US-Iran Relations in the Post-Cold War Geopolitical Order

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Abstract

The end of the Cold War era coincided with the beginning of a shift Iran's foreign policy from the ideological to the pragmatic. The collapse of the Soviet Union created an important geopolitical region in the north of Iran. The dialogue doors were opened by Khatami's "dialogue among civilizations" in contrast to the "clash of civilizations". With the election of Bush and especially after the September 11th attacks, the US code was changed from globalist to regionalist. In this period Iran, was named as one of three countries in the "Axis of Evil". After 2005, the Iranian policy towards the US changed fundamentally so that Israel and the US were seen as the main enemies of Iran. Also, Iran's nuclear issue aggravated the hostility and it was used by the US to maximize its hegemony. In this context, the US efforts to impose its geopolitical codes on other countries to be involved in conducting its policies against Iran could be justified. It was also regarded as a geopolitical imperative, Today, the US has to curb Iran's ideological-political activities and if both Iran and the United States do not scale down their demands, military confrontation could be predictable.

Keywords: Geopolitical world order, Geopolitical code, Iran's nuclear program, Iran-US relation

Introduction

Geopolitical world order is defined   as a geopolitical model (Dijkink, 1998), a relatively stable global pattern (Johnston et al,2000), which includes a complex of inter-states relations, position of countries and their functions, such that the behavior of most states is predictable. This kind of order dominates over the world for a relatively long time as a specific historical period (Agnew & Corbridge, 1995; Taylor & Flint, 2000). Like an organism, and within a specific historical period, it emerges, grows and ultimately disintegrates. Every geopolitical world order, however, is formed after a geopolitical transition period (Taylor & Flint, 2000). This transition period from the old to the new geopolitical world order is relatively short, and its key characteristic is surprise (Taylor & Flint, 2000), for there is no knowing how long such a period will last (Nijman, 1993). It might also embrace a period of '*morbid disorder'* (Agnew & Corbridge, 1995), or a time of great world disorder (Wallerstein, 1993), and "*crises of meaning*" (O'Tuathail, et al.,1998). In addition, in any geopolitical world order, what is more important is the relations between a few great powers or one most powerful country with others and with other elements of a system, which forms and manages the system's functions (Hafeznia, 2006). These relations are formed due to a combination of material capability, ideas, and institutions (Cox, 1981), and constituting global political systems, labeled as unipolar, bipolar,   multipolar,   or uni-multipolar system (Huntington, 1999).

These orders also include Geopolitical codes, which have been defined 'as the basic building blocks of such geopolitical world orders' (Taylor & Flint, 2000, p. 91). They have also been called '*image-plans'* (Henrikson, 1980) and '*operational codes'* (Dijkink, 1998). In reality, every state has a set of specific strategic political-geographical assumptions, which are made by a government about other states and form its foreign policy (Taylor & Flint, 2000). From this point of view, the ideas and assumptions of the states' leaders play a significant role in defining the states' geopolitical codes and in their foreign policy. Such codes operate in various places out of state and beyond boundaries of state to evaluate the places' strategic importance and as potential threats. Moreover, they operate at local, regional and global levels, and are a combined   definition of the state's interests, external threats which pose a risk to the state's interests, and identification of a planned response to such threats (Gaddis, 1982). In this manner, there are local codes for all countries, regional codes for many countries but only a few countries have global codes (Flint & Taylor, 2007). Furthermore, because the states' geopolitical codes are not independent from each other, the great powers have an excessive influence on the geopolitical codes of other members of the system. As a result, these geopolitical codes fit together to create

a single pattern, which dominates all over the world for a specific historical period. This is what is called the '*geopolitical world order*' (Flint & Taylor, 2007; Taylor & Flint, 2000). In reality, these operational codes form inter-states relations in the hierarchical system, where are defined position, level, and function of each country, especially powerful countries, as a member of the system.

On the basis of this theoretical framework, it is understandable that, with the end of the Cold war geopolitical world order, the world was '*surprised*' (Taylor,1992) by the major reforms and changes in the structure of the global system, which caused great changes in the attitude and strategies of major powers. In fact, 1989 was a year of geopolitical earthquakes in Eastern Europe (O'Tuathail, 1992) and the beginning of a geopolitical transition period (Taylor & Flint, 2000), or an *interregnum* (Sorensen, 2006), which continued until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. With the collapse of this Eastern superpower, East-West relations entered a new phase (Kissinger et al,1989), and global politics moved to the unipolar system from the bipolar system of the Cold war era, as the United States remained in force as the only global superpower (Huntington, 1999). This Unipolar system appeared in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, when the United States was able to rally and lead much of the world against the aggression of Iraq towards Kuwait. Regardless of the time of the Persian Gulf War, there had been no agreement on a common consensus concerning the kind of Post-Cold War system although various models had been offered, including the multipolar system, globalized system, stratified model, Clash of Civilizations, uni-multipolar system, universal empire model, super UN model, unilateralism, and so on (Huntington, 1999; O'Loughlin, 1992; Roskin & Berry, 2008).

