

Conflict Studies Research Centre



**Main Currents in
Iranian Strategy
Since 9/11**

Dr Babak Ganji

March 2005

Main Current in Iranian Strategy Since 9/11

Dr Babak Ganji

Key Points

There have been continuities and changes in Iranian foreign policy since 9/11. The main area of continuity has been the pursuit of detente with the EU and conservative Arab states. The main changes are new divisions between advocates of the pursuit of selective bandwagoning with the US on Afghanistan and Iraq and advocates of asymmetric strategies aimed at driving the US out of the region.

Both strategies cut across the factional divisions in Iran. The most prominent advocates of selective bandwagoning include President Mohammad Khatami; the head of the Expediency Council Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani and the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Hasan Rowhani. Advocates of selective bandwagoning appear to believe that by cooperating with the US on a number of important regional issues they can stave off US pressure on Iran's nuclear programme and continue the uranium enrichment process. Advocates of asymmetric strategies seem to believe that cooperation with terrorist organizations such as Al-Qa'idah, Hizballah, Islamic Jihad and Hamas will enable Iran to improve its geostrategic position and galvanize support for a strategy of driving the US out of the region.

At a minimum, the asymmetric strategy is aimed at ensnaring the US in regional conflicts. The premise seems to be that such conflicts will undermine the legitimacy of US power and lead to Islamist uprisings against the US in key countries such as Iraq. Its most prominent advocates are the C-in-C of the Islamic Revolution Corps Maj-Gen Yahya Rahim-Safavi and his deputy Mohammad Baqer Zolqadr. The strategy also had a spokesman in Hasan Abbasi, the head of the Institute for Doctrinal Security Studies Without Frontiers. Abbasi explicitly advocated attacking "Anglo-Saxon" targets.

That both strategies were pursued, at times simultaneously, is as much an indication of the division over strategy in the Iranian state apparatus as it is of Khamene'i's predominant influence on Iranian strategy. The evidence suggests that Khamene'i decided to approve of the pursuit of détente alongside asymmetric strategies because Iran was not in a position to weaponize its nuclear programme.

Contents

Balancing the US	1
Cartelized Polity & Strategic Myths	3
Self Help Strategy	4
Determinants of the Strategy of Detente	5
Asymmetric Strategy After 9/11	7
Pursuit of Selective Bandwagoning Strategy After 9/11	10
Iraq & the Incoherence of Iranian Strategy	13
Nuclear Programme & Asymmetric Strategy	17
Hasan Abbasi & The Asymmetric Strategy	18
Nuclear Policy & State Strategies	18
Regional Dimension of Iranian Strategy	20
Implications of Leadership Change for Balancing Strategy	21
Conclusion	23

Main Current in Iranian Strategy Since 9/11

Dr Babak Ganji

The Iranian nuclear programme has generated a great deal of controversy around the world. However, what is absent in much of the debate is a critique of rival Iranian strategies. Despite the fact that there is a small literature on Iranian factionalism, there is hardly any debate in the English-language literature about foreign policy currents in the Iranian state apparatus or Iranian state strategies. Recently Kenneth Pollack and Ray Takeyh sought to analyse Iranian nuclear policy in terms of the divide between rival groups in Iran, arguing:

If Washington wants to derail Iran's nuclear program, it must take advantage of a split in Tehran between hard-liners, who care mostly about security, and pragmatists, who want to fix Iran's ailing economy. By promising strong rewards for compliance and severe penalties for defiance, Washington can strengthen the pragmatists' case that Tehran should choose butter over bombs.¹

Such seems to be the prevailing view among students of Iranian foreign policy. This paper disagrees with Pollack and Takeyh's assessment in that it does not see the division as being between "hard-liners" and pragmatists". The author believes that on questions of strategy the division is between two rival strategies, referred to here as selective bandwagoning and asymmetric strategies. Both strategies are designed to ensure that Iran will become a nuclear power. However, it is not clear how many of the political figures associated with each strategy intend to weaponize Iran's nuclear programme.

Balancing the US

Iranian regional strategy in the post-Cold war period has been influenced by a number of factors. The author will list these factors first before analysing how they have changed in the aftermath of 9/11. The Iranian revolution radically transformed Iranian foreign policy. Iranian leaders, "radical" and "moderate" alike, held the US responsible for the Shah's despotic rule and accused the US of refusing to recognize the revolution and seeking to overthrow it. Indeed, the accounts provided by the leaders of the Students Following the Line of the Imam, most of whom were or still are advisers to President Mohammad Khatami, indicate that they seized US diplomats hostage because they believed that the Carter administration would try to stage a coup d'état to overthrow the Iranian regime.

One of the most important reasons for the harsh anti-American tone of much of Iranian foreign policy pronouncements in the early years of the post-revolutionary period was Iranian officials' fear of US efforts to bring about regime change in Iran. Perceptions of balancing and bandwagoning have influenced Iranian leaders' views of the international system. The perception of bandwagoning between great powers has been reinforced by their experience of the latter stages of the Iran-Iraq war when both superpowers put pressure on Iran to end the war. The death of

Ayatollah Khomeyni contributed to the warming of Iran's relations with the Soviet Union. Indeed, one consequence of the end of the Cold War was increasing cooperation between Iran and the Soviet Union particularly in the military arena.

From the very beginning of the revolutionary period, the Iranian regime adopted asymmetrical methods to ensure the preservation of the regime. During the Cold War, Iran could rely upon asymmetrical methods such as support for the Lebanese Hizballah, which struck at US, French and Israeli targets in Lebanon, or a variety of Shi'i extremist organization on the Arabian Peninsula, to threaten US regional interests. The advent of Mikhail Gorbachev and US-Soviet detente was a major setback for Iranian strategy which relied upon the stand-off between the superpowers to pursue its regional objectives.

In the final phases of the Iran-Iraq war, the Soviet Union made it abundantly clear to Iran that it would not support the continuation of the Iran-Iraq war.² Indeed, the Soviet Union's involvement in reflagging Kuwaiti tankers and its diplomatic pressure on Iran to end the war, not to mention its refusal to help Iran when the US destroyed a significant part of the Iranian navy, demonstrated to Iranian officials that they were on their own. Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i later observed that both the West and the Soviet Union had supported Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war.³

Fear of diplomatic and military isolation, in fact, seems to be the main reason for Iranian leaders' efforts to press forward with the nuclear programme. Perhaps distrust of superpowers was the main reason why the Islamic Republic resumed its nuclear programme. However, as the then Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati later explained, the programme had to be a clandestine one lest other countries assumed that Iran was pursuing a nuclear weapons programme.

Despite the Soviet Union's diplomatic pressure on Iran during the latter stages of the Iran-Iraq war, Iran moved closer to the Soviet Union after the war. Iranian strategy in the aftermath of the war was influenced to a large extent by its perceptions of US predominance in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian peninsula. However, during the crisis generated as a result of Saddam Husayn's invasion of Kuwait, the then Iranian President Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani sought to take advantage of Husayn's offer to restore the territorial division of Shatt al-Arab.

Rafsanjani, however, faced major internal problems because his opponents, most notably the son of Ayatollah Khomeyni, Ahmad, as well as a number of other left-wing clerics who subsequently emerged as "reformist" supporters of President Khatami after 1997, vehemently opposed Iran's policy of "neutrality" in the war over Kuwait and called for supporting Iraq. The most significant breakthrough as far as Iranian diplomacy was concerned was the success of attempts to reach a modus vivendi with Saudi Arabia. However, this was a limited success at best.

After the war, Iranian leaders were sorely disappointed when the regional security system, dubbed 6+2, included Egypt and Syria, neither of which was an actor in the Persian Gulf as such. Iranian leaders believed that the US was determined to exclude Iran from playing any role in the Persian Gulf. Iran's negative response to the Oslo peace accords should be seen against the background of efforts to exclude Iran from the regional security system.

In fact, the Clinton administration's doctrine of dual containment, enunciated by Martin Indyk, in a sense formalized Iran's pariah status because it paired Iran with Iraq. The Oslo process sought to integrate Israel into the Middle East and as a

result of Oslo the Israeli leadership under Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres managed to considerably improve Israel's ties with conservative Arab states such as Oman and Qatar.

Cartelized Polity & Strategic Myths

The cartelized nature of Iranian polity means that various interest groups and factions compete with one another for the share of economic and political spoils.⁴ Despite ideological affiliations on certain points, the clique-ridden nature of Iranian politics means that small differences over policy are magnified because intrinsic interests of competing groups clash.

The cartelized structure can be observed in the behaviour of foundations which are under the direct control of the supreme leader. Reformists have repeatedly called for scrutiny of their behaviour.⁵ However, not much has been achieved in this field despite the fact that Khamene'i has named the current Iranian year, the year of accountability.

The Iranian state is deeply divided and factionalized over a host of issues. The kaleidoscopic nature of Iranian politics means that some individuals who are described as moderate on some issues may be ultra-radical on others. A case in point is Ali Akbar Mohtashami who was one of the leaders of the reformist factions in the sixth Iranian Majlis (parliament). While supporting President Khatami on domestic issues, Mohtashami has been calling for the destruction of Israel and intervention in Iraq.⁶ In the 2005 presidential elections, Mohtashami is the campaign manager of former Majlis Speaker Mehdi Karrubi, the most senior "reformist" presidential candidate.

The current Iranian government, or any Iranian government for that matter, does not control institutions which are under the direct control of the supreme leader, who has his own foreign policy-making machinery and intelligence services. Thus any deal struck with any Iranian government without the involvement of the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i, is unlikely to gain the support of the supreme leader and is, indeed likely to be sabotaged by him. Iran's most powerful state institutions, namely the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, the Intelligence Ministry, the Judiciary, the Justice Department, as well as a host of vigilante organizations, are likely to oppose attempts to improve relations with Iran unless they are directly involved in the negotiations themselves.

The Foreign Ministry or even the Supreme National Security Council of the Islamic Republic do not have the clout to "deliver". Indeed the fact that a number of so-called "parallel" intelligence institutions have emerged in the Islamic Republic in recent years suggests that those opposed to the improvement of ties are quite prepared to create their own para-state institutions in order to counter attempts to bring them under "reformist" control.

Given the motley character of the "reformist" camp and the often sharp disagreements within that camp over Iranian policy towards the West in general, and the US in particular, there is little prospect of a major improvement in US-Iranian relations even if the reformists totally dominated the Iranian state apparatus, an unlikely prospect even in the best of circumstances.

Self Help Strategy

The devastation of Iranian military and economic power as the result of the Iran-Iraq war and the strained ties with the US, led Iranian leaders to make a major effort to improve their country's relations with the Soviet Union.⁷ Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Khamene'i seems to be influenced more by the concept of bandwagoning and places much greater emphasis on self-help strategies. Iran's vehement opposition to Oslo was a reflection of its regional isolation.⁸ Between 1991 and 1997, the main goal of Iranian strategy was to bring about the withdrawal of US military forces from the Persian Gulf through asymmetric strategies such as terrorism and funding opponents of the Middle East peace process.

