

**Balogh István**

**The Theory of “Strategic Blowback”**

**US Strategy Towards Iran 1993-2010**

# **Nemzetközi Tanulmányok Intézet**

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**Nemzetközi  
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**Ph.D. értekezés**

**Balogh István**

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## List of Abbreviations

**AIPAC:** American Israel Public Affairs Committee  
**CENTCOM:** US Central Command  
**CIA:** Central Intelligence Agency (US)  
**CISADA:** Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Sanctions Act  
**DoD:** Department of Defense  
**EU3:** United Kingdom, France and Germany  
**FATF:** Financial Action Task Force  
**FPA:** Foreign Policy Analysis  
**GCC:** Gulf Cooperation Council  
**GSD:** Gulf Security Dialogue  
**GWOT:** Global War on Terror  
**IFSA:** Iran Freedom Support Act  
**ILSA:** Iran and Libya Sanctions Act  
**IRISL:** Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines  
**ISA:** Iran Sanctions Act  
**MKO:** Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization  
**MNF-I:** Multi-National Force-Iraq  
**MOIS:** Ministry of Intelligence and Security (Islamic Republic of Iran)  
**NSC:** National Security Council (USA)  
**NSS:** National Security Strategy  
**NPT:** Nonproliferation Treaty  
**OTFI:** Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence (Treasury Department, US)  
**P5+1:** The five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany  
**TRR:** Tehran Research Reactor  
**USGAO:** US Government Accountability Office  
**WINEP:** Washington Institute for Near East Policy



# Introduction

*“There are few nations in the world with which the United States has less reason to quarrel or more compatible interests than Iran.”* (Kissinger [2001]: p. 196. also quoted in Balogh-Láng [2007b]: p. 37.)

Henry Kissinger’s words describe well the contradictory and ambivalent nature of relations between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The conflict between Iran and the US has been high on the international political agenda ever since the rupture in the relations of the two entities due to the 1979 revolution in Iran. Many theories and many suggestions have seen light on how Washington should handle the conflict with Tehran. Despite the large number of excellent experts dealing with the issue and the enormous number of works and analysis on the subject, the US has not found a way to tackle the challenge posed by the Islamic Republic of Iran. When one immerses oneself in the tactical details of a given topic, he or she risks losing the overall picture, the *“strategic focus”* that helps an analyst formulate the most important questions. Thus, a large number of works seem to forget asking the most important question: *why?* What are the causes of two such powers unable to come to terms with each other when there had been plenty of opportunities for a *“grand bargain”* during the history of their enmity? Broadly speaking, there were four significant and real opportunities for a grand bargain between Iran and the US since the end of the Cold War.

The first opportunity following the Cold War was the period after the Gulf War of 1991. Iran declared “positive neutrality” during the war and thought it would receive rewards for being relatively constructive during the military campaign to oust Saddam Hussein from power and pushing for the release of US hostages in Lebanon. Instead of using the opportunity for rapprochement, the US left a large military force in the Gulf after the conflict with Iraq, which Iran viewed as a hostile measure.

The second opportunity after the end of the bipolar world order came under the Clinton presidency (1993-2001) and the Khatami (1997-2005) administration. It is important to look at the wider context here. The Clinton administration tried to apply a new approach to the Middle East in general. It initiated the Oslo Process, which seemed to be successful at the beginning, but it began stalling by 1997-1998. The Clinton government also introduced the policy of “dual containment”, the aim of which was to

contain both Iraq and Iran at the same time. However, “keeping Iraq in the box” did not stop Saddam Hussein from breaching the terms agreed upon at the end of the Gulf War and under subsequent UN Security Council resolutions.<sup>1</sup> In Iran’s case, sanctions were introduced against the Middle Eastern country in order to implement the policy of dual containment. Engagement toward the Khatami administration was a success initially, but hard liners in Tehran as well as hawkish political forces in the US seemed to have isolated the Iranian president and the Clinton administration, respectively. Still, President Clinton got quite far in trying to bring about a change in the stalemate that has characterized US-Iran relations since 1979. Despite those limited results, the initiative failed. Even though the constellation of international factors was relatively ideal for rapprochement, domestic factors proved to be obstacles on the way towards the normalization of relations. Thus, the second opportunity was missed and most of President Clinton’s policies in the Middle East could not reach their objectives. Events seem to suggest that containment and aggressive policies do not seem to work – engagement on the other hand, *almost* brought substantial results. The dissertation wishes to shed light on why engagement did not work in the end and why the opportunity was missed after all.

The third opportunity presented itself under the tenure of George W. Bush. The Bush administration’s foreign policy strategy was defined by the “*Global War on Terror*” (GWOT) and extensive reliance on military force. It was not surprising at all that the excessive use of US military power could not remedy the problems of the Middle East, much less realize the strategic interests of the United States. Afghanistan was a success initially, but the US administration already had its eye on Iraq by then. In fact, the issue of regime change in Iraq had been debated in Washington’s intellectual and policy circles since the Gulf War. The US gave special emphasis to the doctrine of preemption and confronting state sponsors of terrorism, thus, Iran was labeled as a member of the “axis of evil” in the beginning of 2002. Clearly, the Bush administration wished to send a strong psychological message that states sponsoring terror will share the destiny of Saddam Hussein’s regime. The “psychological spillover effect” caused by the fear of further US military interventions after the toppling of the Iraqi regime *may have* initially contributed to creating the necessary conditions for another grand bargain

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<sup>1</sup> This was at least the *perception* of US officials. For an excellent account of how the US and the world was deceived by Saddam Hussein concerning Iraqi WMD programs, see: Daalder, Lindsay [2005]: p. 152.

between Tehran and Washington. This is suggested by the May 2003 Iranian offer, which touched upon most of the sensitive issues between the two parties. No doubt, fear of US intervention played a role in Iran's offer. (Ross-Makovsky [2009]: p. 190.) As a result, Iran was convinced that the United States really had the power to change regimes in the Middle East. Nonetheless, the author argues that Iran's offer was a direct consequence of the Iraqi invasion *to a very limited extent*. In fact, Iranian willingness to cooperate emerged in the lead up to the Afghanistan intervention. Thus, Iran was already willing to engage the US even before the invasion of Iraq, meaning that it was not necessarily the invasion itself, which motivated Iran to pursue engagement with the US. Thus, aggressive US policies may not have had the effect ascribed to them by many.

Regardless of what spurred Iran to engage the US, instead of making the most of the opportunity, Washington rejected Tehran's offer and kept pursuing the Bush doctrine – clearly, another opportunity missed. The aggressive policies did not seem to be paying off – Iran took a confrontational course and did all it can to roll back US influence in the Middle East, significantly weakening Washington's position in the region. *Washington rejected the opportunity that could have led to the normalization of relations between the two entities*. This was a result of pure miscalculation and an ideological mindset that reflected confidence in the US ability to change regimes in the region and engineer new states and societies.

The fourth opportunity came in the form of the P5+1 negotiations under the Obama administration. Both rounds failed in Geneva and Vienna in the fall of 2009. This time it was Iran who rejected the offer – again. This instance was quite similar to how the engagement efforts of the Clinton administration ended: the US government wanted a deal, but the policy of engagement failed due to domestic politics in Iran and the US. *Still, Obama got further than any other US president in trying to foster a new kind of relationship between Tehran and Washington*.

It is instructive that a grand bargain seemed most likely when Clinton's second and Khatami's first presidential terms coincided. These two leaders were willing to compromise. However, Bush took a harder stance than his predecessor and détente with Khatami, a reformist, was not on the agenda anymore. Even though Bush's first term coincided with a moderate Iranian presidency, a bargain was not likely due to 9/11 and

the implementation of the Bush doctrine. When Mahmud Ahmadinejad<sup>2</sup> was elected, meaning he would be the Iranian leader President Bush would have to deal with during his second term, rapprochement was out of question because both leaders were less willing to compromise, and they were also more aggressive than earlier leaders of their countries. President Obama was less aggressive in his approach and his efforts almost bore fruit. There seems to be a pattern, a distinct dynamic behind all this: when the US pursues a “milder” approach, it has the chance of fostering a dialogue – a pretext for a bargain. *However, this does not guarantee a bargain, but it does keep the option open – something aggressive policies surely cannot.*

The hypothesis of this work is built around the pattern identified here (to be specified in the following chapter). The author wishes to contribute to the debate on the US-Iran stalemate by providing a possible theoretical explanation as to why United States policies have failed to provide a solution to the conflict so far. The ambivalent nature of US-Iran relations highlighted by Henry Kissinger is reminiscent of Thomas C. Schelling’s theory about conflicts. Every party to a given conflict has common interests despite the obvious clash of their respective interests. Thus, every conflict is a bargaining process – one that is marked by threats, incentives, the offer of “carrots and sticks”. (Schelling [2008]). *The United States and Iran clearly have reasons to cooperate.* Conjecture and intuition are indispensable assets in research, no matter how subjective they may be. ***They lead one to believe that aggressive US policies vis a vis Iran could be counterproductive – this is the central argument of this dissertation.***

Although the thesis is about US strategy towards Iran, the aim of this dissertation is twofold. First, the author wishes to contribute to the literature on the theory of strategy, more specifically, the theory of foreign and security policy strategy. An attempt is made to introduce an alternative way of thinking about foreign and security policy strategies. Second, the dissertation wishes to present a case study to provide evidence that the theoretical approach the author applies holds water in reality.

Thinking in an alternative context about foreign and security policy strategy does not imply the introduction of a new and fully coherent theory. Rather, the author wishes to contribute to existing knowledge by suggesting a new *philosophy or ‘metatheory’* of foreign policy strategy. This philosophy is manifested in taking an “indirect approach” to foreign policy strategy. The concept is taken from military

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<sup>2</sup> Mahmud Ahmadinejad was elected president of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2005. He was reelected after a disputed election in 2009.

strategist and historian B.H. Liddell Hart's concept on military strategy, something the dissertation will elaborate on in more detail. This is not entirely without precedent – others have applied this approach to US foreign and security policy before (see below). However, as the author puts forth, most of those works do not precisely elaborate on the theoretical dimensions of the approach. The theory of an indirect approach to foreign and security policy strategy is “*under-theorized*”.

Philosophy in this context is less accurate than theory. Philosophy *orients* whereas theory *directs* the mind. Nonetheless, even orientation could be viewed as an asset in the present globalized world, where foreign policy strategists have difficulties finding points of reference for trying to determine the direction of policies.

What are the social scientific and practical results of a dissertation built around the above conjecture? If this dissertation is capable of proving the counterproductive nature of aggressive US policies toward Iran, then it will also be able to provide answers to the following questions:

- What are the consequences of taking a tougher stance towards Iran?
- Why have aggressive policies toward Iran failed so far?
- If they have not failed, what are the reasons?
- What is the way out of such a stalemate?

In more general terms, the findings may suggest answers to the following questions:

- What could be the consequences of aggressive foreign and security policies?
- Do aggressive policies pay off in the long run in general?
- In what circumstances do they pay/ do not pay off?

The author deliberately put “*suggest*” in the previous sentence, since it is obviously beyond the limits of this thesis to answer all of these questions properly. Nonetheless, if the methodology applied here shows the correlation the author proposes, then a significant part of this topic could be discovered. An additional result of the thesis would be to deepen our understanding of foreign and security policy strategy in order to *enrich* the theory of international relations by importing new concepts from strategic

studies.

The first part of the dissertation introduces the hypotheses and it describes and analyzes the methodology used in the dissertation. The second part provides the case study which tests the author's hypotheses from the start of the Clinton administration to the 2010 beginning of the popular uprisings in the Arab world. Part three is the concluding chapter, which introduces a possible philosophy for dealing with the present stalemate. This final part also draws up the main theoretical and practical implications of the study.

## **I. HYPOTHESES AND METHODOLOGY: TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY STRATEGY**

### **1. Why the US and Iran?**

First, the author has to provide a sound explanation as to why the US and Iran have been chosen as the subject of this work. The methodological reasoning for selecting these two entities is based on the following considerations.

*1. The US-Iran stalemate as an ideal ground for testing the theories of the thesis.* The dynamic of US-Iran relations provide an excellent theoretical terrain for testing the concept applied in the thesis. The stalemate between the parties has remained unchanged ever since 1979. Nonetheless, there have been (missed) opportunities for a "grand bargain", which has never been realized. At the same time, there are a number of examples when US foreign policy strategy<sup>3</sup> took an "aggressive" course in the Middle East, and, contrary to Washington's expectations and intentions, Tehran managed to enhance its influence in the region. It is logical to ask why, since there has to be a set of factors, which explain this. Because there are numerous signs of this dynamic,

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<sup>3</sup> The author uses foreign policy in a sense that incorporates security policy as well. Sometimes security policy will be explicitly mentioned separately. Also, the term "*foreign policy*" is understood to be synonymous with "*foreign policy strategy*." The author will elaborate on this in more detail in the chapter on the formulation of the hypotheses.

conjecture leads one to believe that there is a *pattern* behind this phenomenon.

2. *The US is still the most powerful nation in the international system.* With its abundance of resources it is the state that faces the highest number of (grand) strategic choices over time. It has the most significant ability *to combine given tools with given goals in order to attain the latter*. Therefore, it is an ideal “model” for analyzing how great powers think in strategic terms and how they implement strategic concepts.

3. *There is sufficient literature on US strategy and grand strategy to provide enough researchable sources for the academic analysis of the issue.* There is an abundance of work on US foreign and security policy and the Iran policy of the US in particular.

4. *The relative transparency of US foreign and security policy-making.* It is easier to examine US foreign policy decisions, since the US foreign and security policy community provides more transparency than other countries, e.g. Russia, where foreign policy is still considered to be “*tsarskoye dolye*” – a privilege of the few within the elite. (Trenin-Lo [2006]: p. 12.) The same is true of most other great powers, most notably China and India. Therefore, given the lack of transparency in these cases, the US seems to be the most ideal great power for studying how great power strategy works in practice.

Why should one choose Iran instead of any another relationship of the US? As the most powerful state, the US has relations with most states of the international system and it has a number of conflicts with various different actors. Thus, why does it make sense to analyze US Iran-policy when discussing the theory of foreign and security policy strategy, rather than, for example, US foreign and security policy towards China? The author provides the following reasons to answer that question:

a. *Again, the US-Iran stalemate as an ideal ground for testing the theories of the thesis.* (See above.)

b. *The significance of the conflict between the US and Iran.* The conflict is relevant from the perspective of international security, economy and Middle Eastern peace and stability. The way it is handled will have a profound impact on the wider Middle East.

*c. The comprehensive use of US national resources to handle the Iranian challenge.* Washington uses multiple types of national tools to overcome the Iranian challenge – it pushed for the adoption of UN enforcement measures and it introduced its own sanctions against the Islamic Republic. Washington has at least one US aircraft carrier patrolling Gulf waters and it tried to up the ante on Iran by placing diplomatic pressure on the regime in Tehran. In other words, the US is pursuing a strategy that is based on the coordinated application of different national resources – political, economic and military – in order to bring about a change in Iranian policies. Thus, due to its large pool of resources, the US faces a number of strategic options (see above).

*d. The perceived Iranian “threat”.* Washington feels that the Iranian nuclear program is a potential threat to its national security and to the realization of its national interests. Therefore, the Iranian case provides an ideal situation for studying how US strategy works in practice. It provides a window on how US strategy can or should handle a problem – in this case a strategic challenge posed by Iran.

*e. The personal interest of the author.* Although not an expert on Iran, the author has been researching US-Iran relations since graduate school and he has been trying to understand the effects of Iranian policies on US foreign and security policy by researching Iranian foreign policy as well. Also, the author of this thesis was lucky enough to be provided with the opportunity to travel to Iran and familiarize himself with the local mindset – a valuable asset when researching Washington’s Iran policy. Again, this was a further incentive to bring the scholarly interests of the author (theory of strategy, the US and Iran) together in one work. The author hopes that his interest in understanding Iranian foreign policy thinking significantly contributed to the quality of this work.



## 2. Time Frame

As far as the time frame is concerned, the interval between the inauguration of the Clinton administration and the beginning of the 2010-2011 popular Arab uprisings will be researched in the dissertation. The Clinton administration was the first US presidency to be inaugurated after the end of the Cold War. By January 1993, the Soviet Union had been dissolved and William Jefferson Clinton was the president who presided over the first phase of US hegemony in the post-Cold War international system. The distribution of power changed in the international system altering the international structure. The US had more resources to commit to new priorities in the “*new world order*” – still, it never managed to solve the Iranian problem. Thus, from a methodological point of view, it is logical to choose the new set of historical circumstances as a starting point for the author’s analysis.

The beginning of the Arab uprisings has been chosen as the end of the time interval researched for more practical reasons. It is clearly a historical watershed in the development of the Middle East that may change the region’s political and social landscape forever. These popular unrests pose various strategic dilemmas for US policies towards the region and they imply a strategic environment fundamentally different from the order that prevailed after the end of the Cold War. The course the US takes may have profound effects on the region, as well as its own position within it. This specific event, however, will not be examined, only the period leading up to the end of 2010, precisely because of the watershed it represents. *To provide a specific date, the author will examine events up to December 18, 2010, the day the first large wave of protests began in Tunisia.*

Thus, the dissertation embraces the tenure of three different US administrations, roughly three and a half presidential terms encompassing moments such as the policy of dual containment, the Oslo process, Iranian President Khatami’s “dialogue of civilizations”, a number of sanctions introduced against Iran, the 9/11 attacks of 2001 and the subsequent Iranian offer concerning a grand bargain, the Bush doctrine, the war on terror, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the overtures of President Obama and their failures.

### 3. Hypothesis 1a – The Theory of “Strategic Blowback”

Having established why the US-Iran bilateral relationship was chosen as the case study for this work and what interval the dissertation wishes to examine, it is obviously necessary to formulate the main hypotheses (H1a; H1b) of the thesis. The author has researched and read a significant amount of books, journal articles, primary sources, as well as numerous shorter analyses in both printed and electronic form in order to comprehend the nature of the relationship between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran. *History suggests that there is a pattern of confrontational US policies backfiring in the long run.* Hence, the question arises: is it true that when the United States pushes ever harder to isolate, confront, deter and intimidate Iran, Washington often makes its own situation more difficult in the long run? In order to prove this, one needs to find a general theory that can be used for the specific case of the US-Iran stalemate.

The blowback dynamism has also been observed by a number of other authors and sources, although their observations are not necessarily related to the US-Iran stalemate specifically. Most notably, the term “*blowback*” was first used by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in the 50's to “*describe the likelihood that ... [US] ... covert operations in other people's countries would result in retaliations against Americans, civilian and military, at home and abroad.*” (Johnson [2004a]: p. ix.). More specifically, the CIA referred to the problem as follows:

“Possibilities of blowback against the United States should always be in the back of the minds of all CIA officers involved in this type of operation” (Appendix E - Military Critique - Lessons Learned from TPAJAX, paragraph “O”. [1954]: pp. 21-22.)

Since this is a term used in the US intelligence community to specifically describe the negative consequences of an intelligence operation, it is too “narrow” a definition for a dissertation dealing with the overall strategy of the US towards Iran. However, it is instructive that the above definition is from a declassified CIA document, the purpose of which was to analyze the 1953 coup against then Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq. That is not the reason, though, why the author wished to highlight this definition. Although a concept used in espionage, the definition describes well *the logic of “blowback”* – the logic around which this dissertation is built.

The term was first introduced to the academic literature on IR by the late

Chalmers Johnson, former professor of political science at the University of California, San Diego. He explains the definition by referring to

“[...] the unintended consequences of policies that were kept secret from the American people” (Johnson [2001]: p. 8.)”

In the second edition of the same work Johnson writes:

“In a broader sense, blowback is another way of saying that a nation reaps what it sows. [...] As a concept, blowback is obviously most easily grasped in its straightforward manifestations. The unintended consequences of American policies and acts in country X lead to a bomb at an American embassy in country Y or a dead American in country Z.” (Johnson [2004a]: p. xi.)

In another subsequent work he contends that blowback is to be understood as the

“[...] unanticipated consequences of unacknowledged actions in other people’s countries.” (Johnson [2004b]: p. 8.)

In his 2008 book Johnson sums up the concept as follows:

““Blowback” does not mean just revenge but rather retaliation for covert, illegal violence that our government has carried out abroad that it kept totally secret from the American public (even though such acts are seldom secret among the people on the receiving end)” (Johnson [2008]: pp. 1-2.)

Johnson implicitly argues that the more expansive and aggressive (covert) foreign policies the US pursues, the more intensive the blowback effect will be, that is, the greater the costs the US is likely to incur in the long run. Johnson’s hypothesis uses the concept in general to explain setbacks in US foreign policy since the World War II. He brings a number of specific examples, such as the 1953 coup against Iranian Prime Minister Mossadeq, the blowback effect of which was partly the 1979 revolution itself. However, his account is essentially a criticism of “imperialist” US foreign policies in general.

Despite the values of Johnson’s works, the author of this dissertation is rather critical of his views. Although the blowback theory is an interesting and useful concept, the author has not elaborated on the theoretical foundations of it. It is not a coherent theory, it is a collection of case studies which *may suggest* that *there may be* some correlation between covert and aggressive US policies and certain negative effects which harmed US national interests. It is not entirely clear that all the examples he brings are undoubtedly the unintended consequences of US policies.

There is also another reason, which makes the author of this dissertation quite

critical of Johnson's argument – a reason mostly of a moral nature. The moral scruple stems from the automatism suggested by Johnson's approach. Aggressive US policies *automatically* generate negative reverberations which harm US interests. This automatism suggests that it is *natural* for the US to suffer significant setbacks in its foreign policies, because "it reaps what it sows." He evaluates 9/11 as a blowback, which occurred due to US policies in the Middle East. Hence, according to Johnson's implicit logic, *the US should not have expected anything less than what happened on September 11, 2001 – as if this was the natural state of affairs*. This logic is just a step away from recognizing the justified nature of the attacks by the perpetrators of 9/11. It is natural for them to behave the way they did on 9/11 because the US pursued flawed policies. This dissertation aims to provide an objective analysis. It aims to assess US policies in a critical manner. It is a work that is indeed critical of many US policies – including the Bush doctrine. And there maybe something to the argument that US policies had a significant role in the aggressive attacks that occurred in September 2001. However, it is obviously morally questionable to suggest something even distantly sympathizing with the thought of justifying the acts of those who committed the terrorist acts on 9/11.

*Also, it is difficult to find anything in Johnson's books that the US did right.* Surely, there has to be at least some policies, which did work out and served the "greater good", as well as the US national interest. It is this lack of balance that questions the objectivity of Johnson's works. It creates an impression that the United States is bent on ruling the entire world and it does so at the costs of applying immoral means to attain strategic ends, therefore, it provides a reductionist picture of reality. (Zelikow [2000]; Ikenberry [2004]) Mainstream authors within IR in the US are also largely critical of Johnson's work, stressing that his works reflect a significant bias against US policies ignoring successful moments and decisions (*Ibid.*). Having read the book, the author found these criticisms to be well grounded, thus, he decided not to build his entire argumentation around Johnson's theory. Nonetheless, the author will use the concept of the CIA reintroduced to the discourse by Johnson when defining the "blowback" concept, but the author will ignore the rest of Johnson's argumentation.

From a methodological perspective, it may seem like a mistake to "borrow" a phrase from a CIA assessment, since it carries risks. It may create the impression that the author's stance is somewhat biased. However, this does not express any positive, or, for that matter, negative bias on behalf of the author towards the US or any part of its

government. It simply shows that the author found the term to be useful for explaining the phenomena observed throughout his research of the topic.

Douglas Kellner, professor of philosophy at Columbia University, New York, refined the definition used by Johnson. He does not only refer to covert operations – he widens the concept when explaining Johnson’s theory.<sup>4</sup> He writes:

“[...] the unintended consequences of aggressive military and covert policies [...]”  
(Kellner [2003a])<sup>5</sup>

This formulation is more useful as a definition, since it deprives Johnson’s concept of its intelligence background, thus, widening its meaning. Intuition leads one to believe that US policies towards Iran, which have caused unintended strategic consequences, were obviously not only about espionage. Thus, one has to find a deeper and wider formulation for precisely defining blowback and this is also needed for formulating the hypothesis.

A further step in that direction was taken by Paul Rogers, professor of peace studies at Bradford University, Bradford, who criticized the Bush doctrine by putting forward that:

“[...] the scale of US military objectives will over time ensure the opposite of what is intended.” (Rogers [2002])

The article is titled “Strategic Blowback” and this expresses well what the author wishes to point out. The definition needs to refer to the significance and the extent of the setbacks suffered due to flawed policies. Therefore the term “*strategic*” is an essential part of the concept.

Another useful account is the theory of Christopher Layne, professor at Texas A&M university. Layne’s hypothesis is that the United States has been pursuing “extra regional hegemony” since World War II. It did this not because its security interests required it to do so, but because the US has been intent on extending its influence ever more. “Extra regional hegemony” (as Layne named this strategy) is not a wise strategy, since it makes the US less secure as it provokes the counterbalancing efforts of other

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<sup>4</sup> It is not entirely clear whether Kellner widened the concept on purpose, because he adds „aggressive military policies” to the definition when actually summarizing Johnson’s blowback theory.

<sup>5</sup> Kellner’s book on the Bush administration’s policy considers 9/11 a blowback effect of earlier US policies. (See: Kellner [2003b]) As noted above, the author does not agree, since this strand of thought provides a sense of legitimacy to the 9/11 attacks.

states and it also “fuels terrorism.” Layne follows a similar logic to that of Johnson’s, without the strong bias of the latter. (Layne [2006]: pp. 5-10.) Layne also uses the expression “blowback” and he also borrows it from Johnson. (*Ibid*, p. 190., p. 278. footnote 90.).

In fact, other authors and analysts (either implicitly or explicitly) suggest a roughly similar dynamic: “blowback” (Maier [2008]: p. 61.); “pushback” (Fukuyama [2008]: p. 207; p. 209.); capitalism (one of the engines of which is the US) producing technological development causing new threats to emerge, and US military presence and cultural influence invoking anti-American feelings in the Middle East (Mead [2005]: pp. 60-62.; pp. 81-82.); the “axis of evil” speech driving North Korea and Iran “to redouble their efforts to acquire nuclear weapons.” (Mearsheimer [2005]). Stephen Walt puts forth in his 2005 book that if states and certain other actors do not agree with US policies and “are simply concerned about keeping American power in check, then US leaders will find it harder to accomplish even worthy objectives.” Such states “employ a variety of strategies to thwart US aims and to further their own interests in the face of American power.” (Walt [2005]: p. 18.). Former US Vice President Al Gore states that:

“Newton’s third law states, “For every action force there is an equal and opposite reaction force.” National security policy is very different from physics, but the principles of logic and reason turn out to be useful and relevant there, too. And something like Newton’s third law does seem to be a reality in international relations. When any nation is seen as trying to dominate others, there is a **“reaction force”** (emphasis added by author, *I.B.*) that pushes back.” (Gore [2008]: p. 161.)

Thus, there is ample indirect evidence to suggest that the blowback dynamism exists in some form or another. Since many theoretical experts have observed it or referred to it, there has to be a dynamism which explains these observations. There has to be a variable, or a set of variables, either at the structural level or below that, which explain this. This conjecture was the basis of the hypothesis developed and tested in this dissertation. Of course, a number of these works do not touch upon the exact same phenomenon that the author calls “strategic blowback” when describing counterproductive processes, still, there seems to be an awareness that such effects do exist. Despite being mentioned by a number of well-known authors, the phenomenon has not been explained by any theory – blowback theory is “under-theorized”, as noted above. The author wishes to remedy this.

*Theorizing and generalizing calls for identifying patterns.* As it is evident from the introduction of the thesis, US Middle East policies suggest such a pattern, especially the Iran policy of Washington. The more aggressive Washington pushed, the more unintended negative consequences (“strategic blowbacks”) it had to suffer.

*Thus, this doctoral thesis provides a test of the blowback hypothesis.* The author applies the theory to US-Iran relations from the Clinton administration to the beginning of the Tunisian protests in December 2010. The dissertation seeks to provide sufficient evidence to support the blowback hypothesis. Therefore, the central argumentation of the author is built around the following hypothesis:

**H1a: *The more aggressive foreign policy strategy the US pursues towards Iran, the more significant strategic blowbacks it is going to suffer.***

The above formulation of the hypotheses calls for the exact definition of expressions used. Thus, the following are established:

**“aggressive foreign policy strategy”:** Any effort on behalf of the US government to attack, bomb, deter, contain, sanction, roll-back, intimidate, isolate, reject a diplomatic offer from or change the Iranian regime either by covert or overt means.

**“strategic blowback”:** Any unintended direct or indirect consequence of aggressive foreign policies where a clear relation to such initiatives could be established.

**“more”:** A larger effort in either qualitative or quantitative terms.

Any assessment of any foreign policy has to take into consideration the costs associated with the path taken. (Baldwin [2000]) *The theory of strategic blowback and H1a is centered on this notion because it implies that the costs of aggressive action can outweigh the benefits.*

Of course, there are still a lot of problematic issues regarding these specifications, since the terms used are rather vague: “clear relation”, “larger effort in qualitative or quantitative terms”, not to mention a lack of definition of “foreign policy”.

There is one more important definition issue that needs to be addressed. The

author uses the term “policy” to mean efforts on two different levels. When the dissertation uses the word “foreign policy” or “policy”, it is meant to cover a specific policy initiative – eg. engaging the Khatami administration. One level higher, the term “foreign policy” is used to mean “foreign policy strategy”. There is a hierarchy between the two levels – specific policies are subordinated to the overall strategic approach to a given region or country, eg.: sanctions against Iran are specific policies which come under the heading of the foreign policy strategy of containment. Containment is the foreign policy strategy and sanctions are the specific policies (tools) which are applied in order to implement the strategy. The difference between the two will be consistently indicated throughout the dissertation.<sup>6</sup>

“Attack” would be a ground invasion or any kind of limited overt or covert ground operation against Iran. Bombing obviously refers to airstrikes. But how is one to distinguish between intimidation and various forms of containment, roll-back, deterrence, sanctions or isolation? *Indeed, a number of these policies cannot be distinguished and various categories will inevitably overlap.* Sanctions, for example, may fit into the categories of “roll-back” and “isolate” as well. These categories cannot be further specified beyond a certain point. *Thus, there will be situations where the lines between these categories will be blurred and choices made during categorizing may be arbitrary at times.*

The issue of falsification must also be addressed. Some of the above definitions are not specific enough. The definition of “aggressive” policies is broad indeed and this may risk judging most policies as being aggressive in retrospect, thus H1a cannot be *falsified*. Most US policies will inevitably qualify as aggressive. This is not the case, however. Indeed, the majority of US initiatives will be considered “aggressive” – except for one, and that is diplomacy. Thus, H1a is definitely possible to falsify, as diplomatic initiatives will be considered as nonaggressive policies. Intuition suggests that this is logical. The Islamic Republic of Iran has been viewed as the enemy of the US, thus, most US policies so far must have been aggressive. If that was not the case, then there would be no enmity between the two entities and the idea of strategic blowback in relation to Iran would not be of importance.

Diplomacy needs to be defined in order to apply the term in the thesis.

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<sup>6</sup> The “conflation” of strategy and policy (eg. “foreign policy strategy”) pose other methodological dilemmas which will be addressed in the chapter on strategic thought. This logic is taken from: Deibel [2007]: p. 11. Figure 1.2. “Policy and Strategy. Spiders vs. Honeybees”



Diplomacy is taken to mean **efforts by official representatives of the US to pursue direct talks and pursuing direct talks with official representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the same place at the same time.**

Finally, implications of the “linkage theory” must be emphasized here. The theory of strategic blowback suggests the implicit acceptance of the so called “*linkage theory*”.<sup>7</sup> This concept holds that Middle Eastern conflicts are linked to one another, but most notably to the Arab-Israel conflict. Dennis Ross and David Makovsky regard this approach as a “myth” and provide a rebuttal of the linkage theory. (Ross-Makovsky [2009]: 12-30) The theory of strategic blowback questions their claim. In fact, the blowback theory provides the strongest evidence supporting the linkage theory yet. The US-Iran conflict is undeniably linked to the Arab-Israeli conflict and it is linked to several other regional conflicts as well. This is true now, as it was true back in 1991, and the two-pillar “peace strategy” of the Clinton administration, in which Dennis Ross also served, rests on the implicit approval of this hypothesis too. Otherwise, it would not have made sense to isolate Iraq and Iran from the peace process. (See below.) Ross and Makovsky claim that a number of Middle Eastern conflicts took place regardless of the Arab-Israeli conflict. However, most of the conflicts they list as evidence of their argument were not the most significant conflicts of the region and did not necessarily have the kind of impact on regional security that e.g. the 1967 war had.<sup>8</sup> In fact, they too implicitly draw on the assumption of the linkage theory when analyzing the possible policies of an Iran with nuclear weapons capabilities. They argue that a nuclear weapons capable Iran:

“Nuclear weapons capability would surely add to Iran’s ability to twist arms in the region. Arab and Israeli leaders with whom we have spoken explain that should Iran possess nuclear weapons, they fear that the landscape of the region will be fundamentally altered. Iranian leaders, they argue, will feel emboldened to use terror and terror groups to threaten or subvert others in the area, including particularly those who might be inclined to pursue peace with Israel, knowing that their nukes provide an umbrella of protection or a built-in deterrent against responses.” (Ross-Makovsky [2009]: p. 205.)

How could Iran subvert the region if there was no linkage between the Arab-Israeli conflict and Iran’s regional policies? How could Iran harass a possible peace process if

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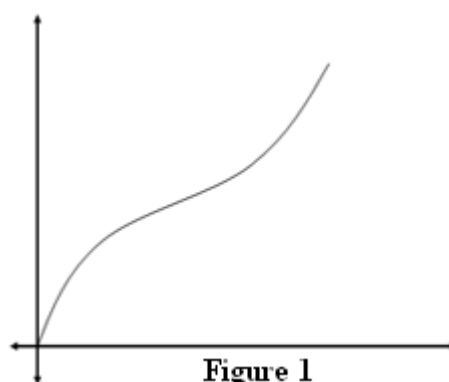
<sup>7</sup> The term “linkage” or “linkage theory” has been used by the literature in different contexts as well. James Rosenau uses the term to describe the connections and interactions between domestic and international factors. (Rosenau [1969a-b]) Henry Kissinger applies the term for package deals which create links between distinct policy issues during negotiations. (Kissinger [1994]: p. 714.)

<sup>8</sup> E.g. the revolt of Kurds in 1974, the Egyptian-Libyan conflict of 1977 and the Iraqi coup of 1958. See: Ross; Makovsky [2009]: p. 13.

it was decoupled from the Arab-Israeli peace effort? Without a linkage, Iran would not be able to cause significant blowback effects either directly or indirectly. *Thus, this dissertation is written based on the implicit approval of the linkage theory.*

If one wishes to use statistical terminology for describing the above relationship, then variable “Xa” stands for aggressive foreign policy strategy toward Iran, while variable “Ya” represents unintended strategic setbacks. The nature of the relationship is causal, thus, “Xa” causes “Ya”. (“Xa”→“Ya”). “Ya” is the *explanandum*, “Xa” is the *explanans*, “Xa” is the independent, while “Ya” is the dependent variable. (See: Kiss J. [2009]: p. 206.) The relationship is also a positive one: the more aggressive foreign policy strategy the US pursues, the more/ harsher harms its national interests are going to incur. However, it is also a nonlinear and disproportionante relationship, meaning that the rate of change in the independent variable (“Xa” or aggressive foreign policy strategy) will not constantly lead to the same rate of change in the dependent variable (“Ya”, or “strategic blowback”) either in a relative or a total sense. Putting it simpler, the same additional “amount” of aggressive foreign policy strategy will not always result in the same additional “amount” of strategic blowback. *Figure 1* shows how the graph of such a mathematical relationship might look like – it indicates the alternations in the rates of change of both variables.

**Figure 1. The Positive and Disproportionate Relationship Between the Variables of H1a and H1b**



Source: PakAccountants.com. What is a non-linear variable cost? May 11, 2011  
<http://pakaccountants.com/what-is-a-non-linear-variable-cost/> Accessed: 01-08-2011 (The author renumbered the original graph)

There is an additional dilemma regarding the relationship between the two variables. Could it be that beyond a certain inflexion point additional pressure pays off, causing the amount and intensity of blowback effects to reduce, essentially suggesting that in some cases aggressive foreign policies do pay off. The author suggests that this is

possible in certain cases. *A strategy of escalation and pressure may work between certain entities.* However, it is argued that such an approach would not work in the specific case of the US and Iran because of Iran's regional economic and political influence, which may become a source of significant strategic setbacks in case Tehran was attacked. The author further elaborates on this issue in more detail in the concluding chapter. Thus, naturally, the application of force could be effective in certain cases, but conjecture suggests that a strategy of escalation would not work in the specific case examined in the dissertation.

Beyond other factors, it is exactly the nonlinear nature of the relationship that makes it extremely hard to tell just how much “additional” strategic blowback the further pursuit of aggressive foreign policies is going to cause. One possible method for overcoming difficulties associated with operationalization is applying an ordinal scale to describe the relationship between “Xa” and “Ya.” This would mean ascribing larger values to more aggressive US policies and blowback effects e.g. a US rejection of an Iranian diplomatic offer causing a less significant strategic blowback than a more aggressive US policy (e.g. airstrikes against Iranian nuclear facilities). However, even this approach is very problematic, since it ignores a lot of qualitative factors, namely, that “aggressive foreign policy” can have different meanings in different circumstances.<sup>9</sup>

The problem confronted here corresponds with David Baldwin's suggestion *that there is no single analytic framework for measuring foreign policy success or the success of one particular foreign policy tool* (e.g. sanctions or military force). (Baldwin [2000]) Since there are obviously a number of other factors at play, the present dissertation will not apply a quantitative analysis, as the author would have to face difficult dilemmas during the operationalization of the two variables. Regression analysis would be a suitable method if the author was able to convert “Xa” and “Ya”

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<sup>9</sup> The following is a possible example of such an ordinal scale: [1]: (Xa):US rejection of a diplomatic offer – (Ya): Iran continuing its nuclear program; [2]: (Xa): US threatening with the US of force – (Xb): Iran taking its nuclear program underground; [3]: (Xa): US arms sales to Gulf allies (Ya): Increased Iranian support for Shia minorities in the Gulf; [4]: (Xa): US air strikes against Iranian nuclear installations – (Ya): Iranian efforts to close down the Strait of Hormuz. The growing values [1-2-3-4] indicate the process of escalation causing increasingly significant blowback effects as a result of Iranian reactions. This ordinal scale may look neat from a social scientific perspective; however, it is inherently *arbitrary*. It is obviously difficult to make a difference between some of the possible scenarios, e.g. what is more aggressive – Iran taking its nuclear program underground or the decision to further enrich uranium? Both would imply possible strategic blowback effects but the difference between the intensity of the response is hard to discern. Also, both scenarios could take up different values in different situations. Thus, carrying out a quantitative research would be too problematic and poses too many dilemmas.

into objectively measurable quantities. However, this is not the case, hence, the dissertation will conduct a qualitative instead of a quantitative analysis.<sup>10</sup>

The thesis applies a deductive logic whereby the general theory of blowback is applied to the specific case of US-Iran relations. It is also inductive in a way, since it seeks to come up with generalizations on the dynamism of blowback based on the individual case of US-Iran relations. It is not without precedent, that such a dual logic is applied – Kenneth N. Waltz used a similar approach in constructing his seminal book, *Theory of International Politics*. He put forward that both deductive and inductive logic are needed in order to build theories. (Waltz [1979]: p. 11.) The assumption inherent in H1a is of a descriptive nature – it wishes to shed light on *how* the dynamism of “strategic blowback” *works in reality* between the US and Iran.

#### **4. Hypothesis 1b – The Strategy of “Seeking the Least Resistance”**

The dissertation has another hypothesis (H1b) and it is logically related to H1a. *In fact, it is not an entirely different hypothesis – it is the inverse of H1a and it has been generated by applying counterfactual logic.* This work wishes to provide a hint as to how the US could find a way out of the present stalemate. If the dissertation succeeds in underscoring the relationship suggested by the first hypothesis, then it should also try to provide some ideas on how the situation could be remedied. Establishing that aggressive foreign policy strategies cause strategic setbacks would be a significant result, but suggesting an alternative strategy would represent even more added value both from a social scientific as well as from a policy perspective.

The author proposes that a possible solution to the present stalemate could be applying military theorist Basil Henry Liddell Hart’s *indirect approach to strategy*. (Liddell Hart [1954]) In fact, Liddell Hart was among the first to elaborate in detail on the “indirect approach to grand strategy”, which will be of great relevance to this dissertation in the subsequent chapters.<sup>11</sup> (See: Liddell Hart [1954] p. 18; 33; p. 138.) It must be emphasized, that Liddell Hart’s concept has been applied to US strategy before

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<sup>10</sup> For the dilemmas of operationalization in social inquiry see: King-Keohane-Verba [1994]

<sup>11</sup> Of course, the first one to elaborate on this concept was Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu. (Sun Tzu [1988]). Furthermore, Clausewitz also had thoughts built on the indirect logic. (See: Clausewitz [1989]) However, the author chose to rely on Liddell Hart’s somewhat more modern approach.

by Brimley and Singh. (Brimely; Singh, [2008]). However, to the best of the author's knowledge, it has not been applied to the particular case of US-Iran relations. Thus, the practice of applying a concept of military strategy to better understand foreign policy strategy is not without precedent. This suggests that there is a strand of thinking arguing that military strategic concepts can and should be applied for a better understanding of foreign policy strategy.

However, it may seem strange to apply a concept of military strategy in foreign and security policy. Since the first hypothesis suggests that aggressive policies do not pay off, it may particularly seem odd to apply a concept that was originally invented to provide a better understanding of warfare itself. However, Liddell Hart's concept of indirect strategy corresponds with the logic of H1a and the theory formulated by the CIA, Johnson, Layne and others (see above). Liddell Hart put forward that direct face-to-face confrontation almost never pays in the battlefield. *The harder a general seeks to push frontally, the greater the chances of losing the battle.* Instead, an indirect approach should be taken. Deception, dislocation, encirclement or getting behind the enemy are the ways to win battles – all of them being indirect solutions to problems that emerge in the battlefield. A direct solution would be to run directly at the enemy on the battlefield. Liddell Hart, however, strongly advises against such a strategy, since *the force of resistance* will be largest when approaching the enemy frontally and aggressively. (Liddell Hart [1954])

How does this approach provide a solution for the present US-Iran stalemate? The author argues that strategic blowback can be understood as a form of or consequence of *resistance* on behalf of the other party to the conflict – in this case Iran. The more aggressive (direct) strategies and policies Washington pursues, the tougher resistance Tehran is going to put up. Strategic blowback and the resistance that Liddell Hart's concept implicitly warns of are very similar in their nature. Liddell Hart's central argument is that the commander should always avoid resistance or seek to find *the least resistance* in order to carry out his plans. (See: *Ibid.* pp. 18-19; p. 209.) This also explains how H1b is connected to H1a. Since aggressive policies will backfire due to resistance, which comes in the form of or causes strategic blowbacks, US strategists should look for *the path of least resistance* – in this case policies which do not qualify for aggressive initiatives as defined above.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Of course, perceptions and cultural factors will also determine how parties interpret the other party's intentions and policies. A policy considered nonaggressive by Washington may well be interpreted as an

As a military strategist, Liddell Hart obviously developed his concept for a better understanding of theater strategy, thus, his concept will not be suitable for this dissertation in its original form. That is due to a number of factors, which may create confusion. For example, it is hard to define what the foreign and security policy equivalent of strategies suggested by Liddell Hart's approach (deception, dislocation, encirclement, getting behind the enemy) would be. In other words, how does one define indirect foreign and security policy strategies based on the logic suggested by Liddell Hart? The alternatives suggested by the English strategist are misleading in another way as well – they all suggest aggressive forms of behavior, which is exactly what one would want to avoid if they are believed to cause strategic blowbacks.

However, the author finds that the concept is still useful in the realm of foreign and security policy strategy for the following reasons. The author only wishes to borrow and build upon the *logic*, the *philosophy* inherent in the concept, namely, that seeking the least resistance in foreign and security policy strategy is the wisest approach when trying to realize national interests. Thus, one does not have to deal with or find the foreign policy strategy equivalent of alternatives suggested by Liddell Hart (e.g.: deception). (See: Liddell Hart [1954]: pp. 18-19.)

There is another apparent contradiction that has to be addressed. Talking about finding the path of least resistance in the world of politics may seem odd, when politics *per se* is about opposing wills. It may seem unnatural to hope for less resistance, when politics in most cases is about overcoming resistance in general. If one is going to have it his way, he has to overcome the resistance put up by the opposing will. This does not mean, however, that seeking the least resistance is not wise. *In fact, it is the only wise strategy in the world of scarce resources.* Thus, the ideal foreign and security policy strategy is one that aims to realize its strategic aims by taking the path of least resistance in order to find the most economical way of realizing those goals. Liddell Hart puts forward that:

As in war, the aim is to weaken resistance before attempting to overcome it; and the effect is best attained by drawing the other party out of his defences. (Liddell Hart [1954]: p. 18.)

Thus, following Liddell Hart's reasoning, the author contends that the "*strategy*

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aggressive one by Tehran. However, this will be determined based on the given context and on a case-by-case basis.

*of seeking the least resistance*” should be applied for overcoming the stalemate in US-Iran relations. This highlights the logic and the specific part of Liddell Hart’s concept that is to be borrowed in the thesis. Therefore, the second hypothesis is formulated as follows:

**H1b:** *A “strategy of seeking the least resistance” should be applied vis a vis Iran in order to create circumstances conducive to realizing Washington’s strategic interests in the Middle East and parts of Central Asia.*

Again, there are a number of methodological risks that one should be mindful of. *First of all, the very fact that the author made the verification of H1b contingent on the verification of H1a is quite risky. If H1a cannot be proved, then automatically H1b cannot be verified either.* Nonetheless, H1a is about the assumption of aggressive foreign policies being counterproductive, thus, identifying nonaggressive policies as possible ways out of the US-Iran stalemate (H1b) is a logical conjecture. The conjecture is somewhat based on deductive logic – if the premises in H1a are valid, then the relationship between the two variables of H1b should also be valid. Thus H1b, is essentially a consequence of H1a. ( $H1a \rightarrow H1b$ ). There is an inverse logic behind this reasoning: the strategy of seeking least resistance may pay off, due to the fact that aggressive policies do not. If H1b is contingent on H1a, then proving the assumption inherent in H1a is crucial for the credibility of the thesis, *since H1b is the inverse of H1a*. Thus, in a methodological and logical sense, H1b is only a “second-tier” hypothesis. *It is counterfactual logic* that leads one to believe that if H1a is proven right, then H1b should also be correct.

Of course, problems of definition arise again. Which policies constitute strategies that are “seeking the least possible resistance”? What does “least” stand for? What is strategy? What kind of circumstances is conducive for realizing US interests? What are the strategic interests of the US? In order to answer those questions, the following meanings have been ascribed to those expressions:

**“strategy of seeking the least resistance”:** this is synonymous with nonaggressive foreign and security policies. Anything that does not belong under the category of “aggressive policies” will belong to the category of strategies seeking the least possible resistance.

**“least”**: the alternative that is *perceived* to incur the least costs at the time of decision.

**“circumstances conducive”**: circumstances, which in theory make it possible for US strategic interests to be realized.

**“Washington’s strategic interests”**:

- concluding a peace treaty between Israel and Arab states (most notably Syria and Lebanon);
- the emergence of a stable and non-hostile Iraq that is able to control its territory;
- the emergence of a stable Afghanistan that is able to control its territory;
- the halting or making of Iran’s nuclear program fully transparent;
- securing the free flow of oil through the Strait of Hormuz; and
- minimizing or altogether eliminating tensions between the US and Iran.<sup>13</sup>

**“Middle East and parts of Central Asia”**: The expression “Middle East” here is used in a narrow sense – it is taken to refer to the following group of countries and entities: Egypt, Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, Iran and Afghanistan.

