

## US and Iran Strategy in Middle East

Zahra Abotorabi Ardestani

International Relations

**Abstract:** The earliest civilizations in history were established in the region, now known as the Middle East (around 3500 BC), in Mesopotamia (Iraq), widely regarded as the cradle of civilization. The Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians and Assyrians all flourished in this region. Soon after the Sumerian civilization began, the Nile River valley of ancient Egypt was unified under the Pharaohs in the 4th millennium BC, and civilization quickly spread through the Fertile Crescent to the West Coast of the Mediterranean Sea and throughout the Levant. The Phoenicians, Israelites and others later built important States in this region. By the 1990's, many Western commentators - some Middle Eastern ones as well - saw the Middle East as not just a zone of conflict, but also as a zone of backwardness.

**Keywords:** Middle East – USA- Iran – conflict.

### 1. Introduction:

By the 1990's, many Western commentators - some Middle Eastern ones as well - saw the Middle East as not just a zone of conflict, but also as a zone of backwardness. The rapid spread of political democracy and the development of market economies in Eastern Europe, Latin America, East Asia and parts of Africa passed the Middle East by boats, and for that matter traders and trade delegations, and politicians and their delegations crises-crossed the region. In the whole region, only Israel, Turkey and to some extent Lebanon and the Palestinian territories were democracies. America is the largest consumer of oil in the world; Iraq has the 2nd largest known oil reserves in the world. There is reason to believe, that this is partially why the US invaded Iraq. The advent of a new western army of occupation in a Middle Eastern capital marked a turning point in the history of the region. Despite successful elections held in January 2005, Iraq has all but disintegrated due to a lack of infrastructure and security system. A post-war insurgency has morphed into persistent ethnic violence which the American army has been unable to quell. Many of Iraq's intellectual and business elite have fled the country, and total Iraqi refugees already outnumber the Palestinian exodus that followed the creation of Israel. All this added to further destabilization of the region.

### 2. US Strategic Policy Interest:

The United States has been actively involved in the Middle East for the last 50 years; its dual containment is a shift in policy direction. It is, therefore, relevant here to examine the viability of dual containment within the context of the region and the balance against the current national security strategy of engagement and enlargement.<sup>1</sup> The United States has long term national interests and vital engagements across the Arab World and with Israel and Iran. This includes key links and resources exploring Middle Eastern relationships, particularly the role of U.S. foreign policy in various regional issues and organizations including the Arab League, Organization of the Islamic States, Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and beyond. Events in the first half of this decade have significantly strengthened America's strategic hand in the Middle East, but several long-term trends threaten to undermine this progress and once again make the region dangerous to Western interests. The type and extent of future US military engagement in the greater Middle East could be determined by the direction of these trends. The collapse of

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<sup>1</sup> Lenczowski, George, "Iran: the big debate," *the middle east policy*, vol 3, no 2, 1994, p .52.

