accept Iran as a “nuclear state.”⁽³⁴⁾ At another end on the continuum, one could discern a more moderate – realistic – outlook, as expressed by an experienced career diplomat: “Under adverse bilateral relations, both Iran and the US loose, and currently many of our [and US] cards in international issues are used by others. These countries can be described as a virus exploiting the sour relations between the two countries.”⁽³⁵⁾ This outlook resonates with the discourse defined in this article as “preventive realism.”

While rival discourses in Iran – depending, of course, on the politics of the day - keep expressing positive feelings about prospective Iran-US relations, it needs to be underlined that there still exist some ideological values and strategic interests



that the Islamic Republic is unable/unwilling to compromise on – the ideological redlines, so to speak. I now turn to major ideological redlines that shape - and constrain - the Islamic Republic's foreign policy toward the US.

2-1. Islamic Solidarity vs. Emergent Perils of Globalization

Islamic solidarity has been part and parcel of Iranian politics for quite a long time; in fact, it could be argued that it has been part of the picture since the days of Jamal-al-Din Asadabadi (Afghani) in mid-18th century. It has gained increasing popularity and prominence in the post-WW2 period, especially since early 1960s (during the Kennedy's administration) when ostracized traditional and Islamic forces found themselves at a dominant position in the anti-Shah and anti-US discourse. Since then these forces have espoused closer liaison – and later alliance - with militant forces in Palestine and Lebanon in the struggle against the Shah's regime and its Western allies and supporters – inclusive, in particular, of Israel.

In the post-revolutionary period, this solidarity has been strengthened with the Islamic Middle East, much more than in the past, and also as a result of the commonly-perceived threats from the seemingly inexorable process of globalization. The Islamic Republic's emphasis, since its very inception, on the imperative of promoting "solidarity and union" with the Islamic countries can be understood within this general framework. In this respect, The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) as well as grass-root outreaches across the Islamic world have been deemed as two supplementary means to reinforce and

invigorate that trend.⁽³⁶⁾ Reiteration by Iranian leaders on numerous occasions since the early days of the revolution on the threats and dangers of what they perceive as the “West’s” conspiracy has constituted an important part of this discourse. As advised by the late Ayatollah Khomeini: “The leaders of the Islamic countries must be vigilant against the hostile provocations and avoid sectarian schisms.”⁽³⁷⁾ The same line of thinking and posture has continued to shape the dominant Iranian discourse in foreign policy to date – as reflected in the pronouncements by the Supreme Leader and Ahmadinejad.

2-2. Protesting US support for Israel as a Bid to Integrate into the Middle East

From the vantage point of the Islamic Republic, Iran’s integration in the Middle East is seen as a requisite measure to promote both cultural-ideological identity of the governing system as well as the regional strategic interests of Iran. However, since the Arab-Israeli conflict has been for decades the most burning issue in the eyes of the people of the Middle East, and the Pahlavi regime was criticized by Arab countries for its close even strategic relationship with Israel, the Islamic Republic has considered it a worthy policy to pay the high costs of vociferous opposition to the Israeli-US axis in its bid for integration in the Middle East. Ayatollah Khomeini’s clear, categorical words in the early days of the revolution - “Defending the Muslims everywhere, and first and foremost, the Palestinians, as the inviolable fundamental principles of the Islamic Republic”⁽³⁸⁾ – have come to shape the policy ever since.



The pivotal significance of this particular aspect of the Iranian foreign policy could also be seen in comparison with the relatively “neutral” position with regard to the situation in Chechnya and Kosovo, and more recently with regard to the situation of Uighurs in China. Given this, it could perhaps be predicted that the resolution of the Middle East crisis will remove a major stumbling block in the US-Iran relations.

2-3. Conflicting Definition of Terrorism and the Domestic Security of Iran

The Islamic Republic, like every other member of the United Nations, accepts the general definition of terrorism, and condemns it, as corroborated by numerous official pronouncements made at international occasions at the UN and elsewhere. In the words of Ayatollah Khamenei, “terrorism” refers to “the attempts on behalf of a group, organization or state posing threats to and terrorizing others in their bid to advance their will”⁽³⁹⁾ and also “We do not support any terrorist. Islamic Republic opposes terrorism and killing innocent civilians.”⁽⁴⁰⁾ However, the problem arises when this general definition is to be applied to who is a terrorist and who is not. And on this, views of the Islamic Republic and the US are diametrically opposed. For instance, the Islamic Republic decries the attempts to describe the actions of Hezbollah and Hamas as instances of terror. On the contrary, Israeli actions against Lebanon and Hamas are characterized by the Islamic Republic as instances of “state terrorism.” Ahmadinejad’s furious polemical reaction in 2006 to *Washington Post* journalist’s

reference to Hamas and Hezbollah as terrorist groups is quite indicative of the official thinking and posture: “If the US is occupied and the people rise up to defend their homeland, do you call Americans terrorists. I call them terrorist only if they kill civilians.”⁽⁴¹⁾

