IRAN-US RELATIONS:
DIVERGENT POLICIES AND
COMPULSORY COOPERATION

Tabereb Ebrahimifar

Since 11 September 2001 many observers have voiced the realization that the threat posed by terrorism will compel governments in all over the world to put aside their differences and unite against any threat posed by terrorism. Much has changed since that event, but the relations between Iran and the United States have remained in their familiar pattern of suspicion and hostility.

However, the epochal transformation after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attack provided the American government with an historical opportunity to advance their cosmopolitan guidelines expeditiously within the framework of the general doctrine of the New World Order thanks to the existing psychopolitical atmosphere dominating the international community. In this respect, it should be pointed out clearly that the said guidelines had already been shaped by the White House leaders in the context of the end to the Cold War and the collapse of the bipolar system. The development is quite conceivable in view of the prevailing power vacuum resulting from the disintegration of the Soviet Union. In this way, with the occurrence of the first Iraqi crisis in 1990 and 1991 at the threshold of the fall of the bipolar system and the end of the Cold War, the first rhythm of the cycle of the US world leadership was played.

This politico-security crisis of the international system was fixed at the threshold of the fall of the bipolar structure and end of the Cold War with the opportunist management of the US by winning the consent of the UN and other major players in international organizations. The US managed to impose its universal leadership on other players in the international order gradually and in the course of subsequent acute international crises. These crises consist of (1) the Bosnia-Herzegovina crisis (1991/92-95), (2) the Kosovo crisis (1998-1999), (3) the 11 September 2001 crisis, and (4) the second crisis in Iraq (2003).

Among these crises, the 11 September strike opened a new chapter in the US pattern of overseas interventionist policy and of course international policies. On this basis, the less intense military pattern during the Clinton administration developed into a strong military pattern under George Bush II. The US officials seriously pursued unilateralism in world politics, because the first Iraqi crisis had been resolved through international consensus mechanism, the Bosnia-Herzegovina’s crisis through constructive cooperation between the UN Security Council and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the Kosovo crisis through NATO’s military action.
A very important point that cropped up after the September attack among Western circles is the subject of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism. Perhaps, it can be claimed that Islamic fundamentalism has emerged among the international community as a force challenging the modern liberal Western government. As such, campaign against international terrorism has been placed on top of the agenda of major world powers and seemingly vulnerable players. In fact, occurrence of the 11 September terrorist attack provided the opportunity for the materialization of Samuel Huntington's theory of clash of civilizations. Now and after the 11 September disaster, political Islam has been presented as belligerent and the sole extremist force opposed to the liberation-seeking and humanistic Western civilization. Meanwhile, the US as an international administrator managed to mobilize its power in economic, social, political, security, and military terms thanks to the 11 September event, making the New World Order discourse operational. Subsequent to the emergence of the second crisis of Iraq in 2002 - 2003, the United States launched an attack despite failing to win explicit endorsement of the UN and strong opposition of the key members of the UN Security Council including Germany, France, Russia and China– however the United Kingdom contributed troops to the US, accusing Iraq of stockpiling weapons of mass destruction and arguing that Saddam Hussein’s regime posed a grave threat to the US security and peace in the region.

The other side of the coin is the Islamic Republic of Iran which has shown a volte-face in its foreign policy towards the West since the 1979 Revolution. Iran has always been regarded by the Western circles, particularly the US, as a player provoking patterns of enmity at regional and international level, thus being excluded from the US regional and international projects. Considering Iran’s geo-strategic, geo-economic and geo-political capacities, its elimination from the said projects because of severance of political and diplomatic ties with the US and spread of hostile patterns is obvious. This does not mean that the state of affairs can persist. In fact, with the emergence of 11 September 2001 events and the second crisis in Iraq in 2002-2003 and subsequent occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq by the US and its allies, the need for drastic change in the attitude of Iran’s foreign policy towards the US is clearly felt. This approach does not necessitate a one-sided outlook, because with a view to Iran’s above-said capacities, the US stands in need of security cooperation with the Islamic Republic in order to bring down its security expenses in the region. Perhaps it can be said that the Islamic Republic of Iran can be likened to a lost chain in the US security arrangements as far as the three sub-systems of Southern Caucasus, Middle East and Central Asia are concerned. The administrators of the political system of the Islamic Republic of Iran can avail of this opportunity to secure its goals and interests, exercising influence on the US regional decision-making structures in line with gainful behavioural patterns.