Such framing of the suggested strategy highlights the inverse logical relationship between H1a and H1b. The term “strategy” is not dealt with here separately – the definition of the term will be elaborated on in detail in Chapter I.6.2. For now, it is simply taken to be *the way in which means are related to ends*. (See: Gaddis [1982]: p. viii.) The term “perception” highlights the limits of objectivity. Deciding whether an alternative qualifies as one that guarantees the least costs, therefore, *will inevitably require making somewhat arbitrary decisions*. The insertion of the term “conductive” into the equation reflects caution on behalf of the author. It is absolutely essential, that if H1a proves right, it not lead to false conclusions. Thus, if aggressive policies indeed backfire, *it is not automatic that nonaggressive policies will not. Pursuing nonaggressive policies only creates the necessary international circumstances for a compromise with Iran in order to promote the realization of US interests. It does not automatically result in the realization of US goals*. This attests to the assumption that even if the US pursues alternative policies, which are least likely to backfire, other

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<sup>13</sup> Seyed Hossein Mousavian uses a very similar list in his 2012 memoir. (See: Mousavian [2012b]: p. 2.)



factors may still hinder the realization of US interests – such as domestic politics in Iran or the US.

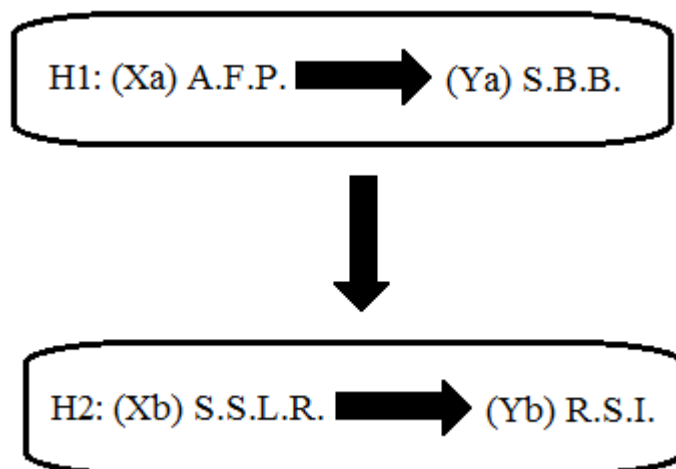
Washington's strategic interests obviously reflect the most contentious issues in the conflict between the two parties. This is due to Iran's regional "web" of relations. Iran has ties to Lebanese Hezbollah, Palestinian Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. All of these groups have a stake in the Arab-Israeli peace process. Iran has traditionally had ties with Afghanistan, especially its mostly Shiite Hazara population in Central Afghanistan, as well as Herat province in Western Afghanistan. It has also been investing in Afghanistan's infrastructure. Tehran has a strategic alliance with Syria and it wields considerable political and cultural influence in Iraq. (See: Addis et al. [2010]; see also: N. Rózsa [2007]). Iran has the ability to control the Strait of Hormuz, where approximately 40% of the world's oil trade flows through. (*Ibid*, p. 2.) Indeed, Iran's regional influence even led King Abdullah of Jordan to talk of the "Shiite crescent", which sparked a large academic debate on the issue. (See: Barzegar [2008]; see also: Nasr [2006]) The concept is somewhat exaggerating, but it is obvious that Iran's regional significance cannot be dismissed. The final bullet point is closely connected to all the previously mentioned US interests. As a result of Iran's regional position, the US could be interested in pursuing a policy aiming to reach a grand bargain with Iran. Central Asia was added to the definition to allow for the inclusion of Afghanistan.

In the case of H1b, variable "Xb" stands for the strategy that follows the path of least resistance and variable "Yb" represents the presence of circumstances conducive to the realization of US strategic interests as defined above. To follow the above logic, "Xb" is the "*explanans*" and "Yb" is the "*explanandum*" (See: Kiss J.: *Ibid*), "Xb" is the independent variable and "Yb" is the dependent variable. As in the case of H1a, H1b also expresses a causal relationship. The relationship is also positive – the more intensively least resistance strategies are pursued, the more likely that US interests will be realized. As for trying to determine "how much" "additional", or "more intensive" emergence of circumstances conducive to realizing US strategic interests will follow an "additional unit" of pursuing certain least resistance strategies is even harder than in the case of H1a. It can be established, however, that the relationship is nonlinear and disproportionate – an "additional unit of least resistance strategy" (Xb) will not always result in the same amount of changes in the "rate" of the emergence of circumstances conducive to realizing US strategic interests (Yb). Thus, the author will not conduct a quantitative assessment for the same reasons as in the case of H1a and

operationalization will not be carried out either. The graph of a function representing such a relationship will most likely look like “Figure 1.” above.

H1b suggests a deductive logic – Liddell Hart’s general theory will be applied to the US-Iran case with some modifications. This experiment is inductive in nature, since one of the goals of the dissertation is to suggest a new general philosophy of foreign policy strategy, viewing the latter as an effort of constantly looking for the path where the least possible resistance is put up by adversaries, rivals and allies. A wall is easier to punch through where its thinner, but if one keeps punching it where its thick, he will end up breaking his hand – *this is what strategic blowback theory is about*. H1b is based on a normative assumption, as it is a “prescription” for the way out of the present stalemate between the US and Iran.

**Figure 2. The Relationship Between the Hypotheses of the Dissertation**



A.F.P.= Aggressive Foreign Policy; S.B.B.= Strategic Blowback;  
S.S.L.R.: Strategy of Seeking the Least Resistance; R.S.I.=  
Realization of Strategic Interests.

## 5. Theoretical Foundations – Ontological Assumptions

The thesis applies two theoretical *traditions* (disciplines). The two disciplines are the *Theory of International Relations* and *Strategic Studies*.<sup>14</sup> Within the tradition of IR, the Realist school of thought is applied. More specifically, the overall theoretical approach of the author is reflected by what students of theory of international relations

<sup>14</sup> When the author writes “*Strategic Studies*” with capital letters at the beginning of the words, it refers to the discipline itself. Also, if “*Strategy*”, or “*Strategic Thought*” is written, it also refers to the discipline in general, or “*Strategy*” in general as an abstract concept and not to a specific set of policies or strategic concepts.

call *Neoclassical Realism*.<sup>15</sup>

A number of methodological concerns arise as to how these two disciplines match. Does the application of two different theoretical traditions create “theoretical or methodological heterogeneity” to the extent that it undermines the logic of the dissertation? Is it not contradictory in a logical sense to have two different disciplines, two different theoretical traditions for explaining the same phenomena? *To be sure, it does create a fair chance for confusion.* However, the richness of a multidisciplinary approach to international relations suggests otherwise.

The possibility of a confusion occurring may be minimized if the author can establish a clear relationship between the theoretical assumptions derived from the two traditions. If this relationship is clear and does not suggest contradictory assumptions about the reality the two traditions wish to describe, then the theoretical foundations will remain sound. Hence, the author puts forth, that the following relationship can be identified between the two traditions.

Both traditions could be viewed as ontological assumptions about how the world – *our reality* – works. Neoclassical Realism depicts the world on two levels: the interstate level is complemented by the introduction of domestic factors. This tradition suggests that states pursue power in order to enhance their security. On the other hand, Strategic Thought – broadly understood – puts forward a set of assumptions about *how* states can achieve their goals. Thus, Neoclassical Realism provides a depiction of the international environment: an international system that is made up of actors (states) pursuing power in order to enhance their security and realize their national interests. It describes the nature of the international environment, as well as the motivations behind policies pursued by states. Strategic Studies, on the other hand, explains how states – driven by security and other motivations – attain or should attain their national goals. From this perspective, it is easy to establish a clear relationship between the two theories. Neoclassical Realism answers the question “*What?*” and Strategic Thought provides answer to the question “*How?*” *Therefore, they are not contradictory on a logical plain.*

The other reason suggesting that the two theories are not contradictory, is the fact that both derive from the same tradition of political thought, namely, Realism.

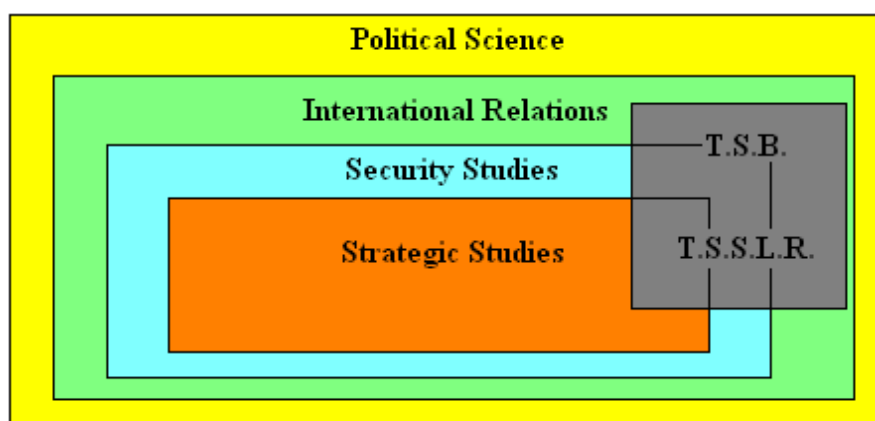
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<sup>15</sup> When the author writes “*Neoclassical Realism*” with capital letters it is to refer to the neoclassical offshoot of Realism in general. This logic will be followed regarding other strands of Realism and other traditions of International Relations as well, e.g.: “*(Neo)liberalism*”, “*Constructivism*”, “*Realism*”, “*Human Nature Realism*”, “*Neorealism*”, “*Defensive Realism*”, “*Offensive Realism*”.

Strategic Thought, understood narrowly, originally dealt with how a state should use its military force to attain its politico-military goals. Broadly understood, it provides a prescription on how a state should use its power in order to reach its national goals.<sup>16</sup> The core assumption of political Realism is the pursuit of national interest, or interests *“defined in terms of power.”* (Morgenthau [1993]: p. 5.) *Thus, strategy, broadly defined, has a very similar view of the world as political Realism does.* If strategy is only narrowly understood, it is reminiscent of Realism in that it views (military) power as central in international relations. Thus, Neoclassical Realism provides the researcher with how the international strategic environment looks like and Strategic Thought describes how actors wish to reach their national goals within that environment.

The following chapters provide an overview of how Neoclassical Realism and Strategic Studies can be useful for understanding the particular case of US-Iran relations. The author wishes to provide a methodological explanation as to why these theories were chosen and why they provided the right approach for proving the relationship suggested by H1a and H1b.

**Figure 3. The Multidisciplinary Approach Applied by the Dissertation**



The figure shows how the “Theory of Strategic Blowback” (T.S.B.) and the Theory of the “Strategy of Seeking the Least Resistance” (T.S.S.L.R.). The figure is based on: Baylis; Wirtz [2007]: p. 13. Figure 1.

<sup>16</sup> The apparent discrepancy between the narrow and broader understanding of Strategy will be addressed in the following chapters.

## 5. 1. Ontological Assumptions I: Neoclassical Realism

Why choose Realism and why Neoclassical Realism in particular for understanding the world? An alternative would be to apply (Neo)liberalism, or Constructivism, or the tools of Foreign Policy Analysis. *However, any choice of theory should reflect the nature of the object observed.* (Neo)liberalism is not particularly well suited for analyzing a conflict. It focuses on the possibilities of cooperation, interdependence, the international economy, international trade, the spread of western values and institutions – concepts which are hard to apply in a conflict such as the one between the US and Iran. Of course, the *theory of complex interdependence* could be an approach well suited for analyzing the security interdependence between Iran and the US. Iran is well positioned in the Middle East to cause setbacks for the US in Iraq and Afghanistan, thus, the regional position of the US partly depends on Iranian actions in the region. (See: Keohane-Nye [1977]) However, (Neo)liberalism lacks the theoretical tools for analyzing a conflict of interests due to its *different ontology* which is based on the possibility of peaceful social change and cooperation.

Constructivism seems to be more useful at first sight. This would provide an opportunity to research the values, ideas and norms held by the two parties. (See: Wendt [1999]) The values held by the US and Iran are conflicting by their very nature. The US cherishes human rights, individual freedoms, democracy, good governance, rule of law, secularism, etc., whereas the Iranian system is not built on western values, it is a theocratic regime with strict laws of sharia. It is a system that does not entirely lack democratic elements, but it is obviously very far from a western type liberal democracy based on the principle of representation. Applying a constructivist approach could cover a significant part of the conflict between the two states.<sup>17</sup> However, it does not provide the researcher with the entire picture. Applying a constructivist approach, one will inevitably make *the mistake of neglecting the concept of power* – an element central to the US-Iran conflict. This standoff is about *regional influence* as much as about

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<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the dissertation suggests that only a negotiated solution may work regarding the US-Iran stalemate. However, the success of negotiations assumes that the atmosphere of distrust can change between the two parties, essentially suggesting that attitudes take on special relevance in the enmity between them. Thus, constructivism could be a viable theory for explaining at least one significant part of the conflict between the US and Iran. Furthermore, the Theory of Policy Networks could also be invoked for providing an issued based analysis of Iranian influence in the Middle East. Iran is embedded in the region in both an economic, as well as a political sense, thus, its links to various regional proxies could be analyzed through the Policy Network approach. However, as the author chose Realism for understanding the US-Iran relationship, none of those theories will applied. Still, the author wished to highlight most of the relevant and alternative theoretical approaches to the problem.

historical distrust and grievances. This element suggests that the tradition of Realism is the best approach for understanding the nature of relations between the two parties. This is further supported by the notion that the Middle East could be best understood through the logic of power politics.<sup>18</sup> (Indyk [2009]: p. 23)

Applying the methodology of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) may seem like a logical decision. However, the problem with FPA is that it does not incorporate structural factors. It primarily deals with unit level factors (organizational behavior, perceptions, limits of rational choice, etc.). FPA does not assume a holistic approach – it is particular in nature. It examines how an individual or an organization brings decisions and it ignores the consequences of those decisions. It is the lead up to decisions that is important for FPA, whereas their consequences are not. (Kiss J. [2009]: pp. 88-85.) Thus, this approach would have difficulties in explaining why a particular set of US policies caused aggressive behavior on Tehran's part.<sup>19</sup>

Now that the author has explained why Realism was chosen, it is also necessary to provide a sound explanation as to why specifically the neoclassical strand was chosen. Realism is not a coherent set of ideas – it is more like “a general orientation” and there are many different theories within Realism itself. (Donnelly [2000]: p. 6.) It is also a “*set of normative emphases*”, suggesting that applying Realism is not a result of an objective decision. (See: Ferguson-Mansbach [1988]: p. 79. also referenced by Donnelly [2000]: p. 6.) It is, to a certain extent, a subjective choice, which reflects a bias on the researcher's part towards actually *believing* that the world works as political Realism suggests. This “constructivist reflex”, however, does not mean that applying Realism is only “a matter of choice”. Beyond reasons already mentioned, Realism was chosen mostly for two reasons. “*Realism emphasizes the constraints on politics imposed by human nature and the absence of international government. Together, they make international relations largely a realm of power and interest.*” (*Ibid*, p. 9.) These two factors – *power* and *interest* – are central to international relations and to the US-Iran conflict in particular. (See also: Morgenthau [1993]: pp. 5-10.).

Hans Morgenthau's *Human Nature Realism* could be useful for this dissertation

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<sup>18</sup> This was also emphasized to the author by a well-known Iranian foreign policy expert at a conference in Tehran in 2010.

<sup>19</sup> For other works on Foreign Policy Analysis see: Allison [1969]; Allison [1971]; Allison-Halperin: [1972].; Clarke [1989]; Frei-Ruloff [1989]; Halperin-Clapp-Kanter [1974]; Hudson [2008]; Lake-Powell [1999]; Palmer-Morgan [2006]; Renshon-Larson: [2003]; Rosenau [1966]; Rosenau [1969b]; Singer-Hudson [1992]; Smith-Hadfield-Dunne [2008]; Snyder-Bruck-Sapin-Hudson-Chollet-Goldgeier [2002]; Sprout-Sprout [1965]; Sylvan-Chan [1984].

due to its focus on the motivations and driving factors of states' foreign policies, namely, national interest and power. Thus, the US can make an accurate assessment of its choices towards Iran. Being a rational actor, it will choose the scenario which implies the least costs and the largest gains. However, Morgenthau's approach does not take into account the real world limits of "rational choice". (See: Morgenthau [1993]: pp. 3-5.) It does not consider institutional rivalries, the process of decision making itself, the lack of sufficient information needed for sound decisions, etc. It is hard to imagine a full-fledged analysis of US strategy towards Iran without incorporating the diverging interests of different domestic political factions in both the US and Iran, since these groups have differing views on what kind of strategy their country should follow concerning various issues. Furthermore, these competing groups influence important decisions. Even if the national interest is defined in detail and agreed upon, it may not determine the path the given state takes because it could be "diverted" by particular interests. Since both Iranian and US foreign policy making involves a large number of actors, the ideal theory will take into account domestic and international limits to rational choice theory.

A classic *neorealist* study would have to treat the state as a "black box", suggesting that the analyst would not have to deal with domestic features of a state. The most important factor would be the analysis of the distribution of power between Iran and the US. Beyond this point, however, Neorealism would have significant troubles in understanding the dynamic of relations between Washington and Tehran. The difficulty derives from the fact that Neorealism is not a theory of foreign policy, it was never intended to be one. Waltz contends that "*An international-political theory does not imply or require a theory of foreign policy any more than a market theory implies or requires a theory of the firm.*" (Waltz [1979]: p. 72.; See also: Waltz [1996]) The essence of Waltz's theory of international politics is that it is a systemic theory and according to this reasoning, it does not require the inclusion of sub-systemic factors, such as the state itself. It is the inverse of FPA: while Foreign Policy Analysis neglects the structural aspects of reality, Neorealism neglects unit level factors. Thus, they are not holistic approaches, they both depict only a "slice" of reality. Apart from the theory of balancing, the lack of perspective on foreign policy decision making makes Waltz's theory of limited value to this dissertation, *since this thesis is about foreign and security policy strategy*.

*Offensive Realism* puts forward that because states seek security, the best

position for them to be in is *hegemony*. (See: Mearsheimer [2001]: pp. 2-11.) Thus, the US is seeking hegemony, since it has the resources to do so and it also wishes to become a dominant power in the Middle East in the process. Since Iran also has regional ambitions, it is obvious that the interests of the two states will clash. This is only a slightly better account of reality than that of Neorealism. It is also a systemic theory and it also puts forward that states seek power and security. The biggest difference is that Offensive Realism is based on states, which are against the status quo. Great powers are bent on changing the status quo in the international distribution of power, since they want to become hegemons. Thus, apart from classical balancing strategies, it allows for one additional strategy: hegemony itself. Waltzian Neorealism has been criticized for its neglect of states following the path of “nonsecurity expansion”, referring to states which do not seek power for security reasons but for the sake of enhancing their own power. (Schweller [1996]: p. 92.) Mearsheimer’s approach clearly remedies this. This could be an important asset for this dissertation, since it may be a sound theory for understanding the motivations of great powers, however, it still does not incorporate domestic factors. Any theory of a strictly structural nature will be of limited use for a dissertation on foreign policy strategy, which is a unit level variable according to Waltz and Mearsheimer (see above).

*Defensive Realism* argues that security is not as scarce a resource in the international system as Offensive Realism suggests. The US and Iran do not necessarily have to be on a collision course. They can identify whether the other’s intentions are benign or not and, thus, provide a solution for the “security dilemma”. (See: Herz 1959; also Booth-Wheeler [2008]) Defensive Realism is also a structural theory and due to Neorealism’s above mentioned “status quo bias”, Defensive Realism is often used as an alternative label for Neorealism (see above). However, contrary to Waltz’s theory, Defensive Realism does leave space for domestic factors to a certain extent. Walt argues that “*Defensive realists such as Waltz, Van Evera and Jack Snyder assumed that states have little intrinsic interest in military conquest and argued that the costs of expansion generally outweighed the benefits. Accordingly, they maintained that great power wars occurred largely because domestic groups fostered exaggerated perceptions of threat and an excessive faith in the efficacy of military force.*” (Walt [1998]: p. 37.) The “*theory of offense-defense balance*” is derived from the assumption that conquest rarely pays. The offense-defense balance mostly “tilts” toward defense, meaning that security can be achieved through defensive means rather than pursuing offensive policies.



(Glaser-Kaufmann [1998]) The security dilemma and war can both be prevented if states are able to communicate their benign intentions. (Glaser [1994-1995]: p. 53.) Thus, defensive realists complement the traditional equation of the distribution of power by adding variables such as domestic groups, intentions, perceptions and communication – all of them being unit level factors. In this sense, Defensive Realism contradicts its structural roots. Applying this concept would depict the US as a great power willing to communicate its intentions, building mostly on defense and not seriously contemplating offensive measures against Iran. Thus, the security dilemma between the two states could be overcome in the Middle East. Of all the strands of Realism examined heretofore, this one comes closest to what this dissertation needs: a Realist theory accepting the centrality of power and interests in international relations, but also incorporating unit level factors. However, common US threats during the tenure of the Bush administration for example regarding US willingness to use force if necessary to prevent the emergence of an Iranian nuclear weapons capability contradicts the defensive logic. Even though Defensive Realism introduces a number of unit level factors, it still does not leave enough room for the introduction of domestic factors, such as lobby groups, hard liner factions, economic interest groups, etc.

Only one strand of Realism is capable of fulfilling those criteria. Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro point this out:

“How do states, or more specifically the decision-makers and institutions that act on their behalf, assess international threats and opportunities? What happens when there is disagreement about the nature of foreign threats? Who ultimately decides the range of acceptable and unacceptable foreign policy alternatives? To what extent, and under what conditions, can domestic actors bargain with state leaders and influence foreign and security policies? How and under what circumstances will domestic factors impede states from pursuing the types of strategies predicted by balance of power theory and balance of threat theory? Finally, how do states go about extracting and mobilizing resources necessary to implement foreign and security policies? These are important questions that cannot be answered by the dominant neorealist or liberal theories of international politics.” (Lobell-Ripsman-Taliaferro [2009]: p. 1.)

The authors go on to argue that a number of very significant foreign policy decisions and strategies cannot be explained by traditional realist approaches. The Bush doctrine too resulted from “*“a veritable witches” brew of systemic and domestic-level factors.*” (*Ibid*, p. 3.)

There were a number of cases in which only structural factors were at play in producing the actual outcome. For example, closing Iran out of the Oslo Process led to Iranian efforts aimed at preventing the peace process, since it was perceived by Tehran

as a way of isolating it in its own region. This was a pure case of realist balancing strategy. Iran perceived the US and Israeli efforts to foster peace with Palestinians and Arab countries as a way of balancing Iranian influence. It provoked Iranian policies aimed at breaking a potential anti-Iran Israeli-Arab alliance before it was even formed. (Parsi [2007]: pp. 175-176.)

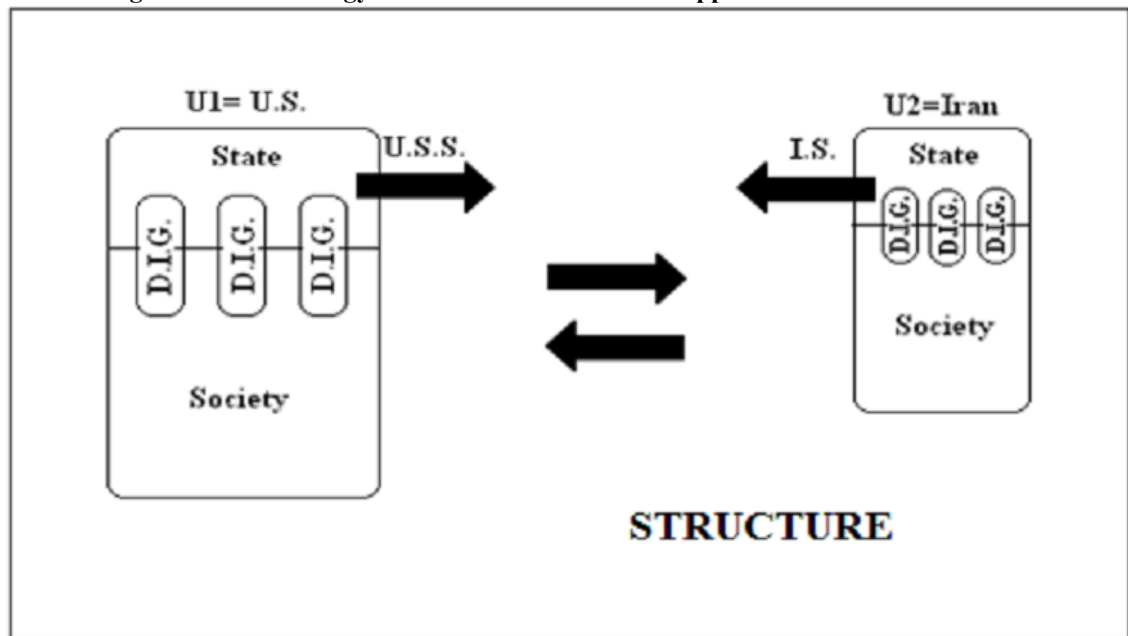
But a number of other instances remind us that domestic factors are just as important. For example, following the Geneva talks of October 2009 some have argued that President Ahmadinejad in fact wanted a deal with the west, but was isolated by his own domestic rivals and radicals. (Perthes [2010]: pp. 100-101.)

Thus, it is only a holistic and global approach that will be able to model the intricate realities of US-Iranian interactions. Neoclassical Realism was chosen for its “richness”. The problem with other offshoots of Realism is that they exclude domestic variables from the analysis, or – as in the case of Morgenthau’s Human Nature Realism – neglect the limits of rational choice. The basic tenets of *Neoclassical Realism* are rooted in the belief that, contrary to what Neorealism and its various other offshoots propose, *domestic factors are important in explaining foreign policies of states*. Security seeking states are the most important actors in the anarchic international environment. According to this view, states are both influenced by the structure of the international system, as well as domestic factors when seeking security. (See: Lobell-Ripsman-Taliaferro [2009]). Indeed, a significant part of the IR literature reflects a realist mindset, but also introduces unit-level factors such as (mis)perception (Wohlforth [1993]), mobilization (Christensen [1996]), state power (Zakaria [1998]) and revisionism (Schweller [1998]). According to their logic, these unit level variables are intervening variables between a state’s relative material capabilities and their actual foreign policy behavior. Thus, a state’s relative material power may not always correspond with its international position. (Rose [1998] pp. 146-147. for a general overview of Neoclassical Realism see: Taliaferro [2006])

According to this reasoning, a neoclassical realist explanation of US strategy towards Iran would result in the following model. US foreign policy making and strategy formulation involves a large number of actors (the National Security Council, the Department of State, the Department of Defense, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Treasury, the Intelligence Community, respective committees of the House and Senate, various think tanks, lobby groups and different economic interest groups) and these actors can and indeed do influence foreign and security policy

making. Therefore, even if the national interest is defined clearly, there is a considerable chance that US policies will “veer off the ideal course” due to particular interests. The same is true for Iran, where the system of foreign policy making is equally byzantine and intricate because of a large number of actors involved (the Supreme Leader, the President, the Supreme National Security Council, the Revolutionary Guards, the Ministry of Intelligence, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, respective committees of the Majlis, the Shiite clergy, various think tanks, economic interest groups, such as the “bazaari” and other informal networks). (See: Goodman [2008]) Even if the US is “able” to pursue cooperation with Tehran, those US policies still have to “stand the test” of the intricacies of Iranian domestic politics. Thus, Neoclassical Realism provides an accurate depiction of the environment in which the US has to implement its policies towards Iran.

**Figure 4. The Ontology of Neoclassical Realism as Applied to the US-Iran Conflict**



“U1;U2”=Unit; “D.I.G.”= Domestic Interest Groups; “U.S.S.”=US Strategy; “I.S.”=Iranian Strategy.

## 5. 2. Ontological Assumptions II.: The Universality of Strategic Thought? - Foreign and Security Policy as Strategy

The other discipline applied is *Strategic Studies*. To be more specific, it is used to better understand foreign and security policy. First and foremost, it is essential to prove that it makes sense to talk of a “*foreign policy strategy*”. Talking of Strategy as such implies accepting that the main tenets of Strategic Thought may be separated from the realm of military thought and applied to foreign policy thinking in general.

It may seem odd that such basic observations have to be established, however, there is no consensus on whether the concept of Strategy should or could be applied to any field not of a military nature. The term “Strategy” has been used to mean many things – many actors seem to have many kinds of different strategies. Transnational companies have marketing strategies, various firms and NGOs have development strategies, states have environmental and economic strategies and strategies for reforming higher education, etc. (See: Strachan [2008]: p. 422.) Indeed, one gets the impression that it is possible to find a strategy for just about any human activity, especially in fields which require the coordinated action of many people or different organizations. This suggests that the modern usage has distanced itself from the original (military) connotation of the expression. (Strachan [2011]) As a consequence, there are those who support the application of Strategic Thought in various fields and there are those who would prefer to keep it as a “privilege” of military sciences. In order to think about foreign policy as a form of Strategy, this debate has to be addressed, since it is of crucial importance to the methodological foundations of the present work. Following the distinction used in the literature on the evolution of security theory, the author will distinguish between “*broadeners*” and “*deepeners*”. (Collins [2007] pp. 6-7.; Wirtz [2007]: pp. 339-341.) “Broadeners” believe that the underlying logic of strategic thought can and should be applied to fields other than military strategy.<sup>20</sup> “Deepeners” are critical of such an approach – they believe that different policies and various human activities not linked to the military realm should not belong under the umbrella of Strategic Studies.

There is, of course, an important element of military strategy that is not shared

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<sup>20</sup> Henry Kissinger also notes that strategy and policy should not be separated from each other, even though he mainly understands strategy to be concerned primarily with military affairs. (See: Kissinger [1957] quoted in: Baylis; Wirtz [2007]: p. 5.)

by all the other types of strategies. Namely, that the stakes involved are fundamentally different in implementing strategies of different realms. Selling detergent is not exactly the same as securing a beachhead or an entire country because the latter categories involve *matters of life and death*.

One of the most notable scholars representing the latter approach is military historian Hew Strachan. He proposes that strategy should not be confused with policy. “Conflation of strategy and policy” is in large part due to deterrence theory during the Cold War, which inspired strategists to discover how nuclear weapons could be used as tools of foreign policy. He further argues that broadening the meaning of Strategy results in definitions which “[...] by being inclusive end up being nothing.” (Strachan [2008]: 426-429.; 431. See also: Wirtz [2007]: pp. 339-341.) By giving up the traditional definition of Strategy, one will not be able to define or understand war in general.

Broadeners, on the other hand, are supportive of the tendency to apply the tenets of Strategic Thought to fields other than military sciences and this is due to the fact that the main concepts and definitions of Strategy can be applied to just about *any field of human activity where a clear intention to reach a desired outcome can be identified*.

This group is strengthened by a number of well-known scholars and students of strategy. John Lewis Gaddis notes in one of his short papers:

“Our knowledge of it [Grand Strategy – added by author, *I.B.*] derives chiefly from the realm of war and statecraft, because the fighting of wars and the management of states have demanded the calculation of relationships between means and ends for a longer stretch of time than any other documented area of collective human activity.

*But grand strategy need not apply only to war and statecraft: it's potentially applicable to any endeavor in which means must be deployed in the pursuit of important ends.* [Emphasis added by author, *I.B.*] That's why we regularly get papers from our students on the grand strategy of navigating the Yale curriculum, or of surviving a summer internship, or of achieving success in soccer, football, and especially rowing, a sport that particularly attracts the members of our class, probably because of its ancient echoes in Herodotus and Thucydides. As does, predictably, one other topic of great significance to them, which is the grand strategy of falling in and out of love.” (Gaddis [2009]: p. 7.)

Liddell Hart, another well-known student of Strategy applies a similar argumentation when introducing his famous “indirect approach” to strategy:

“With deepened reflection, however, I began to realize that the indirect approach had a much wider application – that it was a law of life in all spheres: a truth of philosophy. Its fulfillment was seen to be the key to practical achievement in dealing with any problem where the human factor predominates, and a conflict of wills tends to spring from an

underlying concern for interests. In all such cases, the direct assault of new ideas provokes a stubborn resistance, thus intensifying the difficulty of producing a change of outlook. Conversion is achieved more easily and rapidly by unsuspected infiltration of a different idea or by an argument that turns the flank of instinctive opposition. The indirect approach is as fundamental to the realm of politics as to the realm of sex. In commerce, the suggestion that there is a bargain to be secured is far more potent than any direct appeal to buy. And in any sphere it is proverbial that the surest way of gaining a superior's acceptance of a new idea is to persuade him that it is his idea! As in war, the aim is to weaken resistance before attempting to overcome it; and the effect is best attained by drawing the other party out of his defences.<sup>21</sup> This idea of the indirect approach is closely related to all problems of the influence of mind upon mind – the most influential factor in human history.” (Liddell Hart [1954]: pp. 18-19.)

Beaufre established that Strategy:

“cannot be a single defined doctrine; it is a method of thought” (Beaufre [1965]: p. 13. quoted in Strachan [2008]: p. 429.)

Mearsheimer observes that famous military historian Liddell Hart's attention turned to grand strategy soon after he started researching Strategy due to the following reasons:

There are several reasons for Liddell Hart's interest in grand strategy. His intellectual curiosity was simply too great for him not to move from the narrower realm of strategy; *serious students of war eventually discover that the study of strategy and tactics benefits from considering grand strategy.* [Emphasis added by author, I.B.] (Mearsheimer [1988]: p. 85.)<sup>22</sup>

These thoughts attest to an intellectual tradition, which welcomes the application of the logic of military strategy in various fields, especially foreign and security policy. Moreover, there is a large number of works which use the term “Strategy”- originally taken from the field of military strategic studies – to refer to the foreign and security policy of a given state. The abundant literature on “grand strategy” belongs to this category.<sup>23</sup> This tradition of grand strategic thought suggests that the main tenets of traditional Strategic Thought have already been applied to the realm of foreign and security policy extensively.

The debate between broadeners and deepeners also requires the author of this

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<sup>21</sup> This sentence has already been cited in the chapter on the dissertation's hypotheses.

<sup>22</sup> It is particularly telling and instructive that Mearsheimer himself started his career as soldier in the US Army – he is a graduate of the US Military Academy at West Point. After researching issues of military doctrine and strategy he also turned to researching grand strategy and US foreign and security policy. See Mearsheimer's bio at his personal home page at the University of Chicago. John J. Mearsheimer. Bio. <http://mearsheimer.uchicago.edu/biography.html> Accessed: 07-08-2011.

<sup>23</sup> See for example: Art [2009]; Art [2003]; Deibel [2007]; Gaddis [1982]; Goldstein [2005]; Kennedy [1991]; Layne [2006]; LeDonne [2003]; Luttwak [2009]; Luttwak [1983]; Narizny [2007]; Oye-Lieber-Rothchild [1992]; Parker [1998]; Romsics [2010a]; Schmidt [1985]; Weeks [2002]

work to decide how this dissertation relates to these two groups. One cannot have a theory of foreign policy strategy without accepting the applicability of the main concepts of Strategy to the field of foreign and security policy. Accepting this point of departure is central to the arguments made in this dissertation. *Naturally, the author identifies itself with the group who agree that the tenets of Strategic Thought can be applied to a wide spectrum of human activities. The author does think that the conflation of strategy and policy are useful for a better understanding of foreign policy strategy.* Thus, unless otherwise indicated, the terms “foreign and security policy” in this dissertation stands for foreign and security policy strategy.<sup>24</sup>

The import of concepts of Strategic Studies to the field of IR theory seems not to have been continued beyond the application of the concept of grand strategy. Strategic Studies is a rich tradition and the author argues that it should be further used to provide a better understanding of foreign and security policy – thus, *this dissertation understands foreign policy to be a distinct form of strategy.*

It must also be emphasized that it may be true that selling detergent does not involve the same risks as securing a beachhead, nonetheless, foreign and security policy *in general does touch upon matters of life and death,*<sup>25</sup> especially when one considers the fact that an important element of foreign policy is security policy. Thus, the distinction between “broadeners” and “deepeners” is somewhat artificial and even arbitrary in a sense. Therefore, a theory of foreign policy strategy is, in a number of ways, very similar to traditional Strategy. There are goals, which one wishes to attain and, ideally, there are tools which one possesses in order to achieve those goals. In this respect, military strategy is not all that different from foreign policy strategy *in a strictly philosophical sense.* Even the stakes involved may justify the analogy – foreign policy typically belongs to the realm of “high politics”. Decisions brought may involve matters of life and death. Carl von Clausewitz wrote:

“war is thus an aspect of force to compel our enemy to do our will” (Clausewitz [1989]:

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<sup>24</sup> The dissertation also provides a definition of foreign and security policy strategy in the following chapters and a distinction between foreign and security policy strategy is made as well.

<sup>25</sup> This dissertation attests to the fact that every knowledge reflects its very own physical and psychological environment. *This work is no different.* Hence, the unveiled sympathy with those who prefer to distinguish between “strategies of life and death” and other strategies. The author of this dissertation does not deny the fact that he accepts the distinction between High vs. Low Politics and, therefore, accepts the “securitization” of the concept of strategy. (“Desecuritizers” being those who use strategy in a universal sense – such as marketing strategy, in other words, the broadeners). *This, however does not imply that the basic notions of Strategy should solely be the privilege of scholars dealing with military sciences.*

Paraphrasing Clausewitz, the view this dissertation takes is one that could be summed up as follows:

“foreign policy is thus an aspect of persuasion to compel our rivals and partners to do our will.” The aim, therefore, is to realize one’s will and the least costly way of doing that is by taking the path of least resistance – as the author pointed out earlier. What follows is a brief philosophical discussion of the nature of strategy.

### **5.2.1. The Nature and Philosophy of Strategy – Hegel, Tolstoy, Black Swans and the Unpredictable Ways of Destiny**

Terry L. Deibel, a well-known student of foreign policy strategy, lists the typical features of strategies in general. He puts forward that strategies are *comprehensive, long-range, means-sensitive, purposeful, coherent and interactive*. (See: Deibel [2007]: pp. 13-24.) The list is convincing indeed, however, *Deibel does not elaborate on the nature of Strategy in general*. Before the author goes on to analyzing the features of Strategy, it is necessary to provide an assessment of *the general mindset* and the underlying presumptions that lay behind planning strategies.

As Lawrence Freedman notes, Strategic Thought is inherently a product of the assumption that humans can have *an impact on their environment* and they can *shape* the factors that influence their own perspective and position. Within the agent vs. structure scheme, this means that the agent can change the structure, of which the agent itself is an organic part of. Translating this into the *terminus technicus* of Strategic Thought is equal to proposing that the decision maker (theoretically) has the ability to shape the strategic environment. There is no point of discussing Strategic Thought and Strategy if we accept that agents are by and large passive. The agent has to be proactive and *believe* that decisions made *will make a difference*. *Otherwise all the theorizing about Strategic Thought is merely an intellectual exercise lacking any policy relevance*. An agent that is determined by the structure would mean that the decision maker is merely capable of reading the messages of the surrounding environment and mechanically executing the ‘orders’ dictated by the structure. Accepting this means accepting that the agent is the object of some ‘higher power’ of metaphysical nature, without any ability to influence that ‘force.’ In this realm, the concept of Strategy and



thinking strategically obviously does not make any sense. Therefore, Strategy is *proactive* and *progressive*. (Freedman [2007]: pp. 363-364)

However, it is also essential to realize that Strategy also has a *conservative* touch. A strategist must accept the notion that planning strategies involves *accepting certain limits to one's powers*. Strategy is about bridging the gap between goals and ends. Thus, there are a number of combinations where means available do not justify desired ends. Strategy is about change – but it is also about accepting *limits to the extent of that change*. Accepting those structural limits implies that *Strategy is just as conservative as it is progressive*. These two observations must be added to Deibel's original list.

Analyzing the nature of strategy, the question arises: *what kind of philosophical assumption is Strategic Thought based upon?* Researching the roots of the concept of an active agent capable of decisively influencing its own environment, one has to go back in time – back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The concept that an individual or a group of individuals (the decision makers) can shape and more importantly, *change* society (the strategic environment), is rooted in the progressive mindset of the enlightenment. One of the main messages of 18th century enlightenment is that social change is possible.

This may lead some to come to the conclusion that the underlying philosophy of Strategic Thought is closely related to leftist-Marxist revolutionary or liberal political thought. Taking that logical leap, however, would be a grave mistake. Thus, this is not in any way an attempt to provide the reader with a Marxist interpretation of the philosophy of strategy. Moreover, there is a significant difference between the concept of Strategy and the leftist revolutionary thought as far as their concept of change is concerned. The most important difference is that revolutionary thought is radical and it wishes to bring about comprehensive change rapidly. The concept of Strategy, however, does not necessarily imply radical and comprehensive changes. In fact, it even implies an adaption to realities because it is also conservative, as it has already been mentioned above.

There are, in general, two differing ontological-philosophical views about social change and I will draw on Leo Tolstoy's famous "*War and Peace*" and Hegel's "*The Phenomenology of Spirit*" to demonstrate the two different stances. (Tolstoy [2002]; Hegel [1977])

Tolstoy's work is about the clash of two differing views on history and the world in general. Napoleon is the best example of the "proactive agent", who believes that

everything depends on “Man” himself, that change is solely a function of competence and talent. This view is manifested in the line attributed to him: *“Every soldier carries a marshal’s baton in his pack.”* This emphasizes the will and talent of the individual. Everything depends on the individual and the structure is not viewed as an obstacle in carrying out the plans of the general. According to Tolstoy’s interpretation, Napoleon is active in the battlefield, even “hyperactive” compared to his Russian counterpart, General Kutuzov. The French general is busy giving directives, orders and controlling units during battle. He believes in change brought about by talented individual(s). He is essentially progressive and wishes to change the structure to benefit his interests. (Tolstoy [2002]; Berlin [1953])

On the other hand, General Kutuzov advises his generals to be patient and to remain passive. His directive is rooted in the belief that no matter how talented or competent one may be, man cannot change the course of destiny. The agent is merely a small ship in the vast ocean of “higher powers.” The best course of action is to do nothing. Napoleon is nearing Moscow and the only thing General Kutuzov emphasizes, is to stay inactive for as long as possible. History (or destiny?) will have it her way – there is no general who may win over destiny. He may challenge it – as Napoleon did – but the individual is ultimately bound to fail in that endeavor. Kutuzov withdraws from Moscow and leaves Napoleon to take it. Napoleon wins in a military sense, but he never conquers Russia politically. To use an expression often cited after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: *he won the war, but failed to win the peace*. In the end, history proves Kutuzov right. He is, therefore, conservative – the agent cannot bring about change, especially not against the wishes of history. (Tolstoy [2002]; Berlin [1953])

To a certain extent, Carl von Clausewitz’s reasoning is very similar to that of Tolstoy’s General Kutuzov: he warns that theories are indeed useful for the studying of war, but when it comes to the practice of fighting wars, theories have their limits in providing advice to the commander:

“[...] Theory then becomes a guide to anyone who wants to learn about war from books; it will light his way, ease his progress, train his judgment, and help him to avoid pitfalls... *It is meant to educate the mind of the future commander, or, more accurately, to guide him in his self-education, not to accompany him to the battlefield* [emphasis added by author, I.B.]; just as a wise teacher guides and stimulates a young man’s intellectual development, but is careful not to lead him by the hand for the rest of his life.” (Clausewitz [1989]: p. 141. also quoted by Mahnken-Maiolo, [2008]: p. 1. )

By stating that every theory is of limited use in practice, Clausewitz implicitly

suggests that theory is useful, *but events on the ground have their own dynamic, which do not necessarily fit into a larger theoretical pattern*. There is always the constant element of the unknown, which no theory – as perfect and coherent as it may be – can predict. Therefore, no matter how well educated and well prepared a commander is, there will always be limits to his ability to shape the strategic environment.

Clausewitz introduces the concept of “friction” in order to explain the differences between theory and practice. “The conduct of war resembles the workings of an intricate machine with enormous friction, so that combinations which are easily planned on paper can be executed only with great effort.” (quoted in Smith [2005]: p. 77.) Friction symbolizes the factor that makes it complicated to carry out plans in reality. There are a number of factors, which guarantee that a plan can almost never be executed in its original form.

Similarly, modern examples also attest to the fact that the element of the unknown can – and indeed almost always does – modify original plans. Douglas J. Feith, former US Under Secretary of Defense for Policy from 2001 to 2005, describes in his political memoir how chance, and the factor the author of this dissertation calls the “element of the unknown”, play a huge role in decision making:

“When I was a child, I knew people who made a hobby of military board games in which they played generals moving artillery, infantry and armor units across maps to fight battles. Avalon Hill, as I recall, was the company that made especially sophisticated games of this kind. I never became an Avalon Hill fan, however, because dice helped determine the outcome of battles. As I saw it, that made the games less true than purely cerebral contests of maneuver such as chess. As a grown-up, I still have no interest in board games, but I have come to see the wisdom of incorporating dice into the play. There is an old adage: Better to be lucky than smart. In this case, I thought that Rumsfeld and those of us on his side of the debate were both, which is better yet. *But it is right to keep in mind the role that fortune can play in world affairs.* [Emphasis added by author, I.B.] In our political debates, we often ascribe genius to the people on the winning side of a controversy. Sometimes they deserve the praise. *But success is not necessarily proof of having had the better argument.*” [Emphasis added by author, I.B.] (Feith [2009]: p. 146.)

Niall Ferguson quotes a part of former National Security Adviser and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s papers at the Library of Congress:

“Perhaps the deepest problem is the problem of conjecture in foreign policy....Each political leader has the choice between making the assessment which requires the least effort or making the assessment which requires more effort. If he makes the assessment that requires least effort, then as time goes on it may turn out that he was wrong and then he will have to pay a heavy price. If he acts on the basis of a guess, he will never be able to prove that his effort was necessary, but he may save himself a great deal of grief later on....If he acts early, he cannot know whether it was necessary. If he waits, he may be lucky or he may be unlucky. *It is a terrible dilemma.*” [emphasis added by author, I.B.]

(Decision Making in a Nuclear World, Henry Kissinger Papers, Library of Congress, quoted in Ferguson [2008]: p. 227.)

Ferguson references Nassim Taleb's concept called the "*black swan*" – an analogy philosophers use to describe how people simplify reality and come to wrong conclusions about their own environment through inductive logic. Someone who lives in the Northern Hemisphere has only seen white swans, which may lead one to conclude that swans are normally white, unless he or she travels to the south, to Australia in particular, where the "theory of white swans will collapse", due to the presence of black swans in that country. "*A "black swan" is therefore anything that seems to us, on the basis of our limited experience, to be impossible.*" (*Ibid*, p. 248, see note no. 44.). Again, this logic suggests that *the unknown and the unexpected* may always happen, and one's ability to handle it may always be limited.

Thomas Schelling points out a very similar phenomenon:

"to confuse the unfamiliar with the improbable. The contingency we have not considered seriously looks strange; what looks strange is therefore improbable; what is improbable need not be taken seriously." (Schelling: Introduction in Wohlstetter [1962]: pp. vii-ix.; also quoted by: Daalder, Lindsay [2005]: p. 81)

It is this nature of our world (our strategic environment) that complicates the job of the foreign policy strategist. *In this sense, military and political strategy is not different at all.*

Charles Hill, a well-known theorist of grand strategy at Yale University argues that classical literature can be applied to understanding the challenges of statecraft and grand strategy:

"Literature's freedom to explore endless or exquisite details, portray the thoughts of imaginary characters, and dramatize large themes through intricate plots bring it closest to the reality of "how the world really works." This dimension of fiction is indispensable to the strategist who cannot, by the nature of the craft, know all of the facts, considerations, and potential consequences of a situation at the time a decision must be made, ready or not." (Hill [2010]: p. 6.)

Kutuzov's hesitation to act, Clausewitz's concept of friction, Kissinger's problem of conjecture, Nassim Taleb's black swan, Schelling's dilemma of the unfamiliar, Hill's literature analogy, and the author's "element of the unknown" all refer to the same phenomenon: *strategic uncertainty*. This uncertainty is caused by the same reason that is also the biggest dilemma of social sciences, namely, that *human behavior can never be*

*fully determined*. Different theories and models devise different solutions to narrow the margin of this uncertainty. Human Nature Realism, for example, contends that human behavior can be determined to a certain degree. It proposes that the “rational choice” choice model is able to minimize the margin of uncertainty concerning the behavior of individuals. Neorealism argues that the structure has a determining effect on the agent. But none of those approaches can ever be a 100 percent accurate and so the strategist is back at the same dilemma.