However, apart from the kind of system, it is important to study the role of great powers and geopolitical factors in the world's geopolitical developments. From this point of view, the United States, the European community, Russia, China, and Japan have been introduced as major powers in the world (S. B. Cohen, 1991; Huntington, 1993; Nijman, 1992; O'Loughlin, 1992; Wallerstein, 1993). They are the main actors on the international stage as well as the main competitors in economic, political, military and cultural areas. These countries also are actively involved in various global problems such as terrorism, and weapons of mass destruction among others. However, obviously, although there is this idea that the US hegemony has been declining since the 1970s as a result of Japanese, European and Russian rivalry, among the great powers the United States has continued to remain the only superpower, with superior economic, military, technological and cultural might in the world (Agnew & Corbridge, 1995; Brzezinski, 1997; S. B. Cohen, 1991; Huntington, 1999; Taylor & Flint, 2000). So, examining the US actions and its foreign policy towards different countries as friend or enemy, such as Iran, will be the most important part in investigating the fundamental geopolitical developments in the new era.

The beginning of the new era has been recognized as a "*dramatic opportunity*" for the US because it could redefine its global role (Coll, 1992). In this era, many countries, particularly the United States needed to redefine their geopolitical codes, and if able, their global codes. It is directly related to formation of the new order as the Post-Cold War geopolitical world order, where such codes act as main building blocks. They define threats and necessary responses to those threats and from this view the US had to determine the purpose of its foreign policy (Nijman, 1993) and as O'Loughlin (2000) pointed out, reordering the Post-Cold War world was what the US did. In this regard, it is important to note that US world leadership is the main objective in the US geopolitical code (Flint, 2006) and the country is trying to maximize its hegemony (Harvey, 2005; Iseri, 2009; Taylor & Flint, 2000; Wallerstein, 1993). This could explain and justify many of the US actions and its interventions across the world.

In this respect, studies indicate that the regionalist perspective of the US foreign policy, in particular in two Bush presidencies, has been remarkable (Flint, Adduci, Chen, & Chi, 2009). It can be evaluated with reference to free access to the vast energy reservoirs in different geographical areas such as the Persian Gulf, and ensuring the free flow of oil to the west and industrial states (Peters, 2004;Billon, 2004; Klare, 2001). This view has been reflected as a significant perspective on the US geopolitical codes and its grand strategies (Flint, 2006; Iseri, 2009).

This paper however, presents a geopolitical analysis of relations between Iran and the United States as well as their policies towards each other in the context of the geopolitical world order. It seeks the role of geopolitical factors, particularly the impact of leaders' geopolitical assumptions on the relations between two countries and formation of their foreign policies as well. These are political-geographical assumptions, which form the states' geopolitical codes and subsequently define their friends and enemies. In this regard, this paper uses a type of qualitative content analysis method (Merriam, 1998) to analyze the US-Iran relations in the Post-Cold War era. It also implicitly examines the mutual impacts between the policies of the two countries on the one hand, and the Post-Cold war geopolitical developments on the other. In fact, examining the trend of political relations and the leaders' assumptions can help to explore the relations among geopolitical traits of Iran, the geopolitical

characteristics of the Persian Gulf region, and the US global objectives in the Post-Cold war geopolitical world order.

Beginning of transition period; death of Ayatollah Khomeini, fall of the Berlin wall

The year 1989 marked the end of the Cold war geopolitical world order and the beginning of a transition period (Taylor,1992). It also coincided with death of the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 and the election of his successor as well as intensification of the president's power based on a new draft of the Iranian constitution were two important events that significantly influenced the Iranian leaders' views on their international relations in the geopolitical world. In fact, it was an Iranian transition period, the start of a definite shift from mainly revolutionary values to a kind of more rational thinking. Indeed, with Ayatollah Khamenei as Supreme leader and the election of president Rafsanjani, the country's foreign policy priorities were changed from the ideological to the pragmatic, with greater emphasis on national interests (Marschall, 2003, p. 100). To illustrate, President Rafsanjani preferred "a 'good-neighbour' policy rather than continue to export the "Iranian revolution" (Joyner, 1990, p. 231).

During this period, Iran learned to contribute to the   stability of the Persian Gulf region, improved connections to the global economy, and played a more effective role in the regional and global activities through more effective participation in global and regional organizations (Rakel, 2007). Iran also tried to fill the existing vacuum beyond its northern boundaries created by the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Ultimately, this was the particular region which later became a conflict arena for Iran and the US. Here, new competitions were formed, and Iran-US relations were converted to the new form.   Besides various other reasons, the vast natural resources, in particular around the Caspian Sea, became the most important reason for the presence of different countries in this region. In this context, China's increasing need for energy resources, the fundamental need of Japan for Turkmenistan gas on the one hand, and Europe's urgent needs for the energy resources of Caspian Sea in the west on the other hand, attracted the attention of different countries to this area. Moreover the existence of suitable economic and geographical fields for the transportation of these resources through the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean also had created a specific position for this strategic region. Simultaneously, the United States played the role of decision maker in the region by using the oil companies, its allies in the region, and other obvious ways such as supporting the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline (Mirheydar, 2001) to by-pass Iranian and Russian territories (Carter & Ehteshami, 2004). In this respect, because of the specific geographical location of the region as a landlocked area, the pipelines have been the best transfer equipment for oil and gas. Under such circumstances, Iran as the most beneficial, safest and the shortest way for oil export has played an important role as a member of the Caspian Sea region and as the communicative bridge between the region and the open world and open seas (Mesbahi, 2004).

