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UNITED STATES  
FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS IRAN  
IN  
THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

DERYA RIX

Josephine Butler College

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

2012

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS  
DURHAM UNIVERSITY

# UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS IRAN IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

by

Derya Rix

## **Abstract**

Since the revolution of 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran has become a major foreign policy issue for American administrations. When George W. Bush was inaugurated as the 43<sup>rd</sup> president of the United States, Iran was still one of the unsolved issues on his table. This thesis examines the foreign policy towards Iran during the presidency of Bush as a contemporary history study informed by foreign policy analysis. The first and the most important variable is the executive branch, which conducts foreign policy with the input of various departments, the most visible of these are the Defense and State departments. During the first term, the Bush administration constructed a foreign policy that revolved around Iran's inclusion in the "Axis of Evil" and failed to capitalize on cooperation opportunities. The second term witnessed a softening in America's attitude, but this time the Iranian government was not receptive. Secondly, the posture and the influence of the US Congress are examined through exploring the hearings of both the House and the Senate. The Congress affected the foreign policy through the imposition of sanctions, keeping the executive branch accountable, being publicly accessible and through the accounts of individual members. Regarding Iran, the Congress consistently implemented sanctions and was not open to engagement. Thirdly, the position and impact of prominent think tanks and the Israel lobby are analyzed as beyond the federal government influences. These organizations contribute to the policy-making atmosphere by supplying expert and insider opinions, giving testimonies before Congress and providing personnel for the government agencies.

The main argument of this thesis is that the Bush administration failed to produce a consistent foreign policy -an unchanging logic and a coherent strategy- towards Iran that was able to persuade the Iranian government to cooperate with the US or Europe concerning its nuclear programme and its ties to terrorism. All three variables contributed to this inconsistency either by supporting conflicting policies or by misinterpreting Iranian domestic policies.

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*for my husband*

*--the man who makes things better, easier and happier.*

## INTRODUCTION

“Many people have argued passionately that the best route to change Iranian behavior is by engaging the country. Unfortunately, there is no evidence to support that argument.”

*Bill Clinton*

In his last State of the Union Address, President Bill Clinton said that the United States should curtail the spread of terrorism and the use of technology for terrorist ends and targeted three countries that should be contained: “We must meet this threat by making effective agreements to restrain nuclear and missile programs in North Korea; curbing the flow of lethal technology to Iran; preventing Iraq from threatening its neighbors.”<sup>1</sup> His successor was soon to take over the White House, and in two years’ time would single out these three countries again. Iran, as one of these three troublemakers, constituted a special challenge for four presidents before George W. Bush, and would become one for him as well. Bush asserted in his address in 2002 that, “Iran aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom,” comparing this country again with Iraq and North Korea and making it one of the centerpieces of his foreign policy agenda. Thus, U.S. foreign policy towards Iran during the presidency of George W. Bush became a valuable and interesting area of research as the Islamic Republic vexed yet another American president.

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<sup>1</sup>WJ Clinton, State of the Union Address, 27 January 2000.

This thesis is an attempt to write a contemporary history informed by foreign policy analysis. Even though there is always a need for contemporary history works, engaging in such a field of study has its limitations. First of all, the scholars suffer from not having the advantage of proper hindsight, where one can look at the events of a time period as a detached observer, rather than trying to see through the fog of unfolding events. Secondly, because the subject matter is contemporary to the scholar, there is an increased influence of subjectivity because of personal beliefs and perceptions. Even though subjectivity in itself should not be shunned entirely, the scholar's ability to analyze and present the subject matter could be highly affected by it. Thirdly, in case of writing political history, one is presented with the difficulty of having to use only documents that have been made available to the public as policy formation took place. Since the scholar does not have access to key governmental documents, a contemporary history piece could always be improved as more documents become available. Furthermore, this lack of primary documents has the potential to present only a limited view to the author. However, despite these limitations, a work of contemporary history offers an initial insight in to recent political developments, opens brand new areas of research and provides knowledge and analysis for current and future use. Therefore, contemporary history lays the foundation upon which future scholars can build as more and more sources become available. As one contemporary historian explains, "While occupying ourselves with voluminous public record, we can expect that private thoughts and classified documents, when revealed decades hence, will fuel, not settle, the historiographical controversies we begin."<sup>2</sup>

The main question that is addressed in this thesis is what the United States foreign policy towards Iran was during the presidency of George W. Bush, and how this policy

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<sup>2</sup>LP Ribuffo, 'The Burdens of Contemporary History', *American Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. ½, Special Issue: Contemporary American (Spring-Summer 1983), p.4.



was formed. At this point, there are three theoretical perspectives that prove to be useful. The first one is foreign policy analysis, which is a subfield of international relations. Foreign policy analysis strives to explain behaviour and the decision-making process rather than simply focusing on policy outputs. Richard Snyder was one of the pioneers of foreign policy analysis, because he directed attention to the decision-making process: “By emphasizing decision-making as a central focus we have provided a way of organizing the determinants of action around those officials who act for the political society.”<sup>3</sup> James Rosenau furthered this concept by developing the actor-specific theory, which made it possible to draw generalizations from specific conditions. The actor-specific theory led to the introduction of middle-range theory, which built a bridge between principles and reality.<sup>4</sup> Harold and Margaret Sprout introduced the “Man-Milieu Relationship Hypotheses”, which claimed that foreign policy could only be understood if the psychomilieu (the psychological, situational, political and social contexts) of the decision-makers is taken into account.<sup>5</sup> In summary, the field of foreign policy analysis demonstrates a commitment to look below the nation-state to draw generalizations by using actor-specific information and thus filling the gap between the real world and actor-general theory.

The second theoretical perspective is a subfield of foreign policy analysis, bureaucratic politics, which essentially focuses on the rivalry between various government agencies. Each agency strives to maximise its influence on policy making and this motivation prompts individual leaders to act according to their organizational rather than personal background. Graham T. Allison and Philip Zelikow suggested a decision-making model using the Cuban Missile Crisis as case study in their book *Essence of Decision*. In their “Governmental (Bureaucratic) Politics Model,” the authors present that the

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<sup>3</sup>R Snyder et al., *Decision Making as an Approach to the Study of International Politics*, New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1954, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup>JN Rosenau, “Pre-theories and Theories of Foreign Policy”, in RB Farrell ed., *Approaches to Comparative and International Politics*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966, pp. 27-92.

<sup>5</sup>H and Sprout, “Man-Milieu Relationship Hypotheses in the Context of International Politics, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965.

governments are not monolithic actors, but rather “vast conglomerates of loosely allied organizations, each with a substantial life of its own.”<sup>6</sup> According to Allison and Zelikow, different government agencies have different patterns of behaviour and their input pertaining to policy decisions is in line with this pattern. Though the president technically holds absolute power over his subordinates, he still must achieve a consensus. His subordinates on the other hand strive towards affecting the president’s decision making through their charisma, personal ties and personality.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in their book *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, Morton Halperin and Pricilla Clapp claimed that assertiveness, willingness to assume responsibility, the threat of resignation and the ability to manoeuvre to change the rules played significant roles in foreign policy decision-making. Thus, when a senior official attempted to convince the president to take a suggested course, these four were the ways to influence the primary decision-maker. Furthermore, if a change in personnel occurs, the direction of the policy will also be affected. In accordance with Allison’s conclusion, Halperin and Clapp also argued that senior officials use their account with the president by making some policies personal issues and attempt to antagonize other officials to back off in order to get their own agencies ahead.<sup>8</sup>

This rivalry could clearly be seen between the Departments of Defense and State. As the sword, the former had been traditionally in favour of a more militaristic approach. This could also be seen concerning US policy towards Iran. The Department of Defense consistently underlined Iran’s military capabilities publicly and argued for a more “hands-on” approach. As the pen, on the other hand, the State Department presented a diplomatic approach to international issues including the Islamic Republic. With regards to Congress,

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<sup>6</sup>GT Allison and P Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, New York: Longman, 1999, p 143.

<sup>7</sup>Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*.

<sup>8</sup>M Halperin and P Clapp, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2006.

both Allison and Halperin also recognised the importance of the Congress in organizational politics, arguing that the Congress had the power to change the rules of the game. Allison claimed that the Congress exerted power over foreign policy through making a specific issue a centrepiece for elections, using influential individuals, and putting limits on the game. According to Halperin, the Congress possessed the power to block presidential decisions, change the players in executive politics and, ultimately, have the power to reorganize the executive branch.

Finally, neoclassical realism offers another avenue for foreign policy analysis in the case of US- Iran relations. Even though other theories could have been usefully employed, this relatively new version of the realist school offers a balanced view of international pressures and domestic actors. Since, foreign policy-making and the domestic actors that influence the process are two of the main concerns of the study, neoclassical realism offers an appropriate avenue for analysis because of its emphasis on internal factors. Gideon Rose, who coined the term *neoclassical realism* in a *World Politics* article in 1998, explains its meaning as follows:

Neoclassical Realism explicitly incorporates both external and internal variables, updating and systematizing certain insights drawn from classical realist thought. Its adherents argue that the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is derived first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material capabilities. This is why they are realist. They argue further, however, that the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variable at the unit level. This is why they are neoclassical.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, neoclassical realism agrees with structural realism that relative power is the most important determining factor in a state's behaviour. However, in order to go from general to specific, neoclassical realists introduce domestic level intervening variables. The independent variable, a state's relative power, is influenced by the intervening variables

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<sup>9</sup>G Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy", *World Politics*, No: 51, 1998, pp.144-172, p.146.

and the outcome of this intervention is the foreign policy, which is the dependent variable. Works by Randall Schweller<sup>10</sup>, Fareed Zaakria<sup>11</sup>, Thomas Christen<sup>12</sup>, Jack Snyder<sup>13</sup>, and William Wohlforth<sup>14</sup> all speculate that “systemic pressures are filtered through intervening domestic variables to produce foreign policy behaviour.”<sup>15</sup> In this regard, the systemic pressure that prompts response is mainly Iran’s nuclear programme and perceived terrorist activities. Since the relative power of the United States is the highest in the international arena, Iranian politicians direct their threats towards the U.S., who in turn feels threatened by the Islamic Republic. However, balancing against Iran does not occur solely based on America’s relative power. Instead domestic intervening variables filter the threat posed by Iran and shape the foreign policy.

In this thesis, three domestic variables will be scrutinized. The first variable is the executive branch, which is the main foreign policy making organ of the U.S. government. The executive branch is not a monolithic organ, but a combination of the White House, the Department of State and the Department of Defense, all of which play a key role in what avenues are followed. Because of its importance among other actors that contribute to foreign policy, the executive branch will be examined first and will take primacy above others. After examining the executive branch, the views and strategies of the Congress will be studied. The Congress is the second governmental body that has direct influence on the decisions of the presidency. Even though the White House is primarily in charge of shaping foreign affairs, the pressures stemming from the Congress are taken into account,

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<sup>10</sup>RL Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances. Tripolarity and Hitler’s Strategy of World Conquest*. Columbia University Press: New York, 1998, and RL Schweller, “Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing”, *International Security*, 29, 2004, pp. 159-201.

<sup>11</sup>F Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America’s World Role*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

<sup>12</sup>TJ Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

<sup>13</sup>JL Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

<sup>14</sup>W Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions During the Cold War*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993.

<sup>15</sup>Schweller, “Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing”, *International Security*, 29, 2004, p. 164.

especially in dealing with non-crisis situations, such as Iran. Therefore, in order to give a clearer picture of foreign policy formation, it is crucial to understand the positions and policies of the House and the Senate. The third intervening variable is the influence of think tanks and the Israel lobby. Though the direct influence of these entities could not be measured, because they contribute primarily to the atmosphere in which the foreign policy is formed and, it could be argued, plant the seeds for policy ideas, the examination of think tanks and the Israel lobby shed light on the policy-making environment. These variables are not the only influence on foreign policy, but in order to provide a framework for the study while covering the widest influence area, these actors were chosen as subjects. The aim is to provide an accurate picture of US foreign policy towards Iran during the presidency of George W. Bush.

The thesis consists of a literature review, three main chapters including the executive branch, the Congress and a chapter on think tanks and Israel lobby, and finishes with a conclusion. After examining the relevant literature in the first chapter, an historical account of the US-Iran relations in regards to the executive branch is provided. This chapter aims to determine if Bush's foreign policy was consistent- that is a policy with an unchanging logic and a coherent strategy; what impact 9/11 attacks had on foreign policy; if there was a difference between the first and second terms; what were the differing positions within the various departments in the executive branch; and if there is a case for continuity that can be established between the Clinton and the Bush administrations. The third chapter turns to the legislative branch of the American government. The discussions, bills and opinions of the members of the House of Representatives and the Senate are examined in this chapter. The main questions asked in this chapter are how the Congress influenced the executive branch in terms of policy-making; how public accessibility of congressional records impacted foreign policy; and what impact the leading members of the House and the Senate had on policy-making. The fourth chapter scrutinises the

opinions and roles of notable think tanks and the Israel lobby pertaining to foreign policy towards Iran. With regards to think tanks, the chapter aims to assess in what ways these think tanks advised the government; how they contributed to the policy-making atmosphere; and how much influence they had on the formation of foreign policy towards Iran. Similarly, regarding the Israel lobby, the chapter aims to answer what the position of the Israel lobby was and what impact it had on Bush's policies concerning Iran. Lastly, the conclusion includes how these three intervening variables come together and result in the dependent variable foreign policy; the failures and successes of these policies; and the case for continuity.

Therefore, the main objective of this study is to address the policy making process of the United States during the Presidency of Bush as a contemporary history piece. The conclusion reached in this work is that the Bush administration failed to produce a consistent foreign policy towards Iran that was able to persuade the Iranian government to cooperate with the US or Europe concerning its nuclear programme and its ties to terrorism. All three variables contributed to this inconsistency either by supporting conflicting policies or by misinterpreting Iranian domestic policies. In this regard, the US-Iran relations during the Bush administration were similar to those of the Clinton administration.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In order to achieve these aims, the research relies principally on primary sources. Because the United States and Iran do not have formal diplomatic relations, public documents are crucial. The data retrieved from the media and public records of government bodies contribute to the description of foreign policy, since the two countries conduct their policies relying on speeches, propaganda, shaping public perception, and addressing domestic concerns. In terms of government documents, because most of the papers of the

Bush administration have not been declassified as of 2011, scrutiny and reanalysis of the topic in light of declassified documents are left for future scholars. These primary sources could be found in different forms including policy briefs, memos, analyses and reports of the organizations were used in terms of the lobbies. Additionally, think tanks spread their analyses, theories and suggestions through several means such as: books, articles, congressional testimonies, opinion pieces, and an interview, all of which are used in this research. The chapter on the Congress utilized public hearings of the House and the Senate. Even though there were several closed session meetings, especially at the Senate level, discussions on Iran regarding its nuclear programme, support of terrorism and human rights issues have been made available to the public, in addition to policy suggestions of the representatives and the senators. The chapter on the executive branch mainly employed newspapers articles from the *New York Times*, *the Wall Street Journal*, *the Washington Post*, and *the Economist*, in addition to speeches of the president, vice president and other high-ranking officials in order to provide an account of the foreign policy. Additionally, government sources such as White House and State Department online archives were used. Since only the George W Bush Presidential library was available online at the time of the research, this source was also exploited. Even though the research does not rely primarily on interviews, Richard Perle was interviewed in April 2010 in Washington, D.C.

## **BACKGROUND**

In order to understand where George W. Bush entered the stage and what he inherited from his predecessor, it is important to give a background of US-Iran relations during the Clinton administration. This is by no means a thorough account of the Clinton foreign policy towards Iran, but a summary of major points to be used as reference points later in the thesis.

Bill Clinton was elected as the forty-second president of the US succeeding George HW Bush. Relations between the US and Iran took a different shape during Clinton's presidency. The most important reason for the reconsideration of the Middle East was undoubtedly the collapse of the Soviet Union. The fall of the USSR did not affect Reagan's presidency as much because of the ambiguity of the new international order or Bush's presidency because of the Gulf War. However, by the time Clinton came to office, it was clear that the world had entered a unipolar era, with the US as its only superpower. Thus, this eight-year period became a transition period from a bipolar world to an international structure with the US as the primary source of geopolitical gravity. There were advocates both for a more isolationist foreign policy and for a more interventionist foreign policy. Isolationists argued that there were no more viable reasons for America to be involved in other parts of the world, and the interventionists saw the US as the police state, since it was the only country capable of doing the job. Clinton was more in favour of a foreign policy that promoted the spread of democracy, humanitarian interventions, arms control, and free trade.<sup>16</sup> Yet, the collapse of the Soviet Union did not immediately end the American presence in the certain areas of the world, nor did it erase the ongoing problems with some countries. Iran and Iraq were two of these countries that dominated the foreign policy of Carter, Reagan, Bush Senior and now Clinton.

In May 1993, the Clinton administration outlined a foreign policy objective towards Iran and Iraq under the name of the Dual Containment Policy (DCP). This came not long after Secretary of State Warren Christopher named the Tehran government as an "international outlaw", because of its ties to terrorism and desire to acquire nuclear weapons.<sup>17</sup> A speech titled "The Clinton Administration's Approach to the Middle East"

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<sup>16</sup>R Legvold, "The Clinton Foreign Policy and the Revolution in the East", in Todd G. Shields, et al. (eds.), *The Clinton Riddle: Perspectives on the Forty-second President*, Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2004, pp. 173-185.

<sup>17</sup>E Sciolino, "Christopher Signals a Tougher U.S. Line Toward Iran", *The New York Times*, 30 March 1993.



was delivered to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy by Martin Indyk, who was the special assistant to the president for the Near East and South Asia. The speech shed light on how the new administration saw the region in the post-Cold War period and where Iran stood in this picture. After stating that the Middle East was still an important aspect of American national interests and security, the shift in the policy was defined as seeing the region, not in terms of global competition with the Soviet Union, but rather in terms of how American interests can be pursued in the framework of the region. A crucial point of the speech highlighted how small problems have the potential to affect the whole region with the introduction of ballistic missiles. The ownership of missiles gave power to states like Iran to be able threaten a wider range of countries without deploying land troops. Iran was thus described as a potential danger to the surrounding countries.<sup>18</sup>

After defining the perspective of the Clinton administration in the region, Indyk went on to explain the strategy called “dual containment”. According to this policy, Iran and Iraq were to be balanced, and thus contained, with “promotion of Arab-Israeli peace in the west; backed by energetic efforts to stem the spread of weapons of mass destruction and promote a more democratic and prosperous region.”<sup>19</sup> The practical ways to enforce this were clear in terms of Iraq since the Iraqi government had not sufficiently complied with the UN resolutions. However, for Iran, it was harder to put this policy into practice since the threat it posed to the American interests had four different levels, three of which were: sponsoring global terrorism, supporting Hezbollah and Hamas to undermine the Arab-Israeli peace process, and seeking to subvert friendly governments. The last level of Iranian threat was defined as “the most disturbing”: “Iran is seeking a weapons of mass destruction capability including clandestine nuclear weapons capability and ballistic

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<sup>18</sup>M Indyk, ‘The Clinton Administration's Approach to the Middle East’, *The Washington Institute for Near Eastern Policy*, 1993.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

missiles to deliver weapons of mass destruction to the Middle East”<sup>20</sup>. The method of preventing Iran from achieving these ends, unless its administration was willing to cooperate, was to persuade the European countries, Japan, Russia and China not to support the expansion of the Iranian military, especially its building of nuclear weapons. Even though the Clinton administration was ready to pursue the dual containment policy unilaterally, the possibility that Iran could reach its target with the help of other countries would undermine the whole idea of dual containment. Therefore, there was a need for multilateral endorsement concerning Iran. For instance, Clinton especially wanted Russia to fall in line with the new foreign policy and expressed his thoughts to President Yeltsin.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, to encourage other countries to join the US, Indyk noted that Iran was not a profitable country for investment, taking into account its current economy, and this meant that approaching Iran either for economic or for strategic gains would not benefit any country.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the post-Cold War Middle East policy of Clinton focused on containment of both Iran and Iraq by using international pressure.

The DCP was a shift from previous policies. Preceding administrations had chosen to balance Iran and Iraq by using one country against the other. However, the Clinton administration defined both countries as potential problems for the future of the Middle East and as actors that would undermine the interests and security of the US and its allies in the region. Iran and Iraq did not fit into the parameters of Clinton’s general “engagement and enlargement policy”, which included preventive diplomacy -through supporting democracy, military presence and economic assistance- and enlarging the community of democracies. Since, the Clinton administration was convinced that Iran and Iraq could not be persuaded through the means of preventive diplomacy, a new policy should be employed. DCP created further distance between the two governments with its threatening

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>B Clinton, *My Life*, New York: Knopf, 2004, pp. 654-655.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

rhetoric. Also, since it required the cooperation of the allies of the US, there was a risk of not being able to gain the necessary support. Establishing another international sanctions regime against Iran after Iraq would prove quite challenging for the Clinton administration. Even though European countries, Russia and Japan agreed that Iran was a threat to the other countries, the financial loss of imposing economic sanctions on Iran would be too great for many countries to risk. In any case, the Clinton administration was not able to put concrete evidence on the table regarding terrorism and nuclear proliferation. Compared to the other countries in the region, even the human rights record of Iran did not stand as the worst. Furthermore, Iran was not the only obstacle to the Arab-Israeli peace process, which was one of the objections of the US to the policies of the Iranian government. Therefore, the DCP had more potential to result in further distancing between the two countries than solving the two-decade long problem in that it committed the Clinton administration to a theory by which the actions that must be taken remained very ambiguous. Also the DCP gave the Iranian administration grounds to continue to oppose the United States with its rhetoric of the “Great Satan.”<sup>23</sup> As a result, the introduction of the DCP paved the way to a more rigid foreign policy, which did not leave much room for either rapprochement or diplomacy, a rigidity which would continue until the latter part of Clinton’s second term.

One of the legacies of the Clinton administration regarding Iran was the rhetoric of “backlash” and “rogue” states. Even though the origins of the concept went back to the Carter administration and its list of terrorist countries, the presidency of Clinton was the time the concept took shape. The DCP was the catalyst for the rhetoric. However, the formulation of the concept belonged to National Security Advisor Anthony Lake. In his article “Confronting Backlash States”, published in *Foreign Affairs* in 1994, the primary objective of Lake was to expound on the DCP that was announced the previous year by Indyk. However, he went beyond commenting on the specific countries of Iran and Iraq,

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<sup>23</sup>EG Shirley, “The Iran Policy Trap”, *Foreign Policy*, No. 96., Autumn, 1994, pp. 75-93.

and constituted a general category of “backlash” or “rogue” states that shared similar characteristics and emerged in the post-Cold War world. After naming Cuba, North Korea, Iran, Iraq and Libya as these backlash states, Lake proceeded to list the common features of these countries, which included rule under coercion, dislike of democracy, isolation from the rest of the world and interest in WMDs.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, under the subtitle of “The Challenge from Iran”, Lake made the point that the issue between the US and Iran was not a “clash of civilizations” as suggested by Samuel Huntington: “Washington does not take issue with the 'Islamic' dimension of the Islamic Republic of Iran... It is extremism, religious or secular, that we oppose.”<sup>25</sup> Even though Lake's article was intended to shed light on the DCP, it rather elaborated on the foreign policy of the Clinton administration by putting the problems with Iran and Iraq into the broader framework of “backlash” or “rogue” states. After the publication of Lake's article, the term “rogue state” became widely used among analysts, politicians and government officials. The rogue state rhetoric was important both in terms of the domestic and foreign affairs of these states. In terms of domestic affairs, Clinton had a Wilsonian approach of “democratic states do not wage war against each other”; it was in this respect that Lake's article talked about human rights violations in Iran. Yet, what made Iran a rogue state was not its internal shortcomings, but its international relations such as support for terrorism and desire to acquire WMDs. Moreover, by describing the struggle between the US and rogue states in terms of an ideological struggle between two opposites, the administration paved the way to a post-Cold War strategy in which the Soviet Union was replaced by rogue states.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>A Lake, “Confronting Backlash States”, *Foreign Affairs*, 73, No. 2, March/April 1994, pp. 45-55.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>26</sup>RS Litwak, *Rogue States and U.S. Foreign Policy: Containment after the Cold War*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, pp. 56-64.

In line with the theory, in March 1995, President Clinton issued an executive order prohibiting the importation, exportation and re-exportation of any goods and technology of Iranian origin, and any new investment by citizens of the United States in Iran or any entity controlled by the Iranian government.<sup>27</sup> This was the main executive order that brought the U.S.-Iranian economic relations into a halt; however the Clinton administration issued several other orders to regulate the executive orders of March and May 1995. Clinton justified these orders to the Congress: “This action was in response to actions and policies of the Government of Iran, including support for international terrorism, efforts to undermine the Middle East peace process, and the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction and the means to deliver them.”<sup>28</sup> President Clinton chose to declare his trade ban on Iran in New York at a dinner reception given by the World Jewish Congress. Among the people present at the dinner were Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Edgar M. Brofman, who was a leading critic of Iran as being a hurdle to the Middle East peace. By publicizing his foreign policy toward Iran in the presence of Jewish leaders, Clinton connected the national security of Israel to that of America once again.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, it gave the impression that American foreign policy in the Middle East was strongly influenced by outside forces.<sup>30</sup> The national emergency declared by Carter was renewed several times under Clinton because the Iranian government continued to pose a threat to the security and the interests of the United States.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, during the presidency of Clinton, the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) of 1996 was introduced to increase economic pressure on Iran and hopefully facilitate multinational cooperation for the American foreign policy toward Iran. In the press release from the White House concerning the act, an explanation of what kind of sanctions would be enforced was given

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<sup>27</sup>WJ Clinton, *Executive Order 12959, “Prohibiting Certain Transactions With Respect To Iran”*, 1995.

<sup>28</sup>WJ Clinton, ‘Presidential Letter to Congress on Iran’, September 17, 1998.

<sup>29</sup>TS Purdum, “Clinton To Order A Trade Embargo Against Teheran”, *New York Times*, May 1, 1995.

<sup>30</sup>A Tarock, “US-Iran Relations: Heading for Confrontation?”, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No.1., Mar., 1997, pp. 149- 167, p. 150.

<sup>31</sup>WJ. Clinton, ‘Presidential Letter to Congress on Iran’, 1999.

after pointing out who would suffer from these sanctions.<sup>32</sup> Even though the Clinton administration favoured an act focused more on curbing investment in Iran rather than trade with the country, the Congress passed the ILSA restricting trade and investment.

The issue of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons started to dominate U.S.-Iran relations in the mid-1990s. By that time, Iran had been attempting to invest in nuclear power for some time. Even before the Islamic revolution, the Shah had received American support to build a nuclear reactor. Under President Eisenhower's "Atoms for Peace" initiative,<sup>33</sup> Iran had the opportunity to receive American aid for nuclear energy. Consequently, the Tehran Nuclear Research Center was established in 1967 under the supervision of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran. The reactor in Tehran was supplied by the United States and used to enriched uranium. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was signed in 1968 by the Shah and was ratified in 1970 by the Iranian government. The Shah aimed to set up more than twenty nuclear power plants by 1994, and, by the time he was overthrown, four contracts were concluded for the reactors. Many western countries, such as the U.S., France, the UK and Canada, as well as India and the USSR, helped Iran at different levels in its quest for nuclear energy. After the Islamic revolution, most of the Shah's projects were scrapped, including the four contracts made with the western government for nuclear power plants. Even though the plant in Bushehr was nearly complete, the project suffered from budget cuts and technological difficulties.

In 1983, the Iranian government announced its plan to re-start the nuclear power plant project with the help of India. The need for this change came to light after the Iran-Iraq War resulted in major military losses for Iran, leading to a desire to be self sufficient

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<sup>32</sup> 'The Iran And Libya Sanctions Act Of 1996', The Fact Sheet, 1996, retrieved on 3 November 2007, <<http://www.clintonfoundation.org/legacy/080696-fact-sheet-on-iran-and-libya-sanctions.htm>>

<sup>33</sup> President Dwight Eisenhower delivered a speech titled "Atoms for Peace" to the UN General Assembly in 1953. After the speech, the US launched a program supplying know-how and equipment for peaceful uses of atomic energy within the US and throughout the world. D Eisenhower, 'Atoms for Peace', *The Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library*, 1953, retrieved on 12 March 2010, , <http://web.archive.org/web/20070524054513/http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/atoms.htm>>.

in case of a future attack from another country.<sup>34</sup> This relatively powerful country in the Middle East was a problem for both the American and the Israeli governments. In January 1995, senior officials of both countries were talking about the time frame of the arrival of Iran's weapons of mass destruction. They predicted that, with the pace Iran was acquiring the materials it needed, the Islamic Republic would be able to build an atomic bomb in five years. Israel saw this as a major threat to its national security and its military was ready to bomb the Iranian reactors, as they had done to the Iraqi reactors in 1981. Even though Reza Amrollahi, the president of the Iranian Atomic Energy Organization, frequently denied that Iran was building an atomic bomb and stated that the nuclear reactors were solely for peaceful purposes to generate energy, the contradiction amongst the speeches of high-ranking Iranian officials convinced America and Israel of the existence of an atomic bomb project.<sup>35</sup> However, Iran's technological know-how and material capabilities were far from sufficient to carry out such a project by itself. At this point, the Iranians needed Russian and Chinese support with respect to knowledge, technology and equipment.

The American administration was aware of these limitations. They knew that it would take decades for Iran to build an atomic bomb without Russian and Chinese help. Yet, the challenging part was to get Russia and China to cooperate with the American government. Secretary of State Warren Christopher described how vital the issue was for the Clinton administration:

Today Iran is engaged in a crash effort to develop nuclear weapons. We are deeply concerned that some nations are prepared to cooperate with Iran in the nuclear field. I will not mince words. These efforts risk the security of the entire Middle East. The United States places the highest priority on denying Iran a nuclear weapons capability.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>C Quillen, "Iranian Nuclear Weapons Policy: Past, Present and Possible Future", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 6. No.2., June 2002.

<sup>35</sup>C Hedges, 'Iran May Be Able to Build an Atomic Bomb in 5 Years, U.S. and Israeli Officials Fear', *New York Times*, January 5, 1995.

<sup>36</sup>Warren Christopher quoted in S Greenhouse 'Russia and China Pressed Not to Sell A-Plants to Iran' *New York Times*, January 25, 1995, retrieved on 3 November 2007.

In line with this understanding, Christopher urged the Russians and the Chinese not to make any agreements with the Iranians.

The assumptions of the Clinton administration focused on what the Iranian government might do, not what it was doing, namely the assumption that the Islamic Republic was on the verge of acquiring WMDs and would attack the US or its allies once it possessed this power. Since the American officials were operating under this hypothesis, when Iran neither attacked another country nor produced an atomic bomb, the policy came to a dead end. In two years time, by 1997, U.S. foreign policy would be defined as being at an impasse by Zbigniew Brzezinski and Brent Scowcroft, two former National Security Advisors.<sup>37</sup> The predictions of the Clinton administration about the Iranian military and nuclear build-up had not come true. Iran had been spending on military half of what it pledged. As these projections of the administration fell through, so did the ground the policies of the administration stood on. The single major change occurred in naval power, which was enhanced with Scud missiles, rocket-propelled deep-water mines and three Russian nuclear-powered submarines. Other than the expansion of the navy, Iran's accumulation of conventional or nuclear weapons remained minimal.<sup>38</sup> At this point of bottleneck, hope was offered by the presidential elections in Iran; the election of Mohammad Khatami as the president of Iran in 1997 opened a window of opportunity for the improvement of relations. Khatami was known as a moderate on cultural and international issues, even though he leaned towards the right in terms of getting rid of the legal system of the Pahlavis. Khatami won the election of May 1997 by gaining 70% of the popular vote, leaving his closest rival Nateq-Nouri with only 25%. The election result was seen as the reaction of the public to the ruling elite and its policies; therefore this

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<sup>37</sup>Z Brzezinski, et al. "Differentiated Containment", *Foreign Affairs*, 76 (3): 20-30, May-June, 1997.

<sup>38</sup>E Sciolino, 'Criticized Over Iran, U.S. Struggles to Alter Gulf Policy', *New York Times*, April 20, 1997, retrieved on 4 November 2007.



overwhelming victory gave power to Khatami for reform.<sup>39</sup> Secretary of State Madeleine Albright expressed the optimism of the Clinton administration about the new Iranian president:

[Khatami] installed a moderate cabinet and –mindful of his popularity with female voters –named a woman vice-president. In his public statement he spoke with hope, not bitterness, and emphasised freedom rather than orthodoxy... I also endorsed Khatami's call for intercultural communications, saying that if Iranian officials were ready, we were prepared to sit down without preconditions and develop a road map to normal relations.<sup>40</sup>

Khatami's cabinet consisted of ministers who were in favour of rapprochement with Washington and better economic and political relations with the West. With a strong public support behind him, Khatami was able to persuade the Iranian Parliament to approve all his twenty-two ministers. Even though there were still many hurdles, such as the conservative nature of the legislatures of both countries, previous economic sanctions, and the bitter rhetoric of two administrations against each other, the election of Khatami was seen as a chance to break the political stalemate between the two countries by Washington.<sup>41</sup> In January 1998, the new Iranian president proposed a “dialogue of civilizations” in a CNN interview, calling for a social and cultural exchange of professors, artists, and writers. The new president said that he wanted to break down the “wall of mistrust.”<sup>42</sup> In June 1998, as a response to the elections in Iran and the perceived overtures of Khatami, the Clinton administration gave signs of a policy shift. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright called on the Iranian government to join the American government in its attempts to normalize the relationships between the two governments. For Albright, after two decades of breached relations, it was time to build a bridge between the two

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<sup>39</sup>A Siddiqi, “Khatami and the Search for Reform in Iran”, *Stanford Journal of International Relations*, May 2006.

<sup>40</sup>M Albright, *Madam Secretary*, New York: Miramax Books, 2003, p. 320.

<sup>41</sup>R Wright, and S Bakhash “The U.S. and Iran: An Offer They Can't Refuse?” *Foreign Policy*, No. 108. (Autumn, 1997), pp. 124-137. pp. 124-130.

<sup>42</sup>“Transcript of Interview with Iranian President Mohammad Khatami”, *CNN*, 7 January 1998, retrieved 4 March 2011, <<http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9801/07/iran/interview.html>>

governments. After stating the American desire to see developments concerning human rights, terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, Albright declared that America was ready to take further steps to normalize the relations.<sup>43</sup> Combined with Clinton's decision to waive sanctions on several major oil companies and direct the Vice President Al Gore to send a message to Iran, the US policy towards Iran took a new turn. However, the Clinton administration had misread the political dynamics of the Iranian government and asked more from Khatami than he could deliver.

In response, Khatami said he never asked for opening diplomatic relations, and such a move would not be possible until the US changed its behaviour. Taking Khatami's word to heart, the Clinton administration continued to take steps in order to appease the Iranian government. One of the most significant overtures was President Clinton's acceptance that previous governments had pursued flawed policies: "I think it's quite important to tell people, 'Look you have a right to be angry at something my country, my culture or others that are generally allied with us today did to you 50 or 60 or 100 or 150 years ago.'"<sup>44</sup> Additionally, the president proceeded to drop more sanctions against Iran and the State Department temporarily stopped naming Iran as the leading sponsor of terrorism.<sup>45</sup> After a summer of the worst riots since the Islamic Revolution and death of many reformers in Iran, Clinton sent a letter to Khatami asking for help in the investigation of the Khobar Towers incident. However, the Iranian government rejected cooperation and also turned down the offer to open a cultural dialogue with Tehran.<sup>46</sup> Khatami was not able to deliver what he promised, or more likely he promised more than he could deliver. He needed another breakthrough in domestic politics that would give him more leverage.

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<sup>43</sup>M Albright, *Speech of Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright at the 1998 Asia Society Dinner*, New York, 17 June 1998.

<sup>44</sup>WJ Clinton, "Remarks at Millennium Evening, The Peril of Indifference: Lessons Learned from a Violent Century", White House Official Transcript, 12 April 1999.

<sup>45</sup>P Shenon, 'State Department Drops Iran as Terrorist Leader', *The New York Times*, 1 May 1999.

<sup>46</sup>'Iran Rejects US Plan for Consular Visits', *The New York Times*, 24 November 1999.

Subsequently, the parliamentary elections in Iran in 2000 gave hope for improved relations. Reform candidates gained support, not only from women and the youth, but also from rural areas and religious centres. The elections were perceived as the expression of dissatisfaction with religious fundamentalism, the weakening economy and rough foreign policy.<sup>47</sup> The victory of the moderates in parliamentary elections was seen as a wider window of opportunity than the presidential elections, since it would be harder for the Supreme Leader Khamanei and the clergy to oppose the reforms that had gained strong public support.<sup>48</sup> After the parliamentary elections of February 2000 in Iran and the victory of the moderates, Secretary of State Albright made another speech removing some of the economic sanctions against Iran and declaring another overture in the US-Iran relations. The concessions were primarily symbolic gestures to the small businesses dealing with rugs, pistachios and caviar. Furthermore, in March, Secretary Albright accepted that the US “played a significant role” in the overthrow of Mossadegh, which in the end resulted in the Shah’s repressive policies.<sup>49</sup> Even though there were mixed messages from Iran, Khatami urged the Clinton administration to continue to appeal to Tehran. However, as the hopes came to a new high, Khatami’s UN speech curbed the enthusiasm by attacking the US for its policies and asking the Clinton administration to confess to the American involvement in the overthrow of Mossadegh.<sup>50</sup> Even though Clinton stayed to listen to Khatami’s address and Albright met with the Iranian foreign minister, the domestic troubles in both countries took precedence over foreign affairs, as Khatami started to lose control in Tehran and Clinton was coming to the end of his presidency after a failed impeachment.

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<sup>47</sup> ‘The Reform Tide in Iran’, *New York Times*, February 21, 2000, retrieved on 4 November 2007.

<sup>48</sup> ‘American Relations with Iran’, *The New York Times*, February 25, 2000, retrieved on 5 November 2007.

<sup>49</sup> M Albright, ‘Remarks by Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright on Iranian-American Relations’, Washington D.C., 17 March 2000.

<sup>50</sup> Address by H. E. Mr Mohammed Khatami, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran’, United Nations, New York, 5 September 2000.

In the end, the gestures of the Clinton administration did not result in rapprochement. The fact that, from the beginning, Clinton took a hard stance against Iran with the dual containment policy, further economic sanctions, and by naming Iran as one of the rogue states did not leave much room to manoeuvre for unexpected developments. Many American analysts perceived the dual containment policy as a dead end even before the election of the moderates in Iran. Even though Albright's speeches signalled for a shift, the lack of "parallel steps" by the Iranian government made the future of a new policy very ambiguous.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, the categorization of Iran as a rogue state formed a serious obstruction to any major policy alterations: "The condemnation of Iran as a "rogue" left the administration in a position of unnecessary inflexibility when it was called upon to respond to the 1997 elections of (relatively moderate) Mohammed Khatami."<sup>52</sup> Therefore, despite the efforts to build better relations after the Iranian presidential and parliamentary elections, shifting the policy concerning Iran would be very difficult considering the congressional opposition, especially after the passage of ILSA. In the end, the overtures of the Clinton administration came too late, and came at a time when Khatami was not able to reciprocate the advances from Washington. Clinton started with a non-compromising policy, only to wrap up with unprecedented apologies and offers. However, the opportunity was missed because of the complexity of Iranian domestic politics and the Clinton administration's failure to interpret and act according to the needs of the reformers in Tehran.

This was when Bush entered the stage.

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<sup>51</sup>Litwak, *Rogue States and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 191

<sup>52</sup>J Dumbrell, "Was There a Clinton Doctrine? President Clinton's Foreign Policy Reconsidered", *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol.13, Part. 2, 2002, p.43-56.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

“I think [Iran]’s a very opaque place and it’s a political system I don’t understand very well.”

*Condoleezza Rice*

### INTRODUCTION

The literature covering US-Iran relations during the presidency of George W. Bush is not extensive, because Bush left the office less than four years ago and this time frame is not sufficient to produce a plethora of documents concerning the issue. Furthermore, the lack of declassified documents and the nature of higher offices during the Bush administration, namely the attention to secrecy and the centralised nature of his administration, make it harder for scholars to do comprehensive research. Nevertheless, there are a handful of secondary sources that address the subject matter. In the broadest sense, this thesis is concerned with the foreign policy making process; therefore, it is appropriate to look into literature concerning the foreign policy dynamics within the administration. In addition, the literature that analyses the policies of the American government during this period concerning Iran will be scrutinized. Finally, the largest body of work deals with policy suggestions concerning Iran, and in order to give life to the arguments among the scholars, these will be examined. However, the literature review is not strictly limited to this chapter. Since the thesis is an attempt to examine three different variables in foreign policy making, the literature concerning the Congress, the think tanks and the Israel lobby will be examined in their respective chapters.

## LOOKING BACK: POLICY MAKING

To start with, in regards to the dynamics of the Bush administration and how the White House functioned, David Mitchell's book *Making Foreign Policy* offers a valuable insight. In this work, Mitchell argues that, despite the lack of unclassified documents to make a sufficient case concerning the foreign policy making of George W. Bush, some conclusions could still be drawn. Mitchell argues that, because of his business background, Bush was inclined to run his administration as a business: "George Bush believed that the best way to formulate policy was for an executive to surround themselves with knowledgeable experts and to rely on them to be responsible for the grunt work of constructing policy, while he would be responsible for making the final decision."<sup>1</sup> Among the most trusted, there appeared the names of Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and Condoleezza Rice. However, Mitchell concludes that the policies constructed by Cheney and Rumsfeld were approved by the president because their plans fit into president's desired goals in the aftermath of 9/11, whereas Colin Powell's worldview in general clashed with that of the president's.

The literature exclusively addressing how Bush's White House functioned is exceptionally thin; however, almost all accounts dealing with the Bush presidency address the dynamics within the administration in one way or another. For instance, Sean Wilentz argues that the Bush administration wanted to concentrate power in the hands of the White House from the beginning. He claims that the 9/11 attacks caused the ascension of the neoconservatives to power, and pushed the Republican realists to the back stage. The power started to concentrate around Cheney, Scooter Libby, Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, and John Bolton, while leaving Powell out. Even Rice had to adjust her views to remain in the inner circle.<sup>2</sup> Another book that looks into the inner dealings of the White House came from Trita Parsi. In his book, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the U.S.*, Parsi narrates how the State Department's efforts of

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<sup>1</sup>D Mitchell, *Making Foreign Policy: Presidential Management of the Decision-Making Process*, Burlington: Ashgate, 2005, p. 174.

<sup>2</sup>S Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History 1974-2008*, New York: Harper Collins, 2008.

opening a new lane of dialogue during the Geneva talks were hindered by the Department of Defense and the White House: “Neoconservatives in Washington and the Israeli government tirelessly sought ways to put a halt to the US-Iranian cooperation. Through various means they tried to shut down the Geneva Channel and preempt any possibility that Bush would commit a Nixon-goes-to-China with Iran.”<sup>3</sup> Parsi criticizes Bush’s “Axis of Evil” speech. According to the author, in the previous decades of hostility, no rhetoric was as damaging as Iran’s inclusion in this new axis. Furthermore, the Bush administration missed the historic “Grand Bargain” opportunity in 2003. In conclusion, Parsi argues that the only viable and feasible policy option for the US regarding Iran is to address Iran’s security concerns and demand concessions in return.

Another area of literature deals with the examination and analysis of the foreign policy of George W. Bush towards Iran. Despite the fact that there has not been sufficient time to acquire a sizeable body of work, there are a few notable contributions. The scholars tend to criticize Bush’s foreign policy, arguing that he failed to construct a coherent policy towards Iran. To start with, in her book *Bitter Friends Bosom Enemies*, Barbara Slavin initially gives an account of the complexity of Iranian domestic politics, and demonstrates that Iran was far from being a monolithic country. In terms of US policy towards Iran during the Bush administration, she argues that the American government failed to pursue a coherent policy towards Iran. On the one hand, they aimed for regime change, and on the other hand they asked for Iran’s cooperation concerning Afghanistan and Iraq. Furthermore, Bush damaged the cause of the reformers in Iran by naming the country as one of the “Axis of Evil”. The Iraq War gave the hard-liners in Iran reason to argue that the US sought dominance in the Middle East. Slavin concludes that the policies of the Bush administration swayed the Iranians to elect Ahmadinejad.<sup>4</sup> Another work that criticizes the Bush administration for failing to construct a fruitful policy came from Donette Murray. In her book, *US Foreign Policy and Iran*, Murray undertakes the arduous task of outlining the American foreign policy towards Iran since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The author argues that the Bush administration failed to seize several

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<sup>3</sup>T Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealing of Israel, Iran, and the U.S.*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007, pp. 232-233.

<sup>4</sup>B Slavin, *Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2007.

opportunities to improve relations with Iran following the 9/11 attacks. She claims that the administration failed to produce a policy that would transcend the military victories of Afghanistan and Iraq. Furthermore, Murray states that the route the administration took with a mixture of carrots and sticks and a strong rhetoric may have slowed down Iran's nuclear programme, but failed to restrain or contain Iran. However, as the administration found its hands full in Afghanistan and Iraq, Iran was pushed to the backburner. In the end, she concludes: "The US succeeded in holding the fort but ultimately abrogated the responsibility, a charge doubly damning since it had both raised expectations and tensions and neglected to explore the option presented to it."<sup>5</sup>

There are several works arguing that the Bush administration's policies did not sway far from the policies of the previous administrations. These works, in a sense, make a case for continuity without failing to criticize the Bush policies. The most prominent example of this literature comes from Timothy Lynch and Robert Singh, who offer an analysis of the foreign policy of the Bush administration in their book, *After Bush: The Case for Continuity in American Foreign Policy*. The authors argue that, despite the criticism the Bush doctrine attracted throughout his term, Bush in fact followed the tenets of mainstream American foreign policy tradition. Not only do the authors claim that the War on Terror should be seen as a Second Cold War, but also that the Bush Doctrine had been consistent with the policies of previous presidencies, be it Republican or Democrat. Lynch and Singh compare the presidencies of Truman and Bush, concluding that the Bush presidency was similar to the early years of the Cold War. Furthermore, they claim that the successors of Bush will continue following in his footsteps in the coming years.<sup>6</sup> In *The Absence of Grand Strategy: The United States in the Persian Gulf, 1972-2005*, Steven Yetiv analyzes the foreign policies of Nixon, Reagan, Bush, Clinton and George W. Bush. The author argues that these presidents did not actively seek to shape the politics of the regions, but instead followed policies that were disorganized and saw the US as a last resort. Alternatively, Yetiv offers the concept of

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<sup>5</sup>D Murray, *US Foreign Policy and Iran: American-Iranian Relations since the Islamic Revolution*, London: Routledge, 2010, p. 143.

<sup>6</sup>TJ Lynch, and RS Singh, *After Bush: The Case for Continuity in American Foreign Policy*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.



“reactive engagement”. The concept revolves around the understanding that foreign policy is inconsistent over time:

In the Persian Gulf, American policies did not fall easily or at all under one conceptual and organized roof. They sometimes were near opposites, based on different assumptions about and perceptions of Iran and Iraq, of the Middle East more broadly, and of America’s role and capabilities in the region. Thus, constructive engagement toward Iraq was very much unlike balancing against Iran’s threat, which was different from seeking to accommodate Iranian moderates or to engineer regime change in Iraq.<sup>7</sup>

In a similar sense, in *The United States and Iran: Sanctions, Wars and the Policy of Dual Containment*, Sasan Fayazmanesh argues that the “dual containment” policy of previous administrations spilled over to the presidency of George W. Bush, especially in the presence of the neoconservative officials of the new administration. The author argues that Israel perceived Iran as a more immediate threat than Iraq, and desired that the Islamic Republic would be the first target. However, despite the initial disappointment, Israel worked hard towards keeping the US policy towards Iran on its set course and, if possible, gaining international sanctions through the United Nations. Even though the book does not cover the entirety of the Bush administration, the main criticism of the majority of Bush’s term is that the policy towards Iran was under the strong influence of Israel and the neoconservatives in the administration.<sup>8</sup> Ofira Seliktar also offers an insight to policy making during the Bush administration in his book *Navigating Iran: From Carter to Obama*. The author scrutinizes the policy making process and its results in his book, paying special attention to the Carter presidency. In regards to George W. Bush, he argues that even though Bush did not come to the White House with a set policy goal in mind in regards to Iran, he soon fell back to the policy of containment, which again proved to be fruitless. However, when the administration showed signs of dropping containment, not only was it hard to reach consensus within the administration, but also congressional mandates made it extremely difficult to pursue a

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<sup>7</sup>SA Yetiv, *The Absence of Grand Strategy: The United States in the Persian Gulf, 1972-2005*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008, p. 193.

<sup>8</sup>S Fayazmanesh, *The United States and Iran: Sanctions, Wars and the Policy of Dual Containment*, New York: Routledge, 2008.

policy of engagement.<sup>9</sup>

### **LOOKING AHEAD: POLICY SUGGESTIONS**

The biggest volume of literature appears concerning what the United States should do regarding Iran. Since the examination of this part of the literature sheds light on where the scholarship converges and diverges on the issue, it is important to give it considerable room. At the time of this study, neither the US nor the international agencies have been able to find definitive evidence that the Iranian nuclear programme is geared towards acquiring nuclear weapons. However, because the majority of scholars and politicians have reached the conclusion that the Tehran government has been striving after nuclear weapons, this chapter will examine the issue in that regard<sup>10</sup>. Where the body of the scholarship on this matter actually branches out is regarding what the United States should do in the future concerning Iran. It is virtually impossible to find a scholar who would suggest or defend only one method to solve this problem. On the contrary, almost all the studies suggest a range of policies that complement each other. Because of this complexity, it is hard to categorize the arguments. Yet, there are some common focal points that can be used to differentiate between perspectives. In this review, this portion of the literature is divided into six categories: addressing Iran's security concerns, implementation of political and economic sanctions, EU-US cooperation, normalization of economic and diplomatic relations, deterrence and containment, and, finally, military options. Since the research covers the years of the presidency of George W. Bush, this chapter scrutinizes the literature published between 2001 and 2012.

Addressing Iran's security concerns is considered by many academics as one of the crucial elements of engagement with this country on the way to a long term solution, because it is argued that Iran's desire for nuclear weapons stems from a security dilemma: Iran feels threatened and therefore views nuclear weapons as a survival instrument. Jahangir Amuzegar states in the article "Nuclear Iran: Perils and Prospects" that the fear of foreign involvement in order to ignite

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<sup>9</sup>O Seliktar, *Navigating Iran: From Carter to Obama*, New York, Palgrave Macmillian, 2012.

<sup>10</sup>Scott Ritter, former UN weapons inspectors, argues that Iran is after nuclear power, not nuclear weapons. See S Ritter, *Target Iran: The Truth about White House's Plans for Regime Change*, New York: Nation Books, 2006.

regime change in Iran and the fear of American military intervention have resulted in an unwillingness to cooperate on the Iranian side. Amuzegar argues that the most promising approach for Washington would be to give the Tehran government some security assurances, such as a mutual non-aggression pact or offering Iran incentives in other economic areas concerning unemployment and inflation.<sup>11</sup> Mark Fitzpatrick also addresses the issue of security in his article “Iran and North Korea: The Proliferation Nexus” by pointing out how the US government dealt with the issue of nuclear power differently in Iraq, Libya, and North Korea, an approach that could also be extended to Iran. Fitzpatrick states that Iran was denied the security assurances that were offered to North Korea on the basis of terrorism, human rights and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He argues that the way to dissuade Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons would be by presenting the Tehran government with some level of security assurances. The Bush administration's reluctance to accept the incentive packages proposed by the EU3 foreign ministers in accordance with the UN Charter that guarantees sovereign equality, diplomacy and refraining from use of force against territorial integrity or political independence undermined the validity of these promises. Fitzpatrick does not claim that the lack of American support for security guarantees was the only obstacle; yet, had Iran decided to consent to negotiations, the American position would keep them away from forgoing their nuclear capabilities.<sup>12</sup> Anoushiravan Ehteshami offers an insight on how the Tehran administration perceived their security in the region:

As far as Tehran is concerned, the U.S. military is also omnipresent on land, close to Iran's borders. There are over 150,000 well-armed and well-supported U.S. military forces in place in Iraq and Afghanistan. The U.S. has also established a minor military foothold in Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. Add to these the close partnership between the U.S. and Pakistan and the picture is complete as far as Tehran's perception of encirclement is concerned. Further still are the strategic partnerships Israel, the closest U.S. ally in the Middle East is developing, including its relations with Turkey (a NATO member) and India. All three countries are of great importance to Iran's strategic planners and Israel's links with them is a worrying development as far as Tehran is concerned.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>J Amuzegar, "Nuclear Iran: perils and prospects", *Middle East Policy*, XIII (2), 200, p.17.

<sup>12</sup>M Fitzpatrick, "Iran and North Korea: The Proliferation Nexus", *Survival*, 48(1), 2006, pp. 76-78.

<sup>13</sup>A Ehteshami, 'Iranian Perspective on the Global Elimination of Nuclear Weapons', *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economic and Culture*, Mar2010, Vol. 16 Issue 3/4, p. 22.

Similarly, Wade L. Huntley addresses the connection between Iran's security concerns and its pursuit of nuclear capabilities in the article, "Rebels without a Cause: North Korea, Iran and the NPT." Huntley divides Iran's motivations to acquire nuclear weapons into two categories: security threats and Iranian nationalism. Having two nuclear powers -Israel and Pakistan- in close proximity and the US troops in two neighbouring countries -Iraq and Afghanistan- gave the Iranian government motivation to seek security by acquiring its own nuclear capabilities, even if the mere presence of nuclear weapons will not provide the regional security it longs for.<sup>14</sup> The author concludes that these issues could only be addressed by incorporating Iran with other regional and global actors on the political, social and economic level.<sup>15</sup> Huntley argues that the American administration has to recognize the regional concerns of Iran, especially concerning the US presence in the region and Israeli nuclear capabilities, and provide security assurance in exchange for non-proliferation.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, in "Iran & Israel: Asymmetric Warfare and Regional Strategy", Babak Ganji addresses the complexity of regional politics for Iran; especially in regards to an Israeli or an American attack using the Iraqi territory.<sup>17</sup> This complexity also involves the nature of relations with other strong actors, such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia.<sup>18</sup> Even though the article is mostly concerned with the discourse between Iran and Israel, Ganji's work reveals the regional concerns of the Iranian government, shedding light on the importance of the role the United States plays. Kenneth Waltz, also, points to Iran's security issues in "A Nuclear Iran: Promoting Stability or Courting Disaster?" Waltz argues that, with unstable countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan as neighbours and Saddam Hussein replaced by the US military presence, it was natural that Iran did not feel safe in the region. Furthermore, Bush's "Axis of Evil" rhetoric and the proximity of the American army added to this insecurity. In the shadow of an America, which cannot be overpowered conventionally, Waltz argues, it is logical that Iran strives after nuclear weapons as the

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<sup>14</sup>WL Huntley, "Rebels without a Cause: North Korea, Iran and the NPT", *International Affairs*, 82(4), 2006, p. 735.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 736.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 737.

<sup>17</sup>B Ganji, "Iran & Israel: Asymmetric Warfare and Regional Strategy", *Defence Academy of the United Kingdom Conflict Studies Research Centre Middle East Series*, 2006, p.6.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p.23.

only way to deter the United States.<sup>19</sup>

Scott D. Sagan also points out that reduction in the security threats posed by the US would be the most important element in stopping the Iranian nuclear programme. Sagan reproves proliferation pessimism, i.e. America cannot do anything if Iran wants to build nuclear weapons; and also deterrence optimism, i.e. the US would be able to successfully deter a nuclear Iran. He opposes the argument made by Kenneth Waltz and also Jason Zaborski in "Deterring a Nuclear Iran", in which they argue that US would be able to use retaliatory threats, missile defence and mini-nukes to deter Iran if Tehran undertakes an attack in the region.<sup>20</sup> Sagan claims that, unlike the Soviet Union, Iran will not be easy to deter in the future. Therefore, the author concludes that a limited security guarantee similar to what was offered to North Korea would give the Iranian government a domestically justifiable option between nuclear weapons and regional security.<sup>21</sup> In "The Iranian Nuclear Challenge," Wyn Q. Bowen and Joanna Kidd also recognize the need for addressing Iran's security concerns and how addressing them might lead Iran to forgo its nuclear ambitions, as was the case with Argentina and Brazil in the 1990s. Bowen and Kidd argue that placing the issue in a broader regional setting would not only ease the political tensions in Iran, but also give some reassurance to the countries in the region.<sup>22</sup>

As sampled above, the literature tends to recognize and define the motivation behind the Iranian government's quest for nuclear weapons. Even though the desire to sustain its own security by means of nuclear weapons is not approved, many scholars are aware of the security threats being posed to Iran by the countries in the Middle East and also by the United States. This recognition leads to the conclusion that without removing or at least reducing these threats, the international community will not be able to find a long lasting solution to the problem of an Iranian nuclear programme.

Another angle of approach to the question of a nuclear Iran is the imposition of

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<sup>19</sup>S Sagan and K Waltz, "A Nuclear Iran: Promoting Stability or Courting Disaster?" *Journal of International Affairs*, 60(2), 2007, pp. 135-152.

<sup>20</sup>J Zaborski, "Deterring a nuclear Iran", *Washington Quarterly*, 28(3), 2005, pp. 153-168.

<sup>21</sup>SD Sagan, "How to keep the bomb from Iran", *Foreign Affairs*, 85(5), 2006, pp. 45-59.

<sup>22</sup>WQ Bowen and J Kidd (2004), "The Iranian nuclear challenge." *International affairs* [London] 80(2): 257-276, pp. 273-274.

sanctions. Even though it is widely agreed that sanctions alone will not be the solution, it is still seen as an integral part of showing Iran a united international front. Fitzpatrick mentions the importance of sanctions in “Can Iran's Nuclear Capability Be Kept Latent?” He argues that Western negotiators have seen sanctions as inefficient, but despite their view, the threat of further and tougher sanctions remain an essential element of the negotiation process. Fitzpatrick observes that implementation of the sanctions demonstrates a unified Western front, which would make the Iranian officials and other potential proliferators think twice before starting a nuclear program.<sup>23</sup> Ephraim Kam evaluates the situation from an Israeli point of view in “A Nuclear Iran: What Does It Mean and What Can Be Done?” Although the author mentions several other alternatives -such as a pre-emptive strike by the Americans targeted at the key Iranian nuclear facilities- Kam suggests that political and economic measures taken by the international community is another way to persuade Iran to give up its nuclear programme. These measures include security guarantees, but more importantly, they should outline a threat that would isolate the country internationally. According to Kam, imposing economic sanctions should also be an indispensable part of this process.<sup>24</sup> He also points out that a combination of incentives and sanctions have worked in Argentina, Brazil and Libya, and must be given serious consideration regarding Iran before the country acquires nuclear weapons.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, Emanuele Ottolenghi maintains that with improved sanctions, Iran might be persuaded to alter its nuclear policy: “[T]he West must devise a system of ‘smart sanctions’. They must be carefully calibrated, surgically directed and geared to cause maximum hurt to the regime with as little collateral civilian damage as possible.”<sup>26</sup>

The literature that questions the efficacy of, and opposes, economic and political sanctions should also be mentioned. Ephraim Inbar talked about the shortcomings of economic sanctions in “The Need to Block a Nuclear Iran.” The author argues that countries and regimes have shown resilience to economic sanctions, and Iran would not be any different regardless of how

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<sup>23</sup>M Fitzpatrick, “Can Iran’s Nuclear Capability Be Kept Latent?” *Survival*, 49:1, 2007, p. 14.

<sup>24</sup>E Kam, “A Nuclear Iran: What Does It Mean and What Can be Done,” *Institute for National Security Studies*, Memorandum, 2007, p. 71.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>E Ottolenghi, *Under a Mushroom Cloud: Europe, Iran and the Bomb*, London: Profile Books, 2009, p. 203.

much it would be hurt economically. Furthermore, the success of economic sanctions depends on the time elapsed under the sanctions; however, the international community has not had enough time to observe the impact in regards to Iran as of 2006.<sup>27</sup> Mohammad Javad Zarif reaches a similar conclusion from a different point of view in “Tackling the Iran-US Crisis: The Need for a Paradigm Shift.” Zarif argues that economic sanctions and political pressure will not reach their goals, instead: “they are more likely to unravel the non-proliferation regime, exacerbate tension, perpetuate the enemy paradigm and lead to unwanted –even accidental –escalations.”<sup>28</sup> Therefore, unlike the issue on the security concerns of Iran, the usefulness of political and economic sanctions was highly debatable among the scholars. There are many, as mentioned above, who see this approach as a vital component of a non-proliferation plan by providing a united international front and by pushing Iran to the point of decision-making. Also, there are those who stand on the other side of the argument arguing against imposition of sanctions, due to the possibility of undesirable effects, such as inadvertently strengthening the Iranian regime.

The United States is not the only actor involved in the mission of persuading Iran to forgo its nuclear ambitions because a nuclear Iran would pose a threat to the interests of a number of other countries. In *Iran and the Bomb: the Abdication of International Responsibility*, Therese Delpech argues that each country plays a role in the current problem: “the Europeans have always reacted too little and too late, the Americans have not defined a clear policy on Iran, the Russians have constantly sat on the fence, and the Chinese have hidden behind the Russians.”<sup>29</sup> Bowen and Fitzpatrick also agree that the American government should be willing to work on strategy with its European allies in order to create an international consensus.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, in *Global Security Watch: Iran*, Thomas Mattair maintains that economic and diplomatic sanctions slowly provide

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<sup>27</sup>E Inbar, “The Need to Block a Nuclear Iran”, *The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies*, Bar-Ilan University, 2006, pp. 9-10.

<sup>28</sup>MJ Zarif, “Tackling the Iran-U.S. Crisis: The Need for a Paradigm Shift”, *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol 60. No 2, 2007, pp. 88-89.

<sup>29</sup>T Delpech, *Iran and the Bomb: The Abdication of International Responsibility*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, p. 4.

