FORUM

Iran? It's the Geopolitics, Stupid!

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Abstract: *This article sheds some light on Iran-US relations, Iran's Syria policy, and Iran's nuclear policy including the current nuclear talks between Iran and P5+1. It demonstrates that we need to examine Iran's regional and international relations in light of Iran's geopolitical concerns and constrains. Postrevolutionary Iran has taken both ideological and pragmatic approaches in foreign policy making. There has been a pattern of continuity and change, and a reciprocal relationship between domestic developments and foreign policy strategies. This article suggests that Hardliners of the World are now united to stop the process of confidence building, compromise and diplomacy between the US and Iran. Iran-US cooperation would change the existing regional alliances and will have some impact on the US relations with Israel and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the policy of normalization and lifting economic sanctions would boost Iran's pro-democracy movement. Isolation, economic sanctions, military intervention and other forms of hawkish policies toward Iran would deteriorate democratization process and consolidate the position of the hardliners.*

Keywords: Iran's nuclear policy, Syria, Geopolitics, Foreign policy, Subaltern, Strategic depth

There is an unequal power relation between the hegemon and the subaltern in global politics. The hegemon often uses the concept of order to justify the existing power relations, and the subaltern appeals to justice to change the order. According to Mohammed Ayoob, there is 'a major tension between the hegemonic and

subaltern perspectives of international order;' The hegemon 'emphasizes order among states and justice within them,' but the subaltern 'stresses order within states and justice among them'.[1]

A *just order* is probably a key concept in critical study of international politics, peace and security studies.

No doubt, there is an unequal power relation between the hegemon and the subaltern in global politics. However, the hegemon is unable to shape all policy outcomes in the subaltern state. Regional and international relations of the state are formed by interactions between the global politics from without and civil society from within.[2] As such, state policies are constrained and enforced by the structure of global politics, dynamics of the internal politics and pressures from civil society. Middle East states are no exception here, and therefore we need to challenge the myth of 'Middle East Exceptionalism', or 'regional narcissism,'[3] meaning the exaggeration of the unique Islamic essence of the Middle East politics and states. One needs to maintain some degree of 'skepticism about the weight of history' in explaining the national and international policies of the Middle Eastern states. The 'past, remote or more recent, cannot on its own explain the present'. It is in fact, 'contemporary forces which make use of the past*:* they select and use those elements of the past, national, regional, or religious, which suit their present purposes'.[4] In other words, 'ideologies, nationalist or religious, that do most to invoke the past are themselves modern creations, selected, when not invented, fetishes of the age'.[5] Politics in post-revolutionary Iran is a case in point where two relentless forces of global structure and state-society relations shape state behavior. Cultural and religious traditions of the past are selectively used to serve the present politics.[6] Politics in post-revolutionary Iran is a mishmash of ideology and pragmatism. Ideology is in the service of politics, and geopolitics most often defines Iran's policies.

Post-revolutionary politics in Iran can be categorized into five distinct administrations, or republics. The first republic was under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini (1979-89). Post-Khomeini era is divided into four more republics under the leadership of Ali Khamenei. However, each republic was under a distinct president and presented a different face of the post-revolutionary regime: The second republic was under the pragmatist President Rafsanjani (1989-97), the third republic was under the reformist President Khatami (1997-2005), the fourth republic was under the

hardliner President Ahmadinejad (2005-2013), and the fifth republic has began under the moderate President Rouhani (2013-).

In this article I will argue that Iran has taken both ideological and pragmatic approaches in foreign policy making in all the five republics. There has been a pattern of continuity and change, and a reciprocal relationship between domestic developments and foreign policy strategies. The article sheds some light on Iran-US relations, Iran's Syria policy, Iran's nuclear policy and the current nuclear talks between Iran and P5+1. It demonstrates that one needs to examine Iran's regional and international relations in light of Iran's geopolitical concerns and constrains.