The view held by Napoleon (as depicted by Tolstoy’s novel) is the one shared by G. W. F. Hegel. He put forward the existence of the “World Spirit” (*der Weltgeist*) that manifests itself above all in an individual who is the most talented of his age, a true genius. He is the one who is capable of bringing about change all by himself. (See: Hegel [1977]; Berlin [1953])

Regardless of the fact that Kutuzov is proven right in the end, not surprisingly, from Tolstoy’s perspective, the inherent logic of Strategic Thought suggests that Napoleon is a true strategist, Kutuzov is not. *In fact their battle is a clash of two different ontologies*. Napoleon represents the one which suggests that reality can be a consequence of man’s intended actions, whereas the behavior of Kutuzov implies that reality is always the product of some metaphysical will.

Therefore, the author puts forward that in an ontological sense, Strategy, to paraphrase Jürgen Habermas, is a product of “the project of the Enlightenment”. It is progressive and it suggests that our environment, to a certain degree, can be changed by the willful actions of man. (Habermas [1998]) It is also a narrative, in which the strategist accepts a number of preliminary assumptions about reality. Absent such a narrative, however, no Strategic Thought is possible.

Does this mean that Kutuzov’s views are dispensable? No not at all. The most interesting thing about Tolstoy’s reasoning is the fact that both world views are justified from the strategist’s perspective. A strategist has to believe that he can influence reality. But he also has to accept the limits of that influence. That limit is largely due to the “element of the unknown.” Essentially, modern foreign policy decision makers are all “Hegelian Napoleons” in a way and their job would be senseless if they entirely accepted the views suggested by General Kutuzov’s behavior. On the other hand, the truth lies somewhere halfway between the two views. As Walter Russel Mead notes: “We do not live in a Tolstoyan world where individual leaders and intentions have no weight.” (Mead [2005]: p. 18.) However, the Napoleons of today also have to be aware

of the fact that the talent demonstrated by them has its limits in the complicated strategic environment suggested by General Kutuzov's behavior.

### **5.2.2. From Military Strategy to Grand Strategy – The “Demilitarization” of Strategy**

At the beginning of Chapter 6, the author established that there is a tradition within the literature, which uses the basic concepts of Strategic Thought to describe a state's aspirations. In this sub-chapter the thesis will provide the reader with a brief analysis of the evolution of the term “Strategy”. More specifically, the author will draw up the process of the “demilitarization” of Strategy. Also, the aim of this chapter is to come up with a definition of (foreign and security policy) strategy that could be used during the empirical chapters of the dissertation.

Foreign policy strategy applies all necessary tools in order to achieve a state's goals – it is not only the territory of the department or ministry dealing with foreign policy. Thus, the author has to find a definition, which takes this feature of foreign policy strategy into consideration. Such a definition of foreign and security policy strategy will necessarily be one that embraces the application of all tools of foreign and security policy, be they political, economic, or military. The only concept that is capable of recognizing the application of all national resources is the concept of “grand strategy”. Since there are many different definitions of the concept, the literature on grand strategy will be instructive for finding the “right” formulation. The author aims to find the most suitable definition of grand strategy by reviewing the theoretical development of the concept.

This review is largely based on Hew Strachan's work, which ironically, by trying to criticize the application of the term “Strategy” to fields outside the military realm, produced one of the best analyses of the concept's demilitarization. (Strachan [2008])<sup>26</sup>

Contrary to what certain theorists believe, the origins of the concept of grand strategy does not stem from Carl von Clausewitz<sup>27</sup>, nor was it first used by Paul

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<sup>26</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, the review of the evolution of grand strategic thought is based on Strachan's work. For other overviews of strategic theory see: Bartholomees, [2008] Mahnken [2010]

<sup>27</sup> Walter Russel Mead writes: “The concept of grand strategy comes to us from the German military writer Carl von Clausewitz.” (Mead [2005]: p. 13.) For some inconceivable reason Mead consistently refers to Clausewitz elsewhere too, when writing about grand strategy. (See: *Ibid.* p.14; p. 17.) As I argue, the concept does not originate from him and in fact Clausewitz's famous book *is not centered on the concept*.

Kennedy or John Lewis Gaddis, even though the latter two authors' application of the concept received larger attention than previous sources which applied the same logic.

Alfred Thayer Mahan was among the first to add nonmilitary (political-economic) dimensions to the concept of strategy. The famous naval expert wrote mostly on the benign political economic effects of sustaining naval superiority. (Sumida [1997]: p. 27. quoted in *Ibid.*) Later Julian Corbett, a British naval historian in the second half of the 19th century, wrote of "major strategy" which is the "predecessor" of the grand strategy concept. Corbett wrote that his concept

"in its broadest sense has also to deal with the whole resources of the nation for war, it is a branch of statesmanship. It regards the Army and Navy as parts of one force, to be handled together; they are instruments of war. But it also has to keep in view constantly the politico-diplomatic position of the country (on which depends the effective action of the instrument), and its commercial and financial position (by which the energy for working the instrument is maintained)." (Corbett [1988]: p. 308. quoted in Strachan [2008]: p. 424.)

Strachan notes that the usage of the term "grand strategy" took different paths in different places, since "major strategy" came to be known as "grand strategy" in the U.K. and as "national strategy" in the US. (*Ibid* p. 425.)

John Frederic Charles Fuller was the next influential theorist who elaborated on the concept of grand strategy:

"our peace strategy must formulate our war strategy, by which I mean that there cannot be two forms of strategy, one for peace and one for war, without wastage – moral, physical and material – when war breaks out. The first duty of the grand strategist is, therefore, to appreciate the commercial and financial position of his country; to discover what its resources and liabilities are. Secondly, he must understand the moral characteristics of his countrymen, their history, peculiarities, social customs and system of government, for all these quantities and qualities form the pillars of the military arch which it is his duty to construct." (Fuller [1923]; p. 218. quoted in Strachan [2008]: pp. 425-426)

Raoul Castex also contributed to the development of the traditional concept of military strategy by adding new, nonmilitary categories to the definition, such as the need for the strategist to be concerned with public opinion, geography, coalitions and policy in general. (Castex [1993]; quoted in Strachan [2008]: pp. 425-428.). Although Strachan writes that Castex kept policy and military strategy completely separated in his works, one can tell from the above mentioned example that this was not exactly the case. (Strachan [2008]: p. 428.).

There are two things that should be noted here. First, all of the heretofore cited definitions and approaches think in terms of military strategy and war time policies. Second, they all introduce political and nonmilitary considerations. Corbett regards the monitoring of the country's politico-diplomatic, commercial and financial position as important during the conduct of war. Mahan's approach dealt with the political economy of maritime power during war and Fuller also contended that a country should always be aware of its commercial and financial position, as well as the important characteristics of the given country's people. Castex also introduced novel factors into the debate, e.g. public opinion. The concept of grand strategy was clearly used to describe the war time efforts of a nation, but the immensely political and comprehensive nature of those efforts was also realized. Fuller carefully, but clearly goes one step further. Until Fuller's formulation, grand strategy was understood to mean the "politics of war". However, he also gave a "hint" suggesting that strategy does not exclusively belong to the realm of military affairs and war. By arguing that a state cannot have separate strategies for peace and war, he implies that it can have a strategy in peace time as well. Acknowledging that strategies may exist in peace time as well is an important step towards the demilitarization of the concept of Strategy and a huge step towards the modern definition of grand strategy. Despite all this, Fuller's concept still had a strong military background, since he understood all nonmilitary elements of grand strategy to come under the "military arch".

According to Edward Mead Earle, "strategy" is "an inherent element of statecraft at all times." (Earle [1943]: p. viii. quoted in Strachan [2008]: p. 426.). His definition is similar to that of Fuller, who contends that strategies can exist during peace time as well (see above). This tendency became more intensive, as the strategy of dissuasion in the cold war blurred the line between strategy and policy, as noted earlier. Nations threatened with war in peace time and this also contributed to the emergence of (grand) strategy as a peacetime distinction. (*Ibid.* p. 428.).

George F. Kennan also applied the concept of grand strategy and he defined it as

"[...] the way in which you marshal all the forces at your disposal on the world chessboard. I mean not only the military forces you have, although that is very important, but all the political forces." (Excerpt from lecture held by George F. Kennan on October 6, 1947. quoted in Harlow-Merz [1991]: p. 258. quoted in Deibel [2007]: p. 417.)

Thus, apparently, the term has lost its military background a lot earlier in the US practice than in the European one.



One of the best known theorists of (grand) strategy is the famous military historian and soldier Basil Henry Liddell Hart – he wrote several books on this topic. (See: Liddell Hart [1972]; [1925]; [1954])<sup>28</sup> He distinguished between “strategy”, that he understood to mean “generalship”, which referred to the method of applying military force; and “grand strategy”, which is “distinct from the policy governing its employment [that of military force – added by the author, I.B.] and combining it with other weapons: economic, political, and psychological.” He contends that grand strategy is synonymous with “war policy.” (Liddell Hart [1954]: p. 31; p. 366.) In this sense, Liddell Hart does not go any further in demilitarizing the concept. However, he too emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach, only a part of which is military strategy.

Towards the end of his book, Liddell Hart goes on to refine his distinction between “strategy” and “grand strategy” and distinguishes between “pure strategy” (“the art of the general”) and “grand strategy”. (See: *Ibid.*, pp. 333-337) He defines grand strategy as follows:

“As tactics is an application of strategy on a lower plane, so strategy is an application on a lower plane of ‘grand strategy’. While practically synonymous with the policy which guides the conduct of war, as distinct from the more fundamental policy which should govern its object, the term ‘grand strategy’ serves to bring out the sense of ‘policy in execution’. For the role of grand strategy – higher strategy – is to co-ordinate and direct all the resources of a nation, or band of nations, towards the attainment of the political object of the war – the goal defined by fundamental policy.” (Liddell Hart *Ibid.*, pp. 335-336.)

According to the military historian, grand strategy should also be concerned with the following components of national power:

- economic resources;
- manpower;
- moral resources (“fostering the willing spirit of people”);
- regulation of the distribution of power between military services;
- regulation of the distribution of power between military services and industry;
- fighting power;

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<sup>28</sup> For Liddell Hart’s intriguing intellectual biography and how he thought about „grand strategy”, see: Mearsheimer [1988]: especially Chapter 4 on grand strategy (pp. 84-99.)

- financial pressure;
- diplomatic pressure;
- commercial pressure; and
- ethical pressure. (See: *Ibid.*, p. 336.)<sup>29</sup>

This seems to be the most comprehensive list of means available to a “grand strategist” so far. Liddell Hart concluded that war policy should also be concerned with future peace and the creation of circumstances suitable for a prosperous postwar future. (*Ibid.*; p. 336; p. 366.)

The famous strategist argues that grand strategy is essentially “*policy in execution*”, which is the complete opposite of Strachan’s view, who proposes that strategy should not be confused with policy. Thus, Liddell Hart suggests that this conflation is a natural process. (See above; Liddell Hart [1954]: pp. 335-336.)

J.R.M. Butler wrote one volume of the famous “Grand Strategy” series, a six volume edition on the subject. However, he did not go any further than noting that grand strategy is “concerned both with purely military strategy and with politics.”(Butler [1957]: p. xv. quoted in Strachan [2008]: p. 426.). His approach also suggests that there has to be a level of policy higher than that of military strategy where the basic tenets of Strategic Thought could be applied.

André Beaufre thought of strategy as a concept embracing at least four components: political, economic, diplomatic and military. (Beaufre [1965]: p. 14; p. 23. quoted in *Ibid*, p. 428.) This attests to a tradition of thought, which thinks of grand strategy and Strategy in general as a comprehensive approach to the application of all national resources and tools. This also suggests that the notion does not exclusively belong to the military realm.

The next influential author who dealt with grand strategy extensively was famous British military historian Michael Howard. In his interpretation

“Grand strategy in the first half of the twentieth century consisted basically in the mobilisation and deployment of national resources or wealth, manpower and industrial capacity, together with the enlistment of those of allied and, when feasible, of neutral powers, for the purpose of achieving the goals of national policy in wartime.” (Howard

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<sup>29</sup> It is worth quoting Liddell Hart’s exact words on this topic: “Moreover, fighting power is but one of the instruments of grand strategy – which should take account of and apply the power of financial pressure, of diplomatic pressure, of commercial pressure, and, not least of ethical pressure, to weaken the opponent’s will. A good cause is a sword as well as armour.” (Liddell Hart [1954]: p. 336.)

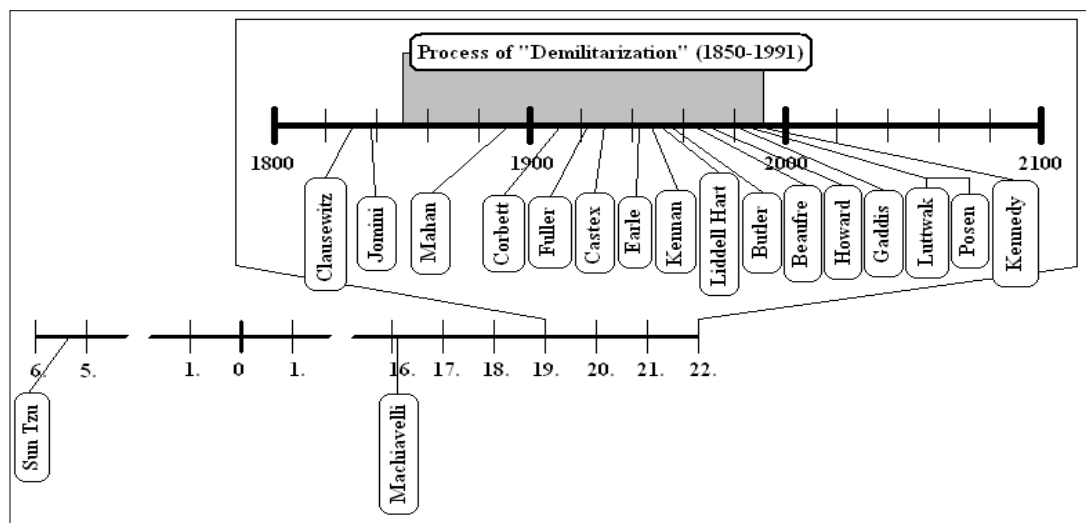
[1972]: p. 1. quoted in Strachan [2008]: p. 426.)

The “problem” with Howard’s definition is that it is still closely connected to warfare – it is suggested to mean the national policies of a state “*in wartime*”. Again, the comprehensiveness of the approach is also similar to the definitions of Hart, Fuller and Corbett. The comprehensive nature of grand strategy will become an important element of the modern definition of the concept.

Edward Luttwak argued that strategy is “the conduct and consequences of human relations in the context of actual or possible armed conflict.” (Luttwak [1987]: p. 4. quoted in *Ibid*, p. 429.) Barry Posen contends that grand strategy is “a political-military, means-ends chain, a state’s theory about how it can best “cause” security for itself.” (Posen [1984]: p. 13; 220; quoted in *Ibid*.) Posen’s approach completely strips the original definition of its military connotation and transforms it into a definition of what one would call security policy. Posen is the author who takes the biggest leap towards the modern definition of grand strategy. It is something that exists in peacetime as well and obviously embraces a number of quite different means.

The eighties were a watershed in the development of the modern definition of (grand) strategy. The definitions of Luttwak and Posen were only two of an abundance of formulations in the eighties which tried to capture the essence of grand strategy.<sup>30</sup>

**Figure 5. The “Demilitarization” of the Concept of Strategy**



The “demilitarization” of the definition of strategy begun around 1850 and approximately lasted until 1991. The following works have been selected for the making of this figure: S. Tzu: *The Art of War*, 6-5<sup>th</sup> c., B.C.; N. Machiavelli: *The Art of War*, 1521; C. v. Clausewitz: *On War*, 1832; A.H.

<sup>30</sup> Indeed it would be impossible to make a full list of those definitions here<sup>30</sup> but Terry L. Deibel did include a selection of those in his book. Deibel [2007]

Jomini: *The Art of War*, 1838; A.T. Mahan: *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*, 1890; J. Corbett: *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, 1911; J.F.C. Fuller: *The Reformation of War*, 1923; R. Castex: *Strategic Theories*, 1929; E.M. Earle: *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler*, 1943; B.H. Liddell Hart: *Strategy: The Indirect Approach*, 1954; G.F. Kennan: *Lecture held on October 6, 1947*; J.R.M. Butler: *Grand Strategy, Vol. 2.*, 1957; A. Beaufre: *An Introduction to Strategy*, 1965; M. Howard: *Grand Strategy, 4.*, 1972; J.L. Gaddis: *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy*, 1982; E. Luttwak: *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*, 1987; B. Posen: *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars*, 1984. P. Kennedy: *Grand Strategies in War and Peace*, 1991.

Instead of citing and analyzing all of those definitions in Deibel's book, the author wishes to pick a suitable working definition in order to carry out the empirical part of the research. The definition the author chose is a combination of the definition used by Paul Kennedy and the one John Lewis Gaddis uses for "strategy". Paul Kennedy uses the following definition:

"The crux of grand strategy lies therefore in policy, that is, in the capacity of the nation's leaders to bring together all of the elements, both military and nonmilitary, for the preservation and enhancement of the nation's long-term (that is, in wartime and peacetime) best interests." (Kennedy [1991]: p. 5.)

Gaddis uses a simpler formulation:

"By "strategy," I mean quite simply the process by which ends are related to means, intentions to capabilities, objectives to resources." (Gaddis [1982]: p. viii.)

The combination the author has made up reads as follows:

***Grand strategy is the practice of relating ends to means by using all the military and nonmilitary tools available to a state in order to preserve and enhance its long-term best interests.***<sup>31</sup>

This definition of grand strategy will be taken to mean "strategy" in general throughout the dissertation. The above combination is justified by the following reasons. It has the original logic of Strategy – the relating of ends to means. It embraces all military as well as nonmilitary means, thus, it also satisfies the criteria of comprehensiveness. The author could have chosen a definition, which specifically makes a distinction between political, economic, military and other tools, but that would not have been wise, since a

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<sup>31</sup> This is taken from one of the author's earlier publications. The earlier version has been slightly modified. See: Balogh [2010b]: p. 4. This definition has also been used in one of the author's other publications: Balogh [2011d]: p. 129.

number of tools/ policies (eg.: containment) do not necessarily fit into anyone of those categories. It would have to be a combination of all those policies covering all aspects of containment, thus, the author chose not to specify the nature of those means. The distinction between military and nonmilitary means should leave enough space for covering all policies pursued by Washington. The formulation “long term best interests” also calls for explanation, since the formulation seems to be rather vague and problematic. Therefore, as applied to the specific case of US-Iran relations, the definition of a US (grand) strategy towards Iran is understood to mean:

***The US practice of relating ends to means by using all its military and nonmilitary tools available in order to preserve and enhance its long-term best interests vis a vis the Islamic Republic of Iran.***

In order to clarify vague expressions, the dissertation will use the following meanings:

**“The US practice of relating ends to means by using all its military and nonmilitary tools available”:** Any executive order, directive, strategy, decision, measure, law or “speech act”<sup>32</sup> focusing on the application of any national tool in order to enhance and preserve US best interests vis a vis Iran. (Buzan-Waever [1998])

**“long term best interests”:** The realization of one or more of the following strategic goals:

- concluding a peace treaty between Israel and Arab states (most notably Syria and Lebanon);
- the emergence of a stable and non-hostile Iraq that is able to control its territory;
- the emergence of a stable Afghanistan that is capable of controlling its territory;
- the halting or making fully transparent of Iran’s nuclear program;
- securing the free flow of oil through the Strait of Hormuz; and
- minimizing or altogether eliminating tensions between the US and Iran.

The same list has been chosen as the one constructed by the author when defining the term “Washington’s strategic interests” for reasons of consistency and coherence. (See chapter: I.4. and also Addis et al. [2010]) However, specific administrations usually

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<sup>32</sup> “Speech act” is understood to mean rhetoric as well as government documents which outline policies. It is taken from the concept of “securitization” introduced by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever. See: Buzan-Waever [1998]

have their individual concept of US national interests and this will always be taken into consideration throughout the thesis. Other terms (“preserve and enhance”) in the definition, by and large, explain themselves.

The above definition of US strategic interests implies a conjecture: that most or all of the above US national interests cannot be realized without at least a limited cooperation with Tehran. Reaching a climate of cooperation with Iran is a pretext for:

- reducing effects that are the results of the strategic blowback dynamic and, therefore,
- realizing US national interests both globally and in the wider Middle East.

There is a final theoretical problem which has to be addressed. The comprehensive logic of grand strategy suggests the application of a combination of national means – political, economic and military – for significant national goals. The strategy of containment was a grand strategy. The spread of democracy is a grand strategy. *Thus, the question arises: can such a comprehensive concept be applied to bilateral relations, such as the US-Iran nexus? Can the US have a grand strategy toward Iran? Is this not tantamount to applying the theory of an “overall strategy” on a tactical level?* Obviously, if one is able to find a precedent for applying the concept in a bilateral arrangement, then it could be argued that such application of the concept could be a viable methodology. In fact, there is a precedent for this approach. Mark Simakovsky applies the concept of grand strategy to US-Iran relations. He assesses the combined application of US diplomatic, informational, economic, political and security tools in order to change Iranian behavior. (Simakovsky, [year of publication unknown]) Well-known scholar Thomas J. Christensen also applies the concept to US-Chinese relations in one of his works. (See: Christensen, [2006]: p. 108; p. 110).

However, this is not enough for a sound methodological justification for using the concept for understanding a bilateral relationship. It is the manner in which a nation pursues its policies that decides whether the concept can be applied or not. It is not only “large” or “overarching” goals that justify the application of grand strategy in general. No definition states explicitly that it can only be applied to a state’s overall aspirations and no definition states that it cannot be applied to a bilateral relationship. Grand strategy can be applied when a state applies all of its tools available in order to attain its national goals – this is what most modern definitions of grand strategy postulate. In that

sense, it is synonymous with foreign and security policy strategy. Since the US applies a host of different assets in order to influence Iranian behavior, grand strategy is a suitable concept for describing US motivations.

The other reason for applying the concept of grand strategy is that it offers the only “demilitarized” concept of strategy. *Such definition is imperative if one wishes to theorize about foreign and security policy strategy.*

## **6. Methodology and Selection of the Empirical Sample – Epistemic Assumptions**

Having established the hypotheses of the dissertation, it is essential to outline the exact methodology and the theoretical foundations for justifying H1a and H1b. Methodology answers the question “How?” – how does one get to know reality? Essentially, it is about a set of epistemic assumptions on how to understand the complex nature of reality.

As the author pointed out earlier, the methodology he wishes to use is qualitative analysis. This approach is warranted by the inherently difficult nature of converting the above defined variables into measurable and objective “units”. Thus, the author wishes to provide a qualitative analysis of policies expressed in the following primary sources:

- government documents and strategies;
- diplomatic cables and military logs released by Wikileaks; and
- speeches of government officials.

A number of previously classified national security and other documents are now available from the tenure of office of the Clinton as well as the George W. Bush administrations. Moreover, Wikileaks documents provide interesting insights into policy considerations of the US government. The other sources are of a secondary nature. The author mostly relies on

- journal articles,
- books, and
- political memoirs.

Of course, one has to keep in mind that the latter category is very subjective, still, memoirs could be applied as alternative sources.<sup>33</sup>

It is vital that one thing be established about official policy statements, e.g. national security strategies. The author does not necessarily consider these documents as credible sources for finding out more about what kind of actual policies the US pursues towards e.g. the Islamic Republic of Iran. Melvyn P. Leffler and Jeffrey W. Legro point this out in the introduction of their 2008 book:

“Yet formulaic and comprehensive documents such as those designed for submission to Congress, and even those more secret national strategy statements that were so important to waging the cold war, have had serious deficiencies. They conflate and they generalize; they often sound like menus; rarely do they contain the interpretive insights that transform strategic vision into strategic policy.” (Leffler; Legro [2008]: p. 9.)

This really captures the essence of the problem. Researchers are not necessarily interested in policy statements, they are interested in the policies themselves *as they are executed* as opposed to how they are *presented*. Professor Richard Doyle of the US Naval Postgraduate School distinguishes between *explicit* and *implicit* security strategies. In the US case, explicit security strategies are mostly official national security strategies and official national security policy statements. “*Implicit strategy is what we mean by observing any country as it interacts with its security environment, that is, with other countries and forces that might threaten it or interfere with its objectives.*” (Doyle [year of publication unknown]). Buckley and Singh remind us that national security strategies or “doctrines” serve a dual purpose.<sup>34</sup> They inform both domestic, as well as foreign audiences. They also highlight the importance of the declaratory nature of such strategies and distinguish between the act of declaration and the actual implementation of the given policy. (Buckley; Singh [2006a]: p. 2.)

Thus, the author is interested in implicit strategies of foreign and security policy

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<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, there is a new wave of US political memoirs. This new practice involves publishing a book and also the personal, heretofore classified documents to improve the credibility of the printed book. The memoirs of Douglas Feith (Under Secretary of Defense for Policy from July 2001 until August 2005) and Donald Rumsfeld (Secretary of Defense from January 2001 until December 2006) are cases in point. See the documents of Douglas Feith published at *War and Decision* at [www.waranddecision.com](http://www.waranddecision.com). Accessed: 03-07-2011. For Donald Rumsfeld’s papers see: *The Rumsfeld Papers* at [www.rumsfeld.com](http://www.rumsfeld.com). Accessed: 03-07-2011. However, the author will mostly rely on the memoirs of Madeleine Albright (Secretary of State from 1997 to 2001) and George Tenet (CIA director from 1997-2004)

<sup>34</sup> Buckley and Singh imply that the expressions “grand strategy” and “doctrine” are synonyms and that is how the present work uses them too. (Buckley; Singh [2006a]: pp. 1-2.) The author will elaborate on the meaning of “doctrine” in more detail in the chapter on the Bush doctrine (see chapter II/2.)



– the actual policies as they are executed. As far as the “*sample*” chosen for research is concerned, the following set of policies implemented between January 1993 and December 2010 is to be examined:

**The Clinton Administration (1993-2001):**

- the Oslo process, and the US and Iranian roles within;
- the policy of dual containment, focusing on the Iranian dimension; and
- the attempt to engage Iran during the Khatami presidency.

**The Bush Administration (2001-2009):**

- the Bush doctrine and Iranian reactions from 2001 to 2006; and
- the policy of containing Iran (2006-2009).

**The Obama Administration (2009-2010):**

- overtures of the Obama administration; and
- the policy of containing Iran.

These are seven different policies embracing some 17 years – *a sample sufficiently large for drawing conclusions and making generalizations*. They were chosen because they cover *the most significant US initiatives towards Iran*. Therefore, this set is ideal for examining if there is a “blowback dynamic”.

## II. A CASE STUDY OF THE THEORY OF STRATEGIC BLOWBACK: THE US AND IRAN

### 1. The Clinton administration (1993-2001)

*“There are two tragedies in life. One is to lose your heart’s desire. The other is to gain it.”* George Bernard Shaw cited in: Henry A. Kissinger [1994]: p. 22.

Former US national security adviser and secretary of state Henry Kissinger cites George Bernard Shaw’s famous words for describing the unusually beneficial position of the United States after the end of the Cold War. Historically, most states would have envied the new position of Washington: unrivaled and unchallenged. The unipolar moment of the US was in the making, but few suspected how many dilemmas Washington would have to face in the coming years.<sup>35</sup> (See: Krauthammer [1990]) The “New World Order”, as it came to be called, turned out to be a burden as much as a privilege. (See: *Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress ...* Bush [1991]) The first post-Cold War US presidency was that of William Jefferson Clinton’s, whose time in office attests to Kissinger’s notion that primacy is a double edged sword. Unprecedented power was a chance – a chance to promote peace and stability and to spread US values, most notably democracy. Interventions in the name of freedom, human rights and democracy, deposing dictators and reshaping the strategic environment to match US interests suddenly seemed like viable strategies. However, unprecedented power also meant an unprecedented burden and responsibility, as the Rwandan and Yugoslav cases have demonstrated. Few US decision makers – or scholars for that matter – realized the ambivalent nature of primacy at the time. Nonetheless, the Clinton administration was initially determined to pursue a number of priorities: NATO enlargement and engagement with former Cold War enemies, spreading democracy and other Western values, sustaining a balanced relationship with Boris Yeltsin’s Russia, expanding the global zone of free trade and pursuing peace in the Middle East.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> For an excellent overview of how US hegemony evolved see: Magyarics [2012].

<sup>36</sup> For a detailed elaboration of those policies see: The National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement NSS [1995]

Indeed, “No president ever came to office with a more promising set of circumstances for promoting peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors [...]” (Quandt [2001]: p. 321.) Clinton’s Middle Eastern strategy had two important “pillars”: 1.) promoting Arab-Israeli peace; and 2.) isolating this process from forces perceived to be opposing the peace effort. The approach was termed the “peace strategy” by Martin Indyk, Clinton’s special assistant on Middle Eastern affairs and one of the architects of this approach. (See: Indyk [2009]: p. 43; 270.) The second pillar came to be known as the policy of dual containment in 1993, which will be discussed in a separate chapter. This two-pillar approach provided a clear and logical framework for US foreign and security policy in the Middle East. In fact, seldom has US policy been so clear-cut and rational in the region as under the Clinton administration.

Every Middle Eastern foreign policy initiative was subordinated to achieving goals set by the “peace strategy”. This concept had a profound effect on the approach Washington took towards Tehran. This chapter analyzes how Iran related to the “peace strategy” and how the US missed a number of strategic opportunities to start off on a new footing with Tehran. I argue that most US initiatives were due to flawed perceptions of the Iranian foreign policy posture and its goals, which led to aggressive US foreign policy measures, which in turn caused a significant “strategic blowback.”

In order to prove that realization of US interests had been hindered by counterproductive US initiatives, one needs to define the specific US interests at the time. First and foremost, Washington was interested in:

- fostering stability in the Middle East by finding a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict;
- securing the free flow of energy trade associated with the region; and
- keeping Saddam Hussein’s Iraq checked after the Gulf War.

The three policies of the Clinton administration will be examined with a special emphasis on whether these interests were realized or not. Initiatives examined in this chapter overlap in time and they are closely connected. Their significance, however, require them to be examined separately. The Oslo process, as well as the policy of dual containment are both “sub-strategies” of the broader Middle East strategy of the Clinton

administration. They were designed to reinforce each other. On the other hand, reactions to the policy of Khatami's détente, the author argues, were not of a strategic significance – they were only tactical moves (see below). What follows is a detailed and separate assessment of the Oslo process, the policy of dual containment and détente under the Khatami administration.

## **1.1. Missed Opportunities Under the Oslo Process**

In order to prove H1a as defined in the introductory chapter, one has to show that indeed, the blowback dynamism was at play during the Oslo peace process.<sup>37</sup> Ideally, in this specific set of circumstances this would mean proving that aggressive US moves resulted in Iranian counter moves that hindered the realization of US interests. To precisely follow the basic assumptions of Neoclassical Realism and the methodological foundations of the thesis, the author puts forward that besides the two main governments examined (the US and Iran), a number of domestic political actors played key roles in shaping US-Iranian relations. The simplest way of defining those political forces would be to label them as US and Iranian hardliners and pragmatists suggesting a two-by-two matrix. However, one must add the Israeli lobby, most notably the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), as well as other US domestic organizations.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, perceptions also influenced policy outcomes. Thus, a Neoclassical Realist interpretation would have to take all these factors in to consideration.

I argue that at least three strategic opportunities were missed by Washington to initiate a gradual thaw in US-Iran relations after the end of the Cold War. This means that at least three opportunities arose when the US had realistic chances of pursuing nonaggressive policies that could have prevented strategic blowback effects. The three opportunities were the following:

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<sup>37</sup> It is surprising how shallow the literature on Iranian involvement in the Oslo peace process is as the mainstream tends to neglect the thorough analysis of the Iranian involvement therein. There are some sources, however that do shed sufficient light on the nature of Iranian engagement in the process. See: Parsi [2007]; Quandt [2001]; Kurtzer, Lasensky [2008]; Ross [2004].

<sup>38</sup> Established in 1953, AIPAC is believed to be the most powerful lobbying force on Capitol Hill. See: Mearsheimer- Walt [2007] and also Parsi [2007]: pp. 182-189.

- the immediate period after the defeat of Iraq in the Gulf War (1991);
- the lead up to, as well as the aftermath of the Madrid Conference and the conference itself (1991-1993); and
- the Oslo peace process (1993-2000).

The author will prove that in all of these cases Iran tried to be constructive, but Washington snubbed Iranian overtures causing unintended negative consequences.<sup>39</sup> Of course, two of these cases took place before the Clinton administration. However, US and Iranian perspectives on the Oslo peace process cannot be understood without comprehending the Middle Eastern strategic environment after the fall of the Soviet Union and the period leading up to the signing of the Oslo Accords.

Iran was largely cooperative during the Gulf war, despite the fact that it perceived it had not received sufficient rewards for demonstrating goodwill towards the US in Lebanon concerning the issue of US hostages. Tehran allowed its air space to be used by the US. It refused to support the Shia uprising in Iraq and declared “positive neutrality” – actions, which undoubtedly served US interests. A generally cooperative Iranian attitude, however, was not realized by Washington as a strategic opportunity for rapprochement. Instead, the US built up its military presence in the Persian Gulf – Iran’s historic zone of influence. This caused Iran to be even more wary of Washington in a climate initially cooperative and possibly suitable for reconciliation. (Parsi [2007]: pp. 139-143.) Mohammad Reza Tajik, who used to be an adviser to President Mohammad Khatami, described Tehran’s perceptions of the new situation as follows:

“The US managed to portray Iran as a greater threat to the Arabs than even Israel. This had a crucial impact on our thinking. The US sold more weapons to the Arabs as a result and became the *hegemon* [emphasis added by author, I.B.] of the Persian Gulf.” (quoted in: *Ibid.*, p. 143.)

In fact, limited Iranian rearmament efforts are believed by some to have partly been due to heavy US military presence in the Gulf, which was perceived to be threatening Iranian security. (Ehteshami; Hinnebusch [2002], p. 83. referenced in: *Ibid.*)

Of course, Iran thought of itself as a state of regional significance and, therefore,

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<sup>39</sup> This reasoning extensively draws on Parsi [2007]: pp. 139-201. In essence, Parsi also argues that a number of opportunities were missed by Washington to remedy problems between the two countries.

it wished to become a leading power in the region. The best way to achieve that was to fix relations with the Arab states in the Gulf and also with the United States. The Rafsanjani government (1989-1997) began a diplomatic offensive to warm up relations with the GCC states and Saudi Arabia in particular. However, the possible warming of relations between Tehran and the GCC states meant that US presence in the Gulf would be less welcome – or even questioned by Arab sheikdoms. Washington started pushing the GCC to choose between two alternatives: “[...] a Middle East order with Iran, or an Arab order with the United States.” (*Ibid.* p. 147.) Thus, Arab states chose the latter alternative and Iranian ambitions to create a multilateral arrangement based on the inclusion of Iran were snubbed. (*Ibid.* pp. 145-147.)

Iran took a relatively pragmatic approach in the period between the defeat of Iraq in the Gulf War and the Madrid Conference. Washington reacted by strengthening its political influence in the region through its military presence and forcing a Middle Eastern order based on the exclusion of Iran. By strengthening its ties with Arab states in the Gulf, the US compensated for Iran’s diplomatic overture towards those countries. The “unipolar moment” of the US was an incentive for Washington to be assertive and even aggressive in a way. Iran was pragmatic, but Washington did not see that as a strategic opportunity to mend US-Iran relations. The Neoclassical Realist interpretation of this dynamic would suggest that structural and even unit level Iranian variables (i. e. the pragmatic foreign policy of the Rafsanjani administration) were ideal for cooperation between Washington and Tehran. Unit level variables, however, on the US side were not ideal. US leaders saw the US as a power that is capable of attaining just about any objective in the Middle East. Hence, they did not see the caveats in the closing window of opportunity for cooperation with Iran. The blowback effects, however, were not experienced by Washington until after the Madrid Peace Conference. The author suggests that at least 2 of the above mentioned US strategic interests were harmed as a result of this approach: *regional stability and checking Saddam Hussein’s Iraq*. Both of those would have been a lot easier to realize, if the US had included Iran in the reshaping of Middle Eastern order. That was not to happen, however, as the analysis of the Madrid Conference shows below.

By 1991, both Israelis and Palestinians were exhausted by the first intifada (1987-1991). Despite the Shamir<sup>40</sup> government’s initial resistance, the Bush

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<sup>40</sup> Prime Minister of Israel from 1986 to 1992.

administration pushed hard for a regional settlement and Prime Minister Shamir gave in by the end of 1991. This led to the Madrid Conference of October 30, 1991. George H. W. Bush emphasized that every significant regional power was to be invited in order to provide them with a stake in the new Middle Eastern peace and order. Hence, the first ever direct negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbors took place in Madrid. A Palestinian delegation, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and members of the GCC, as well as the European Community were all invited. Altogether 43 nations participated at the conference and negotiations took place in two different formats: a bilateral one in Madrid, and a multilateral one in Moscow from the beginning of 1992. The Moscow track was to discuss every regional issue (security, economy, water, environment, refugees, etc.). There was one nation, however, that was not part of the arrangement from the outset: Iran, which never received an invitation from the US. (*Ibid.* pp. 148-152)

The US never provided Iran with incentives or at least the prospect of rewards. (Hunter [2010]: p. 49.) There was a sense of pragmatism in Iranian foreign policy, which never received due credit in Washington. The Rafsanjani government even declared that it was prepared to support any solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that Palestinians were ready to accept. However, this positive attitude was not recognized by Washington. According to Trita Parsi's interview with Dennis Ross<sup>41</sup>, the latter said:

"Certain images get formed, and when they are formed, even when there are behaviors that seem to contradict the image, if there are other images at the same time that tend to confirm it, you give much more weight to those that tend to confirm it, and you dismiss those that should point you in a different direction.... The signals from Rafsanjani tended to be dismissed, but they were there. The behaviors that actually tended to fit with the traditional images were treated as if that was the real Iran." (cited in *Ibid.* p. 152.)

In addition, both Israelis and Americans believed that Iran was not a player in the Arab-Israeli dispute, therefore, it was viewed as a state that did not have much to contribute to the process. However, according to Trita Parsi's logic, the Bush administration never took into account that Iran may become a "spoiler" not only if it is invited, but also if it is left out. Former US Ambassador to Israel Daniel Kurtzer said of the self-perception of the US at the time: "Everything was going our way. All systems were go. And Iran was a problem for us, but so what? We had everything else." (*Ibid.* p.

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<sup>41</sup> Dennis Ross was Special Coordinator for the Middle East in the White House during the Madrid Conference.

153.; see also: Hunter [2010]: pp. 49-50. and Indyk [2009]: p. 2.)

Iran saw the refusal to invite it as an effort to leave it out of shaping the Middle Eastern international order. (*Ibid.* pp. 153-154.; Freedman [2008]: pp. 299-300. see also: Hunter [2010]: p. 50.) The key to the theory of strategic blowback is whether Iran ever transformed its disappointment into actual policies. Was there either a direct or an indirect blowback effect? Indeed, there was. Parsi notes:

“Convinced that Washington wouldn’t grant Iran its legitimate role in the region, Tehran concluded that it was left with no choice but to make America’s nonrecognition as costly as possible by sabotaging its policies.” (quoted in *Ibid.* p. 155.)

Iran felt that if it lost its influence with the Arab street and if Tel-Aviv made peace with the Palestinians, then Iran would lose its regional influence. Furthermore, the possibility of an Israeli-Syrian peace could seriously jeopardize Iranian regional influence. (See: Tyler [2009]: p. 447.; Rabinovich [2004]: p. 76.) There is evidence of Iran’s willingness to support the peace effort if it was offered a seat at the table.<sup>42</sup> Since that was not the case, Tehran denounced the peace process and stepped up its support for Palestinian groups and various militant organizations opposing talks, such as Hezbollah. On March 17, 1992, a bomb was detonated at the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Israel thought that Iran had been the main driving force behind the attack.<sup>43</sup> After Israel and the PLO signed the Oslo Accords in Norway on September 13, 1993, the Iranian Majles adopted a statement in March, 1994, emphasizing that Israel needed to be wiped off the “world map.”<sup>44</sup> (Parsi [2007]: pp. 175.) Then, Israel’s new government, led by Yitzhak Rabin, made Arab-Israeli peace a corner stone of its policies and sought to portray Iran as the main obstacle of that effort. Together with the influential AIPAC, it pushed for a tougher US stance on Iran. Since the US needed Israeli cooperation for its peace strategy, Washington’s policy shifted and it began taking Israel’s stance by October 1994. Following that, the policy of ‘dual containment’ was introduced (see next chapter). Then, on July 18, 1994, the building of the Argentine-Israeli Mutual Association was blown up by a bomb in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Some Israeli experts suggest this to be a result of earlier Israeli operations in

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42 Parsi cites the words of an Iranian reformist, Ali Reza Alavi Tabar: “*We would have been more inclined to support, and cooperate with, the peace efforts if we were given an active and participatory role from the outset, instead of them creating the entire plan and then expect us to simply go along with it*” (Parsi [2007]: p. 176.)

43 Even though there is no direct open source evidence to support this link.

44 The Majles is the parliamentary organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran.



South Lebanon against Hezbollah.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, the Israeli perception was that Iran undertook a shift in its policies and started using terror as a tool for realizing its regional interests. Additionally, Hamas and the Islamic Jihad launched an aggressive terror campaign against Israel beginning in the spring of 1994 and tensions remained high throughout 1995. (*Ibid.* pp. 155-180.; See also: Rabinovich [2004]: pp. 75-76.; Pirseyedi [2013]: pp. 57-59.)

Hamas set off a bomb on July 24, 1995, killing 5 Israeli citizens in Tel-Aviv. Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat were originally planning to sign the deal dubbed ‘Oslo II’ the next day – July 25. As a result of the explosion, Israel froze negotiations and it closed down its borders. Thus, the Oslo II accord was only signed on September 28, 1995. The situation escalated as Israel conducted operations against Palestinian militants. Those groups, however, kept striking back. Israel liquidated a leader of Islamic Jihad and a couple of days later a bomb exploded in Tel-Aviv wounding Israeli citizens. Then, on November 4, 1995, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was killed by an Israeli radical, which was a further blow to the Oslo process.<sup>46</sup> Later on, in January 1996, Peres had a Palestinian extremist killed by Israeli authorities and Hamas responded by sending suicide bombers to blow up buses and set off bombs in public places. (Quandt [2001]: p. 335-336; p.338.) Israeli and US intelligence believed that Iran was involved in this “wave of terror” in order to sabotage the peace process, which threatened Iran with isolation. (Tyler [2009]: p. 449.; see also: Freedman [2008]: pp. 301-302.)

Thus, the US aim of isolating Iran from regional arrangements contributed to hindering the realization of a key US strategic interest: *fostering peace and stability in the region*. Of course, Iran may not have been the primary driving force behind these attacks. However, it did support groups, which rejected the peace process and, thus, contributed to creating circumstances conducive to the failure of the peace effort.

If strategic blowback is a result of escalation and aggressive policies as defined in the introductory chapter, then, logically, de-escalation and less aggressive policies should result in the decreasing intensity of the blowback effect. This is exactly what happened. Partly as a result of the terror attacks, Shimon Peres lost the Israeli elections in May 1996. The most striking evidence of aggressive policies backfiring against Iran

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<sup>45</sup> There is no direct and open source evidence to support Iran was behind all this, or that it was behind all this because US and Israeli policies aimed at isolating it. Nonetheless, it made strategic sense on Iran’s behalf to be involved in such a campaign.

<sup>46</sup> This is not to suggest that Iran had anything to do with Rabin’s death.

are evident in how the Netanyahu government's shift resulted in a less aggressive Iranian foreign and security policy posture. Netanyahu was an ardent opponent of the peace process. He knew that one way of de-escalating the situation partly caused by terrorist attacks was initiating a brief thaw in Israeli-Iran relations by slowing down the peace process. As Iran felt that the process began to stall, it also felt less isolated, thus, it was less motivated to disrupt the peace effort that was already dying. It even pushed Hezbollah to accept a cease-fire with Israel as Tel-Aviv conducted an operation in Lebanon in 1996. Tehran also helped with the release of a number of hostages. (Parsi [2007]: pp. 196-201.)

Once the blowback effects undermined trust between the Palestinians and the Israelis, the peace process got stuck. Of course, this should not be directly attributed to Iran and its actions, but it is fair to say that Iran, to a certain extent, contributed to this outcome. It therefore undermined Middle Eastern stability, which went against US strategic interests (see above). It is true that both the Hebron agreement of January 17, 1997 and the Wye River Memorandum of October 23, 1998, were signed by the Netanyahu government, nonetheless, these were halfhearted efforts to breathe life into a peace process that has already been stalling for a while. Then the process came to a halt in March 1997. (Rostoványi [2006], p. 173.) This tendency remained under the Ehud Barak-led Labor government as well, which took over in May 1999. Barak was a supporter of the Rabin approach, therefore, he supported the peace process too. (Quandt [2001]: pp. 344-345; p. 353.)

He withdrew from Lebanon and this meant a strategic blow to radical Iranian policies, since Iran was not in a position to indirectly harass Israeli presence through Hezbollah. It had to find Palestinian militants instead, to maintain its reach into Israel. Iran even offered a secret dialogue through a back channel and there were signs that Israel would be willing to take a more constructive stance on Iran. Still, Iranian overtures were rejected because the Barak government wished to concentrate on the Arab-Israeli peace process. (Parsi [2007]: pp. 215-218.)

The Barak administration was particularly focused on the Syrian track of this process. Negotiations started between Syria and Israel on a possible peace accord. Even though Tel-Aviv withdrew from South Lebanon, it was not ready to give up the Golan Heights – a precondition for peace according to Syrian President Hafez al-Assad. As al-Assad died in the summer of 2000, the peace process came to an end on the Syrian front. With the Israeli-Syrian peace process coming to a halt, Clinton turned to the

Israeli-Palestinian conflict again. He invited Arafat and Barak to a summit, which started off on July 11, 2000. However, as neither Arafat nor Barak were in a position to make tough and sensitive decisions due to their own constituencies, the summit ended in failure on July 25, 2000. Hopes for peace under the Clinton administration finally evaporated when Likud leader Ariel Sharon visited the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. This unleashed a series of events that eventually culminated in the second Intifada. This did not stop Clinton from trying – in October, Barak and Arafat met and agreed on the need to stop violence. One final and desperate attempt was made by the Clinton administration at achieving Middle East peace. Clinton took his final shot: on December 23, 2000, he introduced a new plan, which touched upon every sensitive aspect of Palestinian-Israeli peace.<sup>47</sup> Efforts were made even in January, 2001, but to no avail. Even though both parties seemed willing to continue negotiations, Clinton's tenure of office as president ended. (See: Quandt [2001]: pp. 357-364; pp. 369-372)

It is telling that with the failure of dual containment and rapprochement between Iran and the Arab countries in the region as a result of President Khatami's détente (see next chapter), Iran was not nervous anymore about Arab-Israeli peace isolating its regional position. Furthermore, as the second Intifada broke out in the fall of 2000, Iran did not need to intensify its support for Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, since the peace process seemed to collapse anyway – *even without Iranian involvement*. Hence, Iran kept a low profile during the Camp David II. talks during 2000. (Parsi [2007]: pp. 221-222.) This attests to the fact that when not cornered, Iran does not feel the need to deny processes that are centered on its exclusion and isolation. This behavior suggests that Iran is rather pragmatic in its conduct and even though ideology plays a relevant role in its foreign policy, rational considerations seem to be more important in explaining its policies.

### **1.1.1. Explaining Outcomes – Strategic Blowback under the Oslo Process**

Does the Oslo process underscore or refute the hypothesis of strategic blowback? First, one has to test if US policies could be considered “aggressive” as defined in the introduction. In fact, the isolation of Iran and/or the rejection of

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<sup>47</sup> For details on the issue of Palestinian statehood, territorial issues, the status of Jerusalem and refugees. See: Quandt 2001, pp. 371-372.

constructive Iranian behavior form part of the definition of “aggressive” (see “Hypothesis 1” in the introductory chapter). The question, then, is whether Iranian responses led to unintended consequences detrimental to US national interests in the region.