2-4. Obsession with Liberalism and Secularism

The Islamic Republic, as an ideological governing system, based on religion, has been very sensitive since its establishment to the question of maintaining ideological purity versus threats – perceived or real – from other ideologies, leftist challenge in the earlier days, and liberal-democratic, and in general secular, currents in more recent times. Ayatollah Khomeini had charged his followers with the task of “preserving” the Islamic Republic as their “top-most religious obligation,”⁽⁴²⁾ which has found its actual reflection in the pronouncements of his successor – Ayatollah Khamenei - as well as others. The statement by a leading conservative columnist in late 2008 that “Islamic Republic is a different regime ... The structure of this regime is inherently different from its Western counterpart”⁽⁴³⁾ clearly point to that perceived sense of uniqueness. Ahmadinejad’s numerous highly polemical pronouncements, since 2005 and particularly since June 2009, directed at “liberal democracy” should be seen as part and parcel of the serious – and growing – concern within the ranks of the Islamic Republic over the creeping threat of secular/liberal thinking.⁽⁴⁴⁾ As analyzed in this article, this approach and posture fits well with the “preemptive surrealist” outlook. It should be add, though, that the concern



over the threats posed by secularism and Western liberalism is generally shared across the political spectrum, including pro-Khatami reformers.⁽⁴⁵⁾

3.The Expedient Range in the Islamic Republic's Approach to the US

As discussed earlier, the ideational and situational contexts of the Iranian foreign policy towards the US have rendered itself into a two-tier package: “suspicious reservations” in the mid-term and “proactive cooperation” in the long-term. The mid-term outlook is reminiscent of both ideological stand-offs and aggravating circumstantial developments. This outlook tends to unfold in terms of a spectrum of approaches/positions/tactics; whereby militant and/or assertive stance defines respectively its worst-case and best-case scenarios. Assertiveness is, in fact, the ceiling-base, to which both moderates and radicals subscribe. As discussed previously, the particular style in implementing this assertive foreign policy would take either the form of “preventive realism” of both pragmatist and reformist administrations (1989-2005) or “preemptive surrealism” under Ahmadinejad 2005 onwards. It needs to be added, however, that due to their peculiar ideological dispossession and orientation – radical right –, the proponents of “preemptive surrealism” generally tend to favor more militant posture and language – which can also be analyzed and judged in terms of and in response to the type and content of US posture and behavior. On the other hand, the proponents of “preventive realism” –

generally belonging to a pragmatist or reform platform – tend to tilt more in favor of the strategic interests of the country – whether called Iran or the Islamic Republic.

Geographically speaking, the proponents of “preemptive surrealism” are more globalist in their overall approach. Their strategy is geared to blunt the US threat through undercutting its influence across the board, in the region around Iran as elsewhere, through an assertive/militant style. Looking at the situation in mid-2010, the proponents of this outlook and policy appear to have maintained the position that was gained in 2005. The coalition of pragmatists and reformists – a loose coalition in any event – currently play the role of the underdog vis-à-vis the policy towards the US; they pursue a rather limited agenda focused mainly on “national interests.” And within the coalition, while the pragmatists are basically institutionalist and concerned with increased national capacity, reformists are more cosmopolitan and concerned with notions of democracy and freedom, and human rights of Iranians. However, these less ambitious, mostly national-orientated foreign policies do not preclude them from espousing simultaneously loyalty to the Islamic Republic’s fundamental sense of solidarity with the Middle East and Islamic World.

Beyond this assertive/or otherwise militant policy in the mid-term, indications are that the Islamic Republic has also envisaged – for the long-term – an alternative interactive foreign policy towards US. The long-term outlook is defined in terms of proactive and constructive relationship with the US, provided that the latter respects the Islamic Republic’s differing value



system and accommodates its legitimate strategic interests. Whereas the mid-term suspicious policy cannot but be judged as a zero-sum game, the long-term outlook provides for a general win-win game. These two outlooks will be further discussed in the next two sections.

3-1. Reflection of Mid-term Suspicion in the Islamic Republic's Foreign Policy towards the US

Judging the development of the Iranian foreign policy outlook since 1989; that is, during the leadership of Ayatollah Khamenei (since 1989), it can be said with a high degree of certainty that he has played an increasingly important role in setting the context for mid-term and long-term approaches, and also in balancing the competing/alternative discourses towards the US in Iran.⁽⁴⁶⁾ By assessing the mid-term context in Iran to be acrimonious and hostile, he deems “National Concord” to be required against foreign threats, which he defines as “taking advantage of all capacities and capabilities of domestic factions” to confront all the threats of the external enemy.⁽⁴⁷⁾ That said, it is also of note that a highly visible tilt in favour of Ahmadinejad appeared to have taken place in the wake of the June 2009 elections.⁽⁴⁸⁾

Based on this situational domestic context in Iran, I will try to discuss, though briefly, the two major competing discourses in Iran towards the US. In section B below, I will look into the narrative in support of long-term “proactive cooperation.” It is to be noted, however, that the transformation of narrative into discourse requires both ideational and situational changes on the part of both countries.