The most significant change in Iran's asymmetric strategy was the decision to cultivate Sunni extremist organizations through Sudanese leader Hasan al-Turabi. Iran's relationship with Sudan enabled it to tap into Sudan's resources and to benefit from Sunni groups' efforts to undermine US regional strategy. Turabi maintained relations with a wide range of Sunni Islamist groups, including Al-Qa'idah. In the 1990s Sudan was involved in the so-called landmarks plot in New York and the assassination attempt on Egyptian President Husni Mubarak. Turabi also maintained close relations with Iraq and Libya, two Arab countries which vehemently opposed US regional strategy.⁹

Moreover, according to some reports, while Usamah Bin-Ladin was in Sudan he established contact with the Lebanese Hizballah through the Iran-based head of Hizballah security, Imad Mughniyah.¹⁰ According to Ali Muhammad, who turned US government witness against his own group Al-Qa'idah, Bin-Ladin was influenced by Hizballah's car bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut and sought to apply the same technique in Saudi Arabia in an effort to drive US forces out of that country.¹¹

At the same time, Iranian officials continued to support hard-line and rejectionist Palestinian groups and the Lebanese Hizballah on the grounds that Israel did not have the right to exist or that they were engaged in "legitimate resistance". Indeed some reformist journalists in Iran argued that Iranian hard-liners preferred Israel to be governed by the Likud because this would make it easier for them to pursue their regional strategy.

Another manifestation of the regime's fear of being overthrown was its campaign against Iranian dissidents abroad. The campaign ended with the conviction of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamene'i, President Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani and Intelligence Minister Ali Fallahian in the so-called Mykonos trial in Germany.¹²

The conviction of Iranian leaders showed that Iran's strategy of asymmetric warfare had backfired. They eliminated opposition leaders such as the Kurds and a number of other leaders who were hardly in a position to overthrow the regime, such as Shapur Bakhtiar. In the process, Iranian leaders actually increased the vulnerability of their regime.

The Mykonos trial was perhaps a textbook example of the so-called security dilemma. Analysts of international relations usually study the concept of security dilemma in relation to great powers. The Iranian case is an interesting one. Iranian leaders' fear of regional isolation and US "plots" led them to exaggerate the significance of dissident activities abroad. The campaign of eliminating dissidents actually exacerbated the threats to the regime. It led to the EU's recall of its ambassadors from Iran.

After the advent of the Clinton administration, Iranian leaders were hopeful that they could somehow drive a wedge between the US and the EU. Mykonos dashed those hopes. In fact, Iranian officials increasingly worried about a US attack on Iran. Nevertheless Iranian strategy, the broad outlines of which were defined by Khamene'i, still relied upon terrorism as the principal means of expelling US forces from the region. This was particularly true of the Arab-Israeli arena where the Khamene'i-Rafsanjani leadership consolidated Iran's alliance with Islamic Jihad and Hamas in an effort to derail the Oslo process. Indeed, one of the main reasons that they may have been concerned about the peace process was the emerging de facto relations between Israel and conservative Arab states. Such an alliance would have made it easier for Israel to galvanize diplomatic support for pressuring Iran regarding its nuclear programme.

Interestingly, prior to the 1996 Israeli elections, Prime Minister Shimon Peres stated that the goal of Iranian policy was to foment terrorism to overthrow his government, which was committed to the Arab-Israeli peace process.¹³ Indeed, Iranian officials rejoiced at the suicide bombing which delivered the coup de grâce to the Peres government and led to Netanyahu's election.

The apogee of the asymmetrical approach to the US was perhaps the attack on Khobar towers in Saudi Arabia. Saudi officials made it clear to US officials that they expected a massive attack on Iran or they would not provide intelligence on the perpetrators to the Clinton administration.¹⁴ The attack on Khobar towers, once again, could have led to a massive US attack on Iran. That it did not was due to Saudi uncertainty about US policy and Clinton administration's fears that Rafsanjani's successor, President Mohammad Khatami, might be overthrown by hard-liners.¹⁵

However, before we address the issue of Khatami, we have to turn to the issue of the domestic determinants of Iranian strategy. Khamene'i has argued that in the aftermath of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, there is no power that can counter-balance the US. Khamene'i has declared that the US is determined to destroy the Islamic regime and that US policy is aimed at ensuring that the fate of the Soviet Union would befall Iran.¹⁶ While declaring that Iran would not attack any of its neighbours, Khamene'i also declared that the Iranian nation would not be "enslaved".

Determinants of the Strategy of Detente

The roots of detente in Iranian strategy can be traced back to the Kuwait war. However, detente of that period was stillborn if only because Iranian decision-makers concluded that their exclusion from key regional security issues made the strategy of detente untenable. However, by 1996 a confluence of factors led to the revival of the strategy of detente. To be sure different officials had different perceptions of detente. The available evidence suggests rather strongly that Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i saw detente with the EU and Iran's conservative Arab neighbours as a means of turning US strategy inside out or dealing with the US from a position of strength. President Rafsanjani had a similar view, but perhaps his views were also influenced by the failure of his economic policy.

In the second term of his presidency Rafsanjani was sharply criticized for his economic policies by the Islamic Coalition Society, the bastion of hard-right

conservatism in Iran. Rafsanjani's main goal was to open up the Iranian economy. However, the opposition of conservative groups to his economic programme stymied his progress.¹⁷ Moreover, Iran also suffered from political instability in the late Rafsanjani period. Riots in Eslamshahr and Qazvin demonstrated that the regime had not been successful in terms of subduing the population. What compounded the problem was the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps' declaration that it would not intervene in riots.¹⁸

It is noteworthy that in the aftermath of the Mykonos trial hard-line Iranian clerics such as Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati threatened a repeat performance of the Salman Rushdie case to silence the German prosecutor. However, Mykonos and Khobar towers increased the threat to the Iranian regime. The Khatami government's decision to embark upon the policy of detente had as much to do with Iranian officials' fears of domestic backlash against hard-line policies as with the regime's fear of an attack. It is important to note that Iran had already approached Germany and China regarding its nuclear programme and neither country was prepared to assist Iran. China, in fact, abandoned the Iranian project under US pressure. The government's policy of detente was closely coordinated with the supreme leader.

At the same time, dissidence spread in the country. The spread of dissidence also strained Iran's ties with the EU, which turned human rights into an issue in its relations with Iran. However, the available evidence suggests rather strongly that Khamene'i saw detente as a means of staving off US and EU pressure on the regime and preventing them from gaining diplomatic influence at Iran's expense in the Middle East.

Ultimately, given the importance all major factions attached to Iran's nuclear programme, the strategy of detente also served as a means of making it diplomatically difficult for the US or Israel to strike at Iran's nuclear installations. Indeed, Iran's policy course was defined quite clearly by Khamene'i as early as 1998 when at a meeting with Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi he called for the creation of a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East.¹⁹ Since then Iran has repeatedly sought to draw a sharp distinction between its own behaviour and Israel's, contending that the Israeli nuclear programme was the main threat to the Middle East.

President Khatami and most of his "reformist" supporters, as well as a number of decision-makers associated with the Executives of Construction of Party, such as Hasan Rowhani, tend to place greater emphasis on the importance of balancing than on bandwagoning in the international system. Indeed, one can argue that the entire dialogue of civilizations project and Iran's improvement of its relations with international institutions were aimed at using such institutions to contain the US.

This school of thought ruled out the concept of revolutionary autarky in security and economic arenas. Even some of Khatami's most anti-American supporters, such as the Islamic Revolution Mojahedin Organization, called for accommodating the US after 1997. For example, Behzad Nabavi who was Iran's chief negotiator during the 1979-1980 hostage crisis and had close relations with hostage-takers, argued in 1998 that the international system was becoming multipolar and that Iran was in a position to reach an accommodation with the US without necessarily normalizing diplomatic relations.

Despite efforts to improve US relations with Iran in 1999 and 2000, there was no major improvement because of Ayatollah Khamene'i's concern that the Clinton administration would try to use the reformists to overthrow him; Iran's continuing

pursuit of a nuclear programme; and the outbreak of the second intifadah which led Iranian officials to express strong support for Palestinian rejectionist groups.

Khamene'i's declaration that the US was hatching a "plot" to bring about Iran's dismemberment stymied reformist efforts to improve ties with the US in 2000. Even the reformist Majlis had to give in to Khamene'i. Majlis Speaker Mehdi Karrubi declared that Khamene'i was responsible for formulating Iran's policy towards the US.²⁰

However, Khamene'i must have approved of the partial opening to the US in the summer of 2000. On 30 August, the American-Iranian Council and Internews held a reception at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Five Iranian MPs, including a Jewish MP, Moris Mo'tamed, and the then Majlis Speaker Mehdi Karrubi attended the gathering. Senators Arlen Specter (Republican, Pennsylvania), Representative Robert Ney (Republican, Ohio), Gary Ackerman (Democrat, New York) and Eliot Angel (Democrat, New York) attended the meeting. The Americans invited the Iranians to visit US congressional representatives in Washington DC and the Iranians expressed interest in inviting their American counterparts to Tehran.²¹

At the time it was reported that Khamene'i had approved of the meeting. However, when Karrubi was asked about it, he described it as "an accidental encounter".²² By the time the Clinton administration left office, Iranian policy had hardened in a number of different arenas, particularly the Arab-Israeli arena. Indeed, one of the leaders of the "reformist" camp Ali Akbar Mohtashamipur, who was a founder of Lebanese Hizballah, went so far as to call for the imposition of an oil embargo on the West in defence of the intifadah.²³

Asymmetric Strategy After 9/11

Iranian officials' reaction to the 11 September attacks changed during the course of the war in Afghanistan. Immediately after 11 September, nearly all Iranian officials condemned the attacks, saying that terrorism was wrong regardless of where it took place. However, almost immediately after the attacks, a number of prominent conservative and radical commentators began to argue that Israeli and American intelligence services, rather than Al-Qa'idah, had been responsible for the attacks.

In an interview with Iranian TV only one day after the attacks, former deputy foreign minister and deputy chairman of the Majlis Foreign Relations Committee, Mohammad Javad Larijani, argued Bin-Ladin was only a "bogey man" created by the US and the West and that the attacks were almost certainly masterminded by "the Zionists" to prepare the ground for exerting pressure on Islamic countries, increasing US presence in the region and confronting states that pursued independent foreign policies. At the same time, Larijani argued that the US had to come to terms with the consequences of its own policy, arguing: "The Americans are desperate, and in desperation, signs of barbarism manifest themselves."²⁴

In the aftermath of 9/11, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i sharply criticized President Bush for saying that "whoever is not with us is against us". He declared that Bush's comments were an indication of the "arrogance of power".²⁵ Khamene'i's constant refrain has been that Iran must strengthen itself in order to survive in an international system dominated by great powers. Despite the fact that the predominant Iranian official line has been that Al-Qa'idah was created by the

US to put pressure on Iran, there were numerous Western press reports that prominent Al-Qa'idah members, including Bin-Ladin's son, Sa'ad, were in Iran.²⁶

Intelligence Minister Ali Yunesi, who is perhaps the most radical member of the Khatami government, argued that the attacks represented a watershed in international politics. On 7 October 2001, the reformist daily *Aftab-e Yazd* quoted Yunesi as saying: "You should know that what happened in America was one of the most important events in the history of mankind. It was even more important than what happened during the disintegration of the Soviet Union."²⁷