The strategic blowback dynamic is, in fact, quite evident in the period between 1991 and the end of the Oslo process (fall of 2000). A relatively constructive behavior on the part of Iran was met with US rejection and denial as the US perceived that Iran could not challenge its overwhelming power in any case. This trend became more prominent when the Oslo Accords were signed in September 1993. Iran responded by attempting to undermine the peace process because it felt isolated. By reaching out to groups rejecting the Oslo Accords, Iran dashed realization of one of the central elements of Washington’s Middle East strategy: *fostering peace between the Israelis and the Arabs*.

The really interesting aspect of this period is that the US was not necessarily aggressive at the beginning. President Clinton ordered a review of US Iran policy as he took office and he was noted for breaking with the old tradition of US foreign policy realism – a concept implicitly supported by Brent Scowcroft and George H.W. Bush. (Freedman [2008]: p. 278; p. 300) The US may have been overly ambitious and perhaps too confident in a sense, but it was not necessarily aggressive when it came to dealing with Iran.

Israeli influence, however, led Washington to take a tougher stance, thus, it declared the ‘policy of dual containment’. An even more spectacular shift came as Israel was able to convince the Clinton administration through official channels, as well as AIPAC that Iran meant a threat far larger than originally perceived by Washington. According to Parsi<sup>48</sup> (see above), Washington revised its stance and took a more aggressive position against Iran in order to maintain Israeli willingness to make peace with Arab entities. Since Washington wanted Arab-Israeli peace more than anything in the region, it was willing to sacrifice a possible engagement with Iran. In the process, however, it undermined its own strategic goal of fostering regional peace and stability in the Middle East by not taking into consideration regional influence. *A strategy of excluding Iran missed the fact that Iran was deeply and organically embedded in its own region*. Strategic blowback occurred because Washington focused on only a certain

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<sup>48</sup> In essence, Parsi’s book is the best narrative and evidence in support of the blowback theory.

segment of the “Middle Eastern chessboard.” By focusing on Arab-Israeli peace too intensively, it lost sight of a set of systemic and sub-systemic factors, which, if not taken into consideration, could prove to be game changers. Washington did sense the willingness of certain Arab entities to make peace with Israel and, thus, it had a more or less accurate picture of at least one segment of regional realities. However, it missed another set of realities of equal importance – Iran’s regional position.

Israeli and US efforts at isolating Iran indirectly contributed to regional instability. Even though Iran may not have been the principal actor directly behind all those acts of terrorism<sup>49</sup>, it did support those groups at the time. This served Tehran’s strategic interests in the region. Iran benefited from those attacks indirectly and delaying the peace process won Hamas and Iran time as the Israeli and US elections were nearing in 1996. Iran could have thought that those two elections may shift policies in Tel-Aviv and Washington, thus they wanted to win time.<sup>50</sup>

How does this fit with the methodological and theoretical model outlined at the beginning of the dissertation? Neoclassical Realism obviously requires the identification of both structural level, as well as sub-systemic variables that were at play during the Oslo process. The author identifies the following systemic and sub-systemic factors which explain the blowback dynamic.

Systemic factors:

- global distribution of power; and the
- regional distribution of power.

Sub-systemic factors:

- government policies of the US (Israel) and Iran;
- perceptions; and
- domestic constituencies and political forces.

The most important systemic factor stems from the international distribution of power. In fact, Shireen Hunter points out quite accurately that there is a “perennial” and perhaps even irreconcilable “tension” between global and “middle powers with regional

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<sup>49</sup> There is no direct evidence to support this, at least.

<sup>50</sup> Parsi also notes that Netanyahu’s election “was privately welcomed in Tehran” as it signaled the end of isolating Iran. (See: Parsi [2007]: p. 200.) Of course, Hamas and Iran opposed the deal for different reasons. Hamas did not support it mainly for ideological reasons and Iran due to its regional interests.

ambitions". (Hunter [2010]: p. 36.) Global powers inevitably collide with regional powers as the latter wish to question the regional influence of global powers, whereas global powers are not comfortable with and suspicious of regional powers. The two only cooperate if the global power in question needs the regional power against a global rival in that specific region. (*Ibid.*)

In comparative terms, the United States was by far the most powerful state after the Cold War. US population stood at 253 million and its territory was the third largest in the world.<sup>51</sup> (CIA [2012]) US GDP calculated at purchasing power parity in current US dollars for 1991 (the year of the Madrid Conference) surpassed the GDP of every other nation in the world. The economic superiority of the US was in fact so profound, that its GDP was almost twice as large as that of Japan, which had the second biggest GDP in the world at the time. US GDP per capita was the fourth largest in the world and it was only preceded by countries with significantly smaller population, geographic area and economy.<sup>52</sup> This suggests enormous economic power, even if the US economy experienced a slight recession in 1991. China and Japan demonstrated significant economic development, but the annual growth of GDP in the EU and India was rather weak and the Russian economy was in recession.<sup>53</sup> Of the six entities examined, the EU had the largest export sector and the share of US exports and services within the US GDP was only the fourth largest.<sup>54</sup> (World Bank [2012-2013]) Despite a slight recession and a relatively smaller export sector, the US was still one of the strongest economies in the world. Not surprisingly, US military expenditure outweighed that of every other nation in 1991.<sup>55</sup> The number of US active duty military personnel stood at 1,716,000

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<sup>51</sup> Population data for 1991 from: World Development Indicators & Global Development Finance, World dataBank, The World Bank Group. <http://databank.worldbank.org> Accessed: 02.02.2012. The area of the **US is: 9,826,675 sq km**. See data on territories of countries: Area, Country Comparison to the World, Central Intelligence Agency, The World Fact Book. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2147.html#ir> Accessed: 01-02-2012

<sup>52</sup> According to World Bank data, **US GDP at PPP** (purchasing power parity) in current international dollars amounted to **5,930,700,000,000** in 1991. The same data for Japan for the same year was 2,501,189,612,359. The 1991 GDP per capita data calculated at PPP in current international dollars for the US was 23,443. See: Selected indicators for the United States. World Development Indicators & Global Development Finance, World dataBank, The World Bank Group. 01-02-2012

<sup>53</sup> For the 1991 annual growth of GDP of some of the most significant powers and entities see: China: 9.2%; Japan: 3.3%; India: 1.1; EU: 1.2%; **US: – 0.3%**; Russia: - 5.1. (Numbers have been rounded.) See: Selected indicators for the above countries. World Development Indicators & Global Development Finance, World dataBank, The World Bank Group. 28-01-2013

<sup>54</sup> For data on export of goods and services as percentage of GDP for 1991 see: EU: 26.7%; China: 17.4%; Russia: 13.3%; **US: 10.1%**; Japan: 9.9%; India: 8.4% (Numbers have been rounded.) See: Selected indicators for the above countries. World Development Indicators & Global Development Finance, World dataBank, The World Bank Group. 28-01-2013

<sup>55</sup> The exact data in constant 2009 million US dollars are: **US: 441,561** (1991); Russia: 232,546 (1990 – 1991 data were unavailable); China: 18,000 (1991). All data are from the SIPRI Military Expenditure

in 1993. (*Selected Manpower Statistics ... DoD* [1997]: p. 53.) Washington's military supremacy was obviously also strengthened by the quality of the military hardware it possessed.

Even though Iran was obviously much weaker than the US, much of this was compensated for by the fact that Iran is geographically, politically, culturally and historically embedded in the region and it is also a significant regional power. Every indicator of Iranian power will suggest that Iran is a less significant player compared to the US. However, the most important aspect of assessing Iranian power stems from the above mentioned fact, namely, that it is in the region and it is a powerful country in its own neighborhood when compared to other states in the Middle East. This was the segment of reality neglected by the Clinton administration from 1993 onwards. A regional comparative perspective would have proven that Iran is a formidable power despite its economic deficiencies and relative economic weakness when compared to the US.

Compared to seven other regionally significant countries (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Israel) Iran stood out in a number of ways in 1991.<sup>56</sup> Its population was only second to that of Egypt and its territory made Iran the 18<sup>th</sup> largest country in the world, which was only second to that of Saudi Arabia's in the Middle East.<sup>57</sup> (World Bank [2012]; CIA [2012]) Iran's GDP was larger than that of any of those seven countries.<sup>58</sup> Its GDP per capita was the fourth largest in the Middle East – it was larger in Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Israel.<sup>59</sup> Compared to indicators of

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Database, Stockholm Institute for Peace Research (SIPRI). <http://milexdata.sipri.org/> Accessed: 25-02-2012

<sup>56</sup> These states were chosen as a basis of comparison because they are the most influential states either in economic or political sense. Other Gulf states could be mentioned, but in terms of territory, population, regional geopolitical influence and military capabilities, these states are relatively insignificant in comparison to the eight countries compared here. *Iraq should have also been examined, but the author was not able to find such indicators for 1991 neither at the World Bank nor the IMF.*

<sup>57</sup> See population data for 1991 for those eight countries and Iraq: Egypt: 57952386; **Iran: 56071545**; Turkey: 55068880; Iraq: 18706561; Saudi Arabia: 16669764; Syria: 12690183; Jordan: 354500; Lebanon: 3026061; Israel: 4949000. Population data from: World Development Indicators & Global Development Finance, World dataBank, World Bank. For data on territory see: Saudi Arabia: 2,149,690 sq km; **Iran: 1,648,195 sq km**; Egypt: 1,001,450 sq km; Turkey: 783,562 sq km; Iraq: 438,317 sq km; Syria: 185,180 sq km; Jordan: 89,342 sq km; Israel: 20,770 sq km; Lebanon: 10,400 sq km. Area, Country Comparison to the World, Central Intelligence Agency, The World Fact Book. Accessed: 01-02-2012

<sup>58</sup> For data on GDP calculated at PPP in current international billion US dollars for 1991 see: **Iran: 286.0762**; Saudi Arabia: 253.8417; Turkey: 250.3011; Egypt: 138.9032; Israel: 68.4406; Syria: 29.4709; Lebanon: 17.4561; Jordan: 7.9368; All data from World Development Indicators & Global Development Finance World dataBank, World Bank. Accessed: 01-02-2012

<sup>59</sup> For data on GDP per capita calculated at PPP in current international thousand US dollars for 1991 see: Saudi Arabia: 15227.67; Israel: 13829.18; Lebanon: 5768.58; **Iran: 5101.99**; Turkey: 4545.24; Egypt:

aforementioned states, the annual growth of Iranian GDP stood at approximately 13 percent, second only to Lebanon's GDP growth.<sup>60</sup> In terms of exports of goods and services as percentage of GDP, Iran was quite weak as data show this percentage to be only the 6<sup>th</sup> largest compared to indicators of the other countries mentioned above. It did not do particularly well in terms of FDI either.<sup>61</sup> However, its total stock of external debt was relatively low.<sup>62</sup> (World Bank [2012-2013]) In 1993-1994 the size of its military amounted to approximately 528.000 active duty personnel in its regular forces and the number of reserves amounted to 350.000.<sup>63</sup> (Cordesman [1994]: p. 29.) Though Iran's military forces used, by and large, outdated hardware, its conventional and asymmetric capabilities, as well as its manpower still made it a relevant military power. (See: Cordesman [1994]) *In a relative sense, Iran's economic power and formidable conventional military capabilities together with its large territory and significant population size definitely made it one of the most powerful states in the region in 1991.*

These are only *some* material variables which obviously do not reflect the overall global and regional position of either the US or Iran. In Iran's case, the most important additional dimension of its influence is the fact that it is deeply embedded in its own region. A helpful concept for providing a more accurate picture of Iranian influence is "latent political leverage".<sup>64</sup> (See: McAdam [1999]: p. 37.; quoted in Banks

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2396.85; Syria: 2322.34; Jordan: 2238.87; All data from World Development Indicators & Global Development Finance, World dataBank, World Bank. Accessed: 01-02-2012

<sup>60</sup> For data on GDP growth (annual %) for 1991 see: Lebanon: 38.2; **Iran: 12.59**; Saudi Arabia: 9.1; Syria: 7.9; Israel: 7.7; Jordan: 1.82; Egypt: 1.08; Turkey: 0.72. All data from World Development Indicators & Global Development Finance World dataBank, World Bank. Accessed: 01-02-2012

<sup>61</sup> For data on export of goods and services as percentage of GDP for 1991 see: Jordan: 59.46; Saudi Arabia: 38.57; Israel: 29.88; Egypt: 27.82; Syria: 24.41; **Iran: 14.97**; Turkey: 13.84; Lebanon: 13.21. For data on net inflows of FDI (balance of payments, current million US dollars) for 1991 see: Turkey: 810.0000; Israel: 345.6000; Egypt: 253.0000; Saudi Arabia: 160.0000; Syria: 54.0000; **Iran: 22.5900**; Jordan: -11.8874; Lebanon: *no available data for 1991*. All data from World Development Indicators & Global Development Finance World dataBank, World Bank. Accessed: 01-02-2012

<sup>62</sup> For 1991 data on total external debt stocks (total, current million US dollars) see: Turkey: 50873.4800; Egypt: 32625.0950; Syria: 19291.5860; **Iran: 11330.0380**; Jordan: 9700.2600; Lebanon: 1562.5900; Saudi Arabia: *no available data for 1991*. All data from World Development Indicators & Global Development Finance World dataBank, World Bank. Accessed: 01-02-2012 The relatively low level of Iranian debt was partly due to Khomeini Ayatollah's economic principle which regarded debt as "un-Islamic." The author wished to use data on external debt stocks as percentage of GNI here, but no such data were available for 1991. Thus, the author used data on total external debt stocks, which is not as informative as the other one when one wishes to assess the relative position of a given state. However, the thesis will apply data on external debt stocks as percentage of GNI in assessing the regional balance of economic power in the Middle East under the Bush and Obama administrations, as those data were available for the years 2003 and 2009. (See the chapters on the Bush and Obama administrations.)

<sup>63</sup> Cordesman uses data of the 1993–1994 Military Balance of IISS.

<sup>64</sup> The concept is used by social scientist Doug McAdam, although in a totally different context and sense. See: Doug McAdam [1999]: "Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970." The University of Chicago Press, Chicago. p. 37. McAdam is also referenced by Angela M. Banks in a work on the relationship between participatory systems and the constitutional process in post-conflict



[2007]: p. 131.) “This is demonstrated by its cultural and religious ties to Iraq and Afghanistan. It is a major player in the Gulf in a position capable of controlling the Strait of Hormuz. It is also an important player in Afghanistan. It also has ties to Hamas and Hezbollah, which make it an important political actor in the Arab-Israeli peace process.” (Balogh [2011a]: pp. 2-3.) Its oil and gas reserves obviously add to its relevance as a regional player.

How does the relative global and regional position of the US, as well as Iran explain their foreign policies from 1991 to 2000? The structural dimension of Neoclassical Realism establishes that states pursue power (and security). In the post-Cold War era it was natural for the US to extend its influence in the Middle East in order to (re)shape the regional political landscape according to its interests. Aware of its overwhelming power and military force, Washington believed it could easily exclude Iran from regional arrangements and it could just as easily handle possible negative consequences. By the same token, of course, Iran was also a state which pursued power (and security) according to its own national interests. The structural element in Neoclassical Realism suggests that “power can only be countered by power”, thus, Iran exerted its influence to oppose Washington’s will. It had the resources and tools to do so and, therefore, it contributed to the undermining of the peace process. On one level, the US-Iran “collision” is the consequence of *structural laws* which are manifested in the opposing national interests of both states.

A further empirical observation also reinforces the strategic blowback hypothesis. As the policy of dual containment could not reach its original goals and Iran managed to break out of its Israeli-US “cage” through Khatami’s rapprochement with Arab countries, Tehran did not feel threatened and cornered anymore. This led to toning down the rhetoric on the Arab-Israeli peace process and decreasing support for Palestinian rejectionist groups. As structural realities (détente between Arab countries and Iran) were shifting the balance of power in Iran’s favor, Iran gave up the aggressive support of groups aiming to undermine the peace process. This underscores the dangers of isolating Iran and it emphasizes that in case the Islamic Republic feels secure, it does not perceive the need stop Israel and Arab countries from reaching a peace agreement.

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states. Thus, like that of McAdams, it is also a work outside the discipline of International Relations. However, the author found the expression and the concept to be useful for the dissertation. See: Angela M. Banks [2007]: “Challenging Political Boundaries in Post-Conflict States.” *University of Pennsylvania Journal of International Law* Vol. 29. Iss. 1. p. 131. <http://www.law.upenn.edu/journals/jil/articles/volume29/issue1/Banks29U.Pa.J.Int%27IL.105%282007%29.pdf> Accessed: 13-10-2010

*Peace built on the exclusion of Iran will fail, while peace organized around the inclusion of Tehran has a realistic chance of being realized. This confirms that aggressive US policies based on isolating Iran from regional arrangements are counterproductive.*

These factors, however, provide only one part of the picture. Neoclassical Realism tells us that structural realities are important but only the addition of sub-systemic variables can provide the analyst with an accurate picture of reality. Thus, on a different level, the US-Iran confrontation was due to sub-systemic (domestic) factors. One such factor was the “peace strategy” of Washington, which thought of Arab-Israeli peace as more important than anything else in the region. This morally justifiable “obsession”, however, led Washington to lose sight of a significant segment of Middle Eastern realities. This corresponded with the strategy of the Rabin government, which, for entirely different reasons, saw Arab-Israel peace as the *sine qua non* of its foreign and security policy. Thus, the government of Israel and its US supporters (most notably AIPAC) persuaded Washington to adopt its threat perception. Iran, on the other hand, felt isolated, thus, it disrupted policies and actions aimed at undermining its regional position.

This leads one to the next sub-systemic variable – domestic constituencies. The all-time president of the US must walk a very fine line when it comes to dealing with Israel. The “special relationship” is a sensitive issue in US domestic politics. AIPAC, of course, draws on this, but even without AIPAC, a number of different US constituencies (e.g. Christian Evangelicals) consider US support for Israel as an unquestionable maxim. These opinions even feed into the process of presidential elections. Political actors have to take into consideration that not supporting Israel may lead to decreasing popularity with voters. The “pro-peace” Rabin government also had to push for peace in order to demonstrate the results of its “policy of peace” before the 1996 elections. President Rafsanjani, on the other hand, had to deal with his own radicals. His constructive initial attitude became increasingly costly as Iranian hawks demanded a tougher stance against Israel and the “Great Satan.” In each case, systemic constraints were linked to domestic ones.

Government “intricacies” and strategies have been described and analyzed above, however, the issue of personalities has not been addressed yet. President Clinton’s willingness to engage in dialogue was a positive condition for facilitating peace talks. He also had a “hesitant political style” as noted by William Quandt.

(Quandt [2001]: p. 376.) The president possessed what John Dumbrell calls “contextual intelligence” - the ability to see the interplay between domestic and international factors. (Dumbrell [2009]: p. 165; p. 171.) ) Clinton obviously understood the intricacies of Middle Eastern politics and the linkage between domestic politics and foreign policies. Thus, he refused to go against all odds and confront the Israeli lobby, as well as Congress, or change the strategy and set in motion a policy based on dialogue with Iran. It is also noted in the literature that Warren Christopher had a rather hostile view of Iran because of his personal experience with that country as a negotiator during the Iranian hostage crisis. (Fayazmanesh [2008]: p. 4; p. 73.; Katouzian-Shahidi [2008]: p. 110.) At the State Department, Dennis Ross was not absolutely sure that the Clinton administration’s approach to the Middle East was appropriate, but others (Daniel Kurtzer, Aaron Miller and Robert Malley)<sup>65</sup> thought it was absolutely wrong. (Indyk [2009]: p. 24.) The personalities, personal views and experience of these key people obviously played a significant role in the outcomes analyzed above.

The final sub-systemic variable to be analyzed is the issue of perceptions. This factor is closely intertwined with previous sub-systemic as well as systemic variables. The US perceived that it was the sole super power in the world. It believed it could do anything. Israel perceived that it would be isolated once a détente between the US and Iran got under way, thus, it was determined to stop it. Iran also perceived the possibility of losing its seat at the “regional table”, thus, it launched a full-fledged counter-offensive to stop that from happening.

The period leading up to and following the Oslo Accords is a tragedy of missed opportunities from Washington’s perspective. A less aggressive posture could have initiated at least some kind of confidence building process. *Overall, the mixture of the above variables explain and provide strong evidence of the strategic blowback effect between the 1991 Gulf War and the beginning of the second intifada.*

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<sup>65</sup> Kurtzer served as the ambassador to Egypt from 1997 to 2001. Before that, he served at in the State Department in various positions as part of Clinton’s “peace team.” (See: Kurtzer-Lasensky [2008] p. xi.); Aaron Miller served as an advisor for a number of secretaries of state on Arab-Israeli affairs and issues related to negotiating and he also served as Dennis Ross’s deputy at the Special Middle East Coordinator’s office. (See: Indyk [2009]: p. 24.); Robert Malley served on the NSC and he was responsible for issues related to the Arab-Israeli peace process. (See: Indyk, *Ibid.*)

## 1.2. The Policy of Dual Containment

Containment is deeply rooted in US foreign policy traditions. The father of the containment concept is generally considered to be George F. Kennan who is originally said to have coined the term in 1946-1947. The *Long Telegram*, as it came to be known, was a diplomatic cable wrote by Kennan as a diplomat stationed in Moscow. It focused on Soviet fears, perceptions and uncertainties, and it outlined a strategy of countering the Soviet Union by force. (*The Charge in the Soviet Union (Kennan) to the Secretary of State*. February 22. [1946]).<sup>66</sup> A year later it was published in the journal *Foreign Affairs*, titled “The Sources of Soviet Conduct” under Kennan’s alias, “X.” He put forward that “[...] the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.” (Kennan [1947]; p. 575.) Ever since then, containment has been one of the “mantras” of US foreign and security policy and US strategic thought.

The famous historian of the Cold War, John Lewis Gaddis gave a broad definition of the concept: “[...] to prevent the Soviet Union from using the power and position it won as a result of [World War II. – *added by author, I.B.*] to reshape the postwar international order [...]. (Gaddis [1982]: p. 4.)<sup>67</sup> However, this definition is too vague and general for judging the policy of dual containment. Robert Art’s explanation of the term is equally general in nature: [containment] “aims to hold the line against a specific aggressor that either threatens American interests in a given region or that strives for world hegemony.” (See Art [2003]: p. 83. also quoted in Yetiv [2008]: p. 91.) Most definitions provided by most of the literature examined here are just as sketchy. Containment was in essence a strategy based on the use of every US national asset (political, economic, military, soft power) available to keep the Soviet Union from

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<sup>66</sup> John Lewis Gaddis notes that Kennan had used the term “at least once” before the publication of the 1947 Foreign Affairs article in front of an audience in the State Department in September, 1946. See: Gaddis [1982]; p. 4.

<sup>67</sup> The concept was put into practice by President Harry S. Truman by introducing what later came to be known as the “Truman doctrine” on March 12, 1947 during a speech in front of Congress. (*Special Message to the Congress on Greece and Turkey*. March 12. [1947]) This political statement was then complemented by an economic strategy for the recovery of Europe. The Marshall Plan was announced at Harvard University by then secretary of state George C. Marshall on June 5, 1947. (See: *The “Marshall Plan” speech at Harvard University*, June 5. [1947]) Due to limits of space, the author will not elaborate on the details of the history of containment or the massive political and historical debate it provoked (and still provokes). For excellent assessments of the topic see: Anderson [2008]; Chamberlin [1953]; Deibel-Gaddis [1986]; Deibel [2007]: p. 328 in particular; Gati [1974]; for a grand strategic narrative see Kennedy [1991] and Kennedy [1987]; Kissinger [1994]; for a cognitive social psychological approach see: Lars [1985]; Layne [2006]; Leffler [1992]; Lind [2006]. Rees [1967]; Spalding 2006; Wildavsky [1983].

expanding its influence. Thus, the author will define containment regarding Iran as follows:

**US efforts as well as concerted efforts by the US and its allies to globally counter and roll back Iranian political, economic, military and soft power influence by political, economic, military and soft power means.**

This definition is acceptable because it distinguishes between certain types of US assets. This is important due to the different dimensions of US containment policies towards Iran and it strengthens the grand strategic dimension of the concept, since grand strategy is based on the application of all of the nation's tools to achieve specific goals. It also qualifies as an aggressive policy according to the definition of "aggressive US policies" in the theoretical chapter of the dissertation. (See hypothesis 1 above).<sup>68</sup> Thus, the author has to look for evidence of blowback effects, which prove that dual containment was, to a certain extent, counterproductive.

Analyzing the dual version of the containment concept, it is quite surprising how little has been written on the Iranian dimension of the policy. Most of the literature focuses on US policy on Iraq and only a few recent works deal specifically with the Iranian aspects of dual containment. (Fayazmanesh [2008]: p. 1.) The recent surge of works focusing on the containment of Iran, however, led to a lively scholarly debate on the concept. This debate will be elaborated in the following analysis of the concept.

The policy of dual containment was officially announced on May 18, 1993, by Martin Indyk, at the time Special Assistant to President Clinton and Senior Director for Near East and South Asia at the US National Security Council. (*The Clinton Administration's Approach to the Middle East*. May 18. [1993]); see also Berger [2008]: p. 85.). The announcement sums up the essence of the dual containment strategy as follows:

"A short-hand way of encapsulating the Clinton administration strategy is thus: "dual containment" of Iraq and Iran in the east; promotion of Arab-Israeli peace in the west; backed by energetic efforts to stem the spread of weapons of mass destruction and promote a vision of a more democratic and prosperous region for all the peoples of the Middle East." (*The Clinton Administration's Approach to the Middle East*. May 18. [1993]: p. 3.)

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<sup>68</sup> It should be stressed that containment is not labeled "aggressive" arbitrarily, thus, it fits the framework of the author's hypothesis. In fact, the essence of containment is some type of confrontation, which makes containment an aggressive policy regardless of the definitions developed in the theoretical chapter.

The interesting part of Indyk's assessment was the notion that Washington was so powerful that it did not need either Iraq or Iran to balance one against the other:

"Accordingly, we do not accept the argument that we should continue the old balance of power game, building up one to balance the other. We reject that approach not only because its bankruptcy was demonstrated in Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. We reject it because of a clear-headed assessment of the antagonism that both regimes harbor towards the United States and its allies in the region. And we reject it because we don't need to rely on one to balance the other." (*Ibid.*)

Thus, the administration did not want to continue the old practice of balancing one country against the other – which was the official policy when the US supported Iraq against Iran in the Iran-Iraq war. (Magyarics [2000]: p. 379.) It is also worth noting the apparent difference in the Clinton administration's approach to Iraq and Iran. Iraq's regime was considered

"[...] a criminal regime, beyond the pale of international society and, in our judgment, irredeemable. [...] We will not be satisfied with Saddam's overthrow before we agree to lift sanctions. Rather, we will want to be satisfied that any successor government complies fully with all UN resolutions." (*The Clinton Administration's Approach to the Middle East*. May 18. [1993]: p. 3.)

In Iran's case, however, Indyk's words were somewhat softer after listing US grievances with regard to Tehran:

"I should emphasize that the Clinton administration is not opposed to Islamic government in Iran. Indeed we have excellent relations with a number of Islamic governments. Rather, we are firmly opposed to these specific aspects of the Iranian regime's behavior, as well as its abuse of the human rights of the Iranian people. We do not seek a confrontation but we will not normalize relations with Iran until and unless Iran's policies change, across the board." (*Ibid.* p. 4.)

The final part of the speech ("*Pursuing Middle East Peace*") provides a hint to the broader political context of the Clinton administration's strategy of creating peace in the region. (See previous chapters; *Ibid.* pp. 4-6).

The other clear articulation of the policy came in the form of an article in *Foreign Affairs* in 1994 by Clinton administration National Security Adviser Anthony Lake.<sup>69</sup> (Lake [1994a]; Lake [1994b]) The text applies expressions and concepts such as "*outlaw states*" and "*backlash states*." (Lake [1994a]: pp. 1-2) Backlash states are essentially dictatorships, which suppress rights of their people. Cuba, North Korea, Iran,

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<sup>69</sup> The article was also published separately in booklet format by the Executive Office of the President in 1994. The author used this one in the dissertation. See: Lake [1994a]

Iraq and Libya are specifically mentioned as states belonging to this strand. “These nations exhibit chronic inability to engage constructively with the outside world, and they do not function effectively in alliances even with those like-minded.” (Lake [1994a]; p. 1.; on the Lake article see also: Litwak [2000]: p. pp. 60-61.; Hunter [2010]: p. 51.; Dumbrell [2009]: p. 153.) After defining the group, Lake moves on to set out the administration’s policy:

“As the sole superpower, the United States has a special responsibility for developing a strategy to neutralize, contain and, through selective pressure, perhaps eventually transform these backlash states into constructive members of the international community. [...] We seek to contain the influence of these states, sometimes by isolation, sometimes through pressure, sometimes through diplomatic and economic measures. [...] The United States is also actively engaged in unilateral and multilateral efforts to restrict their military and technological capabilities.” (Lake [1994a]: p. 2.)

Then, the text outlines the premises of dual containment (“*The Logic of Dual Containment*”). (*Ibid.* pp. 3-8.) This reinforces Indyk’s assessment that the US is powerful enough to counter the influence of both states instead of balancing one against the other. Both powers are regarded as hostile regimes, which need to be checked. The article also establishes the broader regional context, i.e. that both countries need to be contained in order to keep them from intervening in the Arab-Israeli peace process. Lake does point out that the approach distinguishes between Iraq and Iran. The text is quite aggressive on Iraq, and besides pressuring Baghdad to comply with resolutions of the UN Security Council (UNSC), it even goes as far as implicitly advocating regime change by providing support to opposition groups. On the other hand, better relations with Tehran are not entirely impossible according to Lake’s analysis. It emphasizes that the US is only worried about the Iranian government and not the people. He also recognizes that there is no multilateral framework for sanctions as in Iraq’s case, thus, containing Iran is an entirely different initiative. (*Ibid.*; pp. 3-9.; see also: Berger [2008]: p. 85.; Hunter [2010]: p. 50.; Litwak [2000]: p. 2.; pp. 60-61.)

Finally, the other important primary source on the policy of dual containment is the 1995 National Security Strategy (NSS) – *The National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*. The document defines the military dimension of the dual containment policy:

“In Southwest Asia, the United States remains focused on deterring threats to regional stability, particularly from Iraq and Iran as long as those states pose a threat to US interests, to other states in the region, and to their own citizens. We have in place a dual containment strategy aimed at these two states, and will maintain our long-standing presence which has been centered on naval vessels in and near the Persian Gulf and prepositioned combat equipment. Since Operation Desert Storm, temporary deployments of land-based aviation forces, ground forces and amphibious units have supplemented our posture in the Gulf region.” (NSS [1995]: p. 30.)

The document also deals with Iran specifically:

“Our policy toward Iran is aimed at changing the behavior of the Iranian government in several key areas, including Iran’s efforts to obtain weapons of mass destruction and missiles, its support for terrorism and groups that oppose the peace process, its attempts to undermine friendly governments in the region and its dismal human rights record. We remain willing to enter into an authoritative dialogue with Iran to discuss the differences between us.” (*Ibid.* p. 31.)

Official texts of the policy of dual containment highlight some of the most contentious issues of the concept: its nature, its effectiveness, its tools and goals in general. First of all, it should be noted that there seems to be a wide consensus among scholars that the dual containment plan was not a new initiative at all – in fact, it was a policy that has been in place at least since George H. W. Bush’s presidency. (Hunter [2010]: p. 50.; Litwak [2000]: pp. 57-59; Yetiv [2008]: p. 91.) Others point out that the logic of dual containment has always been implicit in the US approach to the Gulf ever since the fall of the Shah. Professor John Dumbrell of Durham University notes that dual containment was different to earlier policies in the Gulf only in that it relied on US military superiority. (Dumbrell [2009]: p. 153.; Fayazmanesh [2008]: p. 1.; Indyk [2009]: p. 34.; Marr [2008]: p. 14.; p. 17.; Rostoványi [2004]: p. 207.; Alikhani [2000]: p. ix.)

There is a lack of such consensus on the exact nature and goals of the policy. Indyk notes that even though the policy reflected a unified approach to tackling problems stemming from tensions between Iraq, Iran and the US, still, the strategy was tailored to reflect differences between the Iraqi and Iranian cases of containment. Indeed, Anthony Lake’s article spells out clearly that ““Dual containment” does not mean duplicate containment.” (Lake [1994a]: p. 5.) Martin Indyk also notes the differentiated approach the administration took: Iraq was to be contained through pushing Baghdad to comply with multilateral UNSC resolutions, whereas Iran was pressurized through unilateral US arrangements. Indyk thought of containing Iraq as “aggressive containment” and Iran was seen as being checked through “active



containment". (Indyk [2009]: pp. 40-41) In Iraq's case, pursuing regime change was a possibility, but in Iran's case the objective was not to *change* the regime, instead, the goal was to *alter* the *behavior* of the regime. (*Ibid.*; O'Sullivan [2003]: p. 75.; Berger [2008]: pp. 85-86.) Indeed, others note as well that containment of Iran was more "limited", as it was based on laws passed in the US and aimed at changing certain dimensions of Iran's policies. (Dumbrell *Ibid.*; Litwak [2000]: p. 59.; Marr [2008]: p. 18.;) Still others view the concept in a different light. They believe that dual containment was just as tough against Iran as against Iraq and its implicit and long term goal was to change the Iranian regime too. (Fayazmanesh [2008]: p. 78.; Yetiv [2008]: p. 100; p. 102.) Hunter even notes the pursuit of regime change by some elements of the US national security establishment. (Hunter [2010]: p. 56.)

A similar debate has seen light regarding whether dual containment was status quo oriented or not. Some indicate that it was purely aimed at "holding" existing lines in the region (Tyler [2009]: p. 408; p. 429.) On the other hand, Martin Indyk notes that "dual containment was one branch of a broader strategy designed to generate a dramatic shift in the regional balance of power that we hoped would result from achievement of comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace." (Indyk [2009]: p. 43.) Another account points out that the policy sought to "transform the Middle East's political landscape" (Hunter [2010]: p. 50.)

The structure of dual containment was built on the premise of decoupling Iran from a possibly successful Arab-Israeli peace process. (Dumbrell [2009]: p. 146.; pp. 149-151.; Freedman [2008]: p. 298; p. 300; Indyk [2009]: p. 43.; Mattair [2008]: p. 68.; Tarock [1997]: p. 218.; Yetiv [2008]: pp. 104-105.) Phebe Marr, a historian of Iraq distinguishes only two different dimensions of dual containment: economic and military. Thomas R. Mattair, executive director of the Middle East Policy Council also highlights the military component of the policy. (Marr [2008]: p. 17; Mattair [2008]: p. 68.). These two dimensions (economic and military) could be interpreted as having political significance by themselves, however, they do not cover various other political efforts by Washington to keep Iran checked in the region. The economic dimension obviously refers to sanctions and the military component covers Washington's military presence in the Gulf since the 1991 Gulf War. Thus, the author argues that dual containment basically had three different layers: *political, economic and military*.<sup>70</sup> This

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<sup>70</sup> Adam Tarock distinguishes between an internal and an external dimension of containing Iran. The internal dimension refers to support for Iranian opposition groups, while the external aspect of the policy

view is also shared by Kenneth Pollack who distinguishes among the same areas of containment.<sup>71</sup> (Pollack [2008]: pp. 372-375.) The structure of this chapter follows this categorization.

Political containment took many forms under the Clinton administration. Washington tried to persuade as many of its (mostly European) allies as possible to support implementation of economic sanctions against Iran. Even though the administration never fully succeeded in this, it did invest considerable political energy into such efforts. (See: Fayazmanesh [2008]: pp. 77-78.; O’Sullivan [2003]: pp. 53-55; p. 88-90; Litwak [2000]: p.4.) The Clinton government also tried to use the Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK), an exile opposition group considered a terrorist organization, against Iran.<sup>72</sup> (Fayazmanesh [2008]: pp. 79-85.; Tarock [1997]: p. 216.) Another example of political containment was applying pressure on Azerbaijan to leave Iran out of an international energy consortium. The project aimed at constructing a pipeline in the region and the most economical way of transportation would have been to make the pipeline run through Iran. Instead, the US pushed Baku to exclude Iran and have the pipeline go through the port of Ceyhan in Turkey. (Fayazmanesh [2008]: p. 86.; Freedman [2008]: p. 303.) This resulted in the construction of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline partly based on circumventing Iran. Furthermore, isolating Iran would have meant decoupling Syria from Iran. This would have resulted in a loss of strategic significance to Tehran.<sup>73</sup> (See: Indyk [2009]: p 43; p. 151.; Tyler [2009]: p. 447.; Freedman [2008]: p. 298.; on political isolation as part of a broader containment strategy see: Yetiv [2008]: p. 101.) The other important dimension of political containment was Clinton’s support for CIA covert operations against the Islamic Republic. These mostly included propaganda measures, which aimed at destabilizing the regime. (Yetiv 2008; p. 102.) Such a program was publicly debated in the US Congress, which was then used as an Iranian propaganda tool against the US. (Freedman [2008]: p. 303.) President Clinton signed the bill in 1995 – the law increased CIA’s financial resources by \$ 20 million specifically for a “covert anti Iran program.” (Fayazmanesh [2008]: p. 78.; Tarock

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refers to trying to change the international policies of the Iranian government. Tarock [1997]: pp. 216-217.

<sup>71</sup> Pollack lists the following areas specifically: military, economic and diplomatic. See: Pollack [2008]: pp. 373-374.

<sup>72</sup> Officially, even the US considers it a terrorist organization. See: *Current List of Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations, Foreign Terrorist Organizations*, January 27, 2012, Bureau of Counterterrorism, State Department. <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm> Accessed: 02-23-20102

<sup>73</sup> This has always been the goal of U.S. foreign policy in the region since the end of the Cold War. However, the U.S. could never really realize this goal.

[1997]: p. 216.)

Analyzing economic sanctions requires one to find an appropriate definition for “sanctions” first. Here, the author will rely on Hossein Alikhani’s work on US sanctions against Iran. Hence, economic sanctions are taken to mean:

**“nonmilitary actions of the United States that adversely affect the flow of goods, services, or financial assets to a specific foreign country in order to penalize or coerce a country for political purposes or to express US displeasure with that country’s actions.”** (Alikhani [2000]: p. 25.)<sup>74</sup>

As noted by Alikhani, this approach is comprehensive enough to account for most US sanctions measures during the tenure of the Clinton administration. It should be noted, however, that “nonmilitary” will be taken to mean military actions not of an offensive nature because the author argues that dual containment did have a military dimension, but this did not amount to large and sustained military operations against Iran. (See below.)

Economic enforcement measures took the form of unilateral economic sanctions. A number of new measures were added to the economic sanctions already in force<sup>75</sup> as the Clinton administration took office. The interesting aspect of sanctions is that US-Iran relations were not particularly bad at the beginning of the 90’s in a relative sense, as noted in the previous chapter. There was even a brief thaw in relations between the two entities just after the Gulf War. (O’Sullivan [2003]: p. 52.) Iran and the Gulf states were also experiencing a brief détente during the same period. (Tarock [1997]: p.

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<sup>74</sup> For an excellent overview of other possible definitions see: “Definition” in Alikhani [2000]: pp. 23-25.

<sup>75</sup> This included the following:

- As a reaction to the taking of hostages at the US Embassy in Tehran, President Carter signed executive order 12 170 which froze some \$ 12 billion worth of Iranian assets and banned all US bound Iranian imports on November 14, 1979.
- In April 1980 the Carter administration suspended all trade and travel between the two countries – only humanitarian aid was allowed to reach Iran.
- As a consequence of the Algiers Accord the US ended the freeze on most Iranian financial assets and the trade embargo was also suspended on January 19, 1981.
- In 1984 Iran was categorized as a sponsor of terrorism which led to the halting of arms- related shipments. The US also imposed controls on shipments of dual-use goods as well as a ban on economic assistance to Iran.
- In 1987 Iran was categorized as narcotics-trafficking country and the Reagan administration strengthens sanctions already introduced.
- October 29, 1987. The Reagan government suspends imports from Iran for the support of terrorism.
- The 1992 Iran-Iraq Non-proliferation Act: this act basically strengthens the 1984 sanctions. It also includes measures against companies and persons involved in Iranian conventional weapons programs. It was amended in 1996 to include provisions which call for sanctions against any government which supports the development of Iranian weapons of mass destruction. All of this was taken from O’Sullivan [2003]: p. 50.

204.; pp. 220-221.) Thus, Iran appeared to be more constructive than before. This fact and Clinton's constant readiness for dialogue could have meant the beginning of a new phase in US-Iran ties. (See: Indyk [2009]: p. 32.) However, the new Israeli government had a more negative perception of Iran.

Yitzhak Shamir's Likud party lost the June 1992 Israeli elections to the Israeli Labor Party led by Shimon Peres<sup>76</sup> and Yitzhak Rabin<sup>77</sup>. Rabin and Peres wished to pursue peace with Arab countries. However, they feared that potential peace with Arab states would devalue Israel's strategic significance to Washington. This would have been reinforced if the US and Iran moved towards normalizing their relations as a result of the brief *détente* mentioned above. Thus, Israel redefined its threat perceptions and foreign policy priorities to portray Iran as the gravest threat in the region (see chapter on the Oslo process). However, Iran was not a significant threat at the time. Iranian military spending in 1991 amounted to \$ 6.7 billion whereas Saudi spending stood at more than \$ 40 billion in the same year. President Rafsanjani even cut spending to \$ 4.2 billion by 1992. Israel, however, spent \$ 8.7 billion on its military, but its population stood at four million and Iran was a country of sixty million at the time. This was when a possible Iranian nuclear weapons capability was inserted into the Israeli political discourse by the Rabin government and this was the context in which the US policy of dual containment was introduced. Thus, the latter policy was at least partly a result of Israel's and AIPAC's efforts to define Iran as the most important regional threat. (See: Parsi [2007]: pp. 158-170.; on Israel's anti-Iran campaign see also Fayazmanesh [2008]: p. 3.; Menashri [2001]: p. 295.)

A number of authors note Israel's influence over US Iran policy with regard to sanctions against Tehran in particular. Even Martin Indyk, the father of the policy of dual containment notes the influence Israel had on US foreign policy considerations: *"So for the first time, but by no means the last, the Clinton administration took an Israeli idea and turned it into an American proposal to make it more palatable to the Arabs."* (Indyk [2009]: p. 27.) Israel and its lobby groups in particular wielded considerable influence over sanctions legislation in the Congress. AIPAC was quite successful in this regard. (See: Fayazmanesh [2008]: pp. 72-73.; Ansari [2008]: p. 112.; O'Sullivan [2003]: p. 53-54.; p. 90.; Yetiv [2008]: pp. 104-105.; and see "The Effect of

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<sup>76</sup> President of Israel since 2007 and former Prime Minister from 1995–1995, from 1984 to 1986 as well as in a short period in 1977.

<sup>77</sup> Prime Minister of Israel from 1986 to 1992. (1992–1995)

Lobbying” in Alikhani [2000]; pp. 177-203.; Mearsheimer-Walt [2007]; Clawson [1998]: pp. 87-88.) Professor Dumbrell, however, notes that Israeli influence over sanctions and US legislation has been somewhat “overstated” in the literature. (See: Dumbrell [2009]: p. 150.) Nonetheless, it is probably fair to say that Israel had considerable, but not decisive influence over sanctions legislation. After all, the final decisions were brought by the US government and legislature, no matter how it was influenced. This, of course, does not take away from the fact that AIPAC proved very much adept at exerting influence and implementing its agenda.

The political context of the first sanction introduced by the Clinton administration against Iran is telling when one thinks of Hypothesis 1a (see chapter on Hypothesis 1a). The subsidiary of the American oil firm Conoco was granted a \$ 1 billion deal by Iran in March 1995. However, Israel (and AIPAC in particular) would not accept a thaw between the US and Iran unless Iran altered its policies. In order to avoid starting a long and difficult legislative process, President Clinton signed an executive order instead on March 15, 1995. (Hunter [2010]: pp. 52-53.; Fayazmanesh [2008]: p. 86. Litwak [2000]: p. 67.; Mattair [2008]: p. 70.). The irony of this is that the Rafsanjani government thought of the deal with Conoco as a “gesture of goodwill”, but the US bluntly rejected it. (*Ibid*; See: O’Sullivan [2003]: p. 54.; Freedman [2008]: p. 302.; Parsi [2007]: pp. 186-187.) Executive order 12957 prevented actors from investing into the development of the Iranian petroleum industry. The main reasons provided by the administration were Iran’s support of terrorism, efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction and meddling in the Arab-Israeli peace process. (O’Sullivan [2003]: p. 50.; Executive Order 12957 of March 15. [1995]) The order basically “prohibited US citizens and companies from financing, supervising, and managing projects in Iran.” (Fayazmanesh [2008]: p. 86.)

On April 30, 1995, President Clinton announced the strengthening of sanctions before the World Jewish Congress. (Mattair [2008]: p. 70.) On May 6, 1995, the US government suspended all economic ties with Iran. (O’Sullivan [2003]: p. 50.) This resulted in another executive order (Executive Order 12959), which prohibited “all US trade, trade financing, loans and financial services to Iran.” (Mattair [2008]: p. 70; p. 85.; Executive Order 12959 of May 6. [1995])

On April 24, 1996 the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 became law. This banned every financial transaction with Iran (and all states considered sponsors of terrorism,) as well as aid to countries, which provide Iran help with its

military programs. (O’Sullivan [2003]: p. 50.; p. 55.; Mattair [2008]: p. 70.; Public Law 104-132 Apr. 24. [1996])

A more controversial act came only at the end of the summer of 1996. In 1995, the republican Senator of New York state, Alphonse D’Amato introduced a bill, which was passed by the senate on December 20, 1995. This required foreign firms to be sanctioned by the US if they invested more than \$ 40 million per annum in the petroleum sector of Iran (Foreign Oil Sanctions Act of 1995). (Hunter [2010]: p. 53.) D’Amato was a staunch supporter of Israel and a reliable ally of various Israeli lobbies, most notably AIPAC. (O’Sullivan [2003]: p. 54.; Fayazmanesh [2008]: p.4.) This act was then extended by Senator Edward Kennedy to include Libya and it became law on August 5, 1996 under the title of The Iran Libya Sanctions Act of 1996 (ILSA). (Hunter [2010]: p. 53; Fayazmanesh [2008]: p. 77; Public Law 104-172-Aug. 5. [1996]) In fact, the case is a testament to the logic of Neoclassical Realism. The language of the actual bill was – in the words of Harvard University sanctions expert Meghan O’Sullivan – so “extreme” that the Clinton government started negotiations with Congress to “soften” the text. This was partly due to “démarches delivered to the administration by European countries.” (O’Sullivan [2003]: pp. 54-55) AIPAC applied considerable pressure – Sasan Fayazmanesh of the California State University cites a report in the *Journal of Commerce* which suggested that despite the obvious difficulties ILSA caused for US corporations wishing to invest in Iran, the Clinton administration did not want a confrontation with AIPAC which is a “key to both media and political support.” (Quoted in Fayazmanesh [2008]: p. 75.) The Act itself mandated the president to apply at least two of six sanctions against firms, which invested more than \$ 20 million per year into the energy sector of the Iranian economy.<sup>78</sup> (O’Sullivan [2003]: pp. 54-55.; Public Law 104-172-Aug. 5. 1996])

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<sup>78</sup> The legislation mandates the president to use two of either of the following six alternatives against foreign firms “(entities, persons)” which invest more than \$ 20 million per annum into the Iranian energy sector: “*The sanctions menu (Section 6) includes (1) denial of Export-Import Bank loans, credits, or credit guarantees for US exports to the sanctioned entity; (2) denial of licenses for the US export of military or militarily-useful technology to the entity; (3) denial of US bank loans exceeding \$10 million in one year to the entity; (4) if the entity is a financial institution, a prohibition on its service as a primary dealer in US government bonds; and/or a prohibition on its serving as a repository for US government funds (each counts as one sanction); (5) prohibition on US government procurement from the entity; and (6) restriction on imports from the entity, in accordance with the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA, 50 U.S.C. 1701). In the original law, the President may waive the sanctions on Iran if the parent country of the violating firm agrees to impose economic sanctions on Iran (Section 4(c)) or if he certifies that doing so is important to the US national interest (Section 9(c)). It terminates application to Iran if Iran ceases its efforts to acquire WMD and is removed from the US list of state sponsors of terrorism.*” Katzman [2007]; p. 2.