3-1-1. Preventive Realist Approach towards the US

As discussed earlier, the proponents of ‘preventive realism’ in Iran – pragmatists and reformers - are also in favor of a paradigmatic shift in the US approach to Iran before the mid-term suspicious policy could be transformed into a long-term proactive foreign policy. However, given the weight of the US-Iran mutual strategic interests, and considering what is currently perceived in Iran as the Chinese and Russian opportunistic exploitation of the state of US-Iran relations, reformers appear to have shifted their wary eyes from the US to these two other major countries with close relations with Iran. The wide range of political forces and currents critical of the Russian and Chinese policy towards Iran contend that their support of the status quo in Iran is in return for hefty oil and gas concessions and rich market share and hence, at the cost of national interests’⁽⁴⁹⁾

It was previously discussed that Presidents Rafsanjani and Khatami, each in their respective terms of office, took the initiative of heralding a “preventive realist” approach towards the relations with the US. Rafsanjani’s articulation of this approach was defined in mostly political terms of “detente” with the US, and Khatami’s approach instead had a predominantly cultural aspect; “Dialogue amongst Civilizations.” The generally positive political ambiance between the two countries in the earlier years of the decade was such that then Deputy-Speaker of the Reform-dominated 6th Majlis, Behzad Nabavi, a veteran politician and prominent reform activist, declared in late 2002 that: “[S]hould an occasion emerge, I will travel to the US and shake hands with the members of the US Congress.”⁽⁵⁰⁾



That, as is now history, never came to pass, and instead the confluence of myriad factors – including significant popular disenchantment with the lackluster reformers - led to the ascendance of the radical right and the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005 and the emergence of a totally different approach in foreign policy. Notwithstanding tactical differences, one could discern the emergence of a strategic outlook in the Islamic Republic – as reflected in the words of a high-ranking Iranian diplomat with close relations with Khatami: I assume there needs to be a differentiation between a revolutionary foreign policy and an adventurous one ... It was under Khatami's administration that Israel left Lebanon ... We subscribe to a trend of thought supporting detente and confidence-building at the global level. Under the reform administration, this policy was condoned by the system's leadership. All of us subscribe to the overall policy under the revolution's umbrella, though we differ in the approach.”⁽⁵¹⁾

As it happened, substantial change in the views of the Iranian leaders appeared to have been interpreted by the US administration as a sign of weakness on behalf of the Islamic Republic – as attested by US Ambassador James Dobbins at a 2008 conference at the US Senate.⁽⁵²⁾ The negative US response in the form of castigating Iran as a member of the “Axis of Evil” (2002) much contributed to the voice and weight of the radical fundamentalists who considered “detente and confidence-building” as a self-defeating approach. The flexible approach and outlook of the reform period, however, came to be succeeded after 2005 by a populist, radical-sounding outlook

that seemed to express anxiety over the trend geared to the “deconstruction of the principles and foundations of the revolution.”⁽⁵³⁾

According to the newly ascendant outlook, proactive policies of the reformers would only reinforce the US determination “to impose their views on Iran,” with the “nuclear issue being only a prelude.”⁽⁵⁴⁾ As described by a prominent conservative politician, back in late 2008, pro-reform policies were “implemented by those inattentive to Islamic glory, and hoping for a velvet revolution in Iran.”⁽⁵⁵⁾ Almost simultaneously, an American analyst also informed his American audience that “those who have argued that he [Obama] will not be able to change the hostile relations [between the two countries] have gained the upper hand in Iran.”⁽⁵⁶⁾ It hardly needs to be added that such a shift in power in Iran corresponds to a shift in favor of heightening ideological differences with the US, with the inevitable negative impact on and at the cost of the mutually-shared high strategic interests involved.

3-1-2. Pre-emptive Surrealist Approach towards the US

In retrospect, it could be said, perhaps even with a sense of lamenting, that the failure of the “preventive realist” discourse in the Iranian foreign policy in instituting a paradigmatic change in the US-Iran relations did contribute, certainly inadvertently, to the rise and ascendance of the proponents of the “pre-emptive surrealist discourse. This discourse, despite its quite unique characteristics when compared with similar assertive/aggressive discourses in the earlier days of the revolution, has come to



establish, itself as the dominant discourse in Islamic Republic's foreign policy towards the US.

