In this last year, as a result of Bush and Ahmadinejad victories in the presidential elections, the media has been talking about a hypothetical US military action against the Islamic Republic of Iran. This article discusses how much of this is true or rather what the US hopes to obtain through such a threatening attitude.

Amid growing speculation about U.S. intentions, President George W. Bush on January 17 restated his position on the issue of Iran’s alleged nuclear weapons program: “I hope we can solve it diplomatically, but I will never take any option off the table”. In this respect, if on one hand he declared his commitment to promote democracy—which has been interpreted as a threat to remove authoritarian regimes by force – on the other he long emphasized diplomacy as the best way to approach suspicions that Iran is developing nuclear weapons.

Dick Cheney himself agreed with Bush position in respect to the need to address Iranian issues diplomatically. Concerned by potential troubles coming from Iran and its nuclear program - which Tehran says is for the purpose of civilian energy production while Washington consider it as a cover for a nuclear weapons program - Cheney included the country in the group of the sponsor of terrorism, pointing to Tehran’s support for Hezbollah and denouncing Iran stated policy aimed at destroying Israel.

The US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice agrees with Bush and Cheney position on the need for Iran to fulfil its international obligations. However military intervention is excluded, in favour of a diplomatic solution.

Specific positions of Europe and Israel remain a big concern for US, aimed at promoting new common efforts with the first, and considering the possibility for pre-emptive strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities enacted by the second. In fact a concrete solution to the proliferation crisis could be reached through joint US-European Union diplomacy.

**How real is Iran’s nuclear threat?**

The key question is how real is Iran’s nuclear threat? The Iranian government has always denied pursuing nuclear weapons development. At the same time, Iran’s needs for alternative energy production are very real. One can make convincing arguments for nuclear energy in Iran based on economical, social, and environmental considerations.

Iran has been exhibiting for years a skyrocketing rise in energy consum-
tion. The pattern has been aided by some of the lowest energy prices in the world, a remnant from the development policies of the kingdom years. At the same time, rapid population growth in the last 25 years led to an increase in demand which has made Iran the 17th country in the world in terms of total consumption. The issue is compounded as the country registers some of the worst levels of energy efficiency in the world.

The situation described above would not be critical in and of itself, but it becomes quite worrisome when one considers that about 80% of Iran’s exports derive from the energy sector. Iran is a country heavily dependent on a single product and has been unable to diversify. This reality is at the core of the argument for nuclear energy production.

Even though production of oil and natural gas has increased in the last few years, the quantities exported have remained the same in the case of oil, while Iran has actually become a net importer of natural gas. This is particularly significant since Iran has the second largest natural gas reserves in the world. If the trend continues, Iran would follow the same path as China, and move from an energy exporting country to an energy importing country. Given the dependence on the sector, such a shift would effectively bankrupt the country.

The development of adequate energy resources is a key component of the national interests of every nation which, by their very definition, transcend the political system that governs it.

Between 1974, when Iran signed her first agreement for building nuclear reactors, and 2000, the use of nuclear reactors for generating electricity has increased by a factor of 12!

While the case for nuclear energy production for peaceful needs is compelling, a number of countries around the world counter that the true motives behind Iran’s pursuit of nuclear technology are, in fact, military.

The last few years have seen conflicting attitudes on Iran’s nuclear program. The country responded with the pragmatism that defines its leadership: step back when pressed (one can easily cite the additional protocol on the TNP regarding surprise inspections) and move forward whenever possible. At the same time, the AIEA president El Baradei has stated that there is no evidence at the moment to suggest military ends at the monitored sites.

Why would Iran want a nuclear weapon in the first place? There are various possible answers:

*Iranians see Nuclear weapons as a matter of internal and external Prestige*

Historically Iran has always aimed at becoming a regional Power. Furthermore, in an area where most of the nations possess nuclear weapons (like Israel, India, Pakistan and Russia) it seems of crucial importance for the leadership and for the Iranian people to acquire this technology.
It is felt that acquiring nuclear technology would confer Iran the status of a regional power, while, at the global level, it would strengthen the perception of the nation as a defender of the third world.