This was the most criticized piece of legislation as it provoked fierce opposition from European allies. Furthermore, Europeans criticized US “hypocrisy”, since Washington tried to persuade allies to join the US in sanctioning Iran, but the US economy itself still maintained significant ties with the Islamic Republic. (O’Sullivan [2008]: p53-55; pp. 88-89.; Fayazmanesh [2008]: pp. 77-78) The original \$ 40 million threshold in the 1995 senate version of the act was reduced to \$ 20 million because European allies never supported the act.<sup>79</sup> (Katzman [2012a]: p. 2.) One of the first foreign entities that should have been sanctioned under ILSA was the TotalFina joint French-Italian consortium. The EU even threatened with measures at the WTO and, thus, the Clinton administration applied the waivers in ILSA in order to avoid sanctioning companies of European allies. In turn, the US expected those European states to introduce similar sanctions against Iran. (Becker-Nixon [2010]; Katzman [2007]: pp. 2-3.) Stuart E. Eizenstat, a former official of the US Department of Treasury in the Clinton administration pointed out that Iran was able to create tensions in the transatlantic relationship by seeking investments from European firms. (Becker-Nixon [2010]) Besides, a number of countries questioned the moral legitimacy of the US because dual containment was aimed at weakening countries due to their non-democratic nature and behavior, however, Washington had good relations with a number of non-democratic Arab states. (Richter [2008]: p. 209.) Indeed, Gulf allies were the ones who were relatively easily persuaded to accept and support (although to varying degrees) the policy of dual containment. (Fürtig [2008]: p. 129.) But even they had scruples about supporting US policies for fear of Iranian subversion in their own countries. (Rostoványi [2004]: p. 208.)

On August 17, 1997, President Clinton signed executive order 13059, which restricted Iran bound re-exports. This order highlighted the fact that most investment and trade activities between the US and Iran have to be suspended. (O’Sullivan [2008]: p. 50.; Executive Order 13059 of August 19. [1997]) The period between 1998 and 2000 saw a brief thaw in US-Iran relations and a number of sanctions were even lifted. (See

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<sup>79</sup> The original \$ 40 million sum was reduced to \$ 20 million a year after the introduction of the original sanctions. This is explained by Katzman as being a result of US allies not joining multilateral sanctions against Iran. (Katzman [20102] p. 2.) However, the explanation is confusing since a lower investment threshold means that less could be invested, which is a stricter rule of course. European countries’ problem was exactly ILSA and the threshold on investments – hence they were not interested in a lower threshold. The explanation to this contradiction could be that due to lack of European support for multilateral sanctions, the US had to find a way to squeeze the Iranian economy by itself since its allies were not willing to join in. The only way to make sanctions stricter in this situation was to make unilateral US arrangements more aggressive, which resulted in reducing the threshold.

the next chapter on the détente under the Khatami presidency.) Still, further sanctions were introduced in 2000. The next important sanctions measure was the Iran Nonproliferation Act, which became law on March 14, 2000. The legislation suspended the export of certain military technologies, particularly to countries which were found to have helped Iran with its military and weapons programs. (O’Sullivan [2008]: p. 51.; Public Law 106-178-Mar. 14. [2000])<sup>80</sup>

The effectiveness of sanctions<sup>81</sup> has been and still is hotly debated. One striking aspect of US sanctions policy is the fact that despite legislation to heavily restrict economic ties between the US and Iran, the value of trade between the two entities was still significant. Adam Tarock notes that the US became Iran’s third largest trade partner in 1994 “surpassing Italy and France”. (Menashri [2001]: p. 198; Freedman [2008]: pp. 302-303.; Tarock [1997]: p. 220.) Since most allies never really supported US unilateral arrangements (and ILSA in particular), enforcement was impossible. (Fayazmanesh [2008]: p. 78.; Freedman [2008]: p. 302.)

O’Sullivan establishes that even though sanctions did play a limited role in weakening the Iranian economy, this effect did not carry the kind of weight originally expected in Washington. Iran’s own economic problems and its debt service made sure that Iran had grave economic problems anyway.<sup>82</sup> In fact, the relatively bad domestic economic situation was only exacerbated by sanctions, but was not caused by them. Sanctions did not enforce a change in Iranian behavior. The only connection that could be made between sanctions and domestic economic instability is that sanctions did have

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<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, the US government did not allow US aircraft manufacturer Boeing to sell its products to Iran. See: Freedman [2009]

<sup>81</sup> A complex and thorough political economic analysis would be required to fully assess the effectiveness of sanctions. This, however, is not the goal of this dissertation. The point is to find out whether aggressive US strategies created blowback effects or not. Besides, most of the referenced literature does not really draw on deep economic analysis of the problem either – but their focus does not require them to do so either. Nonetheless, the efficacy of sanctions is a topic that cannot be ignored when assessing the Iran policy of the US, thus, the dissertation provides a limited and brief introduction to the topic, but since it is not the main focus of this thesis, it will not be elaborated on in detail. However, see the following works on the topic. Pape argues that sanctions cannot be effective: see Pape [1997]; Pape [1998]; Hufbauer et al [1990]; Tsebelis [1990]. Eaton and Engers have developed a model that measures the efficiency of sanctions based on how “tough” the sender and target are. [1992]. Podhoretz points out that economic sanctions only make the target country’s society suffer but generally do not accomplish their political goals. Podhoretz [2007]; Hovi, Huseby and Sprinz develop a model, which suggests that sanctions may actually work, when they are really implemented as opposed to only threatening with them. (Hovi-Huseby-Sprinz [2005])

<sup>82</sup> For data on total Iranian debt service on external debt for the period between 1993 and 2000 see: 1.803.267.000; 1994: 3.292.826.000; 1995: 5.721.209.000; 1996: 6.434.680.000; 1997: 6.221.714.000; 1998: 2.747.796.000; 1999: 3.881.241.000; 2000: 2.916.890.000. All data are given in current US dollars. Source: Iran, Islamic Republic, Debt Service on External Debt, Total, (TDS, current US\$) Index Mundi – World Bank, Global Development Finance. <http://www.indexmundi.com/facts/iran/debt-service-on-external-debt> Accessed: 23-02-2012.



an effect on inflation, which in turn influenced living standards. However, even this connection provides only a partial explanation to Iranian economic problems. When compared to the original political objectives of changing the regime's behavior, US sanctions were not successful. The reasons of ineffectiveness were the following:

- relatively minor economic influence;
- the domestic politics of Iran and the US;
- the unilateral nature of sanctions;
- hiatus of further tools to be combined with sanctions. (O'Sullivan [2003]; p. 75-76; pp. 77-78; pp. 81-89.)

They "[...] did have a notable impact [...] but were neither effective nor useful." O'Sullivan also points out that sanctions targeting Iran's military development were among the most effective ones, since Iran's military programs did slow down to a certain extent.<sup>83</sup> (*Ibid.* p. 88- 89.)

All in all, a consensus is reflected by the literature, that US unilateral sanctions against Iran have not been particularly effective. The extent to which they were is explained more or less by Iranian domestic economic problems as well as mismanagement and less by the introduction of US sanctions. Patrick Clawson's arguments are quite similar. He does contend that sanctions had a significant impact on the Iranian economy and armament programs, however, they have "*not persuaded Iran to change the behavior to which Washington objects.*" (Clawson [1998]: p. 94.) The introduction of sanctions came at a price. The US economy lost 3 billion US dollars as a result and even more as a consequence of reduced trade. The indirect political costs were significantly larger as sanctions also caused friction with allies and Russia. (Clawson [1998])

Having described the political and economic dimensions of dual containment, only the third aspect of the policy remains, which is military containment. The 1994 Lake article outlined that one of the goals of containing Iran was to restrict the country's

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<sup>83</sup> Iran's military expenditure did grow between 1993 and 2000 in relative terms, however, it was a relatively slow and gradual process. See data on Iranian military expenditure in percentage of GDP: 1993: 1.52 %; 1994: 2.36 %; 1995: 1.79%; 1996: 1.92 %; 1997: 2.13 %; 1998: 2.35 %; 1999: 2.97%; 2000: 3.68 %. All data are from: Islamic Republic of Iran, Military expenditure (% of GDP), World Development Indicators & Global Development Finance, World DataBank Beta, The World Bank. *No data were available for total military expenditure.*  
<http://databank.worldbank.org/Data/Views/VariableSelection/SelectVariables.aspx> Accessed: 24-02-2012

access to “military and technological capabilities” (Lake [1994a]: p. 2.). The military component of containing Iran was obviously built upon the US military presence in the Gulf as already noted above. This – at least according to some voices in the Pentagon – caused Iran to partially rebuild its forces. In order to prevent Iran from closing down the Strait of Hormuz, the US Navy activated its 5th fleet with headquarters in Bahrain. (Mattair [2008]: pp. 68-70; on the military component see Marr [2008]: p. 17.) Washington established a system of cooperative defense agreements in the region with Oman, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain in 1990. Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) followed suit in 1991, 1992 and 1994, respectively. Essentially, these were access agreements, which provided for close military cooperation between signatories.<sup>84</sup> (Hajjar [2002]: pp. 19-20.) According to the Arms Transfers Database of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the US exported some \$ 1049 million worth of arms to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain and the UAE altogether between 1993 and 1997. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were among the top fifteen arms recipients in the world between 1993 and 1997. (SIPRI [2012])<sup>85</sup> Thus, the military component of containment also included substantial arms sales to the region.

The political, economic and the military “tracks” obviously overlapped and complemented one another. This combination, however, did not really change Iranian policies, as noted above, and the policy drew criticism from many experts. One of the most referenced criticisms was published together with one of the basic texts of the policy. Gregory Gause III’s article was published in the same *Foreign Affairs* edition in which Anthony Lake’s article on confronting backlash states appeared. Gause’s main argument was that containing both Iraq and Iran could actually force the two states to form an alliance against the US. However, dialogue and engagement with Iran could be more successful in changing Tehran’s policies and containing Iraq at the same time. (Gause III. [1994]) Another authority on US Iran policy, Gary Sick put forth that despite all the sanctions, dual containment was not able to reach its original goals.<sup>86</sup>(Sick

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<sup>84</sup> Access in this context would mean basing rights military assets.

<sup>85</sup> All numbers based on SIPRI’s Arms Transfers Databases. The sum \$ 1049 is the result of the addition of the values of US exports to individual countries. All figures indicate sums in constant (1990) million US dollars. (Bahrain: 313; Kuwait: 2401; Oman: 70; Qatar: 0 – meaning less than 0.5 million US dollars; Saudi Arabia: 7212; UAE: 495) See: TIV of arms exports from USA, 1993-1997. In the period between 1993 and 1997 Saudi Arabia received some \$ 9076 million worth of arms and Kuwait received \$ 3033 million in arms deliveries. Saudi Arabia was the second and Kuwait was the 13 largest recipient of arms in the period. (All figures in constant 1990 US million dollars) TIV of arms imports to the top 50 largest importers, 1993-1997.

<sup>86</sup> Member of the US National Security Council responsible for Gulf affairs under the Carter

[1998]) Further criticism of the policy came from Brent Scowcroft, Zbigniew Brzezinski and Richard Murphy in the form of an article titled “Differentiated Containment” in *Foreign Affairs*. They put forth that the policy has not been able to attain its preset goals. They contended that dual containment was “more a slogan than a strategy” and it was also quite costly. (Brzezinski-Scowcroft-Murphy [1997]: p. 20.) Keeping the two countries in the same box could push them towards Russia.<sup>87</sup> Thus, differentiation specifically refers to the need for a tailored approach to both countries. (Brzezinski-Scowcroft-Murphy [1997]) The concept was then further elaborated on in the framework of a Council on Foreign Relations task force. Similar to the *Foreign Affairs* article above, the paper calls for “nuanced containment” and for lifting some sanctions enacted against Iran, as well as toning down aggressive rhetoric. (Murphy, et al. [1997]: p. 8; p. 13.)

More recent criticisms of containment against Iran point out that Washington has been trying to foster a consensus among Arab states that was built on the false assumption of Arab willingness to team up with Israel against Iran, instead of “gravitating” towards Iran to counter Israel. (Nasr-Takeyh [2008])

Phebe Marr points to inherent contradictions in the policy, which aimed at weakening both states and Iraq in particular, thus, creating a chance for upsetting the regional balance of power. (Marr [2008]: p. 17.) Patrick Tyler points out that dual containment was a “holding strategy” which was “devoid of substance.” (Tyler [2009]: p. 429.) Others contend that dual containment’s prescription on Iran was not clear. (Hunter [2010]: p. 50.) Litwak emphasizes that the initiative was a “policy born of frustration.” (Litwak [2000]: p. 57.) Lars Berger notes that the containment policy was initiated due to a “lack of alternatives”. (Berger [2008]: p. 85.) Steve Yetiv highlights that even though the policy was labeled as a balancing act, it could never fulfill criteria of balance of power policies. Dual containment aimed at changing the Iraqi regime and the behavior of Iran, but balance of power policies do not pay attention to the domestic nature of a power. Such considerations only require the assessment of the configuration of power. (Yetiv [2008]: p. 96.) By introducing dual containment the Clinton administration aimed at making an artificial distinction between “those who supported violence, repression and isolation and those more inclined to peace, freedom, and

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Administration from 1976–1981.

<sup>87</sup> It is unlikely, however, that Iran will ever develop a close relationship with Russia, since Iran is also wary of Russian influence.

dialogue.” (Freedman [2008]: p. 283.) Such distinction was difficult to make because the US had friendly relations with a number of autocracies in the region, as noted above. (*Ibid.*) Sandy Berger, the Clinton administration’s second national security adviser noted once that containment is “aesthetically displeasing but strategically sufficient.” (*Ibid.* p. 284.) However, containment also involved admitting that the US could not solve the root of the problem, hence, it tried to deal with the symptoms. “*A problem contained, therefore, was not a problem solved*” (*Ibid.* pp. 284-285.)

Despite all the criticisms, certain voices implicitly suggest that other strategic options were not better either (O’Sullivan [2003]; pp. 92-94; Indyk [2009]: p. 40.; Pipes-Clawson [1992-1993]). Thus, it is difficult to make a judgment. In assessing whether dual containment was “worth its price” and following the theoretical and methodological framework of the dissertation, the author has to examine if either the political, economic or military strands of dual containment caused any setbacks of strategic significance to Washington. The author argues that all three “tracks” of containment led to significant blowback effects.

As far as the political dimension of dual containment is concerned, Indyk’s assessment of the flaws of the policy partly articulated by him is quite interesting:

“What we failed to foresee was that a reverse symbiosis could also take hold. If Clinton failed at peacemaking, the rogue states would become less isolated and contained, and if he failed at dual containment peacemaking would become that much more difficult.” (Indyk [2009]: p. 43.)

In fact, this is an implicit acknowledgment that the possibility of strategic blowback was always inherent in the structure of the broader Clinton Middle East strategy from the very beginning. The “*reverse symbiosis*” Indyk refers to is exactly what happened when Iran was denied a stake in the Arab-Israeli peace process. He also refers to the possibility that the Clinton administration may not have been sensitive enough “*to how local politics in the Middle East could affect an approach designed in Washington.*” (*Ibid.* p. 25.)

The author has already mentioned above that as the Arab-Israeli peace process started veering off track, a number of suicide bombings occurred against Israeli citizens (see chapter on the Oslo process). Although there is no direct evidence to suggest that Iran was directly behind those, it still supported Hamas and Hezbollah – groups accused of applying such tactics. (Tyler [2009]: p. 449.) Shireen Hunter provides a more detailed

assessment of such Iranian activities. It has been noted earlier that on March 17, 1992, Islamic radicals set off a bomb at the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, and another bomb went off on July 18, 1994, at the Buenos Aires building of the Argentine-Israeli Mutual Association. Iran and Hezbollah were accused of those attacks. (Hunter [2010]: p. 51.) On June 25, 1996, another bomb was detonated in the city of Khobar, Saudi Arabia, killing 19 US soldiers. The Khobar Tower bombing was later also linked to Iran, although there is no official proof to support this and later on Al-Qaeda was also suspected of having committed the attacks.<sup>88</sup> (See: Freedman [1999]; Freedman [2008]: pp. 303-305; Tyler [2009]: p. 460.; Mattair [2008]: p. 72.) Hunter evaluated the possibility of Iran's complicity as follows:

“Considering that similar attacks within the same time frame were carried out in Europe against Iranian opposition figures by Iran's intelligence ministry and its notorious head, Ali Fallahian there is a reasonable case for suspecting Iran of complicity in these acts. Another factor which might have prompted Iranian radicals to engage in such activities, especially the 1994 Argentine bombing, was its coincidence with a particularly sensitive period in Arab-Israeli peace making. In fact Iran was blamed for the failure of Arab-Israeli peace talks by supporting Hamas and Hizbullah. The bombings might have contributed to the Likud victory in 1996.” (Hunter, *Ibid.*)

The ethics of scholarship requires the author to avoid “cherry picking” of ideas and highlight that Hunter continues her assessment as follows:

“But the main causes of the failure of the peace talks were Rabin's assassination by an Israeli, the backtracking of Ehud Barak's government on the implementation of the provisions of the Oslo Accords, and diverging visions of the Palestinian and the Israelis on the terms and conditions of peace. In 1994, neither Hamas nor Hizbullah was strong enough to derail the peace talks. And Iran has never been nor would it be in a position to prevent an Arab-Israeli peace if Israel and the Palestinians were to agree to it.” (*Ibid.*)

Adam Tarock also argues that Iran's capabilities to influence the Middle East peace process are “exaggerated”. (Tarock [1997]: p. 218.) There are two things that should be noted here. First, Hunter makes the case that Iran would not have been able to stop Arab-Israeli peace through its regional surrogates. However, the blowback hypothesis does not “require” Iran to do so. The question is whether any blowback effects occurred that hindered realization of US regional interests. The point is that

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<sup>88</sup> The Clinton administration had always thought that the Khobar Tower bombings were the committed by Hezbollah and that Iran had supported the attack. This is supported by Clinton's secret letter to Khatami emphasizing that “*The United States Government has received credible evidence that members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), along with members of Lebanese and Saudi Hizballah, were directly involved in the planning and execution of the terrorist bombing in Saudi Arabia of the Khobar Towers Military Residential Complex on June 25, 1996.*” See: *Message to President Khatami from President Clinton* [1999].

those attacks did happen and they did hinder the peace process – a setback of strategic importance to the US. Then, the only aspect that needs to be proven is some sort of Iranian complicity in all of this. In fact, most sources accept Hezbollah's complicity in those attacks. (See examples: Howard-Sawyer [2006]: p. 539; Indyk [2009]: p. 40.; Mattair [2008]: p. 70.) Thus, as noted above in the earlier chapter, it is fair to assume that although Iran cannot be directly linked to the failure of the peace process, it was interested in derailing it and it did support elements directly involved in making peace talks fail. *Therefore, it did support factors conducive to the failure of the Arab-Israeli peace process, which was clearly a strategic blowback for the United States.*

Others argue that dual containment undermined a future possible rapprochement with Iran. (Katouzian-Shahidi [2008]: p. 112.) Confronting and rolling back Iran's influence was by itself an incentive for Iran not to be constructive and such conduct decreased the chances of engagement, which could have normalized relations. This reinforces Robert Litwak's opinion on the rogue state rhetoric of US administrations. He puts forward that "the rogue state designation – that is, demonizing a disparate group of states – significantly distorts policy-making. It perpetuates the false dichotomy that sets up containment and engagement as mutually exclusive strategies" (Litwak [2000]: p. xiv.) He also notes that "the rogue state approach [...] undermines its effectiveness by lumping a disparate group of countries under this pejorative rubric." This policy "limits strategic flexibility" if it is needed in case of changes in the strategic environment. (*Ibid.* pp. 74-75.) Dual containment "– by perpetuating confrontation with two major powers in the region – helped preclude the emergence of a more peaceful and stable arrangement that could have served America's regional interests at lower financial and diplomatic costs." (O'Sullivan [2003]: p. 86.) It should be noted that this may have even worse connotations in Iranian culture, where a sense of dualism – such as good vs. evil, light vs. darkness – has always been inherent in Iranian thinking.

Regarding the economic component of the policy, Fayazmanesh notes that a former official of the Department of Commerce evaluated US unilateral sanctions against Iran as "*suicidal*" because it is against US corporate interests. (Fayazmanesh [2008]: p. 76.) Sanctions that did not allow Iranian oil to be purchased by US companies ran counter to US business interests. It has already been mentioned above that many countries were not willing to support ILSA and this led to *tensions in transatlantic relations* (see the US-EU confrontation over the case of French company Total). (*Ibid.* pp. 77-78.) Fayazmanesh also contends that US willingness to support further sanctions

in the second term of the Clinton administration was due to the ineffectiveness of ILSA in a global sense, the relative stability of the Iranian government, as well as *the pressure exerted by US corporate interests*. (Fayazmanesh [2008]: pp. 85-86.)

The logic suggested by Katouzian-Shahidi and Litwak on the general philosophy of dual containment and US “rogue” rhetoric is also present in Meghan L. O’Sullivan thinking about economic sanctions. She contends that “[...] the concrete nature of sanctions dampened the prospects for rapprochement with the United States that could have served US interests, a rapprochement that might have been less visible, less controversial and less subject to appropriation by one side of the political debate in Iran.” (O’Sullivan [2003]: p. 74.) She holds the view that sanctions contributed to the growing influence of conservative elements in the Iranian political establishment and this made any shift in Iran’s policies difficult to carry out for more reform-minded politicians. Overtures of President Rafsanjani were “rebuffed with sanctions”. (*Ibid.*; see also: Arjomand [2009]: pp. 143-148.) This is another proof of aggressive US behavior, which made any US-Iranian bargain impossible because it contributed to the isolation of reformers in Iran. O’Sullivan also refers to the relatively large costs of sanctions that were, by and large, ineffective. Sanctions harmed Washington’s political, economic as well as energy interests. Instead of offering dialogue, the US imposed sanctions. US rhetoric regarding Iran was quite aggressive and yet it did not provide Iran with real incentives to change its behavior. The “rogue” and “backlash state” narrative precluded future “rehabilitation” of Iran. Iranian behavior was rational because altering its policies would have been “costly”, whereas staying the course was “cheap.” Poorly designed overtures, however, undermined the position of reformers. (*Ibid.* pp. 88-92.)

Indeed, Japan and the EU had a stake in the Iranian economy – they held large parts of Iranian financial assets, thus, they were not willing to support sanctions. Iran simply responded to economic enforcement measures by starting to rely on North Korea and Russia for weapons. (Freedman [2008]: p. 303.) This is another indication of ineffective sanctions causing consequences, which go against the logic of US national interests.

Shireen Hunter lists the introduction of sanctions against Iran as a source of discord between Washington and Tehran. (Hunter [2010]: pp. 36-37.) This adds to the impression that not only were sanctions ineffective, they precluded the possibility of warming up relations between the two entities.

As far as military containment is concerned, Phebe Marr points out that US military presence in the Gulf added to tensions between Iran and the US. They served as targets both for terrorism, as well as anti-American propaganda. (Marr [2008]: p.18.) The Khobar Tower bombing is a case in point. (See above.) US military presence was primarily targeting Iraq, but it was also a deterrent against Iran. By 1995, the Clinton government started developing a sense of fear as Iran built up its military forces in the Gulf. Still, some Pentagon officials noted that Iran's deployments were defensive in nature and that they were a result of US presence in the region. Washington still "reactivated the Fifth Fleet as part of the Central Command, basing the fleet in Bahrain and giving it responsibility for the Gulf and the Indian Ocean" in 1995. (Mattair [2008]: pp.68-69.) It is reasonable to suggest that this reaction-counter-reaction pattern was an indirect result of US military deployments in the Gulf. This heightened tensions and it decreased chances of a thaw in US-Iran relations.

### **1.2.1. Explaining Outcomes – Strategic Blowback as a Result of Dual Containment**

In assessing whether dual containment led to any strategic blowback effects, one finds an abundance of circumstantial and direct evidence to support Hypothesis 1a. Again, the author has to determine if dual containment qualifies as an "aggressive policy" as set out at the beginning of the dissertation. Indeed, one finds that containment as defined above does fulfill the criteria of an aggressive foreign policy (see chapter on methodology and definitions). The question, then, is if this policy "backfired" or not.

According to Neoclassical Realism, the author has to identify both systemic as well as sub-systemic factors at play. As in case of the previous chapter on the Oslo Process, the following factors can be listed.

Systemic factors:

- global distribution of power; and the
- regional distribution of power.

Sub-systemic factors:

- government policies of the US (Israel) and Iran;
- perceptions; and



- domestic constituencies and political forces.

The author's observations regarding systemic factors are, by and large, the same as in the previous chapter. The global and regional position of the US, as well as the regional influence of Iran, to a certain extent, explain actions of the two powers. Even though Iran did experience an increase in its military capabilities in the Gulf, it is fair to assume that the balance of power between the two states remained roughly the same as depicted in the chapter on the Oslo peace process. (See chapter on the Oslo peace process.) The regional distribution of power also explains why the US, Israel and Iran confronted each other as a result of dual containment. The growth of US influence in the region and the prospect of Arab-Israeli peace built upon the exclusion of Iran could have shifted the regional balance of power in the Middle East in the favor of Washington and Tel-Aviv. Thus, for systemic reasons Tehran was interested in preventing such a shift. And obviously for the same reasons the US was interested in limiting Iran's power in the region – an influence that can undermine the peace process.

This can be complemented by one other consideration. US allies (the EU and Japan in particular) refused to go along with US sanctions exactly because they wanted to exert their own (economic) influence in the international system and the Middle East. This led to a temporary clash of interests with the United States and caused tensions in transatlantic relations. The expansion of Moscow's economic ties is another example of this. Russian economic and political influence to a certain degree filled the vacuum created by the prohibition of U. S. companies from doing business with Iran. Thus, the ineffectiveness of sanctions is partly due to systemic factors.

As far as sub-systemic factors are concerned, three government strategies are key to understanding outcomes. The US and Israel pursued the strategy of isolation, whereas Iran used its regional ties with its surrogates to keep the US and Israel from fostering a new regional order based on denying Iran's influence. Part of this was to do with systemic incentives, e.g. the regional configuration of power, but the policies of individual governments, as well as certain individuals were also influential.

By the time of the Conoco case, perceptions were so distorted that Washington never realized that the Rafsanjani government thought of the offer as a gesture to the US. The US did not see it as such and the deal was rejected. Iran was viewed as a hostile country and behavior that did not confirm this from time to time was dismissed because it did not fit the "overall scheme". (See Denis Ross's comments on such

schemes in the chapter on the Oslo process. See: Parsi [2007]: p. 152.) Negative Iranian perceptions of the US were reinforced by the imposition of sanctions and aggressive containment. These two tendencies confirmed the already existing negative perceptions of the “other” on both sides and fueled further distrust.

The other very important sub-systemic factor was the role of Congress and the general dynamics of US domestic politics – this is noted by a number of authors. (See: Berger [2008]: p. 86.; Katouzian-Shahidi [2008]: p. 112.; Litwak [2000]: p. 3; p. 67.; p. 173.; Freedman [2008]: p. 302.; O’Sullivan [2003]: pp. 54-55.; p. 88.; pp. 90-91.). The domestic political landscape was of equal importance in Iran’s case. (Litwak [2000]: p. 96.; Freedman [2008]: p. 308.) On the other hand, US initiatives often undermined the position of reform-minded politicians due to the internal dynamic of Iranian domestic politics. (O’Sullivan [2003]: p. 92.) Even if the Clinton administration would not support a particular sanction, Congress and individual representatives supported such measures regardless of the administration’s stance on the issue.

More interesting is the fact that a number of authors note Rafsanjani's constructive attitude and his efforts at expanding Iran’s economic ties. It has already been noted that the Conoco deal was an offer from Iran to start a limited rapprochement with Washington. (O’Sullivan [2003]: pp. 53-54; Tarock [1997]: pp. 219-220.; Parsi [2007]: p. 186.) Some note that Rafsanjani even indicated that Iran would have played a constructive role, had it been invited to Madrid. (See: Freedman [2008]: p. 299.) Another indication of this conciliatory voice was that Rafsanjani also noted in 1995 that Iran would not prevent peace in the region – even though there were still signs that Iran had actually been supporting militant groups at the time. (O’Sullivan [2003]: p. 80.) Still, the US “had to” reject these efforts at reconciliation due to domestic political considerations.

The author already elaborated on the role of Israeli interest groups in the United States. What has not been examined though is the US corporate lobby. Sanctions did infringe the commercial interests of US companies who could not invest in Iran because of sanctions. Fayazmanesh even suggests implicitly that the US corporate lobby was almost as relevant a player as the Israeli lobby in the domestic politics of sanctions. The corporate lobby wielded sufficient influence to mobilize well known foreign policy experts such as Brent Scowcroft, Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter, and Senator Richard Lugar. According to Fayazmanesh, the Brzezinski-Scowcroft suggestion on differentiated containment as a result of work in the framework of a Council on Foreign

Relations (CFR) project was also influenced by corporate lobby interests (see above). According to this argumentation, the Institute for International Economics, the CFR as well as the Cato Institute and the Center for International and Strategic Studies (CSIS), were, to a certain extent and indirectly, all involved in efforts aimed at lifting sanctions. The American-Iranian Council also tried to stop legislation to pass sanctions and it was supported by companies such as Conoco, Unocal, Mondoil and Intermarine. A large group of companies in the agricultural industry formed USA\*ENGAGE – an “umbrella organization” of 600 firms for representing interests of the agricultural industry. This industry established relations with some think tanks – the CSIS in particular – and it supported the publication of position papers which criticized sanctions and suggested lifting them. (See: Fayazmanesh [2008]: p. 4.; pp. 85-95.; see also: Rostoványi [2004]: p. 208.; Mattair [2008]: p. 71.; Litwak [2000]: p. 3.; p. 168.; O’Sullivan [2003]: pp. 85-86.)

Thus, what unfolded was a fully-fledged rivalry between two relatively strong lobby organizations within the US economic and political elite. This all contributed to a “chaotic policy that took no particular direction” as both sides tried to realize their interests. (Fayazmanesh [2008]: p. 91.)

Another important issue worth examining is the well-known problem of “turf wars” within the bureaucracy of the US national security establishment. Indyk points out that “In Washington, no policy decision goes uncontested, not even one driven by a presidential decision and supported by the secretary of state.” (Indyk [2009]: p. 24.) He also emphasizes that some in Washington thought that the “Arabists” at the State Department considered the US-Israeli special relationship to be “a liability”. (*Ibid.*) Dumbrell notes Denis Ross’s exceptional influence on policy: sometimes his office would leave the State Department’s Near East Affairs Bureau or various ambassadors out of the loop. Conflicts regularly occurred between the State Department and the Pentagon, especially on the issue of the use of force. The Pentagon was reluctant to engage in warfare, whereas the State Department was more willing to apply military force. Such tensions could also be felt between the White House and the State Department, but this was kept under control. (Dumbrell [2009]: p. 147; p. 167-168.) This rivalry was obvious from the moment Indyk announced the policy of dual containment. Later that year, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Edward Djerijian did not regard US Middle East policy as “dual containment” during an official event. Indyk quickly responded by saying that the policy was still being

implemented to avoid “rumor of an NSC-State rift over dual containment.” (Litwak [2000]: p. 60.)

Again, one also needs to consider the role of individual personalities. Most observations here are the same as in the previous chapter on the Oslo process. There could be one important addition, though. Senator D'Amato's commitment to the Israeli lobby, as well as his leading role in pushing for sanctions in the Congress should be mentioned, but his role has already been discussed above in detail.

US dual containment efforts were a resultant of the above systemic and sub-systemic variables. This mix of variables explains why dual containment was pursued, as well as why it caused strategic blowbacks.

### **1.3. Détente Between the US and Iran under the Khatami Presidency**

Clinton's second term (1997-2001) brought an unexpected thaw in US-Iran relations. With sanctions and dual containment in general seeming to be ineffective, the US was not efficient in reaching its goals set out at the beginning of Clinton's first term. Then, in May 1997, a reformer candidate named Mohammad Khatami won the Iranian presidential elections by an unexpectedly large margin.<sup>89</sup> His conciliatory tone in domestic politics<sup>90</sup> was soon followed by efforts to improve Iran's relations in its own region.<sup>91</sup> (Freedman [1999])

Interestingly, Laura Neack cites Ruhi K. Ramazani's assessment of Khatami's foreign policy as a policy built on the notion of “democratic peace.” Ramazani points out Khatami's concept, which aims to create a government that is “the servant of the people and not their master”. (See. Ramazani [1998]: p. 183. quoted in Neack [2003]: p. 195.) In foreign policy, this concept “neither seeks to dominate others nor to submit to domination.” (*Ibid.*) His overall approach to “foreign policy can suitably be termed the

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<sup>89</sup> Khatami received 69 percent of the votes during the elections. Takeyh [2009]: p. 187.

<sup>90</sup> For a good overview of the reformist movement under Khatami see: Chapter 11: “The Ecstasy and the Agony” In: Pollack [2004]: pp. 303-342.

<sup>91</sup> President Khatami managed to establish a cabinet in which a number of key positions were filled by reformers. For example, Ata' Allah Muhajirani became minister of culture and Abdullah Nuri, noted for his progressive views and his knowledge of Iranian security organizations, became minister for interior. Muhajirani intended to ease restrictions related to censorship and he supported a détente with the US (See: *Ibid.* p. 188.) Moreover, Khatami's policies in general targeted the increasing of “cultural and personal freedom in Iran”. (Freedman [1999].)

drive for *moderation*.” (Ehteshami [2002]: p. 302.)<sup>92</sup>

Khatami had three foreign policy priorities: détente with Arab countries and Saudi Arabia in particular; improving relations with Europe; and, finally, explore the possibilities of a thaw in US-Iran relations. (Takeyh [2009]: p. 207.) His reformist ally, Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi toured the region in order to mend relations with Arab countries. Then, in December 1997, Iran hosted the summit of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) in Tehran and President Khatami was elected chairman of the organization for three years. The Iranian politician managed to gain support of Islamic countries against US sanctions and he stated that Iran would not be opposed to a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict Palestine is ready to settle for. Former President Rafsanjani paid a visit to Saudi Arabia, where the two countries discussed possibilities of cooperation in the oil sector. (Freedman [1999]; see also: Bakhash [2004]: pp. 254-255.). Then, in 1999, Khatami became the first Iranian president in office to visit Saudi Arabia. (Takeyh [2009]: p. 199.) Iran even sought rapprochement with Iraq and Saddam Hussein’s regime showed signs of willingness to move in this direction. Still, relations never improved due to old grievances and the Iran-Iraq war. The only contentious issue in its own region was the question of the Tunb and Abu Musa islands in the Gulf.<sup>93</sup> Even this did not seem to be that relevant at the time. (Freedman [1999])

Then, in December 1997, President Khatami hit a conciliatory tone during a news conference, which was followed by the famous CNN interview in January 1998, where he proposed a US-Iranian exchange program for US and Iranian journalists, university teachers, intellectuals and tourists. His other messages were also very positive – he expressed respect for the US people and civilization.<sup>94</sup> Soon, US wrestlers were invited to participate at an Iranian competition. The Clinton administration moved swiftly: Clinton announced in January, 1998, that tensions in the US-Iranian relations were not “insurmountable.” (Quoted in Freedman [1999]) Martin Indyk, then US

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<sup>92</sup> Arshin Adib-Moghaddam notes that it is a mistake to view the domestic base of Iranian foreign policy dichotomously. It is misleading to equate “reformism” with „pragmatism and pro-Western policies” and identifying the conservatives with “pan-Islamic” and “anti-Western” ideas is equally flawed. (See: Adib-Moghaddam [2008]: p. 69.) Thus, the labels “conservative” and “reformist” are only used here tentatively. (Csicsmann [2008]: p. 201.)

<sup>93</sup> These islands are the following: Small Tunb, Great Tunb and Abu Musa. They constitute disputed territory as officially they belong the UAE but Iran occupies them. (See: Freedman [1999]).

<sup>94</sup> For the transcript of the CNN interview see: *Transcript of interview with Iranian President Mohammad Khatami*. January 7, 1998, CNN. <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/9801/07/iran/interview.html> Accessed: 24-02-2012.

ambassador to Israel, also emphasized that Washington was ready for dialogue and that it “recognized Iran’s Islamic government”. (Parsi [2007]: p. 205.) In an April speech, President Clinton recognized Iran’s negative historical memory regarding Western intervention in Iran’s affairs. (*Ibid.*) In May 1998, Clinton refused to impose sanctions on French, Russian and Malaysian firms, which were planning to develop gas fields in Iran. (See the case of Total in the previous chapter.) In June 1998, Madeleine Albright held a speech before the Asia Society, where she highlighted the possibility of normalizing relations with Iran and suggesting a “road map” for rapprochement. (Freedman [1999]; *Speech by Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright*. June 17. [1998]) Albright points out in her memoirs that she felt it was time for Washington to “*move beyond containment*”. (Albright [2004]: p. 443.) Clinton also sent reassuring signals when in June 1998, he expressed in a statement before the US-Iranian match at the 1998 soccer World Cup that he considered the event another step towards reconciliation. (Parsi: *Ibid.*)<sup>95</sup> *Clearly, by 1998, the US was forced to give up containing Iran.*

Because dual containment started unraveling and as a result of Khatami’s new approach, Iranian opposition to Arab-Israeli peace began to lose its intensity. Its rapprochement with Arab states meant that it managed to break out of the isolation imposed upon it by US and Israeli efforts to advance the peace process based on Iran’s exclusion. A heated debate began under Khatami whether Iran’s support for Islamic militants and opposing the peace process was worth the price. Clearly, reformers thought it was not. Many reformers explicitly pointed out that Iran was not opposed to a peace deal if it was accepted by the Palestinians and that Iran would be ready to accept a two state solution. This implicitly meant that Iran was ready to tacitly accept the statehood of Israel. Still, this was not realized by Israel and the US. (Parsi [2007]: pp. 202-214.) The regional international system was clearly shifting in favor of normalization of relations between the US and Iran.

Khatami replied to Albright’s speech by stating that even though US rhetoric has indeed changed, this had not been transformed into real policies yet. The level of distrust is characterized well by the discussion an American diplomat had with one of

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<sup>95</sup> Another symbolic episode of the brief rapprochement between Washington and Tehran included the Iranian wrestling team’s visit to the US in the framework of a wrestling competition there. However, US laws required the short detention of some of those athletes, which was a rather unfortunate measure given the sensitive period of détente between the two countries. (Holmes [1998])

his Iranian counterparts. The Iranian diplomat expressed Tehran's fears that America's conciliatory tone is only a trick. He reminded his American colleague of George H.W. Bush's words that "goodwill begets goodwill". (Albright [2004]: pp. 444-445.) When Iran tried to act constructively by mediating for the release of hostages in Lebanon, those efforts were never recognized nor rewarded. As a result of this perception, US efforts to set up an unofficial channel to Tehran were rebuffed by Iran. (*Ibid.*)

Then, the Clinton administration was "forced" to accept new measures of Congress: Radio Free Europe (RFE) and Radio Liberty (RL) were commissioned to broadcast in Persian into Iran. Khatami's much anticipated speech at the U.N. Assembly in 1998 criticized the US and Israel as well. When Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi was invited to a meeting at the U.N. on Afghanistan – convened with the assistance of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan specifically for creating an opportunity for high level US-Iranian direct contacts – Kharrazi did not show up. It turned out later that Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei ordered both Khatami and Kharrazi to avoid direct and official contacts with US officials. (Albright [2004]: pp. 446) This was the result of Khatami and his, by and large, reformist administration coming under fire from conservatives. He chastised the US for the broadcasts of RFE and RL, frozen Iranian assets and sanctions, and US efforts to isolate Iran from realizing profits from Caspian oil. This was particularly the case after Khatami considered the Salman Rushdie case closed. Later, in September 1998, Kamal Kharrazi held a speech before the Asia Society with basically the same message that he had delivered at the U.N. (Freedman [1999]) In late 1998, a number of reformers were imprisoned and some of them were key allies of Khatami. Some reform-minded papers were shut down. (Freedman [2008]: p. 307.) A possible grand bargain seemed to be in danger.

For much of 1999 the reformist movement was under harsh attacks from conservatives and violence was used in rolling back the influence of reformists. Conservatives shut down a number of pro-Khatami newspapers, which sparked violent clashes in July 1999 between protesters and law enforcement still controlled mostly by conservatives. (See: Arjomand [2009] p. 95.) Further rapprochement only seemed possible when Khatami's reformer allies gained a majority in the Iranian Majles in February 2000. Iran signed the Chemical Weapons Convention, contributed to the enforcement of U.N. sanctions against Iraq and fought against drug trafficking. On the other hand, Khatami did not conceal the fact that Iran was supporting anti-Israel militant

groups. At the end of 1998, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) claimed to have found evidence of Iranian involvement in the Khobar Tower bombing. Then, a US court indicted 13 members of Saudi Hezbollah in connection with the bombing in 2001 and the court proceedings also suggested Iranian involvement. (See chapter on dual containment). The United States considered military action against Iran, but figured this would only isolate Khatami and his allies, thus, it did not take action. (Freedman [2008]: p. 307.) Still, the US tried to use the brief momentum of the reformist movement and lifted sanctions on Iranian carpets, caviar, nuts, pistachios and dried fruits. (Albright [2004]: pp. 447-448.; Fayazmanesh [2009]: pp. 94-95.) Albright's speech on March 17, 2000 contained an implicit apology for the 1953 CIA coup deposing Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq from power, who gained his position through democratic elections. (*Remarks by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright... March 17. [2000]; Parsi [2007]: p. 205.; Fayazmanesh [2009]: p. 94.*)

However, the Albright speech almost coincided with the March 14, 2000 approval of the Iran Nonproliferation Act of 2000, which sanctioned foreign persons who had been associated with the development of Iranian WMD-programs. Section 6 of the law prohibits any special transactions to the Russian Aviation and Space Agency regarding the International Space Station, unless the US president could verify that the organization or any other entity under its control had not provided any assistance to Iran regarding its WMD or missile development programs during the year in question. (Katzman [2012b]: p. 31.; Public Law 106-178-Mar. 14. [2000])

The Iranian response to the Albright speech was somewhat mixed and this must have had something to do with the confusing signals that Washington sent. It was willing to soften its stance on Iran, but new unilateral sanctions suggested otherwise. Again, Khatami emphasized the importance of real actions on the part of the US and Khamenei's response was even more negative. (Albright [2004]: pp. 448-449.) As a result of domestic political battles between reformers and conservatives, Khatami's speech before the U.N. Assembly in the fall of 2000 was carefully formulated. (Albright [2004]: p. 449.; Freedman [2008]: p. 307.) However, Supreme Leader Khamenei intervened and put an end to US-Iran rapprochement under the Khatami-Clinton period. (Freedman [2008]: pp. 307-308.)



### 1.3.1. Explaining Outcomes – Strategic Blowback Under Khatami's Détente

One may suggest that Khatami's brief détente period (December 1997-December 1998) actually undermines the blowback hypothesis, since it is hard to find evidence of aggressive US initiatives. Washington was quick to reciprocate Khatami's constructive tone. Furthermore, the conciliatory tone of the US did not result in any significant change of Iran's conduct, since overtures by President Clinton were not really rewarded by Tehran, except for a few, albeit very important, gestures (e.g. Iranian invitation of the US wrestling team). In order to prove the hypothesis of strategic blowback, the author has to look at the hypothesis by applying an inverse and counterfactual logic. If there was a lack of aggressive US policies, then Iran should have become more constructive too. Clearly, such pattern cannot be identified. Furthermore, it is difficult to identify any blowback effects at all. The problem with this interpretation is that it does not fully cover what actually happened during the détente period.

When one takes a closer look, it is possible to identify US initiatives that count as aggressive foreign policies and, accordingly, strategic blowbacks that occurred as a result. It is true that the Clinton administration sent positive signals in return for Khatami's overtures, but Clinton's speeches, Albright's overtures, as well as Martin Indyk's words signaled more of *a tactical shift rather than a strategic one*. This is proved by the fact that a number of sanctions were still being implemented under the period of détente, including ILSA – probably the harshest measure against the Iranian energy sector at the time. Even lifting some sanctions on trading of nuts, carpets, pistachios, caviar and dried fruits did not make a significant difference because Iran's economy is highly dependent on income from its oil sector. Though Iran is one of the world's most important pistachio exporters, it is obvious that income from foreign oil purchases is definitely more relevant to the government. Income from the oil sector has been one of the “main pillars of Iran's grand strategy.” (Ehteshami [2002] p. 288.) Thus, the overtures of the Clinton administration would have been of a strategic nature if the harshest sanctions were lifted and US technology and investment was allowed to be exported to Iran. By overtures on one level and sanctions on the other, *the US sent mixed signals that Iranian conservatives exploited*. Halfhearted overtures without offering any substantial rewards were only enough to isolate Iranian reformers. The gap

between US rhetoric and actions provided Iranian conservatives with sufficient political latitude to isolate reformers.<sup>96</sup>

Thus, aggressive foreign policy here is taken to mean the sustained implementation of sanctions and strategic blowback came in the form of:

- domestic isolation of Iranian reformers, and
- diminished chances for a grand bargain between Iran and the US.

This is obviously not to suggest that Washington directly caused the isolation of Iranian reformers – this would be equal to saying that whatever Washington does is wrong and cannot be successful anyway. Besides, Washington does not have such direct leverage over Iranian domestic politics. Such evaluation of events would also lead to problems with falsification, namely, that a vague definition of aggressive policy could lead to labeling any US policy as “aggressive.” Furthermore, such argumentation undermines the entire logic of strategic blowback, the essence of which suggests that constructive and nonaggressive policies pay off. Thus, the conclusion to be drawn is not that conciliatory US policies do not pay off. The right conclusion is that halfhearted and poorly designed overtures may not reach intended goals.

It should be noted that nonaggressive policies obviously do not, by themselves, cause or guarantee an end to blowback effects. However, they do create a situation conducive to a thaw in US-Iran relations, which can minimize blowback effects in the long run.<sup>97</sup>

It is instructive that Iran changed its policies as it did not feel threatened or isolated by the policy of dual containment anymore – not because Washington changed its policies, but because the policy fell apart due to ineffectiveness. This unintended decrease of pressure on Iran led it to give up its intensified support for Palestinian militants who could jeopardize the peace process. Iran was not opposed to the peace

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<sup>96</sup> It is worth noting that Iran used the same argumentation during President Obama’s overtures. Supreme Leader Khamenei voiced criticism that the US may have changed its rhetoric, but it has not changed its actions. (See the chapter on the Obama administration.)

<sup>97</sup> It is also worth noting that Khatami’s détente period suggests that blowback theory works from Tehran’s perspective too. In case Iran becomes constructive, there is a fair chance that a situation could be created which will be conducive to a diminishing impact of strategic blowback effects (sanctions, isolation, containment). However, this is not the main focus of this dissertation, thus, it will not be elaborated upon in detail.

process because it was not isolating Tehran anymore. Washington's unintended decrease of pressure on Iran led to a more constructive Iranian conduct. Again, this is evidence of the blowback dynamic: less aggressive policies, intentional or unintended, cause a more constructive Iranian behavior, which minimizes the effects associated with strategic blowback.

How does the Neoclassical Realist framework explain this above dynamic? There are obviously good reasons why the Clinton administration, as well as President Khatami could not go any further on the path of rapprochement. Thus, the above criticism does not necessarily amount to a direct criticism of the Clinton administration's policies. Sub-systemic factors will provide compelling answers as to why the Clinton government could not take further steps for normalizing relations with Tehran. Again, the following factors can be distinguished:

Systemic factors:

- global distribution of power; and the
- regional distribution of power.

Sub-systemic factors:

- government policies of the US (Israel) and Iran;
- perceptions; and
- domestic constituencies and political forces.

It is important to note that structural factors did not change significantly. The regional distribution of power remained roughly the same. What is really intriguing in this case is the constellation of domestic factors, which had a significant impact on systemic factors. It is the interplay of sub-systemic and systemic factors that is particularly interesting here.