As argued earlier, the substance of pre-emptive surrealism is geared to undercut the US threat by capitalizing on shared anti-US ideology with other like-minded forces and currents at three levels - domestic, regional and global. The new dominant approach has an unmistakable ideological taint, best reflected in the high-level polemics of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Addressing Barack Obama, in person, in early April this year, he called on him to be "attentive to the realities on the ground", and went on to say: "Consider the fact that bigger, heavier bullies have proved ineffective to cause any harm to Iran. ...and to endanger the Islamic Republic."⁽⁵⁷⁾

While expressing full confidence that the US is simply unable to cause any harm to the Islamic Republic, Iranian surrealists have spared no efforts in finding and enlisting political and ideological partners across the board, in the immediate region around Iran as elsewhere, . Forging of close liaison with such non-state actors as Hezbollah and Hamas in the region and with such state actors as Latin American radicals – Venezuela, Bolivia, and Cuba – Sudan and Syria in the Arab world and North Korea is clearly indicative of the difficulty in enlisting the support of major partners within the ranks of such bigger groups as the Non-aligned Movement (NAM) and, for that matter, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

The "preemptive surrealism" pursues its anti-US campaign in a number of fronts, the essence of all of which, as indicated earlier, is to undercut and blunt the US threat, and exert pressure

on the US status and influence – and for that matter, the US global image. Reciprocal incrimination of the US for involvement in terrorist attacks, as for example in the case of November 2008 terrorist attack in Mumbai, India, is one of such fronts. Amid rumors implicating Pakistan for the incident, Ahmadinejad had already claimed that the attacks had been “carried out as a pressure on Afghanistan and Pakistan, but mainly aimed at India and China.”⁽⁵⁸⁾

Engagement in high-wire political and legal campaign, as witnessed earlier in the case of Ahmadinejad's recent letter to the UN Secretary-General to establish a fact-finding team to investigate the West's culpability in terrorism, constitutes another channel of posing challenging to the US – and the West in general, for that matter. Another avenue for raising the challenge has been through the United Nations, especially at the General Assembly, as the most universal UN body where developing, non-aligned, and Islamic countries form the majority bloc. He has tried since 2005 on an annual basis to use the General Assembly pulpit to project his peculiar Shi'ite messianic vision for a New World Order and preach the world body on what he sees as the Islamic Republic's solutions for the ills of the world.

As for the degree of success of “preemptive surrealism” as a policy, given the fact that the tussle between the two sides is still continuing, it may be difficult as of now to undertake an objective overall assessment. The respective perception and picture on either side appear to be conflicting – and for understandable reasons. From Ahmadinejad's personal point of



view as expressed in April this year: Iran currently enjoys a remarkable status in global issues and “the Iranian nation has become the global epicenter for all virtuous, freedom-seeking and justice-loving groups”.⁽⁵⁹⁾ A Woodrow Wilson Center publication in early 2010 – entitled “Iran in Latin America: Threat or “Axis of Annoyance”⁽⁶⁰⁾ - representing an American viewpoint albeit not a strictly official position, offers a much less rosy picture in this regard.

Beyond what each side would like to depict as its success – or the other side’s failure - the actual situation would point in the direction of further deterioration of the political atmosphere between the two countries since 2005. Repeated exchange of “barbs” between various Iranian and US officials on different issues, inclusive of Iran’s nuclear dossier, and a perceptibly heightened mutual propaganda atmosphere on both sides cannot but be considered negative in itself, and even dangerous, threatening possible further aggravation and flare-up. Intensification of unilateral sanctions against the Islamic Republic, its financial institutions, oil and gas industry, and the military establishment by Western countries, or their companies, should also be counted as among the negative repercussions of the on-going tension.

3-2. Long-term Proactive Outlook towards the US

Notwithstanding the current suspicious approach, as discussed in the previous section, the mutual strategic interests of Iran and the US are sufficiently high to pave the grounds for the emergence of a cooperative relationship in the long-term, albeit

quite different from 'delegated surrogate' In the pre-revolutionary period. An objective look at the reality of Iran proper would indicate that Iran has many assets to contribute to the promotion of mutually-shared Iran-US strategic interests in the region. Repeated assertions by various Iranian officials, including Ahmadinejad himself, that "Iran has already fulfilled its responsibility" and calls on the US to do her part is clearly indicative of this potential approach. While castigating the US past policies towards Iran, Ahmadinejad reiterated in mid-April 2010 the desirability of the US cooperation with Iran in the future.⁽⁶¹⁾ Regional stability and development are two crucial issues at hand. Regional instability, whether emanating from the impact of inexorable globalization or as the unintended consequence of such American surrealist hopes for "democratization" in the region would, in all probability, work against the long-term interests of both countries, and even endanger those interests. For example, Iran has been able thus far to fend off the Salafi hatred and onslaught against itself by funneling it towards the US, even if at a very high cost. Effective pursual of such an approach and policy in the future may in fact need to be re-calibrated through a mutually-cooperative approach, involving an acceptable compromise geared to strengthen the institutional capacity in the region to withstand the destabilizing impact of rampant globalization, including in the form of the emergence of extremist forces and currents. Other countries in the bigger region surrounding Iran, inclusive of Iran's eastern and western neighbors as well as those in the Central Asia and the Caucasus, who are also subject and



vulnerable to similar pressures and challenges, might as well find it to their long-term interest to join hands in this respect. The new cooperative approach would, however, need a new paradigm in the bilateral relationship, which I tend to term “proactive” – to be further discussed below.