IDEOLOGY AND PRAGMATISM IN IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

After Khomeini's death, Rafsanjani's presidency coincided with the end of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88). Urgent needs for the post-war economic and social reconstruction pushed Iran to adopt a pragmatist 'good neighbor policy'.[7] Iran's decision to condemn the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 and its subsequent policy of neutrality during the war signified its willingness to forge closer ties with Arab states and the West. However, Iran-EU relations remained uneasy. In 1992, the EU initiated a 'critical dialogue' with Iran over a host of issues, such as Khomeini's *fatwa* for killing Salman Rushdie, Iran's human rights record, and its policy vis-à-vis Israel, terrorism and nuclear proliferation. By the late 1990s, the catastrophe in Iran's foreign relations, and the domestic socio-cultural and economic crisis had intensified factional politics within the elite, providing much opportunity for the unexpected victory of the reformist presidential candidate, Mohammad Khatami, on 23 May 1997. Khatami pursued a policy of dialogue and détente that would normalize Iran's relationship with other countries. Shortly after his election, in an interview with CNN, Khatami praised American civilization, expressed his appreciation for American democracy and its link with religion, condemned all forms of terrorism, and even expressed his regret for the 1979 American hostage crisis.[8] Nonetheless, Khatami criticized American foreign policy for the 'mode of relationship' it pursues with nations such as Iran; he also condemned American foreign policy for its dependence on Israel and vice versa. Further, Iran's relations with Hamas, Hezbollah and Syria remained unchanged, if not strengthened.[9]

In his address to the UN General Assembly in September 1998, Khatami emphasized that all civilizations need to engage in dialogue with one another, and the United Nations Organization followed this up by declaring 2001 the Year of Dialogue between Civilizations. Khatami's speech 'raised hopes for détente' with the US.[10] Washington's response to Khatami's initiatives was positive; it toned down the anti-Iranian rhetoric and took some small positive steps. After half a century, for the first time US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright admitted that the United States had 'orchestrated the overthrew of Iran's popular prime minister, Mohammad Mosaddeq'[11] in the 1953 coup. Zbigniew Brzezinski, Brent Scowcroft, and Richard Murphy called for an end to the 'duel containment' of Iraq and Iran.[12] With the support of the US, Iran received over $500 million in loans from the World Bank. The US met with Iranian officials at the UN to discuss the Afghanistan issue.[13] Not only did Iran continue its support for the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance, but also, as Americans admitted, it was 'extremely helpful in getting Hamid Karzai in as the president'.[14]

However, President Bush's 'axis of evil' speech in 2002 completely reversed the process. The speech raised much speculation about a US plan for regime change in Iran. President Bush even rejected Khatami's proposal in May 2003 for a comprehensive compromise with the US. The American neoconservatives believed that they were winning the war in Iraq and that Iran would be the next target. The Bush administration declined the proposal, and even the State Department reprimand the Swiss ambassador for conveying the Iranian proposal.

Bush's speech and policy 'created a mood of the past, especially of the 1953 coup;' it emboldened Iran's conservative hardliners 'with the argument that the notion of 'dialogue' is naïve, and that 'homeland security' is the most vital issue of the day. It persuaded some reformers to tone down their public demands; others to put their hopes on the back burner waiting for better days'.[15]

Iran under Khatami continued to talk to the UK, France, and Germany (the EU-3) and suspended its nuclear enrichment for two years (2003-5). But the effort never led the US, as Iran expected, to abandon its regime-change policy and lift economic sanctions. Only in December 2007 did the US National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) announce that Iran had suspended its nuclear weapons-program in 2003. But Iran's hardliners had already seized the moment to radicalize nuclear policy, defeat the reformists and elect a hardliner, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, as president, in 2005. Iran's

pragmatic approach to foreign policy was severely undermined in the aftermath of 9/11. What followed was the rise of 'a security state'.[16]

IRAN'S NUCLEAR POLICY IN CONTEXT

US policy in the Middle East rests on three pillars: the priority of stability over democracy for allied regimes such as Saudi Arabia, the former Shah of Iran and Mubarak of Egypt; the security, survival and regional superiority of Israel; and the free flow of oil for allies, except sometimes in the case of regimes that resist the global hegemon. The current policy of the West, including the US, towards Iran's nuclear issue provides a case in point. A nuclear-capable Iran would shift the regional balance of power; would end Israel's nuclear monopoly/superiority in the region, and would probably foster a regional nuclear arms race. Despite all the virulent rhetoric, Iran knows that a nuclear attack against Israel or the US would be suicidal. A nuclear-capable Iran would not constitute an existential threat to the West or Israel. Instead, it would be a counterbalance against the dominant nuclear regime.[17]