The present paper attempts to project the idea that the forthcoming security cooperation between the US and Iran, irrespective of presumption of its realization or
failing to find reality, concentrates on participation of the two countries in laying the securitization of regional order in the regional sub-systems in which two players share their security interests. These regional sub-systems consist of the Middle East, Central Asia and Southern Caucasus. These sub-systems are counted as continuous and regional security sub-environments adjacent to Iran. Since the US is going to create the pattern of hegemonic order in these sub-systems, and considering the theoretical affirmations relevant to regional security orders, the present paper advocates the idea that Iran can occupy a special standing in micro-regional alliances which are to be established in the sub-systems under the leadership of the US. As such, the US can monitor and manage the regional disputes in the said sub-systems with Iran’s participation.

VIEWPOINTS ON IRAN-US RELATIONS

There are two viewpoints on Iran in the US: One viewpoint contends that the US should have an active presence in Iran. Those advocating this viewpoint suggest that the US should end the long-standing policy of mistrust in dealing with Iran and initiate its continuous aids to this country pending Iran’s adoption of moderate steps. Another viewpoint voices concern over the revamp of Iran-US relations. Advocates of this viewpoint accuse Iran of supporting terrorism and producing nuclear weapons, describing the Iranian system as a prototype of hostility to the West. Iran is therefore among the biggest supporters of terrorism on an international scale. Iran’s support for the Palestinian and Lebanese groups is the root of depicting Iran as a supporter of terrorism. The issues involved in Palestine and the Middle East peace process are among the serious differences between Iran and the US.

Accordingly, there are two viewpoints in Iran: The reformists hold that Iran-US relation is in the interests of Iran and that Iran can secure its national interests and avail of the military and economic assistance of the US, thus generating Iran’s military and economic development. The conservatives maintain that establishing relations with the US is not in the interests of Iran. Proponents of this view condemn the hegemonic policies of the US on an international scale, lashing out at US interventions in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. They consider the US as an opponent of Islam and describe the US as the number one enemy of Iran.

REASONS TO COOPERATE

Iran and the United States are bound to cooperate in the Middle East and this cooperation must be actively cultivated to forge common strategic approaches.

1) Regional stability

Some analysts have argued that the US campaign in Iraq has been about
more than merely removing Saddam Hussein from the power or the question the WMD; it was part of an overall strategy to restructure the region along pro-western lines. While Iran has firmly opposed the American invasion of Iraq, it accepts the overall need to promote economic and political reforms in the region believing political reform to stem from movements within the region. In a demographic sense, Iran is more proximate to the region. As such, continued instability in the region is more likely to affect Iran directly. This consequence may explain Iranian unease with US efforts to bring political changes through force which according to the Iranians promotes more instability. Despite these differences in approach, however, the common concern about stabilization in Afghanistan, mutual concern about the negative effects of continued bloodshed in the Arab-Israeli conflict, generating political and economic reforms in Iraq is a solid basis for Iran-US cooperation.

2) Terrorism

The common threat of international terrorism as the most serious threat to national security after Sept. 11, 2001 has produced some kind of cooperation between Iran and the United States. This opinion helps explain the widespread Iranian support for the US operation to remove the Taliban in Afghanistan. Threat of the terrorist attack is likely to bind the United States and Iran in a common cause for many years to come, even if approaches to the threat are likely to differ.

3) Oil

Despite all differences over oil policies, Iran and the United States share a fundamental need to ensure the secure flow of oil from the region. Iran needs a secure region to export its oil and the United States also needs a stable region to ensure the secure flow of oil from the region.