According to Yunesi, the Bush administration's tacit admission that a Palestinian state had to be formed reflected US officials' recognition of the vulnerability of their country in the aftermath of 11 September. The head of the Expediency Council, Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani was even blunter. He argued that the terrorist attacks in America had exposed its vulnerability.²⁸ Moreover, he also warned that if nuclear weapons were used against Israel it would be destroyed.²⁹ In early February 2002, the daily *Hayat-e Now*, the proprietor of which was Khamene'i's brother Hadi Khamene'i, who has been close to the reformists, reported that the number two man in Al-Qa'idah, Ayman al-Zawahiri, was in detention in Iran.³⁰ This was a serious charge. The Iranian Foreign Ministry and other official sources rejected the *Hayat-e Now* report.³¹ Iran's representative in Egypt, Hadi Khosrowshahi, denied that Al-Zawahiri was in Iran, adding that if Al-Zawahiri were arrested in Iran, he would be turned over to the Interim Government of Afghanistan or deported to Egypt. Khosrowshahi said that Al-Zawahiri would not be turned over to Washington.³²

President Khatami tacitly admitted that Al-Qa'idah members might be in Iran. In an interview published by the Saudi daily, *Al-Watan*, on 26 February 2002, Khatami said: "One could say that these elements do exist. But as far as I know, they do not include any officials or key figures. And if they existed, we would deal with them."³³

In August, Khatami visited Afghanistan. During his visit, Khatami said that Iran would not provide shelter to Al-Qa'idah, but he also sharply criticized US policy towards Iran and "the international community".³⁴ Former and current Afghan officials described Khatami's visit as being of historic importance.³⁵ In an interview with Iranian radio on 12 August, the head of the Transitional State of Afghanistan, Hamed Karzai, said that Khatami's visit was "a turning-point" and praised Iran for its assistance to Afghanistan.³⁶

Karzai went so far as to argue that Al-Qa'idah's presence in Iran did not mean official support for the group, saying: "the possible escape of Al-Qa'idah forces to neighbouring countries does not mean these countries support the Al-Qa'idah network."³⁷ In mid August, Saudi Foreign Minister Sa'ud al-Faysal declared that Iran had turned over 16 Al-Qa'idah members to the kingdom.³⁸ However, Faysal emphasized that the Al-Qa'idah suspects would not be extradited to the US even if Washington submitted an official request to Saudi authorities. However, he said that Washington might be informed of the results of the interrogations.³⁹ An Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman stated that Iran had extradited 150 Arab-Afghans to their countries. However, he noted that it was not clear whether they were members of Al-Qa'idah, the Taleban or "ordinary citizens".⁴⁰ Iran's expulsion of Al-Qa'idah members was cited as evidence of Iran's cooperation with the anti-terrorism campaign and even as a sign of rapprochement between the US and Iran.⁴¹ However, during the same period, a key reformist web site, Emrooz, reported that Iran had, in fact expelled 400 Al-Qa'idah members, some of whom were British, French and Dutch nationals. Nevertheless, even some reformist figures criticized the decision to hand over Al-Qa'idah suspects on tactical grounds, arguing that

Main Currents in Iranian Strategy Since 9/11

timing was everything. They also called into question the role of the US as the leader of the war against terrorism.⁴²

Al-Qa'idah's possible involvement in the assassination attempt on Hamed Karzai only made the situation more volatile. Moreover, US press reports continued to link Iran to Al-Qa'idah.⁴³ Iranian radical figures continued to argue that Bin-Ladin and Al-Qa'idah were not capable of carrying out the attacks on 11 September. In September, Iranian state radio and television, which is dominated by the conservatives, invited French writer Thierry Meyssan to visit Iran. Meyssan had already published a book arguing that the attacks on New York and Washington were plots hatched by the US military. Meyssan was interviewed by Khamene'i's representative in the Kayhan Institute, Hoseyn Shari'atmadari, who argued that Meyssan had contributed to America's "demise". Iranian TV also showed an interview with Meyssan on 9 September 2002.

The most serious allegations about Iran's relationship with Al-Qa'idah have been made by a Hamid Reza Zakeri, who has said that he was an employee of the Iranian Intelligence Ministry. Zakeri also testified at the trial of a Moroccan, Abd al-Ghani Mzoudi, who was on trial in Germany as a 9/11 co-conspirator. According to Zakeri, one of the 9/11 hijackers Ziad Jarrah had met Zakeri's bosses at the Intelligence Ministry prior to 11 September. He also alleged that he had seen Mzoudi at a training camp with Imad Mughniyah and one of Al-Qa'idah's senior operatives Saif al-Adel.⁴⁴ Zakeri also alleged that he had been present at meetings between Iranian officials and Al-Qa'idah operatives prior to 9/11, and that Bin-Ladin's son Sa'ad and Ayman al-Zawahiri had visited Iran prior to 9/11 to discuss "a major attack" against the US with Iranian intelligence officers. Zakeri claimed that he had tipped off the CIA when he met a CIA officer at the US embassy in Azerbaijan. The CIA acknowledged the meeting, but it said that "Zakeri had provided no credible evidence of a terrorist plot against the United States".⁴⁵

Zakeri's allegations regarding the training of Al-Qa'idah operatives by the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps have not been verified. US officials reportedly believed that Bin-Ladin's son Sa'ad was in Iran. However, repeated requests for Sa'ad's extradition for trial had gone unanswered.⁴⁶

Both Rafsanjani and Khamene'i seem to have embraced the logic of the asymmetric strategy. Indeed, when news of the extradition of Al-Qa'idah members to Saudi Arabia was first reported, Hoseyn Shari'atmadari, Khamene'i representative at Kayhan Institute and the managing-editor of the radical daily, Kayhan, which has close ties with the Intelligence Ministry, contended that such reports were incorrect. He continued to argue that the Taleban "were a pretext for America to attack Afghanistan".⁴⁷ On 14 August, Khamene'i made a particularly vitriolic speech and likened President Bush to Adolf Hitler. He declared: "Arrogance of power has brought the bullying apparatus of the West to disgrace, and the president of a country which claims to be a champion of human rights and freedom speaks to the people of the world in the language of Hitler."⁴⁸

Subsequently, the commander of the army, Maj-Gen Mohammad Salimi, declared that Iran was working on a plan to "confront US threats". He said that ground, air and naval forces were being moved around in exercises and war games had been prepared for that purpose. However, he also downplayed the significance of the US threat, arguing that "the American threat is not a new thing" and that the army was merely "acting according to its duties".⁴⁹ However, in August 2002, Iranian political figures, be they reformist or conservative, were concerned about an American or

Israeli attack on the Bushehr nuclear power station. In fact, according to the reformist web site, Emrooz, which was close to Khatami's adviser Sa'id Hajjarian, some Iranian politicians had begun to "start a theoretical debate about the establishment of relations with America" to prevent an attack on the Bushehr nuclear reactor.⁵⁰ A prominent conservative commentator, Amir Mohebbian, criticized those political figures who were not taking seriously the possibility of an attack on the Bushehr power station. However, he also said that holding talks with the US with a view to preventing an attack would be "an egregious strategic error" because it would endanger the entire state apparatus.⁵¹ However, sources close to President Khatami told Al-Sharq al-Awsat that Iran had opened a consultation office in Dubai under Khamene'i's adviser on international adviser, former Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati. The office was reportedly opened in order to establish a channel of communication between Khamene'i and the Bush administration. Iranian officials had denied that such an office had been opened.⁵²

By September 2002 Khamene'i and Rafsanjani seemed to have concluded that Iran could still derive some benefit from the pursuit of the asymmetric option. In a speech at the meeting of the Assembly of Experts, Iran's highest leadership body, on 8 September, which was broadcast by Iranian TV on 14 September, Rafsanjani almost endorsed Meyssan's allegations, describing him as a famous French writer with a good reputation. Rafsanjani argued that although he was not sure about 11 September attacks, he did not exclude the possibility that it was a "plot" hatched by US officials who sought to stage "a coup d'état".⁵³

Rafsanjani said that Al-Qa'idah and the Taleban were created by the US and Saudi Arabia to contain the influence of Iran's Islamic revolution; that Al-Qa'idah was a genuinely anti-imperialist group and that the US had lost control over it. Rafsanjani denied that Iran had been involved in shipping Al-Qa'idah gold out of Afghanistan. However, he argued that the most serious strategic challenge facing the US was the Sunni version of militant Islam which had been imbued with Iranian revolutionary ideas. Referring to a statement issued by the pro-Al-Qa'idah Al-Muhajirun group based in Britain, Rafsanjani said that the statement showed that militant Islam was present in the very heart of Western civilization.⁵⁴

This was the furthest any Iranian official had gone to publicly express support for Al-Qa'idah. As the political pressure on the Iranian nuclear programme increased in the aftermath of the Iraq war, Rafsanjani tended to support the strategy of selective bandwagoning with the US to reduce the pressure on Iran. Nevertheless, the deterioration of the situation in Iraq and the election of a government supported by the Shi'i majority have emboldened officials, such as Defence Minister Ali Shamkhani, who seem to favour the weaponization option. For example, Shamkhani has said that Iran's influence stretches from Jerusalem to Kandahar and that the job of the Defence Ministry is to prepare for a nuclear defence.⁵⁵ "If anyone attacks our nuclear as well as non-nuclear sites without any justification, we will make him retreat in a second".⁵⁶

Pursuit of Selective Bandwagoning Strategy After 9/11

US reaction to 9/11 confronted Iranian decision-makers with a dilemma. They sought to improve Iran's negotiating position and US military build-up in Iran's neighbourhood made it difficult for Iran to pursue either the strategy of detente or asymmetric attack with consistency. In fact, as president Khatami put it, the most serious setback for the strategy of detente was that 9/11 occurred in the year of dialogue of civilizations.⁵⁷

Main Currents in Iranian Strategy Since 9/11

There has been a powerful current of opinion in Iran, represented by President Khatami's supporters, as well as by the chairman of the Expediency Council Hashemi-Rafsanjani and the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, Hasan Rowhani, which favoured cooperation with the US on Iraq and Afghanistan as a means of improving bilateral relations and reducing the diplomatic pressure on the Iranian nuclear programme.

The origins of Iran's policy of selective bandwagoning with the US can be traced to the Afghan war when Iran tacitly cooperated with the US to oust the Taleban. However, contradictory dynamics generated by policy and political rivalries influenced Iranian regional strategy. The Karim A affair and President Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address, in which Iran was referred to as a member of "the axis of evil" were major setbacks for Iran's asymmetric strategy. The seizure of the ship Karim A, which was delivering fifty tonnes of weapons to the Palestinian National Authority, showed that there was a powerful current of opinion in Iran, associated primarily with the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, which was determined to derail the Arab-Israeli peace process. Moreover, the involvement of Lebanese Hizballah in the affair showed that the group was trying to influence the Palestinian arena.⁵⁸

The Karim A affair, however, was also reflective of the influence of advocates of asymmetrical strategy. It is highly unlikely that the Guards would be able to exercise such influence and undermine the government's policy of bargaining with the US without Khamene'i's support. Indeed, during this period, the deputy C-in-C of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, Mohammad Baqer Zolqadr, hinted that Iran might set fire to the oil wells of neighbouring countries to defend itself. Zolqadr's remarks caused a major controversy in the country and Defence Minister Ali Shamkhani had to issue a statement to clarify Zolqadr's remarks. Moreover, 20 MPs raised serious questions about the implications of Zolqadr's comments for Iranian regional strategy.⁵⁹

After the 2002 State of the Union Address, Iranian reformists sharply criticized President Bush for placing Iran in the same category as Iraq.⁶⁰ The criticism was particularly significant because according to the chairman of the National Security and Foreign Affairs Committee of the Majlis, Mohsen Mirdamadi, the US and Iran had been holding secret talks. Mirdamadi did not oppose talks with US officials.