<sup>30</sup>Bowen, op. cit. p. 276; Fitzpatrick, op. cit. p. 19.

pressures that may lead to some compromises.<sup>31</sup> Comparably, in “Ring in Proliferations: How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb Network,” Alexander H. Montgomery argues that good cop/ bad cop play only works if the EU demonstrates that they really can hold the U.S. back if Iran is willing to negotiate. He claims that the Bush administration continuously kept the military option on the table while denying that America had intentions to attack Iran. This mixed signal caused Iran to be hesitant to enter negotiations with the EU: “Without a clear signal from the United States that it will accept the outcome of negotiations and not take military actions, Iran is unlikely to accept an offer from the EU to restrict its nuclear activities.”<sup>32</sup>

Unlike the difference of opinion regarding sanctions, scholars appear to agree that stronger cooperation between the US and the EU is required, in order to give enough room to diplomacy and even the sanctions. Without a balanced strategy that would make the EU more and the US less threatening, it will be hard to persuade Iran to forgo its nuclear activities. As Christopher de Bellague argues in *The Struggle for Iran*; in order to achieve any results, the United States should offer more incentives and that the EU, and Russia and China should become part of the punitive actions. Bellague concludes: “What is needed to deal with Iran and its nuclear ambitions is the formation of international coalition that included the US, and that is not George Bush’s strong point.”<sup>33</sup> Moreover, Ottolenghi argues that if Europe joins the US in implementing sanctions, a behaviour change from Tehran could be attained: “Denying its commercial relationship with Tehran could inflict severe damage on the regime’s stability and, ultimately its survival.”<sup>34</sup> Another work in this line came from Kenneth Pollack. His book *The Persian Puzzle* offers a cautious assessment of the Iranian nuclear programme. Even though the author argues, “Iran is on the wrong path and marching down it quickly,” military involvement in Iran could have disastrous consequences. Instead, he offers a “triple track” solution: hold open the prospect of the Grand

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<sup>31</sup>TR Mattair, *Global Security Watch: Iran*, Westport: Praeger Security International, 2008.

<sup>32</sup>AH Montgomery, “Ring in Proliferation: How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb Network”, *International Security*, 30(2), 2005, pp. 185-186

<sup>33</sup>C de Bellague, *The Struggle for Iran*, New York: New York Review Books, 2007, p. 117.

<sup>34</sup>Ottolenghi, op.cit., p. 212.



Bargain, provide a true carrot-and-stick approach, and prepare for a new containment regime.<sup>35</sup> Overall, the book attempts to address whether the United States would be able to deter a nuclear Iran, or whether, with nuclear weapons in hand, Iran would become a regional menace. Pollack concludes that the US could live with a nuclear Iran and would be able to deter Iran's nuclear power through multilateral engagement.

Another aspect of the solution is found in the fact that the US has not had any formal relations with the Tehran government since the Islamic Revolution. The lacks of formal communication and any kind of formal economic and financial relations have also been identified as major hindrances on the way to a long-lasting solution. Therefore, many scholars see normalizing diplomatic and economic relations between the US and Iran as one of the best methods to dissuade Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. For instance, in an interview titled "Iran: The New Claimant to Regional Power," Vali Nasr stresses the importance of an establishment of diplomatic and economic relations. Nasr argues that resuming diplomatic relations would be the first step towards making Iran realise the benefits and advantages of maintaining its ties with the United States. Moreover, he continues, offering and realizing economic incentives would change the way Iran engaged in politics because "the more Iran is integrated into the world economy, the more its economy, its leadership, and its politics become dependent and a prisoner of those relationships."<sup>36</sup>

Additionally, Sam Gardiner points out that when the US government said they wanted to pursue diplomacy first, they actually meant that Iran should suspend the enrichment program before the negotiations, and then the US government would talk about the future.<sup>37</sup> Gardiner argues that America only appeared to be fond of diplomacy in order to be able to say that the military option was the only remaining solution. A similar conclusion is reached by Inbar. Even though Inbar does not necessarily support normalization of economic and diplomatic relations between Iran

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<sup>35</sup>K Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict Between Iran and America*, New York: Random House, 2004, pp. 400-422.

<sup>36</sup>V Nasr, "Iran: The New Claimant to Regional Power, An Interview with Vali Nasr", *The Fletcher Forum*, Vol. 31:2 2007, pp. 6-9.

<sup>37</sup>S Gardiner, *The End of The "Summer of Diplomacy", Assessing U.S. Military Options on Iran*, The Century Foundation, 2006, p. 5.

and the US, he states that “the United States probably decided to go through the motions required by the Europeans in order to secure European support for a tougher approach when diplomacy ran its course.”<sup>38</sup> Moreover, in *Understanding the US-Iran Crisis: A Primer*, Phyliss Bennis attempts to deconstruct the reasons why the Bush administration pushed forward to justify a conflict with Iran. She argues that economic incentives dominated American foreign policy towards Iran because the US had been trying to undermine its competitors in exports. Therefore, Bennis claims, by instigating an international conflict, the US could remove Iran as an important actor in oil sales.<sup>39</sup> As a result, some scholars argue that America does not have the genuine intention of solving the problem through diplomatic measures, but wants to create the image that the Iranian government has left no other choice than the use of force.

In *Negotiating with Iran: Wrestling the Ghosts of History*, John Limbert argues that confrontations between the Islamic Republic and the United States accumulate a suspicion and hatred in both countries resulting in the current hostile environment. Therefore, Limbert suggests that the United States should conduct negotiations in order to overcome these “mutual myth perceptions.”<sup>40</sup> There are other elements that would make it easier for the US to address Iran through diplomatic and economic routes. Shahram Chubin and Robert Litwak maintain that fostering an internal debate in Iran would be an integral addition to diplomacy. In “Debating Iran's Nuclear Aspirations,” it is argued that, by providing data and supporting forums, the US should encourage debate in Iran in order to make the Iranian public question the nuclear programme. The authors believe that the dynamic young population of Iran would become a part of the solution. To compliment the possible scepticism in the country, the US should be ready to offer alternative technology and energy sources. It is of value to quote the emphasis Chubin and Litwak put on a public debate:

By working to encourage public debate on the logic underlying Iran's pursuit of nuclear energy, the United States would in effect be helping Iranians to wrench the issue out of the grasp of the hard liners, who have shielded the program

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<sup>38</sup>Inbar, op. cit, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup>P Bennis, *Understanding the US-Iran Crisis: A Primer*, New York: Olive Branch Press, 2008.

<sup>40</sup>JW Lambert, *Negotiating With Iran: Wrestling the Ghosts of History*, Washington, D.C.: Institute of Peace, 2009.

from public scrutiny and shrouded it in secrecy. These efforts would thus help to demythologize the benefits of nuclear technology, making it more difficult for elements of the regime to use the program as a cover for acquiring nuclear weapons.<sup>41</sup>

Yet, at the same time, the authors maintain that this would be a complementary piece to diplomacy and a softer attitude by the United States.<sup>42</sup>

In addition, a change of rhetoric on the American side is seen as an important element of any kind of diplomatic solution to work. Litwak points out how the regime change rhetoric in Washington made the Iranian government insecure and led them to be ambiguous about their nuclear programme to keep America from creating a multinational front.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Ali Ansari calls for a deeper change in his book *Confronting Iran: The Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Next Great Crisis in the Middle East*. The author claims that Iran has been neither as uncooperative nor as aggressive as the Bush administration portrayed it. Though the two countries have a bitter history that needed to be overcome, Ansari continues, there is room for improvement. He argued that the cause of the main estrangement between the United States and Iran had been American and Israeli rhetoric about Iran.<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, in *The United States and Persian Gulf Security*, Steven Wright observes that, since Iran and the United States shared common interests in Iraq and Afghanistan, the major obstacle for cooperation remains Iran's support for terrorism. Wright added that the Bush administration did not have many options other than diplomacy:

Under the Bush Doctrine, the preventative use of force was justifiable once all diplomatic avenues had been exhausted. It is important, however, to recognize that in spite of the comprehensive nature of US sanctions towards Iran, the scope of diplomacy remained. In essence, the United States could not realistically impose any further punitive sanction on Iran, so its options were essentially twofold: 1) Use incentives as a means to achieving a moderation in Iran's nuclear policy, 2) rely on the good offices of other countries to negotiate a change in Iran's policies... Given this contextual situation, the Bush administration appears to have little choice but to premise its foreign policy towards Iran on non-military means.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>S Chubin and RS Litwak, "Debating Iran's Nuclear Aspirations", *Washington Quarterly*, 26(4), 2006, p. 112.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., pp. 112-118.

<sup>43</sup>Litwak, op. cit., pp. 7-8.

<sup>44</sup>A Ansari, *Confronting Iran: The Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Next Great Crisis in the Middle East*, New York: Basic Books, 2007

<sup>45</sup>S Wright, *The United States and the Persian Gulf Security*, Reading: Ithaca Press, 2007, pp. 196-197.

Consequently, normalization of diplomatic and economic relations with Iran has been seen as one of the options to make Iran first and foremost a part of a wider global community. Moreover, by establishing diplomatic relations, the US would be able to negotiate directly with the Tehran government, rendering the process less complicated. In this regard, instead of following the Libya example, many scholars favour following the China example, where, despite the domestic atmosphere, the United States built a bridge to reopen the relations. The literature that favours engagement also gives considerable space to supporting strategies such as encouraging an internal debate in Iran and change of rhetoric. The toning down of the hostile rhetoric would give less material to the Tehran government to use against the United States and the opposition groups, and internal debate would foster Iran's integration into the international community.

Another approach to the question could be found in the familiar Cold War terms; deterrence and containment. In "Iran's Nuclear Challenge," Colin Dueck and Ray Takeyh consider four options the US has concerning Iran: containment, rollback, non-entanglement and engagement. The authors claim that out of these four options, containment is the best starting point, and for effective containment, the US needs: "clarity about the consequences of aggression, along with credible military capability, commitments, and alliances within the region." Dueck and Takeyh argue that despite the loss of some muscle with the Iraq War, Washington should sustain this basic guide to containment along with negotiations. This suggestion is based on the assumption that, even though the leadership in Iran puts high value on the nuclear programme, it does not agree on the priority of the programme among the other goals of the government. Therefore, if challenged with a clear-cut choice between nuclear weapons and economic incentives, the pragmatic side of the Iranian government might start putting its weight on the discussion in favour of forgoing the nuclear programme.<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, David Hastings Dunn advocates "a call for a new detente with Iran within

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<sup>46</sup>C Dueck and R Takeyh, "Iran's Nuclear Challenge", *Political Science Quarterly*, 122(2), 2007, pp. 203-205.

the framework of an overall containment policy.”<sup>47</sup> In “Real Men Want to Go to Tehran: Bush, Pre-emption and the Iranian Nuclear Challenge,” Dunn suggests an integrated and a more coordinated Iran policy. In this new approach, an overarching Middle East policy -including Syria, Arab states and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process- should be at the forefront of this policy. Giving the Soviet example as a guide, Dunn maintains that the US should recognize the legitimacy of the Iranian government by directly communicating with the Tehran administration. Addressing Iranian security concerns would also be an important aspect of the detente policy. Yet, Dunn clearly identifies the containment aspect of his policy suggestion by emphasising the importance of “the crucial backdrop of the threat that if Iran were to engage in nuclear rogue state behaviors then the military option is always there.”<sup>48</sup> Another work that emphasizes a new face of containment of Iran is Isaiah Wilson's “Rediscovering Containment: The Sources of American-Iranian Conduct.” In this analysis, Wilson assesses the similarities between the American and Iranian government, such as the idea of exceptionalism, the intention of spreading their ideology and the protection of some existing communities – Israeli or Shia communities.<sup>49</sup> By pointing out these similarities, Wilson argues that the Iranian approach, just like the American, is pragmatic and based on realpolitik. By comparing the Soviets to Iran, Wilson advocates a kind of containment as suggested in George Kennan's “Long Telegram.” Yet, Wilson, too, recognizes the importance of regional dynamics and states that along with military operations in the Middle East, the Bush Doctrine resulted in the long lasting perception of threat among Iranians. A crucial part of containment would be offering a solution for the concerns of the regional countries such as Iraq, Israel and Lebanon, since without addressing the regional issues it would be impossible to engage with Iran. In conclusion, Wilson argues that detente in the framework of containment towards Iran would be the only way to create stability in the region.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>DH Dunn, “Real Men Want to Go to Tehran: Bush, Pre-emption and the Iranian Nuclear Challenge”, *International affairs*, 83(1), 2007, p. 37. David Hastings Dunn is Reader in International Politics in the Department of Political Science and International Studies at the University of Birmingham.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., pp. 32-37.

<sup>49</sup>I Wilson III, “Rediscovering Containment: The Sources of American-Iranian Conduct”, *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 60, no 2., 2007, pp. 100-104.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., pp. 107-112.

Christopher Hemmer reaches a similar conclusion in “Responding to a Nuclear Iran.” After identifying the shortcomings of a pre-emptive military strike and efforts for a regime change, Hemmer argues that the best policy option toward Iran would be: firstly, deterrence of using nuclear weapons; secondly, containment against using nuclear weapons as leverage in the region; thirdly, engagement with an establishment of diplomatic and economic relations; and lastly, reassuring Iran's neighbours.<sup>51</sup> Judith S. Yaphe and Charles D. Lutes argue that a rollback policy would start with the normalization of diplomatic relations and the offer of some economic incentives such as WTO membership. However, without receiving any indications of Iran reducing its hostility towards its neighbours, the US should not offer any security guarantees that would release Iran to undertake any hostile action. Even though a strategy of rollback previously worked with Libya, South Africa and Ukraine, Iran has a lot to benefit from in terms of domestic and regional politics if it possesses nuclear weapons. At this moment, the authors claim, the international community should present Iran with a firm choice between possessing nuclear weapons and enjoying the benefits of good international relations. Stating their opposition to a sanctions-only approach because of its inefficiency, the authors analyze the last resort of a rollback policy: the use of military force. They argue that an attack against Iran would most likely not be a successful one, keeping in mind the limitations of intelligence and effective destruction of targets. Unexpected consequences such as the strengthening of the regime and the subsequent negative international reaction would also make a unilateral American strike undesirable. Yet, Yaphne and Lutes assert that a military presence in the region supported with ongoing efforts to get the backing of regional countries would give America the muscle to deter Iran.<sup>52</sup> Between rollback and deterrence, the authors conclude: “the potential for rollback once the threshold has been crossed is lower than preventing it in the first place, and the costs of rollback may be higher than the costs of deterring and containing a nuclear Iran.”<sup>53</sup>

Sasan Fayazmanesh argues that the United States has been pursuing a containment

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<sup>51</sup>C Hemmer, “Responding to a Nuclear Iran”, *Parameters*, Autumn 2007, pp. 42-53.

<sup>52</sup>JS Yaphe and CD Lutes. "Reassessing the implications of a nuclear-armed Iran." *McNair Papers*, 2007, pp. 54-60.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, p.62.

policy since the Carter Administration, and the final goal of containment would not necessarily solve the problem permanently:

But even if Iran does forfeit its right and capitulates, it is uncertain whether the US and Israel would stop their attempts to contain Iran. If containment means the destruction of any country that stands in the way of US and Israel, the fate of Iran might be similar to that of Iraq; ultimately an excuse will be found to do to Iran what was done to Iraq. The advocates of the dual containment policy, particularly those who had argued that Iran should be contained before Iraq, have been relentless. They will not stop until they achieve the ultimate containment of Iran.<sup>54</sup>

Finally, since the Bush administration never ruled out the possibility of a military strike, the scholarship also analyses the advantages, disadvantages and outcomes of such an action. For instance, Dunn devotes a significant part of his article to the possibility of a pre-emptive strike. After laying out stages of escalation of a nuclear programme -breaking out of the IAEA safeguards, uranium enrichment, undeclared facilities, leaving the NPT, announcement of testing, weaponization and deployment- Dunn observes that the timing of a military action in these steps of progress would depend on the nature of the threat. In the Iranian case, the calculation would not only rely on the technical developments, but also the intentions and motivations of the Iranian government. If the American government concluded that Iran intended to share the bomb with terrorist organizations or attack Israel, it would be likely that America will undertake a pre-emptive strike. He states that there are two options considered by the Pentagon and Washington: strikes on nuclear facilities or strikes on both nuclear facilities and a set of leadership targets. However, Dunn also argues that a military strike would not guarantee a solution; it might even worsen the situation by resulting in an attack on Israel, cutting off of oil supplies, flaming the Shia uprising in Iraq, strengthening the Iranian regime, or increasing hostility toward the US, both in Iran and in the Gulf. Furthermore, such an attack would gain neither international nor domestic support. Therefore, Dunn does not foresee a US strike, but he does conclude that the Bush administration was willing to utilize the threat of strike in order to keep the military option from the table, using it as an aspect of coercive diplomacy and as pressure on China and Russia to take stronger measures against Iran.

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<sup>54</sup>S Fayazmanesh, *The United States and Iran: Sanctions, Wars and the Policy of Dual Containment*, New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 11.

Dunn maintains that the threat of a pre-emptive strike has been self-defeating since Iran was aware of the international and regional vulnerability of the US, and also the Iranian government has felt the need to push further with the programme to deter such an attack.<sup>55</sup> Additionally, scholars like Fitzpatrick and Hemmer argue against a military strike since it does not offer a long-term solution. Hemmer concludes, “Iranian nuclear ambitions can be best deterred by means of an intelligent long-range foreign policy, not the threat of military intervention.”<sup>56</sup>

Robert L. Gallucci addresses similar concerns in “Averting Nuclear Catastrophe: Contemplating Extreme Response to US Vulnerability.” Gallucci points out the risk of terrorist organizations getting their hands on Iranian nuclear weapons. Against such a threat the author advocates two responses: “preventative war to deal with rogue suppliers and expanded deterrence to obtain the cooperation needed to stop the transfer or leakage of fissile material.”<sup>57</sup> He also identifies two possible reasons that would lead an American president to take such an action. Firstly, even if the intelligence services could not give a confident report on whether or not nuclear weapons had been transferred to terrorist organizations, the president might have felt forced to prevent that from happening by use of force. Secondly, the president could decide to act before his successor is forced to make a choice between trusting a nuclear-armed rogue state or attack and try to destroy the nuclear stockpile. Gallucci argues that the second scenario reflected the situation during Bush’s second term. However, he also recognizes the limitations of preventive strike and the alienation it would cause. Furthermore, he claims that even though some would focus on the limitations of a successful strike, some policy-makers might see a preventive strike as a possible option to ensure a regime change.<sup>58</sup> In this line, in *The Iranian Time Bomb*, Michael Ledeen suggests that diplomatic efforts would be fruitless, and “revolution is our most lethal weapon against the Mullahs. We should have used it years ago, but must use it now.”<sup>59</sup>

Moreover, Inbar argues that the only viable option to prevent Iran from acquiring

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<sup>55</sup>Dunn, op. cit. pp 26-30.

<sup>56</sup>Hemmer, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>57</sup>RL Gallucci, "Averting Nuclear Catastrophe: Contemplating Extreme Responses to US Vulnerability", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 607, 2006, p.56.

<sup>58</sup>Gallucci, op. cit., pp. 53-57.

<sup>59</sup>MA Ledeen, *The Iranian Time Bomb*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2007, p. 266.



nuclear weapons is a preventive strike. He claims that even though there was not a comprehensive intelligence survey on Iranian nuclear facilities, there was enough intelligence that would result in crippling the programme with a persistent bombing campaign. Furthermore, Inbar maintains that in addition to having the military capabilities to carry out such challenging operations, the American public would support the decision if informed about the immensity of the threat. Additionally, countries in the region including Turkey, Israel and the Arab countries would support the American decision, since none of them are fond of seeing a nuclear Iran. Still, he argues, an attack might not be necessary if the US gave Tehran an ultimatum and concentrated ground forces along Iranian borders to back up this ultimatum.<sup>60</sup>

Therefore, even though military strike against Iran was unattractive, it was still considered an option by some scholars due to the failure of other efforts and the reluctance of the Iranian government to cooperate. However, a majority of the studies maintain a focus on the negative outcomes of a strike and did not think that it would solve the problem even if there were sufficient intelligence to undertake such a complicated operation.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter overviews the literature on United States foreign policy towards Iran during the presidency of George W. Bush. The first part scrutinizes the scholarship that looked back on the years of the Bush administration and analysed what was missed or achieved. Even though the literature in this area was thin, the major sources concerning Bush's foreign policy have been addressed. The policy making process within the Bush administration and continuity or change from the foreign policy mainstream are the main focal points of this section. In the context of Iran, the dominance of the White House and the Department of Defense over the State Department has been widely observed. Furthermore, even though the administration had much to be criticised for, most of the literature agrees that there was not a significant change in the policy direction between the Clinton and Bush presidencies. The second part of the review dealt with the

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<sup>60</sup>Inbar, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-15.

policy suggestions of the scholars from different backgrounds and areas of expertise. The studies were divided into six in order to categorize the policy suggestions: addressing Iran's security concerns, implementation of political and economic sanctions, EU-US cooperation, normalization of economic and diplomatic relations, deterrence and containment and finally military options. There are several conclusions that may be drawn from these policy suggestions. To begin with, a military attack, comprehensive or limited, against Iran has not been generally favoured by the scholars because of tactical and intelligence limitations, as well as uncertainties about a definite outcome. Secondly, even though there are still many who supported a sanctions regime, because of its inefficiency thus far, those who promoted sanctions agreed that there should be some changes in the current regime. An important aspect of this change in sanctions regime was to convince the EU, China and Russia to work together with the US. However, a majority of the scholars covered here argue that a permanent and constructive solution requires engagement, in which the US government is genuinely willing to talk and negotiate with Iran.

As mentioned before, because of the contemporariness of the subject matter, that the literature is narrow in several areas is understandable. For instance, studies examining the inner workings of the Bush administration, the foreign policy-making process, different factors in decision-making, and analysis on continuity and discontinuity would add valuable knowledge to the field. This thesis is an attempt to fill some gaps in the literature. First and foremost, this work endeavours to provide a historical account of foreign policy towards Iran, thus contributing to the field of contemporary political history. Furthermore, by scrutinizing the contribution of Congress in the foreign policy-making process as regards Iran, the understudied topic of Congress' role in foreign affairs is addressed. Moreover, think tanks and lobbies remain another neglected aspect of foreign policy. Even though their influence cannot be measured, this thesis attempts contribute to the literature by providing an account of their possible influence on policy-making bodies.

# THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

and

## IRAN

“States like these, and their terrorist allies,  
constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the  
peace of the world.”

*George W Bush*

When George W. Bush finally won the 2000 elections, Iran was not at the top of his to-do list. For that matter, he did not run as a foreign policy candidate, but with a domestic policy agenda where education, tax and social security reform formed the majority of his agenda. However, history had something different in mind for the Bush presidency, and he will be remembered for what he did abroad, not for what he did at home. Bush had a humble background when it came to foreign policy, and Iran had already proved to be a challenge for his more experienced predecessors. Even though there were a few precious times when it looked like the two governments could finally break the ice, by the time Bush took his place in the Oval Office, the previous decades had brought US-Iran relations to an impasse. Where Clinton left Iranian policy was not much more optimistic than where Carter had left it.

This chapter aims to pick up from where Clinton left off and provide an historical account of the dealings of the executive branch, to examine the policy

formation process and analyze the outcome during the Bush presidency. The main argument revolves around the impact of bureaucratic politics within the executive branch. The interagency battles among the State and Defense Departments, the National Security Council and the CIA contributed to the formation of an inconsistent policy towards Iran. Especially during Bush's first term, the dominance of the Vice President and the Secretary of State overpowered the Secretary of State, resulting in a more hawkish policy than that with which Bush had started his tenure. The second term witnessed some significant changes; however, the mistakes of the first term continued to haunt this shift, in addition to the changing dynamics of Iranian domestic politics. As a result, like the Clinton administration, the Bush administration was more hawkish toward Iran during the first term and more dovish during the second term to no avail.

Having had very limited foreign policy experience, Bush needed an experienced and trustworthy group of people in the White House in order to compensate for his lack of familiarity. His vice presidential choice reflected this self-awareness. In terms of foreign policy, Dick Cheney had a libertarian outlook from his years in Halliburton, with strong realist awareness about the importance of national security.<sup>1</sup> Despite his opposition to unilateral sanctions, Cheney saw the Iranian regime as a national security threat, and favoured the strict isolation of Iran in order to trigger regime change.<sup>2</sup> The Secretary of Defense was another position that would inevitably be involved in matters international. Bush thought Donald Rumsfeld was a suitable candidate to lead the Pentagon towards the changes he had in mind, which included a stronger and more modern, agile and deployable military.

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<sup>1</sup>SF Hayes, *Cheney: The Untold Story of America's Most Powerful and Controversial Vice President*, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007, p. 269.

<sup>2</sup>B Gellman, *Angler: The Cheney Vice Presidency*, New York: Penguin, 2009, p.343.

Furthermore, Dick Cheney strongly commended Rumsfeld<sup>3</sup>. With regards to Iran, Rumsfeld always assumed a non-conciliatory position, and did not waver throughout his term. Having deemed it a terrorist country, he refused to reward any positive step from Iran, arguing that it would be a “concession to terror”.<sup>4</sup>

In the world of executive politics, the role of the Secretary of State is undoubtedly crucial. Colin Powell was the most moderate figure among those closest to the president. In regards to Iran, from the beginning of his term, Secretary Powell favoured a more balanced policy that included easing the economic sanctions and exploring routes of engagement.<sup>5</sup> However, Powell never enjoyed the personal closeness to the president that Cheney and Rumsfeld did, and eventually Condoleezza Rice would take his place in the State Department after his resignation for Bush’s second term. Rice had served as the Soviet expert in the National Security Council under Brent Scowcroft during the presidency of George HW Bush, which would convince him to include her in his cabinet if he ever became president.<sup>6</sup> George Tenet had been serving as the Director of Central Intelligence since 1997 when Bush came to power. His career was marked by the 9/11 attacks and the intelligence report on WMDs in Iraq. With a strong Vice President and Secretary of Defense, who wanted everything to be done their way, Tenet found himself fighting for authority and control in matters concerning his own department. It was a time when the CIA became part of the political process with the onset of the Iraq War and remained that way throughout Bush’s term. These were the main actors in the new administration, which would become yet another administration to tackle the issues that brewed between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 83-84.

<sup>4</sup>A Cockburn, *Rumsfeld: His Rise, Fall and Catastrophic Legacy*, New York: Scribner, 2007, p. 137.

<sup>5</sup>PW Rodman, *Presidential Command: Power, Leadership, and the Making of Foreign Policy from Richard Nixon to George W. Bush*, New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2009, pp. 233-271.

<sup>6</sup>GW Bush, *Decision Points*, New York: Crown Publishers, 2010, pp. 82-83.

The main objective of this chapter is to address how foreign policy towards Iran was made by identifying the roles of key actors in the Executive Branch. In this regard, the chapter is divided into subsections that deal with specific issues such as the September 11 attacks, the Grand Bargain or the sanctions. Other than addressing how September 11 impacted foreign policy and the shift between the two terms, the question of consistency could be taken up with respect to Bush's time in the office, because his presidency witnessed one of the most dramatic events in the history of the United States and resulted in two wars in eight years. Consistency is defined as unchanging logic and coherent strategy to reach a previously decided goal. In this regard, the chapter is an attempt to find out if the Bush administration came to office with an action plan regarding Iran, if this plan changed, if the policies followed by the administration followed the same logic or if the steps taken by the US government merely reacted to the current bureaucratic and international atmosphere. Furthermore, the executive branch in the United States is not a monolithic government organ, but one that functions with the input of many contributing actors including the State Department and the Department of Defense. Historically, the two departments rivalled for influence over foreign policy matters. By considering the people heading these departments at the beginning of Bush's term, this chapter will attempt to shed light on how these departments differed and how they impacted foreign policy towards Iran. Lastly, since George W. Bush was not the first president to deal with Iran, his policies will be compared to those of Bill Clinton. The main argument of the chapter is that bureaucratic politics, an inability to read Iran, the difficulty of shedding preconceptions, the Iraq War and poor intelligence contributed to the inconsistent policy pursued by the Bush administration. In this endeavour, the key events and issues that arose during the course of eight years will be narrated and analysed separately in order to discern consistency.

## NEW ADMINISTRATION, NEW POLICY?

During the 2000 presidential campaign, Governor Bush emphasised his commitment to the advancement of the missile shield project and continuation of economic sanctions imposed on Iran. Therefore, it was not surprising that the first months of the Bush presidency marked the beginning of discussions about a national missile shield. The lingering ghost of Reagan's Star Wars cast its shadow on Russia's reaction against this new endeavour. However, despite the name given by Russian Marshal Sergeyev, "the son of Star Wars,"<sup>7</sup> the concerns of the United States arguably stemmed from a different source—that of the rogue states like Iran, Iraq and North Korea.

In 1998, a commission was assigned by the Congress to assess the threat of ballistic missiles in the world. The commission was named after its chairman, Donald Rumsfeld. In its report, the Rumsfeld Commission argued that Iran was in the process of developing weapons of mass destruction and would be able to deliver a nuclear weapon in five years time.<sup>8</sup> Only two years before Bush's election, Rumsfeld was working on drawing attention to the threat posed by intercontinental ballistic missiles. Once he became the Secretary of Defense, Rumsfeld also became an avid supporter of the missile defence shield programme despite the technological shortcomings of the project. Rumsfeld was at the forefront of the fight for a defence shield, but he was not alone. Vice President Cheney also backed the abolition of the ABM Treaty, so that the US would be free to pursue European countries to provide assistance with the shield. However, the State Department under Powell argued that abrogating from the ABM Treaty would put

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<sup>7</sup>'Russia Says U.S. Antimissile Plan Means an Arms Race', *The New York Times*, 6 February 2001.

<sup>8</sup>Executive Summary of the Report of the Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States, 104<sup>th</sup> Congress, 15 July 1998.

undue stress on US-Russia relations.<sup>9</sup> National Security Advisor Rice recognized that the US needed to stop and roll back the efforts of the proliferator countries, and in this endeavour abrogating the ABM Treat and deploying missile defence systems would aid considerably.<sup>10</sup> Out of all these voices, Rumsfeld's was clearly the loudest in the President's ears. Not only did his trusted advisors, Cheney, Rumsfeld and Rice, support the idea, but also Reagan, Bush's presidential ideal, was the leader who first brought forth the idea of defending the US territory against missiles with a shielding system.

Bush had talked about the missile defence shield as a measure against threats from rogue states during his presidential campaign. After he assumed office, he started to push this agenda in Europe, since the instalment of such a system would require the cooperation of at least some European countries. As the new president of Russia decided to aid Iran, the need for a defence system became more urgent. Vladimir Putin chose a different route than that of his predecessor Boris Yeltsin by resuming the sale of conventional weapons to Iran and declaring Russia's intention to aid Iran to complete the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant.<sup>11</sup> This renewed cooperation between Russia and Iran enhanced the sense of threat in Washington because it challenged American interests in the Middle East. Russia's willingness to aid Iran in nuclear technology not only created tension between the former Cold War adversaries, but also indicated that American interests were threatened both in the Middle East and at home with the advancement of the Iranian ballistic missile programme.

By April, the Bush administration had told its European allies that the missile defence programme would go forward even at the expense of the Anti-

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<sup>9</sup>D Cheney, *In My Time*, New York: Threshold Editions, 2011, pp.364-65.

<sup>10</sup>C Rice, *No Higher Honor*, New York: Crown Publishers, 2011, pp. 156-157.

<sup>11</sup>'U.S. Faults Russian Nuclear Fuel Shipment', *The Washington Post*, 17 February 2001.



Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM), so the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Lucas Fischer said to the Danish Parliament: “We will deploy defences as soon as possible. Therefore, we believe that the ABM treaty will have to be replaced, eliminated or changed in a fundamental way.”<sup>12</sup>

By the end of April, Secretary Powell had released the State Department’s annual terrorism report. The data for this report had been acquired under the Clinton administration, but the interpretation of the findings belonged to the Bush administration, since the current officials had had time to reinterpret its contents from those of made by the previous officials. This report was the first official overview of how the new administration perceived terrorism, placing Iran at the top of the list of countries accused of state-sponsored terrorism. A few days after the release of the report by Secretary of State Powell, President Bush delivered a speech at the National Defense University, emphasizing his desire for a change in the current international system on missiles, arguing that the ABM Treaty should be abolished.<sup>13</sup>

The prospect of a national defence system continued to be an important component of President Bush's vision, not because Russia was perceived as a threat, but because he argued that minor nuclear powers could pose threats even more so than the major ones.<sup>14</sup> However, starting a defence project that would cost billions of dollars would intimidate Russia and China, and create opposition among Democratic senators. Furthermore, the prospect of being immune to intercontinental missiles and thus ending the half-century long fear of a nuclear attack from any nation on earth, be it a major or a minor power, boosted George Bush’s relatively weak foreign

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<sup>12</sup>MR Gordon with SL Myers, ‘Bush Team Vows to Speed up Work on Missile Shield’, *The New York Times*, 30 April 2001.

<sup>13</sup>‘Transcript: President Bush speech on missile defence’, *CNN*, 01 May 2001, retrieved on 20 October 2009, <<http://archives.cnn.com/2001/ALLPOLITICS/05/01/bush.missile.trans/>>

<sup>14</sup>‘Bush Calls for Missile Shield; ABM Treaty No Longer Viable in Post-Cold War Era, President Says’, *The Washington Post*, 2 May 2001.

policy agenda. Moreover, it gave the brand new president a Reagan-esque stature. The advocates of the missile defence systems far outweighed the opponents of it. Bush had campaigned on it, and was adamant about keeping his campaign promise. Cheney, Rumsfeld and Rice were all on board, while Powell took a more cautious tone about the implications of withdrawing from the ABM Treaty. This policy gave the new administration something concrete to work on in regards to Iran in the face of a string of previous policies. It also gave an indication of what kind of a foreign policy course the Bush administration would follow. It appeared that the mellow voice of Powell would be drowned out when he contradicted the Defence Secretary or the Vice President. Moreover, as Cheney stated in his memoirs, the new administration did not have much faith in international organizations and treaties. Even though Russia's reaction to America's withdrawal from the ABM Treaty was mild, the act itself demonstrated that the Bush administration would like the support of its allies, but did not require the approval of the international community to implement its policies.

When it came to Iran, the issue was far from being simple. Decades of hostility emerged in multiple ways. One of these ways was the suspected Iranian involvement in terrorist activities. At the end of June, a federal jury returned an indictment charging thirteen Saudis and a Lebanese man with the truck bombing of the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia in 1996 that resulted in the death of 19 Americans. Attorney General John Ashcroft argued that these men, all members of Hezbollah, were supported by Iranian officials. Former FBI Director Louis Freeh also stated in his memoirs that there was strong evidence of Iranian involvement.<sup>15</sup> However, even though the indictment contained many references to Iran, there were

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<sup>15</sup>L Freeh, *My FBI: Bringing Down the Mafia, Investigating Bill Clinton, and Fighting the War on Terror*, New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2006., pp. 19-33.

no direct accusations of the Iranian government or any officials.<sup>16</sup> The Bush administration was reluctant to put any Iranian in the defendant position since they did not want any additional strain on the already austere relations, thus damaging a chance to follow a different path than his predecessors. Therefore, this signalled that in the early days, the Bush administration was not willing to charge the Iranian government with additional accusations, but wanted to have a blank sheet to write policy on. This reluctance demonstrated that the administration was open to changing the course with Iran.

Another indication of a softer approach was the administration's desire to extend the ILSA for only two years instead of the regular five-year extension. As mentioned earlier, Cheney had already been against unilateral sanctions and, in addition, the National Energy Policy of the Office of the Vice President argued for periodically reviewing economic sanctions to maximize effectiveness.<sup>17</sup> The State Department assigned the Policy Planning Director Richard Haass to review American foreign policy towards Iran by assessing Iran's military needs and whether the "dual containment" policy was wise.<sup>18</sup> Working through Haass, the State Department argued that the current sanctions policy did not produce any results and resulted in antagonistic sentiments. Haass suggested an altered sanctions policy with gestures like dropping the US opposition to Iran's membership in the World Trade Organization to soften the tensions. During his confirmation hearings, Powell had urged the Congress to reconsider the sanctions before renewing them for another five years.<sup>19</sup> However, despite the efforts, the following month the Senate extended the sanctions on Iran and Libya for another five years despite the Bush

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<sup>16</sup>D Eggen and V Loeb, 'U.S. Indicts 14 Suspects In Saudi Arabia Blast', *The Washington Post*, 22 June 2001.

<sup>17</sup>National Energy Policy', May 2001,

<sup>18</sup>'Iran dances a ballet with US', *The New York Times*, 16 October 2001.

<sup>19</sup>Unsanctioned, *The Economist*, 18 July 2001, retrieved on 12 March 2011,

administration's desire for a shorter, two-year, extension.<sup>20</sup>

Since the situation with Iran did not pose any immediate threat, the Congress had more leverage over the issue than it would have had it been a crisis. Even though the administration, especially Secretary Powell, supported a change in the policy towards Iran, they had to yield to Congress in regards to economic sanctions. Approximately a month later, the Congressional Research Service published a report that documented an actual arms deal between Russia and Iran,<sup>21</sup> which compromised stability in the region as well as American efforts at dissuading Iran from its nuclear programme. This report was not shocking for the administration because Russia had made it clear during Putin's talks with Bush that they were going to continue to supply Iran with conventional weapons. However, at the same time, the report provided legitimacy to Congress' position on continued economic and political pressure on Iran. The unwavering stance of the Congress limited the options of the White House, to a certain extent. For instance, even though the president had the power to waive sanctions, seeing that Congress was set upon the continuation of sanctions restricted how much these waivers could be used. Furthermore, the lack of congressional approval in terms of easing the sanctions made it harder for the administration to use the lifting of sanctions as an incentive.

Consequently, before the terrorist attacks of 9/11, when Bush's foreign policy took a new turn, the path the Bush administration had wanted to follow concerning Iran was not clearly laid out. The ease of simply following what the previous administrations had done seems to have been unattractive because of the

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<sup>20</sup>This objection was verbalised in a Statement of Administration Policy on July 25, 2001: "The Administration supports an extension of the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA), as called for in H.R. 1954, but continues to favor a simple two-year, rather than five-year extension. The Administration's support for a two-year extension reflects the view that sanctions should be reviewed frequently to assess their effectiveness and continued suitability." 'Statement of Administration Policy: H.R. 1954 - ILSA Extension Act of 2001', *The American Presidency Project*, retrieved on 8 November 2010, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=24830>>

<sup>21</sup>'Global Arms Sales Rise Again, and the U.S. Leads the Pack', *The New York Times*, 20 August 2001.

way policies had failed for the last two decades. However, at the same time, the lack of trust between the two countries (and the governments) and the emotion-filled nature of the situation (as the Iran hostage crisis was not easily forgotten) made policy shift a very delicate endeavour. Most likely, because of these two reasons, in addition to a fair amount of uncertainty about how to tackle the issue, the Bush administration did not start with a set policy towards Iran. The pursuit of building a missile defence shield, despite the technological limitations, was one of the steps to establish a policy. However, one cannot help but conclude that these efforts were merely idealistic, especially considering the Russian opposition and the fact that the effectiveness of a shield against ICBMs remained questionable. Even though the administration continued its efforts to build a successful defence system against missiles from rogue states, the policy itself was not intended to change the attitude of the Iranian government. If anything, it was a policy that conveniently helped the administration to stay away from dealing directly with the Tehran government. Therefore, even though the discussion concerning the missile defence system demonstrated that the Bush administration had the potential to become a hardliner uncompromising government, it was more an effort to establish some foreign policy credentials after the criticism Bush received during his campaign concerning his lack of experience in foreign affairs. In terms of policies directly involving Iran, the administration wanted to steer clear. The reluctance of the Bush administration to name or prosecute any Iranians about the Khobar Towers attacks and the desire to change the sanctions regime demonstrated that, in the early days, the administration was open to an alternative policy regarding Iran. The Khobar Towers incident had hindered the efforts of the Clinton administration, and Bush did not want a spill over to his term that might cause undue tension. In addition, Cheney, Powell and Haass wanted to improve the current sanctions regime to increase efficiency and have more

flexibility in dealing with Iran. Therefore, it could be concluded that during the first months, the Bush administration did not have a clear-cut policy concerning Iran. Decades of failed policies prompted them to look for new avenues; however, prior to 9/11, neither the State Department nor the White House was able to find a solution despite being open to policy change. It is impossible to know how far they would have gone, had 9/11 not altered Bush's world view, but it could safely be said that, at least for the first few months, the new White House did not have a clear-cut plan to follow in dealing with Iran.

## **9/11**

“When I woke up on September 12, America was a different place,” said George Bush in his autobiography. He was right. When nineteen al Qaeda operatives hijacked four commercial passenger planes on September 11, the sense of invulnerability the United States felt between two great oceans and as the unrivalled super power shattered, more so even than after Pearl Harbor. Two of the airliners crashed into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, killing thousands. Another plane crashed into the Pentagon and the last plane crashed in a field in Pennsylvania. In the following weeks, not only was a new Middle East policy formed, but also, for a short time, the attacks on September 11 altered the way the Bush administration approached Iran. Immediately after Bush proclaimed America at war, Secretary of State Powell declared that, along with Pakistan and India, Iran was among the possible allies the U.S. would seek to include. Vice President Cheney said that Iran might be helpful to find out if Iraq was involved with the attacks. The CIA knew its limitations in the region, and recognized the need for those who were more familiar with the region, the people and the languages than the Americans. In an NSC meeting few days after the attacks, Tenet emphasized that

“we had to seal off Afghanistan’s borders by directly engaging the Iranians, Turks, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Pakistanis.”<sup>22</sup>

As the United States put together a plan to tackle Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, Iran became an important piece of the puzzle. The administration sent a private message to Iran via the Swiss government thanking them for the condolences and asking for Iran's assistance, especially on intelligence matters.<sup>23</sup> Secretary Powell knew that the US needed Iran in its endeavour to tackle the Taliban, and he also knew that this new common enemy could open a fresh route to the betterment of the relations between the two countries.<sup>24</sup> However, Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi said, “the most important consideration for any kind of action is to forge international consensus, particularly the public opinion of people of the region. Only then can we put our seal of approval on such actions”.<sup>25</sup> A few days after Kharrazi's statement, Iranian supreme leader Khamanei declared that Iran would not be taking part in the American-led coalition. Even though he condemned terrorism and professed the fight against it a “holy war”, he argued that America was using the September 11 attacks as a pretext to strengthen its position in the Middle East and penetrate Central Asia. The Supreme Leader added: “Islamic Iran will not participate in any measure that is led by the United States.”<sup>26</sup>

Despite the fact that the exchange between the two countries made it seem like the tension would increase once the US operation in Afghanistan began, shortly after the first strikes, the Bush administration sent a message to Iran that the United

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<sup>22</sup>Tenet, p.177.

<sup>23</sup>Following the attacks, mayor of Tehran sent a letter of condolence to the mayor of New York, stating that: “Undoubtedly, this act is not just against New Yorkers, but all humanity.” ‘After the Attacks: The White House; Bush Warns of a Wrathful, Shadowy and Inventive War’, *The New York Times*, 17 September 2001.

<sup>24</sup>Leverett, quoted in Murray, D.

<sup>25</sup>‘U.S. Gains More Support Against Afghanistan – Afghanistan’s Neighbours Edge Toward backing Action, Though With Caveats’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 26 September 2001.

<sup>26</sup>JW Anderson, ‘Iran Rejects Role in U.S. Anti-Terror Coalition; Khamenei’s remarks Dim Hopes for Mending Ties’, *The Washington Post*, 27 September 2001.

States would respect Iran's territorial integrity, including its airspace. As a response to that message, Iran conveyed that it was willing to aid any American personnel in its territory.<sup>27</sup> It was an opportunity that the Tehran government did not want to pass on lightly. The Bush administration was sending signals that it was willing to cooperate with Iran concerning Afghanistan, and this softening had the potential to open other doors. Another signal sent by the US government was to ask a federal judge to discharge a lawsuit against Iran concerning the Iran hostage Crisis in 1979. An additional positive development was the comments issued by Mohsen Rezai, Secretary of the Expediency Council of Iran: "If the Americans get trapped in the swamp of Afghanistan, they will definitely need Iran."<sup>28</sup> Additionally, the Six Plus Two Group on Afghanistan had been meeting since 1999 and had extensive knowledge and connections in Afghanistan. After 9/11 the continuation of these meetings became one of the most significant routes of communication and cooperation between the US and Iran. The Bonn Conference, which dealt with the aftermath of America's intervention in Afghanistan, also benefited from Iran's cooperation, because Iran was able to bring about some compromises that led the Afghans to the agreement.<sup>29</sup>

These few months after the attacks provided precious opportunity to change the course of US-Iran relations. The Bush administration had become so occupied with the perpetrator of the attacks that the years of bitter relations were put aside for a time in order to tackle a bigger problem. Afghanistan had been a nightmare for any occupying force throughout its history, and the administration needed all the help they could get. Having been opposing the Taliban years before

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<sup>27</sup>"A Nation Challenged: Tehran; Iran Dances A 'Ballet' With U.S.", *The New York Times*, 16 October 2001.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> James Dobbins, Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs (2001), "Ending Afghanistan's Civil War", Testimony before the Committee on Foreign relations, United States Senate, 8 March 2007.



9/11, Iran certainly had more knowledge and intelligence. Moreover, Tehran was willing to offer its cooperation in Afghanistan, creating a rare warming in the relations since 1979.

The polarization within the administration carried over to its policy toward Iran as well. Rumsfeld was, and had always been, adamant about not cooperating with countries that support terrorism. Iran was at the top of his list. Powell's Chief of Staff, Colonel Wilkerson, recounted: "Cheney and Rumsfeld were always there to sabotage our cooperation in Afghanistan if it got too far."<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, James Dobbins, who led the negotiations leading up to the Bonn Agreement, brought an offer from the Iranian government concerning military cooperation in Afghanistan. Dobbins stated that, even though Powell and Rice looked at the offer favourably, Rumsfeld did not show interest and the offer never received a response.<sup>31</sup> Rumsfeld knew that the US needed the Iranian intelligence and expertise while fighting the Taliban, but this did not mean that this cooperation could or should be expanded to other areas of disagreement. For Rumsfeld, the picture was bigger, thus he suggested to the president that the US should think more broadly than simply tackling Afghanistan and should root out all the countries where terrorism had found a safe haven including Sudan, Libya, Iraq and Iran.<sup>32</sup> While Powell and Rice showed an inclination to use this opportunity to solve a two-decade long problem, Cheney and Rumsfeld perceived the situation as a case of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend until my enemy is gone." Powell was brought in the campaign in order to appease the moderates, and he remained in the periphery of the decision-making process concerning Iran. Therefore, until the second term and Rice's take over of the State

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<sup>30</sup> Wilkerson quoted in T Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, p. 228.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with James Dobbins, Gareth Porter, "How Neo-Cons Sabotaged Iran's Help on Al Qaeda," *Inter Press Service*, 22 February 2006.

<sup>32</sup> Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, p. 346.

Department, President Bush was more inclined to listen to the men he so carefully chose: Cheney and Rumsfeld. As a result, this potential to break the unbreakable ice between the US and Iran was bypassed and became another lost opportunity.

### **GOING SOUTH and *KARINE A***

Now, the onus was on Rumsfeld's department to prove that Iran had not changed after all. The year 2002 started with concerns of the Pentagon and intelligence officials regarding Iran's increasing attempts to influence the political situation across the border in Afghanistan. It was reported that Iran was not pleased with the pro-Western leanings of the new Afghani government, as expressed in the words of one of the Department of Defense officials: "Iran is trying to make sure that Afghanistan remains an Islamic state and does not become more secular, like Turkey."<sup>33</sup> Pentagon officials also stated that even though Iran did not support Al Qaeda, a small number of Al Qaeda fighters were granted safe haven by the Iranian government in order to undermine the American influence. However, these developments contradicted with the recent actions of the Iranian government, namely helping the refugees fleeing from Afghanistan, providing a port for America to supply wheat for the war zone and committing to help the American personnel who escaped to Iranian territory.<sup>34</sup> One explanation for this discrepancy could be that the increasing American influence and presence in a neighbouring country might have triggered a desire for balance. Considering the sour relations between the two countries and the rhetoric about regime change, Iran's security concerns about American presence in the region were understandable. Also, by increasing the number of Iranian troops along the border, the Iranian officials might have wanted to

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<sup>33</sup> 'A Nation Challenged: Regional Politics; Iran Exerts Sway in Afghan Region, Worrying the U.S.', *The New York Times*, 10 January 2002.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

prevent a spill over to Iranian territory. Furthermore, Iran wanted to have an impact on how the new Afghani government would be shaped. Thus, by boosting its power in the bordering regions, an opportunity might have arisen to be an active part of the Afghani politics rather than a mere spectator. Since the Americans failed to build on the rapprochement of the immediate aftermath of 9/11, in terms of national security, it was only a matter of time before the Iranian government wanted to impact the outcome in Afghanistan, especially considering that they had fought the Taliban for much longer than the US. After decades of antagonism and severed relations, it was unrealistic to hope that Iran would give up all its national interests and concerns about the new American-led Afghani government and watch the events unfold from afar.

The day after the Pentagon and intelligence officials revealed the information about Iran's growing influence on the Afghani border, President Bush admonished the Iranian government that Iran should not seek to weaken the Afghani interim government and instead contribute to the War Against Terror.<sup>35</sup> However, at the same time, Bush said he was hopeful that Iran would abate its fears of American hegemony in the region:

We would hope that they would continue to be a positive force in helping us to bring people to justice. We would hope, for example, they wouldn't allow Al Qaeda murderers to hide in their country. We would hope that, if that be the case, if someone tries to flee into Iran, that they would hand them over to us.<sup>36</sup>

With regards to Iran, President Bush found himself in a dilemma. On the one hand, the task at hand (Afghanistan) demanded his full attention and, if at all possible, support from neighbouring nations. On the other hand, he was not willing

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<sup>35</sup>Cloud, David S., 'Whit House Assesses Level of Iran's Ties to Supplying Palestinians with Weapons', *The Wall Street Journal*, 11 January 2002.

<sup>36</sup>'A Nation Challenged: Diplomacy; Bush Tells Iran Not to Undercut Afghan Leaders', *The New York Times*, 11 January 2002.

to completely release the previous problems with Iran for the sake of cooperation, even though he had the opportunity to smoothly change the failed policy of isolation and non-communication. From the beginning, he had surrounded himself with advisers like Cheney and Rumsfeld, who were not willing to put their weapons down just yet regarding Iran, resulting in the administration's more hawkish tone as opposed to breaking the chain of fruitless policies.

As the State Department tried to form a policy that favoured engagement in the face of opposition from the Department of Defense, a ship, *Karine A*, was intercepted by the Israelis in the Red Sea and it was alleged that Iran was supplying the Palestinians with weapons on January 3, 2002. The ship contained rockets, mortars, rifles, machine guns, sniper rifles, anti-tank mines, various explosives and ammunition. The interception came at a time when relations were warming between the two countries in the aftermath of 9/11 and the State Department was gaining some ground towards engagement. The Israeli intelligence concluded that Iran was sending weapons to the Yasir Arafat followers, thus violating the agreement between Israel and the Palestinian authority. It came at a perfect time for Israel, because now Sharon's government had ammunition to pressure the Bush administration about Iran and Palestine at the same time. Even though Khatami asked for evidence that the shipment originated in Iran, Washington did not answer.<sup>37</sup> Even though Khatami took steps to remedy the situation by contacting the US official through Geneva and asking for evidence so that the Iranian government could deal with the perpetrators, the damage was done beyond repair. Cheney recalled this event even as the proof that Arafat was not interested in

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<sup>37</sup>T Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008, pp. 233-234.

peace and did not express any doubts over the incident.<sup>38</sup> The *Karine A* incident became the perfect excuse to break from the rapprochement the State Department was pursuing, and provided the hard-liners in the Bush administration with ammunition. In the aftermath of the incident, the Geneva talks changed in nature, becoming less friendly to the Iranian delegation. In addition to the reports of the Pentagon about Iran's intervention, the *Karine A* incident played into Rumsfeld's hand by demonstrating that the problem was much broader than Afghanistan, and that it certainly included Iran.<sup>39</sup>

As was the case in the American government, not everybody was in favour of cooperation with the Great Satan in the Iranian government. Even though Khatami was able to affect foreign policy on some level, the ultimate decision rested with Ayatollah Khamanei, who was not, at least not openly, cheering for rapprochement. The domestic situation in Iran was volatile and very responsive to US policies. Even though the Bush administration had the promise of being different than the Clinton administration prior to 9/11 and in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, the wind started to blow from a different direction. As much as the State Department and Powell wanted to facilitate a turning point in the relations, for the Department of Defense and Rumsfeld, Iran remained another problem to be dealt with. The facts that the Pentagon overlooked the Iranian efforts concerning Al Qaeda members, did not properly scrutinize the intelligence concerning *Karine A* and was not willing to go beyond cooperation regarding Afghanistan, demonstrate that the State Department was alone in its endeavour for a breakthrough with Iran. This interagency struggle sent a mixed message to Iran, and showed a lack of policy and unity concerning the Islamic Republic. On the one hand, the US was grateful for the

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<sup>38</sup>D Cheney, *In My Time*, p.373.

<sup>39</sup>D Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, p. 346.

intelligence and assistance received from Iran; on the other hand, Iran was aiding Al Qaeda and Palestinian Authority. Moreover, although the Geneva talks gave hope for further cooperation, the offers made to the US was not even answered. The warmth that had started to spread after 9/11 was seeping away, to be replaced by uncertainty about what the Bush administration was going to do next.

### **“AXIS OF EVIL”**

The attacks of September 11 caught the Bush administration off-guard. Even though an operation of this magnitude required extensive training and planning, Al Qaeda was able to fly under the US intelligence radar by spending no more than hundreds of thousands of dollars. If it were this easy to target American cities, what was next? Thus, it didn't take long for the administration to make a connection between terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. Rice wrote that the NSC even considered talking about this connection in Bush's September 20 address, but decided to wait. However, as the months passed, the time became ripe for talking about the next possible attack, this time with weapons of mass destruction: “The world had to prevent the most dangerous weapons from ending up in the hands of the most dangerous people.”<sup>40</sup>

In 2000, Rice argued that the Iranian regime desired to topple the market economy and spread the Islamist regime around the world. In addition to this, Rice argued, the Iranian government threatened the security of Israel, meddled in the internal affairs of Saudi Arabia and strove after missiles and weapons of mass destruction. Because of the sinister nature of its government, Rice stated, “[a]ll in all, changes in U.S. policy toward Iran would require changes in Iranian behavior.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>C Rice, *No Higher Honor*, p.149.

<sup>41</sup>C Rice, “Promoting the National Interest”, *Foreign Affairs*, Jan/Feb 2000, Vol. 79, Issue 1, pp. 45- 62.

Furthermore, Rumsfeld had named these three countries as emerging threats in the so-called “Rumsfeld Commission Report” in 1998:

Concerted efforts by a number of overtly or potential hostile nations to acquire ballistic missiles with biological or nuclear payloads pose a growing threat to the United States, its deployed forces, its friends and allies. These newer, developing threats in North Korea, Iran and Iraq are in addition to those still posed by the existing missile arsenals of Russia and China.<sup>42</sup>

Even before 9/11, the CIA had put Iran and Hezbollah in the same category as Al Qaeda, and warned the outgoing Clinton administration of a possible terrorist attack that could occur with Iranian support.<sup>43</sup> It appeared that the key officials of the administration had already passed their verdict about Iran even before the *Karine A* incident and the confidence gained after the fall of the Taliban contributed to Iran’s fall from grace.

It was the need to justify the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in Iraq that prompted the Bush administration to make such an ideologically charged speech. David Frum recollected in his memoirs how he was asked to find a way to explain the best case for the US to go after Iraq. As he read the historical speech of Franklin Roosevelt after Pearl Harbor, Frum realized that Roosevelt used the attack to declare war against Germany. Why could Bush not do the same? After all, he concluded, like Berlin, Rome and Tokyo, the countries that supported terrorism shared “resentment of the power of the West and contempt for democracy.”<sup>44</sup> Like the Axis states of World War II, “together, the terror states and the terrorist organizations formed an axis of hatred against the United States. The United States could not wait for these dangerous regimes to get deadly weapons and attack us; the United States

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<sup>42</sup>“The Rumsfeld Commission Report”, Senate Hearing, 31 July 1998, <[http://www.fas.org/irp/congress/1998\\_cr/s980731-rumsfeld.htm](http://www.fas.org/irp/congress/1998_cr/s980731-rumsfeld.htm)>, retrieved on 13 May 2011.

<sup>43</sup>G Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm*, p. 129.

<sup>44</sup>D Frum, *The Right Man*, p. 235.

must strike first and protect the world from them.”<sup>45</sup> Michael Gerson, Bush’s chief speechwriter, wanted to adopt Bush’s religious phraseology by turning the “Axis of Hatred” into the “Axis of Evil”. Frum was thinking about Iraq as he sent up his memo to be seen by the NSC, but Rice and Hadley wanted Iran to be included as well. The domestic troubles in Iran made many policy-makers believe that change or revolution was imminent in Tehran. Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz and Feith also held that supporting the dissidents in countries like Iraq, Iran and North Korea would benefit the US national security in the long run.<sup>46</sup> This belief led them to conclude that an encouraging word from the US would surely hasten the process and bolster the opposition.

As a result, on January 29, 2002, President Bush delivered his first State of the Union address in which he named Iran, Iraq and North Korea as the ‘Axis of Evil’, which he later described:

States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastrophic.<sup>47</sup>

Even though this phrase was mostly directed against the Iraqi government, Iran was also updated from being a rogue state to being a part of the alleged “Axis of Evil.” It is true that the president did not put too much emphasis on Iran, but at the same time he failed to acknowledge the steps taken by the Iranian government since 9/11. Bush argued that the phrase was not intended to become the centre of attention in his address, and he claimed he had been startled by the

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<sup>45</sup>Frum, p. 236.

<sup>46</sup>D Feith, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism*, New York: Harper, 2009, p.258.

<sup>47</sup>‘State of the Union Address’, *The White House*, 29 January 2002, retrieved on 18 August 2009, <<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/print/20020129-11.html>>



reaction.<sup>48</sup> Frum also claimed that he had been taken aback by the attention the expression “Axis of Evil” received.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, considering that American history is laden with definitive and immortal phrases like “Domino Theory” or “Star Wars,” it is surprising that they did not anticipate that the phrase “Axis of Evil” would attract attention. Furthermore, Bush’s advisers, like Karl Rove, saw the term as a defining moment that outlined the issue in “graphic, biblical terms without publicly committing to a particular solution.”<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, one clear message was that the Bush administration ended their wavering position toward Iran after 9/11 by declaring it a part of the ‘Axis of Evil.’

The “Axis of Evil” speech was meant to provide an idealistic and moral background for Bush’s Middle East policy. By using the word “evil”, the Bush administration moved America’s mission from merely protecting America to a divine ideal that is to rid the world of all evil. Even though Rice and Hadley were not sure about the word evil, they did not find it objectionable enough to remove it from the speech. One of the consequences of using a word like “evil” is that one did not have a choice but to fight this evil, and thus the US had a responsibility to rid the world of these evildoers. Douglas Feith, the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, argued that Bush knew that, in the cases of Iran and North Korea, the US had not exhausted the avenues of diplomacy.<sup>51</sup> However, the word “evil” was so strong that once one heard it, one had to contemplate how this axis was going to be dealt with. Was it possible to negotiate with “evil” or was the only option to eradicate it? How much room was there for diplomacy between “good” and “evil”?

Following the address, Secretary of State Powell said that there were

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<sup>48</sup>Bush, *Decision Points*, p. 233.

<sup>49</sup>D Frum, *The Right Man*, New York: Random House, 2003, pp 237-238.

<sup>50</sup>B Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004, p. 87..

<sup>51</sup>D Feith, *War and Deicision*, p. 233.

“good things” happening in Iran and also “not so good things.” Moreover, he stood behind Bush’s description: “So I think the president’s characterization was an accurate one, and perhaps some of the condemnatory language you’ve been hearing should be directed toward these nations rather than toward the president’s very powerful and clear and honest statement.”<sup>52</sup> Powell had lost the game, and he was not going to criticize the president openly. The “good things” happening in Iran were not sufficient enough to sway the entirety of the Bush administration to exclude Iran from the Axis of Evil. President Bush had adopted the phrase to the extent that he continued to use it despite the reaction and was not willing to hear criticism about it. If Secretary Powell had objections, they were not expressed, because of Powell’s unwillingness to cause further detriment to his relations with the president.

Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld defended the language of the president’s speech by arguing that the address made things clearer for the named nations. On the issue of Iran, the secretary argued that even though Iran offered to assist America in its fight against terrorism, “we know Iran is actively sending terrorists” to threaten Israel and “we also know that they have a very active weapons-of-mass-destruction programme.”<sup>53</sup> Rumsfeld, not uncharacteristically, shut the doors of engagement with Iran at any level, and reinforced the logic behind the “evil” classification. Rumsfeld’s support was not surprising, since he noted in his memoirs that immediately after the 9/11 attacks, he saw Iran as a major terrorist threat: “We did know the location of the states that were instrumental in supporting the international terrorist network –and we also had the means to impose costs on those regimes. Afghanistan’s Taliban regime, Syria’s Bashar Al-Assad, Iraq’s

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<sup>52</sup>“Powell, Rice defend Bush’s Axis of Evil Speech”, *CNN*, 18 February 2002.

<sup>53</sup>“A Nation Challenged: The Rogue List; Bush Aides Say Tough Tone Put Foes on Notice”, *The New York Times*, 31 January 2002.

Saddam Hussein, and the clerical rulers of Iran were now on notice.”<sup>54</sup> For Rumsfeld, there was not anything Iran could do to convince him that the US should engage with Iran. The problem with Iran was not behavioural but existential; as long as the Ayatollahs ruled, the evil remained.

The vice president, too, stood behind Bush’s principle of tackling terrorism wherever it may be. Since Cheney saw the problem of terrorism as a “nexus” of terrorist organizations sponsored by some states, Bush’s “Axis of Evil” classification was not something to be objected to.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, the uncompromising words of Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice and Powell signalled that the new route laid out by the president’s address had supporters within the administration, regardless of the fact that the speech failed to address the practical implications of what “Axis of Evil” meant. This was especially true for Iran.

After the speech, Bush explained why he wanted Iran in the Axis: “The fact that the president of the United States would stand up and say Iran is just like Iraq and North Korea — in other words you’ve got a problem — and the president is willing to call it, is part of how you deal with Iran. And that will inspire those who love freedom inside the country.”<sup>56</sup> Iraq was the main target of the speech, which aimed to justify the oncoming war. Having moved Iran to secondary importance, Bush at least wanted to show that his administration was behind the opposition groups. This, in his mind, would strengthen the dissidents in Iran and bring about a regime change without any external intervention. Bush’s thought process foreshadowed the policies to come, and he was not alone in his thinking.

A strong reaction came from Iran in February concerning Bush’s classification of Iran as evil. Ayatollah Ali Khamanei accused President Bush of

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<sup>54</sup>D Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir*, New York: Sentinel, 2011, p. 346.

<sup>55</sup>Gellman, *Angler*, p. 226.