Perhaps, controlling the energy fields in this area has been the most significant area of dispute between Iran and the US in this region. Evidences indicate that the U.S has attempted to curtail Iran's activities by exploiting oil and gas resources in its neighbouring states. It also has prevented the building of important new oil and gas pipelines across Iran (Allison & Janson, 2001). Such policies have been for the purpose of preventing Iran's activities in pipeline provision for produced oil transfer from the Central Asia republics to the rest of the world destinations. For instance, the international oil consortium, with the majority   of shares belonging to U.S and U.K companies, decided to choose Azerbaijan for their pipeline constructions, even though they were aware of uneconomical and unsecured paths through Chechnya and Georgia for the pipeline export of Azerbaijan's oil (Akiner, 2004; Mojtahedzadeh, 2000).

In the early 1990s however, Iran tried to improve relations with China and India to balance the country's relations with the West and European states, while further sanctions on Iran were added by the Clinton administration due to some allegations concerning the development of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) by Iran, as well as supporting Palestinian groups in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It was noticeable that the US has supported various anti-government groups against the Iranian government, groups such as "monarchists" and "Mojaheddin Khalgh" (Tarock, 1996, p. 159). The US was also clearly supporting the Taliban to put pressure on the Eastern boarders of Iran. The Taliban were used as a geopolitical threat to impose the US requests on Iran, while at the same time, the US Congress was passing the Iran-Libya Sanction act (ILSA) in 1996, which sanctioned any company to investigate the US $40 million or more in the projects of oil and gas in Iran or Libya. In the Iranian view, however, such measures represented the US priorities in the energy resources section and its necessity to dominate the resources of the region from Central Asia to the Horn of Africa, including the Persian Gulf area as "an American lake" (Bill, 1999, p. 45). On the basis of this goal, Iran was certainly regarded as the main obstacle to the achievement of US geostrategic objectives.

Iran's boundaries and a global geopolitical development

The most notable American policy immediately after the Cold War was towards the Middle East, particularly the Gulf War (Nijman, 1993). Perhaps, nobody supposed that a regional action would be able to create a global response; a war between one country and a coalition force from 34 states. It happened, indeed because one superpower in a bipolar system collapsed, thus leaving sole leadership to the only remaining superpower. Although at this time the 'New World Order' was announced as a global idea, it is clear that it happened only in this region because of a threat to the Persian gulf's energy resources and it was not continued in other situations (Roskin, Cord, Medeiros, & Jones, 2008). In this regard, on September 11, 1990, Bush explicitly said:

> *Our objectives in the Persian Gulf are clear, our goals defined and familiar: ...The security and stability of the Persian Gulf be assured. And American citizens abroad must be protected....Vital economic interests are at risk as well...We cannot permit a resource so vital to be dominated by one so ruthless. And we won't* (G. H. W. Bush, 1990).

He also on March 6, 1991 stressed that:*"Let it be clear: our vital national interests depend on a stable and secure Gulf"* (G. H. W. Bush, 1991).

In this context, although Huntington (1993) has referred to the speech of the supreme leader of Iran about war against the US and its allies as a holy action, Iran as neighbour of Iraq remained neutral in this war. This neutrality by Iranian policy makers showed a change in their policy from the ideological revolutionary policies to policies based on national interests. But the Clinton administration passed the Iran non-proliferation Act in 1992 and   founded the "dual containment" policy towards Iran and Iraq too (Gerges, 1999). This policy was aimed at isolating of both Iran and Iraq, politically, militarily and economically. It was related to Iran's support of Hamas and other anti-Israel organizations, and also the continuance of Saddam in power (Bowen & Kidd, 2004; Rakel, 2007).

Iran and the creation of a "crack in the wall of mistrust"

Perhaps, relations between Iran and US during the first term of the Khatami presidency were the closest relations between them. It was started by Khatami through a dialog with the American people via a TV program on the BBC network in January 1998. He emphasized the creation of a "*crack in the wall of mistrust*" and said:

> *I believe all doors should now be open for such dialogue and understanding and the possibility for contact between Iranian and American citizens,"* He also censured the U.S. foreign policy for being "behind the times" and a "prisoner of a Cold-war mentality" in attempting to "portray Islam as the new enemy (CNN, 1998).

He, in fact, referred to the impact of the existing assumptions about confrontation between the two civilizations of Islam and the West among the US decision makers, which was first mentioned by Samuel Huntington (Huntington, 1993). This discourse had become a significant issue in geopolitical discussions during international relations and political science seminars (Murphy, Bassin, Newman, Reuber, & Agnew, 2004). Khatami also implicitly stressed the necessity of changing the US behaviour, which was related to Post-Cold War developments. Later, in November 1998, his idea, which was termed as "Dialogue among Civilizations" was proposed in response to Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations". It was interesting that the year 2001 was determined by the United Nation as the "Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations" (Henrikson, 2002).

Indeed, these statements of Iran's government did lead to some changes in the US policies towards Iran. Sending earthquake disaster relief to Bam city in Iran and creating some facilities for the export of food and medical essentials were some instances in the thawing of past rigid relations. In 1998, also the American Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright stressed the necessity of extending relations with Iran. It was also clear that Khatami's foreign policy was being changed and moving away from the ideological requirements inherited from his predecessor Ayatollah Khomeini. For instance, President Khatami announced in 1998 that the Selman Rushdie affair was *"completely finished"* (B.B.C News, 1998).