The rationale for Iran's nuclear policy is threefold: First is the issue of *national prestige*. Iran is a major regional power and seeks to be on the cutting edge of science, specifically nuclear technology. The second rationale is an *alternative source of energy*. Iran is the home of the world's third largest oil reserves (except Canada and Venezuela) and the second largest gas reserves. Yet, thanks to the targeted economic sanctions by the West, the oil and gas industry has not developed, and the country needs to import a great deal of refined oil. Iran sees nuclear power as an alternative source of energy. The third concern is *national security*. Three major factors contribute to Iran's national-security concern: First, there is the eight-year Iran-Iraq war (1980-8), started by Iraq and backed by Western countries and their Arab client regimes. Since war and peace were 'imposed' on Iran, the authorities planned to ensure the very survival of the state, pushing for the revival of the nuclear program. Second, Iran is surrounded by nuclear powers, including Russia, Pakistan, India, China, and Israel, not to mention the US itself, given the existence of American bases in many neighboring countries, e.g., Azerbaijan, Turkey, Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Persian Gulf and in former Soviet republics such as Georgia and Uzbekistan. Third, Bush's 'axis of evil' speech in 2002, the quick American invasion of non-nuclear Iraq, the

hesitancy to invade a nuclear North Korea, and the continued policy of regime change contributed to the radicalization of Iran's nuclear position. The military intervention in Libya to overthrow Gaddafi further probably contributed to the perception that had he continued to develop his own deterrent rather than dismantling his nuclear program in 2003 the Libyan leader would have been insulated from such outside action.[18]

It is worth noting that Kenneth Waltz, a renowned neorealist scholar argued that 'Iran should get the bomb' because 'nuclear balancing means stability'.[19] A nuclear Iran would content Israel's nuclear monopoly in the Middle East, bringing nuclear balance of power that would stabilize the region. Waltz argued that, 'despite a widespread belief to the contrary, Iranian policy is made not by 'mad mullahs' but by perfectly sane ayatollahs who want to survive just like any other leaders'.[20] Moreover, he contested the fear of an arms race in the region: 'Should Iran become the second Middle Eastern nuclear power since 1945, it would hardly signal the start of a landslide'. For Waltz, 'If an atomic Israel did not trigger an arms race then, there is no reason a nuclear Iran should now.[21] He advised the US and its allies to pursue diplomacy with the Iranian state and lift economic sanction, let alone war and military intervention: 'Open lines of communication will make the Western countries feel better able to live with a nuclear Iran. But the current sanctions on Iran can be dropped: they primarily harm ordinary Iranians, with little purpose'.[22]

Nonetheless, Iran's national security concern *does not* necessarily mean that Iran is interested in making a nuclear bomb. Rather, like Japan, Iran is probably interested in pursuing its rights for having a 'full nuclear cycle,' not making a bomb. There are some 30 countries worldwide that hold to the 'Japanese option'. The goal is to protect national security, and the rationale is deterrence.[23] On a legal level, the Nonproliferation Treaty recognizes that the development of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes is an 'inalienable right'.

Neither Iranian nor American politics is monolithic. In both countries the authorities share common concerns about national security, yet differ in approaches. In the US, the idea of 'regime-change' is pursued mainly by the neoconservatives who do not distinguish between factions inside Iranian politics and are determined to undo the loss of an important client regime in the 1979 revolution. Similarly, Iranian authorities, in spite of their common concern for the survival of the revolutionary regime, are

divided on how to pursue this goal. For the reformists, the strategy of 'regime change' in general, and the American opposition to Iran's nuclear program in particular, have no military solution and must be confronted at once with democracy at home and diplomacy abroad. Security and democracy are interconnected, and democratization will ensure the security and survival of the state. By contrast, the conservatives are sceptical, if not entirely pessimistic, about the utility of diplomacy and dialogue with the U.S. Furthermore, they believe that democratization provide Americans with the best opportunity to overthrow the Islamic Republic. For this reason, isolation, economic sanctions and other forms of hawkish policies toward Iran would deteriorate liberalization and democratization process and consolidate the position of the hardliners. The current economic crisis and the failure of Ahmadinejad's populist socioeconomic policies have disappointed the youth, the middle class poor and the working class. They are no longer the backbone of the regime. They are disappointed with the socioeconomic and cultural policies of the state and constitute the backbone of the pro-democracy Green Movement.[24] While the policy of normalization and lifting economic sanctions would boost the pro-democracy movement, the main casualty in the event of a military collision and economic sanction with Iran would be Iran's democratic movement.[25]

IRAN'S 'STRATEGIC DEPTH' IN SYRIA:
THE 'SHI'ITE CRESCENT', OR GEOPOLITICS?