<sup>56</sup>Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, p.88.

being bloodthirsty. The Ayatollah continued:

The United States president is threatening and accusing other countries of evil involvement while America has opposed popular movements, supported undemocratic regimes, sold lethal weapons and looted the wealth of other nations more than any other country... These are evil acts and so America is the most evil country... The Islamic Republic is proud to be the target of the hate and anger of the world's greatest evil; we never seek to be praised by American officials.<sup>57</sup>

A few days after the comments from the Ayatollah, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld again accused Iran of turning a blind eye to the Al Qaeda members fleeing across the Afghanistan-Iran border: “The Iranians have not done what the Pakistan government has done: put troops along the border and prevent terrorists from escaping out of Afghanistan into their country.”<sup>58</sup> In the face of these accusations, at a press conference, Iranian Foreign Minister Kharazzi suggested that America should share more information about the situation in Afghanistan so that Iran could be more efficient along the border. Even though Kharazzi acknowledged that Iran was having difficulty controlling the 600-mile border, the foreign minister reassured the US that Iran was doing all it could to prevent leaks through the border.<sup>59</sup> Compared to the statements of other Iranian officials after Bush's “Axis of Evil” speech, Kharazzi's language was the most accommodating. However, the State of the Union address created an icy tone from the Iranian leaders, and put the country in a very strict category, thus limiting how America could conduct foreign policy for a while.

At the beginning of March, *The New York Times* obtained a copy of the previously published Nuclear Posture Review. This was another indication of how the new administration was going to pursue foreign policy after 9/11. The Defense

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<sup>57</sup>‘A Nation Challenged: The Rogue List; Bush's 'Evil' Label Rejected By Angry Iranian Leaders’, *The New York Times*. 1 February 2002.

<sup>58</sup>C Lynch, ‘Iran Fires Back at Bush for Accusations of ‘Evil’; Friction Resumes With Blast at U.S. Israel Policy’, *The Washington Post*, 6 February 2002.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*

Department prepared the Nuclear Posture Review Report in January 2002 after the Congress directed the department to do so. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld summarized the highlights of the report: “the Nuclear Posture Review shifts planning for America's strategic forces from the threat-based approach of the Cold War to a capabilities-based approach.”<sup>60</sup> One of these capabilities was defined as earth-penetrating nuclear weapons that would be able to destroy underground facilities. Another important part of the report was the new contingencies introduced as a result of a flashback to the Cuban missile crisis; hence, these new contingencies included non-nuclear countries as threats: “North Korea, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Libya are among the countries that could be involved in immediate, potential, or unexpected contingencies. All have long-standing hostility toward the United States and its security partners.”<sup>61</sup>

This report was crucial because it demonstrated what a post-9/11 world was going to look like for the Bush administration in its “Axis of Evil” frame of mind. The United States had not suffered an attack on its soil since Pearl Harbor, and that feeling of security collapsed along with the Twin Towers. The line between conventional and nuclear weapons became insignificant, since even commercial airliners could be used as weapons. Therefore a consistent hostility towards the US became a national threat regardless of the weapons capabilities of a country. This report was a reflection that new, unknown nuclear weapons on intercontinental ballistic missiles were not the only threats anymore. Beyond nuclear weapons, the people who were willing to commit suicide for their ideology became the biggest danger. With such a vague understanding of threat, the definition of enemy dissolved, leaving an American policy that is suspicious of entire nations and their

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<sup>60</sup>‘Nuclear Posture Review Report’, *Global Security*, 14 May 2002, retrieved in 18 August 2009, <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/policy/dod/npr.htm>>

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

citizens. Because of the tension between the two countries since 1979, Iran inevitably was affected by this new understanding of “enemy”.

The leaking of the report to the public created some unease among the US allies, which then prompted a few government officials, among whom were Secretary Powell and General Richard Myers, to appear on the Sunday television programmes:

We should not get all carried away with some sense that the United States is planning to use nuclear weapons in some contingency that is coming up in the near future, it is not the case. What the Pentagon has done with this study is sound, military, conceptual planning and the president will take that planning and he will give his directions on how to proceed.<sup>62</sup>

Approximately a week after the leakage of the report, Iranian government spokesman Abdullah Ramezanzadeh declared that the Iranian government was open to talks with American legislators in order to warm up the diplomatic relations between the two countries. However, the spokesman also added that Iran was waiting for a gesture of goodwill to be able to trust the American government.<sup>63</sup> Yet, the following day Ayatollah Ali Khamanei said that talks with the US were not an option as a way to alleviate threats by Washington: “Negotiation is not a solution and will not resolve anything.”<sup>64</sup> Therefore, even though President Khatami expressed his willingness to find a way to ease the tension in the relations with the US, Supreme Leader Khamanei, who has the final word on the matters of foreign policy, closed the door on any attempts towards talks. The contradicting speeches of the members of the Iranian government provided insight into the dynamics and problems of the Iranian regime. The Supreme Leader continued his uncompromising tone, and the Iranian President’s willingness to negotiate with the

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<sup>62</sup>‘Nuclear Arms: For Deterrence or Fighting?’, *The New York Times*, 11 March 2002.

<sup>63</sup>‘Tehran; Iran's Leader Backs Effort For Talks With U.S.’, *The New York Times*, 18 March 2002.

<sup>64</sup>‘Diplomacy; Iranian Cleric Rejects Talks With the U.S.’, *The New York Times*, 19 March 2002.

Bush administration did not bear any fruit, partly because Khamanei managed to shoot down every rapprochement effort of Khatami, and partly because the Bush administration failed to act on the words of the relatively-moderate Khatami. The Axis of Evil speech came as a slap in the face to those who advocated engagement with the US in Tehran. When after all the efforts of sharing intelligence and joining the Geneva talks did not yield long term fruit, nor even persuade the Bush administration to exclude Iran from the Axis, instead of supporting the more moderate faction in Tehran, the administration gave the hardliners ammunition to claim that the Great Satan could not be trusted.

In the end, with regards to Iran, the Axis of Evil speech became a defining point for the Bush administration. The few short months after 9/11 kindled hope for those who advocated engagement with Iran. It was a rare sight to see the US and Iranian officials share intelligence and opinions, working toward the same goal. This rare sight had the potential to give birth to further cooperation, eventually resulting in talks about all the issues that crippled the relations between the two countries. 9/11 made all the nightmarish stories come true. Those who argued for a stronger and more nimble American military were justified, because the world after the fall of USSR was not any safer than the world of the Cold War, and the 9/11 attacks proved that.

During the Cold War, things were simpler in many ways. The enemy was communism, and the Soviet Russia was the embodiment of this enemy. Communism was much more tangible than terrorism. On September 11, 2001, America had been introduced to a new menace. Up until then, terrorism was not a major concern for the United States. It was heard of but not seen. When the biggest terrorist attacks struck New York City that day, America woke up to a brand new world. The sole super power of the world was wounded and vulnerable. This time,

the enemy was not as tangible as the Soviets. Even though Afghanistan became the main target quickly, terrorism had no country and terrorists did not wear uniforms. It was as if the mighty United States were waging a war against smoke. Bush was not expecting to lead the country in a foreign-policy-based presidency, but 9/11 changed his intentions and made him a president that would be remembered by his deeds abroad rather than at home. As Bush's foreign policy unfolded in Afghanistan, the wounded superpower decided to wage a crusade against this intangible enemy. The sky was the limit.

The "War on Terror" had the potential to encompass many countries, but no one would be more vulnerable than the one who had been chanting "Death to America" for the last two decades. Despite the cooperation Iran provided concerning Afghanistan, Iran was not in a safe zone, especially when considering that the president's most trusted advisors were Cheney and Rumsfeld. Neither of these men was willing to dismiss two decades of hostility and anti-Americanism after two months of cooperation. As easy as it is to see those two months as signs of rapprochement, it is more compelling to believe that it was a temporary arrangement in the minds of those who had the power in the Bush administration. Once Afghanistan and the Taliban were out of the way, then there would be a chance to deal with others who had supported terrorism. Powell's overtures did not stand a chance against Rumsfeld or Cheney. Thus came the 2002 State of the Union Address.

The "Axis of Evil" was the real impact of 9/11. It was foreseeable that the "War on Terror" would eventually lead to a narrower, but still vague, classification of "Axis of Evil", because terrorism made the Bush administration become more suspicious of any nation that did not side with America, let alone a self-proclaimed anti-American country. In particular, concerning Iran, the speech



had several impacts. First, by including Iran in the Axis, and lumping it in with Iraq and North Korea, the Bush administration limited its foreign policy options without even outlining a concrete strategy to follow. The unclear stance regarding Iran both before and after 9/11 had the potential to provide many policy options for the administration. In particular, the period of cooperation could have made it possible for Bush to become the president who reconciled with Iran just like Nixon had done with China. However, the speech strictly limited the administration's options. Not only did Bush make it clear that Iran's mullahs were not any better than Saddam Hussein or Kim Jong-Il, but also he raised the expectations about what should be done. Now, Iran had to be dealt with as harshly as Iraq or North Korea.

Secondly, the speech created strong reactions in Iran. Before the Address, the administration had sent strong signals that the relations with Iran could lean in a more positive direction. However, classifying Iran in the same category with two notorious dictatorships in the world, the Bush administration demonstrated where Iran stood for them. Iran's political system, despite its flaws, differs from those of Iraq and North Korea. Furthermore, the Iranian people are politically active and involved in public discourse via the Internet, despite the government censorship, and the speech alienated the Iranian public, giving the government a free hand to unite under the banner of anti-Americanism. Additionally, the advocates of engagement with the US suffered, because it was clear that the American government was not interested in any overtures from the Iranian government. The only option was regime change, and there was no room for diplomacy. Therefore, despite what Bush had hoped for, his speech weakened the opposition in Iran rather than strengthening it.

Thirdly, Bush defined Iran as being part of the "Axis of Evil" even after the cooperation the US received concerning Afghanistan. In addition to undermining

the reformers, it also damaged the future of the relations by ruining the fragile trust that was built after 9/11. The Bush administration proved that the American government could not be trusted, no matter how much Iran wanted to put things right. This likely furthered the confidence gap between the two countries and settled in the back of the minds of the Iranian policy-makers. The shadow of the “Axis of Evil” would cast itself upon the Bush administration’s every step from then on because the fragile trust that was built immediately after 9/11 was now shattered. Lastly, despite raising Iran’s profile, the speech said little about what America was going to do in order to bring about regime change. It was unclear whether the United States would be militarily involved in Iran after Iraq, or if it would simply continue the sanctions regime, or if support for the dissidents would increase, or all of the above.

Bush came to office with a humble foreign policy agenda. But the hawkish elements in his administration, combined with his own leanings and messianic vision, resulted in an entirely new foreign policy approach in the aftermath of 9/11. Up until the 2002 State of the Union Address, the Bush administration had not outlined a foreign policy towards Iran, which had given hope to the moderate element in Tehran, especially after Clinton’s “Dual Containment.” Amidst this hopeful lack of policy came the cooperation in Afghanistan. The two governments had not had diplomatic relations at this level for decades, and it looked like Washington was willing to follow the softer approach of the pre-9/11 days. However, Pentagon reports and *Karine A* put an end to these hopes, and showed that the Bush administration was not ready to deal with “evil” governments. Even though cooperation between the two governments continued after January 2002, the hope of engagement was shut down. Powell had lost to Rumsfeld and Iran was named as one of the “Axis of Evil”. With the speech, the Bush administration that did not want to

indict any Iranians in the Khobar Towers verdict was gone, and left in its place a government that put Iran in the same category as Iraq and North Korea. While the State Department was bringing hopeful offers from Iranian delegates in Geneva, the Pentagon reported how the Iranian military gave safe havens to Al Qaeda operatives. These two pivotal departments of the US government were sending contradictory signals. When the hawks won the argument with the 2002 State of the Union Address, the doves did not have anything left to offer. Then, the more accommodating approach of the first years of the Bush presidency acquiesced to a policy that was intent upon getting rid of evil, including the Iranian government. Cooperation with the Khatami government was replaced with supporting the dissidents in Iran. The help offered was accepted, but it was not reciprocated. This was simply the beginning of the inconsistency regarding Iran; as the faces of the Bush administration changed through the years, the policies would change, but history would not offer another time as opportune and ripe for cooperation as the post-9/11 period.

## **THE IRAQ WAR**

The name of Iraq as a possible target was thrown in by Rumsfeld immediately after the terrorist attacks; however, targeting Iraq without any proof of connection to Al Qaeda would take away from the vehemence of the situation at hand, and Rumsfeld's suggestion was knocked down both by the president and the vice president. That initial response, however, did not mean that Saddam's turn would not come. In the wake of the 2002 State of the Union Address, the actual target became Iraq as the doctrine of pre-emption weaved its way into the Bush administration. Once it became obvious that the US intervention in Iraq was

inevitable, the Tehran administration realized that Iran was about to be surrounded by either American troops or American allies.

The proximity of Iran and Iraq further complicated US-Iranian relations. The US did not show any inclination to include Iran in the operation in Iraq militarily or politically. As it was the case in Afghanistan, Tehran was not willing to sit on the sidelines and watch the events unfold in a country that had been an enemy for decades. In March 2003, Kurdish officials reported that the Badr Brigade, supported by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, created a camp for more than a thousand troops in northern Iraq to be the Iranian proxy during the fight against Saddam Hussein. US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher conveyed the administration's concerns: "We think any Iranian presence or Iranian-supported presence in that region is destabilizing and not positive."<sup>65</sup> Additionally, the Americans had intelligence that the Revolutionary Guards were supplying weapons for the Kurdish elements in Iraq, thus furthering the unrest.<sup>66</sup> At the end of March, Rumsfeld accused Iran and Syria of hindering the American efforts in Iraq.<sup>67</sup> The Pentagon would admonish Iran time and again concerning its intervention in Iraq while not addressing Iran's security concerns concerning Iraq's future.

Cheney presumed that Iranian and Syrian forces were doing all they could do to stop the American efforts to establish democracy in Iraq so that they could use the Iraqi territory as a breeding ground for terrorism.<sup>68</sup> For Rumsfeld, no other country had been responsible for as many deaths as the Islamic Republic of Iran since 1979, and they had been training Iraqis to kill American soldiers. He was ready to do something about Iran, but the Joint Chiefs did not think it was wise to

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<sup>65</sup>K Vick, 'Iran-Backed Militia Seen Moving Into Iraqi Kurdish Zone', *The Washington Post*, 7 March 2003.

<sup>66</sup>G Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA*, New York: Harper Collins, 2007, p.391.

<sup>67</sup>DS Cloud, 'Iran's Moves on Border with Iraq Disturb U.S. Officials,' *The Wall Street Journal*, 11 April 2003.

<sup>68</sup>D Cheney, *In My Time*, p. 337.

open a third front while the troops were stretched thin across two countries.<sup>69</sup> Even when the picture started to get bleak in Iraq, Rice expressed that the US “had no intention of inviting Iran into the Middle East.”<sup>70</sup> Having shut the door for a more meaningful cooperation regarding Iraq by not including Iran or Syria in the military or strategic aspects of the Iraq War, the key officials of the Bush administration also failed to understand the dynamics and history between Iran and Iraq and how much Iran was interested in the future of Iraq. Iraq had been a major threat for decades, and Saddam’s removal was an excellent opportunity to affect the direction of the wind concerning Iraqi politics. For the Iranian government, it was not an improvement to see a pro-American government in Baghdad. Nonetheless, the Bush administration was reluctant to allow this influence because an Iraqi government under the prerogative of the Iranian religious leaders would not be any more acceptable than Saddam Hussein's rule. In light of this, the Bush administration failed to see the security concerns of Iran, even though both governments followed the same logic. Because of the sectarian nature of the Iraqi people, the US would struggle to curb Iranian efforts within the Iraqi borders for the rest of Bush's term.

- **Mujahedeen-i Khalq (MEK)**

Mujahedeen-e Khalq (MEK) has been an active dissident organization since the 1960s. Before the Islamic revolution, the organization stood up against the Shah’s regime and attempted to recruit financial support in the US. In the aftermath of the Shah’s fall, MEK directed its attention to the actions of the Islamic regime; while it was still active in the US, most of its support came from Saddam Hussein. The Iraqi leader provided the group with money, weapons, vehicles and logistic

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<sup>69</sup>D Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, p. 639.

<sup>70</sup>C Rice, *No Higher Honor*, p. 543.

support. Once the US troops descended upon Iraq, the members of MEK were almost up to 5000 fighters, and how to handle this force was more than baffling for Washington.<sup>71</sup> As will be discussed in the following chapter, over the years, MEK was able to garner significant support from the Congress, especially by demonstrating human rights abuses of the Islamic regime against women. There were many in the Congress who thought that MEK would be a useful weapon to wield against Tehran. However, in 1997, MEK had found its way onto the State Department's list of terrorist organizations, and remained so throughout the Bush administration.

In April, after the toppling of Saddam Hussein, American forces bombed the bases of an organization, which was devoted to overthrowing the Iranian government. The officials took this course of action not only because MEK had been classified as a terrorist organization by the United States since 1997, but also because they fought to support Saddam Hussein against America. MEK had been a thorn in the flesh for the Iranian government for a long time because of the organization's support for the opposition movement. The sympathy and support of the Congress was not unique; there were those within the administration, especially the Pentagon, who believed that MEK's status as a terrorist organization should be removed, since there was possibility that they could be used against the Iranian government. For instance, in June 2004, Rumsfeld granted the MEK members the legal status of "protected persons" instead of "enemy combatants", which would be their designation if part of a terrorist organization.<sup>72</sup> Previously, Rumsfeld had expressed his disapproval of George Tenet, the CIA director, because of him letting

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<sup>71</sup>For more information, see: RA Cohen, *The Rise and Fall of the Mojahedin Khalq, 1987-1997: Their Survival After the Islamic Revolution and Resistance to the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 2008; J Goulka et al., *The Mujahedin-e Khalq in Iraq: A Policy Conundrum*, 2009.

<sup>72</sup>Goulka et al., *The Mujahedin-e Khalq in Iraq*, p. 41.

the MEK operate in Iraq during Saddam's rule.<sup>73</sup> The Secretary of Defense clearly did not see the organization as anything more than what the State Department recognised. However, the apprehension of some 3000 members presented an opportunity to undermine the Islamic regime, or it at least provided a bargaining tool.

For the Pentagon, MEK did not pose a threat anymore, and, after having disarmed the organizations and moved most of its members to Camp Ashraf; the US had gained leverage against Iran. In the past years, MEK had proved itself useful by being credited for revealing Iran's secret facilities in 2003. The organization was a priceless source of intelligence in a country where the US intelligence had not been able to penetrate effectively. For the mullahs, MEK had been a headache from the beginning after it became clear that Khomeini's ideology was not conducive to MEK's. This ongoing animosity was seen as an opportunity by the Department of Defense and some Congress members, whereas the State Department had to stand behind MEK's designation as a terrorist organization. However, the situation of MEK remained controversial throughout Bush's presidency thus signifying the willingness of the Bush administration to change the rules of the game in order to win. Especially under the influence of the hawkish actors of the government, the terrorists of Iran had the potential to become freedom fighters.

- **After Saddam**

As the face of Iraq started to change, the influence of Iran became more of a concern for the Bush administration. First, American officials remarked that Iran had been sending trained agents across the border in order to influence the public in

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<sup>73</sup>Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, p. 422.

favour of a Shiite and Iran-friendly political and religious atmosphere.<sup>74</sup> Subsequently, a news channel, al Alam, started broadcasting from Iran and could be received by any television in Iraq.<sup>75</sup> These broadcasts became an issue of concern for the Bush administration; the channel that could be seen in almost every Iraqi home with its pro-Iran ideology had become a potential obstacle as the government strove to win the hearts of the Iraqi public. The United States responded to the attempts of Iranian influence by apprehending the members of the Badr Brigade, an organization supported by Iran, and also by discouraging the Iraqi leaders who would lean toward a Shiite theocracy.<sup>76</sup> Iraq did not evolve into the clear-cut victory and the subsequent democracy the Bush administration had hoped for. The last thing Washington desired was to have another Islamic regime in the region, so the growing influence of Iran was a serious matter of concern. Iran's influence in Iraq was inevitable, since this was the perfect moment to play a role in Iraqi politics in order to facilitate a more Iran-friendly government after the long hostile years under Saddam Hussein. As the security concerns of the US and Iran clashed, tensions rose.

In June 2004, the news that Iraqi leader Ahmad Chalabi revealed intelligence secrets to Iran (for instance, that the United States had broken Iran's intelligence code) created more tension between the two governments, as well as causing an espionage investigation and severing ties with Ahmad Chalabi's group.<sup>77</sup> After this fiasco, the Bush administration seized every opportunity to chastise the Iranian government for its involvement in Iraq. Towards the end of 2006, American forces seized several Iranians who were suspected of planning to attack Iraqi

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<sup>74</sup>Neighbors; Iran Said to Send Agents into Iraq', *The New York Times*, 23 April 2003.

<sup>75</sup>Television; Iranian News Channel Makes Inroads in Iraq', *The New York Times*, 29 April 2003.

<sup>76</sup>Neighbors; U.S. Acts to Limit Influence Of Iran in Iraq's Politics', *The New York Times*, 1 May 2003.

<sup>77</sup>DS Cloud, 'Chalabi Furor Reveals Rifts in the White House; Pentagon, State Department, CIA at ODD Amid Charges Former Exile Leaked U.S. Secrets', *The Wall Street Journal* 3 June 2004.



security forces.<sup>78</sup> In response, Iran's foreign ministry demanded the release of the detainees, and admonished, “this move is against international regulations and can have unpleasant consequences.”<sup>79</sup> However, the American military said that there was strong evidence that the detained Iranians and their Iraqi accomplices were involved in criminal activities, such as shipping arms to illegal forces in Iraq and attacking American forces. That same day, the Bush administration revealed that the two detainees were senior military officials.<sup>80</sup>

Again, at the beginning of 2007, President Bush accused Iran of supporting the attacks on American troops in Iraq, thus ending the softer diplomatic approach of the previous months. The following day American troops raided the Iranian diplomatic office, which was not a consulate, and seized six Iranians.<sup>81</sup> Secretary of State Rice conveyed that the operation was authorized by the President after the administration observed increased Iranian activity in Iraq and decided to curb the efforts of the networks. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates added: “We believe that we can interrupt these networks that are providing support, through actions inside the territory of Iraq, that there is no need to attack targets in Iran itself.”<sup>82</sup>

In his 2007 State of the Union address, President Bush mentioned Iran several times, arguing that the Tehran government meddled with Iraq and supported Hezbollah, which he said was second only to Al Qaeda.<sup>83</sup> In mid-February President Bush said that it was definite that some groups within Iran were providing roadside bombs for the Shiite militants; however, he refrained from saying that any high-

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<sup>78</sup> ‘U.S. Is Holding Iranians Seized in Raids in Iraq’, *The New York Times*, 25 December 2006.

<sup>79</sup> ‘Tehran Assails U.S. Arrests of Iranians in Iraq Raids’, *The New York Times*, 26 December 2006.

<sup>80</sup> ‘U.S. Says Captured Iranians Can Be Linked to Attacks’, *The New York Times*, 27 December 2006.

<sup>81</sup> ‘G.I.’s in Iraq Raid Iranians’ Offices’, *The New York Times*, 12 January 2007.

<sup>82</sup> Jay Solomon, ‘Spillover Feared as U.S. Confronts Iran; Curbing Tehran Becomes Part of New Push to Stabilize Iraq; Critics Warn of Widening War’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 January 2007.

<sup>83</sup> George W Bush, State of the Union Address, 23 January 2007.

ranking officials in the Iranian government were aware of the situation:

I can say with certainty that the Quds Force, a part of the Iranian government, has provided these sophisticated I.E.D.'s that have harmed our troops, and I'd like to repeat, I do not know whether or not the Quds Force was ordered from the top echelons of the government. But my point is, what's worse, them ordering it and it happening, or them not ordering it and its happening?<sup>84</sup>

This was the most specific argument made against Iran suggesting that they were playing a negative role in Iraq. This accusation was the harbinger of the US sanctions against the Qud forces, which was a result of designating the Qud a supporter of terrorism. The administration's failure to control the situation in Iraq created the need to find someone to blame. Iran was one of the easiest targets in this attempt and gave the administration the chance to relieve some of the tension by pointing the finger at someone else.

- **Late attempts**

However, as Iraq became harder to deal with every passing day, the administration had to give in and adjust its policies. In March 2007, the United States officials said that they agreed to join the international meeting, along with the Iranian government, in order to discuss the future of Iraq. Rice and her Iranian and Syrian counterparts would be attending the meeting.<sup>85</sup> Previously, the Bush administration had been reluctant to invite Damascus and Tehran to meetings discussing the future of Iraq; thus, Rice's announcement that Iraq's two neighbours would be part of the talks could be seen as a reversal of previous policies. After Rumsfeld left and the hawkish influence within the administration diminished, Rice had more room to manoeuvre to solve the impasse in Iraq and possibly release some

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<sup>84</sup>K DeYoung, 'Skepticism Over Iraq Haunts U.S. Iran Policy', *The Washington Post*, 15 February 2007.

<sup>85</sup>D Miliband, 'The White House Gets Neighborly in the Middle East', *The Washington Post*, 28 February 2007.

of the rising tension between the US and Iran. However, the relations between the two countries did not get warmer in the aftermath of the talks.

Even though the US clearly needed the help of Iran and Syria in order to make some progress in Iraq, the administration wanted to make sure that its wings were not entirely clipped. This was especially important for those who had been advocating a “no-talk with Iran” rule. Therefore, a month later, from the deck of an aircraft carrier off the coast of Iran, Vice President Dick Cheney said that the United States was ready to use its naval power to prevent Iran from “gaining nuclear weapons and dominating this region.”<sup>86</sup> However, by then the political atmosphere of Washington, especially around White House, had changed and the Vice President did not enjoy as much political weight as he did during Bush’s first term. Thus, a week after the vice president's visit to the aircraft carrier, the United States and Iran announced that they would come together for a meeting about Iraqi security. Nevertheless, the talks that took place at the end of May did not produce any agreement between the two countries regarding Iraq, nor did they promise any further meetings. The talks took place between Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker of the United States and Ambassador Hassan Kazemi Qumi of Iran. Crocker summarized the meeting:

The Iranians, as well as ourselves, laid out the principles that guide our respective policies toward Iraq. There was pretty good congruence right down the line: support for a secure, stable, democratic, federal Iraq, in control of its own security, at peace with its neighbors.<sup>87</sup>

The ambassador further noted, however, that even though the declaratory policies were agreed upon between the two countries, problems arose

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<sup>86</sup>R Wright, ‘In Gulf, Cheney Pointedly Warns Iran; As He Talks Tough, U.S. Pursues Diplomacy’, *The Washington Post*, 12 May 2007.

<sup>87</sup>N King Jr., ‘Mistrust Colors U.S.-Iran Talks; Violence in Iraq is Focus; No Accords Are Reached, But Some Ideas Emerge’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 29 May 2007.

with “the Iranians not bringing their behavior on the ground into line with their own policy.”<sup>88</sup> This was one of the highest level meetings between the diplomats of the two countries since the severance of relations in 1979. The fact that the two governments attended the same meeting demonstrated a change of heart in the Bush administration, even if there were not any significant outcomes as a result of the encounters. Along the same lines, Secretary of State Rice, the President and all the members of cabinet agreed on the pursuit of diplomacy in the case of Iran. It was especially emphasised that Vice President Cheney, who had expressed his favour for more forceful routes, was on board as well.<sup>89</sup>

The Iraq War created a new dimension in US-Iranian relations. In addition to decades of hostilities and the recent American occupation of Afghanistan, now the US troops were moving to the other next door. The fall of the Taliban, and now Saddam, was definitely beneficial to Iran by boosting its regional power. Therefore, the Iraq War was a harbinger of further problems despite the opening of new avenues of cooperation. On the other hand, for the US, with the beginning of the war, Iran was pushed to the back burner. The Bush administration wanted to direct all their political capital to acquiring international support for the new war, but at the same time the administration wanted to keep an eye on Iran’s nuclear programme. Therefore, they neither wanted to pull Iran to the top of the list, nor did they want Iran to be entirely ignored. The back burner was where Iran needed to be.

Following a quick victory in Afghanistan, the Bush administration had become too confident to seek the help of Iran and Syria concerning Iraq. The expectation was that Iraq would also be a fast victory, democracy would be

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<sup>88</sup>‘U.S. and Iranian Officials Meet in Baghdad, but Talks Yield No Breakthroughs’, *The New York Times*, 29 May 2007.

<sup>89</sup>G Kessler, ‘Cheney Backs Diplomacy on Iran Programme, Rice Affirms’, *The Washington Post*, 2 June 2007.

established fairly easily and all would be well before long. This hubris prevented the administration from seeing the true social, political and religious structure of Iraq, and also from seeking the help of regional powers. Most of the high-ranking officials of the administration did not think Iran was needed, and Secretary Powell had lost most of his political capital fighting against the US invading Iraq. In the minds of Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, and, for a long time, Rice, the US presence in Afghanistan and Iraq would act as a demonstration of might against Iran and would give courage and motivation to the opposition movement. The hope was that a democratic Iraq would change the direction of political winds in Iran, igniting regime change. However, Iraq neither became the bastion of democracy in the Middle East, nor did the winds of change sweep through Iran and Afghanistan. This realization, in addition to the change of ranks in the administration, resulted in a change of approach toward Iran concerning Iraq. Rice had hoped that including Iran and Syria would ease the tension and pave a way to a solution in Iraq; however by the time of this change of heart, the US had lost much face in the region, not to mention power. The US was not as formidable as it was in 2003, and the end of the Bush administration was in sight. Nevertheless, despite the lack of results, Rice and her team were able to procure one of the highest-ranking meetings between the countries since the Islamic revolution. But the change of heart had come too late.

### **GRAND BARGAIN**

Looking from Tehran in 2003, the picture was not very encouraging. The wounded giant of 9/11 had crushed two of Iran's enemies in a matter of months without much help from the international community. Regionally, Pakistan and many Arab countries were willing to aid the US in any way they could. Surrounded by US troops and allies, the Tehran administration, including the Ayatollah, realized

that one did not challenge the US at the height of its power, especially not when everything was going according to Rumsfeld's plan in Iraq. After Baghdad, was Tehran the next stop? These thoughts, fears and realizations might have played a role in prompting the Iranian government to present the most comprehensive offer since 1979. The Iranians were willing to put everything on the table in order not to become the next host of the American troops. At the beginning of May 2003, a document offering a "Grand Bargain" with Iran reached the State Department from the Swiss Embassy in Tehran, a plain fax outlining a peace treaty between the US and Iran. The Iranian government was willing to work with the Bush administration concerning every major issue of contention: Iran's connections with terrorist organizations, nuclear programme and Israel. In return, the US government was asked to provide security guarantees, terminate the sanctions regime and never aspire for regime change in Iran. The document allegedly received the blessings of Iran's highest officials, including the Supreme Leader. It was truly unprecedented.

Iran was willing to end its support of Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad in order to ease tension in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Also, the Iranian government would sign the Beirut Declaration, which declared that the state of Israel would be recognized by all the Arab countries and Israel would withdraw from the occupied territories. In regards to the nuclear programme, the gates would be wide open for intrusive international inspections, including American inspectors, in order to demonstrate that Iran did not have a weapons programme. The Additional Protocol to the NPT would be signed as well. Concerning Iraq, Tehran would commit to work closely with the US government to ensure political stability under a democratic, nonreligious government in Baghdad. In return, the US should hand over the MEK operatives captured in Iraq in exchange of the Al Qaeda operatives the Iranians apprehended. In the long run, Iran demanded that the strong rhetoric of the US

governments should cease and Washington should stop interfering with Iranian domestic politics. Furthermore, Iran asked that the US would recognize Iran's regional interests and its right to access nuclear, biological and chemical technology.<sup>90</sup>

Middle East Director in the NSC, Flynt Leverett, recounted that the content of the document was essentially an offer to resolve all outstanding issues between the two countries. His first reaction was thinking that this offer was at the same scale as the offer the Chinese Prime Minister passed to the US through Pakistan that prompted Henry Kissinger's secret trip to China.<sup>91</sup> Rice and Undersecretary Armitage confirmed that a document was received from the Swiss Embassy concerning Iran, but they were not as optimistic as Leverett. Armitage argued that the fax contents were not in line with what the administration was hearing through the intelligence channels, and they were suspicious that the Swiss ambassador might have added to the content.<sup>92</sup> However, these suspicions must not have been strong enough because the State Department was willing to give the offer a chance, at least to use it as a starting point. Powell, Rice and Armitage brought the fax to the attention of the White House; there the offer hit the wall of Cheney and Rumsfeld. Larry Wilkerson, chief of staff to Powell said Cheney and Rumsfeld were determined to not "speak to evil", shutting the Iranian offer down.<sup>93</sup> There would be no negotiations with the Iranians.

In the end, there was no response from the Bush administration, and the Iranian attempt remained fruitless. In 2003, the US was enjoying two victories against two countries that had been complicated foes for invading powers for a long

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<sup>90</sup>Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, Appendix A.

<sup>91</sup>Interview with Flynt Leverett, "The 'Grand Bargain' Fax: A Missed Opportunity?", *PBS*, 23 October 2007, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/showdown/themes/grandbargain.html>

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>Wilkerson quoted in L Dunise and J Bernstein, *Vice: Dick Cheney and the Hijacking of the American Presidency*, New York: Random House, 2007, p. 186.

time. Everything was going according to Rumsfeld's plan and he frequently appeared satisfied and content on television. Bush and Cheney were pleased that they had shown the world that the US still was the superpower and had the muscle to wage war in two countries without significant disruption on the home front. It was a time of victory but also of a lack of vision for the Bush administration. This short-sightedness was demonstrated on several levels. First of all, the argument that the Swiss ambassador might have altered the message went against traditional diplomatic wisdom, as the Swiss Embassy was clearly instructed to convey the messages unaltered in both directions. It would require a severe lack of insight to meddle with a crucial document. Furthermore, with respect to the authoritativeness of the document, regardless of its origins, the fax could be considered authentic enough to have at least originated from high levels of the Iranian government, which means it could have, if nothing else, been used as a springboard for further dialogue. Lastly, Cheney and Rumsfeld were aware that the US was talking from a position of strength, and, instead of taking this opportunity to change the course of US-Iran relations; they assumed a hawkish position by declaring that America would not talk to evil. By this time, Powell had all but spent his political capital and had lost face with the seeming victory in Iraq. Knowing his place among the rank of the Bush administration, he did not even push the issue after it was shut down by Cheney and Rumsfeld. The historic opportunity was lost and the Bush administration held on to the premises of the Axis of Evil speech.

### **SANCTIONS and IAEA**

Advocating preventive war was intimidating to all those who had poor relations with the United States. Looking from the Middle East, the United States



was a financial giant who possessed the strongest and most technologically advanced military in the world. The likelihood that a developing country, regardless of its oil revenue, could resist an American invasion with conventional weapons and a standing army was not reassuring. As the US troops built up their presence in two of the countries adjacent to Iran, the fear that Iran was next in line was bound to enter the minds of the Iranians, both within the civilian population and the government. Even though the fall of Iran's two long-lasting enemies strengthened Iran's hand in the region, a more prominent American presence posed a new threat. In the face of this threat, most likely possession of nuclear weapons, or at least the threat of Iran joining the nuclear club, became more appealing.

- **Post “Axis of Evil”**

Needless to say, American intervention in Iraq created official reactions in Iran, which denounced the doctrine of pre-emption. Furthermore, at the end of January 2003, Foreign Minister Kharazmi repeated that there was no basis for allegations made against Iran, namely regarding developing nuclear weapons.<sup>94</sup> The inspection of Iranian nuclear facilities by the international inspectors followed these declarations. The inspectors, led by chief of IAEA Mohamed ElBaradei, discovered that the reactor in Natanz had a network of centrifuges, which were capable of uranium enrichment, and Iran had the capability of building more centrifuges. Even though the Iranian government guaranteed that these facilities would only be used for low-enriched uranium required for energy production, American and British intelligence argued that the uranium produced in Natanz could be transported to another plant, where it could be enriched to “weapons grade.” Another issue was the

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<sup>94</sup>‘Threats And Responses: Iraq's Neighbors; Iran Veers Between Admiration and Resentment of American Power’, *The New York Times*, 30 January 2003.

possibility of Iran withdrawing from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty even after following the treaty during its first stages. Following the withdrawal, it would be possible to reconfigure the centrifuges to produce weapons-grade uranium.<sup>95</sup> The Iranian government's awareness that the wounded superpower could very well pick Tehran as their next stop made them a little more open to the IAEA inspections after the 2002 State of the Union Address. Even though the highest member of the government continuously condemned Bush's rhetoric, their willingness to undergo an international inspection was evidence of their desire not to further aggravate the US. This did not mean Tehran was ready to give up its nuclear programme, but rather ride these highly charged times out without prompting military intervention.

On May 8, 2003, American concerns about the Iranian nuclear programme resurfaced. The administration expressed concerns that Iran had accelerated its nuclear programme. In response, the United States started to put pressure on the nations who had a role in the board of the IAEA to declare that Iran had violated its obligations under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.<sup>96</sup> If such sanctions were acquired from the IAEA, the possibility of United Nations pressure would increase, thus giving the US international support to compel Iran. However, with the IAEA inspectors failing to find conclusive proof of a clandestine nuclear programme, the possibility of UN Security Council sanctions remained very slim. This tied the hands of the Bush administration. Military involvement with Iran was not a realistic option; the avenues of direct engagement were shut many times by the administration and, without the backing of IAEA, the international community was not willing to impose sanctions on Iran. By mid 2003, the Bush administration was at a dead end; having burnt their bridges, the only way out went through the UN.

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<sup>95</sup> 'Iran to Provide Nuclear Design Details, Inspector Says', *The Washington Post*, 23 February 2003.

<sup>96</sup> 'The Administration; New U.S. Concerns on Iran's Pursuit of Nuclear Arms', *The New York Times*, 8 May 2003.

- **Secret Laboratories Revealed**

At the end of May, the umbrella group for Iranian opposition, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, claimed that it possessed evidence that Iran had two unrevealed laboratories west of Tehran. These facilities, the organization argued, functioned as a satellite plant to support the nuclear plant in Natanz. The organization disclosed that this information was gathered by the Mujahedeen-e Khalq, who had also alerted the international community about the Natanz plant.<sup>97</sup> In the wake of this news, Powell stated that: “our policies with respect to Iran have not changed. We do not approve of their support of terrorist activities. We have made it clear over the years that we disapprove of their efforts to develop a nuclear capability.”<sup>98</sup> During his trip to Germany, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld urged NATO to find new ways of discouraging Iran about its nuclear programme.<sup>99</sup> The news came at a time that the Bush administration was merely a few months into the Iraq War, and was not willing to escalate tensions with Iran. Even though both Powell and Rumsfeld reacted negatively to the discovery of new facilities, turning to the UN and the international community was the best course of action at that juncture.

Following the information that Iran had additional secret laboratories, the United States, Britain and other nations intensified their diplomatic efforts in the United Nations after Mohamed ElBaradei, director general of the IAEA, declared, “Iran has failed to meet its obligations.” The move to pass a UN resolution was not favoured by Russia, who asserted that the UN should encourage the cooperation received from Iran, instead of coming down with such a heavy hand. Even though

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<sup>97</sup> ‘Group Says Iran Has 2 Undisclosed Nuclear Laboratories’, *The New York Times*, 27 May 2003.

<sup>98</sup> ‘After the War: Counterterrorism; U.S. Still Critical of Iran Despite Al Qaeda Arrests’, *The New York Times*, 28 May 2003.

<sup>99</sup> ‘Atomic Weapons; Rumsfeld Says Iran Is Developing Nuclear Arms Under Guise of Civilian Programme’, *The New York Times*, 12 June 2003.

Iranian officials said that they were working towards giving more access to IAEA inspectors, the diplomats were sceptical of Iran's genuineness.<sup>100</sup> For the first time since he took office, President Bush declared on June 19 that the United States and its allies “will not tolerate the construction of a nuclear weapon.”<sup>101</sup> Even though Iran was named as a member of the “Axis of Evil,” the Bush administration had not previously drawn such a clear line until this statement. Methods of prevention were not mentioned during his speech, but it was clear that there would be an increase in diplomatic pressure. For instance, at a later meeting of IAEA, the US ambassador in Vienna, Kenneth Brill, asked:

Without the outside revelations, Iran's extensive nuclear programme would still be proceeding on a largely clandestine basis; Can the I.A.E.A. or anyone else be confident under these circumstances that there are no other clandestine facilities that have yet to be revealed?<sup>102</sup>

Following these remarks, after three days of debate, on June 20, the IAEA asked Iran to cooperate further with the agency inspectors, declaring that Iran should “promptly and unconditionally conclude and implement an additional protocol to its Safeguards Agreement in order to enhance the agency's ability to provide credible assurances regarding the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear activities.”<sup>103</sup> In addition to the diplomatic pressure, the Bush administration proceeded to impose the economic sanctions more strongly. At the beginning of July, four Chinese firms were penalized because of their arms or weapons technology deals with Iran.<sup>104</sup> Bush's strong rhetoric continued to become a part of his policy towards Iran. After the Axis of Evil speech, the words of almost all high-ranking officials struck an uncompromising

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

<sup>101</sup>‘Bush is toughening His Rhetoric About Iran's Nuclear Program’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 19 June 2003.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid.

<sup>103</sup>‘U.N Atom Agency Seeks Wider Scrutiny on Iran, but Is Rebuffed’, *The New York Times*, 20 June 2003.

<sup>104</sup>‘U.S. Penalizes 6 Asian Firms For Helping Iran Arm Itself’, *The New York Times*, 4 July 2003.

tone. After the initial success of the Iraq War, even the State Department was not willing to utter appeasing word in regards Iran. Powell had fought a battle against Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld about attacking Iraq and losing that battle had cost him dearly.

After months of resistance, towards the end of October, Iran agreed to allow the international inspectors to conduct a more scrupulous inspection. However, this decision was not accompanied by any information on when the Iranian reactors would suspend uranium enrichment. French and German foreign ministers went to the Iranian capital to sign the accord.<sup>105</sup> A week after this announcement was made from Tehran, the Bush administration assured Iran that the US did not support regime change in Iran.<sup>106</sup> At the same time, Iranian officials conveyed that they would not hand over the Al Qaeda suspects or commence any dialogue with the US government unless the administration took positive steps towards confidence building in Iran. The government spokesman, Abdullah Ramezanzadeh, expressed the Iranian position: “You cannot threaten from one side and freeze assets from the other side; level accusations from one side and then request dialogue from the other side; we need to see America's practical steps.”<sup>107</sup> Having declared the Tehran government “evil”, it did not carry much weight to state that the US was not after regime change. Time and again the Bush administration showed that they were not willing to engage with the current regime, and this reluctance led the Iranian administration to believe that the ultimate goal of the Bush administration was to topple the rule of the Mullahs. The varying signals sent by the American government led to negative reactions from the Iranian government, such

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<sup>105</sup>G Frankel, ‘Iran Vows to Curb Nuclear Activities; Europeans Win Deal on Rules, Inspections’, *The Washington Post*, 22 October 2003.

<sup>106</sup>G Kessler, ‘U.S. Ready to resume Talks with Iran, Armitage Says’, *The Washington Post*, 29 October 2003.

<sup>107</sup>‘Iran Demands Concessions From U.S. in Return for Cooperation’, *The New York Times*, 30 October 2003.

as the remarks of Ramezanzadeh. While strong rhetoric was used as a form of policy by the administration, the actions of the US government since 2001 demonstrated that Bush's mild words were not to be easily trusted.

In November, the IAEA declared that the inspectors did not find any indication that Iran was producing nuclear weapons. However, there were traces of materials, such as plutonium, that could be used in weapons. The agency refrained from declaring the programme peaceful because of the Iranian government's secrecy in the past.<sup>108</sup> The IAEA report revealed to American officials that Iran's programme was more advanced than they had previously calculated. The most surprising aspect of the report was Iran's ability to work in concealment to enrich uranium for eighteen years. Another surprise was the Iranian mastery of enrichment, including the laser technique, which is known as the hardest and the most expensive method for uranium enrichment.<sup>109</sup> The Bush administration was not pleased with the outcome of the inspections, as the report was not able to establish a clear case for a nuclear weapons programme while at the same time demonstrating that Iran was further along than previously thought. Not surprisingly, Secretary Powell was not able to convince the United Nations to impose sanctions on Iran, because the European nations, including the UK, were in favour of encouraging Iran's cooperative attitude for the time being.<sup>110</sup> As a result, at the end of November 2003 the United States consented to a United Nations resolution that refrained from mentioning any sanctions against Iran, which was what the Bush administration actually desired. However, the resolution stated that the UN would not tolerate any more secrecy or lack of cooperation from Iran. A US official said: "It makes clear that if there are further failures by Iran, all options will be open. This takes care of

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<sup>108</sup>G Milhollin, 'What's 'Cheating' in Farsi?'. *The Wall Street Journal*, 13 November 2003.

<sup>109</sup>'Iran Has Made Plutonium, U.N. Reports', *The New York Times*, 11 November 2003.'

<sup>110</sup>'Nuclear Board Said to Rebuff Bush Over Iran', *The New York Times*, 20 November 2003.

our requirement to take full account of all of Iran's past breaches.”<sup>111</sup>

The revelation of the secret facilities reignited the doubts of many concerning Iran's nuclear programme. Both the Bush administration and the United Nations declared in 2003 that they would not tolerate a nuclear-armed Iran. However, the news came at a time that both the White House and the Pentagon were occupied with the Iraq War. The power struggle between the State and the Defense Departments prior to the occupation of Iraq made it clear that the Secretary of State was not heard in the White House. At the same time, Rumsfeld was preoccupied with making sure that the war he fought to start ended well. The timing of the revelation resulted in the US turning to the UN after declaring that Iran's nuclear activities were unacceptable. Like his predecessors, Bush was fearful that Iran's hostile government led by the mullahs would get their hands on weapons of mass destruction, destabilize the region and threaten American allies. However, again like his predecessors, Bush did not know how to put a stop to Iran's nuclear programme. Having imposed financial sanctions for decades and having cut off political ties, the United States did not have any means to affect Iran other than going through the United Nations and trying to convince Russia and China to stop technologically and financially aiding Iran. Additionally, the Iranian government did not have any motivation to cease its quest. Even though it was intimidating to have the American troops at its doorstep, the irreconcilable nature of the relations tipped the scale towards the continuation of the nuclear programme.

- **Iran strikes back**

In February 2004, the Iranian government admitted that they possessed

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<sup>111</sup>“U.S. Acquiesces to Allies on New Iran Nuclear Resolution”, *The New York Times*, 25 November 2003.

the designs for an advanced centrifuge that enriched uranium much faster than those found by the inspectors. The news came the week after President Bush made a speech about the administration's desire to prevent the flow of materials that could be used in nuclear weapons.<sup>112</sup> At the end of the month, the UN inspectors revealed in their report that there was evidence of indigenous production of fuel that could be used in nuclear weapons. Iran argued that the material was in a concentrated form before it arrived in Iran, and the IAEA inspectors stated that the important parts contained only a negligible amount of the aforementioned material. The possibility that Iran was still hiding details of its nuclear programme generated a response from the administration: "the key right now is to build an international consensus about what Iran is doing, and the Iranians are making it easier every day, by their failure to disclose and by what's being found in Iran."<sup>113</sup> Iran had fought Iraq and Saddam Hussein for years without having won a clear victory. But, the US had come and in a matter of months Saddam's regime was toppled and the dictator himself was captured. Moreover, now the US troops were settled in two bordering countries of Iran. The Tehran government had to either appease the US or discourage the US by demonstrating that Iran would not be an easy prey. They chose the latter.

As months passed after the execution of Saddam, tension regarding Iraq increased since there was no trace of the WMDs. The Bush administration stated that the war was over, but there was not a peaceful and democratic Iraq. This was only the beginning of problems in Iraq and it would consume the rest of Bush's presidency. Iran's attempts to intimidate the US came at a time when the Bush administration was intently looking at Iraq and did not have the political or military resources to deal with Iran's defiance. The best course of action for the

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<sup>112</sup>Iran Admits That It Has Plans for a Newer Centrifuge', *The New York Times*, 13 February 2004.

<sup>113</sup>P Slevin and J Warrick, 'Iran Faulted on Nuclear Declaration; IAEA Calls Disclosure of Research Incomplete', *The Washington Post*, 25 February 2004.



administration was to throw the ball in the UN's court and continue condemning Iran's activities. Therefore, when, in mid June, the IAEA director ElBaradei asked Iran to give a full accounting of its nuclear activities in the next few months, the strong tone of the director's speech was welcomed by the Bush administration because this time ElBaradei was far more firm than in his previous dealings.<sup>114</sup> At the end of June, Iran sent a diplomatic note to Britain, France and Germany saying that the European nations did not honour their commitments for the normalization of relations with Iran. The note stated that Iran was going to resume the work on the centrifuges, while holding off on uranium enrichment. The Bush administration interpreted the note as an act of defiance against the resolution passed by the IAEA the previous week.<sup>115</sup> However, there was no mention of how to tackle this defiance.

At the beginning of August, National Security Adviser Rice said that the president would not allow Iran to develop nuclear weapons and he would consider all the options available to him to prevent a nuclear Iran.<sup>116</sup> A few days later, President Bush said at a Republican meeting that he was still on the side of diplomatic measures:

Iran must comply with the demands of the free world, and that's where we sit right now, and my attitude is that we've got to keep pressure on the government, and help others keep pressure on the government, so there's kind of a universal condemnation of illegal weapons activities.<sup>117</sup>

In mid-November, Britain, France and Germany announced that Iran agreed to halt the uranium enrichment with a formal agreement. Nevertheless, the officials of the Bush administration were sceptical about this agreement, demanding that there

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<sup>114</sup>P Slevin, and D Linzer, 'U.S. Agency Rebukes Iran on Nuclear Activity; Broken Promises on Disclosure Cited', *The Washington Post*, 19 June 2004.

<sup>115</sup>'Iran and North Korea Reignite Fears on Atomic Programmes', *The New York Times*, 25 June 2004.

<sup>116</sup>'Rice Says Iran Must Not Be Allowed to Develop Nuclear Arms', *The New York Times*, 9 August 2004.

<sup>117</sup>Gerald F. Seib, 'As Bush and Kerry Focus Elsewhere, Atomic Threats Stew', *The Wall Street Journal*, 11 August 2004.

should be results and greater compliance to build and instill confidence.<sup>118</sup> In response to Europe, in November 2004, IAEA officials declared that Iran curbed its nuclear activities as it promised to the Europeans with the formal agreement.<sup>119</sup> At the end of the month, during the meetings concerning the Iranian nuclear programme, Iran declared that it would not terminate its nuclear programme. The IAEA director ElBaradei conveyed that Iran had failed to completely stop its uranium enrichment as it pledged.<sup>120</sup> Still, the IAEA board passed a resolution, which was mild, and also removed the possibility that the issue would be brought to the Security Council. They argued that the suspension was a voluntary gesture and was not mandatory, and, therefore, this gesture was to be rewarded.<sup>121</sup>

In regards to Iran's nuclear programme, the US and Iran circled the fighting ground as two wolves during the first term of George Bush. The IAEA, the UN, Russia and China were all needed to increase the pressure in order to encourage or discourage the Iranian government. Although both the US and the UN declared that they would "not tolerate" a nuclear Iran, the government in Tehran continued to push the limits. In the midst of the Iraq War, the Bush administration could not go beyond uttering words and leaving the situation to the UN and the IAEA, hoping that the UNSC would finally impose sanctions on Iran. It was also towards the end of Bush's first term, and domestic concerns in addition to Iraq took precedence over Iran. After not having found WMDs in Iraq, the last thing Bush and Cheney needed was to initiate yet another international confrontation.

- **Starting the second term with warnings**

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<sup>118</sup>D Linzer, 'Iran Vows to Freeze Nuclear Programmes; In Return, Europeans Guarantee Freedom from UN Sanctions', *The Washington Post*, 15 November 2004.

<sup>119</sup>Marc Champion, 'Iran Suspends Its Nuclear Work Under EU Pact; Move Likely Allows Tehran to Avoid Action by UN; Tougher Talks Lie Ahead', *The Wall Street Journal*, 23 November 2004.

<sup>120</sup>'Iranians Refuse to Terminate Nuclear Plans', *The New York Times*, 26 November 2004.

<sup>121</sup>'Iran Backs Away From a Demand on A-Bomb Fuel', *The New York Times*, 29 November 2004.

The focus of 2004 presidential elections was foreign policy because of the War on Terror and the Iraq War. Bush won a majority of the electoral votes, and was elected president for a second term. Bush's second term started with Iran's agreement for inspection of the military base in Parchin, which the US had suspected of being a weapons development site. The concession was seen as a victory for the IAEA; however, given the country's previous record, the Bush administration was sceptical about the extent of the inspection, since the inspectors would not have comprehensive access to all the facilities.<sup>122</sup> On January 18, the day after President Bush repeated again that the military option was not off the table, some Iranian officials said that Iran would not be intimidated by threats. The defence minister of Iran, Ali Shamkhani, said: "We have developed a might that no country can attack us because they do not have accurate information about our military capabilities. We have produced equipment at a rapid pace with the minimum investment that has resulted in the greatest deterrent force."<sup>123</sup>

As the Iranian government resorted to more hostile rhetoric, Cheney, who had been at the forefront of hawkish rhetoric, started his second term declaring his support for diplomacy, while making sure to remind Iran that Israel might decide to "act first" against Iran:

If, in fact, the Israelis became convinced the Iranians had a significant nuclear capability, given the fact that Iran has a state policy that their objective is the destruction of Israel, the Israelis might well decide to act first, and let the rest of the world worry about cleaning up the diplomatic mess afterwards. We don't want a war in the Middle East, if we can avoid it. In the case of the Iranian situation, I think everybody would be best suited or best treated and dealt with if we could deal with it diplomatically.<sup>124</sup>

Whereas, during her first trip to Europe as the Secretary of State, Rice stated that the

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<sup>122</sup>'Iran Agrees to Inspection of Military Base', *The New York Times*, 6 January 2005.

<sup>123</sup>'U.S. Punishes 8 Chinese Firms for Aiding Iran', *The New York Times*, 18 January 2005.

<sup>124</sup>'Cheney Says Israel Might 'Act First' on Iran', *The New York Times*, 20 January 2005.

US would not help Europe in their attempts to offer Iran incentives. Furthermore, she expressed disapproval for the Iranian regime:

I don't think anybody thinks that the unelected mullahs who run that regime are a good thing for the Iranian people or for the region. I think our European allies agree that the Iranian regime's human rights behavior and its behavior toward its own population is something to be loathed.<sup>125</sup>

The moderate words of Cheney and uncompromising tone of Rice were attempts to show a united front against Tehran. Cheney needed to demonstrate that he had room for diplomacy and was not interested in going to war with every country that had clashed with the US, while Rice had to show that she was more hawkish than Powell. Despite the setting-of-the-scene remarks of Cheney and Rice, the administration took the European plan of incentives into consideration, stating that the American government would do its best to support the efforts to avert the Iranian nuclear programme. The European plan included membership in the World Trade Organization and the sale of commercial aircraft and spare parts.<sup>126</sup> On March 11, Europe and the US finally agreed on a course, after the US conceded to assist the programme financially and the European countries conceded to take the issue to the UN Security Council if Iran did not comply.<sup>127</sup> However, President Khatami asserted once again that Iran would not abandon its uranium enrichment programme, even though it was suspended as a gesture of good will. At the same time, the Iranian president communicated that Iran was ready to provide “objective guarantees” that would meet the demands of the European nations.<sup>128</sup>

The six weeks after the US agreed to support the European plan were relatively calm, but at the beginning of May 2005 the Bush administration, at a

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<sup>125</sup>‘Rice Says U.S. Won't Aid Europe on Iran Incentives’, *The New York Times*, 4 February 2005.

<sup>126</sup>R Wright, ‘U.S. Wants Guarantees on Iran Effort; Support for U.N. Action Sought if Tehran Does not Abandon Nuclear Programme’, *The Washington Post*, 4 March 2005.

<sup>127</sup>R Wright, ‘U.S. to back Europeans on Incentive for Iran; Rice to Announce Shift on Nuclear Issue’, *The Washington Post*, 11 March 2005.

<sup>128</sup>‘Iran Offers Europe 'Guarantees' on Its Nuclear Programme’, *The New York Times*, 17 March 2005.

conference about the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, asked Iran to destroy all the equipment and the facilities that were developed for the production of nuclear material. Assistant Secretary of State, Stephen Rademaker, who made the statement on behalf of the administration, also said that they did not want to make the mistake the Clinton administration made with North Korea, i.e. reaching an agreement without getting rid of all the fissile material and the equipment. Therefore, Rademaker added, any solution “must include permanent cessation of Iran's enrichment and reprocessing efforts, as well as dismantlement of equipment facilities related to such activity.”<sup>129</sup>

At the same conference, Iran declared that it would resume some of its nuclear activities, which had been stopped a few months previous. After this announcement, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, on behalf of the European Nations, said that Britain would support the United States to take Iran to the UN Security Council if Iran failed to comply with its obligations.<sup>130</sup> Two weeks later, foreign ministers of Britain, France and Germany persuaded Iran not to resume its nuclear activities. The European efforts were supported by the Bush administration, and this approach was confirmed during a visit between President Bush and the German Chancellor Schröder.<sup>131</sup>

Bush's second term started with many problems on the table. Powell had left his place in the State Department to Rice and, even though his influence was diminishing as a result of problems in Iraq, Rumsfeld was still the head of the Department of Defense. The Iraq War was not going as well as the administration had hoped it would, and relations with Iran were getting even worse. At first, the second

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<sup>129</sup>“U.S. Demand Deepens Gulf With Iran Over Nuclear Facilities”, *The New York Times*, 2 May 2005.

<sup>130</sup>D Linzer, ‘European Officials Issue Iran A Warning; Nuclear Activity Would Mean End of Talks, Letter Says’, *The Washington Post*, 12 May 2005.

<sup>131</sup>“Bush Hears Endorsement From Schröder About Iran”, *The New York Times*, 28 June 2005.

term did not look any different than the first term concerning Iran. The vagueness of being an unaddressed member of the “Axis of Evil” carried over to the new term as both the Vice President and the new Secretary of State made admonishing remarks about Iran, while still trying to go through the UN channels. As the war in Iraq became harder than hoped, Iran settled into its position on the back burner, and American statesmen continued to address it in an inconsistent way. One day Cheney was talking about a possible Israeli intervention, and the next day the administration would agree to support the EU3 plan. One day Rice was condemning the practices of the Iranian government, the next day the US was even willing to sell aircraft parts to Iran. It appeared as if, although the views of the administration concerning Iran had not changed, the self-inflicted lack of options forced the administration to play the game so that the UN would impose sanctions. The CIA director Michael Hayden later stated that military intervention was never really an option: “When we talked about this in the government, the consensus was that [attacking Iran] would guarantee that which we are trying to prevent -- an Iran that will spare nothing to build a nuclear weapon and that would build it in secret.”<sup>132</sup> However, since the administration would not openly admit this, lest it would weaken their position, the result was a confusing picture. On the one hand, the administration strongly criticised Iran and “kept all the options on the table” while, on the other hand, it seemed to offer incentives along with the European nations. The Bush administration was desperate, and would become more desperate with the change of political atmosphere in Tehran.

- **Enter Ahmadinejad**

A year after the conservative takeover of the Iranian parliament, the

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<sup>132</sup>Michael Hayden, quoted in Josh Rogin, “Bush’s CIA Director: We determined attacking Iran was a bad idea,” *Foreign Policy*, 19 January 2012.

reign of the reformers in Iran came to an end with the election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the former conservative governor of Tehran. During his election campaign against Hashemi Rafsanjani, Ahmadinejad stood behind Iran's nuclear programme and said that "They [the EU and the US] will not allow us to progress easily but we should not surrender to their will."<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, Ahmadinejad was disinclined to open diplomatic relations with the United States. As the Iranian people elected Tehran's formerly little known governor as their president, the reformists era came to an end, and left the rule, first of the parliament and then of the presidency, to the conservatives. This change would pose new challenges for the already strained US-Iranian relations.

Shortly after the presidential elections in Iran, the European countries offered a new deal, which would make it possible for Iran to possess nuclear reactors and fuel as long as it stopped the part of its programme that was thought to have been devoted to nuclear weapons. The proposal meant that Iran would have to completely abandon uranium enrichment, which was the aspect that led to a tacit approval from the Bush administration. The administration officials said that even though the proposal was supported by the US government, for a complete normalization of relations between the two countries, Iran would have to stop supporting terrorism and meddling with Iraqi affairs.<sup>134</sup> However, Iran rejected the proposal and resumed its uranium enrichment at the Isfahan facility. This move from Iran resulted in frustration among the European Union countries that had been negotiating with Iran for the past two years.<sup>135</sup>

On August 12, 2005, the IAEA board of governors passed a resolution that urged Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment. Even though the EU3 had

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<sup>133</sup> Ahmadinejad quoted in Where Iran's candidates stood, BBC News, 25 June 2005.

<sup>134</sup> 'President Sends Bolton to U.N.; Bypasses Senate', *The New York Times*, 2 August 2005.

<sup>135</sup> D Linzer, 'Iran Resumes Uranium Work, Ignores Warning', *The Washington Post*, 9 August 2005.

previously said that resuming enrichment would result in taking Iran to the UN Security Council, they did not have the votes. Instead the UN issued another warning. Although these warnings were milder than what the Bush administration wanted, the government officials were positive about the step taken by the IAEA and the UN.<sup>136</sup> At the end of the month, President Jacques Chirac of France threatened that Iran would face the Security Council if it did not stop the enrichment. This new strong position was a clear break from the past dealings of France as an incentive-giver. France had moved closer to the United States' position, giving the new Iranian president a stark message. In mid-September, President Ahmadinejad addressed the United Nations General Assembly stating that Iran would continue with its nuclear programme regardless of what the United States or the European Union did to halt their efforts. As a result, the US and its allies said they would push for a resolution that would take Iran to the Security Council. Following Ahmadinejad's remarks Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns said: "The effect of the speech will be the increased isolation of Iran, as it was seen internationally and at the U.N. as exceptionally harsh and uncompromising."<sup>137</sup> President Ahmadinejad entirely abandoned his predecessor Khatami's moderate tone, leaving the EU3 and the United States more frustrated with Iran than before. The new Iranian president's uncompromising stance pushed France and Britain towards a more punitive approach and closer to the US.

A month after his UN General Assembly speech, Ahmadinejad made his Israel "must be wiped off the map" speech, which resulted in condemnations from every Western country.<sup>138</sup> Even though there was controversy about how the

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<sup>136</sup>'Nuclear Bargaining May Harden; U.S. Hopes Its Recent Flexibility Will Bolster Calls for Coercive Steps', *The Wall Street Journal*, 11 August 2005.