Mirdamadi's transformation from an anti-American activist and hostage-taker to a "reformist" politician was one of the best examples of the kaleidoscopic nurture of Iranian factional politics.⁶¹ In 1979, Mirdamadi was a member of the Students Following the Line of the Imam who took US diplomats and embassy officials hostage. In 2002, Mirdamadi emerged as one of the main opponents of the Intelligence Ministry, the Judiciary and Ayatollah Khamene'i.

Indeed, in April 2002, Mirdamadi briefed reporters on the issue of holding talks with the US. Mirdamadi drew a sharp distinction between government to government talks and talks between members of the two countries' legislative branches, declaring that he and the committee he chaired believed that "there is no obstacle to conducting negotiations between Iranian MPs and US congressmen who are not hostile toward the Islamic Republic. This would also help remove existing tensions between the two governments".⁶²

In May 2002, Mirdamadi claimed that Iran had held secret talks with the US. The media reported that talks had taken place in Cyprus or Turkey since November 2001. The Foreign Ministry rejected Mirdamadi's allegations and the cabinet

declared that the Foreign Ministry was responsible for holding talks with other countries. The government asked the Intelligence Ministry to investigate Mirdamadi's allegations.⁶³

Despite the fact that the Foreign Ministry rejected Mirdamadi's allegations, Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi declared that "there was no reason his country could not have good relations with the United States, as long as they were based on mutual respect". However, Kharrazi told reporters that "he had no knowledge of secret talks" between the US and Iran.⁶⁴ In a speech at New School University in New York City, Kharrazi said that Iran would only participate in talks if the US relaxed its sanctions on Iran, released Iranian assets and "retracted" its description of Iran as a member of the "axis of evil".⁶⁵

The evidence suggests that on the issue of talks with the US, the Intelligence Ministry sought to undermine the role of the Foreign Ministry. As we saw earlier, the cabinet had declared that the Foreign Ministry was responsible for holding talks with the US. Iranian Intelligence Minister Ali Yunesi claimed that his ministry was responsible for such talks. Yunesi vehemently denied that any talks had taken place; he had investigated the reports and concluded that no talks had taken place. More importantly, Yunesi declared that his ministry was "responsible for such talks, if any at all".⁶⁶

Yunesi said that he had asked Mirdamadi to present his evidence, adding that Mirdamadi had "failed to do so".⁶⁷ Finally, Khamene'i intervened to end the debate. He ruled out talks with the US and lambasted those who favoured such talks. Khamene'i declared that the "enemy" had been arrogant and insulted the Iranian nation. Referring to the reformists, he said that they were quite prepared to see Iran humiliated if necessary to improve relations with the US. He said: "Should we go and beg? This is an insult to the zeal and dignity of the Iranian people. This is a sign of a lack of zeal. This is not the way politicians should behave."⁶⁸

Khamene'i declared that holding talks with the US would be tantamount to committing "treason". His speech was a good summary of Iran's self-help strategy which constituted the core of Iran's pursuit of asymmetric tactics against the US. However, there was strong opposition to repression at home and use of asymmetric tactics abroad, particularly in the sixth Majlis. As early as January 2002, Mohsen Mirdamadi had warned that those who were involved in the serial murders of dissidents in 1998 had resumed their activities. Mirdamadi declared that the main reason for the occurrence of the serial murders was "the lack of supervision and control over the Intelligence Ministry". He said that in the past, the Intelligence Ministry had prevented the Majlis from playing any kind of supervisory role regarding the activities of the Intelligence Ministry.⁶⁹

Mirdamadi complained that since the advent of the sixth Majlis, the Judiciary had refused to allow the Majlis to supervise its activities.⁷⁰ For example, in March 2002, former deputy Interior Minister Mostafa Tajzadeh, a *bête noire* of the hardliners, wrote in the daily *Nowruz*, whose managing-editor was Mohsen Mirdamadi, that some people suspected "the conservatives" of seeking to provoke the US and Israel. He wrote that "if the Iranian nation feels that an individual, a group, or a faction is trying to provoke the American and Israeli militarists and to cause friction in the Islamic Republic of Iran's relations with its neighbours, and if they achieve their objectives in the event of the outbreak of war, not only will they never forgive those responsible, but they will also make them feel very sorry indeed."⁷¹

Nowruz was shut down in 2002. Moreover, increasing dissidence in the country led the Defence Minister Ali Shamkhani to threaten newspapers and call on them to refrain from publishing “provocative” reports.⁷² Moreover, the pressure on Khatami increased to such a degree that on 28 August 2002, he said that he would introduce a bill aimed at increasing his powers.⁷³ Khatami’s request was finally rejected in March 2004 and he announced that he would withdraw the bills.⁷⁴

Iraq & the Incoherence of Iranian Strategy

The clearest indication of the disagreement within the Iranian state regarding the choice of strategy was Iran’s policy of “active neutrality” towards Iraq.⁷⁵ As we saw earlier, there were serious disagreements among Iranian leaders over the choice of strategy in the summer of 2002. Iraq was an important issue in the strategic debate. The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps seems to have played a leading role in the dialogue with Saddam Hussein. Reformist web sites Emrooz and Didar reported that Saddam Hussein’s son, Qusay, had met the deputy C-in-C of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Mohammad Baqer Zolqadr. According to the reports, Qusay asked for the return of Iraqi aircraft which had flown to Iran during the 1991 war and he also requested to purchase Shahab-3 missile from Iran. Zolqadr had reportedly responded that “the Iraqi aircraft could not be used and that their return to Iran would not serve any useful purpose”. On the issue of Shahab-3, Zolqadr reportedly said: “The Islamic Republic of Iran will not sell Iraq any weapons under any circumstances.”⁷⁶

However, the contacts with Iraq continued even though Iran was pursuing regional détente. Thus while Iran hosted Iraqi Foreign Minister Naji Sabri, it also hosted the Kuwaiti defence minister. Indeed some analysts argued: “If Iran can broker a constructive meeting” between the Iraqi foreign minister and the Kuwaiti defence minister or hold just a meeting, “it will be a spanner in the works for Washington”.⁷⁷ However, Iranian officials thought about providing the transcript of their conversation with Naji Sabri to US officials in order to reassure the US that Iran would not side with Iraq.⁷⁸ Sabri’s visit to Iran was a failure and Foreign Minister Kharrazi was criticized for meeting Sabri in New York even before the latter’s visit to Iran.⁷⁹

The outbreak of war confirmed the failure of Iranian diplomacy. Iranian officials later claimed that they welcomed the removal of Saddam Husayn. However, they never wanted a war because they feared the establishment of a pro-US government in Iraq. They also feared that Husayn’s removal might lead to the disintegration of the country. The Kurdish issue was of particular importance to Iran given its own large Kurdish population.

Advocates of asymmetric strategies led by Khamene’i believed that the US would be bogged down in Iraq and that even if it managed to install a pro-US regime, US strategy would ultimately fail. On the night the Iraq war broke out, Khamene’i predicted that the US would be defeated in Iraq. He likened the situation in Iraq to those in Vietnam and Chile, arguing that “the dictators” supported by the US were no longer in power.⁸⁰ Rafsanjani was so optimistic about the course of the war that a few days before Saddam Husayn’s statue was taken down, he predicted that the US strategy would be defeated in Iraq. He declared that no-one feared the US any longer.⁸¹ Rafsanjani also said that Iran preferred Saddam Husayn to the US. His comments were given prominence by Iran’s official news agency, IRNA. Rafsanjani

declared: "We never want the US to become victorious over Iraq, because the US is more dangerous to us than Iraq, as is a viper to a scorpion and a pit to a hole".⁸²

Rafsanjani also described the UK and the US as "savage wolves" and declared that Iran had the most powerful armed forces in the region.⁸³ As late as September 2003, Rafsanjani was arguing that US regional strategy was aimed at encircling Iran. Rafsanjani contended that it was Iran which had, in fact, encircled the US. He declared: "God has pushed the Americans into a quagmire in Iraq. If they stay, they will be victims every day, and if they leave, it will be a loss of honour." Rafsanjani predicted that Iraq would be even worse than Vietnam, arguing: "Very soon, the Americans will learn a lesson for this historical error that they will never forget. It will be a curse worse than Vietnam."⁸⁴ Moreover, the Iranian state media, which are under Khamene'i's influence, repeatedly asserted in their commentaries that US forces were being defeated. After Iraq's defeat the state media were sharply criticized for over-optimistic assessments of the war.

In fact, Rafsanjani's behaviour provides a good case study of the dilemmas facing advocates of selective bandwagoning with the US. Despite the fact that he sharply criticized US and British policy towards Iraq and the region, Rafsanjani also called for a referendum on Iran's relations with the US. However, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi said that Rafsanjani's remarks had been misinterpreted and that the interview had been conducted prior to the Iraq war.⁸⁵

In the aftermath of the Iraq war, there were reports of Iranian support for Muqtada al-Sadr and the head of the new Iraqi security service even accused Iran of supporting Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.⁸⁶ However, more recently, prominent Iranian officials and commentators across the political spectrum have started supporting the election process in Iraq. Iran also made an effort to drive a wedge among Sunni groups, in the hopes of persuading some Sunnis to participate in the elections.⁸⁷

From mid 2003 onwards, the predominant trends in Iranian strategy were tacit selective bandwagoning with the US on Iraq and Afghanistan and negotiations with the EU to stave off US pressure on Iran's nuclear programme. After negotiations with the EU got underway, however, advocates of selective bandwagoning sought to involve the US in the talks to protect Iran's nuclear enrichment programme. The reason that officials such as Khatami, Rowhani and Rafsanjani have embraced the strategy of selective bandwagoning is their fear of the Bush administration's decision to impose its "hegemony" on the Middle East under the pretext of fighting the war on terror.

For example, Rowhani told a gathering of Iranian ambassadors that "the Christian-Zionist extremists in the US administration" were causing global instability because they believed in "resorting to military power" to further US interests.⁸⁸ In the immediate aftermath of the Iraq war, some Iranian officials were hopeful that the Iraqi "resistance" would defeat US forces.⁸⁹

Indeed, deputy Iranian Defence Minister Hoseyn Ala'i argued that 1,000 fatalities in Iraq would compel the US and UK to change their strategy.⁹⁰ The pro-Khatami Iranian Labour News Agency summed up the strategic choices being debated among Iranian leaders in the spring of 2003 as follows: "Political groups in our country have proposed four different policies, namely, punishment, issuing a warning to the source of the threat, boosting public and international confidence and reaching a compromise solution."