Changing the US geopolitical code and the geopolitical impasse for Iran

In the United States, the election of George W. Bush as the 43rd president in 2001, and sovereignty of the neo-conservative faction of the Republican Party brought about changes in US foreign policy due to changes in the US geopolitical code, from globalist to regionalist. Flint et al. (2009) refer to the contrast between globalist and regionalist perspectives in the definition of a geopolitical code so that, globalist "reflects a geopolitical code that sees all parts of the globe as equally important", while in a regionalist perspective, particular parts of the globe are more important. From this point of view, "the US geopolitical code is targeted towards particular regions at particular times" (p.613). In this regard, in the early first term of the second Bush administration it was

supported by large American corporations, oil companies and financial capital envisaged a militaristic global agenda and his administration had a comprehensive plan pertaining specifically to US energy as well as to oil fields in the Persian Gulf region. The "National Energy Policy Report" (NEP) was also produced by Vice President Dick Cheney in May 2001, which emphasised the importance of energy for the US in the future and today. In this report, Bush said: "*America must have an energy policy that plans for the future, but meets the needs of today. I believe we can develop our natural resources and protect our environment*" (G. W. Bush, 2001, p. ix).

In this respect, some believe that, even after the September 11 attacks, the Afghanistan and Iraq wars indeed were resource wars and were related to the US global strategy to gain access to the Persian Gulf and Central Asia reserves (Bromley, 2006). It has been said about the Iraq war that even "The country's oil revenues will be deposited in the US dominated 'Development Fund for Iraq' " (Yazdani & Hussain, 2006, p. 280).   But the September 11th events caused major changes in US foreign policy as well as in the trend of geopolitical developments in the world. President Khatami instantly announced that he felt "deep regret and sympathy with the victims" (CNN.com, 2001b). In addition, undermining terrorism has been recognized by him as an international responsibility. The outbreak of the Afghanistan war created another consequence of the Post-Cold war developments in Iran's eastern borders. However, Iran in this case also maintained its neutral position, so that CNN reported:

> *Foreign minister Kamal Kharrazi said Iran would join a U.N.-led anti terrorist coalition but Tehran would not allow its airspace to be used to launch attacks against Afghanistan. Iran also closed its 562-mile border to prevent refugees crossing from Afghanistan in the wake of U.S. attacks (CNN.com, 2001a).*

But in the United States, on January 29, 2002 and nearly four months after the beginning of the War in Afghanistan, the term *"Axis of Evil"* was used to label some states which, according to Bush, were helping terrorism. President Bush referred to Iran along with Iraq and North Korea as those countries attempting to produce the Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). He declared:

> *Our second goal is to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction. Some of these regimes have been pretty quiet since September the 11th. But we know their true nature... Iran aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom. States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world (G. W. Bush, 2002).*

It was actually an official announcement from the US government for Iran, revealing the US hostility against Iran. Declaring this hostility in the "*State of the Union*" address underlined the significance of this issue. The State of the Union address is an annual address which is presented by the US president and reports on the condition of the nation. It also allows the president to outline his/her legislative agenda and national priorities to congress. Clearly, Bush had already separated the US friends from its enemies in the war against terrorism (Naji & Jayum, 2011). He had explicitly noted that: *"You are either with us or against us in the fight against terror"* (CNN.com, 2001c).

It was directly related to the US geopolitical code, when political leaders define state's enemies and friends.   It is important to note that, regardless of the world's political conditions, it reflects the president and his administration's ideas. As has been said, it is "the set of strategic assumptions that a government makes about other states in forming its foreign policy" (Taylor & Flint, 2000). These geopolitical assumptions ultimately formed a hostile policy against Iran and some other states, so that finally it led to an inauspicious war against Iraq in 2003. There is this view that after September 11th the peace condition was altered to the war condition (Soltani & Jawan, 2010). In this new condition, it was the beginning of another war close to Iran's western boundaries. The US in fact settled Iran in a geopolitical impasse (Naji & Jayum, 2011). The US invasion of Iraq could be interpreted along with NATO's movement towards the east, the US and Israel presence in Azerbaijan (Lewis, 2006), military presence of the US in Central Asia, the Afghanistan war and US military intervention, and the US military presence in the Persian Gulf   countries. In sum, at that time "Geostrategically, Iran is surrounded by US-occupied or US-controlled states" (Yazdani & Hussain, 2006, p. 283).

The US, Iran's nuclear program in the global geopolitical rivalries

In June 2003 Bush declared that the US would not "*tolerate the construction of a nuclear weapon*" by Iran (Fox News.com, 2003). In this regard, it is important to note that Iran's nuclear issue highlighted the role of other powerful countries in the new era, so that it provided partly suitable circumstances to present other powerful countries in the international rivalries' arena against the *"only remained superpower"* from the Cold war era.

Obviously, resistance of Iran on its nuclear program on the one hand, and the necessity of stopping Iran's nuclear activities for the US and its allies particularly Israel on the other hand, have caused all states to adjust their positions and relations in the new unorganized Post-Cold War geopolitical world order. Attempting to obtain a higher position in the new geopolitical order is clear in the polarization of great powers within the "5+1 group". Evidences show that Russia and China as two permanent members of the UN Security Council have always resisted in drafting and approving sanctions resolutions against Iran, while on the other side, three other permanent members, namely the United States, the United Kingdom and France along with Germany have formed an informal coalition to approve and apply severe sanctions against Iran.