On the domestic front, Iranians would perceive the acquisition of nuclear technology as an important goal reached by the Nation, and therefore this achievement carries significant political capital. At the same time, having produced the scientific community that achieved weapons capability would carry some degree of scientific success as well.

It should be noted that the population at large is solidly behind the programs. Recent polls have shown that 75-80% of Iranians support the nuclear program.

Security

Iran feels surrounded by the USA. America is actively present in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Persian Gulf, Turkey and various countries of Central Asia. Iran is genuinely afraid of being next on the list. In this context, a nuclear deterrent would be seen by many within the establishment as providing the level of security that today is lacking. Hashemi Rafsanjani must have had the same thought when he declared, “had Saddam had nuclear weapons, he would still be in power”.

Strategic Policy

Nuclear capability would assure Iran a better bargaining position with regards to its enemies. At this point, two issues need to be addressed. The first issue is whether Iran’s strategic policy is regional or global in nature. The answer to this question is fairly simple, although it is often complicated by political motives. Iran’s strategic policy is, and always has been, exclusively regional in nature. During the years of the kingdom, this policy was conceived as a form of sub imperialism, as Iran’s strategic policy in the region was possible due to the USA’s global protection. More recently, in the years of the republic, the policy has remained regional in nature but without any help from a large protector.

The second issue to be addressed is tied to the first, and it concerns the definition of who exactly are the enemies of Iran. This is a much more complicated question to answer. The countries that I would first exclude as enemies of Iran are precisely those that are most often mentioned as such: USA and Israel. The USA are a target beyond Iran’s reach. The only strategy Iran could follow against them is that of a low-level skirmish on external regional areas of influence. The vitriolic rhetoric is simply an inheritance of the first years of the revolution, and it is continued only for political legitimization. This rhetoric has also been used in the last eight years as a political weapon
to isolate reformists and neutralize their attempts at an opening towards the USA. Actually, more than a few people within the establishment would view a warming towards the USA in a positive light.

And now for the other main enemy: Israel. I personally believe that the two countries have a lot more points in common than one would think. First of all, both consider themselves, and are in turn considered, as foreign elements in the Middle Eastern context. Secondly, they have the same medium range strategic objectives. Both countries have a vested interest in avoiding the development of an Arabic power in the region that could channel the united efforts of a joint Arab nation against them. In fact, Iraq under Saddam was a big weight for both Iran and Israel. The ideal for both countries would be to face a number of weak and divided nations from the Tigris to the Jordan River. It is not coincidence that during the long years of the Iran-Iraq war, Israel was the only true ally, albeit covertly, of Iran.

So who are these adversaries that Iran would like to exert its influence over? As we have already discussed, they are located in areas much closer to Iran’s national borders. Until a few years ago, the main adversaries on political and ideological grounds were essentially two: Iraq and Afghanistan. Iraq sought the leadership of the Persian Gulf, while the Afghanistan of the Taliban promoted itself as an alternative Islamic ideology. The developments in the last three years have transformed these two antagonists into potential areas of influence.

Iran’s strategic policy, therefore, is aimed at two directions: the Persian Gulf and Central Asia.

The Persian Gulf represents the historical goal of Iran’s strategic policy. Ever since the years of the kingdom, this area was seen as the natural zone of expansion for Iran’s imperialism. Since Iraq has been eliminated in the short run as a player, the main adversary in the quadrant is Saudi Arabia. Even though recently the two countries have exhibited a warming of relationships, their interaction for most of the 80’s and 90’s was very tense.

The focus towards Central Asia is a fairly recent development. Iran’s hypothetical influence over such a culturally similar area was a topic of much discussion during the 90’s, but in reality Iran exerted such influence in a limited fashion due to organizational deficiencies and its relationship with Russia. The increasing US presence in the area has led to much closer ties between Iran and Russia to counter it. In this quadrant, a nuclear Iran could weigh positively in the resolution of the problem of the legal status of the Caspian Sea.

