US-IRAN RELATIONS: POST-1979

The British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill during the Cold War period described Russia as “a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.”¹ For many Americans and many Iranians, this phrase readily applies to how they perceive the other nation- as the complex politics, economics, culture and ideologies of both countries have stoked confusion and turmoil for the past forty years. These complexities are even more pronounced when examining how Iran and the United States interact with one another, as the on and off history of conflict between the two has created an intricate political legacy that defines the policies of both nations to this day. However, within this long and convoluted history, one element which had remained constant on both sides is a marked trend of political and strategic misperception. Both the United States and Iran have based their policies and strategies around very fixed, and often very inaccurate, images and assumptions regarding the others intentions.

To understand the situation, this chapter instigated by the obvious and intriguing roots and dimensions of their bitter relations by analyzing the records of different crises in Islamic Iran and its neighborhoods. The study analyses the fact that the past 40 years of Western harsh policy toward Iran has proved to be counterproductive and ineffective. Special attention has been given to different war-time relationship between the two countries such as the
Iran-Iraq War of 1980, Iran Contra Affairs of 1980s, the Gulf War of 1991, the Afghanistan Crisis of 2001, and the Iraq War of 2003. The study also explains the over-ending Peace Process in West Asian states and its surrounding politics played by the United States and Islamic Iran. However, prior to study in detail about these crises it would be helpful to have a brief sketch on the background of these events.

The post-Islamic Revolution relationship between the United States and Iran, their foreign policies towards one another stem from decades of complex historical and political events. During World War II, Iran served as an important strategic partner for the US and allied powers to defeat Nazi Germany. But with the help of the British, the United States staged a coup in 1953 that overthrew Mossadgh, returned the Shah to power, and ensured a pro-Western, anti-Soviet government in Iran.\(^2\) Therefore, to many Iranians, it is the US which has long dominated their country, removing its elected prime minister Mossadgh in 1953, sustaining the Shah in the decades that followed and then imposing sanctions and various forms of containment on the Iranian economy even since the 1979 revolution. To many, the US is seen as protecting and subsidizing the state of Israel, in its suppression of Palestinian national rights. Furthermore, many Iranians believe that the US was also involved in urging Iraq to attack Iran in September 1980.\(^3\)
As discussed in the earlier chapter that the Shah had pushed Iran to social and economic reform and modernization during his rule. But his methods upset and alienated many members of society, including the Shia clergy. During this time, a prominent religious leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, was arrested for his criticisms of the Shah and exiled to Turkey from where he eventually moved to Iraq and finally Paris. Social unrest continued to rise in response to the Shah’s increasingly oppressive rule, and Khomeini formed the Islamic Revolutionary Council while in Paris. In 1979, the Shah was finally forced into exile after protests and demonstrations. Khomeini returned to Iran, seized power, and declared himself leader of the new Islamic Republic of Iran. It may be noted here, that before the Revolution, Iran had an aristocratic society, in which the few had the majority of the power. After 1979, the Iranian government included more democracy and checks and balances, but the fundamental interpretation of Islam implemented by the government made many feel less than free. The voices from Iran usually heard in the United States at this time were the voices of those who prospered under the Shah, but left during the Revolution. This greatly skewed the perception of the Islamic Revolution in the US.

Since the Islamic Revolution, the US-Iranian relationship has been one of the most bitter in the modern world. This hostility largely draws from the events of the early 1980s, where it was Iran which, more than any other third-world
power, humiliates the US in the hostage crisis of 1979–1981. On November 4, 1979, the revolutionary group Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line occupied the American embassy in Tehran and took American diplomats hostage. The captors sought to send a message to the US on its support for the Shah and its opposition to the Islamic Republic. Their demands included sending the displaced Shah back to Iran for prosecution and that the US not interfere in Iranian affairs anymore. The hostages were held for almost a year and a half only to be released after extensive negotiations and the inauguration of the next US president, Ronald Reagan. The ordeal likely cost President Carter the reelection and forever tainted American perceptions of Iran. In Iran, the incident was seen by many as a blow against American influence in Iran and the liberal-moderate interim government of Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan, who opposed the hostage taking and resigned soon after. The hostage takers felt that their action was connected to the 1953 American-backed coup against the government of Prime Minister Mosaddegh. Some Iranians were concerned that the United States may have been plotting another coup against their country in 1979 from the American embassy.

In the United States, the hostage-taking was seen as a violation of a centuries-old principle of international law that granted diplomats immunity from arrest and diplomatic compounds sovereignty in the territory of the host. Thus, the Iran Hostage Crisis further complicated the United States’ relationship with
Iran. The images of the hostage crisis, combined with subsequent confrontational policies such as attacks on Persian Gulf shipping in the mid-1980s and woeful tales of internal repression, solidified the image of Iran as that of ‘a crazy outlaw’ nation whose acts were illegal, unpredictable and irrational. The effects of such characterizations run deep within American policy, every President from Ronald Reagan to Barrak Obama have vilified Iran. The US has found it possible to negotiate with East Asian states that have fought and killed tens of thousands of Americans but it has found it harder to find a minimal negotiating ground with, the country which, while not killing Americans, has inflicted humiliation on it.\textsuperscript{10}

Therefore, the Islamic Revolution in 1979 has been considered as a turning point in Iran-US relations. Iran with its oil and gas resources, its geopolitical location and its special place in the region and the Islamic world has been viewed as an important regional and international player. Meanwhile Iran’s domestic process is a vital and integrated part of social and political change in the West Asia, the whole Islamic world and developing countries. Meanwhile, the United States is seeking to impose a new regional order, between and, in some measure, within states in the West Asia and is also seeking to establish itself as a strategic, military and economic power in Central Asia. Yet in all of this Washington finds itself faced with the power of Iran, a country that has been, on and off, a hegemonic power in the region for three thousand years and
which, while it has abandoned some of the revolutionary zeal of the post-1979 period, still has regional goals incompatible with those of the US.\textsuperscript{11} However, this growing political conflict between Iran and the United States is only compounded by the high degree of suspicion and animosity on both sides, the belligerency demonstrated by each in statements about the other and not least, the ideological convictions held by the leaderships in both Tehran and Washington.\textsuperscript{12}

Four decades after the Islamic Revolution, Iran and the US continue to criticize and condemn one another. Time has healed very few wounds. Each side is saturated with myths and misconceptions about the other. Many Iranian officials continue to view the US as a satanic imperialistic bully determined to destroy Iran's Revolution, cripple Iran economically and transform the oil-rich Persian Gulf into an American lake. Yet despite their hostility toward US policy, and although hundreds of Iranians have been killed by US military action in the Gulf while less than a handful of Americans have died at the hands of Iran, the masses of Iranian people still hold warm feelings toward individual American citizens. With the partial exception of Iraq, public opinion surveys consistently reveal that Americans consider Iran to be the least popular country in the world. Anti-Iran feelings are nourished by propaganda disseminated by various groups with political axes to grind, such as the militant and anti-democratic Mujahidin-e-Khalq (National Council of
Resistance of Iran), an Iranian opposition group that has collaborated for years with Saddam Hussein, and a number of pro-Israel lobbies that seek to promote their own agendas by exaggerating the Iranian threat. Meanwhile, distorted and simplistic mass media representations, such as the widely distributed Hollywood film "Not without my Daughter!," question the very civility and humanity of Iranians. Given Iran's overwhelmingly negative image in the US, American congressional leaders have little incentive to consider a serious dialogue with the Islamic Republic. The executive branch of the US government in general and the Department of State in particular enjoy more flexibility in foreign policy formulation than does the legislative branch. Nonetheless, recent presidents and secretaries of state have adopted a knee-jerk, unimaginative and hard-line policy toward Iran.