While the conservative Arab regimes 'portray Iran as a non-Arab, Shia threat to the Sunni Arab world,' Iran's foreign policy enjoyed a relative popularity in the Arab streets of Palestine, Lebanon, and Egypt because it openly opposes Zionism and client conservative Arab regimes.[26] However, Iran's popularity has declined due to its role in Iraq and more importantly in Syria. Iraq under the Shi'ite leadership is seen as a 'battleground for the US and Iran to settle their differences'.[27] Iran's unconditional support to the Assad regime has tremendously damaged its popularity in the Arab street. However, some Iranian authorities believe that Iran gains strategic depth by supporting the statue quo in Syria.

Syria has become a battleground for two different forces in the region. On the one hand, the West, the conservative Arab states (particularly Saudi Arabia and Qatar), Turkey under the AKP, Hamas, and Egypt under former president Morsi side with the

revolutionary opposition. On the other hand, Russia, China, Iraq, Hezbollah and Iran support the Assad regime. While Iran remains a significant player in the Syrian crisis, the West and the conservative Arab regimes have excluded it from any diplomatic role in the matter. As Vali Nasr argues, 'Washington has seen the developments in Syria as a humiliating strategic defeat for Iran'. The Obama administration fears that such involvement 'would throw Tehran a lifeline and set back talks on Iran's nuclear program'. However, while Iran is unable to desert Assad, saving him seems not to be possible either. And Iranian leaders are deeply divided on whether to terminate their 'unwavering support'. Iran would certainly like to participate in diplomatic discussions in order to look after the interests of Syrian Alawites, and especially in order to rebuild its 'damaged prestige in the Arab world' for the post-Assad era.[28]

Let us remember that political calculations and geopolitical issues, rather than a cultural/religious affinity drive Iran's support to the Assad regime. Several factors make the 'sectarian' explanation of the Iranian-Syrian problematic. Members of the Alawite sub-sect of the Shi'ites dominate the Syrian regime but its adherents constitute no more than 13 per cent of the population. The Alawites represent such an unorthodox form of Shi'ism that only recently has it been accepted by mainline Shi`ite scholars as a part of their own branch of Islam. The Assad regime relies on the support of a network of Alawite families (and some members of the Christian community, among others) that fear a future radical Sunni regime that might be motivated by both religious intolerance and retribution against them for supporting the current rulers. However, the Ba'thist ideology of the Syrian regime represents secularism and the idea of one Arab nation without sectarian distinction. Assadism is not a religious ideology. Finally, there is much reason to believe that Damascus would have dropped its alliance with Tehran and make peace with Israel long ago had it been able to recover the Golan Heights peacefully. The current Syria-Iran alliance is purely political. It is *not* based on the contested idea of the 'Shi'ite Crescent'.[29]

The 'Shi`ite Crescent' is a politically motivated concept coined by King Abdullah II of Jordan in December 2004. King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia reinforced this notion, and then-President Mubarak of Egypt even claimed that Shi`ite communities in the Arab world are more loyal to Iran than to their own countries. The alleged Shi`ite Crescent comprises Iran, Iraq, Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and

Hamas in the Gaza Strip – all of whom challenged the interest of the status quo axis made up of the US, Israel, and conservative Arab regimes. This implies that Iran plays a central role in the Shi`ite Crescent mobilizing Shi`ite communities and exploiting their sociopolitical grievances along sectarian fault lines to secure its own regional dominance.

The discourse of a Shi`ite Crescent, however, seems problematic for a number of reasons. Besides the case of Syrian-Iranian alliance mentioned before, the following cases are equally problematic: First, Hamas is not a Shi`ite movement, and Iran is not the single advocate of Hamas in the region. Hamas is a Sunni organization, an outgrowth of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood, and receives significant financial support from Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Moreover it now has distanced itself from Syria and Iran by siding with the Syrian Sunni Islamist opposition. This partial defection from alliance with Iran is not based on a cultural and religious fault line (Sunni-Shi`ite divide). Instead, it is clearly a political and strategic choice in the context of changing geopolitics of the region. After the ouster of Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi, Hamas has begun restoring its relations with Iran. Hamas and Iran shift their political alliances over time based on their political interests.

Second, the Iraqi case is equally unconvincing, as it simply overlooks divisions among the Shi`ites and Sunnis, and the alliance between Shi`ite Arabs and Sunni Kurds in post-Saddam Iraq. It ignores the US role in the country and underestimates the Turkish and Saudi factors in the ongoing crisis in Iraq.[30] The Shi`ite Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maleki, and the Shi`ite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr hardly would sit at the same table. Moreover, President Jalal Talibani, a Kurdish Sunni Muslim, is a friend of Iran, while Ayad Allawi, one of opposition leaders and the opponent of Iran's role in Iraq, is a Shi`ite Muslim. Interestingly, the Saudi regime, the champion of Sunni Islam in the region, supports Ayad Allawi, a secular Shi`ite! Besides, despite Iran's advice, Muqtada al-Sadr joined a supra-sectarian coalition with Ayad Allawi to defend Iraq's national interests. The simple point is that Iraqi Shi`ites are not proxies of the Iranian regime; they are first Iraqis and then Shi`ites.