On a sub-systemic level, the government policies of the US and Iran did change as a reaction to the other side's conciliatory intentions. Mutual gestures were made in order to sustain the process of reconciliation. Israel's policies, however, did not change – it dismissed Iran's *détente*. Since the Netanyahu government did not pursue a peace agenda, it tried to open towards the Rafsanjani government, but Israel's efforts were not rewarded. Thus, when Khatami's *détente* came, it was dismissed. The Barak

government pursued peace with Arab countries, thus, it chose not to focus on a possible thaw in Israel-Iranian relations. This had a profound impact on the chances of reconciliation. It should be pointed out that Khatami's détente policy caused a shift in regional relations. As a consequence of Khatami's approach, US-Iranian reconciliation seemed possible. This caused fear in Israel, which sought to stop the process because it feared it may lose its special status in US foreign relations if Washington was to make a deal with Tehran. (See: Parsi [2007]: pp. 206- 218.)<sup>98</sup> This fear was caused by the fact that the process of détente increased Iran's influence with Washington. This slight, albeit very significant change caused Washington to slightly gravitate toward Iran and concentrate less on Israel's anti-Iran agenda. Khatami's change brought about a slight change in US orientation. A change in a sub-systemic factor led to a slight change in Iranian influence, which had an impact on the structural landscape of the region. Iran's position seemed to be improving because it managed to break out from its "cage." Israel, on the other hand felt that its position in Washington was devalued.

Again, perceptions played a role in limiting the extent to which distrust could be dissolved. The mindset of Tehran as described by an Iranian diplomat while having discussions with a US counterpart during the period of the Clinton-Khatami détente is a case in point. (See above.) His explanation of Tehran's perceptions suggests that the Islamic Republic viewed gestures by Clinton and Albright as "tricks." Even if the climate is suitable for reconciliation, preexisting negative images and earlier experience will always have an impact on thinking about the "other." (See Dennis Ross's comments on preexisting "schemes" that impact policy making in the chapter on the Oslo peace process.)

As far as domestic political forces are concerned, the role of the Israeli lobby (AIPAC) as well as Iranian conservatives must be noted here. For example, the Israeli lobby expressed its fears following Albright's March 2000 speech on US-Iran relations. Her friendly and conciliatory tone was attacked by Israeli officials as well as the Israeli lobby. (Fayazmanesh [2009]: pp. 94-95.) In fact, Albright notes in her memoirs that Israel's warnings about a possible Iranian nuclear weapons capability started sounding like a self-fulfilling prophecy after a while. (Albright [2004]: p. 447.) It has already been noted that one of Israel's main goals was to prevent a deal between the US and

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<sup>98</sup> It is interesting to note that the same mechanism was responsible for outcomes under the Obama administration. See the chapter on the Obama administration.

Iran. Thus, Tel-Aviv's interests differed from Washington's and this was an incentive for Israel to prevent the US from tilting towards Iran. The Iran Nonproliferation Act of 2000 should also be noted as a success for domestic political forces, which did not want a détente with Iran. This, however, only worsened the situation for Iranian reformers and fueled further distrust in the Islamic Republic. This obviously played into the hands of those who wished to end rapprochement with Washington. Thus, further US sanctions obviously contributed to the failure of détente and proves the strategic blowback dynamic.

In Iran, the reform movement was isolated by its own hardliners – Khatami had to make gestures to these political forces and use foreign policy for domestic political purposes. The foreign policy space of Khatami was constrained because conservative elements still had a decisive influence over key issues. (Gonzalez [2007]: p. 86.) Essentially, the Islamic Republic of Iran had two foreign policies at the time. One led by Supreme Leader Khamenei and aimed at supporting militant groups in Lebanon and Palestine; and one articulated by Khatami in order to realize the reintegration of Iran into the international community. (Rakel [2007]: pp. 166-167. on the foreign policy rift between Khamenei and Khatami see also: Bakhshash [2004]: pp. 254-255.) Others note institutional rivalries within the foreign policy establishment of Iran, which have clearly affected US-Iran relations. (Wehrey et al. [2009]: p. 22-31.) Under Khatami, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Intelligence as well as the Quds Force of the IRGC engaged in fierce competition over a number of issues and Afghanistan in particular. (*Ibid.* p. 29.) These domestic divisions contributed to the weakening of the reformist flank within the government, which in turn could not pursue its détente policy effectively.

Empirical evidence vividly corresponds with one particular interpretation of Neoclassical Realism. Fareed Zakaria's model of the "resource extractive state" corresponds perfectly with what happened during the Khatami-Clinton détente. Zakaria and Taliaferro point out that in order to pursue the national interest in the international system, states need to mobilize their domestic resources first. These resources may mean building a strong state, a capable army, or it may refer to domestic political support for certain policies. (See: Zakaria [1998] and also Taliaferro [2006]) *According to this interpretation, normalization of relations could not be achieved between the US and Iran because none of them could mobilize the necessary domestic support for their*

*foreign policies.* Nonaggressive policies on the government level are not, by themselves, sufficient for a reconciliation process that could minimize blowback effects. Domestic constituencies and various political interest groups need to be persuaded to follow a distinct agenda aimed at reconciliation with Iran. Otherwise – as evident in both the US and Iranian cases – *schizophrenic foreign policies will be pursued where the most powerful domestic political forces will decisively influence government policies.*

This interpretation provides a far more accurate picture of why strategic blowback (failure of conciliatory initiatives) was experienced. The Clinton administration did its best to set in motion a *détente*, but it was constrained by domestic political realities. Changing these circumstances would have been politically too costly. The administration had to deal with a number of other domestic and foreign policy priorities as well, thus, its political resources were obviously limited.

This does not take away from the fact, however, that a “full *détente*” would have required lifting some of the toughest sanctions to provide reformers in Iran with “results” they can point to as positive consequences of their policies. Hence, the Khatami *détente* does not undermine the strategic blowback theory – *it actually reinforces it.*

## 2. The Bush Administration (2001-2009)

*"I dread our own power and our own ambition; I dread our being too much dreaded. [...] We may say that we shall not abuse this astonishing and hitherto unheard-of power. But every other nation will think we shall abuse it. It is impossible but that, sooner or later, this state of things must produce a combination against us which may end in our ruin."* Edmund Burke, quoted in Stephen M. Walt [2006]: page unmarked.

Much like under the Clinton administration, the United States' power was still unrivaled in the international system under the government of George W. Bush. Russia was recovering from its post-Cold War economic hardships and China had already been on the rise for years, but Washington was still an unchallenged superpower. Both presidencies had roughly the same resources and capabilities – a power of unprecedented magnitude. *The big difference between them was that Clinton showed restraint, but Bush, given the circumstances, was willing to use America's military power extensively.* (See: Daalder; Lindsay [2005]: p. 14.) The words of conservative political philosopher Edmund Burke on the international position of 18<sup>th</sup> century England capture well the dilemma of such power: it implies a number of strategic opportunities, but it also carries a number of grave risks. The presence of overwhelming power in the international system breeds its own rival: a power or a combination of powers matching that of the challenger. (See also: Morgenthau [1993]: pp. 183-193.; Walt [1987]: pp. 147-180.) The United States' Middle East strategy under President Bush – the 'Bush doctrine' as it later came to be known – produced the same dynamic in practice. U.S. overreactions to the 9/11 attacks produced a set of circumstances, which indirectly led to a decrease of U.S. influence in the Middle East.

President Bush frankly admitted that he is not an expert on foreign policy issues. His campaign focused on domestic political issues as did the first eight months of his presidency. The most important foreign policy issue that came up during the campaign was relations with Mexico – not surprising from a presidential candidate who used to be the governor of Texas. (Daalder; Lindsey [2005] p. 18; p. 47.) Terrorism, Saddam Hussein and Iraq or Osama bin Laden were not important topics in the elections (Anderson [2011]: p. 55.) The pre-9/11 phase of the Bush presidency included focusing on the issue of withdrawing from the ABM treaty and missile defense, as well

as military transformation. Other than that, Bush adopted an entirely “domestic policy-first” agenda mostly concentrating on tax-cuts and education. (Moens [2004]: pp. 2-3.) Bush expressed that he was not in support of nation-building or interventions and he put forth a more or less realist agenda. (Buckley; Singh [2006b]: p. 14.) During the first NSC meeting of the Bush administration on January 30, 2001, Iraq was already a topic and most high level officials received directions from Bush regarding the Middle Eastern country. It was decided that Washington would “disengage” concerning the Arab-Israeli peace process and favor Israel over the Palestinians. (Anderson [2011]: p. 58.) The administration did not show specific interest in terrorism or the threat posed by al-Qaeda. The priority was building a missile shield, partly as a defense against terrorism. (*Ibid.* 58-59; p. 64.)

And then, quite ironically, history intervened: a president who was self admittedly not educated in foreign policy was forced to face possibly one of the toughest foreign policy challenges any U.S. president had to face up until that point. *9/11 had clearly transformed the Bush presidency into a foreign policy one.* (Daalder, Lindsay [2005]: p. 79.) The attacks of 9/11 attacks had a transformational effect on US foreign and security policy, even though many elements of Bush’s foreign policy were not entirely new. (Buckley; Singh [2006]: pp. 14-15.)

However, it is a mistake to imply that the Bush doctrine was the only foreign policy approach the US government subscribed to between 2001 and 2009. This chapter argues that the Bush doctrine was only pursued for the first five years of Bush’s tenure of office from 2001 to 2006. The last two years have seen a more moderate and traditional approach, one that was based on containing and pressuring enemies and one that did not exclude diplomacy all in all. Those last two years are important concerning Iran, since the administration started running out of political capital and resources, thus, it was forced to return to the more subtle ways of multilateral methods, such as pursuing sanctions within the framework of the UNSC. This even included meetings in the P5+1 format from 2006.<sup>99</sup> 2006 is, therefore, a watershed and, thus, it marks an interim period between the two specific policies examined here. (See: Dalby [2006]: p. 47.)

This chapter argues that the foreign policy strategy of the Bush administration

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<sup>99</sup> The P5+1 was an expansion of the EU3 – the UK, France and Germany. This expansion took place in 2006. The new format included Russia, China and the United States, thus, the new configuration was called the „Permanent 5+1” referring to the permanent members of the UN Security Council and “+1” meant Germany.



provides the best evidence of the blowback theory yet. The aggressive foreign policy posture of the Bush White House set in motion a number of factors which then caused a string of blowback effects. This part of the dissertation argues that US policies hindered realization of the following key US national interests in the Middle East:

- defeating militant Islamic terrorism;
- rolling back Islamic extremism by spreading US values and democratic institutions;
- preventing the emergence of an Iranian nuclear weapons capability;
- securing the free flow of energy trade associated with the region;
- fostering stability in Iraq and Afghanistan; and
- fostering stability in the Middle East by finding a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The chapter extensively elaborates on the concept that defined the approach of the administration to foreign policy – the “Bush doctrine.” This includes an in-depth analysis of the doctrine’s Iranian implications and the analysis of the 2003 May offer of Iran to cooperate on a host of issues and a possible grand bargain between the two nations. Then, the chapter elaborates on the period of containing Iran (2006-2008).

## 2.1. Neoconservatism and the Bush Doctrine

Before outlining the actual doctrine, it is worth introducing a few thoughts on the intellectual and philosophical fundamentals that influenced a number of the key decision makers who surrounded President Bush when devising his new strategy after the 9/11 attacks.<sup>100</sup> Then, the chapter provides a detailed analysis of the Bush doctrine in general by examining primary sources first and then it goes onto elaborate on what experts had written about the concept.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> This chapter extensively draws on one of the earlier publications of the author. See: Balogh István [2011b]: A Bush-doktrína és “a fekete hattyúk átka” *MKI-tanulmányok*. T-2011/29 especially: pp. 3-15. <http://www.hiia.hu/pub/displ.asp?id=DGSFQJ> Accessed: 01-09-2012.

<sup>101</sup> The doctrine probably influenced the social discourse on US foreign policy more than any other foreign policy concept in US history. It is interesting to note that – much to the surprise of the author – the Bush doctrine even has its own Facebook page: *Bush Doctrine* <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Bush-Docctrine/113525865324786?ref=ts> Accessed: 09-09-2011.

According to conventional wisdom, Bush and his top advisers were neoconservatives. (Daalder; Lindsay [2005]: p. 14.) While this is not accepted by every expert, it is true that neoconservative ideas had a significant impact on the foreign policy of the Bush administration. (See: Dalby [2006]: pp. 35-45.; Smith [2009]: pp. 54-56; pp. 74-75.) This worldview had its roots in the philosophy of Leo Strauss,<sup>102</sup> but as far as its views on US domestic politics and foreign policy are concerned, neoconservatism emerged in the 1960's and 70's and it was a school of thought associated with former or disappointed liberals at the time. That is how Irwing Kristol, the founding father of neoconservatism identified himself. Another key figure of this intellectual tradition was Norman Podhoretz, who, along with other like-minded intellectuals, argued that détente with the Soviet Union equaled to appeasement. (Anderson [2011] p. 60.; Rostoványi [2004]: p. 188.)

The neoconservative worldview is based on patriotism, rejection of the idea of 'world government', clear distinction between friends and enemies and defining US national interests based on a clear set of principles, as well as defined in terms of global interests. [Kristol [2003] quoted in Rostoványi [2004]: pp. 188].<sup>103</sup> Neoconservatives reject the idea of classical Kissingerian realism, which is based on pragmatism and the neglect of values. On the contrary, they believe that US foreign policy should always be based on morality and a clear distinction between *good* and *evil*. Thus, Ronald Reagan, whose foreign policy rhetoric reflected much of the above listed principles, is considered to be one of the 'role models' for neoconservatives. (See: Mándi [2008]; see also: Kaufman [2007]: pp. 113-123.)

One of the best known articulations of neoconservative foreign policy ideas is associated with Charles Krauthammer's piece titled "*The Unipolar Moment*", published

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<sup>102</sup> For the impact of Leo Strauss on neoconservative thought and the limits of applying Straussian ideas to understanding neoconservative foreign policy thinking see: Ryan [2010]: p. 8.; also Ch 7.

<sup>103</sup> According to Ryan there were two distinct neocon generations. The Cold War neocons were ardent anticommunists and believed that a strong and assertive, albeit defensive US foreign policy built on containment could defeat the USSR. The new generation came to political life in the nineties and thought that US hegemony needed to be protected by military means and offensive action when necessary. The first generation included people like Jeane Kirkpatrick, US Ambassador to the UN in the Reagan administration, Irwing Kristol and Norman Podhoretz mentioned above. The second generation came from circles initially sympathetic towards the right wing of the Democratic Party and former aids of senator Henry „Scoop” Jackson – e.g. Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle and Frank Gaffney. A lot of these people as well as other neocons (Robert Kagan, Elliot Abrams, William Kristol) held positions in the Reagan as well as the Bush 41 administration too but became members of the second generation as they held different views on US foreign policy from those of members of the first generation. Still others came from the think tank world, journalism or they were originally activists – e.g. Charles Krauthammer (journalism) Joshua Muravchik (activist). (See: Ryan [2010]: p. 2.; pp. 12-14; pp. 19-20)

in the journal *Foreign Affairs* in 1990-1991. The central idea of the article was that the US enjoyed an unprecedented freedom in international relations, since its main rival, the Soviet Union, had collapsed. Thus, the most important goal of the US should be to sustain the unipolar situation in the international system. (Krauthammer [1990-1991]; Ryan [2010]: pp. 14-15.)

Another important document of neoconservative thought was an official policy paper. The principles of Irving Kristol listed earlier were also reflected in the 1992 Defense Planning Guidance (DPG), which set out the basic tenets of the Pentagon's strategy at the time. Produced under the supervision of Paul Wolfowitz, then Under Secretary of Defense for Policy; and Dick Cheney, then Secretary of Defense, the paper argued that US hegemony should be sustained for as long as possible because the military dominance of the US serves the cause of global peace. The other principle goal of the document was to underscore the need for *preventing the emergence of rival power centers* in order to sustain US hegemony. Spreading US values and the possibility of unilateral action also featured in the text. After parts of the document were leaked to the New York Times and the Washington Post, the White House had the document rewritten and, thus, it never became official policy. (*Excerpts from 1992 Draft Defense Planning Guidance* [1992]; See also: Rostoványi [2004]: pp. 186-187; Ryan [2010]: pp. 19-26.).

In their 1996 piece titled "*Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy*", published in the *Foreign Affairs*, William Kristol, son of the founder of the neoconservative tradition along with Robert Kagan, argue that US foreign policy strategy should be built upon a US self-perception they called "*the benevolent hegemon*".<sup>104</sup> (Kristol-Kagan [1996]: p. 20.) In fact, the article reflects very similar thinking to the ones found in the 1992 draft Defense Planning Guidance. Benevolent hegemony requires the US to "*preserve and enhance that predominance by strengthening America's security, supporting its friends, advancing its interests, and standing up for its principles around the world.*" The expression "rogue state" also surfaces in the text in relation to Iraq, Iran and Libya. The paper mentions aspirations to change the Beijing regime and puts forth that sustaining US hegemony requires increasing defense spending, the involvement of citizens and "moral clarity." (*Ibid.* p. 27; pp. 20-28; see also: Anderson [2011]: p. 61.) This strand of thought and the prominence of neoconservative ideas

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<sup>104</sup> William Kristol also served in government as the chief of staff to Vice President Dan Quayle (1989-1993).

derived from a sense of “triumphalism” perceived in the US following the end of the Cold War. (Dalby [2006]: p. 35) Indeed, the central idea of neoconservatism was to apply force in order to sustain US hegemony around the globe in order to deter aggression and, thus, serve the cause of peace in the long run. (Ryan [2010])

Irwing Kristol – sometimes referred to as the “godfather” of neoconservatism – engaged in significant institution building in order to provide the neoconservative school with infrastructure. (See: Ryan [2010]: p. 7.) He began by reorganizing the think tank ‘American Enterprise Institute’ and other think tanks also became part of this network (e.g. Cato Institute, Heritage Foundation, Center for Security Policy). (Rostoványi [2004]: pp. 188-189.; Ryan [2010]: p. 13.) Later on in 1997, William Kristol organized the Project for the New American Century and it had a number of well-known conservatives among its ranks: Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, Elliot Abrams, as well as James Woolsey. The newly established neoconservative think tank sent an open letter to then President Bill Clinton in order to persuade him that a tougher US stance was needed against Iraq and, therefore, regime change seemed to be the only viable option. Cheney, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz, Perle, Woolsey, John Bolton, Francis Fukuyama, Zalmay Khalilzad, Robert Zoelick, Peter Rodman were all among the signatories. Later on, most of them took up positions in the Bush administration in the field of national security and foreign policy. (See PNAC website; *Letter to President Clinton on Iraq* [1998]; Anderson [2011]: pp. 61-62.; Rostoványi [2004]: pp. 189-190; see also: N. Rózsa [2003]: p. 57.). Furthermore, William Kristol has established his own foreign policy think tank in 2009, the Foreign Policy Initiative in Washington, D.C.<sup>105</sup> The institutional background has been complemented with considerable influence in the media, since a number of well-known papers and journals became associated with the neoconservative world view – Norman Podhoretz used to be the first editor of *Commentary* magazine and William Kristol is the editor-in-chief of the *Weekly Standard*. Furthermore, the *National Interest* regularly had publications by neoconservatives. (Ryan [2010]: p. 14.)

Criticism of Clinton’s foreign policy on Iraq partly derived from the neoconservatives’ frustration with Saddam Hussein and his regime. A number of them – such as Paul Wolfowitz – thought that George H. W. Bush had made a mistake by not

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<sup>105</sup> See the mission statement of FPI: *Mission Statement*. The Foreign Policy Initiative, <http://www.foreignpolicyi.org/about> Accessed: 29-08-2012

removing Saddam Hussein from power at the end of the Gulf War. (Daalder; Lindsay [2005]: p. 103.; Bolton [2008]: p. 179.) In fact, the Bush doctrine's birth was partly due to Republican influence and dominance in Congress between 1994 and 2006; disagreement over interventions; public disinterest in foreign policy and the fact that few other groups had a clear vision for the US besides the "neocons". Although, as mentioned earlier, 9/11 had a transformational effect, a number of foreign policy elements were already present before the attacks. Neglect and even suspicion regarding international institutions was already visible shortly after the administration took office. (Buckley; Singh [2006b]: pp. 15-16.)

Before moving on to analyzing the doctrine itself, it is necessary to describe what a "*doctrine*" is and how it relates to "*strategy*" as such and other similar concepts. By looking at those expressions first, one can surely establish that doctrine implies a stronger commitment to a set of goals and/ or values.<sup>106</sup> Strategy, on the other hand, is less about commitment to a certain set of worldviews, it tends to be more pragmatic. In the author's typology, doctrine is *ideological* and strategy is *pragmatic*. They relate to one another as *political philosophy* and *science* do: the former is subjective and the latter more – if not entirely – objective. Nonetheless, the two concepts inevitably overlap and, as the author argues, they may be considered synonyms in the Bush administration's case. (See: Buckley; Singh [2006a]: pp. 1-2.) The reason for this argumentation is the fact that the main driving force of foreign policy for at least four to six years after the 9/11 attacks had been the Bush doctrine. Thus, it is difficult to discern the two concepts when it comes to analyzing the Bush administration's foreign policy. The doctrine came to dominate every other issue and consideration and, thus, for a relatively long period of time, strategy and doctrine became synonyms. That is due to the fact that the US government's commitment to pursuing terrorism became so strong that it defined the entire strategic approach of the administration. Normally, a doctrine could be seen as a concept summarizing the most important foreign and national security policy priorities of a state. Thus, it is considered to be a narrower concept than strategy in general. However, in certain cases – like that of the Bush administration – they not only overlap, *they become identical*. (Balogh [2012]: p. 9.)

No doubt, the Bush doctrine was a new grand strategy for the US. (Buckley;

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<sup>106</sup> E.g. Rehnson argues that presidential doctrines essentially provide answers to the most significant strategic dilemmas facing the country. (Rehnson [2010]: p. 38.)

Singh [2006a]: pp. 1-2.; Rhenson [2010]: p. 38.) This approach to the concept by the administration is highlighted by some of the speeches examined here. These speeches and other sources highlight the fact that the doctrine implied the use of every national tool at hand to achieve a particular political goal. Thus, a number of authors refer to the notion in grand strategic terms. (See: Kaufman [2007]: p. 1.; Dalby [2006]: p. 33.; Ikenberry [2011]: pp 221-278.) The all-encompassing and comprehensive view of the administration is supported by the fact that a number of sub-strategies have been released by the Bush administration which all followed the principles set out in the 2002 and 2006 national security strategies.<sup>107</sup>

It is interesting to note that the basic elements of the Bush doctrine were outlined by Bush within the first days after the 9/11 attacks. It was a concept born as events unfolded after the actual attacks and – quite understandably – it was not result of previous considerations. (Moens [2004]: p. 164.) It was formulated gradually as new components were added continuously until the release of the 2002 National Security Strategy. (Smith [2009]: p. 54.; Davis [2006]: pp. 206-207.) The author puts forward that the six most important sources of the Bush doctrine are four speeches and one document. The four speeches are the following: the ones held on September 11 and 20, 2001; as well as on January 29 and June 1, 2002. The first one was the president's speech to the nation on the evening of the actual attacks, the second one was held before Congress, the third speech was the (in)famous State of the Union Address, and the final one was held at the US Military Academy at West Point. The fifth and final source is the 2002 National Security Strategy itself.

The 2006 National Security Strategy is very similar but, as mentioned above, the year marks a watershed as US foreign policy became somewhat more subtle and more traditional. I argue that this softer tone is reflected in the 2006 National Security Strategy, even though it still retained most of what the 2002 strategy put forward. Also, by 2006, a bloody sectarian civil war erupted in Iraq and the chances of stabilizing Iraq

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<sup>107</sup> The administration released the *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (2001; 2006), the *National Strategy of Combating Terrorism* (2003; 2006); the *National Strategy for Homeland Security* (2002; 2007); the *National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction* (2002); the *National Intelligence Strategy of the United States* (2005); The *U.S. National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication* (2007) and the *US Army Field Manual: Counterinsurgency* (2006). Except for the 2007 edition of the homeland security strategy, all of these are listed in: (Rehnson [2010:] p. 39.) *These will not be addressed separately, however, as they are all based on the basic principles of the Bush doctrine and the 2002 National Security Strategy, the author thought it necessary to mention them.* They are also included in the list of references among the “Primary Sources” at the end of the thesis.

were diminishing. The US was forced to reevaluate its policies in the region as it became bogged down in Iraq, thus, Washington returned to containment. Therefore, the 2006 strategy will be examined in the next chapter, which will elaborate on the US containment policy towards Iran between 2006 and 2008.

One of the most important parts of the Bush doctrine was coined in the first speech in the immediate aftermath of the incident during the evening of September 11 2001. Bush noted:

“We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them”. (*Text of Bush’s address*. September 11. [2001])

This lack of distinction is one of the most aggressive aspects of the doctrine. It is aggressive because it leaves no room for a certain type of traditional foreign policy behavior: *neutrality*. Taking sponsors of terrorism and terrorists themselves as equals come with another significant consequence: it extends the front line of confrontation as the targeted group becomes considerably larger. (see: Dalby [2006]: pp. 42-43.; p. 45.; Kellner [2003b]: p. 61.; p. 72; p. 126; p. 207.; also: Rehnson [2010]: p. 30.) The other important element of the speech is the following one:

“America and our friends and allies join with all those who want peace and security in the world and we stand together to win the war against terrorism.” (*Ibid.*)

It is interesting to note, that the “classical” version of the term “war on terror” does not appear in the speech yet, however, the first formal reference to the core of the Bush doctrine is already there: “war *against* terrorism.” Indeed, as Moens notes: “*Within days the President wiped out years of conventional knowledge on terrorism [...]*”. (See: Moens: *Ibid.*; also: Anderson [2011]: p. 101.)

A more powerful and even more aggressive speech was delivered on September 20, 2001, before Congress. This is where the actual term “*war on terror*” was first used by Bush:

“Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.” (*Transcript of President Bush’s address to a joint session of Congress on Thursday night*. September 20. [2001])

The US president further blurred the line between terrorists and their sponsors:

“Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists and every government that supports them.”  
(*Ibid.*)

The first hint concerning the doctrine is the reference to the attacks as an “*act of war*”:

“On September the 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country. [...] How will we fight this war? We will direct every resource at our command - every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war -- to the destruction and to the defeat of the global terror network.” (*Ibid.*)

These lines are important for two reasons. One is that it proves that the administration thought of the concept as a real grand strategy, which is based on the application of all necessary means in order to succeed in reaching certain political ends. The other one is the creation of a “war mentality”, which keeps recurring in the rest of the text. This war mentality and the long term nature of Bush’s new commitment are both reflected by the following lines:

“Our response involves far more than instant retaliation and isolated strikes. Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign unlike any other we have ever seen. It may include dramatic strikes visible on TV and covert operations secret even in success.” (*Ibid.*)

And then, the notion of not making any distinctions emerges again:

“And we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation in every region now has a decision to make: Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime. (*Ibid.*)

The logic of “with us or against us” led to significant tensions between Washington and its Western European allies. (See: Anderson [2011]: p. 97-99.; Buckley; Singh [2006b]: p. 17.; Ikenberry [2008]: p. 98) Donald Rumsfeld spoke of the western part as being “old Europe”, whereas the expression “new Europe” was used to highlight the cooperative attitude of Central and Eastern Europe concerning the war on terror, and the Iraq war in particular. (See: Orbán [2003]; *DoD News Briefing...* [2003]; Anderson [2011]: pp. 125-126.) France opposed the doctrine, thinking that it was too “simplistic” and arguing that there were a lot of other challenges besides terrorism. (*Ibid.* p. 98.) Indeed, the doctrine implied a rather



monolithic perception of power, since military might constituted the basic tenet of the strategy. (Buckley; Singh [2006b]: p. 22.) Interestingly, the concept of preemptive action is not part of the doctrine yet – in fact, it puts the emphasis on defense:

“Our nation has been put on notice, we’re not immune from attack. We will take defensive measures against terrorism to protect Americans. Today, dozens of federal departments and agencies, as well as state and local governments, have responsibilities affecting homeland security.” (*Transcript of President Bush’s address to a joint session of Congress on Thursday night*. September 20. [2001])

The speech is an emotional one, but it does not include all elements of what later came to be known as the Bush doctrine. However, it does include some core “items” associated with the concept: lack of distinction between enemies and their sponsors and the perception of war.

Perhaps the best known speech associated with the Bush doctrine is the former president’s state of the union address on January 29, 2002. This was the “*axis of evil*” speech that has been cited and referenced by so many sources. Again, there are a number of references to an ongoing war.

“What we have found in Afghanistan confirms that, far from ending there, our war against terror is only beginning.” (*State of the Union address by George W. Bush*. January 29. [2002])

Then, the expression “*outlaw regime*”, used by a number of other key US decision makers in US history, such as Reagan, appears<sup>108</sup>:

“Thousands of dangerous killers, schooled in the methods of murder, often supported by outlaw regimes, are now spread throughout the world like ticking time bombs, set to go off without warning.” (*Ibid.*)

And then, the other core element of the doctrine is pronounced, which is *prevention*:

“And second, we must prevent the terrorists and regimes who seek chemical, biological or nuclear weapons from threatening the United States and the world.” [...] Our second goal

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<sup>108</sup> See for example Ronald Reagan’s 1986 speech on the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. Bass [1992]: p. 194.

is to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction.” (*Ibid.*)

The following part of the address elaborates on three specific regimes – North Korea, Iran and Iraq:

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

The final speech considered relevant in the process of introducing the doctrine is the one held at the US Military Academy at West Point on June 1, 2002. (See: Magyarics [2007]: p. 87.) The most important part relates to preventive action:

“Deterrence, the promise of massive retaliation against nations, means nothing against shadowy terrorist networks with no nation or citizens to defend. Containment is not possible when unbalanced dictators with weapons of mass destruction can deliver those weapons on missiles or secretly provide them to terrorist allies. We cannot defend America and our friends by hoping for the best. We cannot put our faith in the word of tyrants who solemnly sign nonproliferation treaties and then systematically break them. If we wait for threats to fully materialize we will have waited too long. Homeland defense and missile defense are part of a stronger security. They’re essential priorities for America. Yet the war on terror will not be won on the defensive. We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans and confront the worst threats before they emerge. In the world we have entered the only path to safety is the path of action. And this nation will act.” (*Text of Bush’s Speech at West Point. June 1. [2002]*)

From a grand strategic perspective, it is important to note the following part:

“Because the war on terror will require resolve and patience, it will also require firm moral purpose. In this way our struggle is similar to the cold war. [...] America confronted imperial communism in many different ways: diplomatic, economic and military.” (*Ibid.*)

Linking the war on terror to the Cold War struggle and implying that the Cold War required the application of many different means, again suggests that the Bush administration thought of the Bush doctrine *as a design of grand strategic relevance*. The speech also includes a number of further references to “evil” and “lawless regimes”, which correspond with the rhetorical traditions of US foreign policy. Finally, the passage includes an emphasis on the need for allies and coalitions:

“Today, from the Middle East to South Asia, we’re gathering broad international coalitions to increase the pressure for peace.” (*Ibid.*)

This may remind one of the “coalitions of the willing” – an important part of the doctrine. However, the term was only used by Bush during the Prague stop of a European trip on November 20, 2002, in order to threaten Iraq by demanding Saddam Hussein to disarm. (Bush [2002b]) The fundamental idea behind this was to rely on groups of like-minded countries, rather than slow and ineffective international and multilateral institutions. As Douglas Feith, Under Secretary for Policy at the Pentagon at the time notes in his memoirs, Rumsfeld thought the point was to find the mission and then rally the partners around that single purpose, but other missions may rely on a different configuration of partners. (Feith [2009] pp. 56-57.; Rehnsen [2010]: p. 47.) As Rumsfeld put it: “*The mission must determine the coalition, and the coalition must not determine the mission.*” (Moens [2004]: p. 183.)

The most important document concerning the doctrine is obviously the National Security Strategy of September 2002. Having analyzed the above speeches, it is interesting to see that the strategy itself draws upon the same building blocks and clichés. The presidential foreword of the document heavily draws on Bush’s earlier speech at West Point, sometimes even literally. (NSS [2002]: pp.3-5) Essentially, the strategy is a ‘grand design’ against terrorism. All of the previously mentioned elements emerge in the document and the expression “global war on terrorism” is also in the passage (*Ibid.* p. 27.)

The most important part of the document is obviously the one focusing on preventive action. Two chapters focus on preventing specific security threats. Chapter III. (*Ibid.* pp. 5-7.) is titled “*Strengthen Alliances to Defeat Global Terrorism and Work to Prevent Attacks Against Us and Our Friends*” and V. is “*Prevent Our Enemies from Threatening Us, Our Allies, and Our Friends with Weapons of Mass Destruction.*” (*Ibid.* pp. 9-11.) Chapter III. begins with the definition of the enemy:

“The enemy is terrorism – premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against innocents.” (*Ibid.* p. 5.)

The text emphasizes again the lack of distinction between terrorists and their sponsors, but the most important provision of the strategy is the sentence specifically emphasizing preemption:

“While the United States will constantly strive to enlist the support of the international community, we will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self

defense by acting preemptively against such terrorists, to prevent them from doing harm against our people and our country.” (*Ibid.* p. 6.)

This statement adds *unilateralism* to the list of core ideas associated with the doctrine. Still, the strategy does emphasize working with partners and international organizations, such as the UN. (*Ibid.* p. 7.) The document reflects the war mentality mentioned earlier by using phrases such as “*the best defense is a good offense*”. (*Ibid.* p. 6.)

Chapter V. continues this logic, although specifically in the context of weapons of mass destruction. The passage highlights the threat of “*rogue states*” – another variation that draws on the “outlaw” tradition in US foreign policy rhetoric. (*Ibid.* p. 13.) The document elaborates on the outdated nature of traditional deterrence, since it puts forward the following argumentation:

“The United States has long maintained the option of preemptive actions to counter a sufficient threat to our national security. The greater the threat, the greater is the risk of inaction – and the more compelling the case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy’s attack. To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively.” (*Ibid.* p. 15.)

This set of thoughts is just as relevant as the one on preemption. *Those statements together constitute the most radical and unconventional part of the document and they clearly define the Bush doctrine.*

The picture provided by primary sources becomes more sophisticated by drawing on what the literature has written on the Bush doctrine. According to Stephen Van Evera, neoconservative foreign policy consists of unilateralism, the concept of preemptive war, applying pressure aggressively, threatening with the use of force, an imperial mindset as well as less role for diplomacy. (Van Evera [2008]: pp. 28-29.) Another well-known international relations expert points out that the neoconservative logic assumed that the US is the “world’s Leviathan”, which neglects international institutions and relies on “coalitions of the willing instead”. (Ikenberry [2008]: pp. 97-98) It also leaves no room for neutrality, as those who do not join the US in the war on terror are considered to be enemies. (*Ibid.* p. 98.; See also Hirsch [2003]: pp. 174-175.). Niall Ferguson sums up the substance of the Bush doctrine as follows: unilateralism, preemptive action and “export” of US economic and political institutions. (Ferguson [2008]: pp. 227-228) Others put forward that the doctrine was based on US efforts to free itself from the limits imposed on it by international institutions, so it could carry

out its policies without institutional limits. According to this assessment, the second part of the concept involved using US power to change the status quo. As a result, unilateral and preemptive action was no longer considered as a last resort. The final element of the concept meant changing regimes of “rogue states.” (Daalder-Lindsay [2005]: pp. 14-15.) Others refer to the concept as “global unilateralism.” (See: Rostoványi [2004]: p. 186) Dalby calls the policy “*imperial geopolitics*.” (Dalby [2006]: p. 47.) Kaufman contends that the doctrine has two basic elements: preemption and democracy promotion. (Kaufman [2007]: p. 1.) Rehnson contends that the doctrine reflected four basic premises: *American primacy, assertive realism, stand-apart alliances, new internationalism, democratic transformation*. (Rehnson [2010]: pp. 40-56.) Based on these works, the following “items” sum up the contents of the Bush doctrine<sup>109</sup>:

- unilateralism,
- extensively relying on military force as a tool of foreign policy,
- the possibility of preemption,
- a reduced role for multilateral diplomacy and international institutions, and<sup>110</sup>
- changing the regimes of rogue states.

There are two further things that should be discussed here. The global war on terror (“GWOT”) and democracy promotion are both closely associated with the Bush doctrine, but how do they exactly relate to the doctrine?<sup>111</sup> They are also closely connected as there are less unsatisfied people in democracies, thus, democracy could be a form of government that helps rolling back the influence of radical groups. (Carothers [2003]) The author argues that the GWOT and democracy promotion are specific policies, which are derived from the doctrine and its above listed principles. Thus, they are based on the doctrine, but are not identical with it. To use the terminology of strategic thought, principles define the strategy but policies derived from those principles represent the “tactical” level of foreign policy strategies. (See: Deibel [2007]: p. 11.)

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<sup>109</sup> Ikenberry also lists very similar elements regarding the contents of the Bush doctrine. (Ikenberry [2011]: pp. 254-262.)

<sup>110</sup> The Bush administration did not recognize the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice it did not support the Kyoto Protocol and it unilaterally withdrew from the ABM treaty.

<sup>111</sup> For an excellent overview of the war on terror see: Glantz [2012]esp. pp. 515-518.

Furthermore, democracy promotion and nation building had never really been part of the foreign policy consensus within the administration. (See: Ryan [2010]: pp. 5-6.)<sup>112</sup> Not even the neocons outside the administration thought of it as a priority regarding Iraq's future. (Ryan [2010]: p. 184.) True, most of Bush's senior advisers accepted a "hegemonist" interpretation of the world – Condoleezza Rice<sup>113</sup>, Bush's National Security Adviser and later Secretary of State; Paul Wolfowitz, the Pentagon's Deputy Secretary of Defense; Vice President Dick Cheney, former Director of the CIA and Secretary of Defense; as well as Donald Rumsfeld shared the opinion that the US had to use its overwhelming military and economic power to dominate the international order.<sup>114</sup> (Daalder; Lindsay [2005]: pp. 41-47.; see also: Dorrien [2004]: p. 2.) Still, people who actually thought that US military force should be used to spread American values and democracy constituted a minority. Richard Perle<sup>115</sup> and Paul Wolfowitz believed that that was the right course of action. (Daalder; Lindsay [2005]: p. 46.)<sup>116</sup> However, some decision makers associated with neoconservatism – Dick Cheney and Condoleezza Rice – were skeptical about nation-building projects in general. Rice even pointed out in one of her well known speeches that "*We don't need to have the 82nd Airborne escorting kids to kindergarten*", by which she meant that the US military was not for carrying out tasks related to nation-building. (Rice quoted in Vaïsse [2007]: p. 18.) Bush was also skeptical about using the US military for nation building projects.

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<sup>112</sup> This is true even though some experts suggest otherwise and put forward that democracy promotion was an integral part of the Bush doctrine. See: Buckley; Singh [2006b]: p. 17.; Kaufman [2007]: p. 1.

<sup>113</sup> In fact, Condoleezza Rice is referred to as being a „*hawkish realist*." Dorrien [2004]: p. 2.

<sup>114</sup> Neoconservative hegemonist ideas lead one to the problem of theorizing about the US role in the world. However, due to limits of space, the present work will not elaborate on this debate in detail. Still, the author found it important to highlight at least one important aspect of this debate because it relates to neoconservative ideas and the concept of the Bush doctrine itself. The literature discusses this problem extensively. The discourse mainly focuses on the "*Hegemony*" vs. "*Empire*" dichotomy. (See: Vitalis [2006]: pp. 22-26.) According to Ikenberry "*empire*" "*refers to the political control by a dominant state of the domestic and foreign policies of weaker peoples or polities.*" (Ikenberry [2011]: p. 24.) Hegemony, however, is different. It implies a system where other polities are less subordinated to the hegemon and the latter's position is accepted by other states because it provides certain 'public goods' – eg. security – to weaker entities. In turn, it also sets the norms and rules (institutions) of the system, which it expects to be supported by weaker players of the system. It is less about control of domestic politics, it is more about influencing weaker entities' foreign policies. Ikenberry puts forth that it is the liberal quality of US leadership that makes its position sustainable. (*Ibid.* pp. 23-26.) However, neoconservative ideas as well as the Bush doctrine supposed a stronger subordination to the US, thus, it was rejected and could not be sustained. (*Ibid.* pp. 249-278.) For thought-provoking contributions to the topic see: Magyarics [2007]; Magyarics [2012]; Romsics [2010b]; Rusett [2011]; Lavina [2009]; Held; Koenig-Archibugi [2004]; Black [2007]; Zartman [2009]; Chomsky [2004].

<sup>115</sup> Richard Perle used to be the chairman of the Defense Policy Planning Board Advisory Committee in the Department of Defense from 2001 to 2003.

<sup>116</sup> Certain other authors do not agree – Dorrien specifically points out that Wolfowitz did not really believe in social engineering either. (Dorrien [2004]: p. 65.)

(Anderson [2011]: p. 56.)<sup>117</sup>

Thus, it is not entirely right to say that Bush and his top advisers were neoconservatives. In fact, Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney and George W. Bush were conservatives who were influenced by neoconservative ideas, but they were not necessarily neocons. (See: Smith [2009]: pp. 55-56.; Dorrien [2004]: p. 3.; Rehnson [2010]: p. 31.) Daalder and Lindsay point out that these people were not neoconservatives, they were rather “*democratic imperialists*”. (Daalder; Lindsay [2005]: p 46; see also Carothers [2003]) Ryan calls them “*conservative nationalists/conservative unipolarists*” who were allied with neoconservatives within the US political arena, but were not neocons themselves. (Ryan [2010]: p. 6.; pp. 179-189.) They shared the neocon view on the need to sustain US hegemony. (*Ibid.*) Kaufman puts forth that the Bush doctrine was based on “*moral democratic realism*”, which is not entirely the same as neoconservatism, but it is the closest intellectual tradition to this category.<sup>118</sup> (Kaufman [2007] pp. 2-4.) Buckley and Singh point out that they were simply “*nationalists*”. (Buckley; Singh [2006b]: p. 16.) Rostoványi calls it “*global unilateralism*” and Dorrien refers to it as “*unilateralist militarism*” (Rostoványi [2004]: p. 186.; Dorrien [2004]: p. 1.) Rehnson contended that the Iraqi implementation of the Bush doctrine was in fact based on “*assertive realism*.” (Rehnson [2010]: p. 29)<sup>119</sup> This also indicates that conventional wisdom has exaggerated the impact of neoconservatism on the Bush administration and its foreign policy doctrine. (Smith [2009]: pp. 74-75.) However, as Anderson points out, it is fair to say that Bush “*listened to the neocons*”.<sup>120</sup> (Anderson [2011]: p. 62.) Others emphasize the intellectual and political alliance between the neocons and hawkish republicans such as Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld. (Ryan [2010]: p. 6; p. 180.; Dorrien [2004]: p. 2.) Drawing on the literature’s

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<sup>117</sup> Rehnson notes that democracy promotion was originally not part of the Bush doctrine. However, later on as Iraq became unstable as a result of the invasion and the fact that the US had not found any WMD stockpiles, government communication increasingly started focusing on the theme of democracy promotion and, thus, it became an important aspect of the doctrine. (Rehnson [2010]: p. 34.)

<sup>118</sup> Kaufman takes *moral democratic realism* to mean efforts aiming to defend US values and its free society and choosing the right (prudent) means to achieve this goal. His theory is based on St. Thomas Aquinas’s theory and is partly rooted in Christian philosophy. See: Kaufman [2007]: 3-4.

<sup>119</sup> Rehnson applies an interesting definition of the Bush doctrine. He puts forth that: “*The Bush Doctrine is best understood as a set of strategic premises or a framework for analysis to be applied, with modifications, to specific circumstances*.” Rehnson argues that the doctrine applied an approach based on differentiating between various challenges – e.g. Iran and Iraq were treated quite differently within the framework of the doctrine. (Rehnson [2010]: p. 29.) Interestingly, he argues that the Bush doctrine was based on an exceptionally aggressive notion of realism – it resembled the concept of John J. Mearheimer’s offensive realism. (*Ibid.* p. 32.)

<sup>120</sup> For an excellent account on the neocons rise to power as well as the “philosophical /ideological war” between the “*neocons and the traditionalists*” see: (Rehnson [2008]: pp. 216-239.)

doubts about the neoconservatism of top decision makers within the Bush administration, the author will refer to them as “*hawkish conservatives*” because this expression is less ideological and refers to the original conservative idea of sustaining US hegemony. “Hawkish” highlights the willingness to use military force – even if it implies unilateral action.

Assessing the doctrine’s overall legacy requires listing the successes as well as the failures of the doctrine, keeping in mind that the present chapter is not well suited to take every aspect of the issue into consideration due to limits of space. First, it is necessary to establish that *the doctrine did not lack strategic logic*. The cost of inaction right after 9/11 could have been enormous. (Kaufman [2007]: p. 13.9.) The idea behind the concept was radical and aggressive deterrence that was reached by the psychology of fear in the region as a result of Iraq’s invasion and the doctrine of preventive war. The Bush administration took on a proactive posture, arguing that the Clinton administration had always been reactive in its response to terrorism. Bush is said to have said: “*I’m tired of swatting flies. I’m tired of playing defense. I want to play offense. I want to take the fight to the terrorists.*” (Moens [2001]: p. 127.; see also Daalder; Lindsay [2005]: p. 75) Thus, preemption was a logical consequence of this reasoning. The goal was to invoke fear in potential enemies and “rogue states.” By defeating Iraq, no US enemy (Syria and Iran in particular) could be sure if their “name was not on the list”. This fear was the direct consequence of uncertainty caused by the fact that potential targets could never be sure if they would be next or not. (Feith [2009]: pp. 507-508; Gordon [2003]) The advantage of this posture was that Washington could now take the initiative instead of being on the defensive and the fact that there was a sense of unpredictability in US foreign and security policy. (Feith [2009]: p. 86.; p. 307.) Just as the US was afraid of terrorists because it did not know exactly when and where they would strike, “rouge states” and terror groups had to fear the US because they could never be certain when Washington would come after them. *The “world’s Leviathan” woke up and it was eager to find its enemies. The success of the Bush doctrine rested on the psychological spillover of this effect.*

As a result, Washington succeeded on a number of fronts initially. Libya gave up its WMD-program and Syria withdrew from Lebanon after twenty years. (BBC [2003]; Feith [2009] p. 508.; Ghattas [2005]). Ties with Russia and China improved as a result of the “war on terror”, partly because both countries had their own problems with extremists in their territories. (Hirsch [2003]: p. 175.) Clearly, the ‘psychological



spillover' had some effect on US adversaries in the region. (See: Mead [2005]: pp. 129-130; Dorrien [2004]: p. 186.)<sup>121</sup>

On the other hand, the doctrine caused a number of setbacks for the US. First of all, the concept of the doctrine was problematic. It was difficult to implement due to a lack of limited US resources. (Buckley; Singh [2006b]: p. 13.) A lot of debate occurred concerning the issue of *preemption* and *prevention*. In fact, the Bush administration blurred the line between the two. Preemption means action against an imminent threat, whereas prevention means war against a threat in the more distant future. Both are problematic as preemption is only permissible if the threat is imminent indeed, which was not the case with Iraq. Also, Article 51. of the UN Treaty puts forward that action in the name of self-defense is allowed only against attacks which are already under way. The administration used the expression "prevention" on many occasions, which led one to think of preventive war. But this is an entirely different category in international law. (See: Valki [2005]: pp. 103-104.) What actually happened in Iraq was basically a preventive war, since Iraq did not constitute a source of instant dangers, instead, it could have become dangerous over time in the more distant future. Thus, like many experts, the administration "blurred" the line between those two different cases. (See: Freedman [2004]: p. 86. quoted in Gray [2007]: p. 29. Ikenberry [2011]: pp. 258-259.; Doyle; Macedo [2008])

In fact, Bush's foreign policy was counterproductive in many ways. The neoconservative idea of unipolarism was too simplistic and it was based on a false premise. Neocons thought of military capabilities as the main source of international power, however, the nature of modern influence was more complicated and consisted of multiple layers – political, economic, military, etc. (See: Keohane; Nye [1977]) The proactive and offensive posture of neoconservative foreign policy condemned traditional approaches, such as deterrence and containment. Still, much of the administration's task following the invasion of Iraq covered "*containment of forces that the invasion unwittingly unleashed, containment of new terrorism, of the new al-Qaeda franchise, and containment of sectarian rivalries that simmer through Iraq and beyond.*" (Ryan [2010]: p. 186.) Even though the US did not have to experience another 9/11-like attack again, the number of terrorist attacks still increased worldwide significantly after the implementation of the doctrine. Ryan notes that between 2003 and

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<sup>121</sup> The next chapter deals with Iran separately, thus, it does not list the doctrine's consequences with respect to Iran.