The Iran-Iraq War and US-Iran Relations:

The Iran-Iraq War and events throughout the 1980s further strained US-Iran relations. Iraq’s Sunni minority, of which Saddam Hussein was the head, interpreted the Shia uprising in this neighboring state as a threat to his power. The Islamic Revolution in Iran made him worried, especially after the greatly oppressed Kurds expressed support for Iran. In 1980, seeking to catch Iran’s new government off guard, Saddam Hussein invaded Iran. This action led to an eight year war and the deaths of millions of Iraqis and Iranians. The
differences between the two peoples: Persians vs. Arabs, Shias vs. Sunnis only added to the horror of the war. While the United States supplied both Iraq and Iran with weapons, it tended to favor Iraq and established diplomatic relations with the nation. The war ended in 1988 when Iran and Iraq signed a U.N. brokered ceasefire agreement.  

Moreover, American Secretary of State of that period Alexander Haig have stated that the United States gave Iraqi President Saddam Hussein approval to attack Iran: "It was also interesting to confirm that President Carter gave the Iraq a green light to launch the war against Iran through Prince Fahd" of Jordan." When Iraq invaded Iran, Carter called Iranian charges of American complicity "patently false". Carter's memoir, *Keeping Faith*, briefly mentioned this accusation: “Typically, the Iranians accused me of planning and supporting the invasion." Journalist Said K. Aburish claimed that Hussein visited to Amman, Jordan before the war, where he may have met with King Hussein and three CIA agents. Aburish believes that there is "considerable evidence that he discussed his plans to invade Iran with the CIA agents". The records of the meeting that occurred on this date between American officials and King Hussein suggest that Saddam Hussein was not present and that the border disputes between Baghdad and Tehran were not discussed, but that joint efforts between Jordan and the United States to oppose Iran were discussed. Others have opposed this view, Eric Alterman in The Nation has called the
charge a “slander” and argued there is no credible evidence to back it up. Adam Tomkins wrote: "There were no diplomatic relations between the US and Iraq for seventeen years, until President Reagan restored them in 1984". American intelligence and logistical support played a crucial role in arming Iraq in the Iraq-Iran war, although Bob Woodward states that the United States gave information to both sides, hoping "to engineer a stalemate. According to the American Senate Banking Committee, the administrations of Presidents Reagan and George H. W. Bush authorized the sale to Iraq of numerous dual use items, including poisonous chemicals and deadly biological viruses, such as Anthrax and Bubonic Plague.

The United States provided battle planning assistance to Iraq at a time when American intelligence agencies knew that Iraqi commanders would employ chemical weapons in waging the war. American officials publicly condemned Iraq's employment of mustard gas, Sarin, VX and other poisonous agents, especially after Iraq attacked Kurdish villagers in Halabja in March 1988. Sixty Defense Intelligence Agency officers were secretly providing detailed information on Iranian deployments, tactical planning for battles, plans for airstrikes and bomb-damage assessments for Iraq, however. In contrast, Secretary of Defense Frank C. Carlucci said: "My understanding is that what was provided" to Iraq "was general order of battle information, not operational intelligence". "I certainly have no knowledge of US participation in preparing
battle and strike packages," he said, "and doubt strongly that that occurred." He added, "I did agree that Iraq should not lose the war, but I certainly had no foreknowledge of their use of chemical weapons." Secretary of State Colin Powell, through a spokesman, said the officers' description of the program was "dead wrong," but declined to discuss it.¹⁹ According to reports of the Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs of the US Senate, the United States sold chemical weapons, including anthrax, VX nerve gas, West Nile fever and botulism to Iraq until March 1992. The chairman of the Senate committee, Don Riegle, said: "The executive branch of our government approved 771 different export licenses for sale of dual use technology to Iraq. I think it’s a devastating record." In 2000, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright expressed regret for that support.²⁰ It is interesting that during the Iran- Iraq War, the United States applied the policy of dual containment which was special feature of power-block politics. The United States provided various legal as well as illegal supports to Iraqi government to counter the Iranian uprising in Iraq’s neighboring region. At the same time it also supported Iran by supplying arms to Iranians in order to contain Soviet influence and other unspecified interest of the US and Israel. Support to Iran was given despite the fact that Iranian relations with US further deteriorated due to Hezbollah several anti-American attacks, including the April 1983 United States Embassy bombing which killed 17 Americans, the 1983 Beirut
barracks bombing which killed 241 US peace keepers in Lebanon, in which the US held the Islamic Republic of Iran responsible.\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{Iran-Contra Affair:}

In the meantime of Iran-Iraq War, under the encouragements of United States the Iran–Contra affair took place in order to contain the communist activity in Nicaragua. The Iran–Contra affair was a political scandal in the United States that came to light in November 1986. During the Reagan administration senior US figures, including President Ronald Reagan, agreed to facilitate the sale of arms to Iran, the subject of an arms embargo. At least some US officials also hoped that the arms sales would secure the release of hostages and allow US intelligence agencies to fund the Nicaraguan contras. The affair began as an operation to improve US-Iranian relations. It was planned that Israel would ship weapons to a relatively moderate, politically influential group of Iranians, and then the US would resupply Israel and receive the Israeli payment. The Iranian recipients promised to do everything in their power to achieve the release of six US hostages, who were being held by the Lebanese Shia Islamist group Hezbollah. The plan deteriorated into an arms-for-hostages scheme, in which members of the Executive Branch sold weapons to Iran in exchange for the release of the American hostages. Large modifications to the plan were devised by Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North of the National Security Council.
in late 1985, in which a portion of the proceeds from the weapon sales was diverted to fund anti-Sandinista and anti-communist rebels, or Contras, in Nicaragua.\textsuperscript{22}