Main Currents in Iranian Strategy Since 9/11

When asked about these policy options, Ala'i said: "A combination of various shades of this spectrum can help us." He argued that Iran should not allow a government which is not based on "the rule of the people" to be imposed on Iran by the US; as long as the US did not accept relations on the basis of "equality", Iran would not compromise with them. He argued that Iran had cooperated with the US on Afghanistan, but all it got was the "axis of evil" speech.⁹¹

Asked about whether US presence in Afghanistan was aimed at "controlling the behaviour" of other great powers such as Russia and China, Ala'i said that the US could not devise a long-term solution to such problems, adding that one could "see that the chasm between Russia and Europe and America is widening". He said that US policy towards Iraq would define the nature of great power relations, adding: "It seems that as a result of the tardiness of American success in Iraq, there will be greater divergence."⁹²

Unlike Ala'i, the majority of reformists believed that only political reforms would prevent a US attack on Iran. However, harsh repression of the reform movement led many to conclude that they had to make a symbolic protest to make their voices heard. Indeed, as many as 50 reformist Majlis deputies were contemplating mass resignation.⁹³ Elaheh Kula'i, the rapporteur of the National Security and Foreign Affairs Committee of the Majlis, argued that the conservatives sought to increase security measures in the domestic arena and enhance Iran's military capability to respond to the US threat to Iran. However, she argued that there was no evidence that enhancing the country's military capability would necessarily be a suitable strategy for deterring the US.⁹⁴

Despite the major problems in US-Iranian relations, Iran did have contacts with the US. Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi briefed 16 Iranian MPs on the messages exchanged between the US and Iran. According to Elaheh Kula'i, Kharrazi had said that the two countries had been communicating with one another on Iraq, Afghanistan, Al-Qa'idah and Mojahedin-e Khalq issues. She said that according to Kharrazi: "The messages exchanged" between the US and Iran had been "positive", and contributed to eliminating scepticism.⁹⁵

However, many MPs were highly critical of Foreign Minister Kharrazi and his management of the foreign policy apparatus. Indeed, prior to the Iraqi crisis some MPs were discuss a motion to impeach the foreign minister.⁹⁶ In May 2003, 127 Iranian MPs signed a letter addressed to Ayatollah Khamene'i arguing that Iran had no choice but to continue the reform programme because it was literally encircled by the US, which was determined to change the geopolitics of the region. In a thinly veiled reference to Ayatollah Khomeyni's decision to agree to peace with Iraq in 1988, they called upon Khamene'i to drink from "the poisoned chalice" and take action to defend the reform programme. They argued: "Perhaps throughout the tumultuous history of modern Iran, one cannot find a period that is as sensitive as the current one. Perhaps one can only compare the current situation with the occupation of the country during World War II or the period prior to the acceptance of [UN] Resolution 598 [which ended the Iran-Iraq war]."⁹⁷

The deputies argued that Khatami's election had ended Iran's isolation in the international arena and parried military threats to the country. The MPs said that most people were "disgruntled and hopeless", adding: "The majority of elites are either silent or have chosen to emigrate. There is massive capital flight and foreign forces have totally encircled the country".⁹⁸ They argued that Iran had two choices, dictatorship or a "democracy" based on constitutional principles. They argued that

dictatorship would ultimately lead to Iran's "degeneration" and "disintegration". They contended that political reforms rather than military capability would ensure the security of the state.⁹⁹

Khamene'i did not agree with the MPs, declaring that normalization of relations with the US would not solve any of Iran's problems. Moreover, Khamene'i declared that what was important to the US was not WMD or human rights or the establishment of a democratic government: what the US wanted was Iran's submission to the will of the US.¹⁰⁰ Subsequently the MPs who wrote the open letter to Khamene'i were harassed by hard-line vigilante groups.¹⁰¹

Harsh repression of the reform movement led some reformists, such as former deputy Interior Minister for Political Affairs Mostafa Tajzadeh to argue: A referendum is the only way to overcome the current impasse."¹⁰² The daily *Jomhuri-ye Eslami*, which usually reflects Khamene'i's point of view, argued that a number of US senators had endorsed the idea of holding a referendum in Iran and that those who expressed such views were furthering US interests.¹⁰³

However, the domestic political situation continued to deteriorate in the summer of 2003. A group of Majlis deputies staged a sit-in in support of students who had been arrested for being involved in generating unrest in the country. The MPs protested that no information had been provided to them on the number of people arrested. Moreover, the authorities would not permit MPs to visit the arrested students.¹⁰⁴

However, the increasing diplomatic pressure on Iran regarding its nuclear programme and the allies' continuing presence in Iraq seem to have led Khamene'i to agree to the pursuit of the policy of selective bandwagoning to reduce US and Israeli pressure on Iran. The clearest indication of the change in Iran's policy towards Al-Qa'idah was the visit to Saudi Arabia by the head of the Judiciary Ayatollah Mahmud Hashemi-Shahrudi, who is Khamene'i's protégé.¹⁰⁵ Hashemi-Shahrudi and Saudi officials discussed the issue of the extradition of Al-Qa'idah members from Iran to Saudi Arabia.¹⁰⁶ At a meeting with Crown Prince Abdullah, Hashemi-Shahrudi called for Iranian-Saudi cooperation against those who sought to "dishonour ... Islam as taught by Prophet Muhammad". Hashemi-Shahrudi also called for a dialogue between Iranian and Saudi clerics "as a way of confronting those who incite violence and terrorism," adding that the two sides had to cooperate to "neutralize the plots" hatched by the "enemies of Islam".¹⁰⁷

However, the policy debate regarding Iran's relations with Al-Qa'idah continued. While Hashemi-Shahrudi was in Saudi Arabia, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi stated that Hashemi-Shahrudi had not discussed the issue of Al-Qa'idah with Saudi officials.¹⁰⁸ President Khatami also repeatedly sought to dissociate Iran from Al-Qa'idah. In September 2003, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* reported that a source close to the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps intelligence had said that Khatami had been behind the deportation of senior Al-Qa'idah members from Iran in order "to improve Iran's image".¹⁰⁹

According to a reformist Iranian Majlis deputy who spoke to *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, the Intelligence Ministry had reported to President Khatami that the Quds Force had fabricated letters threatening the Iranian leadership in an effort to prevent the expulsion of Al-Qa'idah members. The letters were purportedly signed by Ayman al-Zawahiri.¹¹⁰ Indeed, Khatami has said a number of times that Iranian forces had sustained casualties in clashes with Al-Qa'idah.¹¹¹

However, the tug-of-war over policy towards Al-Qa'idah continued in Iran. A man with links to the Iranian Intelligence Ministry and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps told the Financial Times in December 2003 that he had seen Bin-Ladin at Revolution Guards Corps guest house on 23 October.¹¹² Despite his criticism of Al-Qa'idah, since 9/11 Khatami has repeatedly criticized President Bush's policies just as harshly.¹¹³ For example, speaking at a news conference with former Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar, Khatami said that Bin-Ladin had said that whoever was not with him was "an apostate". Khatami contended that the Bush administration had made a similar point when it declared that whoever was not with the US was against it. He said that the US and Iran had exchanged a number of messages, but that the US had accused Iran of supporting the very forces that had "hurt" Iran. He said that Al-Qa'idah had hurt Iran.¹¹⁴ Khatami also told a gathering of Iranian diplomats that Bin-Ladin had been strengthened by the policies of US "neo-conservatives".¹¹⁵

By the summer of 2003, Iranian officials were trying to take credit for fighting and arresting Al-Qa'idah. For example, the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Hasan Rowhani declared: "Iran has foiled a number of attacks which Al-Qa'idah had been planning to carry out inside the Islamic Republic".¹¹⁶ Moreover, Iranian reports indicated that Iran had arrested and deported approximately 500 Al-Qa'idah members who had crossed its borders with Afghanistan and Pakistan.¹¹⁷

Perhaps the greatest change in Iranian strategy after 9/11 was the resurfacing of the concept of the security dilemma in Iranian strategy. The pursuit of the asymmetric strategy coupled with the nuclear programme actually undermined the security of the regime because of the US's strong opposition to Iranian regional strategy. However, Iran's pursuit of selective bandwagoning after mid-2003 was closely intertwined with the pursuit of its nuclear programme.

However, after 9/11 there was a difference of opinion between Iranian leaders regarding the policy of balancing the US. Ayatollah Khamene'i sharply criticized the US for declaring war on terrorism, arguing that US policy was based on "double standards". Khamene'i seemed to indicate that Iran would not cooperate with the US under any circumstances.¹¹⁸ Former president and the chairman of the Expediency Council Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, however, argued that Iran would consider cooperation with the US if the latter refrained from pursuing a "unilateralist" policy.¹¹⁹

After 9/11 this policy continued in fits and starts in the sense that Iran cooperated with the US in Afghanistan and to some extent even in Iraq. In fact, this tendency reached its apogee just prior to the elections in Iraq when Iranian decision-makers repeatedly expressed support for the Iraqi electoral process.¹²⁰ However, the policy of detente seems to be tactical in nature in that it was implemented within the framework of intense Iranian efforts to gain access to the nuclear fuel cycle.

Nuclear Programme & Asymmetric Strategy

After September 11, some Iranian leaders, most notably Hashemi-Rafsanjani who was an advocate of selective bandwagoning, indicated that possession of nuclear weapons would substantially enhance the status and bargaining power of Muslim countries. According to Rafsanjani: "If one day, the Islamic world is also equipped with weapons like those that Israel possesses now, then the imperialists' strategy will reach a standstill because the use of even one nuclear bomb inside Israel will

destroy everything. However, it will only harm the Islamic world. It is not irrational to contemplate such an eventuality.”¹²¹

Other Iranian leaders claimed that they only sought peaceful nuclear technology, contending that the country's oil resources were finite and that Iran needed nuclear power to be a serious country.¹²² Towards the end of 2002, the situation became more serious as media reports indicated that US spy satellites had detected two unknown nuclear facilities under construction in Iran. Officials associated with Khamene'i and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) believed that the US was determined to expand its presence in the region and that, therefore, some sort of asymmetrical response was necessary to counterbalance the US. IRGC commanders Yahya Rahim-Safavi and Mohammad Baqer Zolqadr repeatedly emphasized the threat posed by the US and stressed that Iran had the capability to respond or defend itself.

Hasan Abbasi & The Asymmetric Strategy

After 9/11 a Revolution Guards Commander, Hasan Abbasi, emerged as the main spokesman for the strategy of asymmetric warfare. Addressing a conference on Iraq, Abbasi declared: “Yes, colonialism is very patient indeed. However, the question is what strategy should we adopt? I am not saying that our strategy is that we should occupy the British embassy [in Tehran]. All the documents have already been taken away from the embassy. We should occupy Britain itself.”¹²³ Abbasi declared: “Bush and his deputies last year said that they were going to burn the roots of the Iranian nation. What was the position of Khatami's theory of dialogue between civilizations on such a statement? However, I declare that I am going to post some telling [as published] strategies on web sites showing ways of burning the roots of the Anglo-Saxons. I have made a pledge to the blood of the martyrs to do this.”¹²⁴

Abbasi declared:

“Some 29 weak points of America and the West which can be attacked have been identified ... Any action to instil fear and terror in blasphemers is a sacred act and a source of pride.” Abbasi also advocated nuclear terrorism, declaring: “In our planning, we are targeting some 6,000 of America's nuclear warheads, and we aim to blow these up on American territory. At the same time, we have identified a number of weak points and have informed guerrilla organizations about these. And we intend to act through this channel [the guerrilla organizations]. ... We have create a department for the British too and the objective of bringing about their disintegration is also on our operational agenda. We are even prepared to work with the Mexicans and the Argentines and basically any country which has a problem with America.”¹²⁵

Abbasi's influence has waned since late 2004. He was reportedly investigated by the Judicial Organization of the Armed Forces.¹²⁶ However, the vehement opposition of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Khamene'i and his coterie of advisers to the improvement of relations with the US, as well as the deteriorating situation in Iraq, have made it difficult for advocates of improving relations with Washington to drastically change Iranian policy.