<sup>137</sup>'U.S. and Allies Seek Iran Resolution at U.N.', *The New York Times*, 19 September 2005.

<sup>138</sup>M Jordan, and K Vick, 'World Leaders Condemn Iranian's Call to Wipe Israel 'Off the Map'', *The Washington Post*, 28 October 2005.



phrase was translated –it was argued that the phrase was “vanish from the page of time”, the phrase created intense reactions. The speech was made with a domestic audience in mind, but the effects were felt internationally. President Ahmadinejad later clarified his words and stated that he meant to support democratisation for the Palestinians. However, because his remarks came shortly after IAEA’s conclusion that Iran was in violation of the NPT, the international reactions were strong. Though the support for incentives had started to dwindle in Europe, by the beginning of November, the EU3 composed a new offer to Iran that permitted very limited nuclear activities while moving all the uranium enrichment activities to Russia. The proposal was not favoured by some American officials because it permitted Iran to convert uranium into its gas form, UF<sub>4</sub>, which can be used in centrifuges for enrichment.<sup>139</sup> A week later, President Bush and President Putin said that they would endorse a compromise that would allow Iran to enrich uranium in Russia under strict controls.<sup>140</sup> Furthermore, the US and the EU3 decided not to refer Iran to the Security Council; instead, they would wait for Russia, China and India to persuade Iran to cooperate, since the current developments with Russia were seen as a step to the right direction.<sup>141</sup>

The year of 2006 started with President Ahmadinejad's declaration that Iran would not halt its nuclear programme even if the issue were referred to the UN Security Council. The declaration came a week after Iran removed the seals from its nuclear facilities to resume uranium enrichment.<sup>142</sup> Meanwhile, the European and American officials reassured Russia and China about a Security Council referral by

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<sup>139</sup>‘U.S. and Europe to Give Iranians New Atom Offer’, *The New York Times*, 10 November 2005.

<sup>140</sup>D Linzer, ‘U.S. Backs Russian Plan to resolve Crisis; Uranium Enrichment Abroad Would Ease Arms Fears’, *The Washington Post*, 19 November 2005.

<sup>141</sup>‘U.S. and Europe Put Off Referral of Iran Case to Security Council’, *The New York Times*, 23 November 2005.

<sup>142</sup>‘K Vick, ‘Iranian Says Pressure Won’t End Nuclear Bid; Dismissing Sanctions Threats, President Asserts West Needs Tehran ‘More Than We Need Them’’, *The Washington Post*, 15 January 2006.

conveying that the referral would not mean sanctions, but would aim to create a debate.<sup>143</sup> At the beginning of February, the United States and Europe were able to reach their long-fought goal of UN Security Council referral by an overwhelming vote against the Iranian nuclear programme.<sup>144</sup> Since the new developments in the UN did not move Iran, the Bush administration took a new route of encouraging dissident groups in Iran through financial support. Secretary Rice brought the issue before the Senate: "We are going to begin a new effort to support the aspirations of the Iranian people. We will use this money to develop support networks for Iranian reformers, political dissidents and human rights activists."<sup>145</sup> Even though there were several testimonies before the House and the Senate that stated that any financial endorsement from the American government would hurt the Iranian opposition, the Bush administration continued to publicly declare their support for the dissidents.

Ahmadinejad's election demonstrated the turning of the tides in Iranian domestic politics. Even though the power of the president is limited in the Islamic Republic and the final decision in foreign affairs rests with Ayatollah Khamane'i, the political atmosphere that was more conducive to reform and appeasement under Khatami was no more. Instead the conservative and uncompromising tone of the new president emerged. This change in Iranian politics undoubtedly affected and would continue to affect how the US formed its foreign policy. During his first year in the office, Ahmadinejad made it clear that he was not going to bow down to the wishes of the West and made pronouncements that pushed the EU nations closer to the US' side. The Iranian president's words and defiance hastened the UN Security Council referral; something, for which the US had been fighting for a long time. In

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<sup>143</sup> 'West Tells Russia It Won't Press to Penalize Iran Now', *The New York Times*, 19 January 2006.

<sup>144</sup> 'Behind the Urgent Nuclear Diplomacy: A Sense That Iranians Will Get the Bomb', *The New York Times*, 6 February 2006.

<sup>145</sup> G Kessler, 'Rice Asks for \$75 Million to Increase Pressure on Iran', *The Washington Post*, 16 February 2006.

addition, Ahmadinejad proved to be a special challenge for the new Secretary of State. Having inherited the Iranian nuclear issue, her hands were not only tied by the ever-increasing problems in Iraq and the reluctance of the UN members, but also now by an Iranian president who did not show any willingness to cooperate. This sense of a dead end and lack of understanding of Iranian politics resulted in her openly supporting financially aiding the dissidents in Iran. After having declared many times that the Bush administration was not interested in regime change in Iran, Rice demonstrated that the US government was not to be trusted.

- **Rice and the winds of change**

The attitude of the Iranian government under Ahmadinejad would only get worse. A week before the Security Council meeting, another set of negotiations took place at the IAEA headquarters in Vienna. The Iranian negotiator conveyed a tacit threat: “The United States may have the power to cause harm and pain, but it is also susceptible to harm and pain. So if the United States wants to pursue that path, let the ball roll.”<sup>146</sup> The meeting was Iran's last chance to curb its nuclear programme before the UN Security Council meeting; however, Tehran did not waver. After Iran's rejection of the last offer, the US and Russia started to talk about what course to follow since Russia had been reluctant to impose any sanctions. Following the negative reactions from the Iranian government, President Bush said that he was still committed to diplomatic relations with regards to the Iranian nuclear programme:

One of the decisions I made early on was to have a multinational approach to sending messages, clear messages, to the Iranians, that if they want to be a part of the -an accepted nation in the world, that they must give up their nuclear weapons ambitions, and we're making pretty good progress.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup>‘Threats Rattle at Nuclear Meeting on Iran’, *The New York Times*, 9 March 2006.

<sup>147</sup>P Baker, ‘Bush Dismisses Talk of Using Force Against Iran’, *The Washington Post*, 11 April 2006.

On the other hand, President Ahmadinejad announced that Iran started the research on the P-2 centrifuges, which were an advanced and much faster method for uranium enrichment. This new development cast more suspicions on the Iranian programme since Iran kept the existence of the P-2 programme secret, which led the IAEA investigators and American officials to believe that there was a clandestine programme that was not revealed to the international actors.<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, not only did Iran not comply with the Security Council demand of halting all of its enrichment activities, but also the Iranian government dramatically decreased its cooperation level with the IAEA. President Ahmadinejad said on the day of the UN Security Council deadline: “Those who want to prevent Iranians from obtaining their rights should know that we do not give a damn about such resolutions.”<sup>149</sup>

At the end of May 2006, the US and Russia finally agreed on a draft resolution, which stated that an immediate military action against Iran was off the table. Not only did the US concede on the military option, but the Bush administration also agreed to join the Europeans during the talks with Iran if Iran suspended its uranium enrichment:

Our message to the Iranians is that, one, you won't have a weapon, and two, that you must verifiably suspend any programmes, at which point we will come to the negotiating table to work on a way forward.<sup>150</sup>

The following day, the United States, Russia, China, Britain, Germany and France announced a package that offered incentives for Iran to find a solution to the nuclear crisis. The precondition for the resumption of the negotiations was the suspension of enrichment activities. Moreover, the declaration stated that there

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<sup>148</sup> ‘Iran Claims Nuclear Steps in New Worry’, *The New York Times*, 17 April 2006.

<sup>149</sup> ‘U.S. Presses Other Nations to Penalize Iran on Arms’, *The New York Times*, 22 April 2006.

<sup>150</sup> ‘A Smart Approach to Iran; The United States finds a way to offer talks without rewarding bad behavior’, *The Washington Post*, 1 June 2006.

would be further steps if Iran did not comply with the demands of the Security Council.<sup>151</sup> Furthermore, the US government agreed to provide parts for Iranian aircrafts from Boeing in order to encourage Iran to accept the resolution. The American offer came as a part of an incentives package put forward by Europe.<sup>152</sup> Iran was given weeks to respond to the package offered by Europe, China and the United States, to which President Ahmadinejad replied that it would take longer than a month for Iran to answer.

The change of policy was Secretary Rice's idea. She was aware that the US and Iran had come to a deadlock, and the Bush administration had to either change its policy or leave the situation as is. Rice summarized her position: "What I really needed to do was to help the president understand why what we were doing wasn't going to work, and that we could only build an international coalition against Iran if we had set out a policy that was reasonable on its own terms – and where if the Iranians didn't pick it up, it was the Iranians' fault, not our fault."<sup>153</sup> Rice was also aware that the US had sanctioned itself out of influence over the years because of the inefficiency of the ILSA regime. The Bush administration needed the support of other international actors, if this deadlock was to be broken. At the London Conference in January, Rice had taken some steps to unify the P5+1 concerning Iran and hinted that the US was willing to shift its policy. Concerning the issue of joining the negotiations with Iran alongside the European countries, neither Cheney nor Rumsfeld expressed significant objections; the Iraq War had taken its toll on both men and had shifted the bureaucratic dynamics of the Bush White House. Thus, Rice was able to eventually persuade the President to become part of the incentives

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<sup>151</sup>G Kessler, 'Six Powers Reach Accord on Iran Plan; U.S. Supports Combination of Incentives, "Disincentives"', *The Washington Post*, 2 June 2006.

<sup>152</sup>'U.S. Is Offering Deals on Trade to Entice Iran', *The New York Times*, 6 June 2006.

<sup>153</sup> Rice quoted in Elisabeth Bumiller, *Condoleezza Rice: An American Life*, Random House: New York, 2007, p. 289.

package. As the architect of this policy shift, Rice was optimistic about the outcome and hoped that Iran would accept the carrot.<sup>154</sup>

In addition to these concessions, during the August 2006 conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, President Bush refrained from accusing Iran of arming and training Hezbollah members, even though there were strong suspicions that it was so.<sup>155</sup> However, the month ended with the IAEA's declaration that new traces of highly enriched uranium were found in Iran, which meant that Iran had not complied with the UN Security Council's demand to suspend enrichment.<sup>156</sup> During a visit to Canada in mid-September, Secretary Rice said that the United States would suspend its attempts for UN sanctions if Iran suspended its uranium enrichment for two months.<sup>157</sup> However, the attempts to sway Iran remained fruitless and Rice's new policy failed to persuade the Iranian government. Additionally, as the last month of 2006 rolled around, the coalition of six, the United States, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany, started to crumble. Six months had passed after the UN Security Council offered a package of incentives for suspension of enrichment, there was a draft resolution that dropped the talk of sanctions, and all these advances were turned down by Iran. Meanwhile, the six countries could not reach an agreement on the next step, which vexed the Bush administration immensely. As promising as Rice's overture seemed, things remained the same.

2006 witnessed the passage of the UN Security Council resolution which offered incentives and punitive measures by Britain, Germany, France, the US, Russia and China. However, the Iranian government, under the presidency of Ahmadinejad, did not give in to any of the pressures regardless of their benefits. The

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<sup>154</sup>C Rice, *No Higher Honor*, pp. 460-464

<sup>155</sup>'Hostilities in the Mideast: The Administration; U.S. Treads Softly Over Iran's Role in Crisis', *The New York Times*, 5 August 2006.

<sup>156</sup>'Highly Enriched Uranium Found at Iranian Plant', *The New York Times*, 1 September 2006.

<sup>157</sup>'Rice Indicates Slight Shift in Stance on Iran Sanctions', *The New York Times*, 12 September 2006.

victory of the conservatives in Iran two years in a row, first for the parliamentary then for the presidential elections, impacted the US-Iran relations at different levels. First of all, time and time again the conservatives under Ahmadinejad expressed their commitment to the Iranian nuclear programme. This in itself created an uncompromising atmosphere. The American government found itself facing with a government who was not willing to take a step back. This change in Iranian politics came at a time when the Bush administration was willing to reconsider its Iran policy. The Bush administration had been adamant in the aftermath of two military successes, but the tables had turned and Bush's second term diplomats came face to face with an uncompromising Tehran. Secondly, this unbending and very verbal Iranian government had pushed the Bush administration into a corner, leaving them with very limited options. However, knowing that the American army was bogged down in two countries in the Middle East and Bush's political capital almost drained, the administration had little choice left but to offer some incentives to persuade the Iranian government to make compromises. This became even more crucial after the UN Security Council resolution proved to be fruitless. At the end of 2006, the Bush administration was in a situation where the relatively moderate Khatami government had been replaced by the ultra-conservative Ahmadinejad government, who did not show any inclination to strike a deal with the Americans. Not only did the situation in Tehran become bitter, the wars in Afghanistan and in Iraq also did not end as soon as the Bush administration had planned. The new man in Tehran knew the vulnerability of the American government and played his cards accordingly. However, Rice was willing to alter the previous policies of the Bush administration and would continue to ensure that the Islamic Republic was unwilling to compromise, not the United States.

The year 2007 started with the United States barring American

financial institutions from doing business with a major Iranian bank. The restriction against Bank Sepah came when the government concluded that the bank was involved in an illegal weapons programme.<sup>158</sup> The IAEA finding that Iran was close to operating 1000 centrifuges, showing that the nuclear programme had accelerated, came soon after these announcements. This assessment resulted in President Bush's order of placing another aircraft carrier into the waters in the proximity of Iran. The administration said that this action was to demonstrate to the Iranian government that Washington had different options, even though an attack on Iran was not considered at the moment.<sup>159</sup> Three days later, the six countries, the US, the UK, China, Russia, France and Germany agreed to start working on a new resolution as a result of the IAEA report of the previous week.<sup>160</sup>

In March 2007, the United Nations Security Council passed another resolution that tightened the sanctions against Iran, added an arms embargo, and stepped up the freeze on Iranian assets.<sup>161</sup> The resolution came in response to Iran's refusal of June 2006 incentives package and its further enrichment efforts. Despite the second set of UN resolutions, at the beginning of April, Iran announced that it was capable of enriching uranium in the industrial scale. Even though the announcement was seen as a political move rather than a reflection of real technical abilities, it still defied two United Nations resolutions.<sup>162</sup>

At the end of August, the IAEA released another report on Iran's nuclear activities. The report said that Iran had been cooperative and made an

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<sup>158</sup>D Linzer, 'U.S. Bars Iranian Bank to Curb Access to Dollars', *The Washington Post*, 10 January 2007.

<sup>159</sup>D Linzer, and Colum Lynch, 'Iran Continues Nuclear Work Despite Deadline, Sanction Threat', *The Washington Post*, 22 February 2007.

<sup>160</sup>M Jordan, 'Diplomats Seek Way to Engage Iran', *The Washington Post*, 27 February 2007.

<sup>161</sup>"Security Council Toughens Sanctions Against Iran, Adds Arms Embargo, with Unanimous Adoption of Resolution 1747 (2007)", UN Department of Public Information, New York, 24 March 2007.

<sup>162</sup>'Iran Says It Can Enrich Uranium on a Large Scale', *The New York Times*, 10 April 2007.



agreement to answer the questions about its past activities. Furthermore, the report declared that Iran's uranium enrichment was growing even though the outcome is less than what the experts previously expected. Despite the cooperation of the Tehran government, the Bush administration was not impressed with the outcome of the report because Iran still refused to comply with the UN Security Council resolutions. The fact that IAEA director ElBaradei made an agreement with Iran despite the UN resolutions created tension between the United States and the Nuclear Agency.<sup>163</sup> Just a few days after this report, the Iranian leaders issued statements that they possessed 3000 active centrifuges, which was the goal number as declared by Ahmadinejad:

The West thought the Iranian nation would give in after just a resolution, but now we have taken another step in the nuclear progress and launched more than 3,000 centrifuge machines, installing a new cascade every week.<sup>164</sup>

In September, Bush hosted a meeting with the UK, France, China, Germany and Russia in order to discuss the UN resolutions regarding Iran. France and the US agreed on increasing pressure on Iran, and all the countries “reaffirmed their commitment to maintain a dual-track approach on Iran’s nuclear activities.”<sup>165</sup> Four days later, at the United Nations assembly, President Ahmadinejad said that Iran would completely disregard the UN Security Council resolutions because the organization was dominated by “arrogant powers.”<sup>166</sup> In response, the United States, Britain and France agreed to wait until November to issue another United Nations Security Council resolution against Iran. These three countries were more in favour of immediate action than waiting another month; however, for the sake of unity and

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<sup>163</sup>‘Report Showing Rise in Iran’s Nuclear Activity Exposes Split Between U.S. and U.N.’, *The New York Times*, 31 August 2007.

<sup>164</sup>N Karimi, ‘Iran Says It is Now Running 3,000 Uranium Centrifuges’, *The Washington Post*, 3 September 2007.

<sup>165</sup>‘Rice Says Paris Agrees on Pressing the Iranians’, *The New York Times*, 22 September 2007.

<sup>166</sup>P Baker, and R Wright, ‘At U.N., Iranian Leader is Defiant on Nuclear Efforts’, *The Washington Post*, 26 September 2007

as a concession to Russia, China and Germany, November was chosen as the month to proceed.<sup>167</sup> In October, Bush suggested in a press conference that a nuclear Iran could lead to World War III: “If you’re interested in avoiding World War III, it seems like you ought to be interested in preventing them from having the knowledge necessary to make a nuclear weapon.”<sup>168</sup> Furthermore, Vice President Cheney said that Iran was hindering peace in the Middle East.<sup>169</sup> These remarks from both the President and the Vice President indicated the increasing pressure on Iran. Moreover, the administration, after a bill passed in the Congress, announced that Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps were supporting terrorism and new sanctions were to be imposed on the Guard. During these last months, more and more high-level officials conveyed their disapproval of the Iranian nuclear programme and the suspected Iranian activities in Iraq. The Bush administration wanted to show that they were holding their ground in regards to their demands from Iran. The more hawkish elements of the administration took up the role of “bad cop” in order to make sure that the US had not become a paper tiger.

As was the case with the previous sanctions, Iran dismissed the new sanctions instituted by the United Nations. In a new report by the International Atomic Energy Agency, it was officially confirmed that Iran reached its goal of 3000 centrifuges, which would enable the country to enrich enough uranium for a nuclear weapon in a year or eighteen months. However, the agency said that the centrifuges were working below their capacity, and there was not evidence of attempting to produce weapons-grade uranium. Nevertheless, the report also conveyed that Iran still concealed many aspects of its nuclear programme, and Tehran also missed the

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<sup>167</sup>N King Jr., ‘Iran Action Stalls at U.N.; Push for Nuclear Penalties On Nuclear Efforts Waits to November’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 29 September 2007.

<sup>168</sup>Bush, *Decision Points*, p. 418.

<sup>169</sup>Cheney, ‘Like President, Has a Warning for Iran’, *The New York Times*, 22 October 2007.

deadline for compliance that was agreed upon between the Iranian and the IAEA officials. Undersecretary of State Burns commented about the report: “We think that today’s report does not in any way, shape or form answer the questions that the U.N. Security Council has had about Iran’s nuclear programme.”<sup>170</sup>

By December 2007, the Bush administration had not moved forward in terms of its goals about Iran. However, the hubris of 2003 had been replaced by sobering problems in Afghanistan and Iraq, and Rumsfeld would be resigning from the Pentagon in December 2007. Rice certainly enjoyed a closer personal relationship with Bush than Powell, and now she did not have to fight with the Cheney-Rumsfeld duo at every turn. This change of setting gave Rice more leeway to conduct diplomacy with Iran. Knowing that the US did not have leverage and was bogged down in two countries, Rice concluded that the best course would be to join the Europeans and the Russians by offering incentives. If Iran did not comply, this time the UNSC would be willing to impose sanctions. Not only were Rice’s attempts ill timed, since Khamanei and Ahmadinejad were not willing to compromise on any issue, but also they came after a series of policies that suggested that the Bush administration could not be trusted. Khatami offered cooperation and intelligence after 9/11, and received the “Axis of Evil” speech in return; the US refused to include Iran in matters dealing with Iraq until it was too late and condemned and punished any Iranian influence; and the “Grand Bargain” offer was not even seriously considered, even though it could have ended the decades-long problems. It appeared that the US was ready to accept the Iranian help when in dire need, but once back on its feet, hubris would take over.

On the other hand, Rice’s offer was certainly a shift from previous

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<sup>170</sup>R Wright, ‘U.S. to Seek New Sanctions Against Iran; U.N. Report Faults Tehran’s Input on Nuclear Programme’, *The Washington Post*, 16 November 2007.

policies, as Powell's State Department lacked the influence and the support to bring about such a significant change. However, the picture the Bush administration painted previously was so confusing that the hardliner president of Iran turned it down. Rice's incentives package was another brick in the wall of incoherence in Bush's foreign policy towards Iran. The logic of the Axis of Evil speech and encouraging the Iranian opposition had been set aside in favour of a more pragmatic approach to dealing with the government at hand. The arrogance of not speaking to evil was replaced with the humility brought about by the realization that the US could not sculpt the world to its desired form. Rice's desire to bring the US-Iran relations out of the deadlock would have the potential to bear fruit if they were made a few years ago or if Iran had a different president.

### **The 2007 NIE**

The Bush administration found its way blocked by another obstacle at the end of 2007. In November, the CIA prepared a new National Intelligence Estimate that overturned the conclusions of the previous ones. The report revealed that Iran had abandoned its nuclear weapons programme in 2003 and had kept it frozen since then. This assessment reflected a consensus among sixteen intelligence agencies that also accepted they "do not know whether [Iran] currently intends to develop nuclear weapons."<sup>171</sup> This meant that the Islamic Republic did, indeed, have a weapons programme at a time when the Tehran administration declared that Iran's programme was peaceful. The report was not clear about how far the Iranians had gone prior to 2003, and how long it would take if Iran picked up where they left off. In terms of highly enriched uranium, the estimate stated that the earliest Iran could

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<sup>171</sup>National Intelligence Estimate, Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities, November 2007.

produce a sufficient amount for a nuclear weapons would be 2015. The halting of the weapons programme, the National Intelligence Council (NIC) concluded, was a result of international pressure. This conclusion made it clear that Iran was susceptible to sanctions and was behaving as a rational actor. At the same time, the NIC acknowledged that, if Iran decided to resume its weapons programme, only the Iranian leadership could bring it to a halt. The underlying message was that, due to the impenetrability of the secret facilities, a military strike would not have much impact on crippling the Iranian programme. Even though the intelligence community declared that Iran did not have an active weapons programme, unlike the Iraq case, they left enough room to back track if the Iranian government wanted to restart the programme after having produced enough highly enriched uranium. However, what was widely interpreted as the main message of the NIE was that, in contrast to what the Bush administration had been saying for years, Iran did not have a nuclear weapons programme.

Bush realized that this was such a stunning conclusion that it would leak quickly, so he declassified the key parts of the estimate and promptly added that the new estimate did not change any position on Iran. They continued to enrich uranium, which meant that they could resume their weapons programme any time and reach weapons capability soon after. While Ahmadinejad hailed the CIA's findings, the IAEA officials said that they were sceptical about Iran, even though they welcomed the new intelligence report: "We don't buy the American analysis 100 percent. We are not that generous with Iran."<sup>172</sup> This was the first time the Agency appeared to endorse tougher rhetoric than the US. The same day, President Bush said that the know-how of nuclear weapons should not be trusted to the Iranians, and this included uranium enrichment even if it is for peaceful purposes.

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<sup>172</sup> 'Candidates Hold to Their Stances on Iran', *The New York Times*, 5 December 2007.

The president continued:

Look, Iran was dangerous, Iran is dangerous, and Iran will be dangerous, if they have the knowledge necessary to make a nuclear weapon. What's to say they couldn't start another covert nuclear weapons programme?<sup>173</sup>

Cheney was also critical of the way the NIE was worded, and argued that if one read the report carefully, one would conclude that Iran was making progress in the most important area of building nuclear weapons: fissile material production. The Vice President perceived the estimate as another failure of the intelligence community that affected policy-making. After having been accused of pressuring the intelligence analysts, Cheney and his staff did not want to appear to change the CIA's analyses, but the Vice President knew that the report eliminated some options: "The NIE, itself precluded us from considering as robust a range of options as we might have otherwise."<sup>174</sup>

The main question following the release of the NIE was how to progress in terms of international pressure. Both Bush and Cheney expressed how the Arab countries perceived the NIE as the Bush administration's effort not to deal with Iran. Rice's account emphasizes that Russia temporarily rejected supporting a new round of sanctions, even though they were favourable prior to the release of the NIE.<sup>175</sup> The Bush administration was still supporting moving forward: "This is a report that says what has happened in the past could be repeated and that the policies used to cause the regime to halt are effective policies. And let's keep them up. Let's continue to work together."<sup>176</sup> The European countries reiterated their support for the Bush administration's policies towards Iran despite the report. However, China used

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<sup>173</sup>'Monitoring Agency Praises U.S. Report, but Keeps Wary Eye on Iran', *The New York Times*, 5 December 2007.

<sup>174</sup>Cheney, *In My Time*, pp. 478-479.

<sup>175</sup>Rice, *No Higher Honor*, p. 629.

<sup>176</sup>Monitoring Agency Praises, Op. Cit.

the report as a justification for its cautious policy towards Iran.<sup>177</sup> American intelligence services had lost face when the U.S. troops failed to uncover WMDs in Iraq.

By releasing a report that went against the administration's policies, the intelligence community undoubtedly desired to prevent the outcomes of the earlier Iraq report. The conclusion that Saddam Hussein possessed WMDs was the impetus of the Bush administration to invade Iraq. When the American troops failed to find the stockpile of WMDs in Iraq, the intelligence community found itself in the middle of the controversy and was blamed for warmongering. Soon, the CIA became the scapegoat. This was the backdrop against which the 2007 NIE was prepared. Rumsfeld had asked the intelligence analysts to "lean forward more boldly and imaginatively" concerning the development in Iran and North Korea, asking the agency to be more assertive.<sup>178</sup> Rumsfeld wanted to be able to direct the CIA as well as the Pentagon, and intervened more than he was entitled to. The result was that the intelligence agency became part of the policy-making process instead of merely sharing facts, estimates and conjectures. This politicisation of intelligence agencies backfired on the Bush administration and revealed another aspect of bureaucratic struggles within the executive branch. Even though the facts of the estimate could not be challenged, the way it was worded and organized hinted that the NIC wanted to remove the military option from the table, not wanting to be blamed for yet another war. The first conclusion was the most important: that Iran did not have a weapons programme. However, a country could complete the most important parts of a nuclear weapon under the premises of a peaceful programme and then turn it into WMDs after the fissile material had been acquired. By declaring the absence of

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<sup>177</sup>J Solomon and S Gorman, 'New Assessment of Iran Redraws Political lines; key Powers are Avers to Further Sanctions; Clinton faces Attacks;' *The Wall Street Journal*, 5 December 2007.

<sup>178</sup>G Tenet, *At the Center of Storm*, p.332.

an active weapons programme, the intelligence community wanted to clear its name and put distance between themselves and the hardliners in the administration.

The NIE did not affect how the Bush administration saw Iran; the goal remained the acquisition of another set of UN sanctions for the last year of Bush's term. If anything, the NIE confirmed the administration's fears that Iran had a covert nuclear weapons programme in the past and, therefore, Tehran could not be trusted. Iran would be able to restart its weaponization phase after having produced enough fissile material, so not having an active programme did not amount to much in the grand scheme of building nuclear weapons. Furthermore, the estimate assured the administration that Iran responded to international pressure, and therefore, it would be a mistake to take a step back, especially as Russia had been on board. The possibility of military action against Iran was all but overruled after the NIE,<sup>179</sup> but the Bush administration still favoured a united international effort to prevent Iran from resuming its weapons programme and stop uranium enrichment. Though the IAEA claimed that they weren't as optimistic as the Americans concerning Iran, the NIE cast doubt in the minds of America's allies about the Iranian nuclear programme, especially the reluctant ones. For Russia, the estimate proved to be very helpful since they were already quite reluctant to become a part of the sanction policy. For China, the NIE provided the perfect opportunity to oppose further sanctions, since China was not willing to sacrifice its ties with Iran, especially now that Iran did not have an active weapons programme.

Therefore, four important conclusions could be drawn from the 2007 NIE. First, inter-agency struggles between the departments of the executive caused yet another tense situation. This time, the CIA desired to clear its name after having been blamed for the Iraq War. The discussions revolving around the genesis of the

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<sup>179</sup> Bush, *Decision Points*, p. 419.



Iraq War had politicized the intelligence agency, and in return, this politicization proved to be costly for the Bush administration when the agency did not stand by the administration. Secondly, the administration did not have any justification for military action short of an Iranian attack. The hype, which surrounded this report that Iran lacked a weapons programme, portrayed the administration as inventing non-existent threats. This also resulted in weakening the American position in the international arena, even though the overly cautious IAEA did not agree with the NIE conclusions. Thirdly, it was evident that the Iranian government could be swayed through international pressure, despite its seeming lack of cooperation. Thus, the right combination of incentives and sanctions had the potential to solve the problem through diplomacy. As a result, the NIE effectively limited the heavy-handed options, which in turn limited the effectiveness of the sanctions, because without the potential for military action –no matter how flimsy it is- sanctions lost some of their compelling element. The intelligence community was able to influence the policy not through confrontation, but through a careful back-door strategy.

### **FINAL EFFORTS**

During the last year of Bush's presidency, the administration ventured to repair the damage done by the Iran NIE. The most important task was to send the message that the Bush administration still had teeth. Thus, the year 2008 began with a naval confrontation between the United States and Iran in the Strait of Hormuz. Armed Iranian speedboats manoeuvred around the American warships during the first weekend of the year. The speedboats approached the ships in the international waters after a voice over the radio told them that they would be blown up in a few minutes. Even though the incident ended without any fire or injuries, it was seen as

a “provocative act” by the Bush administration.<sup>180</sup> President Bush declared a few days after the naval incident that Iran remained “a threat to world peace” and the Treasury Department charged an Iranian military commander with harsh economic penalties. During his visit to Israel, President Bush conveyed, “all options were on the table” regarding Iran and referred to the previous weekend's incident in the Persian Gulf: “There will be serious consequences if they attack our ships, pure and simple. And my advice to them is, ‘Don’t do it.’”<sup>181</sup> Later during his Middle East visit, President Bush urged Persian Gulf states to unite against Iran:

Iran’s actions threaten the security of nations everywhere, so the United States is strengthening our longstanding security commitments with our friends in the gulf and rallying friends around the world to confront this danger before it is too late.<sup>182</sup>

Bush clearly wanted to erase the perception that he did not have the power to attack Iran regardless of what Iran did after the uproar the NIE caused. It was highly unlikely that Bush, in fact, intended any form of military intervention in Iran, but he needed the threat of the stick even if he did not want to use it. The confrontation itself would not have been significant enough to attract much attention; however, the timing made the incident a perfect opportunity to toughen the rhetoric and declare once more that Iran was a threat to world peace.

At the end of January 2008, the foreign ministers of the five permanent members of the United Nations announced that an agreement was reached on further sanctions against Iran. In February, the Bush administration made the unconventional decision of agreeing to turn the intelligence data on Iran's nuclear programme over to the IAEA.<sup>183</sup> Furthermore, in March, the IAEA inspectors called

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<sup>180</sup>R Wright, Ann Scott Tyson, ‘U.S. Expresses Alarm After Iranian Boats Threaten Three American Vessels’, *The Washington Post*, 8 January 2008.

<sup>181</sup>New Penalties Set as Bush Calls Iran a Threat to Peace’, *The New York Times*, 10 January 2008.

<sup>182</sup>M Abramowitz, ‘Bush Urges United Action Against Iran; Nuclear Agency Gets Pledge From Tehran to Explain Past Work’, *The Washington Post*, 14 January 2008.

<sup>183</sup>U.S. to Produce Data on Iran’s Nuclear Programme’, *The New York Times*, 15 February 2008.

a meeting with the ambassadors and experts of many world nations in order to display the evidence showing that Iran had tried to design an atomic bomb. There were documents, sketches and even a video that came from Iran's own laboratories. The chief inspectors conveyed that the evidence showed work “not consistent with any application other than the development of a nuclear weapon.”<sup>184</sup> Iran's ambassador denied the claims and said that the evidence was a baseless fabrication. However, on the same day, another UN resolution was passed against Iran. The new resolution urged Iran to cease all enrichment and any research related to uranium enrichment.<sup>185</sup> This new pressure was led by the Europeans, not by the United States. Consequently, the Bush administration's rhetoric became tougher by June. Secretary of State Rice said that any dialogue with the Iranian leaders was futile since they refused to suspend the uranium enrichment. She added that it was the government in Tehran who did not want to engage with the United States, not vice versa.<sup>186</sup>

A week later, President Bush started his farewell tour of Europe, during which he was able to gain European support for additional sanctions against Iran. The President said: “The free world is going to say, ‘Why didn’t we do something about it at the time, before they developed it?’ And so now is the time for there to be strong diplomacy.”<sup>187</sup> Despite the cooperation from the European countries, Ahmadinejad dismissed the new sanctions saying that “Bush’s time is up, and he was not able to harm even one centimetre of our land.”<sup>188</sup> A month after Israel's air exercise in the Mediterranean, which was interpreted as a warning to Iran, Iran announced that nine missiles were fired for testing. Tehran described these missiles

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<sup>184</sup>“Vienna Meeting on Arms Data Reignites Iran Nuclear Debate”, *The New York Times*, 3 March 2008.

<sup>185</sup> “Security Council Tightens Restrictions on Iran’s Proliferation-Sensitive Nuclear Activities, increases Vigilance over Iranian Banks, has States Inspect Cargo”, UN Department of Public Information, 3 March 2008.

<sup>186</sup>“Rice Calls Dialogue With Iran Pointless”, *The New York Times*, 3 June 2008.

<sup>187</sup>D Eggen, ‘Bush, E.U. Threaten New Sanctions Against Iran’, *The Washington Post*, 11 June 2008.

<sup>188</sup>“Iran Unmoved by Threats on Its Atomic Programme”, *The New York Times*, 12 June 2008.

as having a range that would reach Israel. The United States responded sharply to the tests: “The Iranian regime only furthers the isolation of the Iranian people from the international community when it engages in this sort of activity.”<sup>189</sup> As Iran continued testing its missiles for a second day, Secretary of State Rice said that the United States would defend its allies and guard its interests: “We take very, very strongly our obligations to defend our allies and no one should be confused about that.”<sup>190</sup>

Secretary Rice’s decision to send Undersecretary Burns to Geneva demonstrated that the administration was willing to make concessions in order to move the issue forward. However, the international talks about the Iranian nuclear programme in Geneva came to a deadlock. The United States, France, Britain, Germany, Russia and China, pressured Iran to compromise on its nuclear programme. Iran replied to these demands with a letter which failed to address the issue at hand; the cessation of uranium enrichment. The Iranians were given the “freeze-for-freeze” option, which meant that in exchange for a freeze in uranium enrichment, the Western powers would not impose additional sanctions.<sup>191</sup> Two weeks later, after the deadline given by the Western powers passed, Iran issued a warning that it could close a crucial Persian Gulf waterway to oil shipments and also possessed long-range naval weapons that would strike ships in a 200-mile range.<sup>192</sup> A month later, the IAEA announced that Iran was able to overcome some of the difficulties in its uranium enrichment facilities, and thus was able to increase the efficiency of its centrifuges.<sup>193</sup> Iran was operating 3800 centrifuges.

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<sup>189</sup>G Kessler, ‘Iran Launches Nine Test Missiles, Says More Are Ready; U.S. Plays Down Military Showdown’, *The Washington Post*, 10 July 2008.

<sup>190</sup>Rice Warns Iran That U.S. Will Defend Allies’, *The New York Times*, 11 July 2008.

<sup>191</sup>Jay Solomon, U.S.-Iran Thaw Hinges on Nuclear Discussions; Tighter Sanctions May Follow if Talks Fail to Yield Deal’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 19 July 2008.

<sup>192</sup>Iran Issues New Warnings After Defying a Deadline’, *The New York Times*, 5 August 2008.

<sup>193</sup>Nuclear Agency Says Iran Has Improved Enrichment’, *The New York Times*, 16 September 2008.

The year 2008 and the presidency of George W. Bush ended in this manner. In 2008, the administration had to conduct policy in the shadow of the NIE, which stated that Iran had halted its nuclear weapons programme in 2003. The US needed its teeth -the threat of military action- in order to get any compliance from Iran. While the newspapers were discussing if Bush would bomb Iran before he left office, the NIE took this option off the table. The year had started with a naval confrontation, and despite all the arguments which revolved around it, the confrontation was a sign of how cold the relations had become between the U.S. and Iran. President Bush had ordered the placement of two warships in the Persian Gulf to demonstrate that a military option was still possible. The Iranians replied with defiance in order to communicate that they were not intimidated. Even though the third round of sanctions was delayed because of the NIE, the non-cooperation of Iran pushed the Europeans and the Russians to go forward with another set of UNSC resolutions. On the one hand, the administration tried to rectify the damage done by the NIE; on the other hand, they continued to work with the United Nations. It was Bush's last year in office, and he suffered from diminishing influence frequently happens to presidents in their final year. Still, there was a desire to move forward regarding Iran in order not to leave the issue entirely unresolved for the next administration. As Bush fought to show some muscle, Rice continued her diplomatic efforts by sending Burns to Geneva. The European initiation and the UN resolution helped to create a more united front, which made the pressure weightier. However, none of these caused Iran to flinch. The Bush administration had come a long way from its Axis of Evil mentality by the end, but this time Iran was not ready to take the extended hand.

## CONCLUSIONS

### *The impact of bureaucratic politics on foreign policy towards Iran:*

There are many contributors to policy-making at the executive level. The president is advised by the National Security Council. The secretary of state, secretary of defense, national security advisor and the director of national intelligence are the most influential members of the Council. The State Department historically favours diplomacy, and the Department of Defense takes tougher stances, and arguments usually revolve around these parameters. The level of rivalry between the State and the Defense departments mostly depends on the individuals leading these departments. When Bush came to power in 2001 and named his cabinet, it was clear that in the face of a crisis the rivalry would be momentous. Powell's support was able to sway Bush's election results by pulling his campaign to the middle.<sup>194</sup> His moderate views and desire to gain public approval and pursue diplomacy were not in line with those of Rumsfeld. The clash between the two men could be seen most clearly during the discussions prior to and during the Iraq War. However, the difference of opinion was present with regards to Iran as well.

Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld had always been uncompromising concerning Iran and he saw the country as part of a nexus of trouble-making authoritarian states. 9/11 reinforced the way he saw the world, and his hard look became even harder. Cheney and Rumsfeld had worked together for decades and formed their political minds during the Cold War years. This meant that both of these men were not accustomed to dealing with fluid entities like terrorist organizations, which had no capital to bomb and no president to threaten. They were more comfortable dealing with nation-states, not terrorist organizations. In their

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<sup>194</sup>General Colin Powell's speech to the Republican party convention', *The Guardian*, July 31, 2000.

minds, without the backing of nation-states, terrorism would be easily eradicated. This was one of the reasons Cheney and Rumsfeld strongly wanted to topple Saddam Hussein, and this was one of the reasons they were not ready to engage with the mullahs in Tehran, because their support for terrorism made them as bad as the organizations themselves. With a strong vice-presidential backing Rumsfeld led a fortified Defense Department that had regular and personal access to the White House. Even though Rumsfeld was not very popular in the Pentagon because of his espousal of the 'Revolution in Military Affairs' (since the Pentagon had become very cautious after the Vietnam War), Rumsfeld's forceful personality traits, charisma, leadership methods, and strong backing from the White House were the makings of one of the strongest secretaries of defense in recent history. Even though Cheney and Rumsfeld were often labelled as neoconservatives, they were sympathisers of the movement rather than adherents. Cheney and Rumsfeld could be placed more appropriately in the schools of classical conservatism and national realism. Even though Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld agreed with at least one neoconservative objective, i.e. more aggressive use of American military power, in other areas of the movement they remained attached to more traditional aspects of conservatism.<sup>195</sup>

Powell, on the other hand, was definitely more moderate and committed to multilateralism. Because of his more liberal Republican leaning, Powell was left outside the circle of trust; therefore, unlike Rumsfeld, he had to ask the national security advisor in order to see the president, even though one would assume that the secretary of state would have regular access to the White House. Furthermore, Bush and Powell never shared the easy relationship that Bush and

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<sup>195</sup>R. Singh, "Neo-conservatism: theory and practice", in I. Parmar, et al., eds., *New Directions in US Foreign Policy*, London: Routledge, 2009, pp. 32-48.

Cheney or Bush and Rumsfeld enjoyed. Rumsfeld observed that Bush's easygoing manners seemed to dwindle with Powell.<sup>196</sup> Even though Bush would listen and seemingly agree with Powell at their private meetings, on more than one occasion, Bush still went his own way, or the way suggested by his two close trustees: Cheney and Rumsfeld. Rice, as the National Security Advisor, was more hawkish than Powell, but more pragmatic than Rumsfeld. She, too, saw Iran as a national security threat and was not opposed to Iran's inclusion in the "Axis of Evil." Like Powell, during the first term, she was overshadowed by Cheney and Rumsfeld. Rumsfeld portrayed Rice as overstepping her authorities and overcompensating for the interagency problems.<sup>197</sup> However, unlike Powell, she had the President's trust and ear on crucial issues. Meanwhile, Rice was also facing problems with Rumsfeld, as the Secretary of Defense was suspicious of private meetings between Bush and Rice. "A relationship between equals was much harder for him [Rumsfeld]."<sup>198</sup> Her job was to juggle the balls that were thrown by Rumsfeld and Powell, and somehow facilitate the decision-making process.

Rumsfeld talked about Powell as an outsider in the administration and made sure to mention in his memoirs that many thought he was the "good guy" or "the Democrat" in the NSC. He also argued that Powell very rarely expressed his opinion during the meetings, so his reputation was mostly thanks to the media, who glorified Powell over Rumsfeld.<sup>199</sup> Powell and Rumsfeld's biggest clash was over the genesis of the Iraq War. The discussions that led to war excluded not only Powell, but also Rice. Also, they pressured Tenet to be more forward leaning in his analysis. The foreign policy towards Iran was conducted in the highly charged

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<sup>196</sup>Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, p. 322.

<sup>197</sup>Ibid. p. 326.

<sup>198</sup> Rice, *No Higher Honor*, p.21.

<sup>199</sup>Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, pp. 323-324.



atmosphere of bureaucratic politics. Rumsfeld saw Iran as a national security threat both in terms of terrorism and its nuclear activities. In his mind, Iran was not much different than Iraq in essence, but it was a much more difficult case. This was perhaps one of the biggest reasons he did not support military action in Iran in the aftermath of 9/11; nevertheless the country remained on his to-do list. He did not believe that change was possible as long as the theocratic regime ruled Iran, and therefore he neither supported negotiations nor engagement with Iran.

Barton Gellman recorded an incident summarizing the clash between two major branches of the executive. In 2003, Cheney suspected that Iran was behind a possible New Year's Eve attack. He thought a nuclear attack could only be organised by Iran because such an operation would need the reach and expertise of a state. Cheney and Rumsfeld did not need to see evidence supporting their suspicions. For them, it was logical, and subsequently a warning was sent to Iran. On the other hand, Powell and Rice did not reach to any conclusion about the possible attack without first consulting hard evidence.<sup>200</sup> Cheney and Rumsfeld had already decided with respect to Iran that the only acceptable solution was to get rid of the regime in Tehran. Rumsfeld remained consistent in his thinking and was not in favour of any concession because "to change the Iran regime's behaviour, I believed one of our best options was to aid the freedom movement inside Iran. Supporting those locked away in Iranian prisons might eventually lead to something like the Soviet Union's downfall."<sup>201</sup>

Powell had to fight with this mentality during his tenure. For instance, the Department of Defense had an initiative of financially supporting those who were "in violent opposition to the regime" and attempted to undertake a covert

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<sup>200</sup>Gellman, *Angler*, pp. 235-236.

<sup>201</sup>Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, p. 638.

initiative. The State Department and the CIA were not informed about such initiatives. Having been around during the clean up of the Iran-Contra scandal, Powell immediately demanded that the initiative would be taken care of before he had to go to the President.<sup>202</sup> Powell's place in the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld triangle had always been a little insecure. White House Chief of Staff Andy Card told one administration staffer in January 2004, "You know, John Bolton is the only person in that building that the president trusts completely."<sup>203</sup> The lack of trust was significant. Powell's endorsement had most likely tipped the scale for Bush during the elections, but there always remained a distance between the two men.<sup>204</sup> Therefore, instead of taking Powell's advice -who was willing to open talks with Iran- Bush took the hardline advice of Cheney and Rumsfeld. This rivalry between the departments also resulted in conflicting pronouncements throughout Bush's presidency, which made the rhetoric inconsistent, creating an atmosphere of mistrust and insecurity.

After the September 11 attacks, as it was in the resumption of the Iraq War, the opening of Guantanamo Bay and the suspension of the Geneva Convention, the Rumsfeld-Cheney camp prevailed and Powell lost when it came to furthering cooperation with Iran. Though Powell defended the rhetoric of the "Axis of Evil" phrase, the State Department had played little role in the formation of the speech. The biggest cost was Powell's hope for engagement with Iran. After the address and with the start of the Iraq War, Iran was pushed aside with the hopes that change in Iraq would bring about change in Iran. When the Grand Bargain offer was dismissed by Rumsfeld without consideration, it was clear that Rumsfeld's ideology had won, and the only possible solution regarding Iran was regime change. Even

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<sup>202</sup>Tenet, *At the Center*, pp. 312-315.

<sup>203</sup>Bolton, *Surrender is Not an Option*, p. 166.

<sup>204</sup>Woodward, *Bush at War*, p.13.

though Powell's department continued to publicly declare the possibility for dialogue and that the suspension of the Geneva Talks were temporary, the first term of the Bush administration clearly was a triumph for Rumsfeld, who, on more than one occasion, was able to sway foreign policy.

When Rice took Powell's place in the State Department, the Iraq War was becoming less of a victory every day, and Rumsfeld's power and popularity had started to wane. Despite Cheney's opposition,<sup>205</sup> Bush decided to replace Rumsfeld, and this fall from grace gave Rice more room to manoeuvre. Moreover, she had a different political stance than Powell, even though Powell and Rice were both alienated from the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld triangle. Rice's hawkishness was tempered by the awareness that the US had limited options. The new secretary of state was more in line with the 'cautious conservatism' George HW Bush and Brent Scowcroft followed, which "sought to combine mutual accommodation with support for recognised and apparently predictable central authorities."<sup>206</sup> Though she started her tenure with tough talk regarding Iran, she was willing to join the Europeans and make concessions regarding direct talks and WTO membership. Rice found that she was able to manoeuvre more freely than Powell because the Iraq War had taken centre stage. Therefore, the inter-departmental battles were much less severe during the second term, giving Rice greater opportunity to explore diplomacy.

However, the CIA, who was pressured and, at times, manipulated under the thumb of the Pentagon, was able to play its hand in policy making through intelligence reports. Wanting to reverse the negative reputation it received after the Iraq War, the intelligence agency desired to prevent another possible war, this time against Iran, through the wording and structure of an NIE. The inner dynamics of the

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<sup>205</sup>Cheney, *In My Time*, p. 443.

<sup>206</sup>J Dumbrell, *American Foreign Policy: Carter to Clinton*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996, p. 174.

Executive Branch once again influenced the policy conducted. Instead of fighting against a strong Department of Defense, Rice struggled to undo damages done by the CIA during her last year as Secretary of State. Nevertheless, she was dealt a relatively easier hand than Powell, and the CIA's role in the lack of progress was much less definitive than Rumsfeld's role in objecting to engagement with Iran during the first term.

***Inconsistency of policies throughout Bush's term:***

George W. Bush inherited a two-decade long problem as he stepped into the White House in January 2001 as the president of the United States. Iran was not the only matter the previous administrations passed onto him, and it was not the most important one. The short period before the 9/11 attacks had mostly revolved around the defence shield. It could be argued that commitment to a defensive shield provided a foreign policy focus for the new administration, as George W Bush was seen as a lightweight in international politics. Secondly, the yearning for clear technological advantage over the rest of the world seemed reminiscent of a Cold War mentality, where the final frontier was pushed upward and the United States would be the unrivalled superpower. Furthermore, the commitment to the missile shield system tied President Bush to his role model, Ronald Reagan, who first proposed the Strategic Defense Initiative in 1983. In the wake of 9/11, the missile shield system gave the administration a direction and an ideal.

When the issue squarely came to Iran, the new Bush administration did not have a clear course other than committing to the continuation of sanctions and development of the missile shield system. It was clear that the policies of the previous administrations fell short. If anything, the two decades of failed policies resulted in an environment where the United States had lost all leverage. Having

been elected as a president whose primary focus would be domestic politics, Bush had the opportunity to shift the foreign policy towards Iran because of his lack of ambitious foreign policy goals. He wanted to reform Social Security, the public education system and Medicare first and foremost; and other issues, like Iran, came second. Having come to power with vague goals, the new administration took several steps –such as not indicting any Iranians for Khobar Towers and demanding a two-year extension for the ILSA—to be able to have its options open. Even though there had not been time to act on it, the new administration demonstrated signs that they were willing to pursue a different policy than previous administrations. It was clear that the new administration did not have a set agenda or policy with regard to Iran at the outset.

In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, as Rumsfeld and Powell pulled the policy in opposite directions, the Pentagon's reports about Iran and the *Karine A* incident made Rumsfeld's arguments against Iran more plausible in the eyes of Bush. Thus Iran found its place in the "Axis of Evil." Bush's naming of Iran as a part of the "Axis of Evil" stemmed from a limited understanding of the Middle East and Iran. Bush thought that if the US stood strongly against the regime in Tehran, the opposition would gain power; thus, he would be able to undermine the rule of the Mullahs indirectly. Bush and those closest to him failed to understand the inner dynamics of Iran. It was not the first time, and unfortunately it would not be the last. Suddenly, after having endeavoured to keep the options open during 2001 and having built a line of communication and cooperation after 9/11, the Bush administration outlined an ideology without substance. Looking from outside, it looked like a sharp departure from previous months, and the administration would keep zigzagging.

As the war in Iraq took precedence over other issues in the Middle

East, the concerns about Iran were put on the back burner. The Iraq War had revealed a new opportunity for the US and Iran to take steps towards reconciliation. Iran had struggled against the Taliban and had raged a bloody war against Iraq for eight years; seeing these two regimes toppled by the formidable American military in a matter of months most likely had unnerved Tehran. Possibly the offer for a “Grand Bargain” in 2003 was not so far fetched after all, if Iran did not want to be the next in line for an American invasion. The Bush administration missed a historic opportunity to solve a decades-long problem, when the Grand Bargain fax was not replied to after hitting a wall of resistance from Rumsfeld and Cheney. Even if the authenticity of the document was questionable, it still offered a remarkable chance to open communications and address all the controversial issues. However, drunk with the victories in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Bush administration took another step away from the position it started to take in 2001.

The second term of George W Bush as the president would witness some considerable changes in regards to foreign policy towards Iran. But in addition to the Bush administration’s previous record, the victory of the hardliners in Iran for the parliament and presidential elections tied the hands of the American government as to how much could be done to acquire concessions from Tehran. The new president, Ahmadinejad, was not willing to back away from the nuclear programme and took a strong anti-Western stance, so much so that he scared some Arab nations with his anti-Western rhetoric.<sup>207</sup> During the second term, the United States’ joining the EU3 constituted a shift in policy. Condoleezza Rice as the new Secretary of State struggled to solve the dead-lock in US-Iran relations, and her influence along with the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan and Iraq caused a shift in the foreign policy

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<sup>207</sup> A Ehteshami, and M Zweiri, *Iran and the Rise of Its Neoconservatives: The Politics of Tehran’s Silent Revolution*, I. B. Tauris: London, 2007, p. 143.

of Bush in his second term, adding another zigzag to policy direction.

It was hard enough for Rice with the hardliners in power in Tehran and with the history of hawkish policies. Then the NIE of 2007 undermined her hand in the international arena. The report did not cause the Bush administration to change its policy, but it certainly made it harder for them to implement that policy. One of the most significant impacts of the estimate was the slowing down of the passage of the third set of UNSC resolutions, since China and Russia took a step back about imposing sanctions when there was no active weapons programme. In the end, Bush did not want to leave office without having made some progress regarding Iran.

Therefore, the Bush administration lacked the two pillars of a consistent policy: an unchanging logic and a coherent strategy. Regarding unchanging logic, the administration went from not having a clear-cut policy before 9/11 to “enemy of my enemy is my friend” after the attacks, from hoping for a regime change with the “Axis of Evil” speech and Iraq War to dealing with the current government in the second term to progress. Like his predecessors, Bush and his advisers failed to understand and interpret the Iranian government; instead of forming a policy that did not depend on America’s relative power in the world, they altered their policy according to their agenda. With respect to coherent strategy, the Bush administration was not able to employ a tactic that remained unswerving. The strategy of cooperation was turned on its head by slapping the moderates of Iran in the face with the Axis of Evil title, with the intention of supporting the opposition. Then the colossal vagueness of how to fight the “evil” that resided in Tehran, while refusing to deal with it even when an offer like the Grand Bargain was presented, left the administration crippled. The strong rhetoric did not leave much room for a pragmatic, practical approach. Even in Iraq, the administration managed to clip its own wings by excluding Iran, and then when things went terribly wrong, trying to

include it. Furthermore, the good-cop, bad-cop routine with the EU3 countries proved to be fruitless and resulted in Rice's shifting of gears. Having played the bad cop for many years, this modification did not prove to be effective especially when the US had lost some of its muscle in the Middle East.

***Comparison with the Clinton administration:***

Both the Clinton and Bush administration were more hawkish toward Iran during their first terms, and more dovish during their second terms. The Clinton administration had its share of lost opportunities concerning Iran. During his first term President Clinton unveiled his "Dual Containment" policy, which was not very specific as to how to achieve this containment concerning Iran. Clinton's "Dual Containment" and his rhetoric of "backlash states" bear resemblances to Bush's "Axis of Evil" classification. Both presidents demonstrated that they saw Iran as a major national security threat, and furthermore established that they were not willing to reach out to the Islamic Republic. On both occasions Iran's profile and threat level was raised by identifying the Islamic Republic with Iraq, but without outlining any specifics of the policy. Both "Dual Containment" and "Axis of Evil" said very little about how to proceed when it came to Iran, so both presidents started with an Iran policy that put the country towards the top of the list while not knowing how to alter the behaviour of the regime. At the same time, the Clinton administration made it clear that they did not have any problem with the regime in Tehran, just with its behaviour. However, the Bush administration favoured regime change, even though they said they would be willing to deal with the current government if they were ready to give up their nuclear programme. Needless to say, the sanctions policy, which started during the Clinton administration, continued during the Bush administration, even though neither administration had much leverage in the



legislative process concerning Iran. Therefore, it could be concluded that foreign policy towards Iran did not look significantly different during the first terms of Clinton and Bush, even though Bush led a much more politically charged presidency because of the US involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In regards to the second terms of Clinton and Bush, the approach of both administrations was warmer and ready to take a step forward. However, Clinton's administration did much more than the Bush administration. Between Clinton's apology and Albright's repudiation of the "Dual Containment" policy, the Clinton administration took some unprecedented steps in order to reconcile with Iran. Nonetheless, Khatami's government was not able to reciprocate the advances from the Clinton administration. The Bush administration also, in a more subtle way, repudiated its former policy towards Iran. Rice's overtures could have made some impact on Iran if the reformers had not lost the power to the conservatives in the parliament and the presidency. It could be concluded that both administrations failed to read Iranian domestic politics and act when the Tehran government would be willing and able to respond to the overtures. In the end both administrations had their share of lost opportunities.

## **FINAL WORD**

The objectives of the Bush administration were to curb Iran's nuclear programme, stop its support for terrorism, limit Iran's influence in Iraq, and if at all possible, ignite regime change. Ultimately, these goals meant that the Islamic Republic was the troublemaker, and as long as the mullahs stayed in power, Iran and the US would have a level of animosity. This assumption overlooked the likelihood that whoever gains power in Tehran, if the Islamic regime fell, would be inclined to continue the nuclear programme or possibly support Hezbollah. During the first

term, the administration's underlining desire to see the regime toppled undermined the success of its policies. To begin with, it created a reluctance to deal with those who were in power in Tehran, because it would be futile to strike a deal with a government that might not be there in a few years. Bush's hope that democracy in Iraq would trigger regime change in Iran created a remarkable short-sightedness that resulted in the failure to seize the opportunities for rapprochement. The Bush administration should have been ready to deal with Iran when they had the upper hand, and before Ahmadinejad came to power.

Furthermore, the Bush administration failed to grasp the inner dynamics of Iran. This failure resulted in not being able to read the signs of the Tehran government, and also caused the administration to hurt the opposition by aligning them with the US. The administration kept waiting for a train that would not come, instead of taking the bus at hand. Moreover, it was not surprising that the Bush administration failed to achieve one of its main objectives: curbing the Iranian nuclear programme. First of all, America's mere presence in Afghanistan and Iraq most likely convinced the Iranian leaders that Iran needed nuclear weapons, for it was the only avenue of deterrence against a force like the US. Secondly, the inconsistency of policy during Bush's presidency furthered distrust between the two countries, thus making WMDs more appealing.

Furthermore, it was naïve of the Bush administration to think or hope that regime change would happen during his administration. Even though there was domestic unrest and signs of change in Iran, conducting foreign policy according to wishful thinking resulted in a scattered and incoherent approach. Partly, this was because Iran remained somewhat of an enigma to the Bush administration. This lack of understanding resulted in not being able to read the Iranian leaders, hurting the opposition by supporting them, and, most of all, including Iran in the "Axis of Evil". The realization that they were lost in

regards to Iran came towards the end of Bush's presidency, and this resulted in a few last minute efforts to open a door with big carrots and little sticks. However, as Bush left the office to Obama in 2009, the US-Iran relations were at a worse place than what he inherited from Clinton.

In conclusion, there were a number of factors that resulted in the inconsistent policy pursued by the Bush administration. First and foremost, the bureaucratic politics and internal rivalries during the first term paved the road to such a hawkish policy that its effects would linger into the second term and beyond. Secondly, in addition to bureaucratic politics, inability to read Iran was one of the biggest contributors to the policies of the Bush administration. The failure to recognize Iran's security concerns, read Iran's domestic politics and history, and to successfully address these issues through rhetoric and policy made the wall between the two countries even thicker. Thirdly, difficulty of shedding preconceptions by the US and the Iranian government remained a constant obstacle on the way to any cooperation. Not only did the Bush administration time and again utter words that demonstrated mistrust and a desire to see a different regime in Tehran, but also the Iranian leaders made it clear that they did not trust the US or the words of its diplomats. Fourthly, the Iraq War altered the priorities of the administration causing attention to shift to a different direction, which resulted in unintended consequences such as raising tensions because of Iran's presence in Iraq. Lastly, poor intelligence contributed to the suspicions of the administrations by not being able to authenticate documents from Iranian government or offer accurate analysis in terms of where Iran's nuclear programme was. In addition to all these factors, the Iranian government was not receptive to the advances made by the Bush administration. The years of mutual mistrust, strong hostile rhetoric, and dynamics of domestic politics made the perfect brew for an impasse to be inherited by the next administration.



# THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS

and

## IRAN

“The President may serve as the voice of America in our dealings with the rest of the world, but it ultimately proves to be a fairly impotent voice if he lacks congressional support.”

*Doug Bereutner*

The Executive Branch was not alone in its policy-making. The Legislative Branch not only provides a check and balance system for the White House, but also plays a role in foreign policy. The drafters of the Constitution of the United States did indeed create a presidential office, which limited the role of the Congress in the formation of foreign policy by giving the President authority over the armed forces and inter-state policy. Thus, the executive branch has extensive room for foreign policy making, even though the authority of declaring war and ratifying treaties rests with Congress, constitutionally. However, the president’s authority over foreign policy is much more significant in terms of crises where prompt action is needed. When it comes to situations that do not demand decisive and timely action, the Congress has remained influential. Therefore, though some constitutional limitation does exist in terms of the legislative branch in the realm of foreign policy, this did not prevent the Congress from being assertive in the nineteenth century, resulting in the War of 1812; nor did it keep the

isolationist congress of pre-World War II America from avoiding any military engagement in Europe. Although, with Franklin Roosevelt and the beginning of Cold War, the congressional say in foreign affairs had diminished, the end of the Vietnam War and the presidency of Richard Nixon turned the tables again in favour of the Congress:

Because Congress was so willingly deferential for most of the Cold War, the actual problem of institutional power sharing was minimized. The 1970s changed all that ... like other areas of policy, foreign policy is no longer considered immune to political conflict and contention, no longer kept at water's edge.<sup>1</sup>

Sundquist calls this shift a “period of resurgence,”<sup>2</sup> which resulted in legislative efforts to balance the power between the two branches of the government throughout the 1970s. However, starting with the Reagan presidency, the executive powers were used more efficiently despite the Congress’ efforts to get ahead. Presidents were able to regain some of their lost power by influencing bureaucracy through key appointments. Rudalevige argues that this reclaiming of presidential power reached its climax during the presidency of George W. Bush in the aftermath of 9/11.<sup>3</sup> Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein argue that, after the attacks, congressional oversight of the Executive Branch all but collapsed, especially in foreign and national security policy. Conduct of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, reform of the intelligence apparatus, immigration and homeland security became the centre of attention. However, Mann and Ornstein argue:

Congress has failed to ask how policies in these areas have been carried out, how faithfully laws have been executed, how reasonably taxpayer dollars have been spent, how well the executive branch has stayed within its constitutional bounds, and how vigorously malfeasance or nonfeasance by public agencies and private contractors has been handled.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>BW Jentleson, ‘American Diplomacy Around the World and along Pennsylvania Avenue,’ *A Question of Balance: the President, the Congress, and Foreign Policy*, TE Mann, Brookings Institution, Washington D.C., 1990, pp.148-149.

<sup>2</sup>JL Sundquist, *The Decline and Resurgence of Congress*, Washington: Brookings Institution, 1981, p.7.

<sup>3</sup>A Rudalevige, “The Contemporary Presidency: The Decline and Resurgence and Decline (and Resurgence?) of Congress: Charting a New Imperial Presidency”, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Sep., 2006) pp. 506-524.

<sup>4</sup>T Mann and N Ornstein, “When Congress Checks Out”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 6, pp. 67-82.