Russia, however, has pursued economic, military and nuclear cooperation with Iran; Iran's alliance could be useful in order to control the NATO expansion towards the East and control the efforts of the west to access the energy reserves in the region as well as the activities of Turkey and Israel in Central Asia and Caucasia. Moreover, it can establish a position to play a major role in global decisions and prevent the formation of the US regional and global hegemony. In this regard, Iran has also needed the Russian political and military cooperation, and the latter has been known to be one of most important countries in weapons supply to Iran (W. S. Cohen, 2001). These needs and cooperation are also highlighted in the context of Iranian nuclear activities (Bowen & Kidd, 2004), in the form of an agreement worth USD 800 million signed between the two countries in January 1995 to complete the nuclear construction of Bushehr (Cordesman & Al-Rodhan, 2006, p. 179). The relations between China and Iran also have noticeably been increasing. The high economic growth of China and its significantly increased energy needs have led to look at energy resources in countries such as Iran, so that in the geopolitics of the energy sphere there is serious competition between China and the US to access energy resources around the world. Iran, furthermore, was the second largest energy supplier to China in 2003. Ultimately, as a result of these relations, the dual-use technology was supplied via China to Iran, which could be used to make   nuclear, chemical and biological weapons (Bowen & Kidd, 2004; Rakel, 2007).

These three countries also have expanded their trilateral relations and there is considerable cooperation among Iran, Russia and china in the "Shanghai Cooperation Organization" (SCO). It should be noted that China and Russia are the main members of the SCO in the East of the world, which reminds one of Cohen's "*two geostrategic realms*" (S. B. Cohen, 2003), and shows an attempt to form a multi-polar world-system opposite to US unilateralism.   The presence of Iran in this organization as an observer member and Iran's request for full membership indicates that there is a tendency to form a new coalition against the west coalition. Clearly, in this context, Iran as a regional power and strategic country can play a crucial role to create an axis of China-Russia-Central Eurasia-Iran against the US- Japan-Europe axis.

But on the other hand, there are some other geopolitical realities: Russia is a powerful country, and was a superpower for a long time and it pursues its global and regional strategies simultaneously. So, the Russia policy to support the Iranian nuclear program will continue, as long as this policy ensures its national interest in the international system and it will definitely stand up to Iran when its interests should prescribe another policy. It means that Russia will pursue its global interests as a global powerful country while maintaining its regional interest along with Iran. Responding to Ahmadinejad's protest due to Russia's companionship with the US camp in May 2010, the top Kremlin foreign policy advisor, Sergei Prikhodko, explicitly said: *"Our position is Russian, it reflects the interests of all the peoples of Russia and thus it is neither pro-American nor pro-Iranian"* (RNW, 2010*)*.

From this point of view, China, also like Russia, is one of the main actors in the world system and pursues its objectives opposite those of the US actions to gain a higher position in the hierarchical world system. It is therefore a global rival for the US in the world economic and political sphere. Obviously, China attempts to prevent the strengthening of US global and regional hegemony around the world, in particular, in Eurasia and the Middle East areas. In this regard, it pursues its national and global interests in the world system and although it is one of the permanent members of the UN Security Council as well as a powerful country, it will not separate itself from other members as it will be unable to solve international issues alone.

In fact, especially in this case, China should be cooperating with its Eurasian strategic partner, Russia. It must be noted that Iran cannot rely on China as a secure supporter and the former should be   reminded that   it was US pressure on Beijing that finally led to an agreement between China and the United states in 1997 "to cancel most of its existing assistance to Iran and not to embark on new projects" (Bowen & Kidd, 2004, p. 262). In this respect, it is important to realize that, based on recent news, because of the UN sanctions against Iran,   it cannot be a full member of "SCO" at this time (Tehran Times, 2010b), and it indicates the actual role of Russia and China in Iran's nuclear issue. In this context, there are even some other countries that have tried at the lower levels to enjoy this opportunity. Among the various states, Brazil and Turkey were most active at the 14th summit

of G-15 in Tehran, and later, simultaneously signed an agreement pertaining to the enrichment of Iranian uranium in their countries on May 17, 2010 (Tehran Times, 2010a).

Iran's leaders; global thoughts and past ideological assumptions

Even as Iran is resisting the US pressures and threats, it is expanding its relations and spreading ideas in different geographical regions. Its geographical distribution covers the vast area from the Middle East and Africa to the US backyard in South and Latin America (Naji & Jayum, 2011). Selecting a kind of aggressive policy, Iranian foreign policy was changed significantly especially after president Ahmadinejad came to office in August 2005. At this time, Iran re-established its foreign policy which was based on some revolutionary principals introduced in the days of Ayatollah Khomeini during the first decade after 1979. In this respect, the US government and Israel were the two biggest enemies. In the first year of Ahmadinejad's presidency, he declared that: *"As the imam said, Israel must be wiped off the map"* (The New York Times, 2005). He also said in October 2005: *"And God willing, with the force of God behind it, we shall soon experience a world without the United States and Zionism"* (CNN.com, 2005).