While President Ronald Reagan was a supporter of the Contra cause, no conclusive evidence has been found showing that he authorized the diversion of the money raised by the Iranian arms sales to the Contras. Handwritten notes taken by Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger indicate that Reagan was aware of potential hostage transfers with Iran, as well as the sale of Hawk and TOW missiles to "moderate elements" within that country. Oliver North, one of the central figures in the affair, wrote in a book that "Ronald Reagan knew of and approved a great deal of what went on with both the Iranian initiative and private efforts on behalf of the contras and he received regular, detailed briefings on both." Mr. North also writes: "I have no doubt that he was told about the use of residuals for the contras, and that he approved it enthusiastically." North's account is difficult to verify because of the secrecy that still surrounds the affair.\textsuperscript{23} However according to\textit{ The New York Times}, the United States supplied the following arms to Iran:\textsuperscript{24}

1. August 20, 1985. 96 TOW anti-tank missiles
2. September 14, 1985. 408 more TOWs
3. November 24, 1985. 18 Hawk anti-aircraft missiles
4. February 17, 1986. 500 TOWs
5. February 27, 1986. 500 TOWs
6. May 24, 1986. 508 TOWs, 240 Hawk spare parts
8. October 28, 1986. 500 TOWs

After the weapon sales were revealed in November 1986, Reagan appeared on national television and stated that the weapons transfers had indeed occurred, but that the United States did not trade arms for hostages. To this day, it is unclear exactly what Reagan knew and when, and whether the arms sales were motivated by his desire to save the US hostages. Notes taken December 7, 1985, by Defense Secretary Weinberger recorded that Reagan said that "he could answer charges of illegality but he couldn’t answer charge that 'big strong President Reagan passed up a chance to free hostages.' Investigations were compounded when large volumes of documents relating to the scandal were destroyed or withheld from investigators by Reagan administration officials. On March 4, 1987, Reagan returned to the airwaves in a nationally televised address, taking full responsibility for any actions that he was unaware of, and admitting that "what began as a strategic opening to Iran deteriorated, in its implementation, into trading arms for hostages." Several investigations ensued, including those by the United States Congress and the three-man, Reagan-appointed Tower Commission. Neither found any evidence that
President Reagan himself knew of the extent of the multiple programs.²⁷ In the end, fourteen administration officials were indicted, including then-Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger. Eleven convictions resulted, some of which were vacated on appeal. The rest of those indicted or convicted were all pardoned in the final days of the George H. W. Bush presidency, Bush had been vice-president at the time of the affair.²⁸ Internationally the damage was more severe. Magnus Ranstorp wrote, "US willingness to engage in concessions with Iran and the Hezbollah not only signaled to its adversaries that hostage-taking was an extremely useful instrument in extracting political and financial concessions for the West but also undermined any credibility of US criticism of other states' deviation from the principles of no-negotiation and no concession to terrorists and their demands."²⁹ This episode, however, failed to improve the relations between the US and Iran.

In 1986, the Reagan administration helped sell weapons to Iran, using the profits to fund anti-communist Contras militants in Nicaragua. In 1988, the United States launched Operation Praying Mantis against Iran, claiming that it was retaliation for the Iranian mining of areas of the Persian Gulf as part of the Iran-Iraq war. The American attack was the largest American naval combat operation since World War II.³⁰ American action began with coordinated strikes by two surface groups that neutralized the Sassan oil platform and the Sirri oil platform of Iran. Iran lost one major warship and a smaller gunboat.
Damage to the oil platforms was eventually repaired. Iran sued for reparations at the International Court of Justice, stating that the United States breached the 1955 Treaty of Amity. The court dismissed the claim but noted that "the actions of the United States of America against Iranian oil platforms on October 19, 1987 (Operation Nimble Archer) and April 18, 1988 (Operation Praying Mantis) cannot be justified as measures necessary to protect the essential security interests of the United States of America." The American attack helped pressure Iran to agree to a ceasefire with Iraq later that summer.

Another incident which further complicated the matter between them happened on July 3, 1988, near the end of the Iran–Iraq War, when the US Navy guided missile cruiser USS Vincennes shot down Iranian Airbus A300B2, which was on a scheduled commercial flight in Iranian airspace over the Strait of Hormuz. The attack killed 290 civilians from six nations, including 66 children. USS Vincennes was in the Persian Gulf as part of Operation Earnest Will. The United States initially contended that flight 655 was a warplane and then said that it was outside the civilian air corridor and did not respond to radio calls. Both statements were untrue, and the radio calls were made on military frequencies to which the airliner did not have access. According to the Iranian government, the attack was an intentional and unlawful act. Iran refused to accept the idea of mistaken identification, arguing...
that this constituted gross negligence and recklessness amounting to an international crime, because the aircraft was not on a trajectory that threatened the *Vincennes* and had not aimed radar at it.\textsuperscript{33} The United States has expressed regret for the loss of innocent life but has not apologized to the Iranian government.

**Persian Gulf War, 1990 and the US-Iran Relations:**

The Persian Gulf War was a war waged by a U.N. -authorized coalition force from thirty-four nations led by the United States, against Iraq. The invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi troops that began on August 2, 1990 was met with international condemnation, and brought immediate economic sanctions against Iraq by members of the UN Security Council. A series of UN Security Council resolutions and Arab League resolutions were passed regarding the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein's Iraq. One of the most important was Resolution 678, passed on 29 November 1990, which gave Iraq a withdrawal deadline until 15 January 1991, and authorized “all necessary means to uphold and implement Resolution 660,” and a diplomatic formulation authorizing the use of force if Iraq failed to comply. US President George H. W. Bush deployed American forces to Saudi Arabia and urged other countries to send their own forces to the scene. An array of nations joined the Coalition of the Gulf War. The great majority of the military forces in the coalition were from
the United States, with Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and Egypt as leading contributors, in that order. Around US$40 billion of the US$60 billion cost was paid by Saudi Arabia. The initial conflict to expel Iraqi troops from Kuwait began with an aerial bombardment on 17 January 1991. This was followed by a ground assault on 23 February. This was a decisive victory for the coalition forces, which liberated Kuwait and advanced into Iraqi territory. The coalition ceased their advance, and declared a cease fire 100 hours after the ground campaign started. Aerial and ground combat was confined to Iraq, Kuwait, and areas on the border of Saudi Arabia. However, Iraq launched missiles against coalition military targets in Saudi Arabia.