As a result, in American history, there were periods that witnessed strong congressional influence in foreign policy, and there were periods during which congressional oversight suffered.<sup>5</sup> James Lindsay concludes: “everyone agrees that the Congress is more active in foreign policy today than at any time since the 1930s. The dispute arises over the consequences of Congressional activism.”<sup>6</sup> However, at the same time, the literature on how the Congress impacts foreign policy is divided on why these fluctuations occur in terms of congressional power and why they do not remain permanent. Morgenthau and Waltz argue that overall foreign policy making was a reaction to international crises, and domestic politics was not a major factor.<sup>7</sup> While other scholars, like Putnam, Rosecrance and Stein, argue that internal politics played an important role in how the foreign policy is conducted.<sup>8</sup> In this complex nature of politics, Loomis argues that the president had the power to dominate the agenda and become a centralizing force because the Congress is individualistic and party-oriented.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Fisher argues that with the recent evolution of committees and the increase in the staff, now Congress is more equipped for the challenges of international politics: “Instead of periodic and idiosyncratic interventions, Congress now has the institutional capacity to monitor foreign policy on an informed, sustained basis. Congress is better prepared to challenge assertions and premises from the administration and less willing to show deference of expertise and authority.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>A few notable sources: *Congress and the Foreign Policy* by Cecil V. Crabb, Glenn J. Antizzo and Leila E. Saredinne; *Congressional Abdication on War and Spending* by Louis Fisher; *Less Than Meets the Eye: Foreign Policy Making and the Myth of the Assertive Congress* by Barbara Hinckley; *Congress and the Politics of U.S Foreign Policy* by James Lindsay; and *A Question of Balance: The President, the Congress, and Foreign Policy* edited by Thomas Mann.

<sup>6</sup>JM. Lindsay, *Congress and the Politics of US Foreign Policy*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994, p. 37.

<sup>7</sup>H Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948. Kenneth Waltz, *Men, the State, and War*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1959.

<sup>8</sup>RD. Putnam. “Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games”, *International Organization*, Vol. 42, No. 3 Summer, 1988), pp. 427-460. Richard Rosecrance and Arthur A. Stein, *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy*, New York: Ithaca, 1993.

<sup>9</sup>B Loomis, *The Contemporary Congress*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996, pp. 136-153.

<sup>10</sup>L Fisher, *The Politics of Shared Power*, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 1998, pp. 175-76.

In more general terms, international affairs can influence domestic politics significantly, as was the case during World War II, the Vietnam War, the critical moments of the Cold War, and during a global economic depression. Therefore, the impact of an international phenomenon on internal politics could be profound. For instance, mobilization during war, conscription, increase of taxes and government spending can change the domestic social and political atmosphere. These international factors could either limit or expand the options and influence of the Congress.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, at times, the legislative procedure was directly affected by international factors, and gave the Congress a chance to be more, or less, assertive on a given issue. In this regard, the question of how the Congress impacts foreign policy arises. Lindsay points out that it would be insufficient to solely judge the Congress' effectiveness on the basis of its legislation. In addition to passing laws and bills, Congress also influences policy through what Lindsay calls "anticipated reactions." According to this argument, both the president and the Congress anticipate each other's moods and reactions and adjust their policies accordingly. If the Congress were to overturn a foreign policy initiative, the president's hand in policymaking would weaken significantly.<sup>12</sup> At this juncture, Henahan's conclusion is most compelling: "an underlying pattern shaping congressional behavior on foreign policy is formed by the rise and resolution of these critical foreign policy issues. When a critical foreign policy issue arises, congressional activity and attempts to influence foreign policy increase. Once the debate is resolved and one side wins, a consensus emerges, and Congress settles into a more passive role."<sup>13</sup> Henahan's argument finds a path that reconciles the previous contradicting arguments about why Congress' impact on foreign policy diverges at different times. At the same time, Hersman observes the complexity of the relationship

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<sup>11</sup>P Gourevitch, *Politics in Hard Times*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1986.

<sup>12</sup>J Lindsay, "Congress and Foreign Policy: Why the Hill Matters?", *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 107, No. 4, (Winter, 1992-1993), pp. 607-628.

<sup>13</sup>M Henahan, *Foreign Policy and Congress: An International Relations Perspective*, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2000., p. 5.



between the executive and the legislative branches and how this complexity may result in an incoherent policy. The complex nature of the relationship should be taken into account while reading this chapter, as Hersman summarises:

The complex and often troubled relationship between the Congress and the executive branch over foreign policy defies simple explanations and convenient caricatures. The challenge of institutional weakness and individual power, the complexity of the informal procedural world, the potency of cross-institutional linkages, and the dominance of issue-based policy and politics define the reality of executive legislative relations ... and create a complex, nearly incoherent policy process.<sup>14</sup>

In light of this, the chapter at hand will attempt to narrate and analyze why the United States Congress saw Iran as a pariah state, and what it did or proposed to do to in order to change the policies of the Iranian government. After giving a historical account of the House and the Senate proceedings concerning Iran, the research questions outlined below will be addressed. This chapter's main question is how the Congress impacted the executive branch in its foreign policy-making towards Iran during the Bush presidency, and Henehan's conclusion will be helpful in answering this question. The Congress had other avenues of influencing the foreign policy without having to directly interfere with the executive politics. Because of its mostly transparent proceedings and the availability of materials and transcripts, the Congress' opinions are readily available to foreign governments. Thus, another question is whether public accessibility plays a role in Congress' influence on foreign policy by sending mixed messages. Lastly, since there was a continuity of individuals in the House and the Senate during the Bush presidency, the issue of whether or not certain individuals had more say in foreign policy matters than others was also examined.

The following chapter will attempt to summarize the opinions of the House and the Senate of four congresses that functioned as the legislative branch during the

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<sup>14</sup>R Hersman, *Friends and Foes: How Congress and the President Really Make Foreign Policy*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000, pp.105-106.

presidency of George W. Bush. In this regard, the hearings of the House and the Senate are important since they serve a purpose other than leading to legislation. The congressional hearings act as a national debating forum, where alternatives are offered and opinions are considered. By debating the policy options in a very public way and by criticising the administration, the hearings shape the public debate and thus become an intricate part of the policy-making atmosphere. Hence, the reasons behind Congress' policy choices are examined under the first subtitle, which include Iran's nuclear programme, Iran's involvement in Iraq and terrorism, and Iran's human rights records. This section aims to shed light on how and why the Congress formed its opinion regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran. Subsequently, the policy avenues taken by the Congress are scrutinized and how these policies impacted the executive branch and the foreign policy is considered. Even though the Congress could not be classified as assertive during this time, especially regarding Iran, the overarching bipartisanship, support for the sanctions policy and its continuity created a limited framework for the Bush administration to function in, as Doug Bereutner, former Republican Representative, observed: "The President may serve as the voice of America in our dealings with the rest of the world, but it ultimately proves to be a fairly impotent voice if he lacks congressional support."<sup>15</sup>

## **THE CAUSES OF CONGRESSIONAL POLICIES**

### *The Nuclear Programme*

Even though the Iranian nuclear programme has its roots dating back before the fall of Shah Reza, after 1979, an anti-American government potentially possessing nuclear weapons was a completely different scenario than a pro-Western shah pursuing such a

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<sup>15</sup> D Bereutner, "Key Issues in Congressional Foreign Policy Making", Weatherland Center for International Affairs. Working Paper Series No 99-02. 1999, p.2.

course. The suspicions surrounding the Iranian nuclear programme constituted a crucial aspect of understanding how any branch of the American government perceived Iran, and the US Congress was not an exception. Consequently, even though Iran's possible acquisition of nuclear weapons cannot be divorced from its support of terrorism, to understand how the Congress saw the issue during the Bush administration, one has to glance at the congressional hearings regarding Iran's nuclear programme in order to comprehend what prompted the Congress to follow the policies it did. The reasons of the Congress' objection to Iranian policies were manifold, but doubtlessly the nuclear programme took the centre stage.

In this regard, the hearings of the House of Representatives are examined first. The hearing before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia on March 29, 2001 included sections on Iran demonstrating that the new House was concerned with Iran as much as the previous House had been. Congressmen Ben Gilman (R, NY) and Gary Ackerman (D, NY), both prominent members of the subcommittee, made it clear that the House would be uncompromising on the issue of Iran's desire to acquire nuclear weapons. In this regard, they also pronounced that ILSA would be extended and the new administration would be held accountable for making sure that Russians understood the cost of trading with Iran.<sup>16</sup> The first session concerning Iran revealed the major issues with which the current House was concerned and the main policy to be followed by Congress, i.e. the economic sanctions. Even though, as mentioned before, these issues could not be completely divorced from each other, Iran's nuclear programme was a major concern for Congress, in both the House and the Senate. All other areas of concern, such as terrorism and human rights, remained in the shadow of the prospect of Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons. Iraq, Syria, Libya, Cuba, North Korea, and Sudan, other states who were also

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<sup>16</sup>House of Representatives, *Developments in the Middle East*. Hearing Before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia of the Committee on International Relations, , One Hundred Seventh Congress, First Session, 29 March 2001. p. 6.

named as state sponsors of terrorism, did not receive as much attention from the Congress. Even though after 9/11, the situation would change with the Iraq War; without the alleged existence of WMDs in Iraq, the Bush administration would not have been able to gain the backing of Congress solely based on Saddam's sponsoring of terrorist organizations. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how the legislative branch perceived the Iranian nuclear programme and where this perception led.

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R, FL) was one of the representatives who were vociferous about issues concerning Iran. Being a strong supporter of Israel and having concerns for the human rights situation in Iran, Ros-Lehtinen was one of the most vocal and pressing voices in the House subcommittees arguing for strict measures against the Iranian government. During the meeting titled "Iranian Proliferation: Implications for Terrorists, Their States Sponsors, and U.S. Counter-Proliferation Policy", Ros-Lehtinen claimed, aside from supporting terrorism, Iran was trying to acquire nuclear weapons and building long-range missiles, which explained the existence of the Natanz and Arak nuclear sites and the testing of the Shahab-4 missile. After mentioning the administration's efforts to get the United Nations to issue multilateral sanctions, the congresswoman stated that:

We prefer the support of the global community in curbing these weapons of mass destruction; however, when our safety and security and that of our allies in the region is being threatened, we must take immediate action to address the problem and not sit idly by waiting for consensus to be achieved. Diplomacy does not mean surrender.<sup>17</sup>

Even before 9/11 attacks and the paradigm change it offered, there were advocates of harsher policy towards Iran in the House. Where the new administration in the White House desired a more flexible hand in dealing with Iran, the Congress was inclined to being more assertive both in terms of sanctions and international consensus building efforts. Iran's nuclear programme posed a clear national security threat and therefore had to

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p.7.

be dealt with accordingly. The 107<sup>th</sup> Congress made it clear that they were not going to give the new administration a free hand, even though there were attempts to ease tension during the first months of the Bush presidency, such as not indicting any Iranians for the Khobar Towers attacks or lowering the level of hostile rhetoric. The Congress was still concerned about the Iranian nuclear programme, and it was made clear that these concerns would not be erased easily.

The terrorist attacks of 2001 made dealing with Iran's nuclear weapons programme a more imminent issue than before. After 9/11, the link between Iran and terrorist organizations gave ample room for the doomsday scenarios in the minds of the Congress members. For instance, when the Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia met in June 2004 under the hearing titled "Iranian proliferation: Implications for terrorists, their state sponsors, and U.S. Counter-proliferation policy," the purpose of the meeting was defined by Ros-Lehtinen as addressing the Iranian nuclear programme that could also become a tool for terrorism. The questions the chairwoman asked revolved around what would happen if Iran were to acquire nuclear weapons and if nuclear, chemical or biological weapons would fall into terrorists' hands after this acquisition. At this point, Ros-Lehtinen referred to the supply of Iranian weapons to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, and the assessment of former CIA Director Tenet who stated that Iran was "willing to supply missile-related technology to countries of concern."<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, she added, al-Qaeda had started to operate in cooperation with Hezbollah who was backed by Iran and Syria. Ros-Lehtinen ended her opening remarks by concluding that "An Iran with nuclear weapons could significantly alter the regional

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<sup>18</sup>U.S. House of Representatives, *Iranian Proliferation: Implications for Terrorists, Their States Sponsors, and U.S. Counter-Proliferation Policy*. Hearing Before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia of the Committee on International Relations, One Hundred Eighth Congress, Second Session. June 24, 2004. p.7.

dynamics and lead to further proliferation in the region—both from other State-sponsors of terrorism, such as Syria, or from United States allies which may feel threatened.”<sup>19</sup>

In addition to what might happen if Iran were to provide terrorist organizations with nuclear weapons, what concerned the representatives was how foreign policy was conducted by the Iranian government. The Islamic Republic was not perceived as a rational actor who would weigh the pros and cons of joining the nuclear club and act accordingly; instead, the Iranian government was seen as pursuing the power that WMDs offered regardless of the consequences. For example, Democrat Congressman Brad Sherman of California, who had been in office since 1997, compared Iran to the Soviet Union, which was described as a deterable nuclear rival, whereas Iran's regime was unstable and undeterable. The conclusion reached was to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons by cutting the country's ties to the financial world. In this scenario, all international monetary cooperation with Iran was undesirable. For instance, the World Bank still approved loans for Iran and exports of carpets and caviar continued: “So when we are asked, what are we doing regarding that Iranian nuclear weapons development program, what are we doing about it, the answer is clear: We are financing it on favourable terms.”<sup>20</sup> The words of Sherman would be repeated many times during the subcommittee meetings, because not only did he express his strong opposition to a nuclear Iran, but also he argued that the US was still taking part in empowering Iran to advance its programme. A similar view was endorsed in the hearing that was held jointly with the Subcommittee on Europe in September 2004 discussing counterterrorism and US-European cooperation. Robert Wexler (D, FL) analysed the situation in Iran after pointing out that the war in Iraq created a division between the US and its European allies, which left these countries powerless in

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p.13.

dealing with Iranian nuclear proliferation.<sup>21</sup> Sherman elaborated on these comments by claiming that the Iranian government was able to reassure its people that their current foreign policy could continue without any significant financial cost since the Europeans had been pressuring the US to waive the ILSA, and the World Bank had been providing loans for the Islamic Republic.<sup>22</sup> Again the representatives from both parties expressed their disapproval of the long diplomatic process concerning how to approach Iran. Each month that passed brought Iran closer to the bomb, and with each carrot offered by the Europeans, Tehran gained months. The urgency of the matter was clear for the House, and the administration was not doing enough to bring the issue to a conclusion. The opposition to Iran's nuclear programme and the belief that Iran would be unstoppable with WMDs were so strong that the policy suggestions that came from these leading representatives on several occasions went beyond economically punishing the Iranian government for its defiance.

As it was articulated in the previous chapter, in the aftermath of 9/11, the threat of nuclear weapons created a new dimension by demonstrating the reach of terrorism. Historically, the Congress adamantly opposed the Iranian nuclear programme under the Islamic regime, and this opposition gained even more support after 9/11. Even though Republicans gained more seats during the congressional elections, the members of two parties expressed similar concern about Iran's nuclear programme. Since the administration was busy in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Congress was also more inclined to discuss matters in these countries; however, this did not mean that Iran was forgotten. Representatives like Ros-Lehtinen and Sherman brought the issue to the forefront so as not to lose focus, repeatedly reminding the public and the administration that Iran's nuclear weapons

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<sup>21</sup>U.S. House of Representatives, *U.S.-European Cooperation on Counterterrorism: Achievements and Challenges*. Hearing Before the Subcommittee on International Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Human Rights of the Committee on International Relations, One Hundred Eighth Congress, Second Session. September 14, 2004. p. 11.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p.12-13.

programme remained a great risk for US national security, especially considering the country's ties with terrorism.

The same could be said for the next congress. During one of the first meetings of the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress, Representative Ros-Lehtinen referred to arms deals and cooperation between the Palestinian Authority and the Iranian government, arguing that “the rapid expansion of Iran’s unconventional weapons program, in particular, its nuclear program, combined with its support for terrorist organizations worldwide, raises the prospects of a potential transfer of chemical, biological, or nuclear materials or components to terrorist organizations from Iran.”<sup>23</sup> In the minds of the representatives, the threat stemmed from not only a direct nuclear attack by the Iranian government, but also from the possibility that these WMDs could end up in the hands of another hostile regime or organization. Again, Congressman Ackerman's remarks were in the same vein with those of Ros-Lehtinen's. He pointed out that the US did not have a policy towards Iran because the ILSA had not been implemented. Iran moved closer and closer to nuclear weapons, and its support for Hezbollah was so great that even the Palestinian Authority started to complain about Hezbollah's interference. Ackerman, thus, concluded: “So in Iran, we have exactly what we thought we had in Iraq: A State with enormous wealth in natural resources, significant WMD capabilities and the means to deliver them, and the use of terrorist organizations as an instrument for state policy.”<sup>24</sup> On both sides of the aisle, the representatives referred to Iran’s involvement in the terrorist activities that made the its threat level even more formidable. The insinuation that the US should have targeted Iran instead of Iraq also demonstrated the severity of the issue for the Congress.

The Senate’s views were not different than those of the House. The consensus was still that Iran’s nuclear ambitions should be curbed, but the suggestions for the

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p.9.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p.13.



methods differed. For instance, during the May 2005 hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, a week after Iran threatened the European countries with resuming the uranium enrichment process, the senators expressed different policy suggestions for the administration. Senator Joe Biden, who was the Democrat senator from Delaware from 1973 to 2009, opened the meeting stating that the United States was forming a diplomacy, which would convince Iran that producing nuclear weapons would cost them dearly. But at the same time, he argued, diplomacy should offer sufficient security and financial incentives for the Iranian government to compensate for the lack of nuclear weapons.<sup>25</sup> The next step, Biden continued, was to create an overarching plan, which involved more “sticks” on the European side, and more “carrots” on the American side. Even though Biden offered an alternative approach, he mainly argued that the US government failed to convey the message that Iran would be at a loss in the long run if it insisted on acquiring nuclear weapons. At the same time he recognized that the Iranian government needed some security reassurance if they were not to possess nuclear weapons.

Unlike Biden, Senator Richard Lugar reiterated the concerns about the viability of the NPT and how this viability depended on the actions taken when a party was found to be guilty of not fulfilling its obligations. Lugar argued that, even though the efforts of the European countries had slowed the Iranian advancement, the international community had failed to act in a united way. Moreover, the Senator stated that the perils of a nuclear Iran did not only stem from its government, but also its ties with terrorist organizations as it had been repeatedly declared by the State Department's “Country Reports on Terrorism”. Therefore, Lugar concluded, “We must be decisive in isolating and pressuring Iran to stop its pursuit of nuclear weapons, but we should also reach out to the Iranian people with hope

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<sup>25</sup>United States Senate, *Iran: Weapons Proliferation, Terrorism and Democracy*, Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, One Hundred Ninth Congress, First Session, 19 May 2005, p. 1

that more pragmatic, rational voices in Iran will prevail.”<sup>26</sup> Lugar once more placed Iran’s nuclear programme in the centre of his opening statement. According to the senator, acquisition of nuclear weapons by a government was not objectionable *per se*. However, in the case of Iran, the country’s government and its ties to terrorist organizations made a nuclear Iran a security problem for the United States. Senator Thomas Coburn (R, OK) made a similar argument in his opening statement at another senate hearing, “Permitting a more destructive weapon in the hands of those motivated to murder is worse than reckless, it is immoral.”<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, the senators of the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress remained united in their desire to inhibit the Iranian nuclear programme. However, as the attempts of the US government and the European nations failed to ensure that outcome, the Democrats and the Republicans started to promote different approaches. Biden argued that there should be more efforts to address Iran’s security concerns. On the other hand, Republicans like Lugar and Coburn were more forceful in their suggestions, such as stricter imposition of the sanctions and support of the dissident groups. Yet, it’s important to note that even though there were differences in the method to be pursued between parties, the Senators still believed that Iran should not be allowed nuclear weapons.

As America’s involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq became more complicated and the elections neared, the Congress did not give much time or attention to Iran. This lack of interest could also be interpreted as a response to the deadlock between the US and the Islamic Republic. Still, there were a few references to Iran during the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress that emphasised the growing danger Iran presented. In one of the first hearings of the last Congress of the Bush administration, Sherman emphasized that the only thing the world

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>United States Senate, *Iran: Teheran's Nuclear Recklessness and the U.S. Response – The Experts' Perspective*, Hearing Before the Federal Financial Management, Government Information, and International Security Subcommittee, One Hundred Ninth Congress, First Session, 15 November 2005. p. 5.

was able to achieve after 2002, when Iran's covert uranium enrichment operations were revealed, was to make it a little harder by cutting off the trade of nuclear technology related materials with Iran. Ackerman's statement on how the US failed to stop Iran was significant:

How did we come to such a predicament? To be blunt, 5 years ago we picked the wrong oil-producing, terrorist-sponsoring, weapons-proliferating, ultra-violent, authoritarian Persian Gulf state starting with the letter I on which to focus our attention. And ever since then, Iraq has been an enormous distraction from our most pressing national security interests.<sup>28</sup>

According to Ackerman, the “I” should have been Iran instead of Iraq. The hostile rhetoric of the House members would only increase as the Bush administration failed to achieve any progress concerning Iran. The projections regarding Iran’s missile development efforts also furthered the fears of the representatives that, while the US army was bogged down in two countries, the country presenting the real threat was taking its time in developing nuclear weapons and missiles to deliver them.<sup>29</sup> Hence, the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress did not lose sight of the importance of the Iranian nuclear programme, although it was temporarily hidden behind the problems in Iraq. Even though the Democrat congressmen criticised the administration and its focus on Iraq, they remained united with the Republicans in asserting that there should be more done in order to curb Iran’s progress.

To a certain extent, the desire for one country to limit the weapons potential of another country is inherent in the state system. For instance, when the American scientists realized that they no longer needed the assistance of the UK on the path to creating the first atomic bomb, the US halted its co-operation with the UK. So much power packed in one warhead was not something to be shared. It was the ultimate weapon in the history of weapons. As other countries unlocked the sub-atomic power of nuclear fission, the United

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p.8.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., pp.50-51.

States government wanted to reign in its proliferation. The attempt to control the spread of nuclear weapons started with President Truman and has been an issue for every single US president since then. However, the mere possession of nuclear weapons did not make a government problematic, such as has been the case with the UK, Germany or France. The combination of a hostile government and the nuclear weapons posed the threat for the U.S. government. The arms race of the Cold War, horror scenarios of mutually assured destruction and the isolation of Libya and North Korea are all a reaction to this combination.

The continuous objection of the US Congress to Iran's possible acquisition of nuclear weapons should be seen in this context. The representatives and the senators of the last fifty years have not lost sleep over UK's or France's nuclear warheads. However, since 1979, Iran's nuclear programme, even though not proved to be a weapons programme, has been a problem for the US government. The anti-American rhetoric of the Iranian leaders, accompanied by incidents like the Iran hostage crisis, contributed to the collective memory of the lawmakers. As a result, regardless of Iran's security concerns, its rights under the NPT or the lack of concrete evidence about a WMDs programme, the Congress saw Iran's nuclear programme as a national security threat. In Congressman Sherman's words "Iran is unstable and undeterable" and, therefore, cannot be trusted with nuclear weapons. This understanding formed the core of the sanctions regime that was the main policy of the Congress during the eight years Bush was president. This perception did not change throughout these years, and was even heightened after the 9/11 attacks. The prospect of a nuclear Iran in the post 9/11 world remained the major motivation of the Congress to pressure the administration. Unlike Mann and Ornstein suggested, the shadow of nuclear Iran made the House and the Senate even more wary than they were of Afghanistan and Iraq, where the Executive had the most say. The same shadow also prevented the Congress

from acquiescing to the administration's occasional desire to soften policies and resulted in congressional resistance, which was mentioned by James Lindsay.

### *Ties with Terrorism*

As mentioned before, the potential acquisition of nuclear weapons was not the exclusive reason for the US Congress' desire to halt the Iranian nuclear programme. The Iranian government's support of terrorism, along with its anti-American rhetoric, was one of the biggest reasons that put the country in the list of undesirables. Consequently, the second most important reason for the reaction given to a nuclear Iran was the country's ties to terrorism. In fact, in most cases the representatives and the senators mentioned the nuclear programme and terrorism in the same speech. Especially after the 9/11 attacks, the threat of terrorism became the major national security concern bringing the Islamic Republic and its possible acquisition of nuclear weapons to a new level of danger. Iran, therefore, was a threat from both sides, which led the Congress to legislate with the goal of altering Iran's policies.

For instance, terrorism played a role in the repeated extension of the ILSA by the House, demonstrating that Iran's nuclear programme was not the only incentive. Gilman opened the session on the extension of ILSA by stating that Iranian behaviour had not changed as a result of the sanctions. The congressman also argued that Iran's national security revolved around the destruction of Israel and threatening the United States. After quoting Khatami about Israel being a "cancerous tumour," the chairman questioned Khatami's moderate views.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Ackerman made the argument that Khatami was not a reformer on the issues of foreign policy, since his stance did not change regarding the

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<sup>30</sup>U.S. House of Representatives, *The ILSA (Iran-Libya Sanctions) Extension Act of 2001*. Hearing Before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia of the Committee on International Relations, One Hundred Seventh Congress, First Session, May 9, 2001. pp. 5-6.

Arab/Israeli problem. Ackerman also pointed out that Iran continued its support of Hezbollah, Hamas, the Palestinian-Islamic Jihad and Ahmed Jabril's PFLP-GC as well as pursuing the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction.<sup>31</sup> The representatives perceived the Islamic Republic as a hostile country with a continuous and consistent foreign policy, of which supporting terrorist organizations was a big part. Even though Khatami had proved himself to be more open to warming relations with the US, his willingness alone was not sufficient, even if he were able to deliver a shift in Iranian foreign policy. The nuances and hardships of being moderate in Tehran under the rule of Ayatollah Khamanei eluded the House members, and therefore they remained ever suspicious of Khatami's words, motivations and ability.

After September 11, the way the Congress saw the Middle East was altered. This change not only included the concerns about how al Qaeda managed to function in more than one Middle Eastern country, but also welcomed a new emphasis on democratization, as Gilman declared in October 2001: "It seems to me that the considerations that led our Nation to curtail its democratization efforts should be rethought."<sup>32</sup> Iran was not immune to this shift in perspective. Gilman pointed out that even though the Congress saw Iran as moderating, and even though America had removed the Taliban from power in Afghanistan with whom Iran nearly had a military clash in 1998, Iran became one of the strongest critics of the US, and this was also revealed by the way they reacted to the September 11 attacks.<sup>33</sup> Ackerman expressed similar thoughts to that of Gilman by stating that "our war on terror begins with al-Qaeda but it does not end there." These remarks and questions demonstrated that Iran's ties to terrorist organizations became even more important in the aftermath of September 11. The demonstration of what terrorism can

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p.10.

<sup>32</sup>U.S. House of Representatives, *Recent developments in the Middle East*. Hearing Before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia of the Committee on International Relations, One Hundred Seventh Congress, First Session. October 17, 2001. p. 6.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p.7.

achieve with commercial airplanes, without weapons of mass destruction, made the direction of Iran's foreign policy of vital importance. Therefore, following September 11, it could be argued that many in the House started to see the region as a whole instead of differentiating between countries. Terrorism provided the framework that was needed to classify all the Middle Eastern countries, in which each country was categorized according to where it stood on its support of terrorism. This is an important shift in perspective. A terrorist did not necessarily mean an al Qaeda member, but a member of any terrorist organization. Consequently, suddenly Hamas and Hezbollah were both as capable of harming the US or its interests as al Qaeda did in September 2001. Thus, the Middle East became different shades of the same colour.

This new angle would reveal itself again and again over the years. For example, during the hearing in June 2002, Gilman named three countries and their leaders as major threats in the region: Iraq under Saddam Hussein, Syria under Bashar al-Asad and Iran under Ayatollah Khamanei. Gilman argued that as long as these countries continued to support terrorism, the national security of the US and its allies would be under threat.<sup>34</sup> Sharing the perspective of Gilman, Sherman argued that Iran was using every spare penny to stay in power so that it could develop nuclear weapons to attack America. He, therefore, demanded that the administration stop allowing imports from Iran, and send a message to Europe that America was not willing to trade with "the government that wants to murder as many millions of Americans as it develops the technology to deal with."<sup>35</sup> This was another hearing showing that September 11 altered the way the House saw the Tehran government and made the Iranian nuclear programme and support of Hezbollah seem a more tangible and imminent threat than before. Iran was classified in the same group as

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<sup>34</sup>U.S. House of Representatives, *Recent Developments in the Middle East*. Hearing Before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia of the Committee on International Relations, One Hundred Seventh Congress, Second Session, June 18, 2002. p. 7.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, p.16.

Syria and Iraq in order to convey the message that the US should deal with the Tehran as harshly as it would deal with Baghdad. The Congress did not intend to relent until the dual threat that emanated from the Islamic Republic was eradicated.

Thus, Iran had become the crucible where nuclear weapons met terrorism, and this time this terror would not only strike Israel but also the US. Ros-Lehtinen stated that after September 11:

...suddenly, nuclear related terrorism became a vivid and very real threat. This sense of urgency was palpable as the U.S. Put on standby alert its nuclear emergency search team, which is trained to respond to terrorists armed with nuclear weapons. We therefore needed to evaluate what the U.S. has done and will do unilaterally and globally to prepare and protect against the daunting possibility of nuclear terrorism<sup>36</sup>

Congressman Sherman compared the foreign policy of the US towards Afghanistan, which was harbouring al Qaeda, and towards Iran, which was aiding at least three important al Qaeda figures, surmising that another September 11 with nuclear weapons was not a far-fetched scenario.<sup>37</sup> These concerns were yet another manifestation of how 9/11 altered the perspectives of the representatives. Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen's words expressed what the other members feared the most. Even though the term "nuclear terrorism" had been in the vocabulary for a while, it became a common occurrence at the congressional meetings after the terrorist attacks. It constituted the worst-case scenario if Iran managed to develop nuclear weapons and passed it on to other capable organizations that are also hostile to the US. Furthermore, Iran was directly linked to bin Laden, a perception that led to the belief that Iran would become al Qaeda's route to nuclear weapons. The amorphous nature of terrorist organizations, al Qaeda or Hezbollah, made

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<sup>36</sup>U.S. House of Representatives, *The Role of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Safeguarding Against Acts of Terrorism*. Hearing Before the Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights of the Committee on International Relations, One Hundred Seventh Congress, First Session. October 3, 2001. p. 5.

<sup>37</sup>U.S. House of Representatives, *Al-Qaeda: The Threat to the United States and Its Allies*. Hearing Before the Subcommittee on International Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Human Rights of the Committee on International Relations, One Hundred Eighth Congress, Second Session. April, 2004. p. 8.



every rumour and every scenario possible. This is not to say that the fears of the representatives were entirely baseless; however, when the perceived threat was terrorism, which could not be defined with boundaries or a nation, the interpretation of the data can go beyond what is intended. In this state of fear and uncertainty, the representatives began to criticise the administration for not having done enough against Iran compared to what had been done in Afghanistan and Iraq. Even though it was unlikely that the Congress would approve military intervention in Iran, the sense of urgency in the words of Sherman and Gallegly once again demonstrated how Iran became their worst nightmare in the aftermath of 9/11.

Therefore, the concerns over the link between terrorism and Iran were very much intertwined with the concerns over the country's nuclear programme. Even though the claims about Iran's support of terrorist organizations had not shown that Iran promised nuclear weapons or dirty bombs, or shared information about the know-how, the combination of weapons of mass destruction and ties to terrorism made the Congress suspicious of the Iranian government. Furthermore, these ties demonstrated that Iran had a desire to impact the regional dynamics in order to create a Middle East that was more pro-Iran and less pro-American and pro-Israel. Considering that most of the representatives were still strongly committed to a strong relationship between the US and Israel, trying to undermine Israel meant a direct national security threat for the United States. In the end, both the representatives and the senators failed to address Iran's security concerns and focused entirely on how Iranian foreign policy affected the US. Especially in the aftermath of 9/11, the Congress became much more suspicious about any nexus between a state and any organization deemed terrorist by the State Department. This perceived nexus resulted in strong criticism of the administration both in congressional hearings and in the public eye. One of the harshest criticisms was the suggestion that the Bush administration had

picked the wrong country to attack in 2002. The tone of the rhetoric sent the message that the Congress would not approve any softening of policy towards Iran; instead, stronger rhetoric and better implementation of the sanctions were urged. It was not hard for the administration to anticipate Congress' reaction if they wanted to extend a hand to the Islamic Republic. Unlike other areas of foreign policy, the Congress continued to exert pressure on the administration regarding Iran even after 9/11, and this pressure even increased because of Iran's nuclear weapons programme and ties to terrorism. The administration seemed to have been incapable of solving the problem, and the Congress pressed for a more robust and firm policy.

### *Involvement in Iraq*

With the beginning of the Iraq War, the dynamics for the US government in the Middle East changed. The controversial genesis of the war and its complexity after the fall of Saddam Hussein took the attention away from other countries. Iran was no exception to this. However, as the situation in Iraq became more complicated and the country became unstable, Iran's involvement was inevitable. Sharing a long border with Iraq and having fought with Saddam Hussein for eight long years were only two of the reasons Iran was interested in Iraq. Like the United States, Iran desired to preserve Iraq's territorial integrity and did not want the civil war to get out of hand, causing further regional problems. However, when these common objectives did not bear the fruit of cooperation between the two countries, Iran had to start pursuing its own interests in Iraq, requiring the United States government to react, both on the ground and in Washington.

Having failed to acknowledge Iran's security concerns about Iraq, the politicians in Washington, both in the executive and legislative branches, resisted addressing these

issues. Therefore, from the beginning of the Iraq War, Iran's involvement was a concern for the congressmen. For instance, following Undersecretary Bolton's statement, Thomas Tancredo (R, CO) asked what it meant if the Al-Sharq Daily of Saudi Arabia was right about the amassing of Iranian troops along the Iraqi border: Was Iran waiting for a sign of weakness to move in, or was Iraq's democratization becoming a threat?<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, during 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, Representative Adam Smith inquired about the motivations of Iran after the testimonies of General Patreus and Ambassador Crocker:

On a different issue in the same area, do you think our presence motivates insurgents, or I think it clearly motivates Iran to cause more problems in Iraq than they otherwise would, because if we are not there, as I think Ambassador Crocker mentioned, Iran doesn't have much interest in Iraqi instability. But if we are there, given the conflict we have with Iran and the very real threats that Iran poses, they have to be worried about what our military would do if it got too secure in Iraq.<sup>39</sup>

The perception that Iran was only interested in Iraq because of the increasing American presence in the region failed to appreciate the longwinded hostility between the two countries. Instead of recognizing that Iran had legitimate national security concerns in Iraq regardless of the increasing number of the US troops, the representatives saw Iran's activities as simply another form of defiance.

The state of mind was the same in the Senate. There were a number of Senate hearings that addressed foreign policy towards Iran. However, even though there was a hearing on Iraq and the reshaping of American foreign policy in the Middle East in February 2005, Iran was not mentioned as a part of the solution, nor as an essential part of the future of Iraq. Consequently, even though the representatives and senators wanted to be knowledgeable about Iran's influence and interests in Iraq, the issue was not pursued doggedly, since the day-to-day dealings of a hot war and its consequences were left to the

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p.27.

<sup>39</sup>The Status of war and political developments in Iraq, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, One Hundred Tenth Congress, Second Session, April 9, 2008

executive branch. However, Iran's involvement in Iraq was still worthy of mention in terms of understanding the Congress' view of Iran, because this connection produced another point of concern, in addition to its nuclear programme and ties to terrorism. Both in the House and the Senate, the general atmosphere favoured the idea of leaving Iran out of matters concerning Iraq. Later in the second term, the administration realized the importance of Iran and Syria; however, the Congress remained suspicious of Iran's involvement. During the time it appeared that the US was still control in Iraq, the Congress was not willing to include Iran and its concerns in the equation. The administration was aware that the Congress was suspicious of any cooperation with Iran, and this more than likely played into the hands of the hardliners in the administration, while pushing the more accommodating figures back.

### *Human Rights Record*

Along with concerns about WMDs, terrorism and the Iraq War, the Congress was interested in the human rights situation in Iran. The House especially highlighted this issue in its hearings. Iran's human rights situation had been finding its place in State Department's country report on human rights practices. However, among all the other countries -such as China, Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Turkey- Iran was the country that attracted a significant amount of attention from the representatives. This was most likely due to the fact that Iran's human rights record became one among the country's many sins. It also provided a humanitarian aspect to the concerns about Iran and gave another dimension to the foreign policy by bringing it out of the cold hands of national security. Furthermore, it demonstrated that the US Congress was genuinely interested in the struggles of the Iranian people and was willing to listen and act to better their situation.

When the country reports on human rights practices was released by the State Department on March 4, 2002, the Iran report mentioned several human rights issues in the country. Restriction of freedom of religion was one of the main issues because of the persecution of the Bahai's, who were seen as a heretical group rather than a minority religion. The oppression of political opposition was also mentioned in the report, which stated many dissidents left the country because of perceived threat from the government.<sup>40</sup> The Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights held a hearing on March 6, 2002, upon the release of the Human Rights Reports. Ros-Lehtinen rhetorically asked if not much had changed in Iran under the Khatami government.<sup>41</sup> Ros-Lehtinen had long been interested in human rights violations and the issue remained a sore spot for the congresswoman as its continuance demonstrated that the nature of the Islamic regime was the problem, not who sat in the chair of the president. This made her, and other representatives, suspicious of the Khatami government. If this so-called moderate president was not able to improve the simple human rights violations in his country, how could he be trusted on other issues such as rapprochement with the US?

Since the Islamic regime was responsible for suppressing those with different political and religious stances, the House reached the conclusion that compromise at any level with the Tehran administration would worsen the plight of the minorities in the country. For instance, the same subcommittee held a hearing about the review of the country reports on human rights practices by the State Department on April 30, 2003. After Chairman Gallegly's opening statement, Congressman Sherman articulated that the constructive engagement approach of the European countries towards Iran did not contribute to the improvement of the human rights situation in Iran; on the contrary, these

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<sup>40</sup>U.S. Department of State, *Iran Country Report*, retrieved 15 September 2008, <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8251.htm>>

<sup>41</sup>U.S. House of Representatives, *A Review of the State Department's Human Rights Reports from the Victims' Perspectives*. Hearing Before the Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights of the Committee on International Relations, One Hundred Seventh Congress, Second Session. March 6, 2002. p. 26.

incentives offered financial benefit to the government. Furthermore, Sherman argued that the State Department should give up hopes of establishing relations with the moderates in the Iranian government, because, he added, the government itself was the root of the problem, and thus, it could not be a part of the solution.<sup>42</sup>

Consequently, Iran's human rights violations contributed to the negative perception of the representatives. It was a demonstration of what the Islamic regime stood for. Tehran's policies were not only perceived as irrational in the international arena, particularly regarding Iran's relations with the West, but also the regime was intolerant of opposition and unjust to those who were different. In the minds of the House members, the domestic behaviour of the regime freed the harsh policies of the US from being solely due to national security and brought a humanitarian aspect to the table. The Mullahs were portrayed as a group of oppressors who not only yearned for power and influence in the Middle East and the world, but also wanted to rule absolutely within Iran. Still, the Congress' interest in human rights abuses in Iran should be analyzed in the light of its concerns over the Iranian nuclear programme and Iran's ties with terrorism. This is not to say that concerns of the representatives were not genuine; however, the questions arises whether the Congress would be as attentive to Iran's human rights issues if the Iranian government's policies were not seen as anti-American. Most likely the answer to this question is no because the trouble with the Islamic Republic stemmed from its *raison d'être*, which was dominating within and without. At the same time, the representatives did not help improve the situation in Iran. Stronger rhetoric, public condemnations and disapproving the State Department's attempts to reconcile were not seen as sufficient. Even though the leaders of the Iranian opposition movement suggested otherwise, the Congress

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<sup>42</sup>U.S. House of Representatives, *A Review of the State Department's "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices."* Hearing Before the Subcommittee on International Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Human Rights of the Committee on International Relations, One Hundred Seventh Congress, First Session. April 30, 2003. p.8.

proceeded with the passing of the Iranian Freedom Act. This legislation demonstrated how little the representatives understood the inner dynamics of Iran. Getting help from the Great Satan would not help anybody's cause in Iran, and being anti-regime did not necessarily mean being pro-American. The complex social and political structure of the Iranian society not only evaded the Bush administration, but also the Congress members.

### *Implications*

Throughout the presidency of Bush, the US Congress adopted a consistently hawkish, uncompromising position toward Iran. A review of the hearings that discussed these four aspects of Congress' opposition to a more open foreign policy towards Iran revealed that this government branch perceived the Islamic Republic as a threat by definition, rather than taking each Iranian government into account by its own merits. The most important implication of such a viewpoint was that it provided the administration with a very rigid framework in which to function. By repeating over and over Congress' disapproval of the Iranian government in regards to its nuclear programme, ties to terrorism, involvement in Iraq and human rights record, the administration was reminded that they would hit a wall if they were to look for legislative approval for engagement. Furthermore, the rhetoric coming from one of the branches of the American government sent the message that the White House was not all-powerful. The reading of the congressional records in Tehran had the possibility of convincing the Iranian officials that the compromises made by the State Department could not be relied upon. Therefore, simply by expressing their disapproval through public hearings, it could be argued that the Congress played a role in foreign policy making by providing the parameters of the policy making scene for both the Bush administration and the Iranian government.

## SANCTIONS

The concerns about Iran's nuclear programme, terrorism, its involvement in the Iraq War, and its human rights issues led the US Congress to take some measures. Throughout the eight years of the Bush administration, the Congress never wavered from the resolution that Islamic Republic of Iran was a threat to the US national security and to its own people. On more than one occasion, one of the members suggested that the US should have picked Iran as target instead of Iraq. However, at the same time the Congress was made acutely aware that the US did not have leverage over Iran, and the legislative branch itself was limited in what it could do; limited but not powerless. Considering that the Congress has the authority over finances, the budget and regulation of international commerce, one of the most effective ways to be involved in the matters of foreign policy is to limit or to restrict international trade with a country of concern. In the case of Iran, the ILSA was first passed in 1996 under President Clinton. The ILSA targeted both US and non-US businesses that made certain investments in Iran. Subsequently, the ILSA was extended several times during the Bush administration starting in 2001. The sanctions regime was the most important tool in the hands of the Congress because it facilitated a means to pressure the executive branch, while proclaiming to the world, and especially to Iran, that the elected representatives of the US were not willing to deal with Tehran.

The strongest tool of the Congress came under review not long after Bush was sworn in as the president. Unlike the toned down first months of the administration, the House remained adamant about continuing the policies of the previous congresses, especially since most of the members of the committee that voted on the renewal of ILSA had retained their seats in the Congress. This continuation in the individual members made it more unlikely that the ILSA would not be renewed. The hearing titled "The ILSA Extension Act 2001" of the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress took place before the Subcommittee on Middle



East and South Asia. During the hearing, chaired by Gilman, there were four witnesses who touched on different aspects of the issue. Gilman opened the session by stating that Iranian behaviour had not changed as a result of the sanctions. The congressman also argued that Iran's national security revolved around the destruction of Israel and threatening the United States. After quoting Khatami about Israel being a “cancerous tumour,” the chairman questioned Khatami's moderate views.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Ackerman made the argument that Khatami was not a reformer on the issues of foreign policy, since his stance did not change regarding the Arab/Israeli problem.<sup>44</sup> Both representatives opened the hearing by clearly indicating that the House had not altered its direction regarding Iran, and this resolve could be seen in both parties.

Iran had to be contained, but was ILSA doing its job? More accurately, had the administrations been implementing the sanctions harshly enough to encourage Iran to comply? Both John Cooksey (R, LA) and Tom Lantos (D, CA) directed questions about the efficacy of the sanctions. Cooksey mentioned several companies, like Total SA and Elf Aquitaine of France, Bow Valley of Canada and Royal Dutch Shell, that had dealings contrary to the ILSA and then asked if the sanctions were working or not. Furthermore, Lantos recalled Secretary Albright's words about the US and Iran planting seeds as a result of the Clinton administration's removal of the sanctions on caviar and carpets, and, therefore, he also expressed a similar concern to that of Cooksey's. These seeds the previous administration was trying to plant had backfired and weakened the sanctions. Lantos argued that Iran did not reciprocate the good will shown by the US government, either internationally or domestically. Consequently, both congressmen supported the

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<sup>43</sup>U.S. House of Representatives, *The ILSA (Iran-Libya Sanctions) Extension Act of 2001*. Hearing Before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia of the Committee on International Relations, One Hundred Seventh Congress, First Session, May 9, 2001. pp. 5-6.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, p.10.

renewal of ILSA.<sup>45</sup> While on the one hand, these congressmen were not pleased that the Clinton administration did not implement the sanctions properly, they were also able to get a glimpse of what would happen if the sanctions were loosened. The conclusion they reached was that the Iranian government would remain defiant at the face of softening from Washington, and, therefore, in order to demonstrate the strong hand and resolution of the Congress, ILSA should be continued.

Even though there were concerns about how the sanctions affected American companies, these financial concerns were not the priority.<sup>46</sup> What concerned the Congress was not only the effectiveness of the current restrictions, but also the message economic sanctions communicated. Sherman's words reflected the way the committee saw the matter:

I think Dr. Cooksey is correct, that perhaps economic sanctions, no matter how effective, are not enough. ... if we do not at very minimum extend ILSA, if we do not tell our corporations that their business as usual will have to be cut back, then we cannot turn to American servicemen and women and say go risk your lives on some mission or go undertake any harsher action against Iran.<sup>47</sup>

The second witness for this hearing was Howard A. Kohr who was the executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. This choice of a second witness was significant since it was a demonstration of where the Congress' loyalties stood in the Middle East. Even though AIPAC's position was clear on the issue and an unbiased survey of the efficacy of ILSA could not have been expected from the organization, Kohr supported D'Amato's assessment of the sanctions by providing political grounds for the continuation of sanctions. The only witness who spoke against the renewals was William A. Reinsch, President of National Foreign Trade Council, Inc. Reinsch argued that the ILSA had failed to achieve its goals, and a new approach was needed to deal with Iran.

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p.11-13.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p.22-27.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p.24-25.

However, Cantor objected to Reinsch's position because, the congressman argued, prioritizing national security required some form of sanctions against a country that saw both the US and Israel as principal enemies.<sup>48</sup> In general, the main stance of the committee on ILSA was that even if the sanctions regime could not change the foreign policy of Iran, they would at least limit its ability to implement their current foreign policy. It had been five years since ILSA was passed under Clinton, and the representatives questioned how much the sanctions achieved in the course of these five years. However, even though the efficacy of the sanctions was questioned, the representatives still believed that an ongoing sanctions policy sent more than an economic message; it was a gesture of solidarity against a country that threatened the national security of America and its allies.

The Senate was on the same page as the House about the renewal of ILSA. The meetings of the Senate of the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress regarding Iran and US foreign policy also started with an examination of the sanctions policy. Senator Paul S. Sarbanes (D, MD) opened the hearing regarding ILSA, stating that the Congress strongly supported the reauthorisation and reminding the Senate that Iran remained the major state sponsoring terrorism in the latest State Department report.<sup>49</sup> After the opening statement, Senator Gordon Smith (R, OR), who drafted the proposition along with Senator Charles E. Schumer (D, NY), continued the hearing emphasizing the bipartisan nature of the proposition that would “send a signal to those governments in the Middle East that sponsor terrorism that the US Government will do all it can to work against their goals to prevent new holocausts and to stand by our allies, such as Israel.”<sup>50</sup> Senator Schumer agreed with Smith that removal of the sanctions would be “backward reasoning” if a behaviour change

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p.51.

<sup>49</sup>United States Senate, *Reauthorization of the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act*, Hearing Before the committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, One Hundred Seventh Congress, First Session, 28 June 2001, pp. 5-6.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

was expected from Iran and Libya. He also argued that ILSA was a flexible sanctions policy that gave the president the right to waive on specific cases.<sup>51</sup>

However, the Bush administration was not content with this flexibility and wanted a freer hand to conduct foreign policy towards Iran. For the administration, it could be that the time was ripe for a change in policy, but for the Senate any backtracking would mean defeat. While the Executive desired room to manoeuvre in order to solve the problems with the Iranian government, the Legislative wanted to show that the US was not willing to relieve the sanctions before Iran made a compromise. During these discussions Anthony Wayne<sup>52</sup> from the State Department stated that the administration supported the renewal of the ILSA but only for two years, which would result in frequent revision and debates.<sup>53</sup> Wayne argued that a sanctions policy required frequent checks and fine-tuning to be more effective, and that was the reason the administration desired a shorter renewal period. Sarbanes replied “the legislation as written gives the President the opportunity to conduct that review at any time and with considerably flexible authority, then, to act upon it.”<sup>54</sup> Schumer objected to the administration's proposal arguing that it would be perceived as “softening” and the new bill would not be able to express the intentions of the American government properly. Even though there were suspicions in regards to the efficacy of the sanctions, it was the most significant tool the Congress could use to affect foreign policy. From their perspective, weakening the sanctions regime by submitting it to frequent reviews would only play into the hands of the Iranian government and would give even more flexibility to the administration undermining the authority of the Congress and the efficiency of the sanctions.

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>52</sup>Assistant Secretary for Economic and Business Affairs

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., pp. 10-11.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., pp. 12-17.

Arguing that non-renewal would be counter-productive, the Senate was in agreement with the House in terms of the extension of ILSA. Furthermore, when the executive branch asked for a two-year extension instead of five, the senators rejected the offer because they did not want to send the message that the US was conceding in the face of a non-conciliatory Iranian government. This rejection of a shorter extension period was one of the ways the Congress was able to affect the foreign policy, by making it harder for the State Department and the Presidency to deal with the complications that arose with the implementation of the ILSA. The new administration had showed signs of changing previous policies. One of the top guns of the administration, like Cheney, had expressed his disapproval for economic sanctions for years, arguing that unilateral sanctions never worked.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, Powell had also urged the Congress “to stop, look and listen” before they imposed sanctions.<sup>56</sup> Before he became president, even the Bush himself had expressed his desire to lessen the use of sanctions.<sup>57</sup> Although by the time the sanctions were under consideration again, the Bush administration had only asked for a minimal adjustment, rather than going after the big fish of removing the sanctions, the Congress was not even willing to grant this relatively minor change in the policy. The legislative branch wanted to demonstrate that the new administration would not have a free hand, especially concerning a country that had been vexing the American government for so long. Moreover, it sent the message that the Congress was not willing to engage Iran yet, a position that further limited the reach of the Executive Branch. Even before 9/11, the Congress was not keen to bow to the wishes of the White House in regards to Iran. Since the US and Iran had been in a stalemate situation, the Congress had more power over the direction of the foreign policy. Had Iran become a crisis situation, the White House would

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<sup>55</sup>SF Hayes, *Cheney: The Untold Story of America's Most Powerful and Controversial Vice President*, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007, p. 269.

<sup>56</sup>‘Unsanctioned’, *The Economist*, 18 July 2001.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*

have more say over the direction; but, at this juncture, Congress's held the cards, and this power showed the Bush administration that a true change of policy would require convincing the Legislative Branch.

After 9/11, the position of the Congress concerning ILSA did not change for the better, even in the face of Iran's cooperation. From their perspective, the attacks made Iran even more dangerous because the possibility of the combination of nuclear weapons with terrorist organizations became very real. 9/11, in addition to the lack of change in Iran's behaviour, made the House even more concerned that ILSA was not working as it should. In June 2003, the Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia met to discuss the enforcement of ILSA and the security threats posed by Iran. Ros-Lehtinen made an opening statement as the chairperson to remind members of the State Department's terrorism report about Iran and how it "remained the most active state-sponsor of terrorism."<sup>58</sup> She argued that the ILSA had lost its deterrent effect because it was seen as a "paper tiger" by those who make investments in Iran.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, she argued, the ILSA was a crucial weapon to stop the flow of hard currency into Iran. Furthermore, she asserted that the European belief that only constructive engagement with Iran would produce results proved to be false. Ros-Lehtinen ended her statement by claiming that the implementation of ILSA would be reviewed carefully because, "Now that we have seen the painful truth that the oceans that separate us no longer provide us the protection they once did, we all must be mindful of the actions we take in building up tyrants who may one day grow to hurt us."<sup>60</sup> Ros-Lehtinen blamed the administration for not properly implementing ILSA, and thus weakening the sanctions regime and providing money for the Tehran government.

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<sup>58</sup>U.S. House of Representatives, *Enforcement of the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act and Increasing Security Threats from Iran*. Hearing Before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia of the Committee on International Relations, One Hundred Eighth Congress, First Session. June 25, 2003. p.5

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, p.9.

The congresswoman was not alone in her thinking that the Executive Branch had been falling short of its duty to execute ILSA. Representative Shelley Berkley (D, NV) also directed a question about how the administration was implementing ILSA, to which Bolton replied that there was less investment in Iran because of ILSA. Berkley also inquired what the Bush Administration was doing to bring the Iranian issue before the UN Security Council, since Russia, Japan and France were under as much of a threat as the US if Iran were to develop nuclear weapons. To this question, Bolton responded that the American government had not been able to persuade these countries.<sup>61</sup>

Congressman Sherman went even further by accusing the administration of attacking the wrong country:

Looking at the Middle East at the beginning of this year, we saw two threats to the security of Americans, Iraq and Iran. It is pretty clear that Iran was overwhelmingly the greater threat, far more advanced in its nuclear program, not suffering from the diplomatic infirmities of having invaded a country in the 1990s, and not subject to any international inspections it wasn't happy with and easily able to evade. Recent efforts to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq have shown that it was a distant competitor with Iran in terms of which country was most likely to develop weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, and have the capacity to smuggle them into American cities. It is odd that the Administration has sacrificed the lives of American servicemen and women to go after this distant competitor of Iran and yet when it comes to Iran we have not even used the economic tools. It is as if we are more willing to risk the lives of our servicemen and women than we are to inconvenience the corporate sector.<sup>62</sup>

The representatives cornered Bolton because the House had put the onus of assuring that the sanctions produced results on the shoulders of the administration. In the minds of the members, not only did the Bush administration fail to impose the sanctions effectively, but also they failed to convince other important actors like China and Russia to side with the US. The Congress made demands on the Executive Branch about the

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p.29-30.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p.37.

implementation of ILSA because of the waivers the executive granted and also because of the lack of tightened control regarding the sanctions. Even though the breadth of the sanctions and its limitations on international firms made it hard for the president to impose a comprehensive observance of the restrictions, the legislative still was able to use the holes in the implementation of the sanctions to target the administration, and thus exert power over foreign policy making. Luckily for the hard liners of the administration, the increasingly hawkish tone of the Congress made diplomacy a tough route to take, even if Powell was able to get his way. In this regard, the pressure coming from the legislative provided more ammunition to those who were not willing to further the cooperation between the US and Iran. The hawks of the administration were not hawkish enough for the Congress.

The Congress' frustration with the inefficacy of the sanctions only heightened as the next Congress took over. During the hearing of the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, the problems with the implementation of the sanctions by the US companies and the breaches that occurred were among the issues of concern. Two subcommittees came together to discuss the place of sanctions and the international financial system when encouraging change in proliferation and sponsoring terrorist organizations. Chairman Sherman placed Iran at the centre of his opening statement by demanding that no Iranian bank should be able to do business in the US.<sup>63</sup> Conversely, where Royce and Luis Gutierrez (D, IL) expressed similar viewpoints to those of Sherman, Ron Paul (R, TX) declared that he was opposed to further sanctions towards Iran because they paved the way to war: "This is the same pattern we saw in the run up to the war on Iraq. Congress passes legislation calling for regime change, sanctions are imposed, and eventually we are told that only an attack will solve the

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<sup>63</sup>U.S. House of Representatives, *Isolating Proliferators and Sponsors of Terror: The Use of Sanctions and the International Financial System to Change Regime Behavior*. Joint Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Subcommittee on Domestic and International Monetary Policy, Trade and Technology of the committee on Financial Services, One Hundred Tenth Congress. First Session. April 18, 2007. pp. 2-3.



problem. We should expect the same tragic results if we continue down this path. »<sup>64</sup>

Furthermore, Paul continued, sanctions never worked to topple hostile regimes as could be seen in the examples of Cuba, China or Iraq. On the contrary, sanctions led to anti-Americanism, which in turn was used by the very same regimes as a unifying force. Paul argued that free and open trade contributed more to the liberalization of countries than economic sanctions. Paul also reminded the subcommittee that Iran had not been found in violation of the NPT, and the intelligence that came from MEK was not reliable since this organization itself was on the State Department's terrorist list.<sup>65</sup> In this line, Paul rhetorically asked Szubin<sup>66</sup> from the US Department of Treasury if harming the people, helping the regime to solidify and hurting American businesses were seen as acceptable costs. Szubin, in return, argued that those were the points of consideration when the administration tried to apply the sanctions in a smart and effective way. He gave the example of Bank Sepah, which was one of the largest Iranian banks, and how it faced a global ban, which resulted in discomfort for the Iranian regime.<sup>67</sup> Paul's voice would always remain in absolute minority in regards to the abolition of the sanctions regime. An Iran armed with nuclear weapons was too formidable to be left alone. Gone were the isolationist days of pre-World War II; it was a world of the Cold War and September 11, where if the US wanted peace at home, the US had to risk intervening abroad politically, militarily and financially. Where Paul's views would not be perceived as extreme sixty years ago, in the congresses of the twenty-first century, they were shared by very few. Needless to say, the Congress was not swayed by Paul's arguments and remained faithful to the sanctions.

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p.13.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., pp.13-14.

<sup>66</sup>Adam J. Szubin, Director of the Office of Foreign Assets Control, U.S. Department of State

<sup>67</sup>Isolating Proliferators and Sponsors of Terror, pp.42-43.

Not only did they continue to endorse sanctions, the Congress grew more restless and confrontational as the years went by and Iran did not become another Libya. The suggestion of coercive diplomacy found its way through the halls of the House to give more teeth to sanctions and demonstrate that the US was willing to take action if Iran did not take a step back. The Subcommittees on the Middle East and on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade held a joint hearing on “U.S. Policy Option to Prevent a Nuclear Iran” in April 2008 to remind the Tehran government that the US Congress was behind coercive diplomacy and that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq did not necessarily keep Iran safe. Chairman Ackerman opened the hearing by arguing that the benefits of acquiring nuclear weapons overpowered the costs, which did not go beyond harmless sanctions and diplomacy lectures. Ackerman inquired what the US should do during the present and when Iran got the atomic bomb in the future. He argued that the “toothless diplomacy” that had been pursued was not moving the US away from war; on the contrary, its fruitless efforts were bringing confrontation closer: “I am not calling for another war. I want to prevent one. But we may have to go right up to the very brink if we are going to be considered serious and credible when we call an Iranian nuclear weapon unacceptable.”<sup>68</sup> The representatives grew more impatient with the lack of results concerning Iran. Even though their viewpoint concerning Iran did not change over the years, in many cases, the rhetoric became stronger, such as likening Ahmadinejad to Hitler, or suggesting going to the brink of a war.

Since Iran never became an immediate threat during the Bush presidency, the Congress was able to impact the foreign policy with that country more so than Iraq or Afghanistan. ILSA was the most prominent tool the Congress used to pressure the White

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<sup>68</sup>U.S. House of Representatives, *Between Feckless and Reckless: U.S. Policy Options to Prevent a Nuclear Iran*. Joint Hearing Before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia and the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, One Hundred Tenth Congress. Second Session. April 17, 2008. pp. 7-9.

House and convey the position of the House and the Senate to the Iranian government. Before 9/11, the representatives and senators made it clear that they were not willing to lighten the sanctions by renewing ILSA every two years instead of five. This sent the message that the new administration should not hope to get the Congress' approval without seeing any improvement on the Iranian side. The Bush administration, thus, knew from the start that whatever policy they had in mind had to be conducted within the framework of ILSA. The hopeful first months of the Bush administration were replaced by a post-9/11 world where the Congress saw terrorists with nuclear weapons when they looked at the Islamic Republic. Therefore, implementation of sanctions became more important. The Congress, time after time, pressured the administration to impose the sanctions more fully and get China and Russia on board. As Iran remained defiant of international sanctions in addition to ILSA, the Congress started to hint at using coercive diplomacy in addition to sanctions in order to demonstrate that the US still had the claws to teach Iran a lesson. The frustration of the representatives could be read in their speeches and questions during the hearings. As sanctions failed to bear any fruit, the Congress became more aggressive in rhetoric giving the administration the opportunity to say that all options were on the table.

### **PROLIFERATION SECURITY INITIATIVE**

The Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) was introduced by President Bush in 2003 in order to curtail the efforts of the countries or organizations that desired to acquire nuclear weapons. The PSI was a multinational initiative, which aimed to interdict cargoes related to WMDs, whether on the land, in the air or at sea.<sup>69</sup> The initiative was limited because the US did not have any authority to intercept vessels in international waters.

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<sup>69</sup>U.S. Department of State, *The Proliferation Security Initiative*, retrieved on 10 December 2008, <<http://www.state.gov/t/isn/rls/fs/105217.htm>>

Action could be taken only if the vessel entered the waters or air space of one of the countries that was part to the agreement. However, PSI was still able to create a loose international coalition that, to some extent, provided a *de facto* legitimacy to interception in international waters.

An early assessment of the PSI was made in June 2005 by the subcommittee. Congressman Sherman's words gave a clue about the advantages of the PSI even though it was not legally binding:

Absent a handful of universally recognized scourges, such as slave trading and piracy, there is virtually no legal authority for the United States or any other power to hail over and board an international ship outside its own territorial waters. So even if we know a ship cruising in international waters is carrying centrifuges destined for Iran, unless we have an agreement with the flag country or unless that ship enters a friendly state's territorial waters and that country grants us the right to board, we do not have the legal authority to board that ship. I might point out that given a choice between letting the centrifuge get to Iran or get to North Korea, on the one hand, and boarding the ship without legal authority, on the other, I would certainly advise the second course. But it is always nice to have legal authority, and it is nice to have diplomats around the world getting us that authority.<sup>70</sup>

The congressional support for the PSI was significant, especially because this support came from both the Republicans and the Democrats despite the legal problems that accompanied the initiative. The support demonstrated that the Congress was willing to bend the rules and not necessarily demand indelible legitimacy when it came to a major national security issue. Both the House and the Senate approved the initiative, even though it was ambiguous how the White House would be able to track the success of the programme or the compliance of the signature countries. The eagerness of the congressmen was yet another indication of how hawkish the House and the Senate had become in the wake of 9/11 in regards to proliferation. Thus, this endorsement again sent the message that the

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<sup>70</sup>U.S. House of Representatives, *Proliferation Security Initiative: An Early Assessment*. Hearing Before the Subcommittee on International Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Human Rights of the Committee on International Relations, One Hundred Ninth Congress, First Session. June 9, 2005. p. 7.

Congress' policy towards Iran would remain in the realm of coercion through sanctions, and in this incidence through military involvement in international waters. The Bush administration had to fully implement sanctions in the previous years, but a concrete step like intercepting vessels in high seas would be welcome if it meant curbing Iranian or North Korean nuclear activities.