the Soviet Union and the withering of its bilateral security ties abroad have severely reduced Moscow's ability to affect regional events and have modified the orientation of countries such as Syria and Yemen. Without this competition, the United States emerged as the principal external actor in the region.<sup>2</sup> This advantage was reinforced by the outcome of the Persian Gulf War in 1991 and continuing effort in defense of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States. Despite positive developments and dangerous prospects, core US strategic interests in the area remain essentially what they were during the Cold War. Protecting access to Persian Gulf oil; maintaining peace between Israel and its neighbors and limiting radical political movements remain vital US interests. The United States protects its vital interests in the Gulf with a diplomatic policy of dual containment, backed up by the US Central Command. This policy, which labels both Iran and Iraq as hostile to Western interests, has thus far effectively isolated the region's most immediate security threats. It dual containment is a unilateral initiative with only limited support from Europe and Japan. Should and for matter china to come closer to neighboring, radical changes shall be effected by the dismay and possibly against domination, if not the against the players. Russia supply Iran with fissile material, the dual containment policy could break down and Gulf allies would be increasingly threatened.<sup>3</sup> Along with the successful US, Persian Gulf policy and the peace process, the most alarming development in the greater Middle East was the growth of Islamic extremism in Algeria, Sudan, Egypt, and elsewhere. In its most extreme form, resurgent Islam was an ideological and, populist movement that sought to overthrow regimes, endorsing anti-Western strategies, and advocating supremacy of Islamic parties. The United States and its Western allies can work with the great majority of Muslims, who do not support a radical anti-Western agenda. In any case, it would be both fallacious and counterproductive for America or its treaty partners to develop policies which could be perceived as anti-Islamic. Given rising economic, social, and political difficulties confronting the US friendly governments in the Middle East there is little the United States can do militarily to ameliorate the present situation.<sup>4</sup> In this regard, the US, policy towards Israel vis-à-vis the Middle East must not lose sight of the futurity. There is the direct result of three events for US, policy towards the Middle East First, the end of the Cold War allowed the United States to pursue a more discriminate policy towards Iran and Iraq. Previously, these two nations were used by the superpowers as pawns, with the Iraqi regime leaning to the Soviets, and Iran developing ties with the United States. A second determining factor is the political outcome of Desert Storm. Although the war was a clear military victory for the coalition forces, its political aftermath is considered a failure by many observers because this, Saddam Hussein remained in power. The United States, ever leery of Saddam's preoccupation with military adventurism, stood resigned to the fact that American foreign policy must incorporate strategies that will cripple this despot. The third factor is the Arab-Israeli peace process. Both Iran and Iraq carried well-documented ties to subversive elements that are opposed to the peace process. In the case of Iraq, these relations were generally formed with the more radical Palestinian groups. Iran, in contrast, tended to form ties with the Shiite Islamic Hezbollah.<sup>5</sup>

### **3. Israeli-Palestinian conflicts: Failure of a Partial Policy:**

The second Palestinian Intifada in 2000 underscored the continuation of the US foreign policy in regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict. For most part, the US foreign policy continued its favorable stance toward Israel and showed little interest in acknowledging the Palestinians' predicament in the occupied territories. Despite the administration's claim in support of a "viable Palestinian State", the Palestinian population remains under siege by the Israeli army and the advancing march of extremist Jewish settlers in their territories.<sup>6</sup>

### **4. Oil: the Problem Is Price:**

Oil has been the greatest need of industrialised US, for instance. During the Cold War, the key US interest was keeping the oil flowing at what was a remarkably cheap price in order to support the recovery of

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel C. Diller (Editor), *The Middle East*, Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1994, p.75.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel C. Diller (Editor), *The Middle East*, Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1994, p.44.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel, p.47.

<sup>5</sup> Stav, Arie, *Mideast Arms Race: Reaching Critical Mass*, *Global Affairs*, Vol, 8, No. 3, summer, 1993, p. 60.

<sup>6</sup> Moin A. Siddiqi, *A 21st Century Success Story*, *the Middle East*, June 1, 2002.

Europe and encourage the growth of Asian and Third World economies. In those days oil was a new fuel, having displaced coal only by a decade or two for most countries, as it was utterly cheaper. As a result, oil soon became locked in a benign input-output equation with economic growth. The danger was not that the oil would not flow in normal times, because Western companies controlled the vertically integrated industry from exploration to extraction, to refining to transporting, to marketing. The danger was that the Soviet Union might directly or indirectly, through proxy- aided subversion, literally interdict the flow, thus gaining decisive leverage over the European fortunes<sup>7</sup>. People live today in very different circumstances. Sources of oil are more diversified than during the Cold War period. The result is that today what matters most is not the security of the physical flow of oil, but rather its price.<sup>8</sup> The days of cheap “easy oil” are over, and the startling, unprecedented wealth transfer in recent years to several upcoming political actors (Iran, Russia, Venezuela, and Arab States) constitutes the real problem to the policy makers in the west particularly the US.