Nuclear Policy & State Strategies

The fact that so many proponents of the asymmetric strategy occupied key positions in the Iranian leadership and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps made it difficult for advocates of the bomb in the basement strategy to gain the upper hand in

Main Currents in Iranian Strategy Since 9/11

Iranian policy debates. The sixth Majlis sought to make it compulsory for the government to sign the Additional Protocol to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. This policy was essentially aimed at preventing US military action against Iran.

However, Iranian officials, be they reformist, radical or conservative, have repeatedly declared that they will not agree to "the cessation" of enrichment.¹²⁷ Speaking at a military parade on the anniversary of the Iran-Iraq war on 21 September 2004, President Mohammad Khatami declared that nuclear weapons posed a threat to the entire world. However, he also said that Iran would continue its nuclear programme "although it may lead to cessation of international supervision and cooperation".¹²⁸

The seventh Majlis, however, was much more intransigent than the sixth Majlis on the nuclear issue. Some MPs in the seventh Majlis have said that Iran has the right to withdraw from the NPT if the Iranian nuclear case is not closed.¹²⁹ Moreover, former Iranian foreign minister and current international adviser to Khamene'i, Ali Akbar Velayati, has said that Iran has "the capability to withdraw from the NPT".¹³⁰ In fact, the current parliament has repeatedly taken a hard-line position on the nuclear issue, indicating that it is highly unlikely agree to "the cessation" of Iranian enrichment activities. More recently, Iran's chief negotiator, Hasan Rowhani, said that Iran would resume its enrichment programme in the near future. He has also said that Iran was involved in the production of yellowcake.¹³¹

Iranian officials, particularly Khamene'i, Defence Minister Ali Shamkhani and the IRGC seem to think that the US has no choice but to acquiesce in the emergence of a nuclear Iran.¹³² Both strategies, bomb in the basement and weaponization, are primarily aimed at the US because Iranian decision-makers view the US as the main threat to the Iranian regime. For advocates of the bomb in the basement strategy, Iranian access to nuclear technology would enable the country to negotiate with the US from a position of strength. This position has been implicitly expressed by Hasan Rowhani and Iranian nuclear negotiators, who have indicated that they are willing to talk to the US.

There have been reports on the possibility of a US or Israeli "surgical strike" on Iranian nuclear installations or a commando attack. Recently American investigative journalist Seymour Hersh wrote an article arguing that the Bush administration was indeed contemplating such a possibility.¹³³ Iranian officials were scathing about the Hersh article and Intelligence Minister Ali Yunesi said that it was part of a psychological warfare campaign against Iran.¹³⁴

However, despite Yunesi's comments, the Intelligence Ministry set up a unit recruited from 5,000-6,000 elite staff members of the Intelligence Ministry to protect Iran's nuclear installations.¹³⁵ Iranian officials seem to believe that because the IAEA has asserted that it cannot certify that Iran has a nuclear weapons programme the US will find it difficult to justify such a strike. Khamene'i has told the IRGC that Iran is so strong that it will be able to deter an attack. However, he has also warned them that they must not be lulled into a false sense of security.¹³⁶

Even some Israeli strategists, such as Ephraim Kam, are sceptical about the chances of success of a limited strike on Iranian installations. According to Kam, there will be a vast difference between an Israeli strike on the Iranian installations and the one on Iraq's Osirak reactor in 1981. Firstly, the Iranian installations are dispersed all over the country and there may well be clandestine installations which Israel is not aware of. Kam has also contended that given the strained ties between

Israel and its Arab neighbours, a strike on Iranian nuclear installations will destroy what remains of Israel's ties with the Arab world. Kam has argued that even though many Arab countries will derive some benefit from an Israeli attack on the Iranian nuclear programme, they will diplomatically oppose Israel.¹³⁷

Regional Dimension of Iranian Strategy

Iran's bomb in the basement strategy has already had a negative impact on the geopolitics of the region. In fact, there have been reports that Saudi Arabia has already started developing a nuclear programme.¹³⁸ Given the fragility of the Saudi regime and the strong Al-Qa'idah opposition to the House of Saud, Iranian strategists will have to start thinking seriously about the implications of a nuclear Saudi Arabia ruled by Al-Qa'idah. The prospects are too horrifying to contemplate, but given Al-Qa'idah's persistence in seeking a nuclear and WMD capability and the Saudi regime's inability to introduce meaningful reforms, this is, unfortunately, not a far-fetched scenario.

Such a regime may well come into conflict with its neighbours or contemplate aggression against Iran or Iraq. In the case of Iran, Al-Qa'idah leaders will not have forgotten that Iran first sheltered and then abandoned them.¹³⁹

Currently, what unites militant Islamist groups is their hatred of the US. However, one important caveat is in order. It is important to note that US support for Israel is not the only reason for the rise of anti-American Islamism in the Middle East. Despite its vehement opposition to US support for Israel, Al-Qa'idah is actually almost entirely concerned about overthrowing Saudi and Egyptian regimes. Al-Qa'idah is an association of various Islamist groups none of which is really engaged in a war with Israel. US association with Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Pakistan and US military intervention in Iraq have enabled Al-Qa'idah to recruit terrorists for its cause, namely, the creation of an Islamic Caliphate.

Thus the Middle East peace process will, in itself, not reduce support for Al-Qa'idah. There is plenty of evidence which makes it abundantly clear that those who join groups such as Al-Qa'idah are determined to end US military presence in their countries and overthrow regimes which have been identified as US client states. Thus the key policy issue as far as Al-Qa'idah, or at least its Middle Eastern component, is concerned, is US military presence in the Persian Gulf and close US relations with Egypt, Jordan and other conservative Arab states. The Saudi regime has repeatedly demonstrated its inability and unwillingness to introduce reforms which reduce support for the Islamist opposition. Moreover, the situation is such that even reforms are likely to bring to power hard-line Islamist groups.

Reform or revolution are both likely to lead to the establishment of a more Islamist regime in Saudi Arabia in the medium term. Given the precarious situation in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Afghanistan, a balancing strategy towards the US must seek to grapple with the problem of the emergence of militant Wahhabi and Sunni Islam. This current has emerged as a result of the failure of Saudi, Egyptian and Pakistani regimes to introduce meaningful reforms which give new counter-elites a say in the political affairs of their country.

The problem in Pakistan is particularly acute given President Musharraf's tenuous power base and the country's nuclear capability. Iranian regional strategy may score a short-term pyrrhic victory in the event of Islamist takeovers or revolutions in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Pakistan. However, given the past record of hostility

between Shi'is and Sunnis in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan it is more than likely that the advent of al-Qa'idah-backed regimes will only lead to a deterioration of Iran's relations with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

Secondly, involvement or military intervention in Saudi Arabia will not be a feasible strategy. The only long-term and realistic way in which Iran could counter an Al-Qa'idah led regime in Saudi Arabia or other Persian Gulf sheikhdoms is to support Shi'is groups in those countries.

The strategy of promoting secessionism in Saudi Arabia will be problematic from the point of view of implementation and it is likely to backfire for several reasons. Firstly, any such strategy will have to be implemented as part of a coordinated effort with the US. Given the strained relations between the US and Iran and the likelihood of the escalation of the US-Iran dispute over the Iranian nuclear programme, it is unlikely that any Iranian leader would support such a policy. In order for such a policy to be successful, the US will have to accept Iran as a nuclear power and acquiesce in Iranian hegemonic aspirations in the region. It is highly unlikely that Iran will form such a de facto alliance with the US unless there is a major change of leadership.

Implications of Leadership Change for Balancing Strategy

As we saw earlier, Khamene'i has been an advocate of self-help and balancing strategies. However, not all of Khamene'i's opponents are pro-American or are likely to pursue a foreign policy which is radically different from that of Khamene'i. The available evidence does not suggest that any reformist successor to Khamene'i is likely to abandon Iran's nuclear programme. However, two kinds of attempts have been made to curtail the powers of the supreme leader. It is not clear from the available evidence whether those seeking to curtail Khamene'i's powers were trying to overthrow him or merely reduce him to a figurehead.

The first policy, which has merely targeted the supreme leader, has been aimed at reactivating an Assembly of Experts committee which is responsible for the oversight of institutions under the control of the supreme leader. These institutions could include a number of foundations, the state radio and television, as well as such nominally "independent" branches of the state as the Judiciary and ministries such as the Intelligence Ministry. The Intelligence Ministry is, of course, technically part of the cabinet. However, any such investigation will inevitably affect the Intelligence Ministry even if the investigators do not formally acknowledge this. Given the fact that the Assembly of Experts is responsible for appointing the supreme leader, the mere suggestion that it is contemplating the possibility of investigating such institutions raises the issue of Khamene'i's incompetence. The most prominent advocate of pursuing this course of action is Ayatollah Mohsen Musavi-Tabrizi who is a member of the Assembly of Experts.¹⁴⁰ Musavi-Tabrizi, however, has said that his intention is to ensure that the position of the leader as the centre of gravity of the system will be preserved.¹⁴¹ Thus the evidence suggests that Musavi-Tabrizi opposes Khamene'i' and his policies, rather than the guardianship of the supreme jurisconsult. He has stated: "We should know that our objective is not to govern and it is not right to do so. Those individuals whose only aim is to acquire good political posts are worshipping an idol. However, the government's job is to guide the people. A ruler must consider himself to be answerable to his people. Regardless of his position."¹⁴² He has even called for making public the proceedings of the Assembly of Experts, arguing: "Supervision is

the vital duty of the Assembly of Experts. If this is neglected or if less attention is paid to this matter, the jugular of the Assembly of Experts would, in fact, be severed and the institution would turn into something which is of little use.”¹⁴³

The second proposal to curtail the powers of the supreme leader has far-reaching implications for the future of Iran as a theocracy. It calls for a public referendum on the nature of the Iranian state.¹⁴⁴ Advocates of this course of action, who are all prominent reformists, have been frustrated by the Guardian Council’s decision to disqualify reformist candidates in various Iranian elections.

Advocates of this policy seem to believe that in a referendum, the vast majority of Iranians will vote for the abolition of the Guardian Council or even the guardianship of the supreme jurisconsult. Some of the most prominent members of Iran’s largest student organization, the Office for Fostering Unity, have called for a referendum. More importantly, some advocates of holding a referendum have also called on the US government to support them and freeze Iranian officials’ bank accounts. However, many reformists, including President Khatami’s own brother, have opposed the referendum proposal. Despite the fact that they have dismissed the idea as vague and unworkable, the fact remains that they are worried that the abolition of the current state structure will lead to their own political demise.

There have been intermittent efforts to unseat Khamene’i.¹⁴⁵ The chances that such efforts will be nipped in the bud are very high. Firstly, Khamene’i’s staunch supporters have already accused prominent reformists of being on the pay-roll of the US and Israel. Secondly, the discovery of such intervention will almost certainly enable radical opponents of the improvement of relations to start a new anti-American campaign, arrest reformists and increase their support for anti-American and anti-Israeli terrorist organizations in the Middle East.

Expatriate Iranian opposition groups are highly unlikely to be effective either in terms of overthrowing the Iranian regime or putting military or even diplomatic pressure on it. The broadcasts and publications of such groups indicate that they lack even basic knowledge of the internal Iranian situation. Recently, there have been calls for the resumption of support for the Mojahedin-e Khalq group. The Mojahedin-e Khalq or the National Council of Resistance has a long history of anti-Americanism and terrorism and is deeply unpopular in Iran. Given the cult-like nature of the group, it has little support in Iran. Moreover, the group is far too weak to pose a significant challenge to the Iranian regime either militarily or diplomatically. However, Iranian officials have made an issue of the Mojahedin-e Khalq’s presence in the US or Europe to parry criticisms of their own sponsorship of terrorism. The Mojahedin-e Khalq are far too weak to be traded for Al-Qa’idah figures which the Iranian regime has been harbouring, or for Hizballah or the Palestinian groups that the Iranian regime has been supporting.