### **SUPPORTING THE DISSIDENTS**

Even though the main policy of the US Congress towards Iran was imposing economic sanctions, other policies found their way to the halls of Capitol Hill. One of the major ideas was to support the dissident groups in Iran and appeal to the Iranian people. The vocalization of this support and passing legislation to stand behind it financially were major policy decisions for the Congress. Not only was it a clear foreign policy move by-passing the executive branch, but also it severely limited the credibility of those in the administration who declared that the US was not after regime change in Iran. For instance, Ros-Lehtinen stated that there were many, in the US and in the world, who stood behind the opposition movement in Iran, and she added: "I hope that we give them the support that they need and no longer consider them part of the terrorist organizations. They are the freedom fighters."<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, Royce elaborated on the issue by pointing out that the Iranian people were not the enemies of the US and therefore they should be supported and reached through public diplomacy and through Radio Farda.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, Royce mentioned the importance of public diplomacy, because the US should reach out to the Iranian people to communicate that the policies of the Iranian regime were to blame for their current

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p.27.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p.14.

situation and the US was solely against the government, not the people of Iran who were also suffering under this regime.<sup>73</sup>

The words of the representatives were also made into a concrete policy through the passage of “Iran Freedom and Support Act”. Following the hearing where victims of terrorism testified, in April 2005, the Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia voted for a mark-up that aimed to hold the Iranian regime accountable for hindering the transition to democracy in that country. The bill was introduced by Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen and was referred to the committee on International Relations. The bill H.R. 282 was cited as the “Iran Freedom Support Act.” After laying out the details of the ILSA, and the codification of the existing sanctions, the bill authorized the President to provide financial and political assistance to those who promoted democracy in Iran.<sup>74</sup> She expressed the bipartisan embrace of the bill: “Mr. Ackerman and I are pleased to announce that our bill, H.R. 282, enjoys the support of over 140 bipartisan co-sponsors, including a significant majority of Members of our International Relations Committee and virtually all of our Subcommittee membership.”<sup>75</sup> Ros-Lehtinen and Ackerman introduced amendments to the bill, which encouraged the solution of pending investigations under ILSA and also the sanctions were amended to include the foreign subsidiaries of US Companies. Furthermore, the amendments urged diplomatic efforts, which included a UN Security Council resolution for inspection in Iran in order to abate Iran's activities in terrorism and nuclear proliferation. The amendments were adopted by unanimous vote in the subcommittee.<sup>76</sup> Not only did the Iranian Freedom and Support Act bring the imposition

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<sup>73</sup>U.S. House of Representatives, *Iranian Nuclear Crisis: Latest Developments and Next Steps*. Joint Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade and the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, One Hundred Tenth Congress. First Session. March 15, 2007. pp. 5-7.

<sup>74</sup>U.S. House of Representatives, *Holding the Current Regime in Iran Accountable for Its Threatening Behavior and Supporting a Transition to Democracy in Iran*. Markup Before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia, One Hundred Ninth Congress, First Session. April 13, 2005. p. 16.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, p.27.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, p.26-37.

of the sanctions to another level, but also it directed the US president to spend the appropriated funds to support the groups that opposed the Iranian government.

Two conclusions could be drawn from the passage of this bill. First, it was a clear indication that the Congress ultimately supported regime change in Iran. As it was mentioned before, for the representatives, the problem between the two countries did not rise from who was in power in Tehran, but from the Islamic Republic itself who declared the US its archenemy from the beginning. For a permanent improvement of relations and human rights issues in Iran, the Islamic Republic should be replaced by democracy. How this could be accomplished points to the second conclusion: the Congress was more in favour of igniting the regime change from within rather than a military operation. Even though many members declared that Bush had picked the wrong country to attack in 2003, US military involvement remained the last resort in the minds of the representatives. Bipartisan embrace of the bill emphasized both of these points and sent a clear message to the administration and the Iranian government. However, the Congress again failed to understand the inner dynamics of Iran. Receiving –even the suspicion of receiving- any money from the Great Satan would undermine the cause of any movement in Iran. It would give a reason to the government to crack down on the opposition movement. Also, it would create the alienation of any dissident who received money from the US, because not supporting the regime did not necessarily correspond with supporting the US.

In terms of implication, the passage of this act severely limited the hand of the Bush administration. As long as one of the branches of the American government was so adamantly determined to topple the regime in Tehran, the efforts, gestures and promises that came from the White House or the State Department did not carry much weight. It seemed that the Bush administration did not have the authority to relieve the sanctions or open diplomacy with Iran, even if Tehran was willing. The Iran Freedom and Support Act

once more confirmed that the hawkish steps of the administration would be applauded and the dovish steps would be undermined. Furthermore, the passage of the act was a direct foreign policy move that put the Iranian government once again in the defensive stance. Threatening gestures encourage the other party to self-preserve. If all within the US government were after toppling the Islamic regime, the last thing the mullah would want to do would be giving up their only bargaining tool and maybe the last defence against the might of the US. Therefore, the act most likely played into the hands of those who supported developments of nuclear weapons in the Iranian government, making moderates look foolish.

## ENGAGEMENT

Among the hawkish speeches and policies of the Congress, there were those who advocated the opening of negotiations and direct engagement with the Iranian government. However, for the majority of the Congress members, engagement would only reward the Tehran government and would send the message that the US could be bent if one resisted the pressure long enough. Wexler recalled that, six to seven weeks following the invasion of Iraq, Tehran communicated with Secretary of State Powell, offering to discuss their nuclear program and support for terrorism. The congressman added:

Vice President Cheney crunched up the offer after it was authenticated by our State Department as being deemed approved by the highest authorities in Iran, and he chucked up that offer, threw it in the wastepaper basket and said, “our policy is regime change and regime change only.” So now Secretary of State Rice, with all due respect, hides behind a policy that failed 7 weeks after the Iraq War. We blew an opportunity then. And now we find ourselves with an Iran on the brink of becoming a nuclear power. And yet we continue the same policy.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid., pp.55-56.



Senator Arlen Specter (R, PA) also defended a policy of negotiations because “if you can talk to Gaddafi and you can make a deal with Gaddafi, you can make a deal, I think, with anyone.”<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, Specter drew a parallel between Ronald Reagan's “Evil Empire” rhetoric and George W. Bush's “Axis of Evil” rhetoric, concluding that Reagan's foreign policy would be an appropriate role model for the administration. Another observation he made was that offering negotiations with preconditions that are objects of the negotiations did not mean opening the diplomatic route, or that it was “insulting”.<sup>79</sup> Senator Dianne Feinstein (D, CA) was another voice that was in favour of opening direct negotiations, especially in light of the latest National Intelligence Estimate of the U.S intelligence community, which argued that Iran halted its weaponization efforts in 2003. She argued that, like North Korea, Iran had been isolated from the international community and it could result in dangerous consequences, as had happened in North Korea, and as was starting to happen in Iran.<sup>80</sup>

Moreover, in July 2008, a year after this hearing, Senator Joseph Biden's (D, DE) opening statement contained more criticism of the administration, blaming its policies for Iran's stronger position in the Middle East. He argued for a direct engagement with Iran in addition to the P5+1 incentives: “I believe that now is the time for aggressive diplomacy with Iran, including direct U.S. engagement. There is still a realistic chance, but not a guarantee, that the world can change Iran's behavior. And if we go the extra diplomatic mile, the world is much more likely to stand with us if diplomacy fails.”<sup>81</sup> Senator Lugar's testimony leaned more towards the advancement of the international effort, while

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<sup>78</sup>United States Senate, *Addressing Iran's Nuclear Ambitions*. Hearing before the Federal Financial Management, Government Information, Federal Services, and International Security Subcommittee, One Hundred Tenth Congress, Second Session, 24 April 2008. p. 7.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p.8.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., pp.10-11.

<sup>81</sup>JR Biden, Opening Statement. Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, One Hundred Tenth Congress, Second Session, 9 July 2008. p. 3.

furthering the cause of one-to-one diplomacy between the two governments.<sup>82</sup> Undersecretary Burns outlined the route taken by the Bush administration confronting the Iranian nuclear program. Burns underlined that the aim of the administration was a behaviour change in Iranian leadership, and was ready for engagement at any level of the government if Tehran accepted.

The advocates of engagement could be found both in the House and the Senate. The rejection of the Grand Bargain offer was mentioned to criticize the vice president and his lack of vision concerning Iran. Then Rice's policies were criticized by being likened to those of Cheney's in the aftermath of the Iraq invasion. For some of the Congress members, the administration had done everything but trying to directly talk to the Tehran administration. However, unlike the Iran Freedom and Support Act, those who argued for engagement were predominantly from the Democratic Party, and when the suggestion was raised, Republicans remained on the opposing side, in addition to other members of the Democratic Party. The strong Republican opposition supported by many Democrats was one of the significant reasons the option of engagement was never seriously considered as a policy option. Another reason was that engagement suggested that the Tehran administration was a rational actor and that the Islamic regime could be reasoned with, but, as demonstrated before, the majority of the members believed that the core of the problems was the regime itself, who could be not be swayed as rational actors would. A policy of engagement would negate all the Congress had done in the past decades and embolden the Iranian government to defy the US and the West even more. The Congress' stance on engagement overall was much less compromising than the administration. The doves of the Congress found that they were in the minority. Thus, the sanctions regime and the support of dissidents prevailed in the halls of the Capitol.

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<sup>82</sup>RG Opening Statement. Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, One Hundred Tenth Congress, Second Session, 9 July 2008. p. 1.

## CONCLUSIONS

The impact of the Congress on foreign policy has been seen as an ambiguous subject, since it is difficult to measure or analyse the degree of this impact. Since the president enjoyed more versatility to form foreign policy because of his role as the commander-in-chief and his freedom to move faster because of not being bogged down with long hearings and voting procedures, the role of the Congress in this process had been often overlooked. However, even though the executive office remained the most important actor in foreign affairs, still the House and the Senate could influence the direction of policy in several different ways, even if this influence cannot be classified as assertive in the sense that the Congress did not alter the policy formation single-handedly. This chapter scrutinized four congresses during the presidency of George W. Bush. The following analysis will deal with this specific time period even though historical parallels can be observed.

*The question of impact on the executive policy-making* -- The main inquiry of this chapter has been how the US Congress perceived the Islamic Republic of Iran and what the Congress did to adjust Iran's behaviour. First of all, the Constitution of the United States bestowed on the Congress the power to regulate foreign trade, which came to the forefront in the case of economic sanctions. Sanctions were not merely a method to dissuade foreign governments or organizations, but also they expressed how the Congress perceived that certain entity. The United States employed a sanctions policy towards many countries including the United Kingdom, Russia, and China starting in the nineteenth century. Currently, the Department of Treasury lists the Balkan countries, Belarus, Burma, Cuba, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, North Korea, Somalia, Sudan,

Syria, and Zimbabwe as being under financial sanctions.<sup>83</sup> Even though the extent of the sanctions in case of each country varies, it is clear that the United States government, specifically the Congress, sees limiting financial accessibility to assets of the strongest economy in the world as a foreign policy tool. Even though there are very few cases in which economic sanctions could be considered successful<sup>84</sup>, the widespread use of sanctions continues. This could be attributed to two reasons. Firstly, the imposition of sanctions demonstrated domestically and internationally that the US government was willing to lose business in order to achieve political goals such as curbing terrorism, improving human rights or undermining a hostile government. Secondly, sanctions provided a course of action when other more direct options, like military intervention or invasion, were not possible. Rather than being perceived as doing nothing, the government opted to continue to impose sanctions regardless of its efficiency.

These motivations could be observed in the case of Iran as well. The sanctions policy had not born any fruits as of 2012, and the Iranian nuclear programme advanced despite the thirty-year span of strict economic isolation. As stated above, the long history of sanctions, their impositions and repeated extensions demonstrated that the Congress was willing to make economic sacrifices in order to reach political ends. The Congress continuously renewed the sanctions through different presidencies to show that the House and the Senate were not willing to condone the actions or the nature of the Iranian government. Though the Iranian government did not budge under the pressure of the US economic sanctions, and even the international sanctions, the Congress was not willing to stop giving the message that the United States was not prepared to tolerate a nuclear Iran. This message was not only intended for Iran, but for other potential proliferators.

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<sup>83</sup> Department of Treasury, Sanctions Programs, retrieved 29 November 2010, <http://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Pages/Programs.aspx>

<sup>84</sup> Elliot and Hufbauer examines over 170 cases of sanctions in their book *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered*, 2009, and found that the sanctions achieved their goals only in a quarter of the cases.

Furthermore, the hearings of these four congresses demonstrated the lack of an alternative policy. If the sanctions policy were abandoned, what would replace it? Wouldn't that only mean that the Iranian persistence won and the road was open for another nuclear power?

Although the Executive Branch had the authority to issue waivers on a case-by-case basis, the continual existence of the sanctions regime gave Congress leverage and a reference point for the White House in its foreign policy towards Iran. Implementing a continuing set of sanctions is the most important contribution of the Congress to the foreign policy making. The implementation of ILSA, then ISA, tied the hands of the Executive Branch in terms of being able to form a flexible foreign policy. To illustrate, when the Bush administration asked for a two-year extension in 2001, the House and the Senate refused and gave the regular five-year extension. Furthermore, the Congress was able to pressure the administration regarding the proper imposition of the sanctions, arguing that the administration fell short of cracking down on the businesses that functioned in Iran, and thus indirectly empowered the Iranian government. Therefore, with the Congress strictly set on a sanctions policy rather than diplomacy and negotiations, it is questionable how much freedom the Bush administration had to break from the Legislative Branch and pursue a different route, if it chose to do so.

On a more practical note, the Congress refused to give the two-year extension for the ILSA when asked by the White House. This forced the White House to formulate policies that would account for a sanctions regime that would last another five years. Furthermore, Congress members repetitively criticized the Bush administration for granting waivers that undermined the sanctions regime. Even though the president had the power to use executive orders to free companies from restrictions under ILSA, the Congress kept a close watch on how these waivers were used. Instances like criticizing the State Department for allowing President Khatami in the United States also sent a message

that the Executive was not completely free to conduct a foreign policy without the approval of the Congress.

The Congress sent the clear message that the Bush administration would not find a complying Congress if there was going to be engagement between the US and Iran. As Lindsay argued, the Bush administration knew where the Congress stood on the issue and anticipated a resistance from the lawmakers. This, in turn, made them realize that the game of diplomacy should be played carefully in order to incite congressional disapproval. Secretary Rice had to deal with congressional resistance more than Secretary Powell because Powell had sufficient opposition to halt his efforts within the administration. Whereas, Rice had to continuously make it clear that the US' stance concerning Iran had not changed and that the administration was working with its allies. The Congress made the administration tread carefully, especially when Rice wanted a more positive approach towards Iran. It was clear that the Congress would oppose unconditional engagement with Iran; therefore the route of Nixon-China was closed for the administration.

With regard to how the Congress pressured or approved the Executive Branch, even though the precise impact could not be measured, several points are worth mentioning. From the beginning, the House wanted to reiterate that they were still concerned about the situation in Iran and would remain committed to finding a solution. The pressure was to keep the White House accountable in its endeavours towards Iran. The representatives and the senators kept building a bridge between the Iranian nuclear programme and its ties with terrorist organizations, causing another pressure point by refreshing the importance of the issue. Another set of stressing remarks was made concerning the NPT regime. With extensive hearings about the shortcomings of the current non-proliferation regime, the Congress demonstrated their displeasure and desire to improve the situation by remedying the problems with Iran and, thereby, preventing further proliferation efforts.

Finally, the fact that most of these hearings were public and the perspectives expressed largely bipartisan in both of the houses was significant in communicating a signal of solidarity, which let the world know that the Congress was behind the president. At the same time, public discussions about funding separatist groups in Iran or getting help from MEK might have had implications on how the Executive could conduct diplomacy if the diplomatic route were to open between the two governments. Despite the discussions about other options, the fact that both houses remained loyal to the imposition of sanctions, not favouring --at least publicly-- a military option, even becoming sympathetic to negotiations, provided a limited framework for the Bush administration to conduct foreign policy by clearly identifying the boundaries the administration could not cross. Moreover, the congressional support for the PSI granted legitimacy to Bush's efforts. Also, the Iran Freedom and Democracy Support Act encouraged the president to take steps towards supporting the Iranian dissident groups.

*The question of accessibility* – Another noteworthy point was the accessibility of the congressional hearings. Unlike the times when the Congress' voice was not heard by foreign governments, the advance of technology and the Internet has made it possible for anyone to find out what the Congress is discussing, as long as it is not a closed session. This causes Congress to have more impact on foreign policy independent from the White House. For instance, in 2007, Representative Tancredo asked if MEK could be used to realize American goals in Iran.<sup>85</sup> MEK was in the State Department's list of terrorist organizations, and was opposed by the Iranian people because of its ties with the Saddam Regime. However, Tancredo's words about using this organization implicitly or explicitly

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<sup>85</sup>U.S. House of Representatives, *Iranian Nuclear Crisis: Latest Developments and Next Steps*. Joint Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade and the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, One Hundred Tenth Congress. First Session. March 15, 2007. P.68

had the potential to create distrust among the Iranian officials against the American government:

Maybe we can't talk about it in this kind of a setting. That is one thing that is possible. I mean, there are certainly covert operations that may have to be undertaken, and that we can't discuss. But I am just thinking that if they despise them as much as they do, if they fear them as much as they do, if the Mullahs fear the MEK as much as they appear to, there is something there we should be able to take advantage of. I am just hoping.<sup>86</sup>

Therefore, it could be argued that, looking from the outside, the views expressed within the Congress shed light on how different branches of government perceived a certain country. The propositions and leanings of the representatives and the senators would form its own tangent in terms of foreign policy by either moving away from the policy of the executive branch or by undermining it. It creates a possibility that the outside observer, in this case the Iranian government, could perceive a duality within the government and not trust the promises or advances of the White House. These remarks and the fact that they were publicly available muddled the waters and sent mixed messages to the Iranian government.

On the other hand, congressional support gave the Executive branch legitimacy. In contrast to the previous point, when the Congress backs the White House on a policy matter, it makes the policy domestically and internationally sustainable. Without congressional support, any crucial foreign policy decision would eventually fade. For instance, support of the PSI was significant because, even though the implications of this initiative were not entirely legal in terms of international law, the Bush administration gained legitimacy by being backed by the Legislative branch.

It was very unlikely that, if there were a military attack planned by the Pentagon and the White House, Capitol Hill would be consulted prior to the operations. However, this did not mean that the administration did not stay tuned to the congressional

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<sup>86</sup>Iranian Nuclear Crisis: Latest Developments and Next Steps, p. 68.



inclinations for such an option, especially considering that in private settings and closed sessions that option has most likely been thoroughly examined. The Senate committees held several closed session meetings about Iran and nuclear proliferation during these eight years. Not knowing for certain what was discussed in these sessions, it could be speculated that the Senate was informed on the more confidential aspects of the foreign policy as well as the intelligence, and was given the opportunity to support or object to a military operation. Unlike during the Cold War, when the President was looked to for making decisions regarding crisis situations and the Congress followed his lead in order to fight the advance of Communism, the post Cold War period resulted in a more demanding and attentive Congress that was willing to challenge the commander-in-chief. For instance, President Reagan had to reach a compromise with the Congress in order to authorize participation in the Multinational Force in Lebanon in 1988, or the dispute between the Congress and the president when Clinton authorized deployment of American troops in the Bosnian conflict in 1996. This wind of change that started after the Vietnam War, and gained even more strength after the collapse of the Soviet Union, made the presidents more attentive to the opinions of the Congress members. Since the unclassified hearings of the House and the Senate did not lean towards a military intervention in Iran, it could be argued that the presidency was aware of this possible obstacle if they were to undertake such an action. Therefore, the lack of congressional support, especially with American involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq, demonstrated to the administration how far they could go, thus once again providing a clear foreign policy framework.

*The question of the influence of individuals* – Both in the House and the Senate, during this period of eight years, the names of the people who were involved in foreign policy underwent very little change. This continuity meant that these politicians were not under the threat of losing their seats because of their involvement or views in foreign affairs. Congressional elections in the United States revolve around domestic concerns

such as economy, unemployment and education. Since every representative and senator is accountable to a certain electoral district, the concerns of the constituency affect the Congress more than it affects the presidency. Owen Abbe lists education, social security, health care, the economy, moral and ethical standards and taxes among the top elector concerns.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, James Lindsay argues that “on most foreign policy issues voters know or care little about specific policy choices. Thereby giving members considerable freedom to vote their consciences.”<sup>88</sup>

There are several consequences of voter disinterest in foreign policy. First of all, the congressmen do not have to adjust their foreign policy decisions or leanings according to the tides of public approval or disapproval. This leaves them free to conduct policy regarding international affairs without fear of voter backlash. Secondly, the representatives and the senators are left to pick their positions on a more personal basis, which results in a consistent and more passionate approach to different foreign policy matters. Lastly, party differences are not as strong in foreign policy issues as they are in domestic issues, such as taxes and education. In regards to Iran, Congresses since the Carter administration voted for the renewal of economic sanctions, and condemned the Iranian government for its nuclear programme, human rights abuses and support of terrorism. This consistency could be partly attributed to the fact that these congresses remained bipartisan concerning Iran despite the fluctuations of party affiliations of the congressional seats. This case was also true concerning the congresses that functioned during the presidency of George W. Bush. The four congresses examined in this chapter did not follow or suggest different policies regarding Iran, even though the number of seats the two parties occupied changed from

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<sup>87</sup> Owen G. Abbe, Jay Goodliffe, Paul S. Herrnson, Kelly D. Patterson, “Agenda Setting in Congressional Elections: The impact of Issues and Campaigns on Voting Behaviour,” *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No.4 (Dec., 2003). Pp. 419-430. p. 422.

<sup>88</sup> JM Lindsay, *Congress and the Politics of US Foreign Policy*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994. p.4.

election to election. The House and the Senate mostly remained united in their opposition to the policies of the Iranian government and in their loyalty to the sanctions policy.

Furthermore, the profile of the politicians in the Congress was not as fluctuating as one would assume because of frequent elections. The ranking members of the committees that dealt with foreign policy matters remained as incumbent politicians not only through the Bush administration, but going back to the 1980s, when Iran started to occupy the minds of the politicians as a foreign policy matter. This consistency had three implications: First of all, the fact that main influential figures remained the same resulted in the continuity of the general direction and perspective. The foreign policy objectives of the House and the Senate did not undergo a dramatic change after every congressional election because of leadership change. Secondly, since these individuals had to work together in relatively small committees for long periods of time without their constituencies pressing them about foreign policy issues, there was more opportunity for bipartisanship. Lastly, the presidency could not count on persistent senators or representatives to be removed from the office after the elections. Therefore, the consistency in the member names created a constant pressure point for the Executive.

At this point, a few names could be mentioned. One of the most verbal representatives in the Committee on Foreign Affairs was Representative Brad Sherman from California, who assumed office in 1997 in the ranks of the Democratic Party. Sherman has been an avid supporter of strong US-Israel relations, and his views on Iran also fell under this category. He argued:

Iran's nuclear weapons program is the single greatest threat not only to Israel, but also to U.S. national security and our wider interests today. A nuclear Iran will cause several countries in the Middle East to follow suit. If Iran is allowed to develop nuclear weapons, the global nonproliferation regime will effectively be dead.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>B Sherman, Campaign Site, retrieved December 13, 2010, <http://bradsherman.com/israel.html>

Sherman maintained his position through the years of the Bush administration by being a strong supporter of Iran's economic isolation. The Congressmen expressed time and time again that if economic sanctions were strong enough the Tehran government would take a step back.

Another important figure from the Democratic Party in the Committee on Foreign Affairs was Gary Ackerman, who was elected into the office in 1983 from New York. Throughout the Bush administration, and continuing into the present during the Obama Administration, Ackerman has expressed his strong disapproval for the Iranian nuclear programme and called for political, diplomatic, cultural and military pressure, in addition to economic sanctions, in order to either alter Iran's policies or undermine the Iranian government.

Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen from the Republican Party shared the views of Sherman and Ackerman. Ros-Lehtinen, who assumed office in 1989, was one of the key players in the House concerning Iran. Not only did Ros-Lehtinen support strong U.S.-Israel relations, but also she consistently called for tougher sanctions for "rogue regimes", especially Iran and North Korea. During the Bush administration, she frequently spoke against the Iranian nuclear programme and the human rights abuses.

There were two dominant voices in the Senate: Biden and Lugar. Senator Biden assumed office from Delaware in 1973 from the Democratic Party, and remained in office until he became the vice president under President Obama. In regards to Iran, Biden called for comprehensive economic sanctions along with the United Nations, but he remained open to diplomacy in order to break the stalemate. Even though Biden applauded the Bush administration for its efforts in appealing to the United Nations and in joining the European countries for incentive packages, he also criticized the administration for not taking steps towards diplomacy. He was adamantly against any military confrontation with Iran. Biden voted against a bill that would classify the Iranian Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist

organization and threatened the Bush administration with starting the impeachment process if a war were started with Iran without congressional approval.<sup>90</sup> It is important to note that Senator Biden inclined more towards a diplomatic solution and direct talks with Iran as the 2008 presidential elections approached.

Richard Lugar was elected as a Republican Senator from Indiana in 1977. Since then, he has been an active and outspoken chairman and member of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. One of the areas he was involved in was counter-proliferation, which resulted in the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program that deactivated more than 7500 nuclear warheads in former Soviet countries. Therefore, it was not surprising that Lugar was also interested in proliferation efforts. Lugar held that WMDs were the biggest national security challenge. In regards to Iran, Lugar argued that a nuclear Iran was perilous because of the nature of its government and its ties with terrorism, and against this threat, the international community had failed to act in a united way. Lugar suggested that the best policy option would be to pressure the Iranian government and reach out to the Iranian people.

Under the leadership of names like Sherman, Ackerman, Ros-Lehtinen, Biden, Lugar and others, the Congress was able to present a more unified front from which the Executive could not hope to manoeuvre away at the end of their relatively short term. Even though there were disagreements concerning the method, the congress members never wavered from their position that Iran could not be allowed nuclear weapons. This continuity in the individuals' names and their opinions provided a constant pressure point for the administration in the sense that the Bush administration had to pay attention to the congressional leanings if there were to be a policy change. Also, these names gave the Executive branch a basis for consultation if a reason to do so occurred.

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<sup>90</sup>J Biden, 'Meeting the Iranian Challenge', The Huffington Post, December 13, 2007, retrieved 13 December <2010 [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joe-biden/meeting-the-iranian-chall\\_b\\_75628.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joe-biden/meeting-the-iranian-chall_b_75628.html)>

In this regard, the members of the House and the Senate were almost always on the same page. Since the Senate was more prone to holding closed meetings, there were fewer records available. However, public records suggest that both the Senate and the House refused to extend ILSA only for two years, both were in favour of continuation of the sanctions regime, both were critical of the administration when there was no progress, and both approved initiatives like PSI and the passage of the Iranian Freedom and Support Act. When it became clear that the sanctions were not producing the result the Congress hoped for, both argued that the administration failed to impose the sanctions to their full extent and also failed to get countries like China and Russia cooperate. The mention of Iraq being the wrong target was heard more often in the House than the Senate, and the administration was blamed for not having been able to accurately assess the danger Iran posed. On the other hand, the Senate was more open to the idea of engagement than the House, where engagement was seen as accepting defeat. Engagement was seen as an alternative to what Bush had been doing, especially coming from Senator Biden towards the end of the Bush presidency; it seems to have been more of an effort to distance himself from the administration rather than offering a real alternative.

In conclusion, the US Congress had significant impact on foreign policy making in regards to Iran. This impact not only stemmed from checking and pressuring the Bush administration, but also from remaining committed to the sanctions policy despite its ineffectiveness. The fact that Iran did not constitute a crisis situation, which would put the commander-in-chief in charge, but a strategic situation, where policy could be formed in a medium to long-term time frame, gave the Congress more say on how this foreign policy was shaped. This is an important point, as the Bush administration was not willing to share its power to make foreign policy with the Congress. In crisis situations like Afghanistan and Iraq, the White House and the Pentagon were less than eager to abide by the Congress' requests and were unwilling to share information. Ruth Marcus from the *Washington Post*

summarised this reluctance perfectly: “[The Bush administration] thinks of congressional oversight as if it were a trip to the dentist, to be undertaken reluctantly and gotten over with as quickly as possible. Most astonishingly, it reserves the right simply to ignore congressional dictates that it has decided to intrude too much on executive branch power.”<sup>91</sup> Therefore, the Congress’ influence on foreign policy concerning Iran during the Bush administration could not be generalized to other fields of foreign policy. As Mann and Ornstein suggested, in many other fields of foreign policy, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, the Congress took a step back and let the Executive deal with the wartime situations. Especially in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration enjoyed more power than its predecessors did for a long time. However, Iran never became a crisis situation and the Congress persistently continued its sanctions policy, resulting in a more assertive Congress compared to other areas of foreign policy.

This stance of the Congress had become predictable to the administration quite early in its term; the Legislative Branch was not ready for a breakthrough and, as Lindsay argued, the “anticipated reaction” of the Congress framed how far the administration could go in regards to Iran. When the State Department was ready to make overtures, it was essential that the move was justified and remained within the parameters of the sanctions regime. Lastly, one must return to Henehan’s conclusion that the Congress would settle into a more passive and consistent role after a policy decision was made concerning a critical issue. In terms of the Islamic Republic, the issue rose years before the Bush administration. The previous congresses settled into a sanctions policy, and every congress after that renewed the ILSA and continued this policy. This position prevailed even though there were heated arguments and doubts about the effectiveness of the sanctions regime and other options were presented. The policy was not working in the sense that it did not achieve the intended results, but, at the same time, Iran remained a low profile issue during

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<sup>91</sup>R Marcus, “Contempt for Congress”, *The Washington Post*, 25 January 2006.

the Bush administration because of the involvements in Afghanistan and Iraq. Because of this low profile continuity, the Congress did not feel the immediate need to alter its policy.



## **MOVING IDEAS INTO POLITICS:**

### **BEYOND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT**

“The American political system is the ideal environment for think tanks to inhabit. As organizations competing in the free and open marketplace of ideas, they have innumerable opportunities to share and discuss their ideas with the public, with the media, and with policy-makers.”

*Donald E. Abelson*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The practice of scholars aiding rulers is not unique to the twentieth century. In fact it is even older than Aristotle tutoring Alexander the Great or Thomas Hobbes instructing Charles II. However, as the world has gotten smaller throughout the centuries, the politics of international affairs has become more convoluted. The need for educated opinion increased as the complexity of foreign affairs started to overwhelm governments. Additionally, as the governments became more complicated, foreign policy became a concern for many, not only a few at the top. This is especially true in the United States where the Constitution gave the power to conduct foreign policy to the executive and the legislative branches. These multiple layers of official foreign policy making increased the need for and created the ambience for other actors, such as think tanks and lobbies.

There are several factors that make the American political environment more conducive to the growth and influence of these non-federal entities. First of all, in all avenues of politics, including foreign policy, think tanks have become the channel through which the vast

amount of information and data are digested and analysed for media and public consumption, causing these organizations to become the main contributors of public dialogue. Secondly, the United States enjoys a highly decentralized political structure, including a weak two party system. The adherents of either the Republican or the Democratic Party could be markedly varied in their opinions on any given subject. The members of the Congress often choose to conduct their own research and analysis rather than simply relying on what is provided through the party channels. This fragmentation provides the perfect opportunity for the think tanks to be able to participate in the debate and reach individual members of the Congress. Hence, the congressmen are able to acquire a pool of knowledge, information, data, analysis and suggestion from which they can form their own position regarding an issue. Thirdly, both in the executive and legislative branches, the policy makers have certain political leanings, which make certain think tanks and organizations more attractive than others. For instance, depending on how conservative or liberal a policy maker is, the choice of which reports are read and which organizations are favoured will change, fluctuating the level of influence of various think tanks and lobbies during different periods. Thus, the wide spectrum of think tanks, corresponding with the wide spectrum of political leanings, provides an advantageous atmosphere for think tanks to flourish. Fourthly, think tanks have become avenues for former and future government employees to remain in the network, allowing people and ideas to stay relevant while providing the policy makers a pool of potential personnel. Lastly, as technology has advanced not only do a large number of people have access to classified materials, the need for accurate and sound analysis has increased as well, not to mention the access to a number of policy options. The burden of making sense of all this input was shared with the think tanks, easing the load of the governmental bodies and providing them an array of analysis and policy options.

Therefore, the complex mechanism of foreign policy making does not only include governmental entities such as the presidency and the Congress, but also non-governmental organizations such as lobbies and think tanks. Even though the actual impact of these organizations may at times be minimal or, as it is in most cases, quite difficult to measure, at the very least these

entities contribute to the atmosphere in which policy-making takes place. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century unfolded, smaller actors realized that their voice could be louder than before. During the Cold War, foreign policy was conducted under the consensus of anti-communism and a constant threat of a hot war between the two super powers: “a layer of political leadership that in large measure agreed on the ends and means of US foreign policy, an attentive public that followed this leadership, and a mostly inert, mass public generally uninterested and uninvolved in foreign affairs, but nevertheless hostile to communism”<sup>1</sup> adeptly describes the environment at the time. However, as the decades of Cold War slowly reached an end and the government policies were strongly questioned during the Vietnam War, the influence of domestic actors increased. Just as the Congress had become more assertive after the Vietnam War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, lobbies and think tanks were able to find more ways to penetrate into the mechanism of foreign policy. Even though more often than not this penetration did not imply direct influence, the setting of the chessboard allowed for more input. For instance, James McGann gave six reasons for the growth of think tanks since the 1970s: “information revolution; end of government monopoly on information, complexity and technical nature of policy problems, size of government and crisis in confidence in government officials, globalization and the growth of state and non-state actors, need for timely and concise information and analysis in the right form at the right time.”<sup>2</sup> Considering their rise in significance, the inevitable question that surfaces at this juncture is just how much of a role the think tanks play in the actual policy making process.

The growth in the number of the think tanks during the last decades could be seen as an indication of their importance in policy making. While the directors of and major contributors to these think tanks would agree with this conclusion, however, they would at the same time accept that it would be very difficult to demonstrate the impact of a certain think tank on any given agenda, let alone foreign policy. This inherent ambiguity in measuring their influence has resulted

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<sup>1</sup>RA Melanson, *American Foreign Policy Since the Vietnam War: The Search for Consensus from Richard Nixon to George W Bush*, New York, M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2005 p. 37

<sup>2</sup>JG McGann, ‘ The Global Go-To Think Tanks: The Leading Public Policy Research Organizations in the World’, Think tanks and Civil Societies International Relations Programme, University of Pennsylvania, p. 11.

in a notably slight body of literature concerning the impact of think tanks on policy making. Donald Abelson pointed out that since the impact of a think tank would encompass the introduction of a new idea or policy direction to the executive or legislative bodies, it would be much harder to trace the origins of a new shift in policy: “Every successful policy idea, as many have claimed, has a hundred mothers and fathers; every bad policy is always an orphan.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, the major issue is the difficulty of how to “measure” policy influence. It could be measured through media appearances, testimonies given before the Congress, or the individuals who eventually work for the government, but all three options fall short of giving a definite answer to the real impact of an organization. However, at the same time all these tools shed some light on how much the ideas of any given think tank are spread in the policy-making circles. Because of these difficulties in measuring in a numerical sense their actual impact, it seems more appropriate to look at the relevance of think tanks in foreign policy rather than try –and fail – to quantify this influence. Therefore, instead of suggesting any direct or measurable influence, this chapter is an attempt to shed light on how the prominent think tanks of the country perceived Iran and what policy suggestions they proposed to better the US-Iran relations. As such, the political atmosphere in which the policy makers functioned will be illuminated, even if only dimly.

With respect to their impact on political atmosphere, Diane Stone argues that think tanks “move[d] ideas into politics.” By using prominent scholars, think tanks offered an array of policy ideas from which to choose for the policy makers. Furthermore, think tanks did more than other organizations to educate the public concerning policy matters. Stone concludes that think tanks played a role in the policy process: “In a world where knowledge, information and expertise is burgeoning, think tanks are an increasingly important mechanism for filtering and refining such resources in a relevant and usable manner.”<sup>4</sup> Kent Weaver and James McGann reached a similar conclusion, namely that one of the major roles of think tanks is to research and analyze viable policy options and advise the policy-makers. In addition to this, think tanks evaluate government

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<sup>3</sup>Donald E. Abelson, *Do Think-Tanks Matter? Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes*, Montreal: McGill University Press, 2002, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup>Diane Stone, *Capturing the Political Imagination: Think Tanks and the Policy Process*, London: Frank Cass, 1996, p.7

policies, provide a platform for the exchange of ideas, supply the government with personnel and interpret policies in the media.<sup>5</sup> Abelson argued that along with the weak party system, the highly decentralized political organization of the United States made the country more receptive to think tanks. In such an atmosphere, these institutions found that they could establish contact with the members of both parties and become especially influential during the turmoil of presidential elections and the aftermath. Therefore, Simon James' definition that think tanks have "atmospheric" influence has been the most viable and applicable term when discussing the policy impact of think tanks.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, Stone argues that:

By elaborating on policy options, increasing the number of alternatives and outlining possible problems, these policy research bodies potentially overload collective decision-making processes, disrupt established programs, undermine consensus and question the legitimacy of a government's chosen policy. They provided the rhetorical weapon for opposition groups. Identifying flaws in policies or promoting superior policy design does not endear these organizations to politicians or bureaucrats.<sup>7</sup>

Consequently, Stone concludes, "It cannot be denied that the impact of even the best known think-tanks on policy is modest. Policy-making is mainly driven by interests, not by ideas."<sup>8</sup> It would seem that such an argument by Stone undermines the possibility of think tanks having a level of influence that merits significant discussion or study. According to Stone's line of thinking, however, the influence of think tanks would not be direct, but indirect by providing policy avenues for the policy makers if needed, thus creating a market of ideas and options for political consumption. As a result, even embracing Stone's argument against the significant direct influence of think tanks, James' argument that think tanks formed an environment for the executive and the legislative to function in and as a result become an indirect part of the policy making process holds ground. Even Inderjeet Parmar in his Gramscian analysis concluded that these organizations played a crucial role in developing self-awareness and ideas that contributed to the intellectual

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<sup>5</sup>R. Kent Weaver and James G. McGann, "Think Tanks and Civil Societies in a Time of Change", in McGann and Weaver, *Think Tanks and Civil Societies*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000.

<sup>6</sup>S James, "Influencing Government Policy Making", in D. Stone ed., *Banking on Knowledge: The Genesis of the Global Development Network*, London: Routledge, 2000.

<sup>7</sup>D Stone, *Capturing the Political Imagination*, New York, Routledge, 1996, p.105.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

environment, as well as provided material for the political atmosphere.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, atmospheric influence is the general term that could be considered most appropriate for the role think tanks play in the policymaking process. In particular, they can achieve this goal through several different avenues. Abelson's list of public and private influence of think tanks provides a most useful guide in terms of deciphering the opinions of think tanks on any given subject:

**Public Influence:** Holding conference and forums to discuss domestic and foreign policy issues; encouraging the scholars to give public lectures; testifying before the Congress; media exposure; publishing opinion pieces; using the Internet and other media

**Private Influence:** Serving in the bureaucratic positions in the government; serving during the presidential elections; maintaining liaison offices in the House and the Senate; inviting policy makers to conferences; offering position to former policy-makers; preparing studies and policy briefs for policy makers; maintaining direct contact with policy makers.<sup>10</sup>

As this list indicates, the possible modes of influence are various and sundry, the very vastness of which suggests that impact is indeed accomplished at some, if not many, points of contact with the public and private spheres.

In regards to lobbies, some scholars argue that the end of the Cold War also marked the end of a singular national interest and resulted in more active ethnic communities. As David Paul and Rachel Paul stated: "The lack of a post-Cold War consensus and changes in the geopolitical environment created new opportunities for ethnic groups to affect the foreign policy-making process since there is no longer a singular "national interest" driving US policymaking."<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Michael Clough argued that as America became more and more diverse, there appeared an increase in individuals who emphasized their ethnic identity as a result of which different ethnic populations were able to make their voices heard.<sup>12</sup> On the issue of methods of impacting foreign policy, Thomas Ambrosio identified three such methods for ethnic lobbies to impact foreign policy:

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<sup>9</sup>I Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century: The Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations in the Rise of American Power*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2012. 'See also Steven Lukes, 'Power: A Radical View' (Basingstoke: Palgrave, second edition, 2005) for a classic discussion of the so-called 'third' dimension of power.

<sup>10</sup>DE Abelson, "Think Tanks in the United States", in Diane Stone et al. eds., *Think Tanks Across Nations*, New York: Manchester University Press, 1998.

<sup>11</sup>DM Paul and RA Paul, *Ethnic Lobbies and US Foreign Policy*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 2009, p.5.

<sup>12</sup>M Clough. 'Grass-Roots Policy Making', *Foreign Affairs*, jan/Feb94, Vol. 73 Issue 1, pp. 2-7.

framing, which is the attempt to lay an issue in the government's agenda; information and policy analysis; and policy oversight.<sup>13</sup>

In light of this emergence of lobby influence, this chapter is an attempt to illuminate the views of eleven notable organizations and the Israel lobby in regards to US foreign policy towards Iran during the presidency of George W. Bush, define the atmosphere think tanks created for the policy makers to function in, and analyze the role, if any, they played in the policy making process. The chapter will be divided between the scrutiny of prominent think tanks and the Israel lobby. Throughout this chapter, ten prominent think tanks will be scrutinized: the Brookings Institute, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the RAND Corporation, the Heritage Foundation, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the American Enterprise Institute, the CATO Institute, and the Hoover Institution. There are hundreds of think tanks operating in Washington D.C. and other parts of the country today. However, since the remit of studying all these think tanks are beyond the scope of this chapter, only these ten think tanks will be examined according to McGann's 2009 research on the most influential think tanks<sup>14</sup>. Only the top ten think tanks were chosen because the objective of the chapter is to determine what atmosphere the think tanks created for the policy makers concerning Iran, and this atmosphere would be dominated by the think tanks that have the biggest budget, most number of scholars and the easiest access to media. However, since Project for the New American Century hosted the major ideas of the Bush doctrine, this ad hoc organization will likewise be examined as a special case for influence beyond the federal government.

Subsequently, the Israeli lobby is chosen as subject matter because, throughout the Bush presidency, Israel as a country perceived Iran as a threat, and the Bush administration repeatedly affirmed the Israeli government that Israel was an indisputable US ally. This "special" relationship between the two countries has historical roots. In addition to this, the pro-Israel lobby

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<sup>13</sup>T Ambrosio, *Ethnic Identity Groups and U.S. Foreign Policy*, Praeger: Westport, 2002, p.2.

<sup>14</sup>McGann, op.cit.

in the United States had been advocating the importance of stern measures against Iran. The term “Israel lobby” or pro-Israel lobby is used to indicate the political agenda of furthering the cooperation between the US and Israel and encouraging the US foreign policy to accommodate the Israeli national security. Freedman defined the pro-Israel lobby as a group that “is composed of an assortment of advocacy groups, political action committees, think tanks, and media watchdog groups that seek to influence US government policy toward Israel in a direction that they believe is in Israel’s interests.”<sup>15</sup> Even though there are many smaller organizations that are considered part of the Israel lobby, such as CAMERA, Honest reporting and the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting, and Christian Zionists, the top three most notable and most influential organizations of the lobby will be examined in this chapter: AIPAC (The American Israel Public Affairs Committee), the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA) and the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP)<sup>16</sup>. These organizations are committed to the security of Israel and ongoing cooperation between the US and Israel, and actively work towards influencing American foreign policy towards this end using different means. Therefore, despite the fact that JINSA and WINEP are defined as think tanks, their history and political tendencies made it appropriate to classify them under the title of the Israel lobby. These think tanks enjoyed a different platform than AIPAC and strove towards influencing the public opinion and conducting research and analysis to provide the policy makers with pro-Israel policy suggestions.

In both sections, primary sources from the organizations’ publications will be examined and their positions concerning Iran will be identified. The main objective of the chapter is to define the perimeters of the atmosphere the think tanks, the conservative family and the Israel lobby formed for the policy makers. Even though, individual members of some of these think tanks enjoyed a certain level of sway through working directly for the federal government, and this will

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<sup>15</sup>RO Freedman, *Israel and the United States: Six Decades of US-Israeli Relations*, Westview Press, Boulder, 2012, p. 80.

<sup>16</sup>J Street is not examined in this chapter because its foundation date is not until the last year of the Bush administration. J Street is a non-profit advocacy organization formed to support a two-states solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. The organization, located in Washington D.C., claims to be committed to diplomatic, non-military, solution in the Middles East, including Iran. J Street offers more liberal solutions as opposed to AIPAC, who is conceived as the most influential, right wing Jewish organization. In case of Iran, J Street believes that an Iran with nuclear weapons would upset the balance in the Middles East especially considering Iran's support of terrorism. However, the organization supports a comprehensive multilateral approach, remaining strongly against military action. < <http://jstreet.org/>>



be touched upon, the atmospheric influence of the organizations is the major concern of the chapter.

## THINK TANKS

Prior to considering each think tank individually, let us take up the definition of think tanks in general. McGann and Weaver define think-tanks as being “non-profit, independent of the state and dedicated to transforming policy problems into appropriate public policies.”<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Andrew Rich defines them as “independent, non-interest based, non-profit organizations that produce and principally rely on expertise and ideas to obtain support and to influence the policymaking process.”<sup>18</sup> Even though the origins of the first think tanks can be traced to the 1910s and the Progressive Era, their numbers have greatly increased since the 1970s, reaching some 300 in 1996.<sup>19</sup> Regardless of the difficulty of accurately determining a measurement technique, think tanks remain an actor in the current policy making environment. Therefore, the most important concern is the relevance of these non-federal actors, rather than any quantifiable influence. As discussed previously, the impact of think tanks in foreign policy is mainly “atmospheric influence”, with a few exceptions, and any direct or measurable impact is not implied and remains secondary to the objective of identifying the atmosphere that was created. In the following section, the policy suggestions and opinions of eleven organizations will be examined keeping in mind the questions: What did the notable think tanks advise the foreign policy making bodies concerning Iran? What kind of an atmosphere did these think tanks create?

Under this subtitle, the organizations that had more liberal or centrist tendencies will be examined. Because of their political leanings, these think tanks did not have much direct effect on the Bush administration; however by both being part of the congressional process and contributors to the debate, these prominent organizations continued to influence the political atmosphere indirectly.

Among the most well known thinks tanks, the Brookings Institution could be seen at

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<sup>17</sup>JG McGann and RK Waever (eds.), *Think-tanks and Civil Societies*, Transaction Publishers, London, 2000, p.3.

<sup>18</sup>A Rich, *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, p.11.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p.15.

the top of the list, tracing its origins back to the Institute for Government Research, which was founded in 1916 with the aim of becoming “the first private organization devoted to analyzing public policy issues at the national level.”<sup>20</sup> Robert Somers Brookings, one of the backers of the Institute, established the Institute of Economics in 1922 and a graduate school bearing his name in 1924. Eventually, in 1927, these three institutions were united under the name of the Brookings Institution. Since its foundation, the institution assisted President Franklin D. Roosevelt with a study on the causes of depression during the Great Depression; was asked to create a plan on European economic recovery, which supported the Marshall Plan; aided President Bill Clinton on 2001 tax legislation; testified before the Congress about national security and intelligence issues; and expanded its research area as well its federal and private funding with a budget of \$80 million in 2009.<sup>21</sup> Today, the institution has been one of the most recognizable names in terms of think tanks and enjoys extensive media coverage. Because foreign policy is one of the areas covered by Brookings, the US foreign policy towards Iran was evaluated and criticised during the Bush administration.

In the 2001 Policy Brief, the scholars at Brookings argued that the foreign policy pursued by the American administrations since the Islamic Revolution had been counter-productive despite the two countries having common issues such as Saddam Hussein, drug problems stemming from Afghanistan and instability in the Caucasus region. Furthermore, the brief argued that establishing bilateral relations through dialogue would not only benefit the Iranian economy, but also provide a substantial consumer market for the US companies. The policy brief acknowledged the difficulties faced by the Bush administration on the road to dialog, especially considering the preeminent concerns of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Saddam Hussein, but still a change in policy was urged. In their assessment of Khatami's election, the Institution claimed that, despite small but crucial reforms, the conservatives remained in power by controlling the key institutions.

However, Khatami, as a president whose election reflected the shifting dynamics

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<sup>20</sup>Brookings Institution, Official Website, retrieved on 2 February 2010, <<http://www.brookings.edu/about.aspx>>

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

among the Iranian population, gave hope for a change. The brief offered six preliminary policy steps for the Bush administration in order to break the stalemate. Firstly, the sanctions should be made more persuasive and effective by showing the Iranian government that their economy would benefit immensely from improved relations. Secondly, involving Iran in the discussions of energy transportation in the Caspian region would reduce the Iranian fears of encirclement by the United States. Thirdly, the sanctions that limit Iran's integration into the world community should be eased so that Iran's private sector would boost. Fourthly, the long-standing problem of revolutionary period hostage crisis claims should be settled in order to remove this strain. Fifthly, people-to-people contact should be encouraged in areas like environment, medicine and education to create social and institutional desire for normal diplomatic relations. Lastly, fingerprinting of all Iranian visitors should be ended. On the matter of Iran's nuclear programme, the brief conveyed that Iran's past record with its nuclear activities and the development of its missile capabilities left little doubt about the country's nuclear ambitions. "Long-term policy must address the perceptions of threat by all parties, ideally through a regional security dialogue. In the interim, the Bush administration should work with U.S. allies to enhance export controls and other counter-proliferation policies, and continue to impress upon Iran the exigency of international concerns."<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, the brief argued that the administration should be in tune with the domestic dynamics of Iran, and should remove itself from the suspicions of attempting to influence the regime.<sup>23</sup> The timing of the brief coincided with the beginning of the Bush administration and the pre-9/11 period. This was a time when Bush's White House had not yet set its course in terms of Iran, and, therefore, was likely more open to new policy ideas. The Brookings brief in this regard was important. Even though the brief embraced the current sanctions regime and argued that Iran in all likelihood had a clandestine weapons programme, the fact that the institution urged the administration to recognize the security concerns of the Iranian government and take action in order to ease these concerns was crucial. Thus, the brief opted for a carrots plus the existing sticks approach, which could have been the

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<sup>22</sup>S Maloney, 'America and Iran: From Containment to Coexistence', *Brooking Policy Brief Series*, # 80, <[http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2001/08iran\\_maloney.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2001/08iran_maloney.aspx)>

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

route the administration took, had 9/11 not altered the course of the Bush presidency.

Nevertheless, in the aftermath of 9/11, the direction of the foreign policy towards Iran took a different turn than the institution previously suggested. This new direction attracted criticism from the scholars of Brookings. These criticisms came in two different forms: one argued for the enhancement of the sanctions regime through more incentives, and the other argued for engagement with Iran. A senior fellow in the Brookings Institute, Susan E. Rice, who is currently the US ambassador to the UN, placed herself in the first camp. She criticized George W. Bush's policy towards Iran in 2004. She said that the president seemed to have concluded that the US would have to tolerate a nuclear Iran because, despite the threat Iran projected, the President said “we've sanctioned ourselves out of influence.”<sup>24</sup> In response to Bush's words, Rice argued that a unilateral sanctions policy was the right step for the United States; however, she continued, a sanctions policy would not remove US leverage over Iran. Rice claimed that a persuading policy should include strong incentives from the United States and tougher policy from Europe and Japan.<sup>25</sup> In a similar vein, Senior Fellow Philip H. Gordon argued that the 2005 US-EU offer to Iran with an incentives package from the US was a right step because the United States had run out of sticks with its tough sanctions policy and the EU had run out of carrots with its policy of incentives involving trade, investments and talks. Therefore Gordon concluded:

If the Americans and Europeans pursue a tough-minded, united approach, Iran would basically be confronted with a clear choice: Become an impoverished, isolated, pariah state with nuclear weapons (like North Korea), begin to reintegrate with the international community, meet the needs of its young and growing population, and preserve its security in exchange for foregoing such weapons.<sup>26</sup>

Consequently, Rice and Gordon came to the conclusion that the US should continue to impose sanctions on Iran, thus demonstrating how seriously the US was taking the weapons programme, but at the same time should provide avenues of change and leverage for the Bush administration by providing incentives alongside the EU governments and find ways to integrate

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<sup>24</sup>SE Rice, ‘We Need a Real Iran Policy’, *The Washington Post*, 30 December 2004.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>PH Gordon, ‘Bush's Conversion on the Road to Tehran’, *Yale Global Online*, 2005, retrieved on 20 February 2010, <<http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/bushs-conversion-road-tehran>>

the Iranian society into the world community. The significance of these arguments was the lack of condemnation of the sanctions regime despite its obvious failure since its inception. The fellows held that the reason the sanctions regime failed was the lack of proper execution of current sanctions and also lack of incentives in case Iran complied with the demands of the international community. Hence, they concluded that sanctions should be the main policy, but they should be supported by other policies that would increase the chance of their success.

In the camp that argued for engagement, two fellows are worth mentioning. During the ‘After Iraq’ Symposium of the Brookings Institute in 2007, Suzanne Maloney and Ray Takeyh argued that Iran was a crucial actor in the future of Iraq and America’s exit plans. They identified two threats that the Iranian government wanted to deter when it came to Iraq: the Sunni Baathist and the American military. Against the Sunni Baathist, Iran had been supporting the Shia elements in Iraq, which also had the benefit of damaging the US troops in the country. The American troops intercepted some of the Iranian agents in Iraq and made several arrests; however increasing the operations against Iran in Iraq would not only cause more problems in the country, but also enable Iran to have an advantage over the U.S. troops because of its familiarity with the territory and the people. Therefore, Maloney and Takeyh suggested that engagement was the sole viable option with the purpose of restraining and redirecting the Iranian efforts: “A lessened American presence in Iraq may just invoke a degree of caution and responsibility on the part of Tehran, forcing the recalcitrant theocracy to behave in a more judicious manner and open itself up to dialogue with the United States—if Washington is willing to talk.”<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, in the summer of 2008, Maloney looked back at the Bush administration's handling of Iran. She argued that, because of its inability to read Iranian domestic politics, the Bush administration missed a chance to “generate real momentum on Iran”. Maloney claimed that the central mistake of the Bush administration was to assume that the Islamic regime in Tehran was on the brink of collapse. Furthermore, in the aftermath of 9/11, the internal turmoil of Iran had become a piece of the bigger agenda, which desired promotion of democracy in the Middle

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<sup>27</sup>S Maloney and R Takeyh, ‘Engage Iran’, *Democracy*, Issue #6, Fall 2007.

East. Maloney continued that this miscalculation eventually led to catastrophic policies such as the inclusion of Iran in the “Axis of Evil” and providing a \$75 million-fund for the promotion of democracy in Iran. Moreover, the senior fellow argued that the United States lost a very significant opportunity to improve relations with Tehran when they declined to continue the cooperation with Iran after the dialogue concerning Afghanistan. The suspension of cooperation demonstrated to the Iranian government, she added, that the Bush administration was not trustworthy and they would only follow their interests. Maloney concluded: “No regime is likely to bargain away its ultimate deterrent capability so long as it perceives that the final objective is its own eradication.”<sup>28</sup> Takeyh and Maloney claimed that the Bush administration continuously read Iranian domestic policy wrong and waited for a change that was not to come. This failure to comprehend Iran and the regional politics resulted in missing the valuable opportunities of engagement in Afghanistan and in Iraq. These avenues of engagement could have then been capitalized upon and turned into talks in other areas of conflict.

The Brookings Institution was, in general, critical of the Bush administration, arguing that its policies had been ineffective and counter-productive. It failed to further the cooperation with Iran regarding Afghanistan and Iraq, thus closing the door leading to greater engagement. Furthermore, Iran was named as one of the “Axis of Evil” countries, and this created an atmosphere of distrust and further anti-Americanism. However, there were also those who argued that a sanctions policy could still be effective, if Iran was convinced that the country’s economy would improve significantly when the sanctions were lifted. At the same time, the institute suggested that the sanctions should be directed only at the government agencies in order to let the private sector bloom. Moreover, the connection between the American and the Iranian societies should be encouraged. In Iraq, regarding Iran, the best course of action would be to engage the Iranian government without escalating the conflict. Therefore, the institute favoured a sanctions policy, albeit an altered one with more incentives and with stronger participation from the EU and Japan.

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<sup>28</sup>S Maloney, ‘U.S. Policy Toward Iran: Missed opportunities and Paths Forward’, *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, Volume 32:2, Summer 2008.

Criticism of the Bush administration by Brookings was expected considering its liberal-centrist political stance. However, concerning Iran, policy suggestions were not necessarily in favour of unconditional negotiations, but in favour of furthering the cause of sanctions along with international cooperation and encouraging the Iranian people. Even according to those who argued for engagement, the process should start in regards to Iraq and then be taken further. In this regard, the position of Brookings was not drastically different than AEI or the Heritage Foundation, who are known as conservative think tanks.

In terms of policy impact, it could be argued that Brookings contributed to the atmosphere by arguing for a sanctions policy that was also supported by incentives. Even though, during the first term, the Bush administration was not willing to work with the EU nations, the second term witnessed some changes along the lines that were suggested by especially Maloney and Gordon. Since the State Department under Rice did not explicitly say how they reached the policy decisions, it is impossible to know how and why the US agreed to join the EU nations and made offers for significant incentives. In this regard, Brookings may well have contributed to the policy-making atmosphere by suggesting an alteration in the sanctions regime, and providing the preliminary ideas about how to make this change. On the other hand, the fellows who called for engagement did not see their ideas come to fruition. The Bush administration remained adverse to the idea of engagement until Rice assumed the State Department, and even then the extent of engagement suggested by the Brookings' scholars was not realized. Overall, it could be concluded that the most prominent think tank in the US was able to contribute to the atmospheric influence with policy suggestion that could be seen in the policies of second term of the Bush administration.

Another notable think tank is the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), which is a non-profit organization committed to analysis and betterment of US foreign policy and international relations. The origins of the organization could be traced back to the 150 scholars, called "The Inquiry", who briefed President Woodrow Wilson about the aftermath of World War I. Out of this core, the Council was founded in 1921 in the New York City. In its mission statement, it is claimed that the Council does not have any institutional line of policy, but instead it strives to maintain a

diverse membership, create platforms for discussion of major foreign policy issues, and publish *Foreign Affairs*.<sup>29</sup> Concerning the debate regarding Iran, CFR was able offer a wide spectrum of opinions and policy suggestions.

Before the Iraq War, some CFR fellows saw the opportunity the situation provided for US and Iranian relations. David L Phillips, senior fellow at CFR, wrote an article laying out the common objectives of the United States and Iran regarding Iraq. According to Phillips, for both countries, Saddam's removal was a priority and both were interested in maintaining Iraq's territorial integrity after Saddam's removal. In this endeavour, Iran could provide valuable intelligence about Saddam's military. Phillips argued that the interests of the United States and Iran converged at this point, and the Bush administration should reach out to Tehran whenever the American national security was concerned. In order to convince Iran, the US should stop hindering Iran's membership in the World Trade Organization, ease the restrictions on food and medicine trade, and make the visa process less complicated. If Iranian reform continued to progress, the dialogue could be turned into unconditional talks. Phillips concluded his article: "Iranian hard-liners think that after Iraq, the United States has its sights set on Iran. But America need not interfere in Iran's domestic affairs. The Iranian state has much more to do at home to fulfil its promise of prosperity and greater political and social freedoms. Reform is the inevitable next stage in Iran's evolution."<sup>30</sup>

After the 2002 State of the Union address, Ray Takeyh, senior fellow for Middle Eastern Studies at CFR, wrote an article analysing the Bush administration's policy towards Iran. Takeyh argued that the administration's aim of supporting the Iranian people to change the regime would give more power to the government and further undermine the democratic forces within the country. Bush's words supporting the student demonstrations in 2002 were used by the clerics as a tool for calling for unison against foreign intervention. Thus, Takeyh concluded, the well-meaning words of Bush backfired against the Iranian opposition. Takeyh argued that despite the leanings

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<sup>29</sup>Council on Foreign Relations, Main Website, <<http://www.cfr.org/about/>>

<sup>30</sup>DL Phillips, 'America and Iran are Allies', *Council on Foreign Relations*, November 2002, retrieved on 22 February 2010.  
<[http://www.cfr.org/publication/5255/america\\_and\\_iran\\_are\\_allies.html?breadcrumb=%2Fregion%2Fpublication\\_list%3Fgroupby%3D3%26id%3D404%26filter%3D2002](http://www.cfr.org/publication/5255/america_and_iran_are_allies.html?breadcrumb=%2Fregion%2Fpublication_list%3Fgroupby%3D3%26id%3D404%26filter%3D2002)>



towards Western life-style among the Iranian youth, there still was a continued suspicion of America, not necessarily reminiscent of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, but fuelled by a remembrance of the toppling of Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953. In addition to that, the “Axis of Evil” speech alienated the Iranian population and the dissidents, because in Iran, unlike the Soviet Union, there did not appear a clear line between the government and the opposition. Therefore, Takeyh suggested: “The best way to aid the cause of reform in Iran is for Washington to temper its rhetoric and relax its economic sanctions. By gradually integrating Iran into the global economy, the US can assist the reformers in rehabilitating the economy and consolidating their power base.”<sup>31</sup> Takeyh, as previously mentioned, argued for an approach that favoured more engagement and fewer sanctions. He stated that Bush’s well-intentioned policy of supporting the Iranian opposition harmed the reformers in Iran and gave more power to the Iranian government. However, Takeyh’s suggestion would not resonate with the Bush administration since the rhetoric towards Iran remained and did not change over the years. Despite the changes in other areas of the policy, the administration stayed committed to supporting the Iranian dissidents.