4) Arab-Israeli conflict

Despite continued policy differences on the Arab-Israeli Peace Process, mutual concern about the negative effects of continued bloodshed in the Middle East provides another basis for cooperation. Iran and the United States have never cooperated on the Middle East peace process, but their fear of continued violence and its potential to destabilize the broader region provides a strong incentive for cooperation in this ongoing conflict.

DIVERGENT POLICIES

The breakdown in Iran-US relations can be ascribed to the poor diplomacy on both sides. The breakdown has its roots in the different strategic appraisals of Iran and the United States.
1) Contrasting Threat Perception

It seems that the United States and Iran have almost similar views of international threats, particularly the terrorist threat. But how each side perceives the nature of the threat is different. Iran is more likely to distinguish groups seeking clear political objectives from terrorist groups, while the US is more likely to group all movements together as an evil that must be eradicated, usually by force. For instance, Iran views Palestinian guerillas in a political context, while the US government places all wings of these organizations on the US terrorist list. The issues of Iranian nuclear enrichment provide another example of contrasting threat perceptions. The Bush administration expresses overriding concern that WMD in the hands of states such as Iran poses a serious military threat to the United States.

2) Peace Process

Different US and Iranian approaches toward the Arab-Israeli conflict provide another example of divergent policies. The US tilt toward Israel is not just the result of the pro-Israel lobby; the fact that Israel shares western values appeals to the US public at large and increases its political support across the US political spectrum. Moreover, from Washington’s perspective, the road to peace may run through Baghdad, while for Tehran it runs through Jerusalem. Containing the conflict may be enough for Washington at this stage, but it is not enough for Iran. Thus the Arab-Israeli conflict divides US and Iran and this issue is likely to remain a source of tension for many years to come.

3) Human Rights

The US accuses Iran of violating human rights and of failing to observe democracy in Iran. However, Iran believes that the US attempts to realize the theory of “stability by domination,” denouncing American militaristic policy for incorporating Western liberal system and democracy into the structure of the Persian Gulf countries in order to harmonize them. Iran does not approve of the US strategy to change the regimes discordant with the US interests and to pursue the strategy of “regime-change” in the name of provision of security and stability. Iran pillories the US categorization of the regional countries into opponents of reform, supporters of terrorism and friends of the US. The first group should be pushed towards political reform by software attitude, the second group should be subjected to political pressure with any move anticipated to counter forestalled by ever resorting to military might to either force it to succumb to Western democracy or, if need arises, changing the government structure and supplanting it with an exogenous one, while the third group is entitled to treasure the merits of democracy. Iran further believes that based on the “Greater Middle East Plan”, the US in-
tends: first, to pursue the project of “developing security” by changing regional regimes and governments such as the ones in Iraq and Afghanistan; second, to install secular governments affiliated with the West and third, to acculturate Western democracy and liberalism to Islamic countries. By so doing, Iran believes, the US plans to put the project of “modernizing Islam” into action so as to pave the ground for a crackdown on revolutionary Islam in the region.

4) Training extremist groups

Many in the US are convinced that Iran supplies weapons to certain Palestinian and Lebanese groups and has been involved with Hezbollah, a Shia group, in Lebanon for a very long time. Hence the United States accuses Iran of supporting extremist groups in Palestine and Lebanon.

5) Nuclear Weapons

To prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear capability is the US long standing policy. In his State of the Union address, President Bush proclaimed that “the United States of America will not permit the world’s most dangerous regime to threaten us with the world’s most destructive weapons”. Condoleezza Rice also pointed to Iran’s alleged nuclear weapons program as a serious looming threat. Iran denies it is pursuing nuclear weapons, consistently calling for regional disarmament, including Israel. The Iranians are angered by the US interference in their development of nuclear power. However, Iran considers nuclear capability as a matter of equilibrium believing that it provides security for Iran.

PRESUPPOSITION OF REALIZATION OF COOPERATION BETWEEN IRAN AND THE US

Iran has always been considered by the US government administrators as belligerent and listed among the ‘axis of evil’ countries. The most important factors prompting the accusations against Iran may be summed up as follows:

* Constant violation of human rights,
* Support for international terrorism, and
* Attempt to gain access to weapons of mass destruction.