Negotiating Tool

Teheran hopes to bargain its nuclear position to obtain economic incentives, collaboration in the non-military nuclear sector, and support for WTO candi-
dacy from the West in the next ten years: essentially an end to its isolation. The country has an urgent need of foreign investments given its demographic situation, and this could be a plausible answer.

The other nation included in the Axis of Evil, North Korea, carried out a policy that was precisely based on a sum of some of these same factors. On February 10th, the North Korean Foreign Ministry said that “North Korea’s nuclear weapons will remain a nuclear deterrent for self-defense under any circumstances,” and “the present reality proves that only powerful strength can protect justice and truth”. North Korea said it made the decision because “the U.S. disclosed its attempt to topple the political system in North Korea at any cost, threatening it with a nuclear stick”. Still, North Korea said it retained its “principled stand to solve the issue through dialogue and negotiations and its ultimate goal to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula remain unchanged”. Such a comment has widely been interpreted as a negotiating tactic to bargain more economic and diplomatic concessions from the United States.

**POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CRISIS**

What are some of the possible developments of the crisis?

Some American think-tanks declared that a nuclear Iran could be very dangerous in light of a foreign policy frequently anti-US, which has led Iran in the past to try to overthrow more than a few governments supported by the US in the region.

Within this framework, Ken Pollack, former director of Gulf affairs on the National Security Council, has declared that “what we’ve seen from them over the past 15 years, since the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, is a group that is aggressive and anti-American, but prudent...But the problem is, nuclear weapons have a bad habit of changing things. Sometimes nuclear weapons change things all for the good. Sometimes reckless governments get nuclear weapons and suddenly they change, and they become much more...On the other hand, we’ve seen other occasions where governments became more reckless when they acquired nuclear weapons, where they believed that once they had nuclear weapons they were effectively invulnerable, and therefore they could embark on more aggressive behavior”.

How could such a development be avoided? Could something be done to prevent Iran from crossing this threshold?

At the moment there are various possible options which we will analyze in turn.

**ISRAEL’S MILITARY OPTION**

Israel sees Iran, especially a nuclear Iran, as its major strategic threat. Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom claimed during a visit to London in February
that Iran was six months away from having the knowledge to build a nuclear bomb, and said the problem must be tackled by the entire world. For a variety of reasons, Iran, for Israel, is a much more aggressive sponsor of some of the many terrorist groups in the region than other neighbors. Syria, for example, has made it clear that it is willing to sign an agreement with Israel although they are more implicated internationally in attempts to support terrorist groups against Israel. Naturally there are issues on the exact details of such an arrangement, but the attitude is constructive. Iran, on the other hand, has shown itself to be much more unwavering in terms of its opposition to the peace process. That being said, Israel has threatened repeatedly a pre-emptive action against Iran directed at the destruction of nuclear plants before they become active in weapons production. I think that Israel is probably trying to sabotage Iran’s nuclear program covertly. But on the overt military level the Israelis don’t have the resources to take out Iran’s nuclear program. In 1981 Israel destroyed Iraq’s Osirak nuclear reactor. Learning from this, Iranians have dispersed, fortified and bunkered their nuclear program in as many as a hundred different sites around the country. Furthermore, Iranians have shown an unbelievable capability to keep their nuclear facilities secret. At the same time, Israeli intelligence doesn’t have sufficient knowledge about the Iranian nuclear program to accurately hit all facilities. For example, until 2002 many sites that were later denounced by MKO were unknown to Israel. Therefore, even if an attack were to take place, Israel could never be sure it had succeeded in eliminating all of the sites. The Israelis also have another problem, since they have only 25 planes that can reach these facilities. Since such an operation is at the extreme range of the F-15s, they would have to carry full tanks and thus would only be able to deliver very small payloads. This would make any attack on bunkered sites useless. Furthermore, in order to reach Iran, Israeli planes would have to fly over Saudi Arabia and Jordan, which would probably be perceived as an act of war in and of itself given the current political circumstances; or over Turkey, which would also constitute a problem; or over American-controlled Iraq, which would require U.S. authorization of the mission. Surely, such an action would also cause a reaction from Europe and the Muslim world that would condemn Israel’s attempt to solve the problem on its own. Long term relations with the Arab world would definitely be compromised. In light of this analysis, I would exclude a direct attack by Israel.