In 2004, Max Boot, Jeane J. Kirkpatrick Senior Fellow for National Security Studies at the CFR, started his article stating that it was clear which side Iran was on in the war against terror. Iran had been called the most active state sponsor of terrorism by the State Department and had been supporting organizations that attacked US troops. Referring to Former Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani's sermon, which declared that Iran had “an opportunity to teach this beast a lesson, so it won't attack another country,” Boot argued that Iran had reasons to fear an American attack because of its nuclear programme and growing missile capabilities. Since the United States could not trust Iran and its ruling mullahs to make a deal, Boot suggested supporting the opposition groups in Iran, because it would not matter if a democratic Iran possessed nuclear weapons.<sup>32</sup> At the beginning of 2006, after the election of Ahmadinejad, Boot changed his position into one that was

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<sup>31</sup>R Takeyh, ‘Bush's Hard Line Trips Up The Reformers In Iran; Tough Talk Aids Reactionaries And Stymies Change’, *Council on Foreign Relation*, August 2002, retrieved on 20 February 2008, <[http://www.cfr.org/publication/7371/bushs\\_hard\\_line\\_trips\\_up\\_the\\_reformers\\_in\\_iran\\_tough\\_talk\\_aids\\_reactionaries\\_and\\_stymies\\_change.html?breadcrumb=%2Fpublication%2Fpublication\\_list%3Ftype%3Djournal\\_article%26page%3D45](http://www.cfr.org/publication/7371/bushs_hard_line_trips_up_the_reformers_in_iran_tough_talk_aids_reactionaries_and_stymies_change.html?breadcrumb=%2Fpublication%2Fpublication_list%3Ftype%3Djournal_article%26page%3D45)>

<sup>32</sup>M Boot, ‘Bush Can't Afford Inaction on Iran’, *Council on Foreign Relations*, September 2004, retrieved on 20 February 2010, <[http://www.cfr.org/publication/7317/bush\\_cant\\_afford\\_inaction\\_on\\_iran.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/7317/bush_cant_afford_inaction_on_iran.html)>

more favourable to a military strike. He came to this conclusion because there was no prospect of serious United Nations sanctions while Russia, China and European countries remained trade partners with Iran. Since a full-scale military action by the United States was not possible, Boot suggested an air strike by Israel or the US forces. Even though such an assault would not completely destroy the nuclear programme, it would be enough to set the programme back for years. He predicted two possible problems with an air strike. The first one was the possibility that the Iranian people might unite against the United States. The second one was the terrorist retaliation that would almost certainly follow the strike. Boot asked: "These are real worries. But do they outweigh the consequences of letting Iran go nuclear?"<sup>33</sup> The espousal of supporting dissidents or a military strike coming from a non-conservative think tank is significant in showing that, firstly, there was an air of confusion in formulating a fruitful foreign policy towards Iran, and, secondly, the political atmosphere in Washington was not as divided as it was on other foreign policy matters. In addition to demonstrating that CFR had the desire to give room to all arguments, the variety also suggested that Iran remained an enigma for non-state contributors as well as policy makers.

The diversity of policy suggestions would only widen with time. In 2005, when it seemed like the Bush administration was finally willing to make some changes, Charles D. Ferguson, an adjunct senior fellow for science and technology at the CFR, argued that the West would be able to guide Iran's nuclear programme. Ferguson devoted most of his article to demonstrating the inefficiency of other methods followed by the Western powers. Firstly, without the support of China and Russia, American threats of UN Security Council sanctions were powerless. Secondly, a military strike would not eradicate the Iranian nuclear programme since it was extremely difficult to locate the primary locations of the nuclear facilities and the European nations were unwilling to carry out any military action. Lastly, Ferguson pointed out that under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Iran had a right to have a peaceful nuclear programme. Therefore Ferguson argued "What is needed is a means to increase confidence that Iran is not developing

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<sup>33</sup>M Boot, 'Iran's threat, Bush's Dilemma', *Council on Foreign Relations*, January 2006, retrieved on 20 February 2010, <[http://www.cfr.org/publication/9659/irans\\_threat\\_bushs\\_dilemma.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/9659/irans_threat_bushs_dilemma.html)>

nuclear weapons, while ensuring that its right to use nuclear technologies for peaceful purposes is not inhibited.”<sup>34</sup> In this line, the author suggested that the United States could introduce Iran proliferations-resistant nuclear technologies that would persuade Iran not to invest in military uses of nuclear power. Even though Iran has a bad record of disclosure of its nuclear facilities, the country showed willingness to open its facilities to the IAEA and guaranteed that the programme was peaceful; thus, in order to break the vicious cycle, the United States and Europe should start working together to make sure that Iran has a peaceful nuclear programme.<sup>35</sup> Ferguson was able to present a new idea that involved answering Iran’s security concerns. The fellow pointed out that Iran had every right to have a peaceful programme under the NPT, and what the US government should do was to guarantee and support this peaceful aspect of the Iranian nuclear programme. The policies of the second term bore some resemblance to this idea of making the programme peaceful instead of trying to persuade Iran to completely abandon its efforts. It is again difficult to ascertain how much, if any, Ferguson’s ideas were taken into account, but this is an excellent example of a think tank introducing a new idea into the policy-making atmosphere.

Another example of CFR’s contribution to the political atmosphere presents itself in a joint article by Ray Takeyh and Clifford A. Kupchan, which analysed the two-way policy of threats and diplomacy of the Bush administration in early 2007. Two days before Iran was invited to have direct talks concerning Iraq, Vice President Dick Cheney issued threats against Iran on board of an aircraft carrier. The scholars argued that this method of using threats to persuade concessions would not work. Instead, the administration should understand the inner dynamics of the Iranian government, where, even though there were no pro-Americans, there were three factions: hard-line conservatives with Ahmadinejad, traditional conservatives with the Supreme Leader, and the pragmatic conservatives. The third faction was in favour of engagement with the United States, and threats would weaken their position: “Official talk from Washington about military action

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<sup>34</sup>CD Ferguson and J Boureston, ‘Finding Nuclear Sanity: West Could Guide Iran's Nuclear Energy Research’, *Council on Foreign relations*, August 2005, retrieved on 20 February 2010, <[http://www.cfr.org/publication/8768/finding\\_nuclear\\_sanity.html?breadcrumb=%2Fregion%2Fpublication\\_list%3Fgroupby%3D3%26id%3D404%26filter%3D2005%26page%3D2](http://www.cfr.org/publication/8768/finding_nuclear_sanity.html?breadcrumb=%2Fregion%2Fpublication_list%3Fgroupby%3D3%26id%3D404%26filter%3D2005%26page%3D2)>

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

undermines this faction, the only one that is committed to giving diplomacy a chance.”<sup>36</sup> The scholars attempted to shed more light on the inner dynamics of the Iranian government so that the policy makers would not undermine the faction who would be able to change the course of Iranian politics towards a more agreeable direction. Since Iran remained a mystery to many in the federal government, the think tanks were able to contribute to the understanding of the country and its policies by the policy makers.

Thus, the CFR offered different points of view to solve the Iranian problem. Some scholars were supportive of easing certain sanctions that would give breathing room to the Iranian people and the Iranian private sector. Some argued that backing the opposition groups within Iran in order to weaken the mullah’s regime was the best long-term solution. Still others favoured military action, losing hope that the United Nations would ever be able to impose effective sanctions without China and Russia. This wide spectrum of positions reflects the CFR’s claim of being non-partisan. Even defence for military action could find a place within this think tank. Therefore, it could be argued that many different voices found a place in the CFR, resulting in an institute whose only unified voice was to remain critical of the Bush administration. Even though CFR could be characterized as a centrist-liberal think tank, it still was able to present a wide range of policies that presented the opinion of both conservatives and liberals. In terms of atmospheric influence, the CFR is one of the most notable think tanks. Not only because the think tank publishes one of the most circulated and highly regarded journals in the foreign policy field, but also the CFR is able to see beyond strict political leanings and give room to all from different perspectives. At first glance, it is not very hard to see that the Bush administration did not follow the advice of CFR scholars who favoured easing sanctions and toning the rhetoric down. However, at the same time, the argument for making sure that the Iranian programme stays peaceful may well have been compelling enough to impact the State Department under Rice.

Another influential think tank in American politics is the Carnegie Endowment for

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36R Takeyh and CA Kupchan, ‘Try Jawboning Iran, Not Chest-Thumping’, *Council on Foreign Policy*, May 2007, retrieved on 20 February 2010, <[http://www.cfr.org/publication/13453/try\\_jawboning\\_iran\\_not\\_chestthumping.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/13453/try_jawboning_iran_not_chestthumping.html)>

International Peace, which was founded in 1910 by Andrew Carnegie, one of the most well known industrialists and philanthropists of the twentieth century. Carnegie gave a gift of \$10 million, and the donation deed requested that the funds would be used for the abolition of international war. Elihu Root, former senator from New York and Secretary of War and State, became the first president of the endowment. Currently, the Endowment has offices in Moscow, Beijing, Beirut, Brussels and Washington.<sup>37</sup> The policy suggestions of the Carnegie Endowment scholars first pointed towards a more accommodating diplomacy and then, later in the Bush presidency, towards a more robust sanctions regime.

George Perkovich, who was the vice president for studies and director of the Nuclear Policy Programme at the Endowment, argued in 2003 that if the Iranian and the American governments treated the issue solely on a nuclear-energy base, the solution would be as easy as letting Iran build a nuclear reactor while Iran continued its position on desiring only nuclear energy, not weapons. However, both countries had some classic security dilemmas which caused the problem to be much more complicated than previously stated. For the United States, the alleged presence of al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations in Iran was a significant part of this dilemma. For Iran, the turn over of Mujahedeen-e Khalq and the strong presence of the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq formed the core of the security dilemma. However, Perkovich argued that the biggest quandary for the Iranian government was the rhetoric of regime change. Since there was almost a consensus on the non-interference of the United States with regards to regime change, the Bush administration had no other option but to deal with the men in charge at the time. Therefore, the author suggested that the United States should make it clear that Iraq would not be used as a military base against Iran, that the US was ready to cooperate with Iran about issues concerning the Iraqi Shiites, and finally that the US should eliminate any rhetoric of regime change if Iran conceded on its nuclear programme and support of terrorism.<sup>38</sup> Perkovich's suggestions, if taken

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<sup>37</sup>Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Official Website, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/about/>

<sup>38</sup>G Perkovich, 'Now is Time for U.S., Iran to Have Their Overdue Talk', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, November 2003, retrieved on 24 February 2010, <<http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=1388>>

into account, would address the security dilemmas of the Iranian government. However, this advice would work under the presumption that the Bush administration was willing to interact with the current Iranian government. In 2003, the Bush administration did not show any willingness to see the situation from the eyes of the Iranian government, and in fact, hoped that change in Iraq would bring about a change in Iran as well. Therefore, Perkovich's suggestions were not very palatable for the Bush White House during the first term and his voice went unheeded.

In 2004, the division within the administration had started to become more prominent as the Iraq War did not conclude as fast as the administration hoped. Michael McFaul, who was a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment, wrote an article about the different camps within the Bush administration concerning the Iranian nuclear programme. He pointed out that the hard-liners in the administration argued against any deal because the Iranian government would only gain more time; thus, according to this perspective, the United States should use military force to deal with the issue. However, the mullahs wanted the nuclear weapons to strengthen their regime, not to spread a theocratic form of government. Therefore, if the United States wanted to promote democracy in Iran, it should work with the mullahs and the Iranian people without any threat of direct involvement. Furthermore, McFaul continued, deterrence against Iran would work because the Iranian government would not risk a nuclear retaliation from the United States. On the other hand, a pre-emptive strike would only give more power to the hard-liners in Iran. Not only would an air strike kill civilians and destroy ancient Persian cities, but also it would unite the whole nation behind the mullahs. At the same time, the deals offered by the European nations made it very easy for Iran to cheat. McFaul writes, "In the long run, the world's only serious hope for stopping Iran from developing nuclear weapons is the development of a democratic government in Tehran. A democratic Iran will become an ally of the Western world no longer in need of a deterrent threat against the United States."<sup>39</sup> In order to facilitate this, the United States should establish a presence in Iran with the permission of civic leaders, academics and business people. McFaul recognised that

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<sup>39</sup>M McFaul, 'How the U.S. Should Take on Iran', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, November 2004, retrieved on 24 February 2010, <<http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=16228>>

such a change would not be possible without easing some of the economic sanctions and having a minimum level of diplomatic relations. This renewed presence and influence of the United States would help remove the mullahs' decades-long tool of anti-American rhetoric.<sup>40</sup> McFaul's argument recognized that a democratic government in Tehran should be the ultimate goal of the US administrations. This goal seemingly was not very different than that of the hard-liners in the administration. Nevertheless, the scholar wanted to reach this goal through social means rather than trying to sanction the mullahs out of power. Even though the Bush cabinet was soon to go under some serious changes, the environment was not ripe for the easing of the sanctions and resuming diplomatic relations. In this regard, McFaul's argument also clashed with the Congress, since time and time again, the House of Representatives expressed their unwillingness to lift even some of the sanctions. Thus, it could be concluded that McFaul's ideas did not turn into policy, but still contributed to the atmosphere who argued for less forceful policy towards the Islamic Republic.

When the UN Security Council resolution failed, the Bush administration ran out of viable options to pursue. In late 2007, Georgina Jones, a Junior Fellow in the Nonproliferation Programme at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, suggested that in the face of problems with efficient Security Council sanctions, a new route that would involve Germany's cooperation was possible. Jones argued that even though trade with Iran constituted less than half percent of German trades, Iran was dependent on trade with Germany including products for nuclear plants. Jones argued that German support for the new European Union sanctions would demonstrate to the United States that Germany was a reliable ally. Furthermore, the German public had an increasing concern about Iran's nuclear programme, and even though the public opposed military action, they believed the imposing of sanctions would have significant impact in Iran.<sup>41</sup> In December 2007, Perkovich wrote an article analysing the National Intelligence Estimate that said Iran ceased its nuclear weapons programme in 2003. The author created a scenario where Iran

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>G Jones, 'Germany's Pivotal Role in the Iranian Nuclear Standoff', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, November 2007, retrieved on 24 February 2010, <[www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=19720](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=19720)>

continued its nuclear weapons programme until it became more educated on the details of the NPT and found out that it could have a nuclear programme and even enrich uranium without being confronted by the international community or losing credit. It was more likely that the Iranian government would change its nuclear strategy as a result of the pressure from the United States and the IAEA. Perkovich summarised the consequences of the NIE. Firstly, even though the NIE did not label the Iranian activities as being part of a nuclear weapons programme any more, the potential threat remained. Secondly, the NIE demonstrated that the NPT needed revision. Thirdly, a military attack was off the table and the Congressional resolutions on Iranian sanctions became precarious because they relied on Iran having a nuclear weapons programme. Lastly, the NIE would make it much harder for the international community to pressure Iran. Perkovich concluded:

In sum, Iranian leaders appear to have recognized that by staying within the rules they can acquire capabilities sufficient to impress their own people and intimidate their neighbors, without inviting tough international sanctions or military attack. The NIE, in a sense, says that Iran is playing the game so well that stopping it may not be possible within the rules.<sup>42</sup>

Carnegie Endowment scholars agreed that the best long-term solution regarding the Iranian nuclear programme and its support of terrorism was having a democratic government in Tehran. However, since the United States did not want to be involved in the toppling of the current regime, the only option remained was to convince the Tehran government to change its behaviour. Improved sanctions, where the EU nations joined the United States, and improved civil relations with Iran would be two ways to sway the Iranian government to the side of the international community. At the same time, the Endowment scholars recognised the difficulty of having Ahmadinejad in power. As a result, after 2005 presidential elections in Iran, the scholars became more sceptical of the possibility of engagement, and turned towards making the sanctions regime more successful. The Endowment members supported a stricter sanctions policy and more communication with the Iranian people, and objected military operations in Iran. The Carnegie Endowment could also be classified as centrist-liberal. Consequently, it was expected that there

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<sup>42</sup>G Perkovich, 'Assessing the NIE', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, December 2007, retrieved on 24 February 2010, <[www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=19747](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=19747)>



would be criticisms of the Bush administration; however, policy suggestions were not necessarily a stark break from policies of the administration. Instead, by suggesting an improved sanctions policy and more communications with the Iranian people, the Endowment desired to modify the current policy, rather than offering a completely different route.

The RAND Corporation (Research and Development) is another notable think tank that was founded in 1945 under a special contract to the Douglas Aircraft Company. In 1946, the first RAND report was published concerning the potential use of artificial satellites. In 1948, the project was turned into a non-profit organization. Currently, the RAND Corporation is funded by the federal, state and local governments and the private sector.<sup>43</sup> Despite its ties to the government, RAND was among those who called for a shift in foreign policy regarding Iran and remained critical of the Bush administration.

James Dobbins, former assistant secretary of state, special envoy for Afghanistan and the director of the International Security and Defense Policy Center at RAND Corporation, authored an article in 2004 criticising the United States policy towards Iran. Dobbins argued that the Bush administration was not willing to join the negotiations with Europeans, nor did they offer any incentives. Furthermore, the United States did not have any political or economic leverage because of the decades-long embargo policy. In contrast, the United States dealt with North Korea in a completely different manner by employing a multilateral approach. Even though it was argued that the United States played the “bad cop” while its European allies played the “good cop”, Washington did not have any sticks to back its role, considering that a military operation was not plausible because of American involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq. Moreover, Dobbins continued, the Bush administration failed to pursue dialogue with Iran in Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban and in Iraq concerning the elections. Dobbins added, though one could not predict how dialogue with Iran would have affected the relations between the two countries, the result most likely would not have been any worse than the current situation. Dobbins concluded, “At present, nothing Iran does or fails to do will alter the American posture. This unyielding attitude undercuts

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<sup>43</sup>The RAND Corporation, Official Website, <<http://www.rand.org/about/history/>>

the prospects for Europe's effort to negotiate a positive resolution to the nuclear crisis. It also provides the weakest possible basis for common action in the absence of such a settlement.”<sup>44</sup>

Dobbin's main suggestion was for the US to join the European efforts and become part of the international process by offering incentives. His analysis could very well be one of the many Rice read in her struggle to achieve some results concerning Iran, since he was one of the think tank members who suggested US's sanctions policy should be strengthened and supported by carrots.

The same year, Robert E. Hunter, senior advisor at the RAND Corporation, encouraged engagement with Iran. The United States and its allies argued that the nuclear club should remain restricted because of concerns about the lack of caution or dubious third party connections. In this context, the United States strove to prevent countries from gaining the know-how, from producing nuclear weapons and delivery capabilities, and from acquiring plutonium or enriched uranium without considering the possibility that some of these countries might actually have legitimate reasons for such endeavours. Therefore, Hunter turned to an “old-fashioned strategic analysis” that looked into Iran's security concerns, which once included Iraq that consisted of a strong US presence in Afghanistan and Iraq and a constant rhetoric of regime change. Furthermore, not only did President Bush include Iran in his “Axis of Evil” speech, but also the United States supported Iranian opposition groups, such as Mujahedin-e Khalq. When one considered the interests of the two countries in the Gulf Region, the picture was not as bleak as one would assume. For instance, both Iran and the United States wanted an Iraq free of weapons of mass destruction and an Afghanistan free of Taliban. Hunter recalled how President Nixon breached the lines of domestic opinion when opening talks with China in order to advance American interests. Therefore, Hunter concluded, considering the stakes of a nuclear Iran and rewards of a cooperative Tehran government, there was much the United States could gain by engaging in direct talks with Iran.<sup>45</sup> Hunter was one of those who addressed Iran's security dilemmas. Since the Bush

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<sup>44</sup>J Dobbins, ‘In Iran, the U.S. Can't Stay on the Sidelines’, *The RAND Corporation*, December 2004, retrieved on 25 February 2010, <<http://www.rand.org/commentary/2004/12/02/IHT.html>>

<sup>45</sup>RE Hunter, ‘Engage, Don't Isolate, Iran’, *The RAND Corporation*, June 2004, retrieved on 25 February 2010, <<http://www.rand.org/commentary/2004/06/27/SDT.html>>

administration, at least during the first term, was blind to the possibility that Iran saw nuclear weapons as insurance, the advice for dialogue with Iran did not come to pass.

Along the same lines, Stephen Larrabee and Peter Wilson, senior fellows at the RAND Corporation, authored an article titled “Averting War with Iran” in 2006. The article started with the mention of the lessons the United States government should take from the Iraq War, which, instead of igniting a series of democratisation in the Middle East, caused more turmoil in the region. Iran was the winner in this war because Iraq was no longer there to counter-balance Iran's Shiite influence. Therefore, the United States should cease to use the threats of regime change and military intervention, and start a direct dialogue on security because “Such an offer could strengthen the hand of the more sober-minded members of the Iranian regime who lately have begun to speak out more forcefully against President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s extremist policies.”<sup>46</sup> Again in 2007, James Dobbins reiterated his opinion of talks with Iran. Dobbins stated that the most important dialogue between the United States and Iran occurred after the 9/11 attacks in order to topple the Taliban. Then, the United States became part of a coalition that had been working against the Taliban for years: Iran, India, Russia and the Northern Alliance. Dobbins stated that, as he worked as a part of the American delegation, the US and the Iranian officials worked closely producing considerable results. However, the experience was not repeated because of domestic pressures, bureaucracy and the absence of President Khatami. Even though the tension between the two countries rose through the years, they still shared some common objectives concerning Iraq, and upon that a series of talks could be built. Dobbins argued that if both sides were serious about dialogue, the privacy of these talks should be assured in order to be free from media and domestic attention. Also, a platform where American and Iranian lower level officials met regularly would provide the basis for long lasting and higher level dialogue.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, during the second term of the Bush administration, the RAND Corporation scholars leaned more towards engagement with

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<sup>46</sup> FS Larrabee and PA Wilson, ‘Averting War with Iran’, *The RAND Corporation*, May 2006, retrieved on 25 February 2010, <<http://www.rand.org/commentary/2006/05/02/UPI.html>>

<sup>47</sup> J Dobbins, ‘How to Talk to Iran’, *The RAND Corporation*, July 2007, retrieved on 25 February 2010, <<http://www.rand.org/commentary/2007/07/22/WP.html>>

Iran and criticised the administration for not seizing the opportunities of cooperation in the aftermath of 9/11.

The RAND Corporation scholars criticized the Bush administration for its lack of cooperation with the EU countries and its unwillingness to engage Iran. Despite the post-9/11 atmosphere, where the US and Iran came the closest to having a dialogue since the Islamic Revolution, both parties showed reluctance to extend this cooperation beyond sharing intelligence on Afghanistan. President Bush's Axis of Evil speech and the election of Ahmadinejad further widened the gap between the two governments. Many scholars argued that this was a lost opportunity and it should have been capitalized on while Khatami was in power. At the same time, since there still was a chance for directly engaging Iran in regards to the future of Iraq, the Bush administration still could amend its previous mistakes. The RAND Corporation members remained supportive of engagement and dialogue with Iran, and criticised the administration's policies. Because of its connections with the US military and the federal government, the RAND Corporation is seen as right-centrist. However, unexpectedly, the Corporation was highly critical of the Bush administration and strongly in favour of engagement. The stance of the Corporation also demonstrated the complexity of the Iranian problem because the nature of the issue did not comply with political tendencies, forcing organizations like RAND to adopt alternative views. In terms of policy influence, RAND members were definitely among the choir of scholars who called for engagement and cooperation with the Iranian government. In this regard, even if the administration officials did not directly use RAND for policy making, as one of the oldest and most prominent think tanks in the US, its views widely contributed to the atmospheric influence.

One of the older think tanks, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for International Scholars, remains one of the most influential communities. The Center was established by the Congress in 1968 "to commemorate the ideals and concerns of Woodrow Wilson by providing a link between the world of ideas and the world of policy; and fostering research, study, discussion, and collaboration among a full spectrum of individuals concerned with policy and

scholarship in national and world affairs.”<sup>48</sup> The Center publishes the magazine *Wilson Quarterly*, as well as hosting a broad range of projects, visiting scholars, interns and fellows. The Center is supported by both public and private funds.<sup>49</sup>

Covering a wide spectrum of issues resulted in a limited interest in US-Iran relations; however, the main contribution of the Center urged a shift in the foreign policy. In 2003, Robert S. Litwak, the director of international studies at the Woodrow Wilson Institute, and Shahram Chubin wrote a joint article analyzing Iran's nuclear programme and what the United States could do about it. The scholars observed that the fate of the Iranian nuclear programme was still strongly tied to the future of Iranian politics. The US had two options regarding Iran: military attack or engagement. After dismissing the military option because of intelligence issues, political repercussions and the uncertainty of the results, the authors favoured an approach where the United States stayed clear of Iranian domestic politics while increasing the threat of stronger sanctions with a promise of nonaggression. However, an internal change within Iran was also needed for success: “Such external pressure, which may include the imposition of penalties if Tehran does not come around, is necessary but not sufficient. An internal process, in which the Iranians themselves debate and scrutinize the nuclear programme in all its dimensions, is the essential complement to any outside effort”.<sup>50</sup> Litwak again argued that the Bush administration failed to offer a consistent policy, by supporting sanctions and incentives but still not dropping the talk about military action. Litwak stated that Iran had two choices: either to become a state that accepted international norms or a state that rejected the international system. The Washington administration would be able to push Tehran to make the right decision by aiming to attain behaviour change, not regime change, as it did with Libya.<sup>51</sup>

The Iran experts in the Woodrow Wilson Center criticised the Bush administration for its lack of consistency regarding Iran. They opposed military attack for strategic and logistic

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<sup>48</sup>Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Official Website, <<http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=about.about>>

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>S Chubin and RS Litwak, ‘Debating Iran's Nuclear Aspirations’, *The Washington Quarterly*, Autumn 2003, p. 110.

<sup>51</sup>RS Litwak, “Regime Change 2.0”, *The Wilson Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 4, Autumn 2008, pp. 25-27.

reasons, and argued that the only alternative was engagement. They argued that this approach should be carried out by entering into a dialogue with Iran, while increasing the effect of sanctions, therefore weakening the current regime. As a liberal think tank, it was expected to see the Center favour engagement and oppose military intervention. However, surprisingly, engagement was not necessarily seen as a tool to appease the Iranian government, but to weaken the regime in the long run. In this regard, the stance of the institute did not stray far from the centre. It was unlikely that the Center influenced the Bush administration directly as the political leaning of key governments officials were almost on the opposite side of the spectrum. However, the views of the organization contributed to the policy-making atmosphere by providing an argument for the administration's critics.

Lastly, the Center for Strategic and International Studies was founded in 1962 by David M. Abshire and Admiral Arleigh Burke as a means to sustain America's position in the world. The Center defines itself as bipartisan with the aim of "provid[ing] strategic insights and policy solutions to decision makers in government, international institutions, the private sector, and civil society".<sup>52</sup> The current president is former Deputy Secretary of Defense John Hamre, the chairman of the board of trustees is former Democratic Senator Sam Nunn. The board of trustees includes Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, William Cohen and Brent Scowcroft.<sup>53</sup> In 2009, the Center was funded mostly by foundation, corporate and individual sources with a 16% government contribution.<sup>54</sup>

In 2006, in a joint paper entitled "Iranian Nuclear Weapons? The Uncertain Nature of Iran's Nuclear Programme," Anthony H. Cordesman and Khalid R. Al-Rodhan of the CSIS discussed the past and the present of the Iranian nuclear programme. The authors argued that the Middle East was on a slippery slope towards proliferation where Israel already had nuclear weapons, Syria had a biological and chemical weapons programme and it was uncertain where Egypt was in its WMD efforts. If Tehran managed to acquire nuclear weapons, the reaction of Saudi

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<sup>52</sup>The Center for Strategic and International Studies, Official Website, <<http://csis.org/about-us>>

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., <<http://csis.org/about-us/board-trustees>>

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., <<http://csis.org/about-us/financial-information>>

Arabia, Jordan, Egypt and Turkey remained uncertain. However, despite Tehran's dubious history with transparency regarding its nuclear programme, the uncertainty surrounding Iran's intentions remained. This, Cordesman and Al-Rodhan argued, could be intentional:

Iran seems to be trying to develop a “bomb in a fog;” to keep its efforts both covert and confusing enough so that there will be no conclusive evidence that will catalyze the UN into cohesive and meaningful action or justify a US response. Such a strategy must be made more overt in the long-run if it is to make Iran a credible nuclear power, but the long-run can easily stretch out for years; Iran can break up its efforts into smaller, research oriented programmes or pause them; focus on dual-use nuclear efforts with a plausible rationale; permit even intrusive inspection; and still move forward.<sup>55</sup>

In November 2007, John J. Hamre, president of CSIS, wrote an article entitled “War with Iran in 2008?” Hamre summarized that the past relations of the two countries had many elements that could lead to war, namely Iran's nuclear programme and its hostile rhetoric against Israel. In addition to these ongoing issues, American military officials were assured that Iranian agencies had been working against the U.S. in Iraq by collaborating with the insurgents. However, despite the reasons mentioned above, Hamre added, the talk of war against Iran in 2008 was quite different than the talk of war against Iraq in 2003. In the absence of a coherent opposition, the post 9/11 atmosphere, along with the rise of neoconservatives, made the Iraq War possible. In 2008, there were more discussions about an attack against Iran and a coherent opposition. Therefore, Hamre concluded that an open conflict between the U.S. and Iran was not likely in 2008. Even though the author argued that talk about military intervention kept the international community alert concerning Iran, at the same time the origins of the Iraq War undermined the efforts of diplomacy with the backdrop of threats. Hamre also added that the U.S. did not have the military capability to invade Iran after long involvements in Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>56</sup>

At the end of 2007, Jon Wolfsthal, senior fellow at the CSIS, and Jon Alterman, director and senior fellow of the Middle East Programme at CSIS, scrutinized the latest NIE. They

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<sup>55</sup>AH Cordesman and KR Al-Rodhan, ‘Iranian Nuclear Weapons? The Uncertain Nature of Iran's Nuclear Programme’, *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 12 April 2006, pp. 3-6.

<sup>56</sup>JJ Hamre, ‘War with Iran in 2008?’, *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, November 2007, retrieved 15 March 2010, <<http://csis.org/publication/war-iran-2008-global-forecast-top-security-challenges-2008>>

argued that despite not having an active nuclear weapons programme, because Iran continued its uranium and plutonium programmes, there still was danger of resuming the weapons programme at any moment without having lost much time. However, Iran's willingness to stop its weapons progress as a response to international pressure was hopeful. The fellows applauded the NIE in general, because of the critical information it provided. They argued that if such confident intelligence was present about Iraq's WMD programme, the Iraq War might not have taken place. Therefore, they concluded, "the fact that our intelligence community can determine with such confidence that Iran's nuclear weapons programme ended in 2003 provides the United States with an opportunity to recalibrate its policy toward Iran without the looming threat of a nuclear conflict."<sup>57</sup> Moreover, Alterman assessed the Bush administration's Middle East policy. He argued that the United States was at a worse place in the Middle East at the end of the Bush presidency than it was eight years previous. Alterman observed that the Iraq War did not deter Iran or Syria; on the contrary, these countries managed to make the job of the U.S. troops harder in the aftermath of Saddam's fall. The weakening of American influence in the region, he added, persuaded other governments of the region to appease Iran out of the concern that the United States would not be able to protect them.<sup>58</sup>

The leading scholars of the CSIS agreed that the United States had limited options regarding Iran because the country was already tied down to two military operations in Afghanistan and Iran. Therefore, in addition to domestic opposition to another military involvement, the United States did not possess the military strength to carry out a lasting attack or a land invasion in Iran. Furthermore, even though the Center warned against the tactics of the Iranian government, it still remained critical of the Bush administration, arguing that during this eight-year period the influence and power of the US in the Middle East weakened. As a conservative-centrist think tank, the CSIS criticized the Bush administration for weakening the political influence of the United States. It was

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<sup>57</sup>J Wolfsthal and JB Alterman, 'Iran and the New National Intelligence Estimate', *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, December 2007, retrieved on 15 March 2010, <<http://csis.org/publication/iran-and-new-national-intelligence-estimate>>

<sup>58</sup>J Alterman, "The Bush Administration's Legacy in the Middle East", *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, Middle East Programme, October 2008, retrieved n 16 March 2010, <[http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/mesh/2008/10/the\\_bush\\_legacy\\_4](http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/mesh/2008/10/the_bush_legacy_4)>



to be expected that the institution would be critical because the administration failed to advance the interests of the United States by undermining the US influence in the Middle East through the long-winded involvements in Afghanistan and Iraq. As one of the more conservative think tanks, the views and analyses of the CSIS most likely found their way into the hands of the government officials more often than others. The criticism of the scholars probably contributed to the atmosphere that inspired the Bush administration to adjust its policies in the second term.

### THE CONSERVATIVE FAMILY

Having established the Bush administration's conservative tendencies in the previous chapters, doubtlessly officials' ears were more open to the suggestions coming from the conservative think tanks. The three branches of conservatism (classical conservatism, libertarianism and neoconservatism) all found their voices within the organizations discussed below. However, the most controversial one after the 9/11 attacks was the influence of the neoconservatives. Even though scholars found it hard to define the perimeters of the movement, the uniting idea could be summarized as importing democracy through US's unrivalled military and financial power. The controversy among the conservatives emerged from the fact that there were many neoconservatives around the administrations' top officials. However, the members of the conservative think tank family ranged in their opinion of foreign policy as much as they differed from their liberal counterparts. With respect to Iran, there were different voices as to how to tackle the issue, spanning a wide range along these three conservative lines.<sup>59</sup>

The AEI took its place among the top conservative think tanks, and was arguably one of the most influential think tanks during the Bush administration. The American Enterprise Institute was founded in 1943 as a not-for-profit organization dedicated to research on government, politics, economics and society. The AEI mission statement declares that the institute strives "to defend the principles and improve the institutions of American freedom and democratic capitalism

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<sup>59</sup>For more information on the neoconservative movement: P Berkowitz, *Varieties of Conservatism in America*; J Velasco, *Neoconservatives in U.S. Foreign Policy*; I Peleg, *The Legacy of George W. Bush's Foreign Policy*;

– limited government, private enterprise, individual liberty and responsibility, vigilant and effective defense and foreign policies, political accountability, and open debate.” Among the names of its affiliates, there appears Richard Cheney, Lynne Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, Michael Novak, Richard Perle and Irving Kristol.<sup>60</sup> AEI was one of the most influential think tanks during the Bush administration because of these names and its strong support of conservative ideals. Even though there were those who belonged to the neoconservative camp in the AEI, the think tank voiced many opinions from the conservative and realist camp, and did not embrace a universal adherence to neoconservative ideals.

Before 9/11, during 2001, Richard Perle, a resident fellow at AEI and a self-prescribed neoconservative, wrote an article on the development of a missile defence system. Perle claimed that a missile defence system would save lives, discourage the nations who strive to acquire weapons of mass destruction, and bring stability to regional conflicts.<sup>61</sup> Perle’s views were clearly along the same lines with those of the new administration, because development of the missile defence system was an important foreign policy issue for Bush and his team. After the 9/11 attacks in 2001, Newt Gingrich, who was a senior fellow at AEI, authored an article titled “U.S. Must Pre-empt Further Evil.” Gingrich opened his argument by stating that, since 9/11 made the dangers of the world more visible, now the world needed an alternate approach. He also claimed that the long-standing policies of deterrence and retaliation did not have any impact on terrorists, therefore “pre-emption is a necessity.” However, in the case of Iran, Gingrich suggested that the United States should side with the majority of the Iranian people who opposed the rule of ayatollahs.<sup>62</sup> Pre-emption was one of the mainstays of the Bush doctrine, and the idea found many supporters within the AEI. This notion of pre-emption could take any form, including military action or being involved in other countries’ internal and foreign affairs. In this vein, Gingrich’s comments signalled a policy suggestion that favoured regime change in Iran, and this goal was to be achieved through

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<sup>60</sup>American Enterprise Institute, Official Website, <<http://www.aei.org/>>

<sup>61</sup>R Perle, ‘Missile Defense a Moral Obligation’, *The American Enterprise Institute*, May 6, 2001, retrieved on 4 February 2010, <<http://www.aei.org/article/14794>>

<sup>62</sup>N Gingrich, ‘U.S. Must Pre-empt Further Evil’, *The American Enterprise Institute*, February 2002, retrieved on 3february 2010, <<http://www.aei.org/article/15691>>

supporting the opposition. This position remained one of the foundational policies of the Bush administration with the hope that the US support for opposition would eventually get rid of the Islamic regime.

In 2004, Danielle Pletka, vice president for foreign and defence policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute, claimed that engagement would not produce any results for policy change in Iran; it would only buy time for the regime to further its plans. Even though Pletka acknowledged that the American policy towards Iran failed to induce any change in terms of the country's nuclear programme, which required a policy shift for the American government, she refrained from agreeing with the argument that engagement and trade would break the stalemate. In its stead, since a military operation was not feasible, Pletka offered a three-part policy. Firstly, the Bush administration should increase its support for the dissidence in Iran by emphasising human rights abuses in Iran. Secondly, the European Union and the IAEA should be persuaded to take tough measures against Iran, and refer the country to the Security Council if they failed to comply. Lastly, containment of Iran should be led by the United States in order to cripple weapons imports and exports, as well as limit finances that might go to terrorist organizations and terrorists being trained in Iran.<sup>63</sup> Pletka's approach was in line with other AEI scholars. The idea that engagement would not produce any results with Iran was the likely explanation why the Bush administration time and again failed to take cooperation with Iran after 9/11 further. Her policy suggestions neatly summarized the attitude of the administration towards Iran, at least during the first term.

In a similar manner, at the end of 2004, Michael Rubin, resident scholar at AEI, analysed the situation in Iran. After stating that the major concern of the American administration was not Iran's intention to strike first with nuclear weapons, but that it would not respond to international norms because there would not be retaliation, Rubin made several noteworthy points about Iranian politics. Firstly, the anti-Western ideology remained the central component of the regime, which founded Palestinian Islamic Jihad, financed Hezbollah and supported al Qaeda. If

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<sup>63</sup>D Pletka, 'The Hawkes and Doves Are Aflutter over U.S. Iran Policy', *The American Enterprise Institute*, July 2004, retrieved on 3 February 2010, <<http://www.aei.org/article/20960>>

Iran possessed nuclear weapons, the regime would not have to rely on other organizations, but would be able to carry out more aggressive activities from Iranian soil. Furthermore, Rubin argued, the opposition groups would suffer much more if the current Iranian regime acquired nuclear weapons. Thus, the indecisive stature of the Bush administration had to come to an end because time was running out. Rubin suggested that the administration should be ready for a military operation if engagement and diplomacy failed. If there were to be a military action, the means of oppression of the Iranian government should also be targeted.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, after the elections, Rubin claimed that the second Bush administration would make the same mistakes as the first by insisting on engagement with the Iranian government. According to Rubin, regardless of how the administration approached it, engagement would fail because the reasons of this failure were ideological, not political, since the Iranian regime stood on its hatred of America.<sup>65</sup> Rubin's argument that engagement and diplomacy would fail led to his belief that the only viable option was military engagement. Rubin was in accordance with the other AEI fellows in the argument that engagement was not the solution. However, military involvement in Iran as the solution was not shared with many members of the institute. The fact that attacking Iran would open a "can of worms" that the US might not be able to deal with was the main reason the AEI scholars did not see the military avenue as an option.

As the Bush administration started to alter its policies toward Iran in the second term, the AEI members' criticism got louder. In 2006, Richard Perle criticised the Bush administration's decision to negotiate with the Iranian government and their sending of mixed messages to both the clerics and the opposition groups in Iran. Perle stated that President Ahmadinejad wanted nuclear weapons and the means of acquiring them was through oppression within Iran and sponsoring terrorism without. President Bush, Perle added, knew what the Iranian president desired; however, after years of tough speeches, the United States joined the EU3 concerning Iran's nuclear

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<sup>64</sup>M Rubin, 'Tapping the Hornet's Nest', *The American Enterprise Institute*, December 2004, retrieved 3 February 2010, <<http://www.aei.org/article/21675>>

<sup>65</sup>M Rubin, 'Bush Marches into a Second Term, His Agenda Set by Mideast Foes', *The American Enterprise Institute* January 2005, retrieved on 3 February 2010, <<http://www.aei.org/article/21858>>

programme. Perle asked, “How is it that Bush, who vowed that on his watch ‘the worst weapons will not fall into the worst hands,’ has chosen to beat such an ignominious retreat?”<sup>66</sup> One of the answers he gave to his own question was the change in Condoleezza Rice's stance, which shifted to a more accommodating one with regards to American allies. Perle added that Bush knew of Iranian dealings in Iraq and in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and of the years of concealments and lies of the Iranian government concerning the nuclear programme. Furthermore, an excellent opportunity presented itself when the existence of Natanz, Arak and the other hidden laboratories became known. This would have been the time to push for an immediate action from the United Nations Security Council; however, Perle argued, “neither our allies nor our diplomats nor the State Department experts assigned to the White House desired confrontation.”<sup>67</sup> Accordingly, President Bush backed away from what he had promised to do in the previous years, which had given hope to the opposition in Iran. During an interview in 2010, Richard Perle argued that even though Bush believed that Iran should not be allowed nuclear weapons, he did not do anything to curb the Iranian nuclear programme. Perle stated that instead of calling for a regime change, the Bush administration narrowly focused on the Iranian nuclear programme and, to a lesser extent, on Iran's support for terrorism. Therefore, Perle claimed, even though the Bush administration had several attempts to create a coherent policy towards Iran, this was never achieved, and “this was one of the greatest failings of the Bush administration.”<sup>68</sup> Perle's criticism was only the beginning of the reactions the altered policies under Rice would receive.

Again, Michael Rubin criticised the Bush administration's offer of incentives along with the European countries in 2008. In the package, the administration promised assistance for the construction of a light-water reactor and the provision of the nuclear fuel. However, at any time during the deal, Iran had the option to walk away and continue its programme. Rubin reacted to this new package: “Diplomacy is not wrong, but President Bush's reversal is diplomatic malpractice on

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<sup>66</sup>R Perle, ‘Why Did Bush Blink on Iran?’, *The American Enterprise Institute*, July 2006, retrieved on 3 February 2010, <<http://www.aei.org/issue/24691>>

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>R Perle, *Interview by Derya Rix*, Washington, D.C., 13 April 2010.

a Carter-esque level that is breathing new life into a failing regime.”<sup>69</sup> Rubin argued that by following a path of multilateralism, the State Department gave the impression that the red lines drawn by the White House were mere illusions. By doing this, they enabled Ahmadinejad to claim that his government brought the United States to its knees.<sup>70</sup> Rice’s new direction to break the stalemate between the US and Iran was not welcomed by the AEI fellows, who had found even the policies of the first term too accommodating.

The American Enterprise Institute approached the Iranian problem from an angle that favoured the deployment of a missile defence system, support of Iranian dissidents, and undertaking tougher sanctions. The Institute contributors agreed that not only should the international community unite and impose tough sanctions against Iran, but also the regime of the mullahs should be undermined through supporting the opposition groups. The institution remained critical of the Bush administration, arguing that insistence on fruitless diplomacy and the lack of a consistent foreign policy bought time for the Tehran administration to further its nuclear programme. Furthermore, the administration was criticised for not being willing to challenge the Iranian regime or clash with its allies. Therefore, the AEI supported a more confrontational foreign policy, where the United States was willing to follow a unilateral strategy. The AEI is a well-known conservative think tank that most likely had the most influence on the Bush administration. Not only was the AEI the meeting place for many neoconservatives, but also the arguments made by AEI members closely resemble some of the policies of the administration, such as the missile defence system, the doctrine of pre-emption, and the concept of the Axis of Evil. Policy suggestions of the AEI are in line with the organization’s political leanings. Furthermore, the AEI had strong individual connections to the Bush administration including: John Bolton, the US Ambassador to the UN; Dick Cheney, the vice president; Lynne Cheney, wife of the vice president and a conservative scholar; Daniella Pletka, a leading AEI scholar and wife of Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control Stephen Rademaker; Newt Gingrich, former House Speaker and conservative

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<sup>69</sup>M Rubin, ‘Now Bush is Appeasing Iran’, *The American Enterprise Institute*, July 2008, 3 February 2010, <<http://www.aei.org/article/28353>>

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

analyst; Michael Ledeen, consultant to National Security Council and Department of State; David Frum, author of the term “Axis of Evil”; and Richard Perle, Chairman of the Defense Policy Board Advisory Committee. Because of these connections, the AEI was able to influence the Bush administration more directly than other think tanks. At the same time, the institute became a platform for those who shared similar opinions and needed a place to unite and be intellectually active. However, as the face and policies of the administration started to change during the second term, the influence of the AEI diminished, mostly because the friendly ears were not in power anymore.

Another non-governmental organization that had an impact on the Bush administration was PNAC. Project for the New American Century was more an ad hoc organization that was brought together by like-minded individuals than a think tank. However, since the ideas promoted by PNAC were among the most controversial and public during the Bush presidency, the organization is well-worth mentioning among those who formed the political atmosphere of Washington. PNAC was formed in 1997 and came to an end in 2006, having been founded by leading neo-conservatives William Kristol and Paul Kagan, and became the home of neoconservative agenda in the intervening years. Even though PNAC cannot be counted among the most influential organizations in general because of its short life span and ideological orientation, the names affiliated with the think tank were some of the major officials of the Bush administration. Therefore, it is important to give room to the opinions of the PNAC in terms of foreign policy towards Iran. Before going into its position regarding Iran, it is imperative look at the Project’s core principles:

- we need to increase defense spending significantly if we are to carry out our global responsibilities today and modernize our armed forces for the future;
- we need to strengthen our ties to democratic allies and to challenge regimes hostile to our interests and values;
- we need to promote the cause of political and economic freedom abroad;
- we need to accept responsibility for America's unique role in preserving and extending an international order friendly to our security, our

prosperity, and our principles.<sup>71</sup>

Among the signatories of these principles were the heavy guns of the Bush administration, such as: Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz and Lewis “Scooter” Libby. Because of these names, PNAC could be classified as the most influential non-federal actor during Bush administration, especially throughout the first term. Even though neither Cheney nor Rumsfeld had been classified as neoconservatives, they were very sympathetic to at least one of the core principles of the movement, namely a more aggressive use of American military power. PNAC’s position concerning Iran was in line with its core principles. In their writings, the PNAC fellows consistently praised President Bush and his foreign policy approach, especially after his 2002 State of the Union Address.

For instance, in August 2002, Senior Fellow Reuel Marc Gerecht praised President Bush for his unwavering commitment to the Western ideal of democracy. After commending the President for his “liberation theology”, which meant spreading democracy around the world, the fellow turned his attention to Iran and its ruling mullahs. Gerecht argued that the rulers of Iran would not be able to stand against the attractiveness of the American way of life among the Iranian youth. He argued that a war in Iraq would have an outstanding effect in the region, and thus ignite a regime change in Iran, either because of the proximity of American troops or as a consequence of a democratic Iraq. The fellow concluded that the Bush administration should throw its support behind any demonstrations against the Iranian government. However, he did not support military intervention in Iran, because the priority was Iraq and it would be overwhelming to be engaged in both countries.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, in his memoirs, Bush stated that he hoped regime change in Iraq would trigger regime change in Iran. Furthermore, supporting the opposition groups in Iran and ultimately aiming for toppling of the mullahs were the main objectives of the Bush administration. Though Gerecht later, in 2004, recognized that the US was too busy with mending Iraq to undertake any serious action against Iran, he continued to hold that diplomacy and engagement would be fruitless

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<sup>71</sup> Project for the New American Century, Statement of Principles, Official Website, accessed on 2 July 2011, <<http://www.newamericancentury.org/statementofprinciples.htm>>

<sup>72</sup> RM Gerecht, “Regime Change in Iran?”, *The Weekly Standard*, 5 August 2002.



and the Bush administration should continue its tough policy.<sup>73</sup>

In the same way, Bill Kristol criticised the Council on Foreign Relations for supporting engagement with Iran, and argued that Iran had ties with al Qaeda, was involved in planning terrorist attacks in New York, and was undermining US efforts in Iraq. Therefore, Kristol concluded: “We do need a coherent, serious policy toward Iran; one of containment, pressure, accountability and, ultimately, regime change.”<sup>74</sup> Across the line, the members of the PNAC argued that only a regime change in Iran would solve the problems between the two countries. The real impact of the think tank stems from its supporters. The unwavering stance of PNAC could be seen in the political attitude of Cheney and Rumsfeld clearly. This was not only the case concerning Iraq, but also Iran. The belief that the Islamic regime was not fit for negotiations led to the failure of engaging Iran in the aftermath of 9/11. The top officials of the administration had set their eyes upon toppling the mullahs and failed to see other viable options available to them. Though neoconservatives lost most of their power during Bush’s second term, the effects of the ideology lingered. PNAC remained the meeting place of those who favored an aggressive foreign policy. The minds surrounding Bush found their kindred spirits in the organization, and the seeds of the Bush Doctrine, the “Axis of Evil” speech and the Iraq War were all sown in PNAC.

Yet another notable think tank during this time was the Heritage Foundation, which was founded in 1973 with the mission of formulating and promoting conservative public policies. These conservative values include free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom and strong national defence.<sup>75</sup> The foundation was intimately involved in the birth and introduction of the Reagan Doctrine, and was an influential think tank especially during the Reagan presidency.

In 2003, Peter Brooks, former deputy assistant secretary of defence and a senior fellow for national security affairs at The Heritage Foundation, drew attention to the least mentioned member of the “Axis of Evil”, i.e. Iran, who, according to the writer, was the worst. After reciting

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<sup>73</sup> RM Gerecht, “Going Soft on Iran”, *The Weekly Standard*, 8 March 2004.

<sup>74</sup> W Kristol, “Memorandum to Opinion Leaders”, PNAC Official Website, 20 July 2004, accessed 6 July 2011, <<http://www.newamericancentury.org/iran-20040720.htm>>

<sup>75</sup> The Heritage Foundation, Main Web Site, <<http://www.heritage.org/About>>

Tehran's history of violence and support for terrorism, Brooks argued that the United States should convince the UN Security Council and Europe to impose sanctions on the basis that Iran violated the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.<sup>76</sup> Helle C. Dale, on the other hand, claimed that a regime change in Iran could be achieved through domestic pressure. Dale applauded the Nobel Prize Committee for awarding the prize to Shirin Ebadi, an Iranian human rights activist. Referring to the young population of Iran who had been disillusioned with the rule of the mullahs, the writer argued that the prize would create more unrest among the Iranian youth. Therefore, Dale suggested that, in addition to sanctions, the United States should ardently support the democratic forces in Iran, especially now that the Iranian opposition had an international figure like Shirin Ebadi to follow.<sup>77</sup> From the beginning, the Bush administration wanted a regime change in Iran, and Brooks and Dale offered two different, but not mutually exclusive, ways to undermine the Islamic regime. These two suggestions alone could be seen in the policies of the Bush administration. For years, the US government wanted the UN Security Council to pass resolutions against Iran, which then would impose economic sanctions. Furthermore, Bush addressed the Iranian people many times, declaring that the US government was only against the Iranian government, not the people. In addition, both executive and legislative branches explicitly adopted policies of supporting the Iranian opposition.

By 2005, not much had changed in the views of the Foundation members. Kim Holmes of the Heritage Foundation also recited an account of human rights abuses and limitations on freedom of speech in Iran, a country that was listed as being next to last in terms of its political and civil rights in *Freedom House*. Holmes stated that “a government so barbaric can't be allowed near nuclear weapons.”<sup>78</sup> In the writer's opinion, the human rights record of Iran could be used as leverage in the international field because the Iranian government is conscious about its image; thus there might be sufficient pressure on the Tehran government for behaviour change. Therefore, if domestic issues along with its nuclear programme were brought to light in the United Nations, Iran

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<sup>76</sup>P Brookes, 'Time to Pressure Iran', *The Heritage Foundation*, May 2003, retrieved on 26 February 2010, <<http://www.heritage.org/Press/Commentary/ed051203.cfm>>

<sup>77</sup>HC Dale, 'Regime Change in Iran, Internal Pressure May Do the Job', *The Heritage Foundation*, October 2003, retrieved on 26 February 2010, <<http://www.heritage.org/Press/Commentary/ed102303a.cfm>>

<sup>78</sup>KR Holmes, 'World Must not Allow Nuclear Iran', *The Heritage Foundation*, October 2005, retrieved on 26 February 2010, <<http://www.heritage.org/Press/Commentary/ed101105c.cfm>>

might be willing to concede. Holmes concluded: “The world should make a stand and say unequivocally to the mullahs that no country that treats its citizens so badly can or will be trusted with nuclear weapons.”<sup>79</sup>

James Phillips, a research fellow at the Heritage Foundation, laid out a policy strategy to deal with Iran after the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the office of president. The writer stated that Ahmadinejad was committed to Khomeini’s ideal of spreading Islamic revolution, and had appointed members of the Revolutionary Guard to key positions in the government since the Presidential elections. Not only did Iran withdraw many of its ambassadors from European countries, but Ahmadinejad's government had also been causing trouble in Iraq. Phillips argued that diplomatic pressure relying on the United Nations was unlikely to produce any results because of the lack of consensus and the ineffectiveness of the Security Council. However, the United States should still push for a UN Security Council resolution in order to gain prestige in its position regarding Iran. Furthermore, in addition to international economic sanctions that would include denying Iran loans, trade deals, arms trades and nuclear assistance, the United States should align itself with the Iranian opposition. In addition, the Iranian people should also be informed that, by sustaining a nuclear programme, the Iranian government had been hurting its own people. Lastly, Phillips argued, the United States should be prepared for military intervention as a last resort:

To deal with a nuclear or terrorist threat from Iran, several military capabilities are particularly important. They include (1) expanding and strengthening the proliferation security initiative; (2) theater missile defense; (3) robust special operations forces and human intelligence (HUMINT) assets; (4) assured access to bases and staging areas in the theater for both special operations and conventional ground, air, and sea forces; and (5) energy security preparations.<sup>80</sup>

Again in 2007, Steven Groves, a fellow at the Heritage Foundation, wrote an article about the importance of promoting democracy in Iran after his testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Groves stated that the Iranian people were dissatisfied with their government, and this could be used as a means to a peaceful regime change in Iran. The writer elaborated on the

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>J Phillips, ‘U.S. Policy and Iran's Nuclear Challenge’, *The Heritage Foundation*, June 2006, retrieved on 26 February 2010, <<http://www.heritage.org/Research/Iran/hl942.cfm>>

lack of freedom in Iran including: constitutional despotism, an anti-bill of rights, the press law, and restricted freedom of assembly. Therefore, Groves argued, the Iranian regime could not be trusted because of its despotic nature and the political and civil rights situation. The nature of the Iranian government made a policy of negotiations and dialogue fruitless because “all appearances indicate that Iran is unwaveringly determined to possess nuclear weapons for international prestige, to acquire regional dominance, to deter the regime's enemies, and to ensure the mullahcracy's survival.”<sup>81</sup> Thus, the only viable solution was to encourage the Iranian people to take charge of their government. Groves identified several policy suggestions on this route: promoting a referendum on Iran's constitution by assisting the dissidents with literature, training and material support, United States legislation that favoured regime change in Iran, public diplomacy that placed the Iranian people among the international community, stronger economic pressure and no security guarantees for the current government in exchange for concessions with its nuclear programme.<sup>82</sup>

The Heritage Foundation scholars took a much tougher stance against Iran. They agreed that the best option for the United States concerning Iran would be regime change. This aim could be acquired by imposing stricter sanctions, in addition to the political and economic backing of the Iranian opposition groups. The scholars were pessimistic about dealing with the current regime because of its lack of reliability, commitment to Khomeini's ideals and poor human rights record. Even though the foundation only advocated military action as a last resort, it still supported a more assertive policy towards Iran. The Heritage Foundation was one of the most influential conservative think tanks. Its influence on the Bush administration could be observed, even though not as obviously as it was during the Reagan administration. For instance, President Bush visited the Foundation to defend his appointment for the attorney general position. Also, the administration's two-fold policy of acquiring UN resolutions and supporting Iranian opposition groups nearly mirrored the arguments of Heritage scholars. Fitting to its conservative leanings, Heritage favoured a tougher policy without engagement and dialogue. Therefore, the Foundation

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<sup>81</sup>S Groves, ‘Advancing Freedom in Iran’, *The Heritage Foundation*, March 2007, retrieved on 26 February 2010, <<http://www.heritage.org/Research/WorldwideFreedom/bg2019.cfm>>

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

was likely to have influenced the Bush administration because of its conservatism and previous ties with the Reagan administration.

The Cato Institute was founded in 1977 by Edward H. Crane in Washington, D.C. Since its name is based on a series of libertarian papers that provided the philosophical foundation of the Institute, the organization defines its mission as “increas[ing] the understanding of public policies based on the principles of limited government, free markets, individual liberty, and peace.”<sup>83</sup> The Institute does not receive any government funding, and depends on funding from individuals and corporations, and the sale of publications. The Institute labels itself as libertarian: “It combines an appreciation for entrepreneurship, the market process, and lower taxes with strict respect for civil liberties and scepticism about the benefits of both the welfare state and foreign military adventurism.”<sup>84</sup>

In 2003, Ted Galen Carpenter, vice president for defence and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute, wrote an article arguing that Washington's policies created the atmosphere in which North Korea and Iran found possessing nuclear weapons attractive. Carpenter gave a list of U.S. military involvements since 1989, which created a formidable international arena, in addition to the threatening nature of the “Axis of Evil” classification. Therefore “[i]t is hardly surprising if Pyongyang and Tehran concluded that they were next on Washington's hit list unless they could effectively deter an attack. Yet neither country could hope to match the conventional military capabilities of a superpower. The most-reliable deterrent — maybe the only reliable deterrent -is to have nuclear weapons.”<sup>85</sup> The author concluded that the U.S. leaders should recognize that their own policies in Iraq, Haiti and the Balkans paved the way for nuclear proliferation.<sup>86</sup> Carpenter is the most vocal contributor of Cato, and he consistently criticised the Bush administration's policies concerning Iran, arguing that the only viable option for a positive direction was to introduce Iran into the world economy. On a different note, Stanley Kober, a research fellow at Cato, commented

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<sup>83</sup>The Cato Institute, Official Website, <<http://www.cato.org/about.php>>

<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

<sup>85</sup>TG Carpenter, ‘Logical Conclusions: North Korea, Iran and Unintended Consequences’, *The Cato Institute*. January 2003, retrieved 12 March 2010, <[http://www.cato.org/pub\\_display.php?pub\\_id=6022](http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=6022)>

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

on Ahmadinejad's speech about wiping Israel off the map. Kober argued that there was a possibility that the Iranian president was trying to provoke the United States, Britain and Israel into striking first, and thus starting the confrontation that would lead to the destruction of Israel. Even though the military might of Iran was not comparable to that of the United States', through the lessons it learned from Vietnam and Iraq, Iran figured out the limits of Washington and was not intimidated by its power. Kober warned against walking into a trap because "Ahmadinejad's threat, it should be noted, was not isolated, but looks like part of a coordinated strategy. He may be attempting to foment a wider war between Islam and the West, beginning with the most western-oriented country in the region, Israel."<sup>87</sup>

Similarly, Malou Innocent argued that the war in Iraq made U.S.-Iranian relations even more crucial; therefore engagement, not military operation, should be the way to approach Iran. According to Innocent, the biggest reason to avoid military conflict with Iran was the overload and strain the American troops experienced by being involved in Afghanistan and Iraq. Not only would a new operation overstretch the troops at the overseas level, but also the home front would suffer from lack of man-force and equipment, as was the case during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Furthermore, Innocent added, Iran could retaliate by attacking the US forces in Afghanistan, Iraq and Lebanon by using medium-range missiles. Therefore, the author concluded that the US should undertake a comprehensive strategy including engagement and military deterrence leading to normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries.<sup>88</sup> On the same issue, David Isenberg, a US Navy veteran and an adjunct scholar with the Cato Institute, wrote a series of articles analyzing the military option of the United States regarding Iran. Firstly, Isenberg argued that it was not likely that Israel would attack Iran because of a want of aircraft that could fly to Iran and back without refuelling, a lack of intelligence, doubt about the successful destruction of the

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<sup>87</sup>S Kober, 'An Iran Trap?', *The Cato Institute*, November 2005, retrieved on 12 March 2010, <[http://www.cato.org/pub\\_display.php?pub\\_id=5210](http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=5210)>

<sup>88</sup>M Innocent, 'Engage and Deter: A Judicious Path with Iran', *The Cato Institute*, August 2007, retrieved on 12 March 2010, <[http://www.cato.org/pub\\_display.php?pub\\_id=8772](http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=8772)>

facilities and the Israeli vulnerability to retaliation.<sup>89</sup> In the last instalment of his series, Isenberg outlined the possible outcomes of US military attack to Iran: an attack against the US forces in Afghanistan and Iraq; an attack on US naval forces in the Gulf; interference with the oil flow thus globally raising the oil prices; and giving justification to the Iranian government for the production of nuclear weapons.<sup>90</sup>

Even though the members of the Cato Institute voiced a certain degree of differing opinions concerning Iran, the consensus leaned towards engagement rather than military involvement. For instance, there were those who blamed the United States for being responsible for the Iranian attitude; there were also those who claimed that the Tehran government had been provocative in order to strengthen the Islamic regime. Different fellows analysed different aspects of possible policy avenues, and came to conclusion that an uncalculated policy of military attacks or isolation policies would play into the hand of the mullahs. Therefore, the Cato contributors did not find a military attack fruitful, not only for ending the Iranian nuclear programme, but also in regards to its consequences related to the world economy. Therefore, overall, even though the current and previous administrations were criticized for their policies, the Institute favoured engagement instead of military action. Being a libertarian conservative think tank, Cato was not in favour of the use of force, which would negatively affect the world and the US economies. Similar to the suggestions of Ron Paul, who argued for opening economic relations with Iran, Cato defended less military and more economic involvement. The real influence of the institute is questionable, because the Bush administrations continued with the sanctions regime, and was not willing to go very far concerning negotiations with Iran. Even though the policy shifted towards a more talks-oriented approach in the second term, it is doubtful that the administration had libertarian motivations, but rather desired to break the deadlock. Furthermore, instead of weakening, the federal government got stronger during the Bush administration, and this in itself is

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<sup>89</sup>D Isenberg, 'U.S. Military & Iran –Part 1', *The Cato Institute*, December 2007, retrieved on 13 March 2010, <[http://www.cato.org/pub\\_display.php?pub\\_id=8841](http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=8841)>

<sup>90</sup>D Isenberg, "U.S. Military & Iran –Part 6", *The Cato Institute*, December 2007, retrieved on 13 March 2010, <[http://www.cato.org/pub\\_display.php?pub\\_id=8861](http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=8861)>

contrary to the arguments of an economic libertarian, who promotes less government intervention and weaker centralization. Thus, it could be concluded that even though the Cato Institute most likely did not directly affect the policies of the Bush administration, its members contributed to the atmosphere of engagement-supporters and justified this position in a different way.