The author holds that the US can provide the ground for mounting international pressures on Iran by availing of the above-said arguments. Therefore, continuation of Iran’s nuclear crisis and failure of talks with the major European negotiators: the UK, Germany and France can culminate in greater strained relations between Iran, the West and the US. Hence, continuation of the situation will make the US more resolute to adopt a unilateral decision, even multi-faceted attitude, towards Iran. The author charts out two possible scenarios as follows:
* Imposing collective enforcement on Iran, and
* Launching limited or unlimited military action against Iran.

Considering the above postulations, it can be suggested that the administrators of the political system of the Islamic Republic of Iran maintain the prolonged military presence of the US in the security environment adjacent to Afghanistan and Iraq as well as regional security environment of Central Asia and Southern Caucasus, as a factor threatening the national security and territorial integrity of Iran’s political system.

To see if in the process of formulation of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the face of the US mounting threats the scale of ideological interests will be heavier or that of national interests, calls for another opportunity to study. At the same time, however, for its survival, Iran’s political system, like any other system, should struggle to be free from the taint of overload. To this end, Iran’s administrators should assimilate inputs suggested by key administrators of the international order and equally inject its political system’s output into the international system. Iran is not the first country that has shown such an attitude with a view to post 11 September developments. Libya and to some extent Syria have already reacted to the existing warnings in an attempt to preserve their political systems.

Reestablishment of political and diplomatic relations between the US and the Islamic Republic of Iran is the only logical step to be taken by the Iranian political administrators so as to be relieved of the current threatening situation. On this account, this reconstruction effort is collateral to the main presupposition which I describe as “development from within in terms of external requirements.” To elaborate, the homogenization model in Afghanistan and Iraq is utterly different considering the following parameters:

- Like Afghanistan, Iran is not a failed state. In fact, the US launched the attack on Afghanistan as a base designing and monitoring Al-Qaeda’s terrorist operations threatening the US vital interests and strategic leadership.
- In contrast to Iraq embroiled in a bare dictatorial regime under Saddam Hussein, Iran is a country wherein general democratic elections at their prescribed times are held. It is understood that American leaders watch for internal changes in Iran culminating in an about-turn in Iran’s foreign policy towards the US. George Bush in a comment on Iran implicitly showed his inclination to this about-face, addressing the Iranian people. The developments in the presidential election in the Islamic Republic of Iran in June 2005, bringing neo-conservative fundamentalists to power, play a decisive role in the materialization of the “development from within” doctrine. Pursuing a kind of moderate approach at home and establishing diplomatic relations, however secret, with the White House officials, the neo-conservative government can take steps to secure the entity of the Islamic establishment and give expression to essential security cooperation between the US and the Islamic Republic of Iran.
Iran treasures potential substructures propitious for security cooperation with the US. In fact, among the sub-systems in the Middle East region, Central Asia and Southern Caucasus, Iran is presented as an appropriate alternative to materialize security cooperation with the US. From this perspective, by realization of the aforesaid fundamental assumption, Iran can be raised as the number one ally of the US in the totality of the regional sub-systems. The following arguments can serve as evidence to the truth of this claim:

1) Link between Iran’s security issues with those of Central Asia and the Caucasus. This link is very important for the US in strategic terms. Seen from this angle, Iran is raised as a link connecting Iran’s military presence in the said regions. The US can thus settle the said security issues by using geo-strategic and geo-political privileges. In fact, the US need for absorbing Iran’s security cooperation on security issues of Central Asia and Southern Caucasus is increasingly palpable.