Third, the ongoing alliance between the Lebanese Hezbollah and Iran is a reality. Iran did play a central role in the creation of Hezbollah, but it was not a coincident that the organization rose in response to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and gained popularity among the Arab public. Hezbollah's role in support of

the Assad regime is a fact and can be explained in light of power politics rather than religious affinity.

Fourth, it is interesting that Bahrain, a country with 75 per cent Shi`ite population but ruled by an autocratic Sunni minority elite, is not included in the Shi'ite Crescent. Bahrain is excluded because its regime is a conservative Arab one allied with the West and the home to the US Fifth Fleet in the region. Likewise, Shi`ite communities in other conservative Arab countries, particularly in Saudi Arabia, are marginalized and do not enjoy full religious, cultural, and socio-political rights. Hence, 'by insisting on the fabricated idea of Shia Crescent, the Arab rulers deepen the suspicions in their own societies and encourage sectarianism'.[31] The Shi'ites in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia are not proxies of the Iranian regime. Like Saudi Arabia, Iran is a major regional power, aiming to expand its regional influence. This might include supporting Shi`ite communities in the region. However, the point is that the Arab client regimes use the overstated threat of Iran to silence the local legitimate demands for political reform in their countries. In the past few years, Human Rights Watch has harshly criticized Saudi Arabia and Bahrain for torture of their Shi'ites citizens and blatantly discriminatory policies against Shi'ites.[32]

The discourse of Shi`ite Crescent, in sum, implies that the religious mind provides the superior explanatory factor for the Muslim Middle East politics. It overemphasizes sectarianism and religious fault lines (the Sunni-Shi`ite divide), undermines the complex network of economic and political factors in international relations, reduces the political into some constructed religious fault lines and reinforces the Orientalist discourse. Religion and cultural values are often politicized to serve the interests of global and regional power. In many cases geopolitical interests overshadow religious values. Realpolitik often bypasses and trumps cultural fault lines. The discourse of Shi'ite Crescent serves as an ideological tool to suppress the Shi`ite communities under the rule of Arab conservative regimes.[33]

CONCLUSION

All revolutions are ultimately, argues Kenneth Waltz, 'socialized to the international system'.[34] As such, Iran's foreign policy has been a synthesis of ideology and pragmatism, continuity and change, and the ascendency of geopolitical concerns. Ayatollah Khomeini's first priority was the survival of the state he founded. He laid the

foundation for the postrevolutionary state to adopt a mishmash of ideological and pragmatic foreign policy. He himself revealed that 'today's idealists may be tomorrow's realists and vice versa'.[35] Khomeini agreed to an arms deal with the US and Israel during the Iran-Iraq war and ultimately, accepted the1988 UN Security Council Resolution 598, which called for ending the war with Iraq. Likewise, Rafsanjani took a non-confrontational approach to the world in order to reconstruct Iran economically in post-war period. Similarly, Khatami pursued a policy of détente with the West to pursue political reforms; his foreign policy was a 'means to address domestic political problems'.[36] The hegemonic world order, however, worked against Khatami's reform agenda: The 2001 American invasion of Afghanistan, the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and President Bush's 'axis of evil' speech in 2002 all contributed to the ascendency of the hardliner President Ahmadinejad.[37]

Nonetheless, Iran is now under a new moderate pragmatist President, Hassan Rouhani. The combination of repressive domestic policies and controversial foreign policy led Hassan Rouhani to win the presidential election in 2013. Rouhani's campaigning for *etedal* or 'moderation', in domestic and foreign policy aims to resolve Iran's nuclear issue, lift the widespread economic sanctions and put an end to international isolation. Ayatollah Khamenei's remarks regarding Iran's 'heroic flexibility' vis-à-vis the West has given Rouhani momentum to pursue constructive policy positions towards the West. It is within this context that the new president advocates the necessity of ameliorating the mistrust and suspicion that characterizes US-Iranian relations and pursuing a transparent approach to nuclear talks in order to resolve the tension in the foreseeable future. Appointing the US-educated diplomat, Mohammad Javad Zarif, to the position of foreign minister and transferring 'Iran's nuclear dossier from the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), controlled by the hardliners, to the foreign ministry' are examples of this pragmatic approach'.