3-2-1. An Iranian “Correspondent Discourse”

Unlike the earlier either strategic or ideological paradigm of relations during the pre- or post-revolutionary periods, it appears that a new paradigm involving a positive balance between these two seemingly dialectical constituents of Iran’s foreign policy under the Islamic Republic is emerging in Iran. As discussed in preceding pages, the primacy of strategic interests prior to 1979 had led the Iranian monarchical regime to act as a surrogate of the US in the Persian Gulf area. In a diametrically opposed approach and policy, and as an almost knee-jerk reaction to that, the post-revolutionary Iran chose to cater to the primacy and preponderance of the ideological paradigm in its foreign policy. Looking back three decades after the revolution, it can be safely argued that the shortcomings and drawbacks of either strategy seem to have become part of national consciousness. Strategically speaking, and considering a more consensual ideology, Iran is well poised to take advantage of its geopolitical assets; dominating the entire northern tier of the Persian Gulf, , acting as a unique gateway to the Caspian Basin, in more recent years, serving as a bridge to the rising politico-economic pole of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Iranians of various political persuasion appear to have come to a

fuller realization of the country's strategic status and potentials, viewing it as an "island of stability" in the Persian Gulf area, projecting its burgeoning military prowess as a source of stability and security and its huge economic potentials as a source of regional development.⁽⁶²⁾ Such statements as "security of the Persian Gulf is inconceivable without Iran" and "US attention to the region arises from its strategic importance"⁽⁶³⁾ by a high-ranking military officer reflect this growing appreciation of the strategic dimension of the country's unique geographical position. Beyond the realistic appreciation, there exists also more Iran-centric viewpoints which tend to believe that the "Greater Middle East is forming around the axis of the Islamic Iran, ...without whose support no development in the region stands any chance for success."⁽⁶⁴⁾

3-2-2. The General Framework for a Proactive Foreign Policy

In so far as Iran's long-term approach to the US is concerned, notwithstanding the mid-term suspicion and dogged campaign to thwart the US acrimonious threats, a growing awareness and deliberation - and hope - is emerging within the Iranian body politic on how to set the modalities for a workable framework of future relations. Even if, unfortunate as it is, the fallout from the 2009 presidential elections has tarnished the picture and drastically dashed the hopes. But, aside from this hopefully short-term setback, the contours of the framework for the new paradigm are still sketchy and quite general in nature – for a host of reasons; some of which relate to Iranian politics and others which pertain to the US side, for example, lack of clarity on the



part of the US long-term intentions towards the region, inclusive of Iran. Continued emphasis on the Iranian side on differential philosophical dispositions has kept the discussion at a skeletal, broad level, requiring further articulation and refinement needed for the proper balance to develop between the two overall sets of concerns and interests, also between the regional and international concerns.

As part of the general framework for the new paradigm – and, in fact, a central part – the Islamic Republic appears to be critically keen to convincing the US to genuinely commit herself to respecting Iran’s independence – beyond verbal pronouncements – and to desist from undermining the Iranian government/governing system through subversive policies and measures. Within the framework of this overarching consideration, the following two considerations appear to define the basis for the Iranian government’s future perspective towards the future relations with the US:

1. Establishment of a legal-egalitarian base for mutual relations. Iranians have on numerous occasions during the past years emphasized the imperative of the principles of justice and mutual respect, free from interference and pressure, for laying the foundations of a healthy relationship with the US – as with other countries.

2. Preference for dialogue instead of confrontation. Even if the paradigm of “dialogue” happened to be a hallmark of the reform years under Khatami and not particularly subscribed to or officially espoused and pursued by the succeeding fundamentalist administration of Ahmadinejad, it appears,

however, that the principle of 'dialogue as a precondition for international relations' has come to be accepted as a 'modus operandi.' What might prove quizzical, in this regard, is the frequent alternation in official pronouncements between soft and dialogical exhortations intended to entice the US towards rapprochement on the one hand, and tough words and gestures intended to discourage the US from adopting threatening posture and policies on the other.⁽⁶⁵⁾