2007 jihadist attacks outside Iraq and Afghanistan increased by 35%. If one adds the attacks committed in those two countries, the increase in jihadist terrorist attacks adds up to a 607% rise. (*Ibid.*; Dorrien [2004]: p. 216.) The implementation of the doctrine in Iraq caused the emergence of circumstances that the Iraqi invasion precisely sought to avoid. Thus, the enterprise became a “self-fulfilling prophecy” (Bolton [2008]: p. 199.; Dorrien [2004]: p. 192.) Dorrien called the neocon project “self-defeating” and not suitable for handling the problem of terrorism (Dorrien [2004]: p. 5.) This all underscores the argumentation that the Bush doctrine in fact caused a number of strategic blowbacks, which made it harder for the US to accomplish its foreign policy goals in the Middle East.

The other frequently brought up criticism argues that wars are waged on states rather than terrorism, which is a tactic, a form of violence. (Howard [2003]; Byford [2002]; see also: Buckley; Singh [2006b]: p. 17.; Dalby [2006]: p. 42.; Moens [2004]: p. 164.) Zbigniew Brzezinski referred to this as “*siege mentality*”. (Brzezinski [2007] quoted in Anderson [2011] p. 73.) Indeed, the process of radically securitizing the issue of terrorism was intentional. Brzezinski and Scowcroft point out the “culture”, “atmosphere” and “environment” of fear that “has also been propagated” by the US government. (Brzezinski-Scowcroft-Ignatius [2008]: p. 2; p. 19.; p. 239; p. 3. respectively) Francis Fukuyama and others point out that the threat of terrorism has been “overstated” and “inflated”. (Fukuyama [2008] pp. 208-209.; Leffler and Legro [2008]: p. 3.) Ikenberry contends that the security situation of the US has in fact worsened as a result of the doctrine’s implementation. (Ikenberry [2008] p. 96.) Another expert argues that the “war on terror” contradicted efforts to spread democracy, since Washington had to cooperate with states that were not democratic (e.g. Saudi Arabia) in order to be effective against terrorists. (Carothers [2003]) Fixing the “intel around the policy” regarding Iraq was another practical result of the doctrine. (Anderson [2011]: p. 102.)<sup>122</sup> As a consequence of aggressive US behavior, Syria did not keep insurgents from infiltrating Iraq. (Hinnebusch [2005]: p. 6.) North Korea doubled its efforts at acquiring a nuclear weapons capability and it conducted test explosions with nuclear weapons in 2006 and 2009. (Moon; Bae [2003]; Mearsheimer [2005]; BBC [2003]; BBC [2009]).

The US also incurred significant alternative costs as a result of the doctrine. The

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<sup>122</sup> Dalby notes that preemption has to be based on successful intelligence operations but Iraq showed that US intelligence did not operate perfectly well. (Dalby [2006]: p. 47.)

“war on terror” distracted the administration’s attention from other important regions such as Latin America or the Arab-Israeli peace process. (See: Anderson [2011]: pp. 58-59) The US did not respect other states’ national interests and opinion, which made it hard for Washington to realize its national interests in the long run. (Van Evera [2008]: pp. 19-20.) The doctrine resulted in significant anti-American sentiment.<sup>123</sup> (Daalder; Lindsay [2005]: p. 190.; Anderson [2011]: p. 117; p. 127.; Buckley; Singh [2006b]: p. 14.; Bolton [2008]: p. 174.) US foreign policy divided Europe and caused tensions in transatlantic ties. (Guertner [2007]: 33-39.; Anderson [2011] p. 98.; Bolton [2010]: p. 178.)<sup>124</sup> US actions were not supported in the Middle East and US strategy alienated allies in general. (Dalby [2006]: p. 45.; p. 49.)

The previous “list” of successes and failures clearly show that the implementation of the doctrine caused more setbacks than advantages overall. Prevention caused more trouble than what it could tackle. It was also dangerous, as it could have created a precedent. It was difficult to judge what standards could be applied for identifying threats that required anticipatory action. Extensive application of US military power led to the “overstretch” of Washington’s resources and this “*maximalist foreign policy*” led to “*minimalist results*” (Buckley; Singh [2006b]: pp. 21-23.) In the long run, the concept compromised world security rather than strengthening it. (Dalby [2006]: p. 49.) These observations all support the theory of strategic blowback.

Not surprisingly, experts outside the administration were divided on the doctrine. A number of well-known foreign policy intellectuals opposed the Iraq war. Brent Scowcroft, James Baker, Lawrence Eagleburger, Richard Holbrooke all criticized the approach. (Buckley; Singh [2006b]: p. 21.; Anderson [2011]: p. 111.; Kaufman [2007]: p. 137.)<sup>125</sup> Theoretical experts and scholars were equally divided but many provided a relatively objective analysis of the doctrine. Some well-known intellectuals supported the doctrine such as John Lewis Gaddis, Philip Zelikow and Michael Ledeen. (Buckley; Singh [2006b]: p. 20.; Anderson [2011]: p. 111.) Daalder and Lindsay refer to the Bush doctrine and the foreign policy of the Bush administration as a “*revolution*” in

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<sup>123</sup> In Poland, a country with strong transatlantic credentials, only 50% of those asked had a positive opinion on the US and the same data for the United Kingdom was only 48%. A poll conducted in various Islamic countries not long after the invasion of Iraq showed that the majority of the people did not trust Bush’s leadership in countries such as Pakistan, Indonesia and places like Palestine. A significant number of people had a favorable opinion concerning Osama bin Laden. See: Daalder; Lindsay [2005]: p. 190.

<sup>124</sup> See then defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld’s statements on “*Old*” vs. “*New Europe*”. (DoD [2003])

<sup>125</sup> For a detailed and rather critical assessment of the Bush administration’s foreign policy see the document released by the Iraq Study Group. (*Iraq Study Group Report...* [2006]; also: Rehnson [2010]: pp. 61-62.

US foreign policy. (Daalder; Lindsey [2005]: chapter 1, esp. pp. 1-15) Others point out that the US has always been striving to spread its own values, thus, the Bush doctrine did not represent a novel approach to foreign affairs. (Kagan [2008]: p. 37.; Buckley; Singh [2006b]: p. 13.; Grondin [2006]: p. 13.) Ikenberry thought of the strategy as a ‘grand offer’ from the US regarding its own role in the international system. (Ikenberry [2011]: p. 255.) The US requested subordination to its will and offered global security in turn. (*Ibid.* pp. 254-273.) Niall Ferguson emphasizes that the doctrine was never as radical as its critiques had been suggesting. No US president has ever closed out the possibility of preemptive action. Thus, the concept itself was not radical nor was it novel – it was the actual practice of foreign policy that differed from other presidencies. (Ferguson [2008]: p. 228.; also: Ryan [2010]: p. 9.; Dorrien [2004]: p. 1.; also: Rehnson [2010]: p. 33.) Kaufman considered it a “prudent” strategy for tackling modern challenges of the international security environment. (Kaufman [2007]: pp. 128-129) Preemption was needed against Iraq and the application of force was a wise choice. (*Ibid.*) Lynch and Singh provide another account, which actually defends the doctrine against its critiques. (Lynch; Singh [2008])<sup>126</sup>

It is difficult to define what type of theoretical approach the doctrine followed. Ryan puts forth that neoconservative ideas were based on the pursuit of national interests rather than the promotion of certain values. Thus, it is part of the realist tradition. (Ryan [2010]: p. 7.)<sup>127</sup> Rehnson also concludes that the concept was a realist one. (Rehnson [2010]: pp. 31-32.) Yet it included a number of liberal elements as it built on the concept of “democratic peace theory”, the idea arguing that democracies do not fight wars among themselves. (Kaufman [2007]: p. 129.; Dalby [2006]: pp. 42-43.) Tony Smith argues that the doctrine followed the principles of Wilsonianism, while Thomas Knock and Anne-Marie Slaughter contend that the Bush doctrine did not respect international norms and institutions, thus, it was not a Wilsonian concept. (Smith [2006]; Knock [2006]; Slaughter [2006]) According to Buckley and Singh, it was an “amalgam” of realism and “an extensively muscular Wilsonianism”. (Buckley; Singh [2006b]: pp. 12-13.) Ikenberry puts forth that the doctrine made the US an “order-creating Leviathan” which spreads its values (democracy) because the creation of

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<sup>126</sup> The work by Lynch and Singh comes as a surprise, as an earlier book written by Robert Singh together with Mary Buckley is in fact quite critical of the doctrine. (See: Buckley; Singh [2006a-b])

<sup>127</sup> Ryan contends though, that this realism was different from the traditional, Kennan- and Morgenthau-style, balance-of-power realism mainly in that it was based on a more “expansive” concept of the US national interest. (Ryan [2010]: p. 7.)

democracies corresponds with US national security interests. (Ikenberry [2011] pp. 255-262.) The creation of order is a realist distinction and the spreading of democratic values and norms is a liberal concept. Altogether it was a notion based on “*realist liberalism*” as the Bush administration sought to spread liberal values (*democracy*) by realist means (*military force*). (Balogh [2012]: pp. 4-5.) Thus, it is fair to conclude that specific elements of the Bush doctrine were not new in US foreign policy thinking. *It was the new emphasis on specific elements and the practice itself that differed from those of previous administrations.*

## 2.2. The Bush Doctrine and Iran

It is surprising how little has been written on the Iranian implications of the Bush doctrine.<sup>128</sup> As opposed to the topic of the Bush doctrine itself, this specific aspect of the concept is not discussed by a large number of sources. Hardly any book has been published on the issue. Two excellent books, however, provide unique insight into how Iran reacted to the implementation of the Bush doctrine – Trita Parsi’s 2007, as well as David Crist’s 2012 book.<sup>129</sup>

These sources highlight that Iran’s immediate reaction to US actions in Afghanistan and Iraq was mostly cooperative, since the Taliban and Saddam Hussein constituted two of Iran’s fiercest enemies. Suddenly, the near term interests of Iran and the US were aligned. Iran was ready to use the opportunity and demonstrate its influence in Afghanistan and Iraq.

It should be noted that despite the importance the US government attached to Iran, no real strategy existed on the inter agency level on how to deal with the Islamic Republic between 2003 and 2005. Condoleezza Rice tried to push a draft through the bureaucracy, but no consensus was reached as the administration could not decide between two different alternatives. Vice President Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and people in their policy shops would not agree to anything less than regime

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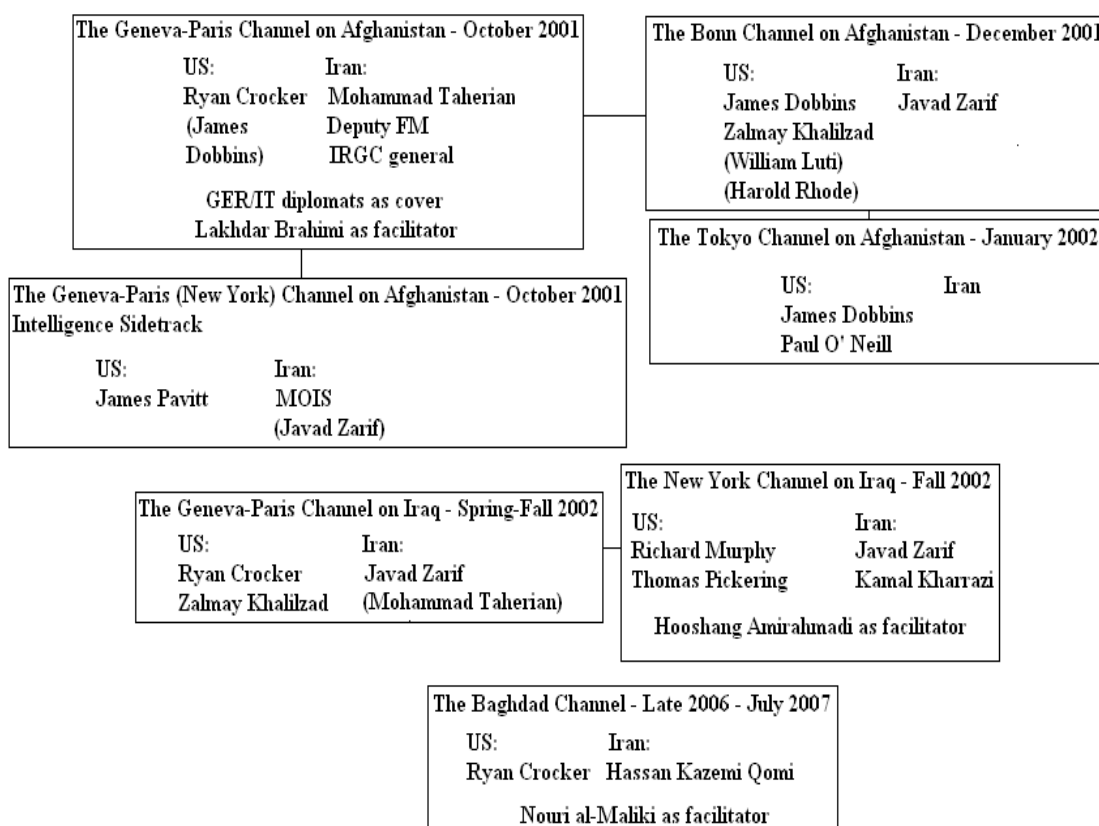
<sup>128</sup> One aspect of the Bush doctrine that involved Iran was the introduction of sanctions in the framework of the “war on terror”. On September 23, 2001, President Bush signed Executive Order 13324, which froze the financial assets of entities supporting terrorism and it also prohibited all transactions with such actors. The order primarily targeted al-Qaeda, but it was also often used against Iranian organizations as well. (Katzman [2012b]: p. 29.)

<sup>129</sup> Trita Parsi’s book has been referenced earlier a number of times. See: Trita Parsi: *Threacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, the U.S. and Iran*. Yale University Press, New Haven, 2007.; David Crist: *The Twilight War: The Secret History of America’s Thirty-Year Conflict with Iran*. The Penguin Press, New York, 2012.

change. Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell on the other hand, would have accepted direct talks with Iran, especially regarding matters related to Iraq. In the end, the draft never developed into a National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD) – strategic papers for implementing government wide policies on specific subjects. (Crist [2012]: pp. 443-447.)<sup>130</sup>

Thus, US policy towards Iran was rather ad hoc. It was initially one of symbolic and limited engagement, but mostly for realizing Washington’s unilateral goals. Nonetheless, Iran was willing to engage the US. According to accounts, the US and Iran established channels with each other at least four times altogether between October 2001 and 2006, and some of these were initiated by Iran. (See: **Figure. 8.**) Some meetings were organized parallel to one another and some of the participants took part in negotiations of more than one track.

**Figure 6. Direct High-Level Communication Channels Between the US and Iran 2001-2007**



Source: Parsi [2007]: pp. 227-257; Crist [2012]: pp. 430-535. Names in brackets indicate people who joined the negotiations at some point but were not necessarily there from the beginning or the whole time.

<sup>130</sup> The draft included that “*The United States should not at this point respond to overtures from the current regime but will continue to meet with the Iranian Government representatives in multilateral settings when it serves U.S. interests.*” According to Crist, this was added by Vice President Cheney. Crist [2012]: pp. 446-447.

Indicated names are only those found in the two sources, which means that this is by no means a full list of the participants. MOIS stands for the Iranian *Ministry of Intelligence and Security*, GER/IT is for German and Italian diplomats who provided cover for what would seem to be a multilateral track for outsiders. In case no specific name is indicated – as in some Iranian cases in the first box on the October 2001 Geneva-Paris channel – that means that the two sources did not specify the exact names of those present. The positions of those indicated in the boxes at the time of the negotiations are as follows (in case of retirement the most important milestones of the given persons career are highlighted): Ambassador **Ryan C. Crocker**: former US ambassador to several Middle Eastern countries and appointed chargé d'affaires to the interim Afghan government in 2002. Ambassador **James Dobbins**: former US ambassador to the EU (1991-1993), Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs (2001) and chief US negotiator in the lead up to the Bonn Conference on Afghanistan in December 2001 where he was the US representative to Afghan opposition groups. Ambassador **Mohammad Taherian**: former Iranian ambassador to Afghanistan (80's) and Bosnia-Herzegovina (90's). **Lakhdar Brahimi**: Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Afghanistan and head of UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) 2001-2004. **James Pavitt**: Deputy Director of Operations (1999-2004), CIA. **Mohammad Javad Zarif**: Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs (1992-2002); Ambassador of Iran to the UN. **Zalmay Khalilzad**: Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Southwest Asia, Near East, and North African Affairs at the National Security Council (2001-2002). **William J. Luti**: Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (2001-2005). **Harold Rhode**: analyst at the Office of Net Assessment (1982-2010). **Paul H. O'Neill**: Secretary of the Treasury (2001-2002). Ambassador **Richard W. Murphy**: former ambassador to several countries (e.g. Syria and Saudi Arabia) and Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (1983-1989). Ambassador **Thomas R. Pickering**: former ambassador to several countries (e.g. India, Russia, Israel, etc.) and Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (1997-2000). **Kamal Kharrazi**: Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran (1997-2005). Ambassador **Hassan Kazemi Qomi**: ambassador of Iran to Iraq since 2003. **Nouri al-Maliki**: prime minister of Iraq since 2006. It is quite likely that the 'Deputy FM' in the first Geneva-Paris channel was in fact Javad Zarif, whom Crist does not identify by name but he indicates that the person is an expert on "international political organizations", which fits Zarif's profile perfectly. See: Crist [2012]: p. 431.

Colin Powell's Department of State was receptive to Iran's cooperative attitude, thus, US and Iranian diplomats started meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, in October 2001. Powell's policy was to offer partnership to Iran in return for ending Iranian support to anti-Israeli extremist groups. The meetings were organized with the help of Lakhdar Brahimi, the leader of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). The US delegation was headed by Ambassador Ryan Crocker on the US side, while the Iranian delegation consisted of a deputy foreign minister, an IRGC general and Ambassador Mohammad Taherian – Iran's former ambassador to Bosnia-Herzegovina and Afghanistan. German and Italian diplomats provided cover to make the event look like multilateral negotiations. The Iranian delegation showed unanimous support for US actions in Afghanistan and even provided a detailed map with exact troop locations and information on which military sites and installations the US should bomb. It offered its airports to the US and search and rescue assistance with downed US pilots. Iran served as a communications channel between Washington and the Northern Alliance in the fight against the Taliban and they caught some al-Qaeda fighters using intelligence from the US. Furthermore, Iran proposed the normalization of relations between the two nations and the State Department had in fact prepared for such an

option. (Parsi [2007]: pp. 226-228.; Crist [2012] pp. 431-433.)<sup>131</sup>

The Geneva-Paris channel had a sidetrack: it was led by CIA deputy director for operations James Pavitt and Iran was represented by MOIS (Ministry of Intelligence and Security) agents. US intelligence requested help on finding or handing over “high value” al-Qaeda operatives. Iran did not want to hand over some of them because it viewed them as an insurance against al-Qaeda. As a response, Javad Zarif travelled to New York to provide information on over two hundred al-Qaeda and Taliban operatives in Iranian custody. In the meantime, Iranian president Khatami traveled to the US for the annual UN General Assembly sessions and requested to visit the site of Ground Zero in order to pay tribute to those perished in the 9/11 attacks. Also, the IRGC wished to expand the Geneva talks by introducing additional IRGC officers to the dialogue. Washington rejected both initiatives. (Crist [2012]: pp. 432-438.)

The Department of State was willing to engage Iran on issues other than Afghanistan, but the Pentagon was strictly against it. “[Vice President] Cheney and [Secretary of Defense Donald] Rumsfeld were always there to sabotage our cooperation in Afghanistan if it got too far” according to Colonel Wilkerson, who served as Powell’s chief of staff at the Department of State. (Parsi [2007]: p. 228.)

The second and parallel track was the Bonn channel in December 2001, where the US was represented by Ambassador James Dobbins. (Parsi [2007]: p. 229.; Crist [2012]: p. 433.) This channel worked entirely separately from the Geneva-Paris track.<sup>132</sup> During the Bonn Conference on Afghanistan in December 2001, Iran pointed out that the draft declaration that was to be adopted by the conference did not contain any references on democracy or commitments on Afghanistan’s behalf to fight international terrorism. It was Iranian chief negotiator Javad Zarif who persuaded the representative of the Northern Alliance to accept a more limited role in the post-conflict government of Afghanistan, thus, saving the negotiations from breaking down. *Iran was also willing to*

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<sup>131</sup> There is considerable confusion in the literature as to the exact participants of the different tracks. Crist points out that two different channels were established: the Geneva-Paris channel headed by Crocker on the US side and the Bonn channel headed by Dobbins. (Crist [2012]: pp. 430-435.) On the other hand, Parsi writes that the Geneva-Paris track was headed by Dobbins for the US and Crocker was merely a member of the negotiating team. Parsi [2007]: p. 227-228. The author chose to rely on Crist’s description of the events as his book provides a fresher account of these developments, thus, he could base his research on a larger pool of information as 5 years have gone by since Parsi’s 2007 book has been published.

<sup>132</sup> The two channels were coordinated by Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (2001-2005) Marc Grossman at the State Department. It is also interesting to note that the US kept up two separate channels, while Iran rotated some of the participants in the two meetings, thus, they always had a consistent position. Crist [2012]: pp. 433-434.



*equip and organize the new Afghan army.* Clearly, Iran was cooperative and open to discuss issues that went beyond the problem of Afghanistan. At the Tokyo summit In January 2002, Iran promised to contribute \$ 500 million to the reconstruction of Afghanistan – the most significant sum offered by any country at the event. Moreover, Iran helped rebuild the infrastructure needed for radio and television broadcasts, gave more than a billion US dollars in the form of financial aid. Iran also initiated direct flights between Tehran and Kabul. (Parsi [2007]: pp. 226-231; see also: Crist [2012]: pp. 435-436.)

Contacts were sustained throughout the above mentioned Tokyo donor conference in January 2002. During the course of discussions, Secretary of Treasury Paul O' Neill received a note from the Iranian diplomats passed on by the former UN High Commissioner for Refugees saying that Iran was ready to discuss any issue regarding the standoff between the US and Iran. It was forwarded to the State Department, but no one ever reacted. (Crist [2012]: p .436.)

The Pentagon and hawkish conservatives were bent on stopping a rapprochement from happening and sought to cut the Geneva channel by provoking extremists in Iran to pressure the reformist Khatami government to shut down the channels. They succeeded by organizing a secret meeting with an Iranian opposition figure, Manuchehr Ghorbanifar, who was involved in the Iran-Contra scandal. His American contact was Michael Ledeen. Ledeen was also implicated in the Iran-Contra affair and now worked as a consultant to Under Secretary for Policy Douglas Feith. The meeting was organized in Italy and was attended by the head of the Italian military intelligence service (SISMI), Niccolo Pollari. They had close ties to the Pentagon's Office of Special Plans, the unit accredited with distorting intelligence on Iraq. Other Iranian exiles were also present at the meeting. The local office of the CIA in Rome learned of the meetings and it intervened, thus, the meetings were forced to end. Still, the Iranian government gotten word of the US reach out to Iranian opposition groups and the regime in Tehran was upset. (Parsi [2007]: pp. 226-233; Crist [2012]: 448-451; Crist [2007]: pp. 448-451.)

Furthermore, the Israeli interception of the cargo vessel named "Karine A" in the Red Sea added to tensions between the US and Iran. The ship contained several types of weapons and guns, and according to Israel it was headed to Palestine for Palestinian extremist groups. Still, none of the members in Khatami's National Security Council admitted to having been involved in the shipment. The interception was puzzling

because it is quite rare for supplies to be shipped by sea rather than air through Lebanon and Syria. The Pentagon started accusing Iran of providing support to al-Qaeda fighters on the run from Afghanistan, in order to use them against the US. Iran had in fact increased the number of its troops stationed on the Iranian-Afghan border and it provided reports on the 290 al-Qaeda fighters it caught. Moreover, there was no sufficient intelligence to support the Pentagon's accusations. (Parsi [2007]: pp. 233-235.; Crist [2012]: p. 436.)

The final blow to the Geneva channel was the "Axis of Evil" speech. This was the final in a series of events that played into the hands of the hard-liners in Iran. Khatami was isolated both domestically and internationally. The speech came just weeks after Iran made serious efforts to demonstrate its cooperative attitude. Some Iranian officials, who supported the opening, had to pay for the failure of opening with their jobs. This forced everyone to be even more wary of establishing contacts with the US in the future. As a result of the speech, Iran shut down the Geneva channel. Ambassador James Dobbins had warned Condoleezza Rice that Iran may respond by destabilizing Afghanistan, but Rice did not ascribe any importance to such a scenario. The administration was focusing on Iraq by then. By early 2002, neoconservative columnists were arguing for an attack on Iran. In order to avoid a possible military action against Iran, Tehran agreed to revive the secret communications channel during the spring of 2002 in Geneva after the State Department approached it. In fact, Iran accepted that the US was going to attack Iraq anyway. Thus, Teheran chose to demonstrate limited support for the US effort. (Parsi [2007]: pp. 235-243.)<sup>133</sup>

In September 2002, another channel was opened with the mediation of Hooshang Amirahmadi, president of the American Iranian Council. Talks took place at Javad Zarif's house in New York, as he became Iran's permanent representative to the UN. Amirahmadi had coordinated with former Secretary of State George Shultz in bringing five experienced diplomats to the talks – Thomas R. Pickering and Richard W. Murphy were both among them. Under Secretary of State for Policy Nicholas Burns let Pickering know before the talks that the US was ready to normalize relations as long as Iran renounced support for terrorism and halted its nuclear and missile programs. When Pickering relayed this to Zarif, he indicated that in order for Iran to change its policies,

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<sup>133</sup> Crist also mentions that the Iranian military attaché in Bahrain also let US officers know that Iran would be ready to help US actions in Iraq and provide assistance with search and rescue operations in case US airmen were downed. However, Crist does not elaborate on whether the US responded to the message or not. Crist [2012]: p. 466.

the US needed to demonstrate some “goodwill” first. (Crist [2012]: p. 455-456.) Staffers of senators Joe Biden and Chuck Hagel were also present at the meeting. The Iranian delegation, however, was much higher level than the US one. The Iranian Minister for Foreign Affairs Kamal Kharrazi was personally present and he indicated that Iran was ready to normalize relations with the United States. All this was passed on to the NSC in Washington. Zalmay Khalilzad, the senior official responsible for Iran and Iraq, did not have objections against a policy of rapprochement. From then on the meetings were held between Crocker and Zarif and the latter kept proposing normalization of relations. Despite several Iranian attempts to remedy tensions between the two countries, the Bush administration rejected Tehran’s offers. Khalilzad joined the discussions headed by Crocker, but he would only be allowed to continue talks concerning issues which helped realize US national interests. (Crist [2012]: pp. 456-459.)

Conservative hawks, such as Ledeen, tried to undermine the Geneva channel by organizing further meetings between Iranian exiles and Pentagon officials. Still, Iran chose not to shut down the channel. It took steps to sustain Iraqi stability by calling on influential Iraqi Shia factions to take part in the reconstruction of Iraq, instead of waging war against coalition forces. (See: Parsi [2007]: pp. 242-243.; Nasr [2006]: p. 91; pp. 177-178.) The US crushed the Iraqi army in a few weeks, which “*sent shivers down the spines of America’s foes in the region and beyond*” (Parsi [2007]: p. 243.) Iran was now encircled by the US military. Tehran decided to once again engage in dialogue with the US and worked out a detailed offer, *which was essentially a roadmap for a grand bargain*. The proposal was sent to the US through Swiss mediation in May 2003. It contained all the contentious issues that hindered a US-Iranian rapprochement. Iran would give up sponsorship of militant groups. Tehran also put its nuclear program on the agenda of possible negotiations, since it offered full transparency on its program and proposed to abide by international norms related to its nuclear program. It offered cooperation on fighting against terrorism and Iraq and it was also willing to accept the 2002 Saudi peace proposal on resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. Essentially, this meant Iranian acceptance of the “*two-state solution*” of the conflict. (*Ibid.* p. 244.) In turn, Iran sought to exchange al-Qaeda fighters it detained for members of the Iraqi based Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO). Finally, Iran wanted US recognition of its legitimate security interests and an end to US threats. (Parsi [2007]: pp. 240-245.; see also: Appendix A, B, in *Ibid.* pp. 341-346.; IAEA [2003]) Iran tried other channels too – Sweden and the United Kingdom. Few weeks before the Swiss delivered the Iranian

message, Iran made a gesture to Israel as well. Former IRGC commander General Mohsen Rezai offered to work out a plan for handling Israeli-Iranian enmity at a meeting attended by Israeli, US and Palestinian officials. Still, the US and Israeli hardliners never supported the idea, and no response was ever given to the Iranian offer. (Parsi [2007]: pp. 250-251)

Even though the State Department and Condoleezza Rice were ready to negotiate, Rumsfeld and Cheney vetoed responding to the Iranian offer. Washington even “rebuked” Switzerland’s role in delivering the message – Parsi highlights that this was a clear message: anyone who even tried to mediate between the US and Iran would be “punished.” (Parsi [2007]: p. 248.). In the meantime, hawkish conservatives were targeting the Geneva channel, but it was kept open and Khalilzad, Crocker, Zarif and Taherian – by then Iran’s Ambassador to Afghanistan – met in Switzerland. The US wanted assistance with al-Qaeda and Iran wanted assurances that the MKO would remain designated as a terrorist organization by the US. Khalilzad pointed out that Iran held five al-Qaeda operatives who were involved in planning attacks which were about to take place imminently. Zarif promised to look into the matter. On May 12, 2003, three different sites linked to Western firms were attacked by terrorists in Riyadh killing thirty-five people, seven of whom were US citizens. Intelligence suggested that al-Qaeda members in Iran had prepared the attack. Despite a lack of direct evidence of Iranian knowledge on the planned attacks, the incident was enough to minimize the chances of a grand bargain between the US and Iran. The next Geneva meeting was scheduled for May 25, 2003. However, days before the meeting, Washington informed Iran that the event would not take place. The channel was shut down. Moreover, Arkansas senator Sam Brownback introduced a bill which designated a \$ 50 million sum for supporting Iranian opposition groups and the creation of an Iran Democracy Fund. The bill never became law, but it almost made Iranian regime change official US policy. All in all, the Iranian domestic political effect of the US rejection of the May 2003 offer was that hardliners were strengthened and reformist elements open to dialogue were pushed aside within the domestic political arena. (Parsi [2007]: pp. 251-256; Crist [2012]: pp. 476-481).

To make US strategy toward Iran even more complicated, *regime change had become official policy by 2005*. Principle Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Elizabeth Cheney (daughter of the Vice President) and Deputy National Security Advisor for Global Democracy Strategy Elliot Abrams headed the “Iran-Syria

Working Group”.<sup>134</sup> Its aim was to direct government policy on Iran and Syria. The output of the group’s deliberations was the “Iran Action Plan” which was signed by President Bush in 2005. The idea was to facilitate freedom and democracy in Iran through information operations and intensifying interactions between the societies of the US and Iran through exchange programs. The policy entailed new financial sanctions and sought to limit Iran’s reach of dual-use technology. One additional element of the overall policy was the Democracy Project headed by Elizabeth Cheney at the State Department. This program promoted Western values through certain media outlets and aimed to influence Iranian society. The State Department spent 10 million US dollars for Iranian democracy promotion and this sum increased to 75 million US dollars in 2006.<sup>135</sup> The money went to groups which promoted Western values inside Iran and US organizations with the same goals. Radio Free Europe’s Farsi edition (*Radio Farda*) was also involved in the programs. However, the overall success of the policy of Iranian democracy promotion was rather limited. The Congress also passed the Iran Freedom Support Act, which is the legal basis for democracy promotion in Iran. (Crist [2012]: pp. 495-499. See also: Katzman [2008]: pp. 41-43.; Public Law 109-293-Sept. 30. [2006]) The US increased the number of Farsi-speaking diplomats in the vicinity of Iran and elsewhere – Baku, Istanbul, Frankfurt, London and Ashqhabad. All of these US embassies were strengthened by “Iran-watcher” positions not to mention the enlargement of the US Consulate in Dubai. Since these countries have a large number of Iranian immigrants, the US sought to find Iranian partners for implementing projects related to US democracy promotion programs. (Katzman [2008]: p. 41.) Other sources have reported that the State Department had created an Office of Iranian Affairs within the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. (Weisman [2006]) According to certain sources, the organization had close ties to the Pentagon’s Iranian Directorate, which dealt with intelligence related to Iran and undermining the government in Tehran.

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<sup>134</sup> The Iran-Syria Working Group (see above) used to work under the auspices of the Office of Iranian Affairs and its primary task was to work out plans for promoting democracy in Iran. (Dinmore [2006])

<sup>135</sup> The Congressional Research Service (CRS) says slightly otherwise. Kenneth Katzman of the CRS lists the exact Congressional appropriations for promoting democracy in Iran – these data are the following on a yearly basis. FY2004: \$ 1.5 million for promoting democracy and human rights; FY2005: \$3 million for development of parties, the media, and civil society as well as labor and human rights. FY 2006 (regular): \$11.5 million in the form of foreign aid appropriation. FY2006 (supplemental): \$ 66.1. million (out of \$75 million requested by the government). The breakdown is as follows: \$20 million for democracy promotion; \$5 million for public diplomacy; \$5 million for cultural exchanges; \$36.1 million for Voice of America-TV and Radio Farda. See: Katzman [2008]: pp. 41-43.

(Alexandrovna [2006]; Rozen [2006])<sup>136</sup>

These efforts clearly imply that the US intended to change the regime in Tehran. Nonetheless, while the author accepts that the US would have been more than happy to see the Tehran regime collapse – to say the least – and it is clear that it had even taken steps to promote democracy in Iran, however, the overall policy was rather symbolic. *If Washington had really wanted to or could change the regime in Iran it would have done it by force by then.* Thus, the policy of promoting Iranian democracy was a way of countering Iran's growing influence and not so much intended at regime change *per se*. It was an inherent acknowledgment of the limits of US actions and influence. Still, the policy played in to the hands of hardliners in Tehran.

By 2006, the US had stepped up its actions against Iran's presence in Iraq and placed significant military pressure on Iran's agents and surrogates in Iraq. Iran bowed to the pressure and signaled its willingness through the government of Iraq in 2006 to engage in discussions with the US. The talks were held in Baghdad on May 28, 2007, and they were facilitated by Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. The US delegation was led by Ryan Crocker once again and Iran was represented by Iran's ambassador to Iraq, Hassan Kazemi Qomi.<sup>137</sup> Crocker wanted an end to Iran's meddling in Iraq, while Kazemi Qomi proposed the idea of Iranian assistance in rebuilding the Iraqi army and establishment of a mechanism for coordinating between Iran, Iraq and the US on Iraqi security issues. The talks continued in July 2007, but to no avail. The two sides could not agree on a common platform. (Crist [2012]: pp. 533-535.)

It is interesting to note, that in terms of rhetoric, the first term of the Bush presidency focused mostly on Iraq and the issue of Iran was not emphasized in particular. The wording of President Bush's speeches was not particularly harsh, except for the "Axis of Evil" speech. Despite the strong and aggressive words in the speeches analyzed above and the 2002 National Security Strategy, only a few other speeches highlighted Iran in the context of sponsorship of terrorism, pursuit of nuclear weapons

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<sup>136</sup> Part of this has been taken from the author's graduate dissertation. (Balogh [2008b]) and the logic also builds on another publication of the author together with László Láng. See: Balogh-Láng [2007b]. The logic has also been applied in a paper submitted for an essay writing competition for graduate students also written together with László Láng. (Balogh-Láng [2007a])

<sup>137</sup> Hassan Kazemi Qomi used to be Iran's ambassador to Iraq until 2010, when Hassan Danafar took over. Qomi is said to have been a member of the Quds Force of the IRGC and he used to be a consultant to Hezbollah in Lebanon before that. Danafar used to serve in the Navy of the IRGC. (See: Guzansky [2011]: p. 87.; Cordesman et al. [2012] p. 11.)

as well as the need for democratic reforms.<sup>138</sup> (See: Bush [2003]; [2004]) This is true even if the administration kept threatening Iran with the use of force occasionally. (USA Today [2005])

Furthermore, Iranian surrogates in Iraq played a constructive role in the Iraqi transition period, with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani specifically speaking out against resistance against US forces, as well as encouraging the Shia to take part in the democratic process of electing the representatives and leaders of Iraq. (Nasr [2006]: p 91; pp. 173-175.; Bolton [2008]: 193-195) Still, the Iraqi situation between 2004 and 2006 is best described as sectarian strife. Muqtada al-Sadr's role should also be noted – he was a cleric who received support from Tehran. He was considerably more aggressive than Sistani and sought to counter US military presence, as well as Sunni influence. Both al-Sadr and Sistani were influential in post-invasion Iraq and both had ties to Iran. When Iran sensed that its constructive behavior regarding US actions in Afghanistan, as well as the invasion of Iraq did not pay off, it reversed its policies. Although it is far-fetched to say that Iran was directly behind the civil war that unfolded by 2004 in Iraq, it is clear that it did not mind that the US was losing resources and political capital in the Middle Eastern country, as well as in Afghanistan.

Iran became a significant player in the domestic Iraqi political disputes and it started providing “*tactical military assistance*” to various Shiite factions and militias. (Guzansky [2011]: p. 86.) Since 2003, Iran's neighbors have been trying to meddle in Iraq, but Iran's presence outweighed other foreign influence. The secret Quds Force of the IRGC sent a number of operatives to Southern Iraq with diplomatic passports “*to identify and train Iraqi fighters, set up safe transit routes for activists and arms between Iraq and Iran, and aid militias in terrorist activities.*” (*Ibid.*) Some sources point out that as much as 1.5 million Iranians crossed the border following the invasion of Iraq. Many of those were exiles but a number of them had ties to the IRGC. General Petraeus, former commander of coalition forces in Iraq, called these undercover operatives as the “*executive arm of Iranian foreign policy in Iraq.*” (*Ibid.* p. 87.) Both of the last two Iranian ambassadors to Iraq (including the one in office) had or still have

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<sup>138</sup> The author counted 22 relevant speeches between 2001 and the March 16 2006 release of the second National Security Strategy of the Bush administration, which included thoughts on Iran in the context of supporting terrorism, and/or lack of democratic practices and/or the Iranian nuclear program. Those 22 include the 4 speeches that actually laid the foundations of the Bush doctrine itself. These speeches can be found in a separate appendix at the end of the thesis, along with other relevant speeches mentioning Iran after the 2006 release of the Bush administration's new National Security Strategy. (See: Appendix). ‘Relevant’ is taken to refer to the speeches listed by the website “Presidential Rhetoric.” See: <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/bushpresidency.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012

ties to either the IRGC or the Quds Force. (*Ibid.*)<sup>139</sup>

The study by researchers of a prominent Washington, D.C. think tank claims that although it is difficult to estimate the number of Iranian operatives in Iran, but experts put the presence of the Quds Force to the order of several hundred operatives in the period between 2003 and 2011. Iran supplied Iraqi groups with components for IEDs and EFPs.<sup>140</sup> The latter appeared in Iraq in 2003, but they became a serious threat to security in 2005. Besides supporting Shiite Iraqi groups, the outfit is also claimed to be providing support to the Taliban in Afghanistan, as well as certain Sunni groups in Iraq. Iran provides these groups with training, funding, weapons and even guidance.<sup>141</sup> (Cordesman et al. [2012] pp. 114-119.)

It is true, though, that Iran was perhaps not interested in an all-out civil war and unlimited instability in Iraq, since that could have backfired. However, it was interested in “*keeping the U.S. preoccupied and at bay*” and in “*promoting a degree of chaos but of a manageable kind.*” (International Crisis Group [2005]: pp. i-ii) Iran has probably shown restraint and had not done all it could to undermine Iraqi stability between 2003 and 2005. A 2005 report points out that Iraq could have been regarded as a bargaining chip by Teheran in its relations with the U.S. In case the US further threatened its security, Iran would answer by causing chaos in Iraq. Also, Iran had been afraid that the Bush administration’s “*hawks [...] set their sights on Teheran as well.*” (International Crisis Group [2005]: p. 9.) Iran felt that its cooperative attitude regarding the issue of Afghanistan was not rewarded duly by the US, thus, it chose not to cooperate with it. Still, identifying Iraq as an Iranian proxy is an exaggeration, since the Iraqi Shia wish to maintain their independence. Thus, all Iran was interested in is a “*strategy of managed chaos.*”(International Crisis Group [2005]: p 11.; pp. ii-23.) The significance of Iranian (military) influence and the existence of a calculated Iranian strategy in Iraq are further reinforced by another source. It points out that Iranian power projection in Iraq is

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<sup>139</sup> The influence of Iran is analyzed in detail by Guzansky who divides Iran’s power into four categories: military, political, economic and religious. It is instructive, that the value of Iraqi-Iranian trade was around four billion US dollars altogether in 2009 which signals a significant Iranian economic influence. (Guzansky [2011]: p. 92.) For a fresh and official US assessment of Iranian military power see: *Annual Report on Military Power of Iran*. April 2012. Department of Defense. Federation of American Scientists (FAS) <http://www.fas.org/man/eprint/dod-iran.pdf> pp. 1-4. Accessed: 15-12-2012 Also referenced by Cordesman et al. [2012]: p. 114.

<sup>140</sup> IED stands for improvised explosive device and EFP is for explosively formed projectile/ penetrator. Both are rather primitive and relatively cheap devices but still capable of causing significant destruction. A large number of US deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan resulted from the presence of such explosives. For more on this see: Burton [2007]

<sup>141</sup> According to the CSIS report, Iran provides the above mentioned groups with advanced rockets, sniper rifles, automatic weapons, mortars, IEDs and EFPs. (See: Cordesman; Wilner; Gibs [2012] p. 119.)



limited and Iran's main source of influence is not of a military nature because Iran focuses on providing support to Iran's domestic political allies in Iraq. Tehran's primary strategy rested on supporting almost every political faction in Iraq in order to have surrogates in power no matter who won in the political battles. The source provides details on Iranian assistance provided to Iraqi Shiite militias in the form of funding, weapons supplies and training in both Iran, as well as Lebanon by Hezbollah. (Felter, Fishman [2008])

There is also a large pool of primary sources, which provide empirical evidence proving that Iran has been trying to exert its influence in Iraq through supporting various Iraqi factions and militias. One of the Iraqi war logs leaked by *Wikileaks* describes an attempt by a group of men to smuggle explosives from Iran to Iraq.<sup>142</sup> (*Intel Report...* [2005]; Gordon; Lehren [2010]). Another document highlights training provided to an Iraqi Shiite insurgent by the Quds Force of the IRGC in July 2006.<sup>143</sup> (*Alleged Jaysh Al-Mahdi plans to...* [2006]; Gordon; Lehren [2010]) Still another war log describes a border skirmish between a US platoon teamed up with an Iraqi squad against Iranian border guards east of Balad Ruz in Diyala province.<sup>144</sup> (*Summary of Incident on Iraq-Iran Border ...* [2006]; Gordon; Lehren [2010]) There is further evidence of Iran attempting to plot assassinations in Basra, as well as the IRGC smuggling weapons into Iraq.<sup>145</sup> (*Threat Warning ...* [2005]; *Intel Report: Ammunition*

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<sup>142</sup> The report notes: "It is clear that the movement of explosives and bomb-making equipment was taking place from Iran into Iraq on the night of 9/10 Nov 05 in northern Basra Province. An anti-smuggling operation mounted by the DBE Border Police in Basra disrupted the movement and recovered a quantity of bomb-making equipment, including explosively formed projectiles (EFPS)." The abbreviation in the sentence represents text that has been redacted by the New York Times for security reasons. (*Intel Report ...* [2005])

<sup>143</sup> The report notes: "Salim [a senior commander of the Jaysh Al-Mahdi group – added by author, I.B.] chose Dulaymi [a Shiite insurgent – added by author, I.B.] because he allegedly trained in Iran on how to conduct precision, military style kidnappings (NFI). Dulaymi reportedly obtained his training from Hizballah operatives near Qum, Iran, who were under the supervision of Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Quds Force (IRGC-QF) officers in July 2006." The abbreviation in the sentence represents text that has been redacted by the New York Times for security reasons. (*Alleged Jaysh Al-Mahdi plans to...* [2006])

<sup>144</sup> Apparently, the Iranians wanted to discuss matters related to border crossing with the Iraqis, but the US platoon leader judged the situation to be too dangerous and ordered its forces and the Iraqis to leave. That is when Iranian forces started engaging the US platoon which returned fire killing one Iranian soldier. The report notes: "As the PLT [platoon – added by author, I.B.] broke contact – Iranian indirect fire landed around them for approx 5:00 minutes." (*Summary of Incident on Iraq-Iran Border ...* [2006])

<sup>145</sup> According to the report – which states that the information therein has not been fully verified – "The IRGC provides Sayed Al Shuhada, Hezbollah, Thar Allah, Al Fadilah, Badr Brigade and other Basrah-based Islamic militia groups with assassination instructions. The instructions include the target's biographical data and the method of assassination. The instructions also detail if a handgun or rifle should be used and what part of the target's body should be targeted, for example, the head, stomach, back, or heart. If an order is given to assassinate multiple targets at the same time, the instructions for each target will be different in order to mislead investigators, news media and the public that it is a

... [2005]; Steele [2010])

The same is true for Afghanistan, where according to the Afghanistan war logs, Iran has been supporting various factions and conducting covert operations. (Tisdall [2010]) There are also reports of Iran having provided safe haven for Taliban leaders.<sup>146</sup>(*Threat Report*) *Attack Threat*... [2005]; Tisdall [2010]) Other documents point to financial support to certain entities in Afghanistan and the presence of Iranian intelligence in the country.<sup>147</sup>(*Threat Report (Crime)*... [2005]) Still another war log confirms the presence of Iranian intelligence and highlights the forged Afghan IDs of Iranian intelligence personnel. <sup>148</sup>(*Threat Report (Other)*... [2006]) Finally, another document reports about groups originally from Afghanistan residing in Mashhad, Iran.<sup>149</sup>(*Threat Report*) *Other RPT Hirat* ... [2005])

The above provide ample evidence that Iran established and strengthened its positions within Iraq and Afghanistan by 2005-2006. It followed a strategy of keeping the US bogged down in both places while expanding its political, military, economic, as well as its cultural and religious influence in the region. The author argues that this had much to do with the US rejection of the May 2003 Iranian offer – this linkage is explained in detail in the next chapter.