Iranian approach to this war was, more or less, of neutrality and caution, not of open support to the coalition forces. During the 1990s, relations between the United States and Iran remained contentious. Iran not only sought to assert itself as a regional power but also to protect itself from external threats and to spread Islamic revolution in the region. The United States sought to isolate Iran by banning trade and placing various sanctions on Iran. Commercial relations between Iran and the United States were restricted by American sanctions and consisted mainly of Iranian purchases of food, spare parts, and medical products as well as American purchases of carpets and food. Sanctions originally imposed in 1995 by President Bill Clinton were renewed by President Bush, who cited the "unusual and extraordinary threat" to American
national security posed by Iran. The 1995 executive orders prohibit American companies and their foreign subsidiaries from conducting business with Iran, while banning any "contract for the financing of the development of petroleum resources located in Iran". In addition, the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act of 1996 (ILSA) imposed mandatory and discretionary sanctions on non-American companies investing more than $20 million annually in the Iranian oil and natural gas sectors. The ILSA was renewed for five more years in 2001. Congressional bills signed in 2006 extended and added provisions to the act, on September 30, 2006, the act was renamed the Iran Sanctions Act (ISA), as it no longer applied to Libya, and extended until December 31, 2011. The act was denounced by the European Union as invalid, but it blocked some investment for Iran.\(^{35}\)

In the late 1990s, relations began to normalize with the election of the moderate cleric Mohammad Khatami and victories by various reformist candidates in municipal and Parliamentarian elections. Shortly after taking office, Iran's new reformist president, Mohammed Khatami, in January 1998 called for a “dialogue among civilizations” with the United States on CNN, raising hopes of a thaw in US-Iranian relations. In the interview, Khatami invoked Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* to explain the similarities between American and Iranian quests for freedom. American Secretary of State Madeleine Albright responded positively, and the countries
exchanged of wrestling teams. This also brought freer travel between the countries as well as an end to the American embargo of Iranian carpets and pistachios. Relations then stalled due to opposition from Iranian conservatives and American preconditions for discussions, including changes in Iranian policy on Israel, nuclear energy, and support for terrorism. Iran slowly reformed and changed, but relations between Iran and the US did not greatly improve. Congress continued sanctions on Iran, citing terrorism and opposition to the peace. Later in March 2000, the US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright delivered a speech apologizing for America's role in the 1953 overthrow of Mohammed Mossadegh (a democratically elected prime minister who threatened to nationalize Iran's oil fields) and acknowledged the coup, which installed the shah, “was clearly a setback for Iran's political development.” Because Albright's speech ended with a hectoring of Iran's domestic and foreign policies, the theocratic regime in Tehran responded with a denunciation of the goodwill gesture. On August 31, 2000, four United States Congress members, Senator Arlen Specter, Representative Bob Ney, Representative Gary Ackerman, and Representative Eliot L. Engel held informal talks in New York City with several Iranian leaders. The Iranians included Mehdi Karroubi, speaker of the Majlis of Iran (Iranian Parliament), Maurice Motamed, a Jewish member of the Majlis, and three other Iranian parliamentarians. On August 31, 2000, four United States Congress members,
Senator Arlen Specter, Representative Bob Ney, Representative Gary Ackerman, and Representative Eliot L. Engel held informal talks in New York City with several Iranian leaders. The Iranians included Mehdi Karroubi, speaker of the Majlis of Iran (Iranian Parliament), Maurice Motamed, a Jewish member of the Majlis, and three other Iranian parliamentarians. The same year in September, Albright and President Clinton were present at the UN's Millennium Summit and sat in the same room as President Khatami as he addressed the General Assembly. Albright later met with Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi as part of the Six-Plus-Two regional talks on Afghanistan. Also present were envoys from China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Russia. The talks marked the highest diplomatic contact between the United States and Iran since the 1979 hostage crisis.37

The US and Iran on Afghanistan War:

Afghanistan provided to both US and Iran an opportunity to work together and settle their relations. It would be, therefore, convenient for this research work to have a glance on the Afghan War. The War in Afghanistan began on October 7, 2001, as the US military’s Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) that was launched, along with the other militaries of the alliance, in response to the 9/11 attack on the US. The character of the war evolved from a violent
struggle against Al-Qaeda and its Taliban supporters to a complex counterinsurgency effort. June 7, 2010, marked the 104th month of US military engagement in Afghanistan, making it the longest war in the history of the United States (American involvement in the Vietnam War lasted 103 months). Even before the 9/11, 2001 happened, US planned a covert operation in Afghanistan in January, 2001 to deny al Qaeda a safe haven there. The plan allegedly involved support for the Northern Alliance, air strikes, and the introduction of US special operations forces into Afghanistan. One day before the September 11, 2001 attacks, the Bush administration agreed on a plan to oust the Taliban regime in Afghanistan by force if it refused to hand over Osama bin Laden. The plan involved using escalating methods of applying pressure over a three year period. If the plan failed, "the deputies agreed that the United States would seek to overthrow the Taliban regime through more direct action."39

Iran, following the emergence of the Taliban and their harsh treatment of Afghanistan’s Shi’a minority, stepped up assistance to the Northern Alliance. Relations with the Taliban deteriorated further in 1998 after Taliban forces seized the Iranian consulate in Mazari Sharif and executed Iranian diplomats. Following this incident, Iran almost went to war with the Taliban regions of Afghanistan but intervention by the United Nations Security Council and the United States prevented an imminent Iranian invasion. Iranian suspicions of
the Taliban movement were present before the attacks, engendered by its origins in the radical Sunni seminaries of Pakistan and its close association with Islamabad’s military and intelligence services. Their animosity was exacerbated by the rising tide of drugs and instability from Taliban-controlled Afghanistan that too frequently spilled across the Iranian border. For the Taliban’s part, their extreme ascetic doctrine reviled Shi’a Muslims as apostates, and its militants menaced Afghanistan’s Shi’a minority. Therefore, tensions between the neighbors nearly escalated to direct conflict in August 1998, after eleven Iranian diplomats were murdered in the Taliban takeover of a Shi’a city. As a result, Iran cultivated close ties to the opposition militias that were battling the Taliban, including the Northern Alliance. This history placed Iran in a good position to assist the US-led war on the Taliban regime in the fall of 2001.

In US war against Taliban Iran’s track record of support has been promising: Tehran continued to work with the US military effort in Afghanistan through the Northern alliance and among other activities, offered to allow American transport aircraft to stage from airfields in eastern Iran and agreed to perform search and rescue missions for downed American airmen who bailed out over Iran. The Iranian government was also instrumental in helping to forge a new coalition government. Although the Iranians (as mostly Shi’a Persians) had their problems with the Sunni Pashtuns, they were instrumental in bringing in
key Pashtun figures, such as former king, Zahir Shah, and incorporating them into the process. It was the United States and Iran, *working together*, that made the UN conference in Bonn-which gave birth to the Afghani interim government-a success. According to Americans who participated in the conference and the backroom negotiations, although the Pakistanis often took the credit, it was the Iranians who generally deserved it.\textsuperscript{42}

Since the overthrow of the Taliban's, the new government has engaged in cordial relations with both Iran and the United States. However, the relations between the United States and Iran have grown strained due to American objections to Iran's nuclear program. Iran's strained relations with the United States have not prevented Tehran from strengthening its economic and trade cooperation with Kabul. It helped revive Afghanistan's economy and infrastructure.\textsuperscript{43} It has restored some of its traditional sway in western, central, and northern Afghanistan where Persian-speaking Afghans predominate. It aided Northern Alliance figures that were prominent in the post-Taliban governing coalition, and Iranian companies have been extensively involved in road building and other reconstruction projects in western Afghanistan. Since 2004, Iran's influence has waned somewhat as its allies, mostly Persian-speaking Afghan minority factions still referred to as the "Northern Alliance," have been marginalized in Afghan politics. But, many US politicians and military officials as well as some Afghan law makers believe that Iran is
meddling in Afghanistan by playing a double game. Iran usually denies these accusations, and the Afghan government under Hamid Karzai has denied these accusations as well, calling Iran a "helpful brother and partner to Afghanistan."  