Despite many frustrating episodes between the two countries in the past – regardless of which side to blame and to what degree - including the less-than-encouraging current atmosphere, one cannot but come to the conclusion that there still remains the residual hope that working out a solution is simply not of question or out of sight – albeit not within easy grasp. Both sides need to manage short-term thorny issues, overcome mid-term suspicion, and prepare for the long-term cooperative arrangements. Iran, for her part, needs to finally overcome the apparent dialectical conflict between the Islamic Republic's ideology and Iran's long-term strategic interests and articulate its "correspondent discourse" addressing the mutually-shared interests with the US. The US also, on her part, needs to address and undertake the requisite ideational change to be able to look at the Islamic Republic/Iran through a different prism than has been the case thus far. Beyond the ideational change on the part of both sides, they need to work out, separately and in tandem, a situational roadmap to move in the direction of long-term rapprochement and ultimate cooperative arrangements, which drawing on the conceptual framework advanced by



Graham and Halperin (1972) I tend to call a “post-modern perspective.”⁽⁶⁶⁾

Conclusions and Policy Considerations

In this article, it was attempted to demonstrate the two-tiered nature of the Islamic Republic's foreign policy vs. the US: suspicious mid-term outlook and approach unfolding through a mix of “preventive realism” and “pre-emptive surrealism” and proactive long-term outlook. It was argued that, due to ideological and strategic preferences, the Islamic Republic has been searching for a new paradigm for its long-term relations with the US - which still remains within the limits of generalities. To go beyond generalities, it was suggested here that the new paradigm can be conceptualized in terms of proactive foreign policy and implemented in consensual terms. The consensual approach is deemed as a workable venue to pave the way for the strategic aspirations and ambitions of both Iran and the US, hitherto frustrated by lack of consensual foundation and also betrayed by hostile approaches. The consensual approach in Iran needs to be implemented at all the three levels of Iranian politics: domestic, regional and international. The future proactive foreign policy - and its requisite consensual basis - needs to revolve around the following terms: 1) Domestically: democracy and human rights; 2) Regionally: Iran's integration into the Middle East; and 3) Internationally: Iran's strategic role as a gateway to both the Caspian Basin and the Persian Gulf as well as a bridge between the West and SCO.



Policy-wise, three subsidiary issues also need to be taken into consideration and addressed for the new proactive policy to hold as a new paradigm in bilateral Iran-US relations. First, as Suzanne Maloney has adroitly warned, the US must “deal with Iran as a whole,” implying that any policy geared to manipulation of domestic discord and government-people cleavages fails as per practice to reach the desired outcome, and worse, serves to further institutionalize and perpetuate the state of mutual distrust and suspicion currently infecting Iranian politics – and relations – at all three levels. As for Iran, long-established historical heritage from the ancient times, strong, deep-seated patriotic feelings, and millennial hybrid Iranian-Islamic culture have generated a holistic approach to politics. Moreover, politics in Iran has always involved both domestic and international dimensions. As a result, foreign developments tend to have strong domestic reverberations and ramifications. Given this, and the long, enduring shadow of the infamous British practice of “divide and rule,” it is important to note that the element of mistrust between Iran and the US in the post-revolutionary period has been most responsible for contaminating the harsh, acrimonious political ambiance between the two sides, so much so that critics and dissidents in Iran are denounced as per policy as US pawn.

On the positive side, consensual approach on the Iranian side is deemed to serve the legitimate interests and aspirations of both Iran and the US; also serving as a means of promoting confidence-building between them. On the US side, a less-partisan, more even-handed approach and policy towards the



Israeli-Palestinian conflict would also have positive impact on the US-Iran relations. Considering the substantial US potentials in various fields, a more proactive approach and outlook on her part can certainly make a positive contribution to the institutional capacity of Iran to achieve confidence-building at all three levels. That is, the US can address and deal with Iran as a whole; help Iran's in its attempts to integrate into the Middle East; and engage it in a meaningful manner and commensurate with its capabilities and potentials in promoting peace and stability in the region.

Conceptually, Iran's long-term, strategic interest lies in its success in striking a delicate balance between its domestic, regional and global strategic interests on one hand and between the West and SCO on the other. Policy-wise, such a balanced deal requires both pluralism and consensual negotiation skill. Pluralism is the overarching factor for an exit from the short-term, transitional impasse. But consensual negotiation skill is required at all three domestic, regional and international theaters in order to make the long-term strategic cooperation functional. The US positive contribution to assist Iran towards reaching such a compromise deal is highly required. At the domestic level, this contribution is in need of a consociational democracy. At the regional level, the positive contribution must facilitate two processes: one, to help Iran arrive at a compromise deal between its integration into the Middle East with its global strategic responsibilities; and two, contributing to the peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. At the global level, the US contribution would be to pave the way for the development and

success of the new paradigm in Iran-US relations.