MILITARY ACTION

As fears over Iran’s nuclear program have multiplied, public discussion of a military strike by the US against Iran has increased. Secretary of State
Condoleezza Rice has said that a military option against Iran was “not on the agenda at this point,” but President Bush declared that his “administration wouldn’t take any option off the table”.

An attack on Iran would be much more difficult than on Iraq. Compared with Iraq, Iran has three times the population, four times the land area as well as being more powerful, richer and having more international legitimacy than Iraq. On the other hand, imperfect US intelligence on the Iranian nuclear program and the fears that the country could have a nuclear weapon within three years raise the possibility that soon Iran will have an arsenal that no foreign power will be able to destroy. Thus, the US necessarily will consider such an action.

A military intervention could be carried out in three ways: a pre-emptive air strike on nuclear facilities, a land-based attach, and an air offensive.

A pre-emptive air strike on possible nuclear facilities offers the same problems analyzed in the case of Israel: a lack of detailed knowledge of nuclear sites. US intelligence in Iran is not up to par, since it was in part dismantled after the Islamic Revolution. Therefore the main current sources of information on Iran are only two and both questionable for many reasons: the MEK and Israel. The MEK sources and the few remnants of the imperial system are compromised since they come from movements in opposition to Iran’s leadership. Thus, they are determined to influence American policy to obtain their objectives. By the same token, Israel is the main regional rival of Iran with regards to political and military issues; it’s quite probable that information may be compromised as it represents a useful tool used to carry out an adversarial policy towards Iran.

Given the incompleteness of the data available to the US, they would run the risk of undergoing an incomplete bombing exclusively on unknown sites. This would give Iran a valuable alibi to complete their nuclear program as fast as possible.

A land-based attack would include three phases. The first would be centered on an attack on the main units of the Pasdaran and the Armed Forces. Essentially the dual aim would be to neutralize the possible Iranian reaction in Iraq and Afghanistan and, especially, the repression of hypothetical internal uprising opposition forces. The second phase would be preceded by a bombardment of the main infrastructures and would lead to a dual attack that Gardiner, a retired USAF colonel whose exercises were adopted in 2003’s assault on Baghdad, describes as “this: a deception effort from the south, to distract Iranian troops; a main-force assault across the long border with Iraq; airborne and Special Forces attacks from Afghanistan and Azerbaijan; and cruise missiles from ships at sea”.

Given the inadequate capacity of airports, this option is not feasible in the short run, as it necessitates an investment of US$700 Million.

The third option is solely based on an air bombardment to avoid having to
use troops on the ground against the enemy, much like the war in Serbia in 1999. This strategy would be centered around a massive attack on civil infrastructures (power plants, primary industries) to exasperate the malcontent of the people towards a leadership incapable of defending the interests of the country.

Regardless of which option they choose, the US would have to take into account a number of logistical problems. The Afghanistan government has declared its refusal to use its territory and airspace for military actions against Iran. It is very likely that the Shiite majority government of Iraq would maintain the same position. Even Turkey and Saudi Arabia would have serious problems with regards to its own public opinion were they to openly side with the US on the issue. Finally, the US would face a large problem with regards to the availability of manpower and military equipment to use for this attack if they were to choose the second option.

So far we have analyzed the US intentions. However, the issue is not static and we need to explore the likely Iranian reactions.

Iran’s counteroffensive could be carried out on multiple fronts at the same time. It could attempt a political and diplomatic strategy by calling on the UN for a resolution condemning the attack, while at the same time, trying to benefit from divergences among USA, EU, Russia and China in order to stop the attack.