It is highly unlikely that Iranian leaders will try to negotiate a grand bargain with the US. Firstly, the Iranian state apparatus is far too factionalized to be able to deliver. Secondly, even if one of the factions involved in the power struggle manages to eliminate all its rivals, it will probably try to drive a hard bargain, thereby making it difficult for the US to conclude an agreement rapidly. Thirdly, Iranian officials will seek to take advantage of the instability in Iraq to compel the US to make significant concessions in terms of its regional interests.

Conclusion

It is important to take account of rival policy currents in the formation of Iranian state strategy. The overall strategy has been formulated by Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i. Khamene'i has been concerned about both his status as the supreme jurisconsult as well as about Iran's regional position. The most important goal of Iranian grand strategy is to establish Iran as a regional power. The means employed include; acquisition of nuclear technology; improvement of Iran's relations with the EU, Russia and China, as well as with regional powers such as Saudi Arabia and conservative Arab states such as Egypt and Jordan, as a means of pressuring the US to agree to the gradual withdrawal of its military forces from the Persian Gulf.

Iran's policy of detente suffered a set-back as a result of the outbreak of the second intifadah and 9/11. Even after 9/11 Iran cooperated with the US in Afghanistan and to some extent in Iraq. Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i was ultimately responsible for defining the parameters of Iranian policies. However, it is important to note that the ultimate goal of the strategy of detente is to make it easier for Iran to acquire nuclear technology and to deal with the US from a position of strength. Thus cooperation with the US in Afghanistan was aimed at deterring the US from attacking Iran. However, while Iran was cooperating with the US in Afghanistan it was also facilitating the escape of Al-Qa'idah members and supplying weapons to the Palestinian Authority to destabilize the occupied territories. Thus as far as Iran's chief strategist Ayatollah Khamene'i was concerned, detente and asymmetric strategies were the two sides of the same coin.

ENDNOTES

¹ See Kenneth Pollack and Ray Takeyh, "Taking on Tehran", *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2005.

² For further details see Carol Saivetz, *Soviet Union and the Gulf in the 1980s* (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1989, paperback edition).

³ See "Khamene'i says 'enemy' trying to repeat Soviet-style plot in Iran", Iranian TV, 14 July 2000, BBC Monitoring.

⁴ For the application of this concept to great powers see Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Cornell Studies in Security Affairs), (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1991).

⁵ See for example Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002).

⁶ "Prominent Iran reformist says 'resistance' will drive US out of Iraq", *Iranian Students News Agency*, BBC Monitoring, 4 June 2004.

⁷ See John Calabrese, *Revolutionary Horizons: Regional Foreign Policy in Post-Khomeini Iran* (London: Macmillan, 1994).

⁸ For a good overview of Iran and Islamist groups see Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (London, I B Tauris, 1994). For a good discussion of Iranian and Syrian policies during this period see Anoushiravan Ehteshami & Raymond A Hinnebush, *Syria and Iran* (London: Routledge, 1997).

⁹ On these points see Monte Palmer and Princess Palmer, *At the Heart of Terror: Islam, Jihadists, and America's War on Terrorism*. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), Daniel Benjamin & Steven Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror: Radical Islam's War Against America* (New York: Random House, expanded paperback edition, 2003).

¹⁰ See for example Peter L Bergen, *Holy War Inc, Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden* (London: Wewidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001), p92-93.

¹¹ Bergen, *Holy War Inc*, p93.

- ¹² These high-ranking officials were convicted of supporting the assassination of Kurdish leaders in Mykonos restaurant in Germany.
- ¹³ On this point see Gil Sedan, "Peres accuses Iran of trying to topple his government", *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 12 April 1996, and "Peres tries to curb Iranian influence in Israeli elections", CNN, 19 May 1996.
- ¹⁴ Kenneth Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle* (New York: Random House, 2004).
- ¹⁵ Kenneth Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*.
- ¹⁶ Iranian TV, 14 July 2000, BBC Monitoring.
- ¹⁷ See Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002) and David Menashri, *Post-Revolutionary Politics in Iran: Religion, Society and Power* (London: Frank Cass, 2001).
- ¹⁸ For further details see Wilfried Buchta, *The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic* (Washington: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000).
- ¹⁹ See "Iran: Khamene'i receives Italian premier, expresses concern over arms race", Iranian TV, 1 July 1998, BBC Monitoring.
- ²⁰ Iranian TV, 2 July 2000, BBC Monitoring.
- ²¹ See Dilip Hiro, *Neighbours Not Friends: Iraq and Iran after the Gulf Wars* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p279.
- ²² See Hiro, *Neighbours Not Friends*, p279.
- ²³ Iranian TV, 10 August 2000, BBC Monitoring.
- ²⁴ Iranian TV, 12 September 2001, BBC Monitoring.
- ²⁵ Iranian TV, 26 September 2001, BBC Monitoring.
- ²⁶ See for example, Robin Gedye, "Terrorist son of bin Laden 'has haven in Iran'", *Daily Telegraph*, 15 October 2003.
- ²⁷ *Aftab-e Yazd*, 7 October 2001, BBC Monitoring.
- ²⁸ "Rafsanjani criticizes America for producing chemical, nuclear weapons", Iranian radio, 6 November 2001, BBC Monitoring.
- ²⁹ "Iran: Rafsanjani warns of high cost of US support for Israel", Iranian radio, 14 December 2001, BBC Monitoring.
- ³⁰ See "Iran denies apprehending Bin-Ladin's assistant", IRNA, 17 February 2002, BBC Monitoring, see also "Presence in Iran of Bin-Ladin adviser Al-Zawahiri denied", Al-Jazeera TV, 17 February 2002, BBC Monitoring and Afshin Valinejad, "Newspaper: bin-Laden's right-hand man, Ayman al-Zawahri, imprisoned in Iran", Associated Press, 17 February 2002.
- ³¹ "Iran denies apprehending Bin-Ladin's assistant", IRNA, 17 February 2002, BBC Monitoring, see also "Presence in Iran of Bin-Ladin adviser Al-Zawahiri denied", Al-Jazeera TV, 17 February 2002, BBC Monitoring.
- ³² Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Iran Report, 4 March 2002, Vol 5, No 8.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ See "Iran will never allow any Al-Qa'idah terrorists to use its territory", IRNA, 13 August 2002, BBC Monitoring, see also "Khatami: Security in Afghanistan guarantees security in Iran", IRNA, 13 August 2002, BBC Monitoring.
- ³⁵ See for example, "Afghan leader says Khatami's visit will be a turning point in Tehran-Kabul ties", Iranian TV, 12 August 2002, BBC Monitoring, "Khatami's Kabul visit to open new era of bilateral ties - Tanai", IRNA, 12 August 2002, BBC Monitoring, "Khatami's Kabul visit adds new dimension to bilateral ties - Afghan diplomat", IRNA, 17 August 2002, BBC Monitoring.
- ³⁶ "Afghan leader says Khatami's visit will be a turning point in Tehran-Kabul ties", Iranian TV, 12 August 2002, BBC Monitoring.
- ³⁷ See "Afghan leader comments on possible Al-Qa'idah presence in Iran", Iranian radio external service in English, 12 August 2002, BBC Monitoring.
- ³⁸ See "Saudi foreign minister comments on relations with Iran, USA", Kingdom of Saudi Arabia radio, 12 August 2002, BBC Monitoring.
- ³⁹ See "Saudi foreign minister: Al-Qa'idah suspects will not be extradited to US", Al-Sharq al-Awsat web site, London, 13 August 2002, BBC Monitoring.
- ⁴⁰ See "Iran: Foreign Ministry spokesman comments on extradition of Al-Qa'idah members", Iranian Students News Agency, 15 August 2002, BBC Monitoring.
- ⁴¹ See "Iran, US moving toward rapprochement", Al-Sharq al-Awsat, web site, London, 18 August 2002, BBC Monitoring, see also "Iran: Al-Qa'idah extradition boosts Iran's role in

campaign against ‘terrorism’ – MP”, Iranian Students News Agency, 20 August 2002, BBC Monitoring.

⁴² See for example, “Iran: Reformist criticizes timing of Al-Qa’idah members hand-over”, Iranian Students News Agency, 14 August 2002, BBC Monitoring.

⁴³ See for example, “Al-Qaeda is in Iran, bin Laden still missing: Pentagon”, AFP, 28 August 2002.

⁴⁴ See Kenneth R Timmerman, “Defector Points Finger at Iran in September 11 Plot”, *Insight On the News*, 17 February 2004.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ See “Iran unlikely to have handed over Al-Qa’idah members, says powerful right-winger”, Iranian Students News Agency, 12 August 2002, BBC Monitoring.

⁴⁸ See “Iranian supreme leader likens Bush to Hitler; notes importance of theocracy”, Iranian TV, 14 August 2002, BBC Monitoring.

⁴⁹ See “Army commander says Iran preparing to confront US threats”, IRNA, 21 August 2002, BBC Monitoring.

⁵⁰ See “Reformist web site says Iran holding talks with US to prevent attack on reactor”, Emrooz web site, 4 August 2002, BBC Monitoring.

⁵¹ See “Conservative figure says Iran should not ‘gamble’ on state to prevent attack”, Emrooz web site, 6 August 2002, BBC Monitoring.

⁵² See “Sources close to Khatami confirm Al-Sharq al-Awsat’s information about the Iranian office in Dubai”, Al-Sharq al-Awsat, 29 August 2002, BBC Monitoring.

⁵³ Iranian TV, 14 September 2002, BBC Monitoring.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ See for example Ali Shamkhani’s interview with *Iranian Students News Agency*, 18 December 2004, BBC Monitoring.

⁵⁶ See *Iran News*, web site, 2 March 2005, BBC Monitoring.

⁵⁷ Iranian TV, 17 October 2003, BBC Monitoring.

⁵⁸ See Robert Satloff, “Karine A: The Strategic Implications of Iranian-Palestinian Collusion”, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 15 January 2002.

⁵⁹ See the report in the daily *Seda-ye Edalat*, “Iran: Ministers, deputies clarify Zolqadr’s remarks on oil wells”, *Seda-ye Edalat*, 20 February 2002, BBC Monitoring.

⁶⁰ See “Hamid Reza Jala’ipour denounces US ‘cold war’ against Iran”, *Aftab-e Yazd*, 24 February 2002, BBC Monitoring.

⁶¹ On such transformations see Daniel Brumberg, *Reinventing Khomeini: The Struggle for Reform in Iran*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

⁶² See Mirdamadi explains Iran’s foreign policy in ‘talks’ with US”, *IRNA in English*, 22 April 2002, BBC Monitoring.

⁶³ For a good summary of the debate see “Information minister categorically rejects Iran-US talks”, *IRNA*, 22 May 2002, BBC Monitoring and Jean Michel Cadiot “Secret US-Iran talks” stir new political row in Iran, *AFP*, 21 May 2002.