Beyond the factual domain, Iran and the US can theoretically have a long-term strategic relationship. The emergence of a new world order and a highly globalized world positively contribute to that. Such changes have substantially altered the security environment of the Islamic Republic, requiring it to effect change in its relations with others, within the region and beyond, inclusive of such powerful international actors as the US. Given the US continued presence in Iraq and the long-term security pact signed with that country, Turkey's continued military alliance with NATO, and the US presence and active military engagement in Afghanistan, it would be plausible to conceive of and consider a different role for Iran. While these arrangements seem to have addressed major US security concerns in the immediate vicinity of Iran, from the Iranian point of view they can indeed be seen as sources of insecurity and potential threat – which need to be addressed within the framework of the new paradigm of bilateral Iran-US relations.

And finally, in so far as the new paradigm is concerned, it is in need of both soft-ware philosophical dispositions and strategic considerations. In this respect, it should be further added that consensual approach itself is in need of the recognition of both shared strategic interests and diverse philosophical dispositions, and at times difference in strategic interests. Philosophically, Iran cannot afford a zero-sum game either with the West against SCO, or considering its global interests at the cost of its regional or domestic interests or vice-



versa. Rather, domestically Iran should be deemed as a whole, and regionally as a part of the Middle East, and globally as a strategic gate or bridge - primarily as a gate to the Caspian Basin or the Persian Gulf sub-regions and more broadly as a peace bridge between the West and the great powers in SCO. Both require a compromise deal based on the consensual approach. As far as the ideological disposition of the Islamic Republic is concerned, inherent flexibility in the Shi'ite thinking and jurisprudence and also the traditional tolerant accommodating culture of Iran can both make a positive contribution to make towards the development – and ultimate success – of the paradigm.

Notes

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2. VOA, Persian program, 16 April 2010.
3. Recited by VOAPNN, December 2 2008.
4. *Kayhan*, Azar 10 1387/November 30 2008.
5. *Kayhan*, Azar 10 1387/November 30 2008.
6. *Kayhan*, Azar 10 1387/November 30 2008.
7. <http://www.irna.ir/En/View/FullStory/?NewsId=1053738&idLanguage=3>
8. *Tehran times*, April 3 2010, http://www.tehrantimes.com/Index_view.asp?code=216463
9. *Kayhan*, 14 Farvardin 1389/3 April 2010.
10. *Sahifeh Emam*/Collected Statements and Addresses by Ayatollah Khomeini, cited by Keyhan daily, 29 Aban 1387/19 November 2008.
11. *Ettela'at*, 1 Azar 1372/22 November 1991.
12. Printing Media in Iran, 30 October 2008 speech, reiterated again in his New Year [Nowrooz] address in Meshed in both 2009 and 2010..
13. <http://www.newser.com/article/d98c5nto3/ahmadinejad-says-predecessor-humiliated-iran.html>
14. *IRIB*, reporting the Qurban Feast, 19 Azar 1387/10 December 2008.
15. Cited by *Tabnak News Website*, 24 Shahrivar 1387/14 September 2008. He said: "I do not say that Iraq's imposed war on Iran was directly ordered by America ...I say America was happy with this war and perhaps had a role in its inception. Later on, documents revealed how Americans had encouraged Saddam for the war. ...We had reached the



conclusion that they [US] would not let us win the war.”

16. *IRNA* 18 Azar 1387/8 December 2008.
17. *ILNA* (Iranian Labor News Agency), Azar 20 1387/December 10 2008.
18. <http://www.afp.com/afpcom/en/>
19. <http://www.irna.ir/En/View/FullStory/?NewsId=1052375&idLanguage=3>
20. *VOA*, April 15 2010.
21. <http://www.irna.ir/En/View/FullStory/?NewsId=1053224&idLanguage=3>
22. <http://www.irna.ir/En/View/FullStory/?NewsId=1053738&idLanguage=3>
23. <http://www.irna.ir/En/View/FullStory/?NewsId=1051831&idLanguage=3>
24. *Kayhan*, April 12 2010.
25. <http://www.irna.ir/En/View/FullStory/?NewsId=1052999&idLanguage=3>
26. <http://www.irna.ir/En/View/FullStory/?NewsId=1054039&idLanguage=3>
27. *Aftabe Yazd*, 20 Azar 1387/10 December 2008, quoted the the influential Friday prayer leader in Meshed warning “The arrogant power [US] is determined to provoke students against the system.”
28. “Joint Experts' Statement on Iran,” *Opendemocracy*, November 25 2008.
29. www.thecroissant.com/sample_articles.php?action=viewarticle&id=399&style=print - 23k -
30. Hooman Majd, an Iranian-American journalist, expressed such speculation in his book on Khatami - *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ*. Pierre Tristam, <http://middleeast.about.com/od/iran/p/me090308.htm>
31. <http://www.netnative.com/news/archive.html>
32. Ayatollah Khamenei, feedblitz@mail.feedblitz.com, Aban 23 1387/ November 13 2008.
33. <http://www.tabnak.com/nbody.php?id=33002>
34. *Kayhan*, 14 Farvardin 1389/3 April 2009.
35. Ali Khorram, “Americans have been unaware of Iran for 30 years,” *Tabnak*, 17 Azar 1387/7 December 2007. As former ambassador to Libya, China, and UN (Geneva), he has served as advisor to foreign minister since late 1980s.