It is salient to note that Rouhani is no stranger to the Islamic Republic's political establishment. He is known for his ability to negotiate and compromise in foreign policy circles. For example, in November 2004, when he was Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, he temporarily suspended the country's uranium enrichment activities to build confidence between the two parties. His strategy of engagement with the West was clearly stated in his September 25, 2013 speech at the UN, wherein he emphasized that Iran is

keen to 'solve problems, not to create them'. He defended this position on the grounds that 'nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction have no place in Iran's security and defense doctrine'.

Rouhani's commitment to implement pragmatic policies that address Iran's domestic turbulence and contentious foreign relations is therefore not a matter of debate. However, the extent to which he can fulfill his vision remains to be seen, especially in light of the complex power structure and tremendous pressures from the hardliners in Iran, the U.S. Israel, Saudi Arabia and other conservative Arab regimes. *Hardliners of the World* are now *united* in order to stop the process of confidence building, compromise and diplomacy between the U.S. and Iran! It has been argued that Iran-US cooperation in the region would change the existing regional alliances and will have some impact on the US relations with Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Both Iran and the U.S. administration seem to have come to the conclusion that Iran-US relations in the region have resembled a strategic chess game in that 'wherever Iran goes, it faces the United States [and vice versa]'.[38] It is time to make tough decisions, rethink about new regional alliances, and redefine Iran-US interests in the region. The recent Geneva agreement between Iran and P5+1 is a significant step forward for peace and democracy. Although fragile, reversible, and not ideal, the agreement has given a chance to peace and diplomacy; it has paused the jingoistic policies of the hardliners in Iran, U.S. Israel, and Saudi Arabia. The agreement has a potential to bring a new chapter to Iran-US relations in the region, as Iran and the US under Obama can work together in Afghanistan (against the Taliban), in Iraq and Syria (against the rise of radical Salafis, the al-Qaeda, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant/Syria, and the J*abhat al-Nusra*). More importantly, the agreement can gradually lift the so-called 'smart' economic sanctions against innocent people of Iran who are caught between a rock and a hard place, between an authoritarian regime and the global hegemony of *realpolitik*. The main targets of these economic sanctions, like the case of Iraq in 1990s, are the middle and working classes – ordinary people who are the main drive/engine of democratization in Iran. These sanctions have strengthened the regime's mafia economy and benefited the state-sponsored rentier class. Furthermore, the agreement could give more chance to President Rouhani to push back the hardliners and push forward for more social and possibly political reforms in Iran.

The same probably applies to President Obama who badly needs a symbolic victory before his term comes to an end, given a crisis in his domestic social reform (Obamacare, health care policy) and a crunch in his Mideast policy in Syria, Iraq, Palestine, and Afghanistan/Pakistan. The agreement can also ease the growing sectarianism (Shia-Sunni fights) in the region mainly sponsored by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iran, and the spread of Al-Qaeda and radical Salafis in Syria and Iraq. Moreover, the agreement is important because it recognizes (or at least does not oppose) Iran's legitimate right of uranium enrichment for peaceful purpose. For all these reasons, if all goes well, the agreement has a potential for the rise of new regional alliances, because both Israel under Netanyahu and the Saudis are dissatisfied with Iran-P5+1 nuclear deal and would have liked to see a complete shutdown of Iran's nuclear program. The P5+1, including the U.S., seems more realistic than Iran's regional rivals.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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[33] See Mojtaba Mahdavi, 'Postrevolutionary Iran: Resisting global and regional hegemony,' 161-164.

[34] K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass: Addis Mazani, 'Reflection...,' on-Wesley, 1979), cited in Ramazani, 'Reflection,' *Iranian Review, 2010, vol. 1,* p. 57.

[35] A. Ehteshami, and M. Zweiri, *Iran's foreign policy: From Khatami to Ahmadinejad* (U.K.: Ithaca Press, 2008), 28.

[36] S. Chubin as cited in E. P. Rakel,'Iranian foreign policy since the Islamic revolution: 1979-2006'. *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology,* 6(1), 2007, 159-187, 178.

[37] See Mojtaba Mahdavi, 'Postrevolutionary Iran: Resisting global and regional hegemony,' 168.

[38] Hassan Rouhani, as cited in S. Chubin, *Iran's nuclear ambitions* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), 117.