Iranian cooperation in Afghanistan has largely continued, and to date it has maintained its commitments towards Afghan reconstruction. Iran, along with the United States, Russia, and the countries bordering Afghanistan, attended U.N.-sponsored meetings in New York (the Six plus Two group) to try to end the conflict in Afghanistan. During the major combat phase of the post-September 11 US-led war in Afghanistan, Iran offered search and rescue of any downed service-persons and the trans-shipment to Afghanistan of humanitarian assistance. In March 2002, Iran expelled Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, a pro-Taliban Afghan faction leader. Iran froze Hikmatyar’s assets in Iran (January 2005). Whereas United States accused Iran of supporting “negative elements,” such accusations are dubious and contradict Iran’s positive record in Afghanistan. However, the West believes that the recent allegations of collusion between Al-Qaeda and Iranian hardliners are particularly dubious. Iran’s ambassador to the UN, Javad Zarif, has denied these accusations, stating, ‘Iran has been very active in capturing, arresting, preventing the entry of al Qaeda into Iran and once they enter Iran, in capturing them, arresting them and extraditing them to friendly governments. We have probably
captured more al Qaeda people in the past fourteen months than any other country." Such claims contravene both the Islamic Republic’s accommodating stance toward the 2001 US military campaign in Afghanistan and the well-established track record of hostility between Iran and Al-Qaeda’s ascetic strand of Sunni militancy. Al-Qaeda’s ideology and worldview are unrelentingly opposed to the Shi’a brand of Islam, which its theologians brand as a heretical sect. Moreover the allegations of cooperation between Al-Qaeda and Iran are shrouded by the lack of much verifiable public evidence.

Like nearly all world leaders, Ayatollah Khamenei condemned the attacks of 9/11. Iran cooperated with the US and was helpful in overthrowing the Taliban Government and establishing the new one. Hopes for new ties and the cooperation between the US and Iran which emerged were foreclosed when President Bush in his 2002 State of the Union address labeled Iran as part of the ‘Axis of Evil.’ The speech caused outrage in Iran and was condemned by reformists and conservatives. Relations became more tensed as the US became more involved in the region, infringing on states’ security and sovereignty. Cooperation by Iran in Afghanistan could not generate trust. Rather further events complicated the relationship. The US war with Iraq began in 2003.
The Iraq War and the US-Iran Relation:

As with the Taliban, Iran’s long track record of conflict with Saddam Hussein is well established. The eight year Iran-Iraq War was so bitter and exhausting that it did not end in a formal peace treaty and relations between the two countries did not fully resume for the ensuing sixteen years of Saddam’s rule. Here too, Tehran and Washington found themselves improbably united by a common enemy, although the problematic history of US policy toward Iraq and the implicit threat of Iran’s affiliation with its Shi’a majority added considerable layers of complexity and wariness. Moreover, during the Geneva talks on Iraq, it quickly became clear that the two countries had lost the spirit that they had during the Afghanistan war. By this point, both sides had reaffirmed their distrust of each other- through incidents such as Karine A and Bush’s unexpected remarks in the State of the Union address in which he labeled Iran as part of ‘an axis of evil.’

While Iran was not as helpful during Operation Iraqi Freedom, it should be noted that it was not unhelpful. The United States and Iran have many common interests in Iraq, which has provided a unique opportunity for Tehran and Washington to edge toward normalization. Tehran, like Washington, is keenly interested in avoiding a civil war and sustaining Iraq as a unitary state. Iranian elites support a democratic Iraq, fully aware that consensual arrangements for
power sharing among Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds are vital to Iraq’s survival. Indeed, the Bush administration’s satisfaction with January’s parliamentary elections was echoed by Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, the reactionary head of the powerful Guardian Council, when he said: “Iraq is now going through its election cycle. The election results are very good.” Moreover, Iran did not undertake any endeavor to cause problems for the US-led coalition, rather, it advised various Iraqi groups to participate in the US-led reconstruction. This was critical because many of the most important Shi’a groups, such as ad-Dawa and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), as well as key individuals such as famed guerrilla commander Al-Muhammadawi, all had support from Iran in one fashion or another during the 1980’s and 1990’s. In addition, Iran offered early recognition to the precarious provisional government and quickly launched efforts to expand economic and cultural ties with Iraqis.

Just as in Afghanistan, however, Iran’s cooperation did not negate US concerns about its leaders’ ultimate intentions. Thus, as casualties continue to mount, so too do US allegations of Iranian interference in Iraqi affairs. Paul Bremmer, the chief US administrator in Iraq, has claimed that there is “incontrovertible” evidence of “meddling and interference” by Iran, whose leaders ‘know they are doing it, they know we are unhappy about it and they ought to stop it.” While the American Enterprise Institute scholar, Michael
Ledeen, has claimed that ‘inside Iraq there are thousands of Iranian agents at work’ who had been ‘committed’ by Tehran to sabotage peace in post-Saddam Iraq in a ‘brilliantly managed campaign to mobilize the Iraqi Shiites.’ Such claims become more unconvincing when one scholar switches, within just a few sentences, from saying there are ‘more than a hundred highly trained Arab militants,’ that the Iranians have smuggled into Iraq, to claiming that ‘thousands of Iranian backed terrorists have been sent,’ and adds that these terrorists are ‘next to impossible to identify.’ These claims have also been highly doubted by observers on the ground, such as the British commander in charge of the Persian Gulf who, despite these American claims to the contrary, has said that he has seen no sign of Iranian meddling, and by Ahmad Chalabi, leader of the Iraqi National Congress, who has said that such allegations are ‘basically unfounded.’