Lastly, the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace within Stanford University, California, was founded in 1919 by Herbert Hoover, former president of the United States, as a collection of documents about World War I. As the contents and knowledge of the centre expanded, the Hoover Institution became a public policy research centre after the 1940s. The mission statement highlights the phrases “representative government,” “private enterprise,” “peace,” “personal freedom” and “safeguards of the American system” and states that “by collecting knowledge, generating ideas, and disseminating both, the Institution seeks to secure and safeguard peace, improve the human condition, and limit government intrusion into the lives of individuals.”<sup>91</sup> The institution receives government funding and also is supported by individual donations and library operations.<sup>92</sup>

As the efforts of the Bush administration failed to produce any result, in 2004, Hoover fellow Charles Recknagel offered a policy direction in regards to curbing Iran's nuclear ambitions, after Tehran's attempts to ease the international tensions by giving access to IAEA inspectors, and thus gaining time and maintaining its trade ties. One of the first steps, according to Recknagel, was to stop Iran's uranium enrichment permanently and make sure that Iran would also halt its efforts to produce its own plutonium. Another important step was to persuade Russia to impede its assistance to Iran in building nuclear reactors. Furthermore, the United States should ascertain that there was no flow of knowledge and material from Pakistan to Iran, especially through unofficial channels. Lastly, the intelligence on what the North Korean activities were regarding the Iranian nuclear programme should be improved. Dismissing the argument for a military strike because of its near impossibility, the Hoover fellow concluded “Our goal now should be to take the diplomatic steps

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<sup>91</sup>The Hoover Institution, Official Website, <<http://www.hoover.org/about/mission>>

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., Finances, <http://www.hoover.org/pubaffairs/brochure/3253171.html>.



that leave Iran with what it officially says it wants: a peaceful nuclear energy programme.”<sup>93</sup> The idea that Iran should be allowed a peaceful nuclear programme could be seen in the administration’s second term efforts. Letting Iran use the uranium that was enriched in Russia was one of the steps that would lead to a peaceful programme rather than a weapons programme. In this context, Recknagel’s suggestion contributed to the atmosphere that led to administration’s change of heart.

In 2005, Abbas Milani, a research fellow and co-director of the Iran Democracy Project at the Hoover Institute, argued that even after the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the case for a surgical attack against Iranian nuclear facilities did not have any weight because it would kill many innocent people and the fortified facilities would most likely remain intact, leaving the world with a stronger Islamic regime in Tehran. Milani argued that the only solution for the United States was to bring about democracy by aligning itself with the Iranian people. He argued that discussions about the cost, viability, feasibility and the real value of the Iranian nuclear programme were never an aspect of the US policy. The new political atmosphere of Iran had the potential to make such a policy very fruitful: “The shocking incompetence of the new regime might open just enough of a gap in Iran’s pseudo-totalitarian power structure so that the indigenous forces of democracy can thrive again. Wise and judicious U.S. policy can help widen that gap, reinvigorating the dormant movement for democracy in Iran.”<sup>94</sup> Milani was among those who claimed that the U.S. should support Iranian opposition groups in order to undermine the Islamic regime. The Bush administration retained the hopes that the regime would topple, despite the attempts to alter its behaviour. Therefore, the idea of supporting the dissidents in Iran remained a part of the US foreign policy throughout Bush’s term in office.

In 2007, in a joint article, three Hoover fellows, Milani, Larry Diamond and Michael McFaul, again claimed that a military attack on Iran would only strengthen the regime at a time when opposition against Ahmadinejad was growing within the government. They argued that despite the international perception, President Ahmadinejad neither possessed immense power nor

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<sup>93</sup>C Recknagel, ‘Tehran, Coming Clean at Last?’, *Hoover Digest*, No.1, 2004.

<sup>94</sup>A Milani, ‘Iran’s New President’, *Hoover Digest*, No. 4, 2005.

the love and support of the Iranian people. On the contrary, Ahmadinejad's mismanagement of the economy along with unemployment and poverty led him to lose his place in the power struggle. The fellows suggested: "Rather than throw the reactionaries in Tehran a political lifeline in the form of war, the United States should pursue a more subtle approach: contain Iranian agents in the region, but offer to negotiate unconditionally with Iran on all the outstanding issues."<sup>95</sup> The argument for engagement for the Hoover fellows was significant in that it was seen as a route to weaken the regime rather than strengthen it. Even though unconditional negotiations with Iran never took place, the idea that engagement might strengthen the opposition might have contributed to why the State Department under Rice was more willing to talk with Iran. After the NIE of December 2007, McFaul and Milani again argued for diplomatic engagement as a means to the United States' short and long term goals. The short-term goal, being arms control, could be achieved through direct US-Iran talks, which should include a change in the sanctions regime, Iran's support for Hezbollah and Hamas, and human rights issues. The authors claimed that as the connection between the American and the Iranian society increased, the regime would lose its legitimacy in the eyes of the Iranian people: "During the past four decades, autocratic regimes rarely have crumbled as a result of isolation; more often, they have collapsed while seeking engagement with the West. Even the collapse of the Soviet Union occurred not when tensions between Moscow and Washington were high but during a period of engagement."<sup>96</sup>

The Hoover Institution scholars opposed military intervention arguing that it was doubtful that the Iranian facilities would be successfully destroyed and war would give the regime a pretext to strengthen their hold and unite the country under their banner. Instead, they argued, the United States should appeal to the Iranian people -who had the real power to change Iran- by demonstrating the disadvantages of nuclear power plants and by supporting the Iranian opposition. As the Iranian people become more and more connected to the rest of the world, the regime would start losing legitimacy. As a conservative and libertarian think tank, the Hoover Institution did not

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<sup>95</sup>A Milani, L Diamond and M McFaul, 'How to Turn Iran Upside Down', *Hoover Digest*, No. 2, 2007.

<sup>96</sup>M McFaul and A Milani, 'Don't Let Up', *Hoover Digest*, No. 2, 2008.

favour military intervention and encouraged creating debate among the Iranian people. The Institution was another influential think tank during the presidency of Bush because of its connections to the administration, such as Condoleezza Rice and Retired Army General John Abizaid, who was involved in administration's Iraq policy. A similarity between the suggestion of Hoover scholars and Rice's policies as Secretary of State can be observed. For instance, the idea that talks with the Iranian government could give the moderates and the opposition groups more voice in the government are a point of convergence. Furthermore, the institute fellows argued for supporting the dissidents, which was one of the policies of the administration even during Rice's attempts to approach the Iranian government. Therefore, it could be argued that not only did the Hoover Institute contribute by means of atmospheric influence, but also it affected the policies of the administration through key officials.

### THINK TANKS –CONCLUSION

Intellectuals and their diverse academies have been the subject of utopian speculation since antiquity, and the relationships of learned advisers to rulers have remained central themes in political histories, biographies, and books of practical statecraft. Yet modern policy experts and their research institutes—no longer fanciful inventions but a fundamental feature of modern political life—have attracted far less attention, and their role in American politics is no less than that of Lagado's Grand Academy.<sup>97</sup>

In his travels, Gulliver was saddened after seeing the political experts of the Grand Academy of Lagado. Swift does not divulge the reasons for his sadness, but maybe he was upset because of the gap between politics and academia, or maybe because the unending opinions of the academy members never quite found their way into the halls of the king. Today, think tanks provide a bridge between the universities and the government; but, nevertheless, they remain closer to academia. As idea manufacturers, the exact influence of think tanks is seemingly impossible to measure, since the origin or initial inception of an idea cannot be determined. However, this difficulty does not negate their importance. Think tanks are a part of the political atmosphere of Washington D.C., and in one

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<sup>97</sup>JA Smith, *The Idea Brokers: Think Tanks and the Rise of the New Policy Elite*, New York: Maxmillian, 1993, p.xii.

way or another, every decision-maker encounters them. Their overwhelming presence, the literature they produce, their media appearances, the congressional testimonies and the staff connections between think tanks and the government are sufficient reasons to research this ever-increasing phenomenon in American politics. The objective of identifying the role think tanks played in foreign policy making regarding Iran remains an arduous task, but nevertheless it should be addressed.

*The question of advice of think tanks concerning Iran* – There was a vast array of opinions concerning how the Bush administration should proceed in its foreign policy towards Iran. Even though there were differing perspectives on what to do, the think tanks, from liberal to conservative, agreed that the Islamic Republic was a problem to be solved. The approach was varied, but the objective was similar. Another shared view was that the administration was not doing a very good job concerning Iran. Across the board, the think tanks argued that the Bush administration either was not tough enough or was not engaging enough. One of the major criticisms was that the Bush administration failed to capitalise on the cooperation avenues concerning Afghanistan and Iraq. The Brookings Institution, the RAND Corporation, Cato and the Woodrow Wilson Center were among those who advocated cooperation between the two governments concerning Iraq, and the use of this cooperation as a starting point to further talks. These think tanks spread the notion that the only viable policy option regarding Iraq was engagement. As a result, the liberal and libertarian think tanks argued for engagement and cooperation. The sanctions policy had its advocates, too. While Brookings and Wilson Institute claimed that the U.S. should join the EU nations by offering incentives, Carnegie, Heritage and the AEI claimed that a tougher sanctions policy would yield results. Thus, the liberal leaning think tanks wanted to ease the sanctions, while the conservative leaning ones urged toughening the current regime. Supporting the opposition groups in Iran was another common theme in the writing of the scholars in various organizations. For instance, the CFR, the AEI, and the Hoover Institute argued that the U.S. should back the opposition groups in Iran, because that is the only way to get rid of the regime of the mullahs. Military attack was hardly ever favoured by think tanks because of

the challenges an attack against Iran presented and because of American involvements in Afghanistan and Iraq. Finally, regime change should be the ultimate aim in the minds of many think tank scholars. Carnegie, Heritage, Wilson Institute, the AEI and, of course, the PNAC all advocated regime change through different means. While Wilson Institute scholars believed that engagement with Iran would ultimately lead to regime change, the others argued that tougher sanctions and united international pressure would weaken the Islamic regime.

*The question of atmospheric influence* – In light of these positions, the think tanks created a challenging atmosphere for the executive and the legislative to function in. It was clear that the policies of the previous administrations were not working, and as time passed, it became clear that the policies of the Bush administration were not working either. The opinions of think tanks would offer new routes of policy for policy makers at that point. The highly polarized political climate of the Bush years most likely affected the influence each think tank had. The liberal-leaning think tanks created an atmosphere where engagement, incentives and cooperation with Iran were at the top of the agenda. In this they offered ammunition to those who were critical of the Bush administration within the government, since the arguments favouring an engagement and incentive centred policy gained prominence as the years of Bush's presidency advanced. Additionally, the idea of an incentive-based sanctions policy came to life as Rice inherited Powell's place in the second term, whereas, during the first term, the advice of the conservative think tanks was more visible, that being an uncompromising approach with the mindset of regime change. Therefore, it could be concluded that the dual atmosphere created by the think tanks provided the policy-makers multiple avenues to follow as the administration adjusted its policies.

*The question of the policy influence of think tanks* – In more particular terms, there are other means by which think tanks make themselves visible. To begin with, giving testimonies before the Congress is one of these approaches. During the eight years of the Bush presidency, the Heritage Foundation and the Brookings Institutions sent the greatest number of scholars to testify before the Congress. These two think tanks usually presented alternate opinions to the same issue. It should, of course, be noted that the frequency of testimonies given by a certain think tank does not

necessarily demonstrate policy influence. At times, the testimonies of scholars will reinforce the opinions of a congressman, in which case the think tank did not have any impact. At other times, the congressmen might simply ignore the testimony given, in which case the policy would remain unchanged. During the congresses examined in this thesis, the congressional policies underwent very little change despite the number of think tank members that testified during the subcommittee hearings. On the other hand, considering today's world of interconnected world politics and economies, the knowledge and information provided by think tanks became essential in terms of their gathering and analyzing information, then digesting plausible scenarios for this information as possible policy options. In regards to Iran, think tanks are able to offer insider opinion and different insights than the Congress or the White House might have access to ordinarily. Therefore, by bringing this knowledge to light through hearings, conferences, public records and publications, think tanks make it possible for policy-makers to access a wide range of information and suggestions.

Secondly, think tanks contribute to the formation of public opinion. By communicating their knowledge and suggestions on television, radio and newspapers, think tanks have the opportunity to reach a wide audience. Consequently, with the increase of think tanks, the public has more access to information and opinion about important policy matters. How much a certain think tank shapes the public opinion cannot be identified, but the more an organization is quoted in the media, the more its influence will be. For instance, the Brookings Institution was cited 4,724 times in the media in 2004, the Heritage Foundation 3,114 times, the American Enterprise Institute 2,902 times, the Council on Foreign Relations, 2,265 times, and the Hoover Institution 1000 times.<sup>98</sup> The media exposure of a think tank's ideas would, furthermore, give the organization more credibility, influence and funding, thereby impacting their ability to influence again in the future.

Lastly, the individual affiliations of a think tank are crucial in its prospect of shaping foreign policy. For instance, several officials of the Bush administration were affiliated with certain

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<sup>98</sup>M Dolny, 'Right, Center Think Tanks Still Most Quoted', *FAIR*, 2005, retrieved on 17 May 2010, <<http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=2534>>

think tanks. Important figures like Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle are all affiliated with the American Enterprise Institute. Therefore, it could be argued that the AEI had a significant impact on the policies of the Bush administration because of its proximity through its members. Furthermore, the think tank most likely provided an umbrella for neo-conservative officials where their ideas would receive intellectual, public and official attention. Moreover, several trustees of the Heritage Foundation were also involved in congressional and executive politics during Bush's presidency; Richard Scaife and Robert Herbold are among these names. On the other hand, CSIS enjoyed the affiliations of Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, William Cohen and Brent Scowcroft, whose criticisms of the Bush administration's policies gave more weight to the impact of the think tank. Therefore, it could be concluded that, different think tanks have different levels of impact depending on the political orientation of the White House. It could be speculated that, during George W. Bush's presidency, the AEI and the Heritage Foundation had more impact on policy than the Woodrow Wilson Center or the Carnegie Endowment.

PNAC required special attention in this juncture, despite its relatively short life span. The arguments of PNAC formed the core principles of the Bush administration, especially after 9/11. The biggest reason for this impact was the involvement of high-ranking officials among the supporters of PNAC ideals. Cheney, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz are only three of the many supporters of neo-conservative ideas. The organization provided a gathering ground for these similar minded individuals and acted as a uniting platform. Unlike the other think tanks, the PNAC directly influenced the foreign policy of the Bush administration, especially concerning the genesis of the Iraq War. In terms of Iran, PNAC favoured regime change, and this uncompromising view likely led to the Bush administration's failure to engage and cooperate with Iran during the first term. PNAC and the top guns of the Bush administration shared the view that the USA should be assertive in the international arena, even though there was a difference of opinion as to what to do with this power. As the Iraq War became an unsolved problem rather than a victory for Bush, the influence of Cheney and Rumsfeld diminished and so did the influence of PNAC.

## THE ISRAEL LOBBY

Beginning in the early 1970s and continuing into the post-Cold War era, the U.S. foreign policy-making system has been transformed from the relatively closed and presidential dominated system of the early cold war into a more open, contentious, and pluralistic system. The president remains the most powerful actor, but he now must contend with an active Congress, oversee a complex executive bureaucracy, and respond to pressures and ideas generated by the press, think tanks, and public opinion. During this period, there also has been a sharp increase in the number of interest groups actively seeking to influence U.S. foreign policy. These interest groups have mobilized to represent a diverse array of business, labor, ethnic, human rights, environmental, and other organizations. Thus, on most issues, the contemporary foreign policy-making system has become more similar to its domestic policy-making counterpart, with multiple interest groups using multiple channels to try to influence policy choices.<sup>99</sup>

The Israeli lobby is one of the most visible and controversial ethnic lobbies. There are those who argue that the Israel lobby is so powerful that not only they influence the US policy towards Israel but the Middle East in general.<sup>100</sup> At the same time, there are those who argue that pro-Israel organizations have minimal effect on the formation of foreign policy.<sup>101</sup> As Robert Freedman suggested, however, the reality is mostly likely somewhere in the middle, since the political, financial and intellectual impact of the Israel lobby has been fortified by national security concerns and other ideological influences, such as Evangelical Protestantism. The reason the Israel lobby is relevant in this study is that the lobby has been the most vocal concerning the Iranian nuclear programme and Iran's activities regarding Hezbollah. Two main questions are addressed concerning the Israel lobby and Iran: What is the position of the Israel lobby in terms of Iran, and what influence does the lobby have?

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) was founded in 1963 in Washington D.C by Isaiah L. Kenen, Isadore Breslau and Joseph Ottenstein with the aim of

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<sup>99</sup> JW Dietrich, 'Interest Groups and Foreign Policy: Clinton and China MFN Debates', *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 29, no. 2, 1999, p. 292.

<sup>100</sup> JJ Mearsheimer and SM Walt, *The Israel Lobby and the U.S. Foreign Policy*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.

<sup>101</sup> Michelle Goldberg, "Is the Israel Lobby Distorting America's Middle East policies?" *Salon*, April 18, 2006; Christopher Hitchens, "Overstating Jewish Power," *Slate*, March 27, 2006; Joseph Massad, "Blaming the Lobby," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, March 23-29, 2006; David Gergen, "An Unfair Attack," *US News and World Report*, April 3, 2006; Max Boot, "Policy Analysis – Paranoid Style", *Los Angeles Times*, March 29, 2006.



"strengthen[ing] and advanc[ing] friendship and goodwill between the people of the United States and Israel."<sup>102</sup> The organization was originally called the American Zionist Committee for Public Affairs, which was also founded by Kenen in 1951. In 2010, the AIPAC website claims to have reached to 100,000 members and was described by the *New York Times* as "the most important organization affecting America's relationship with Israel". The official website states the aims of today's AIPAC as securing US aid for Israel, promoting strategic cooperation between the US and Israel, supporting the development of anti-terror policies, and hindering rogue nations such as Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.<sup>103</sup>

In an AIPAC Memo in December 2006, the organization warned against engaging with Iran and Syria. In the case of Iran, the memo states that the Tehran government did not respond to the positive steps taken by the Clinton administration. Similarly, the EU3 incentives package was also turned down. Furthermore, Secretary Rice's offer of joining multilateral talks with Iran in exchange for cessation of uranium enrichment, too, was rejected by Iran. The organization argued that engaging with Iran "could provide the regime legitimacy and prestige at a time when they are using terrorism, murder and the threat of nuclear weapons to destabilize the region".<sup>104</sup> Secondly, starting a dialogue before Iran suspends its enrichment programme might be seen as an opportunity to buy time and take a break from the sanctions while still continuing its support for terrorism. Engagement policies, the AIPAC suggested, should be accompanied by clear deterrence with robust sanctions in order to force the Iranian government to focus on its financial situation rather than the nuclear programme.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, in the AIPAC briefing book, Iran was described as the main threat to the United States, because Ahmadinejad called for "a world without the United States and Zionism."<sup>106</sup> The book stated that Iran had the capability of delivering nuclear weapons with its

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<sup>102</sup>Certificate of Incorporation of American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Institute for Research Middles Eastern Policy, retrieved on 28 January 2010, <[http://irmep.org/ILA/AIPAC/01021963\\_AIPAC\\_Articles\\_of\\_Incorporation.pdf](http://irmep.org/ILA/AIPAC/01021963_AIPAC_Articles_of_Incorporation.pdf)>

<sup>103</sup>The American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Official Website, retrieved on 18 March 2010,

<[http://www.aipac.org/about\\_AIPAC/Learn\\_About\\_AIPAC/26.asp](http://www.aipac.org/about_AIPAC/Learn_About_AIPAC/26.asp)>

<sup>104</sup>AIPAC Memo, December 2006, retrieved on 23 February 2010,

<[http://www.aipac.org/Publications/AIPACAnalysesMemos/AIPAC\\_Memo\\_Proceed\\_with\\_Caution\\_if\\_Engaging\\_Iran\\_and\\_Syria.pdf](http://www.aipac.org/Publications/AIPACAnalysesMemos/AIPAC_Memo_Proceed_with_Caution_if_Engaging_Iran_and_Syria.pdf)>

<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

<sup>106</sup>'Iran's Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons', *AIPAC Briefing Book*, p.14, retrieved on 23 February 2010,

current ballistic missiles to the American troops in the Middle East, parts of Europe and the U.S. allies such as Israel.

The possibility that Iran might be developing intercontinental ballistic missiles, which would be able to reach the United States, was also mentioned. Moreover, AIPAC articulated that nuclear weapons would give the Iranian government the power to achieve its foreign policy goals. With the leverage of nuclear weapons, Iran would be able to interfere with Iraq and increase its support for terrorist organizations. Moreover, the book argued that a nuclear Iran would cause a nuclear arms race in the region. The solution offered for these problems was an imposition of strong economic and diplomatic sanctions. It was argued that the sanctions passed by the Congress slowed Iran's progress by hindering the flow of money and materials into Iran. However, even though the sanctions policy inhibited progress, the problem still remained, and therefore, AIPAC argued, the Bush administration and the Congress could not take any options off the table. At the same time, the United Nations should not be quick to provide incentives and rewards for Iran without seeing any improvement, but instead the international community must demand Iran's cooperation with the UN sanctions.<sup>107</sup> Similar policies were suggested at the end of 2007 in the Near East Report with an emphasis on stronger sanctions by the international community.<sup>108</sup>

The organization consistently objected to engagement with the Tehran government, arguing that this would strengthen the current regime by giving them legitimacy. The only way engagement would be acceptable was after making sure that Iran would not use the time to advance its programme. Therefore, cessation of uranium enrichment and imposing robust sanctions should remain the precondition for any dialogue according to AIPAC. Other crucial policy suggestions included refraining from offering incentives and keeping the military option on the table in order to acquire concessions from Iran. AIPAC took a non-compromising stance by not favouring engagement, encouraging stronger sanctions and being open to the option of a military attack. This view is expected from the organization because Iran was seen as a major threat by the Israeli

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<[http://www.aipac.org/Publications/AIPACAnalysesIssueBriefs/Irans\\_Pursuit\\_of\\_Nuclear\\_Weapons\(1\).pdf](http://www.aipac.org/Publications/AIPACAnalysesIssueBriefs/Irans_Pursuit_of_Nuclear_Weapons(1).pdf)>

<sup>107</sup>Ibid.

<sup>108</sup>Near East Report, AIPAC's Biweekly on American Middle East Policy, November 2007.

government, which consistently urged the Bush administration to be uncompromising concerning Iran's nuclear programme and support for Hezbollah.

AIPAC has long been a controversial organization. Despite the statement in its website about not receiving any financial assistance from Israel, in the 1970s, Senator William Fulbright and CIA official Victor Marchetti, argued that AIPAC should register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act because of its financial ties to Israel. In 2005, Lawrence Anthony Franklin, a U.S. Air Force Colonel, was arrested and charged by the FBI with passing classified information to two AIPAC officials for whom Franklin pleaded guilty.<sup>109</sup> However, despite the controversy surrounding the organization, AIPAC has been able to testify before the Congress, and enjoy the presence of government officials in its conferences. Bill Clinton, George W Bush, Barack Obama, Dick Cheney, Joe Biden and Hillary Clinton have all addressed AIPAC conferences. Though there are several policies concerning the Middle East that were introduced before AIPAC by administrations, it could be argued that AIPAC was more influential in congressional politics. The way the U.S. congressional elections take place makes the representatives and senators more in need of the Jewish vote. Furthermore, AIPAC members testified before the Congress, arguing for continuation of ILSA and presenting the dangers the Iranian government posed. While the extent to which these testimonies bore fruit is not ascertainable, the main focus of AIPAC has been the Congress.

This is not to say that the White House has been forsaken. However, in presidential elections, even though moving away from a pro-Israel policy might be damaging, the Jewish vote is not as vital as in congressional elections. Therefore, instead of being strongly influenced by AIPAC, American administrations have been using the organization as a platform to introduce their policies. Since Israel's security has been seen as a part of American security in the Middle East by many administrations before Bush, AIPAC was perceived as the natural place to address issues concerning the Middle East. Furthermore, AIPAC became an organization that was supported by the conservatives both in the US and Israel. Nevertheless, the appearance of high ranking government

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<sup>109</sup>GF Smith, *Foreign Agents: The American Israel Public Affairs Committee from the 1963 Fulbright Hearing to the 2005 Espionage Scandal*, Institute for Research, Washington, D.C., 2007.

officials or testimonies before the Congress did not necessarily demonstrate the influence of the organization. Rather, AIPAC is a centrepiece for those who tie Israeli and American security together. However, considering that American Jews are predominantly politically liberal, AIPAC started to lose the support of American Jews and so they turned to alternative organizations like J Street. Even though there had been arguments that AIPAC had disproportionate influence on policy-making, the real impact of the organization was most likely exaggerated.

The Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA) was founded in 1973 after the Yom Kippur War with the objective of explaining the role of Israel in accordance with American interests and the connection between the American defence policy and the security of Israel. The organization defines itself as a “non-profit, non-partisan and non-sectarian educational organization committed to explaining the need for a prudent national security policy for the United States, addressing the security requirements of both the United States and the State of Israel, and strengthening the strategic cooperation relationship between these two great democracies.”<sup>110</sup> JINSA policies include stronger defence and anti-proliferation against WMDs, counter-terrorism, increased cooperation with Israel, and regime change in “rogue” nations such as Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Venezuela, Cuba, North Korea and Libya.

The JINSA report of 2005 criticized the Bush administration's desire to refer Iran to the UN Security Council, claiming that the measures of the Security Council would be ineffective, thus concluding that “it would be better to fail to refer the issue to the Security Council and have everyone think we are impotent to deal politically with rogue states with nuclear weapons, than to refer it and have everyone *know* we are.”<sup>111</sup> However, the report continued, it would be extremely hard to take out Iran's nuclear facilities via a military operation as was done in Osirak in 1981. The perceived difficulty of a military strike rose from the intelligence that Iran's facilities were spread out and buried, rendering them extremely hard to destroy. The report also suggested that the best option for dealing with Iran was regime change. Since the government of the mullahs was not

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<sup>110</sup>JINSA, Official Website, retrieved on 16 February 2010, <<http://www.jinsa.org/node/3>>

<sup>111</sup>“Or Else, What?”, JINSA Report #519, September 23, 2005.

willing to change their policies by themselves and it was hard to overthrow the regime by means of external force, the only viable option for a new Iranian regime was to persuade the Iranian people that the United States was on their side, and demonstrate to the mullahs that a continuation of the nuclear programme would result in an uprising of the Iranian people.<sup>112</sup>

Another report in 2006 also indicated that the negotiations led by the Europeans were a waste that bought time for Iran to progress its nuclear programme. Furthermore, the UN option did not promise anything more than providing even more time for Iran. The JINSA report concluded that all the options pointed towards a nuclear Iran who would use this capability for blackmail, in the most optimistic scenario. Because of the inefficiency of diplomacy, “serious discussion about Iran has, therefore, focused on the requirements for regime change and/or military action to set back or eliminate the mullahs' programme.”<sup>113</sup> Nevertheless, concerning Iraq, the report stated that the United States and Iran had common interests, as was demonstrated with the invitation of the Bush administration to discuss the future of Iraq with Iran, and Tehran's acceptance of this invitation. Thus, the United States should attempt to show the Iranian government that a stable Iraq was not necessarily bad news for Iran.<sup>114</sup> Again with JINSA Report #628, the organization touched upon why Iran's possession of nuclear weapons was an issue for the world. Considering that nobody lost sleep over Britain's, France's or Russia's nuclear weapons, the report asked why it would matter if another country acquired similar capabilities. The answer was that the problem was not possession of nuclear weapons or the technology, but who possessed them: “By declaration of intent and/or by behavior including proliferation and support of international terrorism, Iran and North Korea are entirely unacceptable candidates to control nuclear technology.”<sup>115</sup> Instead of trying to stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons, the United States and its allies should take steps towards making sure that Iran was governed by democratic

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<sup>112</sup>Ibid.

<sup>113</sup>‘Nukes and Talks’, JINSA Report #557, March 20, 2006.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid.

<sup>115</sup>‘Democracy Matters’, JINSA Report #628, December 19, 2006.

institutions.<sup>116</sup>

In short, JINSA did not support the Bush administration's desire to refer the Iranian nuclear programme to the UN Security Council, claiming that the ineffectiveness of the Security Council would only weaken the United States' position in the world by making it look helpless against a rogue state. Furthermore, the extensive UN process would give Iran more time to advance its programme, and the efforts of the EU3 were also dismissed for the same reason. Therefore, two options were left: military attack or regime change. Considering that the intelligence on the whereabouts of the nuclear facilities was not clear, and the destruction of the underground facilities was not guaranteed, JINSA supported regime change as the only option. The Association advocated this position consistently because nuclear weapons would not be dangerous in the hands of a democratic Iranian government. Considering that JINSA is committed to the security of Israel, its insistence on solving the Iranian problem in the long run by encouraging regime change was to be expected.

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP) was founded in 1985 with the help of Martin Indyk, former director of AIPAC. The Institute website describes the founders as being "committed to advancing U.S interests in the Middle East" by offering realistic and balanced analysis about the region.<sup>117</sup> Among the list of board of advisors appear names of secretaries of state, Warren Christopher, Lawrence Eagleburger, George Shultz, Harry Kissinger and Alexander Haig; National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane; Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Perle and Director of Central Intelligence James Woolsey.<sup>118</sup>

In 2001, after the 9/11 attacks, Patrick Clawson, who was the director of research at the Washington Institute at the time, wrote a Policy Watch for WINEP concerning Iran's position in the war with Afghanistan. Even though Iran had been fighting the Taliban by supporting anti-Taliban groups in Afghanistan, it never made it clear which faction it supported if the Taliban were

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<sup>116</sup>Ibid.

<sup>117</sup>The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Main Website, Our History, retrieved on 17 February 2010, <<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org>>

<sup>118</sup>The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Main Website, Board of Advisors, retrieved on 17 February 2010, <<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org>>

to fall from power. Since the Supreme Leader Khamenei expressed that Iran would not be pleased if the United States attempted to expand its influence by dispatching forces to Afghanistan and entering Pakistan, Clawson argued that the most realistic expectation from Iran would be their non-involvement. Then, Clawson continued to quote Secretary of State Colin Powell who said that even though Iran was willing to fight against Taliban, it would fall short of becoming part of the coalition because of its continued support of other terrorist organisations. Hezbollah was at the top of the list of these terrorist organizations that were involved in many terrorist activities around the globe targeting American and Israeli buildings. However, Clawson argued that, since President Bush gave state-sponsors of terrorism a chance to halt their support, the United States should push this point of view with Iran by calling for cessation of support for Hezbollah and the disclosure of information about the 1996 bombing of Khobar Towers. Clawson concluded his article: “Perhaps Iran will change. After all, unlike the unabashed gloating seen after previous terrorist attacks on Americans, this time, only some Iranian leaders (including Khamenei) blamed Israel for the bombings.”<sup>119</sup>

After President Bush's “Axis of Evil” speech in 2002, Ray Takeyh, who was a fellow at the Washington Institute, argued that the reformists were able to use the speech by claiming that the Iranian administration gave Washington a pretext to threaten Iran. Even though eventually Khamenei refused to commence negotiations with the United States, the domestic climate persuaded him to form a group to assess the advantages and disadvantages of negotiations. Takeyh concluded that even though the clerics were not able to build a coherent approach with regards to talks with the United States, “there is reason to hope for some more pragmatism in Iran's outlook.”<sup>120</sup> Michael Herzog described the scenario where the international monitoring prevented the country from acquiring some crucial elements by persuading the Tehran government to stop uranium enrichment. If this was the case, Herzog presented an argument that both Iran and the West had advantages as the time elapsed: in the mean time Iran could advance in its programme and the

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<sup>119</sup>P Clawson, ‘Iran: Part of the Problem or Part of the Solution’, *WINEP Policy Watch* 3560, 24 September 2001, retrieved on 27 January 2010, <<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=1438>>

<sup>120</sup>R Takeyh, ‘Iran: Scared Straight?’, *WINEP Policy Watch* #622, 3 May 2002, retrieved on 27 January 2010, <<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=1500>>

current cessation of enrichment could hinder progress giving more time to the West. However, Herzog concluded that since the stakes were too high, if Iran was to resume enrichment, Iran should not be allowed to gain more time by dragging the talks.<sup>121</sup>

Nevertheless, as diplomacy failed to produce any results, talks of a United States military action gained prevalence. Thus, the Washington Institute devoted a policy watch to assessing the possibility of a military action. Michael Eisenstadt laid out the issues the administration would face if there were to be a military action. First of all, since the power to declare war rested with the United States Congress, the administration should either act without informing the entire Congress, at the risk of losing popular support, or consult the Congress, thereby losing the element of surprise. There was also timing considerations such as the intelligence about the locations of the facilities, targeting the facilities that were devoted to the final stages of production, and neutralizing the brains behind the project. When addressing the weapons question, Eisenstadt argued that, considering the relatively shallow Natanz facility, there might not be need for ground penetrating missiles; instead a concentrated assault with conventional ammunition would be sufficient. Thus, Eisenstadt concluded “should diplomacy fail, either of the remaining policy options available to Washington -(a) preventive action or (b) deterrence and containment- is likely to have immense consequences for the war on terrorism, the Middle East, and the role of the United States in the world.”<sup>122</sup>

Michael Jacobson mentioned the congressional pressure on the execution of sanctions against Iran. In 2007, the House Foreign Affairs and Financial Services Committee criticized the Bush administration’s unwillingness to sanction foreign companies. Jacobson observed that the administration was in a conundrum where there was reaction from the Congress if the foreign companies were not sanctioned and from the allies if they were. However, the administration could use the congressional pressure as leverage by arguing that the Congress would be satisfied with the

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<sup>121</sup>Brig. Gen. Michael Herzog (Israel Defense Forces), Visiting Fellow at the Washington Institute. M Herzog, ‘The Ticking Clock toward a Nuclear Iran’, *WINEP Policy Watch* #997, 26 May 2005.

<sup>122</sup>Michael Eisenstadt, Senior Fellow and Director of the Military and Security Studies Programme at the Washington Institute. M Eisenstadt, ‘Iran: The Complex Calculus of Preventive Military Action’, *WINEP policy Watch* #1152, 25September 2006.



current policy if there were results that could only be acquired through international cooperation.<sup>123</sup> As the sanctions failed to persuade the Iranian government, supporting the opposition in Iran became more attractive. Mehdi Khalaji suggested two different ways of reaching the Iranian people: “(1) supporting political opposition groups that explicitly advocate regime change, and (2) empowering human rights and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that do not directly engage in political action but support issues such as women and children's rights, labor rights, and religious freedom.”<sup>124</sup> After arguing that the Iranian opposition groups lacked the necessary dynamics and ideology to come to power in Iran, Khalaji claimed that these political groups could provide information about Iranian public opinion and give advice about the formation of American policy towards Iran. However, he added, these groups do not have the power to influence a wide enough demography to swing a regime change, which also meant their claims about the public opinion should be scrutinized before being taken into account. Furthermore, American support for opposition groups could actually undermine their efforts rather than enhance them. Khalaji suggested that the most efficient way to support and impact the Iranian people is to offer better quality U.S. funded Iranian media. Other methods were to make human rights issues part of the diplomatic process and to facilitate the visa process for the Iranian cities.<sup>125</sup>

In August 2008, Patrick Clawson published an article in *The Guardian*, discussing the policy towards Iran. Clawson argued that Israel had much to lose if it decided to strike Iranian nuclear facilities, mainly because the international community would side against Israel. Clawson argued that the international community should find a way to persuade Iran to halt its nuclear programme. The diplomatic route should include both incentives and punishments, which were to be followed whole-heartedly by all the actors involved. Clawson concluded that “[i]f Iran were in effect locked out of the world's two largest financial centres, New York and London, even hard-line

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<sup>123</sup>Michael Jacobson, Senior Fellow at the Washington Institute's Stein Programme on Terrorism, Intelligence and Policy. M Jacobson, ‘Economic Sanctions against Iran: Engaging, Not Confronting, Allies’, *WINEP Policy Watch #1227*, 4 May 2007.

<sup>124</sup>Mehdi Khalaji, the Next Generation fellow at the Washington Institute. M Khalaji, ‘U.S. Support for the Iranian Opposition’, *WINEP Policy Watch #1258*, 9 July 2007.

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*

Iranian leaders might reflect on the high cost of their refusal to compromise.”<sup>126</sup>

In the aftermath of 9/11, the WINEP scholars argued that the Bush administration should use the opportunity to encourage Iran to halt its support for terrorism. Even though engagement with Iran was advocated as long as negotiations did not give Iran more time to advance its programme, the Institute was open to preventive actions, such as containment and supporting the Iranian dissident groups. However, overall, WINEP favoured a diplomatic approach, not only by the United States, but also by the international community, where both carrots and sticks were used to complement each other. The founder, Martin Indyk, desired to produce credible research in the Middle East while remaining committed to the security of Israel. It could be argued that WINEP attempted to impact policy and opinion by reaching out to the executive branch and military officials, unlike AIPAC who is more focused on the Congress. In order to be more appealing to the administration at different levels by offering a wider array of policy option, WINEP suggested alternative policies such as international cooperation and incentives. Therefore, it is expected to hear WINEP argue for an approach that favours international cooperation where both sanctions and incentives are used to attain long-term solutions for the Iranian issue.

### **THE ISRAEL LOBBY –CONCLUSION**

*The question of the position of Israel lobby concerning Iran* – One common denominator of these three organizations was that unconditional engagement with Iran was not an option. Since the State of Israel saw the Islamic Republic as a national security threat *per se*, the Israel lobby did not advocate extensive engagement with Iran, which could lead to resumption of diplomatic relations. Furthermore, the lobby believed that engagement with Iran would not produce any results and would give more time to the Iranian government to advance its nuclear programme. In order to curb Iran’s nuclear programme and support of terrorism, AIPAC advised tougher

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<sup>126</sup>P Clawson, ‘Sticks, Carrots, and Nukes’, *The Guardian*, 14 August 2008.

sanctions against Iran, and argued that the US should not join in with the Europeans' offer of incentives. Additionally, although the organization did not advocate military attack openly, they argued that no option should be off the table. JINSA, on the other hand, recognized the difficulties surrounding a military intervention in Iran, and concluded that such an option was not a feasible solution. However, at the same time JINSA scholars did not believe that UN Security Council resolutions would persuade Iran, and would weaken America's prestige by showing that the US was not able to deal with the problem unilaterally. The only way out, according to JINSA, was regime change. In order to bring about the toppling of the Islamic regime, the US should align itself with the opposition groups and thus weaken the current government. Out of these three, WINEP was the only one that took a diplomacy-friendly approach. Even though engagement could only be used, no time would be lost giving the Iranian government to further its agenda; the organization favoured that the US should cooperate with the EU countries in offering incentives while making sure that sticks remained in place. Just like AIPAC and JINSA, WINEP rejected the idea of unconditional engagement, even though they were open to some level engagement unlike the previous two. Therefore, in general, it could be said that continuation of the sanctions policy was seen as the major policy direction, even though there were differences in how this policy should be implemented.

*The question of influence of Israel lobby* – The assessment of the influence of AIPAC is speculative, since despite the appearance of the congressmen and senators at AIPAC Conferences, the impact of the organization in the actual policy making is hard to measure. In *The Israeli Lobby and US Foreign Policy*, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt argued that AIPAC has a substantial influence:

The Lobby's influence helped lead the United States into a disastrous war in Iraq and has hamstrung efforts to deal with Syria and Iran. It also encouraged the United States to back Israel's ill-conceived assault on Lebanon, a campaign that strengthened Hezbollah, drove Syria and Iran closer together, and further tarnished American image. The lobby bears considerable, though not complete responsibility, for each of these developments.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>127</sup>Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and the U.S. Foreign Policy*, p. 335.

American commitment to Israel's security has strong roots, going back to World War II. Not only has the post-Holocaust establishment of the State of Israel created a historical attachment, but also having a functioning democracy in the Middle East has encouraged American politicians to support Israel in this region. In addition to the historical roots, organizations like JINSA and WINEP were able to find their way into the halls of the Bush administration, influencing the policy makers on a variety of issues. In Karen DeYoung's biographical work, Colin Powell refers to Rumsfeld's team as the "JINSA crowd"<sup>128</sup>. Furthermore, the board of advisors of JINSA included the names Dick Cheney, former Undersecretary of State for Arms Control John Bolton, former Undersecretary of State Richard Perle, and former Director of CIA James Woolsey. Perle, Woolsey, Robert McFarlane and George Shultz were also in the board of advisors of WINEP. Therefore, it could be concluded that the Jewish lobby exerted a considerable amount of influence on the Bush administration because of its proximity to the current and former policy makers. It is impossible to know how much influence the lobby had over the administration's policy-making; however, Bush and his close advisers' commitment to Israel's security made the Israel lobby an attractive tool to spread ideas and gain support. Therefore, it would be inaccurate to give full credit to the Israel lobby for Bush administration's pro-Israel leanings.

Furthermore, even though only a fraction of Jewish Americans financially supported the Israel lobby, the political differences within the community are rarely reflected to the larger public. This, in itself, magnified the importance of the lobby because of the illusion of unity. Furthermore, the voter turnout among Jewish Americans had been higher than the country average, making this community more important, especially in the areas of higher Jewish population. Having this political card in their hand, the Israel lobby had been able to sway the politicians towards their cause. Furthermore, the fear of being labelled as an anti-Semite in addition to the feeling of guilt over the Holocaust made the policy-makers reluctant to oppose the Israeli cause. The Israel lobby used these sentiments effectively through the years, and gained continuous financial support from

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<sup>128</sup>K DeYoung, *Soldier: The Life of Colin Powell*, Knopf, New York, 2006, p. 358.

the Congress.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that the American government's pro-Israeli stance stems from several different sources, not solely from the formal Jewish lobby. The most important reason for America's pro-Israel policies is Israel's perceived geostrategic importance for United States' interests in the Middle East. Israel has been seen as the bastion of democracy in the Middle East, and having a committed ally ruled by democracy was crucial for the US regional interests, especially during the Cold War, and in the aftermath of 9/11. For years, the US administrations were reluctant to formally bind themselves to Israel through agreements because of the possibility of alienating the Arab states.<sup>129</sup> However, after 9/11, the Bush administration moved towards a formal and strategic alliance between the US and Israel, and this was partly made possible through the individuals who were previously part of the Israel lobby.

Another important source of support of Israel is the Evangelical churches, who not only identify with Israel because of its struggle with terrorism, but also have a biblical conviction that God favours Israel above all nations.<sup>130</sup> For instance *Christians United for Israel*, a Christian organization that was founded to support Israel, quotes the Book of Isaiah from the Old Testament in its front page: "For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like dawn her salvation like a blazing torch"<sup>131</sup>. The organization declares that Israel is in peril because of Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas; therefore Christians should pray, donate and rally for Israel.<sup>132</sup>

In conclusion, the Israel lobby continuously pushed Iran to top the agenda since the Iranian regime's hostile rhetoric became an issue of concern for the lobby, more so that Saddam Hussein and his supposed quest for WMDs. Iran as a national security threat to both the US and Israel remained a major concern for these three organizations; however, the Bush administration

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<sup>129</sup> Janice J. Terry, *U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East: The Role of Lobbies and Special Interest Groups*, London: Pluto Press, 2005, p. 123. See also Lee Marsden, 'US-Israel Relations: A Special Friendship', in John Dumbrell and Axel Schafer, eds., 'America's "Special Relationships"' (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 191-207.

<sup>130</sup> Notable sources on Christian Zionism: Stephen Specter, *The Story of American Christian Zionism*, Oxford University Press, 2008; and Victoria Clark, *Allies for Armageddon: The Rise of Christian Zionism*, Yale University Press, 2007.

<sup>131</sup> Christians United for Israel, Official Website, Homepage, retrieved on 16 April 2010, < <http://www.cufi.org/site/>>

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., < [http://www.cufi.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about\\_AboutCUFI](http://www.cufi.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about_AboutCUFI)>

had other priorities, even though Iran found its place in the “Axis of Evil.” Therefore, although the Bush administration remained committed to security of Israel, the lobby was not able to persuade the administration to put Iran at the top of the list. In this regard, the Israel lobby was neither omnipotent nor insignificant, but somewhere in the middle, as a platform for the administration to voice its policies and also as a political, financial and intellectual organ to further the pro-Israel agenda in Washington.

## CONCLUSION

“All options are available to us to prevent a nuclear arms race in the region and to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran.”  
*Barack Obama*

For American administrations, mending the US-Iranian relations has been like playing a contemporary Sisyphus, the king whose eternal punishment was to roll an immense boulder up a hill, only to watch it roll back down again. Time and again, different presidents encountered the responsibility; time and again they found that the immense rock had rolled back down. Like those before him, George W. Bush inherited a relationship between two countries that had long been strained and was nowhere close to being resolved. This thesis was an attempt at chronicling and analyzing the contemporary history of US foreign policy towards Iran during the Bush presidency.

The field of foreign policy analysis urges the scholar to pay more attention to the decision-making process instead of merely focusing on the policy outcome. Indeed, in order to comprehend why the US foreign policy towards Iran took its current form, one must look into the inner dynamics of the American government and the foreign policy process. In the previous chapters, the foreign policy process during the presidency of George W. Bush was scrutinized by examining two major government branches and the atmosphere in which they functioned. Moreover, through integrating several levels of analysis by examining individual leaders, various organizations and international pressures, Rosenau's suggestion

of employing an actor-specific theory was taken into account throughout this work. In light of this, the impact of powerful figures like Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice and Ahmadinejad was considered and how they affected the policy outcome in different ways was addressed. US-Iranian relations could have been at a different place, had one of these actors acted differently. The congressional pressure and the general intellectual atmosphere of the decision-making environment also shaped the end result. Furthermore, the personalities and the background of top leaders significantly affected how the US foreign policy was formed. The conservative ideals of Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld played a considerable part in decision-making.

The role of bureaucratic politics could also be seen in foreign-policy making. The power struggle between the Defense and State Departments was visible during the eight years scrutinized in this thesis. The Department of Defense was consistently on the side of more hawkish policies, since the Pentagon always desired to justify its existence and emphasize its importance as the nexus of the US military. Under Rumsfeld, the Pentagon again argued for stricter policies towards Iran, even if military involvement was not feasible at the time. On the other hand, the State Department traditionally advocated a more dovish approach, which was the case under both Powell and Rice. Though there are various actors in the foreign policy making process, this thesis assumes that nation states are still the dominant actors in the international arena. However, the single unit of nation state has a complex structure and is far from being homogeneous and monolithic. On the other hand, as neoclassical realism offers, there are many intervening variables that shape the foreign policy outcome. Concerning Iran, instead of simply using its massive military power to dominate the perceived threat, the US government entities filter their reactions through domestic intervening variables. The systemic pressure offered by Iran has been its controversial nuclear programme, ties with terrorist organizations, human rights record and general anti-American stance. Foreign policy was made in response to this systemic pressure



with the contributions of intervening variables, three of which were chosen as the subject matter.

The first, and most important, variable in foreign policy making in the US is undoubtedly the executive branch, which was also the primary actor in the US-Iranian relations. The foreign policy of the Bush administration regarding Iran was laden with badly chosen words, fruitless policies and a big serving of mistrust in addition to an inability to interpret Iranian politics. The executive branch, as the main actor in foreign policy formation, carried the most responsibility for the direction the US-Iranian relations took. The best option in the eyes of Bush and his closest advisers was the collapse of the Islamic regime and birth of a brand new democratic Iran who, it was presumed, would appease America. Even though, Bush came to power without a definite policy orientation concerning Iran, the 9/11 attacks eventually gave birth to Iran's inclusion in the 'Axis of Evil' instead of opening a new avenue for improved relations between the two countries. The conservative ideals of Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld overcame those of Powell, resulting in a hawkish uncompromising policy during the first term. As the UN resolutions failed to incur any changes in the behaviour of the Iranian government, which recently witnessed the election of a conservative parliament and president, the Bush administration started to change some of its previous strategies. Under Rice, the US made some significant overtures as a last attempt to make a difference before Bush left office. However, the timing was not right because of the new face of Iranian politics. In the end when Iran was ready, the US was not, and when the US was ready, Iran was not. The moment was lost once again.

The second variable in the formation of foreign policy scrutinized in this work was the US Congress. The policy direction of the legislative branch during this eight-year period mainly focused on the imposition of sanctions. By consistently supporting a sanctions regime, the House and the Senate made it clear that the president was not entirely free to conduct foreign policy as he wished. Even though the president had the authority to waive

sanctions, the general attitude of not being open to engage with the government in Tehran limited the scope of the policies the executive could pursue, since in a non-crisis situation presidents are more reluctant to step over the Congress. Furthermore, the fact that the congressional records are widely accessible to the general public makes the hearings of the legislative branch more important. The direction the US Congress wanted to follow regarding Iran had the potential to impact the reactions of the Iranian government by demonstrating either the unity in the US government or that the president was not completely free to do as he wished in matters of foreign policy. Lastly, the members of the Congress who were involved in foreign politics did not alter much through the years, and this continuity made it possible for the House and the Senate committees to pursue a more uncompromising and unchanging policy regardless of its effectiveness.

Thirdly, the impact of think tanks and the Israel lobby was examined as the last variable. It was argued that think tanks had an atmospheric influence in policy making. This form of influence presented itself in numerous ways: giving testimonies in the Congress, educating the public, making media appearances, filtering and analyzing information, providing expert and insider opinion and supplying personnel for the government. In terms of Iran, however, the prominent think tanks did not offer a united opinion, though they remained united in their criticism of the policies of the Bush administration. In terms of the Israel lobby, since Bush and his close advisers came to office with pro-Israel ideas, it was easy to overestimate the impact of the lobby. It is true that on more than one occasion the Bush administration used these organizations to reiterate their support of the state of Israel, but it could not be concluded that this was the case because the lobby was able to sway the opinions of the administration.

The interaction between these three variables shed light on the foreign policy process particularly in the case of United States and Iran relations, even though similarities could be observed in other cases. Beyond the federal government, influence of think tanks

and pressure stemming from the Israeli lobby contributed to policy making by influencing the Congress and the Executive Branch indirectly. In the age of information and technology, the input from these organizations defined the parameters within which the policy-makers operated and offered new challenges and alternatives. Meanwhile, within the borders of the federal government, the dealings of the Congress became more readily available as the Legislative Branch used its power to regulate commerce through the imposition of sanctions. As the think tanks provided a wide and amorphous atmosphere for the policy makers, the Congress drew the line in the sand for the White House and State Department. As the main foreign policy making body, the Executive Branch had to maneuver around the line in the sand, while at the same time bureaucratic politics shaped the policy outcome as rivalries between the departments rose and fell.

This study was an attempt to delve into the depths of the policy making process in the case of US foreign policy towards Iran. Even though the literature on this topic is expanding, looking at the process through analyzing not only governmental bodies, but also non-governmental influences remains unique. By using these three main influences, a broader, and hopefully more comprehensive, perspective was established in how foreign policy takes its form over time. Furthermore, by giving a more detailed description and analysis of inner workings of the executive branch and by focusing on the bigger players in the US and in Iran, the intricacies and the complexity of policy formation was underlined, providing an original and more extensive look into the process. Finally, congressional hearings during this eight-year period, the newly published memoirs and biographies of key figures, and publications from think tanks and the Israeli lobby were utilized to provide the data for the thesis in order to lay down a sweeping and thorough groundwork.

### **SO WHAT?**

Therefore, all the variables that were subjects of this study contributed to where US-Iran relations were at the end of the Bush administration. The Bush-Cheney White

House and Rumsfeld Pentagon overpowered Powell's State Department, and elevated Iran's profile instead of investing in cooperation and engagement. In the second term, Rice was more willing to investigate different avenues of policy to reach Iran, though the US was not talking from a position of strength anymore and the newly elected conservatives of Tehran were not as eager to talk to Washington as the reformers of the previous years. The strict sanctions regime imposed by the Congress and the efforts to fund and support the Iranian dissidents were also counterproductive in terms of getting the Iranian government to cooperate. In addition to this, there were too many different voices and analyses coming from think tanks and the Israel lobby advocating tougher policies such that it was fairly easy for the administration to drown out the voices of those who advocated a different path.

Thus, it can be concluded that the actions and words of the executive do not offer a complete picture in regards to policy towards Iran. The Congress persistently defended the imposition of sanctions, thereby limiting the administration's policy avenues. The relatively high number of hearings regarding Iran, refusal to renew the sanction for two years instead of five, pressuring the administration for not implementing the sanctions and blaming the White House for choosing the wrong country to attack in 2003 were all signs of heightened congressional pressure. The Congress' unwillingness to engage with Iran was made clearer through passing the Iran Freedom Support Act, which sent the clear message that at least one major branch of the American government was in favour of regime change. Even though the hawkish policies of the Congress played into the hands of Cheney and Rumsfeld during the first term, Rice found that the congressional mandates and legislations severely limited her hand. Not only did the Congress send a loud and clear message to the Iranian government, but also Rice's overtures concerning the sanctions were weakened. As the legislative put more and more pressure on the administration regarding sanctions, the State Department found that the leash was getting shorter.

In addition, the prominent think tanks of the country failed to offer a viable policy option that would solve the impasse between the two countries. The think tank scholars that appeared as witnesses at congressional hearings came from different points along the political spectrum and were not able to sway the congress members to a more accommodating policy. Rather, the views of the more conservative think tanks reinforced the position of the congress members who supported strict policies. The think tank community served as the center of discussion concerning policy options; however, the conclusions reached varied according to the political colour of the organization. The administration was more inclined to concur with the conservative think tanks, and neither the congressional nor the executive was swayed by the arguments that favoured engagement until the second term. When Rice took over, some of the suggestions that came from liberal think tanks resembled the shift in policy change during the second term. Therefore, not only did the think tanks provide the atmosphere in which the policy was formed through research, analysis, publishing and public education, but also they offered alternate policy options for the policy makers.

As tempting as it is to blame the rise of the neo-conservatism for all the shortcomings of the Bush administration concerning Iran, a closer look suggests that, despite the strong rhetoric, the foreign policy towards Iran was not drastically different than that of the Clinton presidency. Both the Clinton and Bush administrations saw the Islamic Republic as a security threat from the beginning. The first years of both presidencies witnessed raising Iran's profile through the Dual Containment Policy and the Axis of Evil classification, while failing to identify how to contain Iran or prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapons. The policies introduced in the first terms of Clinton and Bush did not change until their second terms. They both failed to produce a more flexible approach when the Iranian government was receptive to overtures from Washington. However, when Rice and Albright made historical concessions to bridge the gap between the two governments, they found that the

momentum was lost, and the complex inner dynamics of the Iranian government was no more responsive. In the end, even though the Bush administration had adapted stronger rhetoric concerning Iran, the outlook of foreign policy did not differ significantly from the Clinton years.

## THEN WHAT?

During his presidential campaign, Barack Obama stated that he would support dialogue with Iran.<sup>1</sup> However, when Tehran's nuclear ambitions posed a threat to the interests of the U.S. and its allies, Obama blamed the Bush administration for sabre-rattling, and argued that Iran should not have been threatened with use of force. He also favoured tough but direct presidential diplomacy without preconditions.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, vice presidential candidate Biden spoke out against war with Iran, and argued that the United States should engage with Iran directly along with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.<sup>3</sup>

After the elections, President Obama issued an unprecedented video recording for 2009 Nowruz celebrations, reaching out to the Iranian government and promising that the foreign policy would not be conducted in a frame of threats, but in an atmosphere of dialogue: "We seek instead engagement that is honest and grounded in mutual respect."<sup>4</sup> In addition to this Nowruz speech, the Obama administration refrained from making provocative remarks concerning Iran's controversial 2009 presidential elections and reiterated America's commitment to engagement. These initial overtures managed to bring

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<sup>1</sup>B Obama, 'Statement of Senator Barack Obama on Additional Sanctions on Iran', *Organizing for America*, 4 March 2008, retrieved on 30 May 2010,

<[http://www.barackobama.com/2008/03/04/statement\\_of\\_senator\\_barack\\_ob\\_7.php](http://www.barackobama.com/2008/03/04/statement_of_senator_barack_ob_7.php)>

<sup>2</sup>B Obama, 'Transcript: NPR Democratic Candidates Debate', *NPR*, 4 December 2004, retrieved on 30 May 2010, <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16898435>>

<sup>3</sup>J Biden, 'Meeting the Iranian Challenge', *The Huffington Post*, 6 December 2007, retrieved on 30 May 2010, <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joe-biden/meeting-the-iranian-chall\\_b\\_75628.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joe-biden/meeting-the-iranian-chall_b_75628.html)>

<sup>4</sup>B Obama, 'A New Year, A New Beginning', *The White House Blog*, 20 March 2009, retrieved on 2 June 2010, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/nowruz/>>

the government in Tehran to the table in October 2009, even after the discovery of yet another secret facility in Iran in September 2009. During the talks in Geneva, Iran agreed to allow the international inspectors to enter -even to the newly discovered site near Qum.<sup>5</sup> However, despite the hopeful signs in Geneva, the Iranian administration did not accept any deals to export its enriched uranium, which was now sufficient in quantity to build at least one nuclear weapon. At the end of November 2009, Iran vowed to build ten more nuclear enrichment facilities, defying the demands of the United Nations.<sup>6</sup> As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton sought Russian and Chinese support to pressure Iran, the Tehran government faced internal problems while the nuclear issue remained unsolved. Thus, President Obama once again offered engagement to the Iranian leaders during the celebrations of Nowruz in 2010. However, although he was willing to talk without preconditions and had a very soft tone the year before, this time he put the threat of international sanctions in the background.<sup>7</sup> The hopeful tone of the 2009 Nowruz talks had been dampened with the revealing of the secret nuclear plant, stalling of the negotiations, and changing domestic atmosphere in Iran. Though Obama had kept the door open for engagement, he had no choice but to pursue international sanctions. Either Obama hoped that his charisma, soft rhetoric and offer for unconditional negotiations would win the Iranian government over, or perhaps he wanted to appeal to the international community and the Iranian people to induce pressure on the Iranian government -in which case his genuineness could be questioned. Consequently, after a year of concessions and refrain, Obama found himself in the shoes of his predecessors, eventually having to follow the policies that Clinton and Bush put into place.

Not long after, the Obama administration started to support the sanctions regime more rigorously arguing that because of their new set of sanctions Iran started to feel

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<sup>5</sup>'Iran Agrees to Send Enriched Uranium to Russia', *The New York Times*, 1 October 2009.

<sup>6</sup>DE Sanger and WJ Broad, 'A Defiant Iran Vows to Build Nuclear Plants', *The New York Times*, 30 November 2009.

<sup>7</sup>H Cooper, 'Obama Offers Engagement in Video Message to Iranians', *The New York Times*, 20 March 2010.

the impact.<sup>8</sup> As the Obama administration reluctantly followed the steps of the previous administration by imposing sanctions and trying to persuade the international community to toughen sanctions, the response of the Iranian government remained the same. The UNSC resolution of June 2010 and EU's 2012 ban on oil imports from Iran have so far failed to produce the desired result. The rumours that Israel was getting ready to attack Iranian nuclear sites further increased the tension, making Iran one of the major foreign policy issues that was discussed during the Republican primaries of the 2012 presidential elections. Even though Mitt Romney remained the front-runner, towards the end of the race there were four candidates. The toughest approach came from Rick Santorum who declared that he would undertake an air strike against Iranian nuclear sites.<sup>9</sup> Another Republican hopeful, Newt Gingrich, said that even though he would support bombing Iran as a last resort, if Israel were to attack Iran, he would be ready to assist them.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, one of the top candidates, Ron Paul, stated that Iran did not pose a national security threat and the sanctions thus far only hurt the American companies.<sup>11</sup> Finally, the Republican candidate for president, Romney, expressed his intention to return to a more Reaganesque policy by strengthening the navy and supporting missile defence systems. Iran would remain under sanctions, and the sanctions would be even stricter.<sup>12</sup>

Even though Romney said that he was open to diplomacy, he also made it clear that a diplomatic route should be buttressed by a military option to demonstrate the severity of the situation. While Obama had returned to previous policies after having failed at what he hoped to achieve in regards to Iran, Romney was not able to offer a viable or a new solution to the problem either. The Republican presidential hopeful desires to pursue the failed policies of the previous administration and achieve a different result. Supporting the

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<sup>8</sup>HR Clinton, "Remarks on United States Foreign Policy", Washington DC, 8 September 2010.

<sup>9</sup>"Santorum Says He Would Bomb Iran's Nuclear Plants", *ABC News*, 1 January 2012.

<sup>10</sup>"Newt Gingrich Contemplates War with Iran", *Time*, 13 December 2011.

<sup>11</sup>"Ron Paul: Iran Does Not Threaten Our National Security", *ABC News*, 30 December 2011.

<sup>12</sup>M Romney, 'How I Would Check Iran's Nuclear Ambition', *The Washington Post*, 5 March 2012.



dissidents and increasing American naval build up would hardly convince the mullahs to give up their biggest bargaining chip. Therefore, looking at Obama and Romney, one can hardly paint a hopeful picture for the future of US-Iranian relations.

### **NOW WHAT?**

The ideal outcome for the Obama, or any future administration regarding Iran, would be gaining sufficient international support, especially from Russia, China and Germany, to convince the Tehran government to alter its policies concerning nuclear weapons and its support of terrorism. However, it seems unlikely that the United States, Russia, China and the EU will conduct an effective sanctions policy that would cripple the Iranian government to the extent that -despite all its anti-American rhetoric and history- Tehran would give in and adjust its behaviour. Unappealing as it is to have the current Iranian government possessing nuclear weapons, it is apparent that the international community has been unable to persuade them to abandon their nuclear programme, and sooner or later the United States will have to change its policies. A new policy could entail calming down the storm until Iran acquires nuclear weapons and thereby removing the international attention the Tehran government receives (and utilizes) when standing up to the “Great Satan”. Afterwards, if Iran indeed manages to build nuclear weapons, the West could treat Iran as a *de facto* nuclear power, as was the case with India. This way, Iran could eventually be integrated into the global network first economically, then socially and finally politically. Whether or not a regime change occurs, if the United States succeeds in not letting the Tehran government use anti-American rhetoric as a tool for suppressing the democratic movement within the country and for uniting the country against an external enemy, the Iranian government will most likely eventually lose its stronghold on the people, and become less belligerent. The US administrations should deal with Iran not as a country

ruled by “nut cases”, but as a rational actor that struggles for survival and power. Furthermore, the American government should make more of an effort to understand the complex inner dynamics of the Iranian politics, which also makes engagement more complicated than dealing with a totalitarian regime.

### **FURTHER RESEARCH**

This study opens several avenues for further research. First of all, the presidency of George W. Bush is still an understudied subject, a situation which will most likely be remedied in the coming years. Research on Iran in the broader setting of the Bush Doctrine, WMDs and the War on Terror would be welcome contributions to current literature. Another avenue is to study the impact of Congress on foreign policy. Even though there are a few notable sources on the subject, as referred to previously, studies answering these questions would be worthy contributions: How has Congress’ involvement in foreign policy making evolved through the course of 21<sup>st</sup> Century?; What impact did 9/11 have on the Congress in regards to foreign policy?; What is the relationship between the legislative and the executive branches pertaining to international affairs? Moreover, further study on the impact of lobbies and think tanks is needed. Case studies concerning different foreign policy issues and the positions of think tanks, the impact of think tanks on foreign policy and how this impact varies, and showing the ties between the executive branch and think tanks would enrich the literature.

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