This extreme policy was in conformity with Ayatollah Khomeini's approach that had labelled the US as *"the Great Satan"* and he declared in 1980 that *"America can't do a damn thing"* (Ganji, 2002, p. 111). It can be noticed that continuing this policy was due to the US threatening Iran over the years. Following Bush's "Axis of Evil", Condoleezza Rice also clearly denounced Iran as *"loathsome"* (Yazdani & Hussain, 2006). She also pointed to Iran as one of the six *"outposts of tyranny"* in the world (B.B.C news, 2005).

On the other hand, the nuclear issue of Iran however, opened the world gates to expand Iran's relations with other countries across the world. Iran expanded its trans-regional relations among most of those states that were in opposition to the US. The frequent presence of Ahmadinejad in Venezuela has always been seen as a response to the geographical and geostrategic siege of Iran. In this context and according to some ideological thoughts, Iran's statesmen have also pursued the global objectives, which are in opposition to the US objectives (Naji & Jayum, 2011). Ahmadinejad introduced the role of the Iran nation as a global role that could be compared with Bush's statements about the US global mission. In May 2010, Ahmadinejad declared: *"The Historical Iran's nation is not only for the geography of Iran and the role of Iran's nation is a global role and it is to establish a blissful society all over the world"* (Fars News Agency, 2010).

The missed opportunity to construct the new geopolitical relations

However, with the beginning of Obama as the 44th president of the United States in January 2009, some Iranian governmental executives believed that US foreign policy, especially towards Iran, will be changed. Perhaps, it is for this reason that president Ahmadinejad, for the first time since 1979, congratulated Obama on his election immediately after the presidential election in November 2008. It was a reaction to Obama's statement that "*he is willing to hold direct diplomacy with Iranian leaders as a way to break the impasse between the two countries or give the US more credibility to press for tougher sanctions if talks fail*." On the basis of this idea, Ahmadinejad also said that he "*hopes Obama will use the opportunity to serve the (American) people and leave a good name for history during his term in office*" (msnbc, 2008). In March 2009, Obama also delivered, also for first time since 1979, a recorded greeting to the Iranian people and government on the occasion of *Nowruoz* or the Iranian New Year. It was the first time that the US president had used Iran's official name, "*Islamic Republic of Iran*". It was a significant official recognition of the legitimacy of the Iranian government which had been formed in 1979. He said to Iranian leaders:

> *We have serious differences that have grown over time. My administration is now committed to diplomacy that addresses the full range of issues before us, and to pursuing constructive ties among the United States, Iran and the international community....we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist* (msnbc, 2009).

It seemed that the leaders of both states had a positive start for reconstruction of their relations, but despite an apparent easing off of tensions between the two countries, there were two important and crucial interests which were the main impediments in the way of rapprochement: the existence of Israel as an ideological enemy of Iran, and improvement of Iran's nuclear program. These two issues were brought up in President Obama's first recorded message to the Iranian government, but on the other hand, he called Israel as "*a key US ally*". In fact, it showed that the survival of Israel has always been a vital national interest for the US. This issue was what was quoted on behalf the supreme leader of Iran in the news: "Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has criticized Obama as merely a continuation of President George W. Bush's policies towards Tehran's enemy, Israel. He has called Israel a '*cancerous tumour*' that is on the verge of collapse and has called for its destruction" (CBS News.com, 2009; mlive.com, 2009; msnbc, 2009).

A new beginning to the geopolitical crisis

Exactly one year later, in March 2010, president Obama in his new video massage to the Iranian people talked with people instead of leaders of Iran. He referred to the fact that Iranian leaders applied hostility to the US as an instrument of its legitimacy. Based on this view he accepted Iran's right to peaceful nuclear energy and said:

> *We are familiar with your grievances from the past.... We know what you're against; now tell us what you're for... the leaders of Iran have shown themselves unable to answer that question.... Faced with an extended hand, Iran's leaders have shown only a clenched fist* (Obama, 2009).

In fact Obama separated the Iranian people from their government; he reminded them of the post-election events in Iran, called the "Green movement" (*Jonbeshe-Sabz*), which was related to demonstrations of protests against the government because of the result of presidential election in June 2009.

> *Last June, the world watched with admiration, as Iranians sought to exercise their universal right to be heard. But tragically, the aspirations of the Iranian people were also met with a clenched fist...and people everywhere were horrified by the video of a young woman killed in the street...even as we continue to have differences with the Iranian government, we will sustain our commitment to a more hopeful future for the Iranian people* (Obama, 2009).

In this message, Obama was in fact supporting the Iranian protests. Although he said: *"The United States does not meddle in Iran's internal affairs",* Iran's government accused the US and West of meddling in Iran's interior affairs. This behaviour was similar to Bush's action on July 12, 2002 when he stated: *"As Iran's people move towards a future defined by greater freedom, greater tolerance, they will have no better friend than the United States of America"* (Payvand.com, 2009*).*

Another important point in Obama's massage related to American thought that can be analyzed in two sections: first, the US global policy to handle global issues has been changed from unilateralism to multilateralism, possibly as a result of the experience of the Iraq war in 2003. And second, resisting the American thought on its world leadership, or   what Colin Flint (2006) mentions as the US geopolitical code. Analysing the following sentences by Obama in his message reveals the importance of this thought for American statesmen.

> *Our commitment – our responsibility – is to stand up for those rights that should be universal to all human beings... The United States believes in the dignity of every human being, and an international order that bends the arc of history in the direction of justice – a future where Iranians can exercise their rights, to participate fully in the global economy, and enrich the world through educational and cultural exchanges beyond Iran's borders. That is the future that we seek. That is what America is for... Finally, let me be clear: we are working with the international community to hold the Iranian government accountable because they refuse to live up to their international obligations* (Obama, 2009).