However, the tensions between Washington and Tehran have not been helped by some Iranian leaders who have taken advantage of the deteriorating security situation to intensify their condemnations of the US presence in Iraq. This represents a combination of political opportunism and authentic empathy with the plight of the Iraqi people and the manifest instability in the sacred Shi’a shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala. For example, Khameini’s public condemnation of Operation Enduring Freedom (much to the bemusement of American officials) and the Revolutionary Guard Commander’s recent
statement that ‘given their political and military capabilities, Iran has the ability to obstruct and create problems for the American warmongering policies in the region ‘could easily be taken as proof of bad intent’.\textsuperscript{58}

In the light of the events of recent years, it is clear that Washington has good reason to suspect a high degree of Iranian influence in Iraq. Yet there are some respects in which America’s own policies have arguably exacerbated the tensions with Tehran over this issue. This is most obviously true because US condemnation of Iranian interference in Iraqi and Afghanistan affairs consciously overlooks the positive contributions made by the elected government and instead emphasizes only the negative actions of what Washington admits is merely ‘a minority’ within its ranks. Inconveniencing the United States is one thing, sowing turmoil in Iran’s own environs is quite another. In simply pragmatic terms, any partition of Iraq or outbreak of civil war could cause spillover effects, imperiling Iran’s own stability. In fact, at the height of the tensions in Najaf, Iran dispatched a team of diplomats to mediate between US forces and the insurgent al Sadr forces.\textsuperscript{59} Washington’s approach has appeared all the more questionable while its allegations have remained unproven but such incidents of Iranian co-operation have never been in dispute. As one CIA officer has claimed, ‘We are absolutely 100% positive that there are Iranian operatives in town.’\textsuperscript{60} But if such intelligence lay behind the charges of interference in Iraqi affairs leveled by Rumsfeld and other
senior administration figures, then it is also unclear why the mere ‘presence’ of Tehran’s agents had become synonymous with their ‘interference’.

Moreover, Rumsfeld’s remarks (which are repeatedly echoed in Washington) that the United States would never allow an ‘Iranian-style theocracy’ to come about in Iraq is a red herring since neither Iraq’s religious leaders nor its population favors clerical rule. Moreover, if Iraq stabilizes, the city of Najaf with its religious seminaries and shrines will re-assume its centrality in Shi’a religious thought. It will be Iraq that dominates Iran religiously, not the other way around. Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani commands a considerable following across the region- wider than that of any of Iran’s ruling clergy. His quiet approach to clerical involvement in politics and reported aversion to Iran’s theocratic system could create new Iranian adherents to the notion of separating religion from politics. Despite the fact that US and Iran shared number of interests in Iraq but their relations pertaining to war which is, in some ways, still happening became more complicated and tensed both accusing one another for their suspicious role relating to them and Iraq war and the present messy situation there. However, the US continues to accuse Iran of trying to destabilize its military presence in Iraq with outcome that the instability in Iraq is fuelling the fires of extremism throughout the region.61
US-Iran on Arab Israel Peace Process:

The concerns of the United States are in response to Iran’s foreign policy that seeks to assert itself as a regional power through the use of various means and development of weapons of mass destruction. It accuses that, Iran has supported radical Palestinian organizations and Hezbollah to attack Israel and disrupt efforts for peace in the West Asia. According to US State Department reports, Iran has also supported other violent organizations to challenge the American presence in Iraq, destabilize progress in Iraq, and maximize its influence in the nation and region. In fact, it is believed that due to Iranian support for Palestinian groups, which is often conjured by both Tehran and Washington as critical to the current Intifada, the West Asia peace process broke down at the end of the 1990’s. Here it would be helpful for this research to keep a glance on Arab-Israel conflict before going into detail about the peace process of the states under study.

The Arab-Israel conflict is basically a fight over the land of historic Palestine and whether a Jewish state has legitimacy there. Israel's claims to the land are rooted in the Old Testament, while the Muslim and Christian Arabs known as Palestinians argue that they have lived there uninterruptedly ever since Biblical times. The conflict dates to the wake of World War I. Until then, the Ottoman Empire had ruled much of the West Asia for centuries, including what was
then called Palestine, comprising today's Israel and the Palestinian territories. Jews and Arabs coexisted there uneasily, with occasional violence breaking out between them. But the Ottomans were on the losing side of the war, leaving the European allies to carve up the Ottoman territories. Palestine was put under British mandate.  

In 1939 the Brits cut off Jewish immigration to Palestine, just as the Holocaust was making refugees of millions of European Jews. The local Arabs opposed Jewish immigration as an invasion of foreigners. The restrictions on newcomers provoked violent rebellion among Palestine's Jews, prompting the British in 1947 to bring Palestine's status before the United Nations. The UN approved a plan to partition the territory into two nations, one for Jews, and one for Arabs. The Jews accepted the plan, the Arabs rejected it. In 1948, in an attempt to prevent the establishment of Israel, the armies of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Transjordan (today's Jordan) attacked the fledgling Jewish state. The two sides fought for months until a UN truce left Israel in control of most of the territory, with Jordan controlling the West Bank and Egypt the Gaza Strip.

The Arab states thought it was just a matter of time before they would remove the Jewish state from their midst. In 1967, the Israelis judged that Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Iraq were preparing to attack again. Israel struck
preemptively, devastating the Arab forces and conquering large parcels of land. Israel took the West Bank from Jordan, the Golan Heights from Syria, the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt. In time, Israeli settlers began taking up residence in these places. In the war's aftermath, Yasser Arafat took over as leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization, based at first in Jordan, then in Syria and Lebanon, from which he stepped up guerrilla raids into Israel and eventually acts of terrorism on a global stage. Angered by Israel's reluctance to give back the conquered lands, Egypt and Syria in 1973 attacked in the Sinai and Golan Heights nearly overpowered the Israeli forces. But at the end, the Israelis, with resupply assistance from the US, managed to push the Arab armies back before the US negotiated a ceasefire.66

Egyptian President Anwar Sadat stunned the region in 1977 by visiting Jerusalem, where he pledged his willingness to live in peace with Israelis. That launched the Camp David peace process between Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, hosted by US President Jimmy Carter. Their talks produced the 1979 peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, Israel's first such accord with any Arab state, which led to Israel's return of the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in 1982. In the same year, Israel invaded Lebanon in an effort to drive out the PLO. Israeli troops would occupy southern Lebanon until their withdrawal in 2000 as a result of resistance by the Shi’ite militia Hizbollah67.
In a spontaneous burst of pent-up frustration, the Palestinians in 1987 launched the first intifada, or grassroots uprising against Israeli occupation. Over time, the insurrection grew deadly. The resisters began using guns and bombs against Israeli soldiers and civilians, and to kill suspected Palestinian collaborators. The newborn militant Islamist group Hamas thrived in the climate of the intifada. With the uprising, the Israelis found it increasingly unpalatable to maintain the occupation, and in 1993, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO leader Arafat announced the first Oslo peace accord. It provided limited autonomy for the Palestinians in about half of the Gaza Strip and in the city of Jericho in the West Bank, with a promise of more territory to come. Arafat arrived in Gaza in 1994 and set up the Palestinian Authority. Subsequent agreements extended limited self-rule to the major cities of the West Bank.68

In 1995, an Israeli extremist opposed to the peace accords assassinated Rabin in Tel Aviv. In 1999, centrist Prime Minister Ehud Barak said he was determined to reach a deal with Arafat on the final status of the Palestinian territories, but talks at Camp David in July 2000 collapsed. In October, the Palestinians launched a second intifada, using suicide bombers69. In 2005 nationalist prime minister Ariel Sharon pulled all Israeli settlers and soldiers out of the Gaza Strip. The following January, Hamas members were elected to a majority in the Palestinian parliament, bringing peace talks to a halt. In July
2006, after the Islamist Lebanese militia Hezbollah kidnapped two Israeli soldiers, fighting erupted, with Hezbollah rocketing the towns of northern Israel and Israel destroying much of south Lebanon and parts of Beirut.