On the other hand, the defense of the homeland against a much stronger enemy could be based on a dual doctrine: defense to the last man, for places with high symbolic value, and guerrillas and sabotage elsewhere. This strategy would work well in Iran due to its territory structure and width.

Another option would be to pursue an asymmetric defense strategy. This option would mean simultaneously carrying out a number of actions aimed at weakening the American rearguard. In Iraq, Shiite and pro-Iranian Kurds would join Sunnis, Baathist, and fundamentalists in the liberation fight. In Afghanistan, Ismail Khan’s partisans, Hazara Shiite political groups and pro-Iranian Tagiks would break dialogue with Karzai Government. From Lebanon, Hezbollah could strike Galilee with its own Katjuscia. Israel could suffer from Hamas attacks and Shahab missiles. American bases in the Persian Gulf, as well as any other country, would likely be targeted by Shahab. In Europe and the USA, the Iranian terrorist network could resume operations or it might form an outright alliance with al-Qaeda to support major new attacks. Iran has the capacity to block the Hormuz strait and, consequently, the passage of oil on a crucial artery vital for energy production worldwide. This action could lead to an immediate spike in oil prices and it would constitute a direct attempt at disrupting the US economic bases.

A very important variable could be the level of resistance of the armed forces, although this is also one of the hardest to be calculated. First of all
there is a purely technical problem: calculating the amount and strength in terms of manpower and equipment of the regular and irregular Iranian army is difficult, as the minister of Defense Ali Shamkari has confirmed, due to the lack of available information. Often, news on new military technological developments or on military actions aimed at increasing Iran’s military potential are broadcast for propaganda reasons. It is naturally very hard to verify most of these news. Iran’s missile attack of April 2001 on the MKO bases in Iraq is a good example. According to MKO sources which were never contradicted by Iran, 44 to 77 Scud-B missiles were used in the attack. Since Iran’s total arsenal is estimated at 300 Scud-B, there was no logical reason for Iran to waste about one third of its arsenal on targets that could have been hit by much more economical methods. Other times, as in the case of the attempt to acquire nuclear technology for military aims, the data is non-existent or certainly underestimated.

Once this purely technical hurdle is jumped, one needs to address the real problem of the level of resistance of the armed forces. This is a hard question to answer, and there are various theories that attempt to do so. Some believe that an attack by the US would lead to insubordination and the subsequent refusal to fight on behalf of the large majority of the regular army. Residual pockets of resistance would be limited to the Baseej and Special Forces around targets of high symbolic value. At the opposite end of the spectrum are those that, as reported from the hard-line daily Kayhan, declare that “Iran doesn’t want war, but if the United States makes the mistake (of attacking Iran), we will give them a lesson and they will have no chance to remedy. We have 10 million volunteers for martyrdom”. “Iran, capable of launching deadly blows against any aggressors, has no limits when defending itself,” said Bagher Zolghadr, deputy commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC).

Personally, I believe that the US stance will be able to influence very strongly the Iranian one. The Iranian people, and the army in particular, are very proud of their origins, and thus very nationalist. Furthermore, the current state of affairs has been in place for five hundred years, ever since the Safawids in 1502 created the Iranian National State. Although with highs and lows, the state has maintained its formal independence throughout all these years, as opposed to most other neighboring countries that became colonies. This is precisely what the US should place a lot of attention on. When the Iranian people perceive the threat of occupation on their national soil by a foreign power, as it happened not too long ago in the war Iraq forced it to endure between 1980 and 1988, they put away all divisive elements to fight together against the common enemy. Reading Iranian blogs on the subject has been very insightful, as an almost
unanimous opinion comes forth, and could be summarized with the phrase: “in case of an attack, the large majority of Iranians would support the IRI, the monarchy, or whomever else was in power!”