2) Link between Iran’s security issues with those of Afghanistan and Iraq. Considering that these countries are regarded as contiguous, the need for Iran to develop security cooperation with the US is increasingly tangible. The security interests of the US can perpetuate parallel to each other under the said sub-system security environments. The two players can deal in security cooperation in the said geographical regions. This security cooperation is conceivable in the following areas:

- Production and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and transfer of the technological know-how and the necessary resources for the manufacture of such weapons
- Security cooperation between Iran and the US in the first place hinges on the settlement of Iran’s current nuclear crisis. By joining the European side, the US can play a conspicuous role in the settlement of the crisis. Hence, by the US and western representatives exercising nuclear supervision, representatives and Iran’s transparent nuclear behavior, and by building confidence between the parties involved in the process of negotiations, it can be hoped that the two players can reach fixed agreements on Iran’s peaceful exploitation of nuclear technology. The most crucial guideline is the periodic exchange of views and information on the advancement of Iran’s nuclear programs between Iranian and American officials. This trend can prevent transformation of Iran’s nuclear crisis to a dilemma such as the one in North Korea. Anyhow, by abating the nuclear crisis in Iran, the opportunity will be provided for the US to engage in advisable cooperation with Iran in the area of nuclear security and transit of the necessary
equipment for construction of nuclear arsenal in north-south and east-west corridors; that is, Central Asia and the Caucasus, Middle East and Central Asia-Middle East. In addition to nuclear security, these two players can cooperate in the field of controlling weapons of mass destruction such as germ warfare and biological weapons, particularly in the Middle East region. The last case on this ground is instructive cooperation between the US and Iran in the area of transit and smuggling of conventional weapons through Afghanistan and Iraq, as the two countries have permeable and penetrable borders, which they share with Iran.

Finally, in the evaluation of security cooperation between the US and Iran concerning production and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, it should be noted that the issue of nuclear security, in addition to posing a threat to the international peace and security, has served as a factor threatening the internal security of the two players, particularly with the presumption that Iran will continue with its peaceful nuclear activities. This will reinforce the necessity of realization of security cooperation between the two countries more than ever.

**Terrorism**

Considering the mounting terrorist provocations ascribed to fundamentalist groups in Central Asia and Southern Caucasus, particularly in the Middle East region and in Afghanistan and Iraq, the necessity for the realization of security cooperation between the US and Iran is indisputable. Iran and the US can embark on creating anti-terrorist bases near the border of Iran, Afghanistan and Iraq. Of further possible cooperation, one can cite the exchange of information on the situation of terrorist groups in Iraq and Afghanistan. The US and Iran can be active in holding security meetings in order to bring viewpoints closer on the nature and concept of terrorism and combat it with the participation of other sub-system security environments. On the other hand, Iran can help the US, by receiving US logistic support, in the combat against terrorist groups located in the west of Afghanistan and northern Iraq which share common borders with Iran.

**Territorial disputes**

Experience of disputes among Azerbaijan, Armenia, Iraq and Kuwait in the 90s has indicated that the said sub-system security environments can be used as venues for kindling the fire of territorial disputes. The US and Iran can, therefore, set up cooperation in the following fields:

* Participation in the removal of factors resulting in the emergence of territorial disputes such as border and land disputes. Therefore, the said players can play the role of broker in the peaceful settlement of
the said differences.
* In the next stage and in case of necessity for exerting collective enforcement on would-be aggressors, Iran and the US can mount cooperation on logistic and support requirements. The use of Iranian ground and sea routes and air space by the US for monitoring military operations, information and surveillance or transit of military forces and other necessary equipment may be cited as an example.

**Armed conflicts**
As regards armed conflicts, the experience of Tajikistan in the 90s and current experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq can pave the grounds for cooperation between the US and Iran in the said sub-security environments. It appears that conceivable cases are in Afghanistan and Iraq, particularly in Iraq where many Iranians fly annually to pay homage to holy places and the Shi’a religious sites. Provision of security for these Iranian groups can necessitate security cooperation of the US and Iran inside Iraq. Iran and the US can enforce plans for the protection of common borders of Iran with Iraq and Afghanistan to prevent transit of military apparatus to groups responsible for the armed operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Furthermore, the US can use Iran to negotiate with the said groups to enforce a ceasefire and end the military operations.

**Organized crime and stonewalling**
As regards organized crime and stonewalling, it should be noted that since this matter necessitates cohesion of two levels of sub-national and super-national analysis, the only conceivable ground regarding cooperation between the US and Iran is the presentation and exchange of information in this respect in an attempt to enforce punitive and preventive measures.