It is true that the Iranian leadership remains opposed to the peace agreement signed between the PLO and Israel, but that opposition is less to do with Iran’s Islamic ideology than with national security considerations. Implicit in Washington's concern is that Iran's stance could puncture the agreement and thus render it unworkable. It can do so, it is argued, by lending political and propaganda support to the opponents (i.e. Hamas) of the agreement who are prepared to wreck it. Cited as examples of attempts to puncture the agreement are the kidnapping by Hamas of an Israeli soldier in October 1994, and the killing a few weeks later of 24 Israeli civilians in Tel Aviv. But this argument is flawed on three accounts. First, it denies the existence of a genuine opposition to the agreement by various Arab and Palestinian leaders and movements, whether the Islamists or the secularists. A reading of the popular and academic literature published since the signing of the peace agreement between Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin would support the above assertion. Second, it ignores the real difficulties that both the Israelis and the PLO leadership have been experiencing in implementing the Oslo agreement. Third, although the Islamic Republic enjoys a degree of moral and philosophical influence over the Islamic movements in the Arab world, Washington, and
Israel and Egypt for that matter, are exaggerating, one would suspect for political reasons, Iran's assistance to or influence in these movements. This is borne out by the fact that, despite Iran's strong opposition to the peace talks over the long period, it has failed conspicuously to persuade the Arab governments to abandon the peace talks with Israel. Even the Syrians, Iran's closest friend in the Arab world, take a different stance from Tehran on the Arab-Israeli conflict. And there is little that Iran can do about it. In fact, President Rafsanjani is on record as saying that, if there was going to be a peace agreement between Israel and Syria which would make the latter content, then Iran would accept the outcome.73

The reality is that because of cultural, racial, historical and religious differences between the Arabs and the Iranians, neither cuts much ice with the other. The financial, political and military support that the Arab states (except Libya and Syria) gave to Iraq in its eight-year war against Iran is a measure of Iran's lack of influence in the Arab states. It is worth noting that shortly after the Gulf War of 1991, Iran improved its relations with the Gulf States and proposed a Gulf security arrangement of all the littoral states, but the Arab monarchies rejected the suggestion and instead signed security treaties with the United States. It could be argued that the Persian Gulf monarchies cannot feel comfortable with a 'revolutionary' government, but they did not feel at ease
with the Iranian monarchy either. They were as much at odds with the Shah as they are with the ayatollahs.

Similarly, the Arabs have had little, if any, success in influencing Iranian politics. For example, they failed to persuade the Shah to withdraw Iran's de facto recognition of Israel, sever trade and technical relations and end the supply of oil to the Jewish state. Iran's relations with its other Muslim neighbors, namely Turkey, Pakistan and Afghanistan, have been friendlier than with the Arabs. Again, this was as true under the Pahlavis as it is under the ayatollahs. Also, Iran has had closer and more cooperative relations with its new neighbors, the Central Asian Republics, than with the Arabs. Notwithstanding the role played by foreign powers to create division between the Arab states and Iran, the fact remains that there are more things to divide them than there are to unite them.

What is being argued here is that as political rhetoric it may be useful for the US to portray Iran as a dragon capable of breathing fire across the Persian Gulf into the defenseless sheikhdoms who are vulnerable to Iran's influence and coercive power? But in doing so, Washington should not lose sight of the historical facts briefly discussed above. In other words, it is wrong to assume, as the United States seems to, that Iran's acquiescence in the Arab-Israeli peace process will have much impact on the outcome of the negotiations. The
opponents of the agreements signed between the Arab states and Israel are not waiting for instructions from Teheran to take to the streets to show their anger against their governments. Such assumptions by the US administration refuse to recognize the authenticity and therefore the legitimacy of nationalist and independent movements in the developing world, believing that they were all inspired, directed and financed by Iran or others.

As pointed out earlier, Iran's opposition to the PLO-Israeli agreement has a security dimension to it, which is perhaps more important than its Islamic dimension. They believe that one of the aims of the agreement has been to further isolate Iran and thus make it more vulnerable to outside pressure. At the time when the US, the world's only superpower, has almost total domination in the area, when both Washington and Tel Aviv view Iran as the only threat to the security of the region, and when Israel and the major Arab states and allies of the United States (i.e. Egypt and Saudi Arabia) show overt hostility towards Iran and are suspicious of its intentions in the Persian Gulf, the Iranians have reason to be apprehensive about and feel vulnerable to the overtures between the Arabs and Israelis. There has been for some time now a school of thought in Israel which believes that one way of making peace with the Arabs is to portray Iran and the radical Islam that it represents as the common enemy. There have been several statements by high-ranking Israeli officials and political analysts to that effect. For example, Israel's military
intelligence officers and Israeli commentators have argued that because of Israel's physical distance from Iran, Israel alone cannot win a conventional ground war against Iran which is 'considered the most threatening' of all Israel's enemies, which include Syria and Iraq. So one way of containing Iran or defeating it in a war, short of using nuclear weapons of course, is 'improved cooperation with some (of its) neighboring states'.

The late Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, is quoted as saying that Muslim fundamentalists, led by Iran, are the greatest enemies of the peace process between the Arabs and Israel. Coupled with this is the statement by US Defense Secretary, William Perry, to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that Iran poses a serious threat to Israel as well as to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other Persian Gulf states, and that only a combined force of Israel, the United States, and the Persian Gulf states can stand up to Iran's military power and deter its threat. In short, the Israel-PLO agreement has created a de facto US-Israel-Arab alliance which, Iran fears, has the potential of being turned into a vehicle for applying political, military and economic pressure on it and thus threatening its national security interests in the Persian Gulf.