Negotiations and international sanctions

The threat of a military action could be an added accessory in the policy of negotiations with Iranians. Often, in similar cases, this has been an important card to play. The ideal situation would be to continue the EU-3 AGREEMENT with some new additions. The US should have an active role in these negotiations, reversing the non-collaborative stance they have kept so far. Essentially their role would be to balance the Iranian pressures. These pressures should be centered on the Iranian weak spot: the economy. The international community should propose a complete and verified suspension of all enrichment–related and reprocessing activities. Concomitant with this suspension, the international community should suggest an agenda with Iran for a more durable solution to the nuclear problem. Such an agreement should force the Iranians to give up their nuclear program with the ratification of the IAEA Additional Protocol, to stop their support of terrorism as well as practices which violate human rights. In return, the international community should allow Iran complete access to nuclear technology for civil applications. The international community should also create a defense and cooperation mechanism for the Middle East with the triple aim of reinserting Iran in the regional context while giving it the weight it deserves as opposed to being a pariah, of creating an integrated defense system that would remove the respective threats of aggression from the various countries in the region, and of giving a serious contribution to the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Finally, the agreement should end Iran’s international isolation. The US would revoke its sanctions and would consent to Iran’s application to begin a WTO associate country. The EU could begin by itself the formal negotiations on a trade pact that would lower the tariffs or increase quotas for Iranian exports to the EU countries. Should Iran not respect these agreements in the future, it would incur a number of sanctions of different types. There would be multilateral sanctions taken within the Security Council (however Iran could count on China’s veto in this forum), as well as new kinds of sanctions much more finely targeted so as not to unnecessarily hurt people.

Regime change policy

Some believe that a regime change could be useful to stop nuclear prolifera-
tion. To address this claim, one needs to analyze three factors.
First, whether any opposition to the current government would be likely to stop proliferation once they would get to power. Very likely they would not, since by now the topic of nuclear development is ingrained in Iranian nationalism. This is proven by the fact that even the student movement is for it. On the other hand, the US would probably tolerate a Republic or a Monarchy in Iran with nuclear capability if they were a trusted ally.
Secondly, whether the people of Iran are afraid of a new revolution. The short answer is that yes, they are afraid, but they are not ready to start a revolution for two reasons. Memories from the massacres following the revolution are still in people’s mind; they got tired and are scared of what could occur again. Also, there is a fear that the lack of an established power in the post-revolution phase would leave the country ungovernable and carry a heavy toll. Iraq and its anarchy are a clear warning.
The third factor is whether there are groups able to overthrow the current regime. This is the most difficult element to value. If it is true that there are opposition groups and that there is a will by the people to change regimes, it is also true that these are very feeble and with a low level of contact with the population at large. This is due both to their own errors committed in the past and to the undeniable capacity by the IRI to contrast them. According to statistics taken from Iranian Diasporas, some positions emerge that are quite incredible. To the question “Do you believe in separation of religion from state in Iran?” 79.5% answered “Yes, of course”, thus breaking a very strong taboo in the western mass-media belief system, that of a unified Iran on militant Islamic positions.
Another interesting question regarding the disillusionment of the Iranian people is “With conservatives at power, is reform possible in Iran?”, 67.7% answered “No way”. “And regarding the future institutional make-up of the country”, 43.5% wants a Republic while 34.8% are favorable to a Monarchy, and another factor that should make people reflect, 13.3% would still want socialism!

Turning to the analysis of the various groups or most important phenomenons, we can find:

About a 60% of Iranians are under the age of 30 and the majority of them are highly educated. This represents a huge resource for the country. That being said, Iran’s economy is so strangled by government control and regulation that it produces too few jobs to absorb all those college graduates; Iran needs to produce about one million jobs per year, but in effect it offer only four hundred thousand.
Foreign direct investments are badly needed. The Ministry of Trade and
Economy estimates that Iran needs about US$17 billion, although Iran occupies the last position in the globalization index. All these factors, in addition to the lack of any personal freedom, inevitably lead young people to a certain lack of interest towards IRI. The Student Movement has tried to channel this alienation. During the disorders in 1999 and 2003, students hoped they could collaborate with Khatami to rid the IRI of those weights that were bringing it down. Unfortunately they could not find in the Reformist party an adequate response, and through the years this Movement was first analyzed and studied, only to then be beheaded of its leadership by the Iranian Intelligence.