⁶⁴ See Siobhan Kennedy “Iran-US ties possible if based on respect-Kharrazi”, *Reuters*, 10 May 2002.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ See Information minister categorically rejects Iran-US talks”, *IRNA*, 22 May 2002, BBC Monitoring.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ See Iranian radio, 22 May 2002, BBC Monitoring.

⁶⁹ See “Iran: Majlis Commission head warns against revival of serial murders headquarters”, *Nouruz*, 5 January 2002, BBC Monitoring.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ See Seyyed Mostafa Tajzadeh, “Iran: ‘Conservatives warned against ‘provoking’ Israeli, US ‘militarists’, *Nouruz*, 18 March 2002, BBC Monitoring.

⁷² See *IRNA*, 31 July 2002, BBC Monitoring.

⁷³ See “Iran: Khatami news conference: steady course ahead, more power for president”, *Jam-e Jam*, external TV, 28 August 2002, BBC Monitoring.

⁷⁴ See “Khatami says will take back presidential authority bill”, *IRNA*, 17 March 2004, BBC Monitoring. For a good article on the subject see Ali Akbar Dareini, “Khatami concedes defeat of key reform plans”, *Associated Press*, 17 March 2004.

- 75 See Iran “declares ‘active neutrality’ toward Iraqi crisis”, *IRNA*, 30 September 2002, BBC Monitoring.
- 76 See “Iran: Reformist web site says Saddam’s son sought to purchase Shahab-3 missile”, Emrooz web site, 2 August 2002, BBC Monitoring.
- 77 See Stefan Smith “Iran accelerates diplomatic drive to head-off US war plans”, *AFP*, 28 September 2002.
- 78 See “Arab diplomat tells daily Iran may inform US of secret talks with Iraq”, *Entekhab*, web site, 29 September 2002, BBC Monitoring.
- 79 See for example *Entekhab*, web site, 25 September 2002, BBC Monitoring.
- 80 Iranian TV, 21 March 2003, BBC Monitoring.
- 81 See Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani’s remarks at Tehran Friday-prayers, *Iranian radio*, 4 April 2003, BBC Monitoring.
- 82 See “Iran says US more threatening than Iraq”, *IRNA*, 4 April 2002, BBC Monitoring.
- 83 See *IRNA*, 14 April 2002, BBC Monitoring.
- 84 See “US surrounded by Iran” says former president Rafsanjani, *AFP*, 11 September 2003, see also *IRNA*, 11 September 2003.
- 85 See “Rafsanjani’s remarks misinterpreted by foreign news agencies”, *IRNA*, 14 April 2002, BBC Monitoring.
- 86 See Ned Parker, “Iraq’s spy chief accuses Badr militia of killing agents”, *Middle East Online*, 14 October 2004.
- 87 See *Iranian Students News Agency*, 3 January, BBC Monitoring. On the visit to Iran by the leader of the largest Sunni party in Iraq.
- 88 See Iranian official says US “expansionism” a serious challenge, *IRNA*, 16 August 2003, BBC Monitoring.
- 89 See for example “Security chief tells Lebanese ambassador Iraqi ‘resistance’ will prevail”, *IRNA*, 20 April 2003, BBC Monitoring.
- 90 See “Iran: Deputy defence minister says 1,000 dead may change US, UK Iraq strategy”, *Iranian Labour News Agency*, 31 March 2003, BBC Monitoring.
- 91 “Iran: Deputy defence minister says 1,000 dead may change US, UK Iraq strategy”, *Iranian Labour News Agency*, 31 March 2003, BBC Monitoring.
- 92 Ibid.
- 93 See “Power structure in Iran too rigid, 50 Majlis deputies plan to resign - MP”, *Iranian Labour News Agency*, 6 March 2003, BBC Monitoring.
- 94 See “Iran: MPs reject ‘militaristic policy’ for deterring US ‘threats’”, *Touse’eh*, 17 April 2003, BBC Monitoring.
- 95 See “Iran: Foreign minister briefs MPs on talks with US”, *IRNA News Agency*, in English, BBC Monitoring, 20 May 2003.
- 96 See “Iran: MPs demand clarification from FM Kharrazi about rumoured US messages”, *Mardom Salari*, web site, 10 May 2003, BBC Monitoring.
- 97 See “Iran: MPs tell Khamene’i to drink from ‘poisoned chalice’ to save Islamic state” *Gooya News*, 24 May 2003, BBC Monitoring.
- 98 Ibid.
- 99 Ibid.
- 100 Iranian radio, 28 May 2003, BBC Monitoring.
- 101 See “Iran: Reformist says reform movement reaching ‘turning point’”, *Iranian Labour News Agency*, BBC Monitoring, 6 June 2003.
- 102 See *Jomhuri-ye Eslami*, 26 May 2003, BBC Monitoring.
- 103 Ibid.
- 104 See “Iran: MPs say if ignored, students will turn to world institutions”, *Iranian Labour News Agency*, 28 June 2003, BBC Monitoring.
- 105 On close relations between Khamene’i and Hashemi-Shahrudi see Wilfried Buchta, *The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic* (Washington: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000). Buchta refers to Shahrudi by his Iraqi name Ayatollah Mahmud al-Hashimi.
- 106 See Iran: Al-Qa’idah reportedly top of Judiciary chief’s agenda in Saudi Arabia”, *Baztab*, web site, 6 July 2003, BBC Monitoring.
- 107 See “Iran, Saudi Arabia call for religious cooperation against ‘enemies of Islam’”, *IRNA*, 7 July 2003, BBC Monitoring.
- 108 See “Iran: Foreign Ministry says Al-Qa’idah not discussed with Saudi Arabia”, *IRNA*, 7 July 2003, BBC Monitoring.

- 109 Ali Nurizadeh, "Bin Ladin's son, five Al-Qa'idah members reportedly left Iran early this week", *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 10 September 2003, BBC Monitoring.
- 110 Ali Nurizadeh, "Bin Ladin's son, five Al-Qa'idah members reportedly left Iran early this week", *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 10 September 2003, BBC Monitoring.
- 111 See for example IRNA, 17 October 2003, BBC Monitoring.
- 112 See Mark Huband & Mohsen Asgari, "Bin-Ladin reportedly sighted in Iranian town of Najmabad on 23 October", *The Financial Times*, Internet version, 26 December 2003.
- 113 See for example, "President Khatami rejects Bush's statement on Iran", 30 January 2002, IRNA, BBC Monitoring, "Iran slams US government for erecting another 'wall of mistrust'" IRNA, 18 June 2003, BBC Monitoring.
- 114 "Khatami and Aznar take part in press conference", Iranian TV, 29 October 2002, BBC Monitoring.
- 115 "President Khatami addresses Iranian diplomats", Iranian TV, 14 August 2004, BBC Monitoring.
- 116 "Al-Qa'idah attacks on Iran foiled - security official", *Tehran Times*, 18 August 2003, BBC Monitoring.
- 117 Ibid.
- 118 Iranian TV, 26 September 2001, BBC Monitoring.
- 119 See "Iran to join coalition if US abandons unilateralism", Iranian radio, BBC Monitoring, 28 September 2001.
- 120 See *Iranian Students News Agency*, 3 January, BBC Monitoring. On the visit to Iran by the leader of the largest Sunni party in Iraq.
- 121 Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, Quds [Jerusalem] Day sermon, 14 December 2001, BBC Monitoring.
- 122 See *Kayhan*, 9 January 2005 for Iranian UN representative Mohammad Javad Zarif's remarks at George Soros's Open Society Forum.
- 123 See "Hasan Abbasi, the director of the Centre for Doctrinal Security Studies Without Frontiers: We must defend the strategy of terrorism", Vaghaye Etefaghyeh, 25 May 2004, BBC Monitoring.
- 124 Ibid.
- 125 See "Iranian daily quotes web site report on plans for 'terrorist' attacks on USA, UK", Vaghaye Etefaghyeh, 25 May 2004, BBC Monitoring.
- 126 See "Iran: Judiciary spokesman says 'Abbasi case open' Towse'eh, 15 December 2004, BBC Monitoring.
- 127 See for example IRNA, 5 November 2004, BBC Monitoring. For Hossein Musavian's comments.
- 128 See IRNA, 21 September 2004, BBC Monitoring.
- 129 See "Khamene'i's adviser says Iran has 'capability' to withdraw from NPT", Fars News Agency, web site, 28 September 2004, BBC Monitoring.
- 130 "Khamene'i's adviser says Iran has 'capability' to withdraw from NPT", Fars News Agency, web site, 28 September 2004, BBC Monitoring.
- 131 See "Iran's top security official warns USA against attack", Iranian TV, BBC Monitoring, 7 February 2005.
- 132 See for example Ali Shamkhani's interview with *Iranian Students News Agency*, 18 December 2004, BBC Monitoring.
- 133 See Seymour Hersh, *The Coming Wars: What the Pentagon Can Now Do in Secret* *The New Yorker*, 17 January 2005.
- 134 See *Iranian TV*, 23 January 2005, BBC Monitoring.
- 135 See *Paris Intelligence Online*, web site, 7 January 2005.
- 136 See "Iran's supreme leader says Guards must be ready to defend country", Iranian TV, 9 March 2005, BBC Monitoring.
- 137 See Ephraim Kam, "Curbing the Iranian Nuclear Threat: The military Option", Jaffee Center For Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, Strategic Assessment, Vol 7, No 3, December 2004.
- 138 See Akaki Dvali, *Will Saudi Arabia Acquire Nuclear Weapons?*, Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterrey, March 2004.
- 139 See for example Faye Bowers, "Iran holds Al Qaeda's top leaders", *Christian Science Monitor*, 28 July 2003.

¹⁴⁰ See Emrooz web site, 14 January 2000, BBC Monitoring and “Iran: Leadership Assembly of Experts’ political role disputed”, 3 September 2001, BBC Monitoring.

¹⁴¹ See Emrooz web site, 14 January 2000, BBC Monitoring.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ See “Iran: Assembly of Experts proceedings may be made public”, Entekhab, 29 August 2000, BBC Monitoring and “Musavi-Tabrizi: Assembly of Experts’ meetings should be open”, Aftab-e Yazd, 8 September 2001, BBC Monitoring.

¹⁴⁴ See for example Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Iran Report, 1 March 2005, Vol 8, No 9.

¹⁴⁵ For a good account of religious opposition to Khamene’i see Wilfried Buchta, *The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic* (Washington: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000).

Want to Know More ...?

See: Daniel Brumberg, "*Reinventing Khomeini: The Struggle for Reform in Iran*", Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001

Daniel Byman et al, "*Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*", RAND Corporation, 2001

David Menashri, "*Post-Revolutionary Politics in Iran: Religion, Society and Power*", London, Frank Cass, 2001

Mehdi Moslem, "*Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*", Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002

Kenneth Pollack, "*The Persian Puzzle*", New York: Random House, 2004

Dr S J Main, "*The Russian Eagle & The Persian Peacock: Russo-Iranian Cooperation 1995-2005*", Conflict Studies Research Centre, 05/03, Russian Series, January 2005, <http://www.da.mod.uk/csrc>

Disclaimer

The views expressed are those of the
Author and not necessarily those of the
UK Ministry of Defence

ISBN 1-905058-10-1

Published By:

Defence Academy of the
United Kingdom

Conflict Studies Research Centre

Haig Road
Camberley
Surrey
GU15 4PQ
England

Telephone: (44) 1276 412995

Fax: (44) 1276 686880

Email: csrc@da.mod.uk

<http://www.da.mod.uk/csrc>

ISBN 1-905058-10-1