Therefore, as far the Arab Israel Peace Process is concerned there have been no improvements in US-Iran relations during the Bush Administration. In his State of the Union Address in 2002, President Bush labeled Iran as part of the
‘Axis of Evil, outraging the Iranian leadership. Iran responded with a public statement: "the Islamic Republic is proud to be a target of the hate and anger of the world's greatest evil, we never seek to be praised by American officials."\(^7\)\(^7\)

However, in 2003, Iran did offer a proposal trying to ease strained relations between the two rivals. Iran put several different issues on the table including an offer, within the framework of the negotiations, to disarm Hezbollah and turn it into a mere political organization. Secondly, the offer included an end of all support for Islamic jihad and Hamas, and provisions that Iran would encourage the Palestinians to go a political route, rather than military route, in their dealings with Israel. The US rejected the offer. Overall, the rhetoric of the Bush administration has been that Iran is a threat to not only the United States, but also to the international community.

In 2003, prior to the Iraq War, the Bush administration reportedly received overtures from the Iranian government. With help from the American Iranian Council, Iran purportedly proposed a "grand bargain", which would have resolved outstanding issues between the United States and Iran, including Iran's nuclear program and support for Hamas and Hezbollah.\(^7\)\(^8\) Bush administration officials, including Richard Armitage, thought the Khatami government and the Swiss ambassador in Tehran were "promising more than it could deliver". Others, such as Vali Nasr and Gary Sick consider the lack of an
American response to be a missed opportunity. Lawrence Wilkerson, Colin Powell's chief of staff, said that "it was Cheney and Rumsfeld who made sure that Washington dismissed Iran's May 2003 offer to open up its nuclear program, rein in Hezbollah and cooperate against Al-Qaeda". There are a number of allegations against Iranian policy which disrupt Arab-Israel peace process.

Iran’s support for Palestinian militant groups has long concerned US Administrations, particularly since doing so gives Tehran an opportunity to try to obstruct Israeli-Palestinian peace prospects. In the 1990s, Khamenei called Israel a “cancerous tumor” and made other statements suggesting that he seeks Israel’s destruction. In December 2001, Rafsanjani said that it would take only one Iranian nuclear bomb to destroy Israel, whereas a similar strike against Iran by Israel would have far less impact because Iran’s population is large. Iran has sometimes openly incited anti-Israel violence, including hosting conferences of anti-peace process organizations (April 24, 2001, and June 2-3, 2002).

On the other hand, during his presidency, Khatemi generally refrained from inflammatory statements against Israel and even conversed with Israel’s president at the 2005 funeral of Pope John Paul II. The Iranian Foreign Ministry, considered a bastion of moderates, has repeatedly stated that Iran’s
official position is that it would not seek to block any final Israeli-Palestinian settlement but that the peace process is too weighted toward Israel to result in a fair settlement for Palestinians. The State Department reports on terrorism for 2005 (released on April 28, 2006) accuse Iran of providing “extensive” funding, weapons, and training to Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the Al Aqsa Martyr’s Brigades, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC). All are named as foreign terrorist organizations (FTO) by the State Department for their use of violence against Israelis and efforts to undermine the Arab-Israeli peace process.\textsuperscript{81}

Since the end of World War II, the US and other Western powers have deemed that they have a moral obligation to protect Israel. At the same time, Muslim rulers and clerics around the world have sought to mobilize Islam's believers against Israel. Iran has threatened Israel with nuclear weapons, and one of the key reasons why Al-Qaeda terrorists are carrying out attacks against the US and its allies is because of what they see as Washington's one-sided support of Israel. Without a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli dispute, there can never be a durable peace in the West Asia.\textsuperscript{82} Foremost among the issues of the region and for Muslims around the world is the establishment of a just and settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Islamic Republic of Iran still has not recognized Israel’s right to exist and has hindered the peace process in West Asia by arming militants, including Hamas, Hezbollah, and Palestinian Islamic
Jihad. This serves as a serious problem both for Israel and the US and might transform into a serious repercussion for the region.

After 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran US has no diplomatic relations. They have rarely engaged in face-to-face talks since then. On April 24, 1981, the Swiss Government assumed representation of American interests in Tehran via an interests section. Iranian interests in the United States are represented by the Iranian Interests Section of the Pakistani Embassy in Washington, D.C.

Obstacles to improved relations between the US and the Islamic Republic of Iran remains. In 2003, Jahangir Amuzegaran, Finance Minister and Economic Ambassador in Iran's pre-1979 government, identified several obstacles to "resumption of relations" between the two countries from the American perspective, the obstacles according to him are:

1. Iranian state sponsorship of international terrorism
2. Pursuit of weapons of mass destruction
3. Threats to neighbors in the Persian Gulf
4. Repeated statements by the Iran's highest government officials that they wish "Death to America" and for Israel to "Vanish from the pages of time"
5. Opposition to the Arab-Israeli peace process
6. Violations of human rights
To this he adds that "in recent years, the last two issues seem to have lost some of their potency and are now only infrequently raised. On the other hand, a new accusation of Iran's harboring of al Qaeda operatives has recently been added to the list". Iran's original post-revolutionary list of demands required the United States to:

Accept the legitimacy of the 1979 revolution

1. Not interfere in Iran's internal affairs

2. Deal with the Iranian regime on the basis of "respect and equality"

Amuzegaran noted subsequent demands by Iran:

1. Lifting American economic sanctions,

2. Releasing frozen Iranian assets in the United States

3. Ending the American military presence in the neighboring countries of Iraq and Afghanistan

4. Removing the US Navy from the Persian Gulf

5. Ending perceived one-sided support for Israel

6. Formally apologizing for intervention in Iran, including the CIA-backed overthrow of Mohammed Mossadiqh in the 1950s

Paying reparations for:
1. American companies' assistance in developing Iraq's chemical weapons facilities during the Iran-Iraq war

2. American support for anti-Iranian organizations (i.e. the People's Mujahedin of Iran [MEK])

3. USS Vincennes shooting down Iran Air Flight 655

4. Economic damage caused by American sanctions and political pressure

5. American unmanned aerial vehicle flights over Iran violating Iranian airspace since 2003

6. America's human rights record

The US objects to Iran’s sponsorship of terrorism, its nuclear weapons ambitions, and its violations of human rights and the theocratic nature of the Government. Although the Islamic Republic of Iran has contributed to positive reconstruction efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, Tehran has also pursued policies to undermine stability in both countries. Additionally the US Government is concerned with the Islamic Republic of Iran’s recent crackdown on human rights and detainment of civil society actors. Iran also continues to object to many of the US policies in the region and with respect to Iran as well. Moreover it also perceives a probability of US attack on Iran independently or with Israeli collaboration to weaken Iran and derail its nuclear program. Despite these obstacles, US-Iranian representatives have
discussed a number of issues of concern over the years. US and Iranian envoys cooperated during operations against the Taliban in 2001 and during the Bonn Conference in 2002, which established a broad-based government for the Afghan people under President Karzai. In 2007, representatives from the two countries met several times to discuss Iraq. But the created opportunities of cooperation could not normalize their relations. And the nation which was, before the Revolution, Iran's foremost economic and military partner today is the foremost adversary with the outcome that their relations are characterized by contentious speeches and statements.
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