The US policy towards a 'political activity by the other means'

From about this time, there were signs that things would come to a head and a crisis was on the way. It appeared that diplomatic policies had not been able to ease the tension between Iran and the US and probable that   the United States, according to Clausewitz view, would continue its "political activity by the other means" (Echevarria II, 2007, p. 90). Following in the tradition of other US presidents, Obama's administration presented its Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) on 6th April 2010, which outlined the US nuclear strategy. On the basis of this strategy "for the first time, the US is ruling out a nuclear response to attacks on America involving biological, chemical or conventional weapons. But this comes with a big caveat: countries will only be spared a US nuclear response if they comply with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty- this does not include Iran and North Korea" (B.B.C news, 2010). In this respect, the US Defense Secretary Robert Gates also declared that:

> *The [Nuclear Posture Review] has a very strong message for both Iran and North Korea…We essentially carve out states like Iran and North Korea, that are not in compliance with [the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty], and basically all options are on the table when it comes to countries in that category along with non-state actors who might acquire nuclear weapons* (Los Angeles Times, 2010).

Military attack to Iran of course, has always been touted as one of the various options, especially by the Bush administration (Klare, 2007) to obligate Iran for following the US objectives in order to strength its hegemony in the Post-Cold War geopolitical world order. Some years ago also similarly, in September in 2004, a US attack on Iran to prevent Iran's nuclear activities was predictable and Bush explicitly said that: "*all options are on the table*" (Fox News.com, 2004). He repeated this statement during an interview on Israeli TV in August 2005

(USA TODAY. com, 2005) and reiterated it in April 2006 (B.B.C news, 2006). He also stressed this idea several times in June 2007 in a meeting with the Israeli Prime Minister. He declared that: "*My position has not changed. All options are on the table*" (Reuters, 2007).

But, the new American message was a clear threat to Iran, especially about its nuclear program. The Bush message was based on a policy of unilateralism, a policy that has lost its credibility particularly after the Iraq war. However, today it is seen a multilateral policy as well as a relative consensus among great powers especially over Iran's nuclear activities. In fact, it shows the relative success of the US to fit different states' geopolitical codes with its codes. It is interesting to note that Iran's efforts do not represent its tendency to reduce the existing tension. In this regard, for instance, contrary to the statements of the US statesmen, Iran also responded in an unfriendly tone when Ahmadinejad said: *"Obama made these latest remarks because he is inexperienced and an amateur politician," he also said "American politicians are like cowboys. Whenever they have legal shortcomings, their hands go to their guns"* (Reuters, 2010*).

This form of diplomacy reflects a kind of deadlock in the solution of Iran's nuclear issue and even in the reconstruction of US-Iran relations, which have been formed because of opposition in the interests of two global and regional powers. One of them pursues its regional and global objectives based on its ideological and political justifications, and the other attempts to promote its regional and global hegemony as well as gaining the highest position in the Post-Cold War geopolitical world order. Different political-geographical assumptions have formed different geopolitical codes at different levels and it seems that there is no possibility in fitting those codes to each other. Therefore, two states have been defined as enemy to each other and it seems that these differences and hostilities cannot be converted to friendly engagement and they should only surrender some their demands and change their positions. Otherwise, as Huntington (1999) declares, after applying the '*economic sanctions*' as the first tool, it will apply the second tool, namely '*military intervention*'. Although using force as "*the very last resort*" to deal with the problem of Iran, the US would pay a broader political price for such a choice (Kemp, 2003).

The US and geopolitical capabilities of Iran

Whether using force or any other tools against Iran, the US should remove its political and economic distance to Iran, a country that is one of the most important geopolitical rings in the world. In fact, the geopolitical capacities of Iran cannot be ignored by the US and other countries. Iran is, as Graham Fuller (1991) correctly puts it, the *"center of the universe"*. Richard Helms (former CIA Director and later Ambassador to Iran) also has referred to it as *"the real center of the world"* (Falk, 1979). This country is "the sixteenth largest country in the world. This is an area larger than France, Spain, Germany, and Italy combined" (Daniel, 2001, p. 6). More importantly, it is located between two of the world's major energy basins: the Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea, the great region which has been called the "*strategic energy ellipse*" (Kemp & Harkavy, 1997). Moreover, this country "is the second main oil producer in the Gulf region, having the world's third largest proven oil reserves and second largest proven reserves of gas" (IEA, 2010).

Iran geopolitically, is placed between three continents - Asia, Africa and Europe - and their events have significant over Iran. It is connected to the continental location of Eurasia and this is the region that in geopolitical and geo-strategic topics has always remained important. Mackinder's Heartland and Cohen's geopolitical model have studied about it. Iran also enjoys a marine location because of the long coasts of the Persian Gulf and Oman Sea in the south. Opinions of Mahan and Spykman about this region also show the importance of this mentioned field (Valdani, 2002). The importance of Iran's location has been seen in some significant global events and decisions during the second World war, for instance, it was a significant supply base for the middle east, particularly to transfer materials from the Persian gulf to the Soviet Union (Anderson, 2000), and it was also determined to be an obstacle against the geo-strategic goals of the Soviet Union in the Cold War era, until the emergence of the Islamic revolution in Iran. On the other hand, Iran, with the strategic Strait of Hormuz, has a strategic passage way position. This strait, along with Melaka and Bab-el-Mandeb straits have formed the three vital highways of world trade. In the case of the Hormuz Straits, it is a significant transfer zone of energy resources from the East to the West (Safavi, 1999).