**Tribal and religious competitions**
Regarding tribal and religious strife, Iran has objective sensitivities because it is a country grappling with tribal incongruities. Its eastern and western neighbors—Afghanistan and Iraq—are embroiled in tribal and religious disputes. Tribal and religious contention in these countries can, therefore, give rise to tribal and religious disputes in Iran. The necessity for security cooperation between Iran and the US in this respect is easily perceived. Security cooperation between the US and Iran regarding tribal and religious disputes tilt towards control of this category through measures aimed to secure peace along with the eastern and western borders of Iran and supervise the relations of tribal and religious groups on the two sides of the borders. Iran can further help
the US with constructive talks between dissident tribal and religious groups in Afghanistan and Iraq. This matter is quite conceivable given the tribal and religious proximities of some groups in Iran and those in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Crisis-provoking tensions
Regarding crisis-stirring tensions it should be noted that this subject covers factors that can result in land disputes, armed conflicts and expansion of the scope of tribal and religious disputes in the said sub-system security environments. Security cooperation conceivable between the US and Iran in this respect overlooks the preventive measures pointed out under the said categories. On the other hand, after completion of security arrangements in the said sub-security environments, Iran can help the US in controlling these crisis-provoking tensions and preventing the crises resulting from these considerations.

Human disasters and afflictions
As for the last case; that is, human afflictions and disasters, it should be noted that Iranian forces can decrease the evil effects stemming from human afflictions and disasters in the said sub-system security environments with the participation of military forces of the US or even NATO. One may cite NATO’s recent experience in relief and rescue operations in the Ferghana valley in Uzbekistan. This operation was carried out under the name of search and rescue operations to protect individuals against damage caused by natural disasters such as earthquakes in the said place. Due to the fact that Iran lies in the earthquake belt beside some other countries in the said sub-system security environment such as Turkey and Armenia, Iran and the US cooperation is conceivable within the framework of operations such as search and rescue operations and logistic cooperation after the occurrence of possible earthquakes.

After assessment of the areas of security cooperation between the US and Iran, the author enumerates the said cases in line with the ‘axis of evil’ countries and their priorities in the following category. These priorities should be presented with a view to objective examples of these areas: production and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, transfer of the relevant technology and resources necessary for the production of such armaments, tribal and religious strife, terrorism, armed conflicts, territorial disputes, organized crimes and stonewalling, crisis-provoking tensions, human disasters, and natural calamities.
POSSIBLE SCENARIOS REGARDING FORTHCOMING SECURITY COOPERATION

Now, in view of the grounds for cooperation in the security stream between the US and Iran, one can present the possible scenarios dealing with possible security cooperation between these two players. The author presents these scenarios in the following light:

1) Trans-regional model: This model consists of two institutional and non-institutional models as outlined below:
   a) Institutional trans-regional model: This model provides for security cooperation between the US and Iran within the framework of NATO mechanism and arrangements. From this perspective, the said players can deal with security cooperation in the regional sub-systems of the Middle East, Central Asia and Southern Caucasus within the framework of Partnership for Peace (P&P) and Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council. Considering the presence of NATO in Afghanistan within the framework of arrangements such as Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PPT), International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), establishment of peace-keeping forces of the said union in this country as well as establishment of NATO forces in Iraq and the like, membership of the Central Asian and Southern Caucasus republics in the participation plan for peace and the Partnership for Peace and NATO, security cooperation of the US and Iran is conceivable within the framework of NATO arrangements and mechanism, because Iran’s security issues have been linked with the security issues of the intended regional sub-systems.
   b) Non-institutional trans-national model: This model provides for independent mutual security agreements between the US and Iran. This agreements can find expression in the following areas:
      1) Possibility for the US to use Iran’s ground, air and sea routes to secure stability and security in the Middle East region, Central Asia and Southern Caucasus for:
         * Securing energy forms, such as oil and gas in the Caspian Sea and Persian Gulf region to the West,
         * Transfer of US military forces through Iran and the bases intended by the US in the said regions,
         * Conducting surveillance flights along the borders of Iran with Afghanistan and Iraq.
      2) Exchange of information on security issues of regional sub-systems of the Middle East, Central Asia and Southern Caucasus.
      3) Technical cooperation in military and defense fields.
2) Regional Pattern: Based on this pattern, Iran can be engaged in security cooperation with the US allies in the regional sub-systems of the Middle East, Central Asia and Southern Caucasus, in which case the following are conceivable:

a) Security cooperation between Iran and Uzbekistan, the US major ally in Central Asia on security issues there.

b) Security cooperation between Iran, Azerbaijan and Georgia, the US ally in Southern Caucasus, on security issues there.

c) Security cooperation between Iran and Turkey on security issues in Iraq and Southern Caucasus.

d) Security cooperation between Iran, Afghanistan and Iraq in common security issues after the establishment of their new political systems. In this way, as it is understood from the preceding situations, Iran can play an active role beside the US in forming regional security arrangements, regional systems and the said sub-systems despite its differences with the said players.

CONCLUSION

None of the major problems in the region today can be solved by one power alone. A stable Middle East depends on the United States and Iran working together in the region. They certainly have common interests in regional security and the secure flow of oil and hence are bound to cooperate in the Middle East. Unfortunately, however, these shared interests are not perceived as vital ones by either side; nor do they see eye-to-eye on the key issues.

This does not mean that the US-Iranian relationship has no future. While there are reasons to doubt an improvement in Iran-US relations, there are substantial reasons to hope that recent developments in the Middle East will lead to an improvement in the Iran US relations.

However, in the foreseeable future, the United States will continue to be preoccupied with terrorism and WMD and hence will face a series of local contenders for power like Iran. If there is to be an Iran-US partnership in the future, then there ought to be some overlap between the strategic perspectives of both partners. However, the largest divergence between the Iranian and American strategic outlook is over the role of military force in security policy. What is conspicuous in the new international climate as far as Iran is concerned is the greater militarization of the world. This state of affairs has left its effect on Iran’s domestic and foreign policy, generating simultaneous opportunities and challenges for Iran’s greater internationalization and dynamic interconnected interactions on the domestic, regional and international scales in dealing with elements of the new environment. The impact of 11 September 2001 on Iran was obviously greater than that on other Middle Eastern countries due to the existence of variables such as juxtaposition with Afghanistan, special state of
Iran-US relations, the existence of religious elements in the domestic and foreign conduct of Iran, Iran’s stand on issues dealing with the Middle East, and finally the question of terrorism.

The new international environment will affect Iran on at least two grounds: first, Iran has been regarded as military target of the US. The speech made by President George Bush on 29 January 2002 in his State of the Union Address was in fact a military threat against Iran in its most apparent symbol.

Another pattern that greater militarization of the world will produce on Iran is the militarization of the Middle East region, as a result of which the atmosphere of the Middle East region has become tough and military-oriented. Measures ranging from daily violence in Palestine to military operations against Iraq and the US military activities in eastern Afghanistan have made the psychological atmosphere of the region more militarized.

Iran is living in such an atmosphere and this atmosphere will affect Iran directly or indirectly. As such, the best way of dealing with such a state is through the employment of a full range of diplomatic, political and economic tools.

Iran and US cannot expect that a multiplicity of common threats emanating from the Middle East will inherently produce strong cooperation. Rather both sides need to recognize how and why their approaches to the region are riddled with differences and then work actively and dialogue on key issues.
NOTES

3 Rafsanjani set off new debate on ties with US, in iranmanica.com/News/Artical-WiewNewsCode=15055& NewsKind=CurrentAffairs
5 www.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/europe/02/09/rice
6 Hamshahri (Iranian daily Newspaper), 8 January 2004.
7 Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), 13 March 2002.

Tahereh Ebrahimi-far is a professor of International Relations at the Faculty of Political Science, Islamic Azad University, Tehran Central Branch, Tehran - Iran.