## 5. Regional Organization in Middle East:

Active extremist groups in this region include: al-Qaida, the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hizballah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades (Fatah’s militant wing), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), Ansar al-Islam and its offshoot Ansar al- Sunnah, and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's organization, Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn, a.k.a. al-Qaida of the Jihad Organization in the Land of Two Rivers (a.k.a. al Qaida in Iraq). And there are categories of international organization in Middle East : Arab Cooperation Council , Arab Organization for Industrialization , Arab Towns Organization and Center for International and Regional Studies , Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, Council of Arab Economic Unity, Electronic Network for Arab-West Understanding, Islamic Development Bank, Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and Shield and OPEC.<sup>9</sup>

## 6. Iran in the Greater Middle East:

Resent developments in Iran while fuelling widespread concern have increased pressure on the international community to find a solution to the political, security and economic challenges, arising from Iran and the whole Middle East Region. Participants in a transatlantic roundtable, co-hosted by the Center for Applied Policy Research in Munich and the EPC in Brussels, stressed that Iran is an important foreign policy issue at hand for the European Union, the United States and the democratic world at large. This two-day event addressed a range of issues, with particular focus on Iran's nuclear programme and its international implications. Options for a transatlantic approach towards Iran and the Greater Middle East were also discussed, focusing on the next steps the EU and US should take in, critical situation .The roundtable opened with an overview of the current political situation from a domestic, regional and transatlantic perspective.<sup>10</sup> The "Islamic Republic" is based on two contrary elements: theocratic and democratic component. There are non-elected institutions which reflect the theocratic element, where sovereignty lies with God, going back to the concept of the rule of the jurisconsult (Wilayat al-Faqih), as developed by the late Ayatollah Khomeini. On the other hand, democracy demands that the people are sovereign, which implies that the political structure of an "Islamic Republic" has to combine these two elements. Therefore, the Iranian Constitution established elected institutions with popular legitimacy (President and Parliament) as well as non-elected institutions with clerical legitimacy. Since the revolution, the Conservatives have occupied positions in the non-elected institutions. This culminated in the election to the Presidency of the neo-conservative and Populist Mayor of Tehran, Mahmud Ahmadi-Nejad. He combines deference to the conservative clerical establishment – most importantly, to the Supreme leader Ali Khomeini – with a revolutionary zeal aimed at religious justice and material redistribution reminiscent of the early days of the Islamic revolution. The government in 1996 was stable while the international community expects led major changes in the domestic situation.

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<sup>7</sup> <<http://conconflicts.ssrc.org/mideast/khoury.com>.

<sup>8</sup> [www. OPEC long term strategy.com](http://www.opec.org/long-term-strategy)

<sup>9</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List of regional organizations by population.com](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_regional_organizations_by_population.com)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.cap-lmu.de/transatlantic/topics/iran.php>

## 7. Iran's Rise to Power in the Middle East:

Some factors such as al-Qaeda terrorism, the regional crises in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Lebanon, along with the rise to power of the Shiite factor in the region's power structure and politics, have connected the Middle East security system to the international security system. Political-security developments since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, as well as the Iraqi crises, carry generalized interconnected and internationalized Middle Eastern issues. In these circumstances, Iran's geopolitical situations, which provide it with simultaneous access to the existing political-security issues of Middle East's region, has put the country in a position where, it connects the Middle East's security system to global security system. Since 9/11, the two main concerns of international security, the war against al-Qaeda terrorism and resolving the regional crises in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, and recently Gaza have given Iran a new role and increased influence in the region. The competitive and changing nature of the Middle East's political-security developments is such that the main regional actors can only enhance their regional and strategic role through the advent of new appearances in the context of geopolitical situation, as well as by shifting the role of actors in the security system. The current circumstances in the Middle East have provided Iran with an unprecedented opportunity to benefit from its advantageous geo-political and cultural positions, thereby empowering its regional and consequently international position.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Kayhan Barzegar "Iran, The Middle East and International security ".volume 1, no 1, p.39.