**Mko**

The MKO or MEK is a mixture of Marxism and Islamism. It is the most organized, structured and active of the movements in Iran, but it has negative elements that make it, nowadays, a party with a small following in Iran. MKO made a fundamental tactical mistake in years of the Iran-Iraq war: it allied itself with Iraq, even to the extent of participating in some military actions against Iran itself. For such a nationalistic people as Iran’s, this was seen both as high treason and as an indication of the low level of trust and political and strategic wisdom of a party that wanted to take power on the coattails of a foreign invader. Another major strategic error, caused directly by Rajavi, was the slow transformation from party to sect, which began with the wedding with Mariam. This led to a gradual alienation of the best minds within MKO, who had largely been present in the initial years. The final mistake was more recent. MKO went from a major backer of Saddam to a source of intelligence for the US, in the off chance the US would turn around and install MKO in Iran.

**Monarchists**

Some Iranian exiles, as well as some people in Iran, want to replace the IRI with a constitutional monarchy led by the son of the late Shah. The principal aims of this movement are the “institution of a constitutional monarchy and genuine democracy in Iran” to be instituted following a general referendum on the future institutional structure of the country. Even though it is followed by roughly 34.8% of the population, this movement is weakened by its own hesitancy to act, as it simply limits itself to broadcasting messages into Iran from Iranian stations in California.

**Yazdi and the increasing power of iranian satellite channels**

Towards the end of September 2004, Ahura Pirouz Khaleghi Yazdi, a US-based Iranian TV personality who had been an unknown until then, prompted
thousands of Iranians to protest for more freedoms. He predicted Iran’s Islamic government would fall on October 1st under the pressure of peaceful means and civil disobedience. This element is an indication of the desperate need for a leadership that can cater to the needs of Iranian society. It is also a symptom of the increasing power of US-based opposition satellite TV stations. The US demonstrated it had understood their potential already in 1998 when the Clinton administration provided an initial $4 millions for “Radio Free Iran”.

**ENGAGEMENT**

According to some analysts, in view of the lack of a real internal opposition, a “selective political engagement” could lead to solving the nuclear problem by bridging the various discrepancies. The US should promptly move towards Iran to discover areas of common interests. There are issues where the US and Iranian security do touch, and the strategy should be to build upon incremental improvements to reconcile the wider scope of fears that divide the two governments. After all, during the years of the kingdom, the US and Iran were the main allies in the area and there was such a convergence of interests that Kissinger stated there were no two other countries in the world with such a match of interests.

Nothing prevents the two countries from becoming allies again like in the times of the shah. It would be enough for the US to offer Iran a direct dialogue on specific issues of regional stabilization and a detailed road map of rapprochement with the principles and objectives for the bilateral dialogue. The main problem with this strategy rests, as was seen under the Clinton administration, with the wide fragmentation of power centers in Iran. Such power is not in the hand of a single group, not coincidentally within the very Clergy of Qom many criticize the direct participation in government by the clerics.

With Khatami’s victory, a real dichotomy of power began to appear and led to the failure of the Clinton plan. Neither of the two Centers legitimized the other to act, thus creating a mutual paralysis. Probably, in the last year, in light of the failure of the reformist attempts by Khatami, the Bush administration decided to end this impasse by seconding the gaining power of the Conservatives. It is for this reason that there were not particularly strong reaction by the US on the management of parliamentary elections in February 2004. On the other hand, the visit in October 2004 in Iran of the Librarian of Congress James Billington could be seen as step towards the resolution of the conflict.

The first elections of the post-Khatami era held in June 2005 have been
characterized by a large alienation of the electorate. The results of the election of Osulgara candidate, Mahmood Ahmadinejad, should be seen in a long term view. If Ahmedinejad will keep his promises announced during his electoral campaign, this would mean quite a few problems for the engagement strategy. Otherwise with all the reins of the power in conservative hands, they may open negotiations with the USA.

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