36. As will be discussed later in this paper, the first contributes to the “preventive realist” discourse in Iran’s foreign policy, and the latter paves the way for ‘pre-emptive surrealist’ discourse.
37. Cited by *Kayhan*, 7 Farvardin 1371/28 March 1992.
38. Cited by *Ettela’at*, 8 Esfand 1371/26 February 1992.
39. *Abrar*, 17 Ordibehest 1374/6 May 1995.
40. *Kayhan*, 28 Ordibehest 1373/18 May 1995.
41. *Mehr News Agency*, Mehr 2 1385/September 23 2006.
42. *Sahifeh Noor*, Collected Statements and addresses of Ayatollah Khomeini, vol. .XV, p.250, Vol. XIX, p. 153, and Vol. XXI, p. 407.
43. *Gooya News Website*, 16 Aban 1387/ 6 November 2008.
44. <http://www.president.ir/fa/?ArtID=19461>
45. Recited by Owner-Persian-htm@lists.bbc.co.uk, 30 November 2008.
46. *Gooya News Website*, 16 Aban 1387/ 6 November 2008.
47. *Khorasan daily*, December 2, 21 and 23 2002.
48. [http://www.jamejamonline.ir/newstext.aspx?newsnum= 100909858928](http://www.jamejamonline.ir/newstext.aspx?newsnum=100909858928)
In the Friday Prayers sermon held a week after the June elections, while referring to the difference of opinion between Ahmadinejad and Rafsanjani since the elections in 2005, he went on to add that, of course, my personal viewpoint is closer to Ahmadinejad.”
49. Elaheh Ravan-shad, “ma mikhahim be syasat-haye estebdadi hakemiat eteraz konim/we want to protest the despotic policies of the Government,” *Radio Farda*, Farsi Service, 17 Azar 1387/8 December 2008.
50. *Resalat daily*, late Azar 1381/mid-December 2002.
51. Sadeq Kharrazi, Former Deputy Foreign Minister and Ambassador to France (also nephew of Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi), *Etemad Melli*, 21 Aban 1387/11 November 2008.
52. This was expressed by Ambassador James Dobbins at a Conference sponsored by PAIIA in the US Senate in 2008.
53. *Mehr News Agency*, 25 Ordibehest 1386/ 15 May 2007.
54. Cited by *Gooya News*, from IRNA, 13 Mehr 1387/4 October 2008,



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55. Mohammad Nabi Habibi, Secretary-General of the powerful Mo'talefeh Party, cited by *Kayhan*, 13 Azar 1387/3 December 2008.
56. Gareth Porter, "Iranian Leaders Debate Obama's Policy Freedom," reporting from Tehran, IPS, 10 December 2008.
57. *Bahar daily*, III:67, April 8 2010.
58. Drawing a comparison between the purported objective of the Mumbai attack and the Iraqi situation in 2003, Ahmadinejad had stated that "Before invasion of Iraq, US economy's collapse was imminent, and that war was deemed a medicine to tame the crisis." Cited by *Kayhan*, 9 Azar 1387/29 November 2008.
59. Farvardin 20 1389/April 9 2010 <http://www.asriran.com/fa/news/107354/>
60. Cynthia Arnson, Haeh Esfandiari and Adams Stubits, *Iran In Latin America; Threat or "Axis of Annoyance"*, Washington DC.: Woodrow Wilson Center, 2010.
61. <http://www.irna.ir/En/View/FullStory/?NewsId=1053738&idLanguage=3>
62. *Etemad Melli*, 7 Azar 1387/27 November 2008.
63. Rahim Safavi, former commander-in-chief of the Islamic Revolution's Guards Corps, and current military advisor to the Supreme Leader, *Etemad Melli*, 23 Aban 1387/23 November 2008.
64. Hossein Shariatmadari, personal representative of the Supreme Leader and manager of the *Kayhan daiy*, 23 Aban 1387/23 November 2008.
65. Statements such as: "We are in control of the Strait of Hormoz. ... it is possible for us to shut it to shipping," as stated by the Commander of the Iranian Navy, reflects the latter tactical approach, *Etemad Melli*, 7 Mehr 1387/28 September 2007.
66. Graham T. Allison and Morton H. Halperin "Bureaucratic Politics: A Paradigm and Some Policy Implications." 1972. *World Politics* 24:40-79.