Ideologically, today Iran is known as the center of Shi'ite thoughts in the world. It is also the only Shi'ite government in the Muslim world, while there are many Muslims around the world who are pursuing Iranian Islamic ideas. It seems that many Muslims across the world have accepted the Iranian foreign policy, especially towards the United States. Inside Iran, what is called Iran's national identity has given a kind of self confidence to the Iranian people. They claim that Iran, among the many nations, has a unique ancient civilization; Iran had

already been a victim of invading powers as well as a victim of military invasions and economic pressures in its history, and thus it must become powerful to be independent (Moshirzadeh, 2007).

The above mentioned reasons, besides other cultural, social and political reasons, justify the important position of Iran at least as a regional power, and basically this is what the United States must pay attention to it in regard to its regional and global objectives as well as every measure taken against Iran. Indeed, the US needs to solve its problem with Iran to maximize its global hegemony, which is not attainable without gaining the regional hegemony in the Middle East. It will definitely be impracticable without the positive role of Iran. In fact, the US global geopolitical code determines the necessity of the positive presence of Iran as a main regional actor in the process of formation of a new geopolitical world order. Therefore, there is a strong relation between the geopolitical location of Iran, the importance of the region which possesses the largest energy reserves in the world, the national interests of the US and its allies, and the US global objectives in the Post-Cold War geopolitical world order.

Conclusion

What can be considered a result of this research is categorized into two main sections: first, it has seen the impact of the world's geopolitical developments on two countries' strategies as well as on their policies towards each other immediately after the Cold war era. In fact, the collapse of one superpower in the bipolar international system occurring in the neighbourhood of Iran and the appearance of many new independent political units are important because of geostrategic and geoeconomic reasons. On the one hand, The United States, as the only remaining superpower, is able to expand its geostrategic realm towards the East, and on the other hand, a major energy field has been created in this region, which is based on the Post-Cold War development regarding the importance of geoeconomic factors, leading to competition for access to these reserves. This 'surprising' occurrence changed many policies and the behaviour of countries, especially Iran-US relations. Therefore, on the one hand, this region became an arena for US-Iran political competition, and on the other hand, the USSR as an historical-ideological enemy was eliminated in Iran's political-ideological assumptions, although later, Russia became a friend of Iran in the political-economic sphere. Such cooperation started from 1995, particularly in the nuclear program and conventional weapons aspects. However, this cooperation, particularly with Chinese partners, formed a strong front against the US and its allies, and also helped Iran to insist on its ideas. It should be emphasized that the cooperation of both China and Russia with Iran can be analysed from the point of their global and regional objectives in the Post-Cold War geopolitical rivalries, but in fact,, cannot ensure Iran's national interests.

Second, reviewing the leaders' dialogues and countries' practices indicates the impact of the leaders' ideas and assumptions on the relations between two states, which show a fluctuating rise and fall curve in the political relations of the two states since 1989. The first change relates to the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, which led to a change in Iran's foreign policy that directly occurred under President Rafsanjani and his administration. He started expanding Iran's relations towards the neighbouring Persian Gulf countries and Europe. In fact, it was the beginning of an era during which more attention was paid to national interest rather than the ideological-revolutionary principles in Iran's foreign policy. However, the most significant changes based on leaders' ideas refer to the presidencies of George W. Bush and Barak Obama in the United States on the one hand, and Khatami and Ahmadinejad in Iran on the other. The dialogues and practices of President Bush and President Ahmadinejad aggravated hostilities between the two countries because of Bush's use of the terms *"Axis of Evil", "all options are on the table"*, "*a world without the United States and Zionism",* and Ahmadinejad's "*American politicians are like cowboys"*. However, two others, president Khatami and President Obama tried to reduce hostilities between the two states by using phrases such as a "*crack in the wall of mistrust*", "*Dialogue among Civilizations*", *"an extended hand"* and so on. Obviously, the world's geopolitical circumstances or international environment, and domestic conditions or internal environment of two states have influenced their ideas and actions as well.

Among different factors, the nuclear program of Iran has posed the most important global and regional security problem, prompting the United States and other great powers such as Russia and China to readjust their positions in the process of forming the new geopolitical world order. It is basically followed via imposing the more powerful countries' geopolitical codes on less powerful countries, and it seems that the United States via Iran's nuclear issue tries to impose its geopolitical codes on other states. It relates to the US efforts to maximize its global hegemony through control of the regional powerful countries in the Middle East and therefore the largest energy reserves in the world. It also indicates regional and global geopolitical imperatives, which instigate US statesmen to engage in conflict with Iran, a country that has its specific important geopolitical traits which the US should accommodate. Anyhow, conflicts of ideologies, national interests as well as regional and global

objectives of both Iran and the United states are predisposed to further conflict which has been done in the sanctions framework. If the two countries insist on keeping status quo, do not control their demands and refuse to change their political behaviours, to the ultimate consequence could be military confrontation in which case both parties will pay a substantial economic-political price.

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