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random act of violence.” (*Threat Warning* ... [2005]; Steele [2010]) Concerning the issue of the IRGC smuggling weapons into Iraq, a report emphasizes that “Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) personnel smuggled Ammunition, explosives, and rockets from Iran to unknown individuals in Al Amarah.” The document adds that these rockets are likely to be surface-to-air missiles, which are quite sophisticated weapons. (*Intel Report: Ammunition* ... [2005]; Steele [2010])

<sup>146</sup> The report states: “A joint group of GOA [Government of Afghanistan – added by author, I.B] officials who held their government positions during the TB [Taliban – added by author, I.B] regime and other TB commanders are planning for future attacks in the Baghran district, Helmand Province, and Deh Rawood district, Oruzgan Province. This joint group currently resides in Iran.” (*Threat Report Attack Threat*... [2005]; Tisdall [2010])

<sup>147</sup> The referenced source notes that: “On 30 January 2005, Iranian Intelligence agencies brought ten million Afghanis (approximately 212,800 USD) from Bir Jahn (CNA), IR to an unknown location on the border of IR and Farah Province, AF. The money was transferred to a 1990's model white Toyota Corolla station wagon. The money was hidden with various food stuffs. The Corolla was occupied by four members of the Hezb-E-Islami, Gulbuddin (HIG) terrorist organization. The money was transported to an unknown location.” (*Threat Report (Crime)*... [2005])

<sup>148</sup> The source puts forth that “Two members of the Iranian Intelligence Secret Service have arrived in SYAHGERD village (42SVD 883726)/ GHORBAND district/ PARWAN province, being helped by JAWED GHORBANDI (important local person in PARWAN province). These two Iranians have forged AFG IDs on the names of ABDUL JALIL and AHMADDIN. Those 2 AFG forged IDs were made in SYAHGERD village/ GHORBAND district/ PARWAN province.” (*Threat Report (Other)*... [2006])

<sup>149</sup> The report states that “ISMAEL KHAN associate FAIZ AHMAD met with HERAT TB members in MASHAD, IRAN to discuss plans on conducting Attacks against the AF Government. Allegedly ISMAEL KHAN associate FAIZ AHMAD is currently living in and representing ISMAEL KHAN in MASHAD, IRAN.” (*Threat Report*) *Other RPT Hirat*... [2005])

### 2.2.1. Explaining Outcomes – Strategic Blowback, Iran and the Bush Doctrine

In order to follow the theoretical tenets set out by the dissertation, it is necessary to see if the Bush administration's "behavior" towards Iran could be considered as "aggressive" according to the original definition.<sup>150</sup> Recall that rejection of a diplomatic offer also counts as aggressive foreign policy. Also, intimidation is another element of the definition that applies to US behavior between 2001 and 2006. Thus, it is reasonable to qualify the foreign policy of the George W. Bush administration as "aggressive" in the given interval.

What remains is the examination of whether this aggressive foreign policy led to strategic blowback effects, i.e. if it hindered the realization of US national interests as defined at the beginning of the chapter.

US actions contributed to the relative growth of Iranian power, which in turn hindered the realization of the most basic US national interests, since Iran's growing influence indirectly led to intensified Iranian support for its regional surrogates – some of whom were designated as foreign terrorist organizations by the State Department. Confronting Iran also increased instability in the region, which was an ideal situation for terrorist organizations to strengthen their organizations and increase their influence. *It is also worth recalling that the threat of international terrorism actually increased as a result of the Bush doctrine.* (See the chapter on the Bush doctrine.) A possible cooperation with Tehran could have reduced the threat of Islamic radicalism as Iran was interested in fighting those elements, *since it viewed some of them as a threat too.* This is true even if Iran supported various terrorist elements in the region, since it mainly supported them on political grounds. Deeper cooperation could have meant less Iranian support for those elements in the long run. It could have turned Iranian influence and knowledge into a US asset that could have helped with stabilizing the region and countering Islamic extremism. This would have also contributed to the security of energy supplies from the region because Iran had considerable control over a large part of Gulf waters, and the Strait of Hormuz in particular. Iranian cooperation would have contributed to securing these routes as well. Finally, less Iranian fear would have meant less motivation for developing a nuclear program. *However, as the US rejected the idea*

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<sup>150</sup> The dissertation used the following definition for "aggressive" foreign policy behavior: "Any effort on behalf of the US government to attack, bomb, deter, sanction, roll-back, intimidate, isolate, reject a diplomatic offer from or change the Iranian regime either by covert or overt means." (See chapter I.)

*of deeper and more meaningful cooperation with Tehran, it inherently limited the possible success of its own policies.*

Of course, the *post hoc propt er hoc* logic does not work – *we cannot know for sure, whether every Iran related blowback effect occurred because it happened after repeated US rejections and threats.* Still, empirical experience as well as intuition leads one to argue that US rejections and intimidation did have consequences, which in turn led to blowback effects. Thus, it is argued here that the two variables are indeed related. Similar to previous chapters and based on the Neoclassical Realist logic, the author puts forth that this is due to factors at two different levels: systemic and sub-systemic. Specifically, the following factors were at play:

Systemic factors:

- global distribution of power; and the
- regional distribution of power.

Sub-systemic factors:

- government policies of the US and Iran;
- perceptions; and
- domestic constituencies and political forces.

As far as the global distribution of power is concerned, it is necessary to note that despite the growing influence of emerging powers, such as China, India and Brazil, the United States still enjoyed *an unprecedented advantage in terms of global economic and military power.* At the time of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, US population stood at 290 million and the US GDP roughly amounted to 12 trillion dollars. This is about three times larger than that of China, four times larger than the GDP of Japan, six times larger than the GDP of India, and approximately ten times larger than the same data for Russia.<sup>151</sup> (World Bank [2012]) Similarly, GDP per capita data, which are slightly better

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<sup>151</sup> For population data for 2003 see: China: 1,288,400,000; India: 1,105,885,689; EU: 488,161,510; **US: 290,107,933**; Indonesia: 221,839,235; Brazil: 181,633,074; Russian Federation: 144,599,446. For data on GDP at PPP (purchasing power parity) in current international dollars for the year 2003 see: EU: 11,959,189,022,040; **US: 11,089,300,000,000**; China: 4,121,011,961,876; Japan: 3,571,046,814,300; India: 2,011,118,500,955; Brazil: 1,366,232,501,576; Russian Federation: 1,338,190,713,151. (Numbers have been rounded.) The author choose these countries as they are among the most relevant international economic powers, thus, their standing is a relatively good indicator of the international configuration of economic power. World Databank, World Bank [2012]

indicators of economic power, show an even larger US lead.<sup>152</sup> (World Bank [2012]) Annual growth of US GDP, however, only stood at 2.5 %, whereas Chinese economic growth stood at 10%.<sup>153</sup> (World Bank [2012]) The US GDP share of exports amounted to 9.4% and the same data for China was 29.5% for 2003.<sup>154</sup> (World Bank [2012]) This demonstrates that even though a number of countries were developing rapidly, *the US was still the number one economic power in the international system.*

In terms of military power, not surprisingly, the US outweighed every other military power in the world. The total number of active personnel in the US military in 2003-2004 amounted to 1.4 million people. (IISS [2005]: p. 23) The number of Russian active personnel stood at 1.2 million people, while the same number for China and India was 2.25 and 1.3 million, respectively. (IISS [2005]: p. 104; 170; 151) The US outspent all three countries in terms of military expenditures and it was also one of the leading countries in terms of military expenditure as percentage of GDP.<sup>155</sup> The US armed forces employ state-of-the-art military technology, which is second to none and this has important implications for the deployability of its forces. Although all three powers have formidable conventional and non-conventional capabilities, still, their ability to project force into great distances is limited in comparison to US force projection capabilities. US bases are scattered all over the globe, giving the US an overwhelming supremacy in terms of its ability to respond rapidly in case it needs to.<sup>156</sup>

Thus, US positions in the world were strong and stable. The United States could fight wars over an extended period of time at just about anywhere in the globe or even in two different places at a time. Thus, as a global super power it was natural for the US to exert its power in different regions of the world – including the Gulf. The political, economic, and military capabilities of the US made it possible for Washington to sustain

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<sup>152</sup> For data on GDP per capita at PPP (purchasing power parity) in current international dollars for the year 2003 see: **US: 38,225**; Japan: 27,960; EU: 24,498; Russia Federation: 9,254; China: 3,199 (Numbers have been rounded). World Databank, World Bank [2012]

<sup>153</sup> For data on annual GDP growth for the year 2003 see: China: 10; India: 7.9%; Russian Federation: 7.3%; Indonesia: 4.8 %; **US: 2.6%**; Japan: 1.7%; EU: 1.4%. World Databank, World Bank [2012]

<sup>154</sup> For 2003 data on exports of goods and services as percentage of GDP see: Russian Federation: 35%; EU: 34%; Indonesia: 30%; China: 29.5%; Brazil: 15%; India: 14.7%; Japan: 11.8%; **US: 9.4%**. (Numbers have been rounded) World Databank, World Bank [2012]

<sup>155</sup> According to the SIPRI database on military expenditures the four countries spent the following amounts on their armed forces in 2003. (All data are indicated in 2010 billion US dollars and all numbers have been rounded.) **US: 492**; China: 52; Russia: 39; India: 27. For military expenditures as percentage of GDP for the same four countries in 2003 see: Russia: 4.3 %; **US: 3.7**; India: 2.8 %; China: 2.1 %.SIPRI [2012].

<sup>156</sup> According to the 2005 edition of the Military Balance the US had 400.000 personnel deployed in some 120 countries of the world. See: “*Global Force Posture Review Changes*” and “*Maritime Force Projection Development*” IISS [2004]: pp. 16-18.

and even enhance its presence in the Middle East and the Gulf region.

Concerning the regional distribution of power, it must be highlighted that Iran was still one of the most formidable regional powers in the Middle East. It covered an enormous piece of land in the region with littoral access to both the Caspian and the Gulf. Its population amounted to 68 million, the second largest in the region.<sup>157</sup> Its GDP was also the second largest – only Turkey had a bigger gross domestic product.<sup>158</sup> Iran did not do particularly well in terms of GDP per capita and exports, but the annual growth of its GDP stood at 7%, which was second only to the growth of Saudi Arabia. Iran also had the lowest external debt stocks as percentage of its GNI among countries examined.<sup>159</sup> Iranian net inflows of FDI were only surpassed by those of Lebanon and Israel.<sup>160</sup> Thus, Iran's economy was one of the most significant ones in terms of economic performance and size. (World Databank, World Bank [2012]) It must also be noted that even though oil prices were not particularly high in 2003, the rise of world oil prices between 1998 and 2008 significantly contributed to the growth of Iranian economic influence. When Iraqi sectarian strife became really intensive between 2004 and 2006 for example, oil prices rose from 38 to 58 US dollars per barrel.<sup>161</sup> (EIA [2012]) Given that approximately 50% of Iranian government revenues stem from oil exports and the petroleum sector contributes 20% to the Iranian GDP, it is obvious that the spread of Iranian influence during the period was partly due to the growth of the

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<sup>157</sup> For 2003 data on population of Middle Eastern states (million people) see: Egypt: 71; **Iran: 68**; Turkey: 66; Iraq: 26; Saudi Arabia: 22; Syria: 17,4; Israel: 6.7; Jordan: 5; Lebanon: 4. (Numbers have been rounded.) World Databank, World Bank [2012]

<sup>158</sup> For 2003 data on GDP at PPP (purchasing power parity) in current international dollars for Middle Eastern countries see: Turkey: 587,855,258,606; **Iran: 551,013,802,433**; Saudi Arabia: 415,642,925,000; Egypt: 288,462,768,535; Israel: 148,909,637,223; Syria: 63,355,803,12; Iraq: 53,394,758,731; Lebanon: 33,721,406,615; Jordan: 18,812,857,174. (Numbers have been rounded.) World Databank, World Bank [2012]

<sup>159</sup> For 2003 data on GDP per capita at PPP (power purchasing parity) in current international dollars for various countries of the region see: Israel: 22,260; Saudi Arabia: 18,610; Turkey: 8,861; Lebanon: 8,569; **Iran: 8,096**; Egypt: 4,034; Jordan: 3,643; Syria: 3,622; Iraq: 2,035. For 2003 data export of goods and services as percentage of GDP: Jordan: 47%; Saudi Arabia: 46%; Israel: 37%; Syria: 33%; **Iran: 27%**; Turkey: 23%; Egypt: 22%; Lebanon: 17%. For 2003 data on the annual growth of GDP see: Saudi Arabia: 7.7%; **Iran: 7.1%**; Turkey: 5.3%; Jordan: 4.2%; Lebanon: 3.2%; Egypt: 3.2%; Israel: 1.5%; Syria: 0.6%; Iraq: -41%. For 2003 data on external debt stocks as percentage of GNI see: Lebanon: 117%; Jordan: 81%; Turkey: 48%; Egypt: 37%; **Iran: 12%**. No data were available for Syria, Israel, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. (Numbers have been rounded.) World Databank, World Bank [2012]

<sup>160</sup> For data on net inflows of FDI (balance of payments, current million US dollars) for 2003 see: Israel: 3322; Lebanon: 2860; **Iran: 2698**; Turkey: 1702; Jordan: 574; Egypt: 237; Syria: 160; Iraq: -0,02; Saudi Arabia: -587. (Numbers have been rounded.) World Databank, World Bank [2013]

<sup>161</sup> According to the Energy Information Agency (EIA) the US average real "crude oil domestic first purchase prices" (1949-2011, dollars per Barrel) one Barrel of oil cost 37.99 US dollars in 2004, and rose significantly by 2006 when the real price stood at 57.82 US dollars per Barrel. See: EIA [2012] Table 5.18. Crude Oil Domestic First Purchase Prices, 1949-2011 (Dollars per Barrel). September 27, 2012 EIA

Iranian economy as a result of rising oil prices. (See: Katzman [2012b]: p. 2.)

According to data from 2003-2004, some 540.000 people were serving in the Iranian armed forces altogether – the largest number in the Middle East.<sup>162</sup> (IISS [2004]: pp. 124) It spent the fourth largest sum of money on its armed forces in the region and it was outspent only by Israel, Turkey and Saudi Arabia.<sup>163</sup> (SIPRI [2012]) In terms of military expenditure as percentage of GDP, Iran only devoted 2.7 % of its gross domestic product to its armed forces, which was only the eighth largest ratio and it hardly surpassed that of Iraq.<sup>164</sup> (SIPRI [2012]) However, Iran's asymmetric warfare capabilities and its considerable inventory of conventional forces make up for the disadvantages in military spending. (See: IISS [2004]: pp. 124-125)

The US was still the preeminent super power and Iran still had a formidable regional influence in 2003. There is another factor that belongs to the systemic level and this factor is the geopolitical reality of the region. This indicates that one of the most important dimensions of the conflict between Iran and the US cannot be captured through indicators of power. Iran's regional web of relations (Syria, Lebanon, the Iraqi Shia, Hezbollah, Hamas, etc.), its economic and military power, as well as its strategic position in the Gulf make it one of the most important regional poles in the Middle East. The United States is also part of this geopolitical explanation: its enormous resources and military capabilities provide it with the opportunity to be physically present in the region. US bases in the Gulf, as well as Iranian ties to various entities in the Middle East mean that both countries are significant powers. Furthermore, as the author argued in the previous chapter, Iran's relative power was even more salient in 2003 because its regional presence was 'natural'. The US is present, but it is not embedded in the historical and cultural context of the region as Iran is. This is the factor that provides Iran with some compensation in terms of regional influence. This is also the reason why US presence is more costly – while Iran's presence is a given, the US has to devote a significant amount of its resources to sustaining its presence. Even if Iran does not

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<sup>162</sup> For the number of active personnel in Middle Eastern armed forces for the year 2003 see: **Iran: 540.000**; Turkey: 514.850; Egypt: 450.000; Syria: 296.800; Israel: 168.000; Saudi Arabia: 124.500; Jordan: 100.500; Lebanon: 72.100; Iraq: no data available. See "Middle East and North Africa" in: IISS [2004] pp. 120-140.

<sup>163</sup> For data on military expenditures in 2010 billion US dollars for the year 2003 see: Saudi Arabia: 25; Turkey: 19; Israel: 16; **Iran: 8.**; Egypt: 5; Syria: 2.3; Iraq (2004): 1.8; Lebanon: 1.2; Jordan: 0.9. (In case of Iraq no data were available for 2003, thus, the author applied 2004 data) Numbers have been rounded. SIPRI [2012]

<sup>164</sup> For data on military expenditures as percentage of GDP for 2003 see: Israel: 9.6%; Saudi Arabia: 8.7%; Syria: 6.2%; Jordan: 6%; Lebanon: 4.6%; Turkey: 3.4 %; Egypt: 3.3%; **Iran: 2.7%**; Iraq (2004): 1.7%. (In case of Iraq no data were available for 2003, thus, the author applied 2004 data) SIPRI [2012]

pursue policies which raise the costs of US presence, Washington still has to invest a lot of political and financial capital just to sustain its positions in the region.

This tendency was even more prominent when the US removed Saddam Hussein (and the Taliban) from power because the US tilted the regional balance of power in Iran's favor and Teheran's regional influence grew rapidly as a consequence. (Balogh [2008a]) Iran felt unsafe due to US military presence and it sought to break out of the geopolitical 'cage' constructed by the US. (Barzegar [2010]: 173; 176-177.)

On the sub-systemic level, the most important variables at play were the government policies of the US and Iran. US policies qualify as "aggressive" as defined by the methodological section of the dissertation. The US rejected several Iranian offers to cooperate and move towards normalization of relations. The author argues that Washington missed at least four opportunities to capitalize on Iran's regional influence by reaching a grand bargain with Tehran: the Geneva-Paris-New York-Bonn-Tokyo talks between October 2001 and January 2002; the Geneva-Paris-New York talks from the fall of 2002, the May 2003 offer from Iran and the Baghdad channel, which was set up as a result of communication that started in late 2006. The official US position never really went beyond negotiations on the specific problem at hand – Afghanistan and Iraq. Since Iran was rejected, it moved from cooperation to confrontation and started sabotaging US policies in Afghanistan and Iraq. Thus, it started pursuing policies, which made it harder for the US to realize its regional objectives. It stepped up its support for various Shiite groups in Iraq, supplied them with financial resources and weapons, and provided logistical help, as well as training to various Shiite Iraqi militants. It also provided some factions in Afghanistan with similar help. Later on, it ended its moratorium on uranium enrichment – a deal negotiated by the EU3 in 2003 – and restarted its nuclear program in 2005. (*Statement by the Iranian Government and Visiting EU Foreign Ministers*. October 21. [2003]) Thus, a number of clearly identifiable blowback effects occurred. Hence, the Iraqi invasion produced a lot of "unintended consequences" as it "emboldened" Iran in the region. (Slavin [2007]: p. 209.)

Still, there were some events, which seem to contradict the logic of the blowback hypothesis. First of all, initial aggressive US behavior did seem to be paying off. The 2007 CIA National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) assumed that Iran stopped working on its nuclear weapons program in 2003. (NIE [2007]: p. 6.) Could this be the result of the "psychological spillover" effect? We cannot know for sure, however, US



aggressive actions probably contributed to the resumption of uranium enrichment in 2005. (See above.) Thus, even if there was some linkage between the implementation of the Bush doctrine and the halting of the nuclear weapons program in 2003, the US did not capitalize on it as it kept pushing Iran against the wall. As a result, the earlier moratorium on uranium enrichment was suspended in 2005.

Furthermore, as US soldiers emerged in Iraq toppling Saddam Hussein's regime in just three weeks, the pressure on Tehran obviously intensified, thus, it decided to prevent the possible invasion of Iran. Even though that was not to happen, Iran may have perceived that it is a realistic option. Thus, the deterrent effect of aggressive actions in Iraq and earlier in Afghanistan may have prompted the Iranian regime to make an offer concerning a possible grand bargain. *This may actually refute the blowback hypothesis* as aggressive US actions may have led to cooperative Iranian behavior, implying that aggressive measures do pay off. In fact, this is not the case. *Cooperative Iranian behavior was not a direct consequence of the US invasion of Iraq – it predates that event.* Iran was already cooperative before the toppling of the Taliban regime in Kabul. Thus, Iranian overtures did not signal a change in policies – it was a mere continuation of rapprochement that begun earlier as a result of common US-Iranian interests concerning Afghanistan. US aggression did not change Iranian behavior – Tehran was already pursuing a policy of détente with Washington.

It may well be that the psychology of US presence and the rapid toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime made Iran *even more willing* to engage in dialogue, *but it was not the original reason behind Iran's cooperative attitude.* From a US perspective, the attack on Iraq did have some 'positive' side effects, no doubt. However, aggressive US behavior came when Iran was already willing to engage – *thus, Iranian cooperation was not entirely a direct result of the US invasion of Iraq.*

When one examines the US response to the May 2003 offer, it was one of outright rejection. Thus, even when Iran repeatedly offered gestures, and even when the side effects of the Iraqi invasion intensified Iranian cooperation to a limited extent, Washington rejected the Iranian offer and "punished" the Swiss ambassador for delivering the Iranian message. Furthermore, regime change became official policy by 2005 and it is not a mere coincidence that tensions in the ongoing Iraqi sectarian strife peaked between 2004 and 2006.

Of course, it is entirely wrong to assume that Iran was entirely cooperative all the time and did not engage in any nefarious activities. The case of the cargo ship

“Karine A” and the May 12 2003 terrorist attacks in Riyadh against Western interests may signal at least some Iranian complicity, but *there is no direct evidence to support such a claim*. Still, such conduct may fit into the pattern of Iranian behavior. Iran’s leaders are seasoned strategists – they are entirely aware of the fact that a good strategy will try to hedge against future uncertainty. In Iraq, the Iranian leadership chose to both support the democratic process; and the reconstruction of the country, as well as various Shiite militant groups. (See: Crist [2012]: pp. 466.)

Iran in fact supported solutions implying different outcomes. The idea was no matter how events unfolded in the end, Iran always had its surrogates in power because it supported almost every Shiite faction in Iraq. Thus, Iranian strategy in Iraq was both supportive and disruptive at the same time. This may seem irrational, but in fact it is not. *It is the best strategy for hedging against uncertainty*. No matter which path led to stability, Iran supported them all because it did not know in advance which one would lead to a solution of the Iraqi situation. Thus, it chose to support every possible avenue towards an Iraqi settlement in order to maximize its influence in Iraq. It did the same thing regarding the US: it was willing to talk, but it was also sabotaging US policies in Iraq (See: *Ibid.*) Thus, it is not entirely farfetched to think that some of the incidents, which served as additional reasons for rejecting Iranian offers, happened with Iranian support or complicity.

Does this undermine the blowback hypothesis? *It does not*, since US cooperation never really went beyond discussing issues other than Afghanistan and Iraq. Moreover, Iranian offers concerning a grand bargain were rejected. Thus, the two incidents may have been results of bureaucratic infighting within the Iranian government itself, aiming to isolate reformists who wished to mend relations with Washington. It may have also been conducted by a “rogue element” of the regime aiming to sideline reformists. It could have been hardliners’ response to what seemed to be a failed policy of rapprochement from Iran’s perspective. This may mean that leaders of the executive branch were still willing to engage in dialogue, but some elements were against it. If those incidents had anything to do with Iran, then they may not have represented the official and overall cooperative approach of the Iranian regime.

The logic of supporting and disrupting something at the same time leads one to the next sub-systemic factor that explains outcomes: *governmental politics*. *The politics of US foreign policy following the 9/11 attacks is a textbook example of governmental politics as described by Graham T. Allison’s 1969 work*. (Allison [1969]) The State

Department was willing to engage in a dialogue, even moving towards mending relations. Condoleezza Rice of the National Security Council was also willing to give this option a chance. The CIA was not against it either. However, the Department of Defense and the office of the Vice President did almost everything to sideline those in favor of rapprochement. By opening up channels to Iranian exiles, the aim was to annoy Iran and provoke hardliners to shut down the Geneva channel that was set up in the fall of 2002. Introducing regime change as an official US government policy was also a product of the Pentagon. *The US government invested almost as much energy into fighting itself as concentrating on executing actual policies.*<sup>165</sup> Thus, even governmental politics hindered a possible cooperation that could have helped the US fight radicalism in the Middle East and secure energy supplies.

If governmental politics played a role in US foreign and security policy, then it must be noted that it definitely had an impact on Iranian decision making as well. President Khatami played a dangerous game by insisting on dialogue with the US – *he risked his political career and probably even his freedom*. In fact, Khatami having been sidelined in Iranian politics is partly due to his rapprochement with America. However, hardliners were bent on stopping Iran from engaging with Washington. It is realistic to suggest that if Iran had a hand in the incidents examined above, it was due to hardliners who did not agree with the official policies of the Khatami government. In fact, the return of hardliners to power with the election of President Ahmadinejad was partly a response to Khatami's failed policies. *Thus, an indirect blowback effect of failed rapprochement with the US was the return of hardliners to power in Iran*. The strange irony of governmental politics is that hardliners on both sides had a common interest: stopping their own moderate forces from engagement with each other. Hardliners played into each other's hands by strengthening the position of the other in the opposite government.

The final sub-systemic factor is *perceptions*. Cognitive dissonance is an instructive model that explains events on both sides. Both the US and Iran had established and 'nurtured' three decade old perceptions about the other. (Beeman [2008]) Both sides were extremely sensitive to events which fit the pattern of perceived US and Iranian behavior, but tended to neglect developments which did not "fit" into this preconception – eg. rapprochement, goodwill and cooperative attitude. The US

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<sup>165</sup> For excellent accounts on this see: Woodward [2004]; [2006]; [2008]

military encirclement of Iran and Iranian nefarious activities in Iraq both reinforced negative perceptions, whereas cooperative behavior was always dismissed as “*exceptions that prove the rule*”, even if such overtures were, in fact, sincere.<sup>166</sup>

US rejections of Iranian offers hindered the realization of almost all US strategic interests in the region. They served as incentives for Iran to create instability in Iraq and Afghanistan. This also made the US national interest of rolling back Islamic militancy and extremism significantly harder, as Iranian support for various Iraqi groups and other forces in Afghanistan indirectly led to the exact opposite effect. The decision to resume uranium enrichment also infringed upon US interests. *Thus, blowback effects hindered or prevented the realization of at least four out of the six US strategic national interests identified at the beginning of this chapter.*<sup>167</sup>

### 2.3. The Return to Containment: 2006-2009 – Business as Usual

The last two years of the Bush administration’s tenure of office marked a return to containment.<sup>168</sup> The 2006 National Security Strategy did keep the language on preemption and preventing threats before they actually emerge. Regardless of the unchanged principles<sup>169</sup> of the document, the text did soften the US stance on the use of military force. The document realized that preemption may set a dangerous precedent for other countries.<sup>170</sup> (NSS [2006]: p. 18.) The dissertation argues that this slight change marks an even larger change in the actual practice of US foreign and security policy

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<sup>166</sup> See the thought of Dennis Ross on preconceptions and images regarding the “other” referenced earlier in the chapter on the Clinton administration’s approach to Iran.

<sup>167</sup> Those were defined as follows: defeating Islamic militancy and terrorism; rolling back the appeal of Islamic extremism by spreading US values and institutions; securing the free flow of energy from the Middle East, fostering stability in Iraq and Afghanistan and, finally, fostering stability in the Middle East partly by reaching a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. (See the beginning of this chapter.)

<sup>168</sup> This part and other sections on the policy of containment under the Bush era in the dissertation partly draws on a specific chapter of the author’s graduate thesis. (Balogh [2008b]: pp. 50-60.) It also partly draws on a paper written together with László Láng for two different essay writing competitions for graduate students in 2007 and 2009. (Balogh-Láng [2007a]; the logic is also applied in: Balogh-Láng [2007b].)

<sup>169</sup> The document puts forth that “*When the consequences of an attack with WMD are potentially so devastating, we cannot afford to stand idly by as grave dangers materialize. This is the principle and logic of preemption. The place of preemption in our national security strategy remains the same. We will always proceed deliberately, weighing the consequences of our actions. The reasons for our actions will be clear, the force measured, and the cause just.*” (NSS [2006]: p. 23.)

<sup>170</sup> The document states that “*To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively in exercising our inherent right of self-defense. The United States will not resort to force in all cases to preempt emerging threats. Our preference is that nonmilitary actions succeed. And no country should ever use preemption as a pretext for aggression.*” (NSS [2006]: p. 18.)

after 2005. The shift started in 2005 and a new policy was in place by 2007. This policy was one of aggressive containment that aimed to isolate Iran by every means, except for the application of military force.

The author argues that this change itself was due to the realization that the US did not have enough resources to confront every threat everywhere in the world. US military capabilities were stretched too thin due to two parallel wars, and as tensions of the Iraqi sectarian strife intensified between 2004 and 2006, it was increasingly clear that the US had serious difficulties stabilizing Iraq. This led to a redefinition of the US role in the world and resulted in returning to more traditional ways in foreign and security policy. This approach meant a more moderate engagement globally, *and in the case of the Middle East and Iran it marked a return to containment, even if the basic tenets of the Bush doctrine had never been given up rhetorically by the US*. Thus, applying military force against Iran was never really an option after 2006. Instead, the administration tried to roll back Iranian influence by applying all the other tools it had. Thus, containment was pursued through several different tracks. Just like under the Clinton administration, containment had three components again: *political, economic and military*. (See: Pollack [2008]: pp. 372-375.) It was pursued through unilateral US policies, multilateral forums and mostly in the form of rhetoric, diplomacy, and limited military measures.<sup>171</sup> It is telling that all efforts aiming to isolate Iran became dramatically more intensive after 2006 – the year that was defined as a watershed by this dissertation.

Considering a policy of containment regarding Iran goes back to 2005 when Condoleezza Rice traveled to Moscow in October to gain Russian support for isolating Iran. The IAEA established that Tehran did not fulfill its obligations under the safeguards of the nonproliferation treaty (NPT) and referred the Iran file to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 2006. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns traveled to Europe multiple times in order to prepare for a UNSC resolution on Iran. The US even began a public affairs campaign in order to publicize Iranian activities in violation of the nuclear nonproliferation regime. The idea was to pursue two different tracks: Iran was offered incentives by promising to engage the

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<sup>171</sup> Note that the author applied the following definition of containment earlier: “US efforts as well as concerted efforts by the US and its allies to globally counter and roll back Iranian political, economic, military and soft power influence by political, economic, military and soft power means.” (See the chapter on “The Policy of Dual Containment” in Chapter I.

Tehran regime if it froze uranium enrichment. However, it would be the target of strict sanctions if it did not comply. Tehran was offered the possibility of easing sanctions against it, permission to import light-water reactor technology and modernization of Iran's energy sector. In case Iran came clean concerning its nuclear program, US officials would not reject the possibility of Iran resuming uranium enrichment. However, domestic Iranian political forces could not agree on the offer, and Tehran rejected the initiative. Thus, on December 23, 2006, the UNSC passed resolution 1737. (Crist [2012]: pp. 504-507.)

The policy of containment, however, did not begin with UNSC 1737. It rather began with repeated rhetorical threats concerning the Iranian nuclear program and Iranian domestic politics, as well as Iran's foreign policy. The author researched all the major foreign policy speeches of President Bush's eight years in office and found that the Bush presidency devoted significantly more rhetorical attention to Iran in the last two years of its tenure of office, than in the previous 6 years. The growth in the number of speeches mentioning Iran between 2006 and 2008 is remarkable. The author identified 22 speeches between 2001 and the March 2006 release of the administration's new National Security Strategy, which mentioned Iran either in the context of sponsorship of terrorism, criticism of its foreign and domestic policies, as well as its nuclear program. On the other hand, the number of those speeches nearly doubled between March 2006 and the end of 2008 – Bush had given 39 major speeches altogether mentioning Iran as a threat in one way or another.<sup>172</sup> This does not include the instances when the administration intensified its rhetorical threats by reminding Iran every now and then that “*every option was on the table.*” (Iran Focus [2006]; CNN [2007]; BBC [2008]; BBC [2008]) This intensified focus on Iran was not a result of a proactive foreign policy – *in fact, it marked an implicit recognition of US limits in the Middle East.* The Bush administration could not be effective against Iran by taking military action, thus, rhetorical pressure was applied against Tehran in order to sustain a credible US deterrence. This rhetorical deterrence formed the backbone of political containment in the last roughly two and a half years of the administration's tenure of office.

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<sup>172</sup> See the appendix at the end of the dissertation for the list of those speeches. Major Bush speeches are defined as speeches which had been listed as “*major*” ones by former president by the website “Presidential Rhetoric.” See: <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/bushpresidency.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012

Political containment did not close out multilateral diplomacy either. From 2006 on, the US was included in the P5+1 framework as a result of expanding the EU3 group to include Russia, China and the US.<sup>173</sup> Their June 2006 proposal to Iran demanded suspension of enrichment, which Iran rejected. Then in May 2008, Iran came up with another proposal, which focused on creating “nuclear fuel production consortiums” in various locations in “the world – including Iran”. (Arms Control Association [2012]) Then, in June 2008, the P5+1 repeated their 2006 offer during a meeting in Tehran; this time, however, they highlighted the potential benefits of Iranian cooperation. The US was not included in this offer, as it did not take part in this particular initiative. This meeting was followed by another one in Geneva in July 2008, where Iran offered a roadmap for negotiations and using the common provisions of previous offers by the two sides as a platform for further negotiations. The meeting, however, did not produce any results. (Arms Control Association [2012]; Slavin [2007]: pp. 221-227.)

Multilateral diplomatic initiatives were not really supported by the US – Washington even chose to abstain once. It was a half-hearted effort to demonstrate US willingness to talk, but Washington probably never really expected any results. The P5+1 adopted the US demand that Iran suspend uranium enrichment, thus, they requested something that Iran was sure to reject. Thus, diplomatic initiatives were not based on meaningful offers and excluded the possibility of real dialogue with Iran. US diplomatic activity within the P5+1 format may contradict the blowback hypothesis. The US pursued not only aggressive policies, it also demonstrated the willingness to engage in diplomacy with Iran. However, even if the US pursued diplomacy, it did this in a very limited and halfhearted fashion and it also kept pressuring Iran at the same time (e.g. sanctions and military containment.) Thus, even if the “mantle” of nonaggressive policies existed, the overall “aggressive” approach was maintained. Diplomacy could not be successful according to the logic of strategic blowback theory because it did not signal substantial changes in US foreign policy strategy.

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<sup>173</sup> The “EU3” referred to the UK, France and Germany. They negotiated with Iran between 2004 and 2006. The official name of the group was “EU/Iran Political and Security Working Group”. Iran came up with four plans during the course of these negotiations (January 17, 2005; March 23, 2005; April 29, 2005; July 18, 2005.) All of those included various possible limitations on Iran’s uranium enrichment efforts but not actually giving up enrichment for good altogether. They included proposals on regional security issues as well as the Iranian willingness to join the IAEA Additional Protocol. In August 2005 the EU presented its own proposal, which focused on providing Iran with nuclear fuel and low enriched uranium but assumed that Iran would agree to suspension of enrichment for at least ten years. Iran rejected the offer saying it infringed its right to enrich uranium. Then, after an unsuccessful Russian proposal, the EU3 format expanded in 2006. See: Arms Control Association [2012].

The other form of political containment meant rallying other nations to support multilateral and US sanctions against the Islamic Republic. These diplomatic measures targeted two groups of countries in particular: countries of the EU and Arab states in the Middle East. (Eggen [2008]; Myers [2008])

One of the most important manifestations of containment and creating an anti-Iran consensus was the convening of the Annapolis Conference on the Arab-Israeli peace process on November 27, 2007. The conference aimed to forge an anti-Iran consensus in the region. The essence of the strategy pursued after 2006 was based on the notion that Iran is connected to every major regional conflict – the Arab-Israeli conflict, Iraq, Afghanistan, etc. Thus, isolating Iran would not only contain its influence, it would also be the only logical solution to the problems of the Middle East. However, the most important conditions for realizing such a consensus did not exist. First, the idea is flawed from a historical perspective, since Iran has always been a key player in the region, thus, its influence is more or less ‘natural.’ (N. Rózsa [2007] p. 38.; Nasr-Takeyh [2008]) The concept is also questionable from a cultural perspective. It is true that Iran and the Arab countries, which should also not be handled as members of a single monolithic block, are very different, but they still have more in common than Arab countries and Israel do. *However, Vali Nasr and Ray Takeyh point out that Arab countries are much more willing to confront Israel with Iran on their side than remedy relations with Israel in order to form an Israeli-Arab front against Iran.* There is no such thing as an “anti-Iranian consensus”, however, there is one against Israel. (Nasr-Takeyh [2008]; Takeyh [2009]: pp. 261-264.) Thus, the concept of containing Iran was flawed from the start. Furthermore, a number of Gulf states have important economic, religious and cultural ties to Iran. (The Economist [2007]) In Afghanistan’s case, everyday food supplies depend on the Iranian economy. (Tahir [2007])

As Iran felt the weakness of the US as a result of the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan, it became emboldened and it was increasingly willing to test the US and its allies in its neighborhood. In 2007, Iran detained 15 British sailors as they were sailing in international waters. They were released later on, but the case demonstrated that Iran is not afraid to escalate the situation. (Lyall [2007]) It sought to increase its influence in Afghanistan and Iraq during the period examined. (See: Rohde [2006]; Leithead [2007]) Other sources also reported of Iran’s growing power in Iraq and US encounters with Iranian Quds Force agents in Iraq in 2006-2007. (Roggio [2007]) Iran



also filled the vacuum left by the EU and US after they stopped the transfer of aid to certain Palestinian entities when Hamas won the 2006 parliamentary elections. Iran immediately offered 50 million US dollars to Hamas in order to fill this political and economic vacuum. (Balogh [2008a]: p. 202) A further sign of Iran's strength at the time was Iran's indirect involvement in the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war and Hezbollah's relatively successful war efforts during the conflict. (See: Sharp et. al. [2006]: p. 1.; Inbar [2007])

The economic dimension of the return to containment did not begin with UNSC 1737 either.<sup>174</sup> On June 28, 2005 President Bush signed Executive Order 13382, which froze the assets of those involved in WMD-proliferation. (Executive Order 13382 of June 28. [2005]) Then the US Congress passed the Iran Nonproliferation Amendments Act of 2005 on November 22, 2005. (Public Law 109-112-Nov. 22. [2005]) This expanded the original law passed in 2000 (Iran Nonproliferation Act of 2000) to include Syria. This legislation was later further changed and became the Iran, North Korea, Syria Nonproliferation Act of 2006 on October 13, 2006. (State Department [2012]; Katzman [2012b]: p. 31.; Public Law 109-353-Oct. 13. [2006])

This trend continued with the passing of the Iran Freedom Support Act of 2006 (IFSA) – a unilateral US arrangement that modified and extended the ILSA of 1996. (Public Law 109-293-Sept. 30. [2006])<sup>175</sup> The law kept every major provision of the original ILSA with some minor changes.<sup>176</sup> It changed the original name of ILSA to Iran Sanctions Act (ISA) by leaving out Libya from the title and extended the law until the

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<sup>174</sup> It is worth recalling that the author applied the following definition for sanctions: “*nonmilitary actions of the United States that adversely affect the flow of goods, services, or financial assets to a specific foreign country in order to penalize or coerce a country for political purposes or to express US displeasure with that country's actions.*” (Alikhani [2000]: p. 25.)

<sup>175</sup> It should be noted, however, that some sanctions targeting Iran had already been introduced as part of the efforts in the “war on terror” in 2001 (e.g. Executive Order 13224 – see the chapter titled “The Bush Doctrine and Iran”; Executive Order 13224 of September 23 [2001]). It is also important to note that the Bush government kept implementing and extending the executive orders issued under the Clinton presidency sanctioning various forms of trade and investment activity with Iran. There are some exceptions to this rule – e.g. the Bush presidency allowed civilian aircraft parts to be sold to Iran. The US allowed General Electric to sell parts for Airbus engines and only European firms were allowed to actually install those parts. In theory it is allowed to swap Caspian Sea oil with the Islamic Republic. Communication of personal nature as well as remittances are not forbidden either. Food and certain medical goods have been allowed, however, providing credits for exports is strictly limited and no exporter is allowed to deal with Iranian banks in a direct manner. Finally, import of certain food stuffs (nuts and fruit products), carpets and caviar were permitted under the Bush administration. (See: Katzman [2012b]: pp. 21-22.)

<sup>176</sup> See the detailed description of the law's provisions in the earlier chapter on dual containment.

end of 2011, since it was to sunset on August 5, 2006.<sup>177</sup> Provisions of the new law banned the sale of WMD-related technology and significant numbers of advanced conventional weapons or types of arms that are considered to be “destabilizing” by the text of the law. The legislation also suggests that any violation of the law should be determined in 180 days by the US government. It added a “national security interest” waiver changing the previous system of waivers. The law prohibited the US from entering nuclear agreements with states which had a track record of supplying Iran with nuclear technology. Katzman [2007]: pp. 1-3.) Finally, the text also included a part that aimed to stop money laundering by criminal groups, terrorists, or proliferators. (Katzman [2007]: p. 3.; Public Law 109-293-Sept. 30. [2006])

Besides sanctions limiting investment in Iran’s energy sector, the US also introduced financial sanctions against Iran. On September 6, 2006, the Bush administration sanctioned so called “U-turn transactions” with Bank Saderat, a bank the US accused of supporting terrorist organizations including Lebanese Hezbollah.<sup>178</sup> Then, on November 6, 2008, the US moved to sanction such transactions with all Iranian banks. (Katzman [2012b]: p. 26.) Also, the Treasury Department started an extensive information campaign to further isolate Iran and raise awareness of Iranian “deceptive financial conduct.” (Levitt [2010]: p. 125.)

Moreover, President Bush signed Executive Order 13438 on July 7, 2007, which targeted persons associated with providing arms and financial transfers to Iraqi Shiite militias and, thus, promoting instability in Iraq. The measure was mostly against the Quds Force of the IRGC. (Katzman [2012b]: p. 35.; Executive Order 13438 of July 17. [2007]) Unilateral arrangements were complemented by multilateral arrangements as the IAEA referred the “Iran file” to the UN Security Council under US pressure. This effort resulted in the adoption of four UNSC sanctions between 2006 and 2008. UNSC 1696 requested that Iran halt its uranium enrichment activities and all related research

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<sup>177</sup> The original ILSA was to expire on August 5, 2001. However, the 107th Congress enacted a law that extended the 1996 act – it was called the ILSA Extension Act of 2001. (Public Law 107-24-Aug. 03. [2001]) The law “*changed the definition of investment to treat any additions to preexisting investment as new investment, and required an Administration report on ISA’s effectiveness within 24 to 30 months of enactment. That report was submitted to Congress in January 2004 and did not recommend that ISA be repealed.*” Again, as Congress was considering various bills on extending the law, it extended the act until September 29, 2006 to win some time before the law was to expire on August 5, 2006. Thus, this law was titled “An Act to Amend the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act of 1996 to Extend the Authorities Provided in Such Act Until September 29, 2006.” Katzman [2007]: p. 3. ; Public Law 109-267-Sept. 29. [2006]

<sup>178</sup> “U-turn transactions” refer to “*transactions with non-Iranian foreign banks that are handling transactions on behalf of an Iranian bank.*” Katzman [2012b] p. 26.

and development efforts. It prohibits all sales related to nuclear or missile technologies. (*Resolution 1696... UNSC [2006]*) UNSC 1737 added further provisions to the above. It prohibited all heavy water reactor-related activities and introduced sanctions against specific persons and firms related to the Iranian nuclear program. More specifically, it froze their financial assets and limited freedom of their international movement. It prohibited any contributions to Iran's nuclear program and all possible proliferation-related Iranian trade. (*Resolution 1737... UNSC [2006]*) UNSC 1747 introduced a weapons embargo besides extending earlier sanctions to further entities and persons. It also banned all Iranian weapons trade. (*Resolution 1747.... UNSC [2007]*) UNSC 1803 targeted Iranian exports and imports, thus, it prohibited all credits for trade headed for Iran, as well as exports from the Middle Eastern country. (*Resolution 1803 ... UNSC [2008]*) The UNSC adopted one further resolution (UNSC 1835) which reinforced all four previous resolutions. (*Resolution 1835... UNSC [2008]*; Arms Control Association 2012; Starr [2010]: pp. 119-122)

Finally, it should also be noted that other multilateral bodies have also taken steps to weaken Iran economically. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF)<sup>179</sup> released a number of warnings between 2007 and 2009 in order to persuade members and their financial institutions to exercise “enhanced due diligence” when engaging in business with Iran. Meanwhile, OECD has “raised Iran's risk rating” in 2006. (FATF [2012]; Levitt [2010]: p. 125.)

The time of the introduction of unilateral and multilateral sanctions is instructive again – all of these efforts took place from 2005 and 2006 onwards with the toughest and most far reaching laws and executive orders passed and signed in 2006 and 2007. Some experts point out that Iran's economy has not been doing well during the period. It is a type of soviet economy, which sustains sectors and businesses even if they are not profitable. The energy sector lacked refined oil products at the time and Iran did not have the resources to modernize its infrastructure. The situation at the time was so bad that Iran lacked even the resources for maintenance, which effectively threatened the sustainability of Iranian oil exports. Roger Stern put forth that Iran may even stop exporting oil by 2014-2015. (Stern [2007]) The Iranian energy sector is responsible for about 80-90% of Iranian export revenues. Thus, lack of foreign investment may threaten

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<sup>179</sup> The Financial Action Task Force was established by the G-7 in Paris in 1989 and it comprises 34 countries. Its primary goal is to combat money laundering and financing of terrorism. See: “What do we do?”; “History of the FATF” ([www.fatf-gafi.org](http://www.fatf-gafi.org)) Accessed: 03-12-2012

the stability of the economy. (Campbell [2007]) Others point out that the index of the Iranian stock exchange fell almost 25% after Ahmadinejad was elected, signaling that markets did not trust the leadership of the new President. (Burns [2005]) Bread, tea and sugar had been subsidized during the examined period. Due to the bad economic situation, the unemployment rate among the youth was around 30%. (Milani [2005]: p. 45.)

Others point out that the Iranian economy was not in a particularly bad situation. Its energy sector still attracted considerable investment over time and the volume of trade has also been growing since 2003.<sup>180</sup> According to the US Government Accountability Office (USGAO), Iran has signed deals altogether worth some \$ 20 billion with foreign companies in order to develop its energy sector between 2003 and 2007. (*Iran Sanctions – Impact in Furthering...* [2007]: pp. 3-4.) The growth of the Iranian economy stood at 5.8% on average in the years preceding 2007. Poverty was on the decline and social differences did not seem to be growing. (Campbell [2007])

If opinions regarding the state of the Iranian economy were contradictory, then, just like under the Clinton presidency, the effect of sanctions was an even more divisive issue.<sup>181</sup> Essentially, there were two different opinions concerning the topic between 2005 and 2007. Some pointed out the strategic vulnerabilities inherent in the Iranian economy and energy sector – these voices supported sanctions because they were thought to be effective. (Berman [2008a]; Berman [2008b]; Clawson [2007]; [2009]; Ross; Makovsky [2009]: pp. 216-219.) Another report established that cumulated sanctions efforts over the years have started taking “a dramatic toll on Iran’s economy.” (Katzman [2012b]: p. 52.) This, however, is a relatively recent report, which was published after the October 2012 collapse of the Rial that was probably due to stricter sanctions introduced under the Obama administration. Thus, its conclusions may not be entirely appropriate for the period examined here (2006-2009).

Others pointed out that the embargo was not likely to be successful and as the sanctions in question were not part of a unitary effort on behalf of the EU and the US,

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<sup>180</sup> Between 1987 and 2006 Iranian exports grew from \$ 8.5 billion to \$ 70 billion in 2006 constant US dollars. “The annual real growth in Iran’s exports between 1987 and 2006 was nearly 9 percent; however, the export growth rate between 2002 and 2006 was 19 percent, reflecting the steep rise in oil prices since 2002.” (According to the USGAO these rates have been calculated using the “ordinary least square method.”) See: *Iran Sanctions – Impact in Furthering...* [2007]: p. 27.

<sup>181</sup> See the debate on the sanctions introduced under the Clinton presidency and the works referenced regarding the efficiency of sanctions in Chapter II.

American companies forced to leave the Iranian economy had in fact left an investment vacuum for European or other actors to fill. (Becker-Nixon [2010]) This may have even contributed to driving a wedge between the two sides of the Atlantic. (Milani [2005]: p. 53.)

Another rather surprising account established that “*The federal government has awarded more than \$107 billion in contract payments, grants and other benefits over the past decade to foreign and multinational American companies while they were doing business in Iran, despite Washington’s efforts to discourage investment there, records show.*”<sup>182</sup> The article also reported that of the altogether 74 companies doing business with both the US government and Iran, 49 were still engaged in business with the Islamic Republic. It is also instructive that the ILSA (called ISA after the 2006 amendments) was never really implemented due to the objection of European allies. William A. Reinsch, the President of the National Foreign Trade Council pointed out *the counterproductive nature of uncoordinated international sanctions*. He argued that sanctions are “futile” as US energy companies that left the Iranian economy had “simply been replaced by foreign competitors.” (Becker-Nixon [2010]) He also pointed out that a number of those US companies employ a lot of US citizens, thus, if they are kept from investing abroad, those workers’ jobs will be more difficult to sustain. (*Ibid*; Becker-Nixon et al. [2010])<sup>183</sup> Moreover, a 2008 article emphasized that the volume of US-Iran trade kept growing despite sanctions and the aggressive rhetoric of the Bush administration. The astonishing part of the piece is that it provides information on US military hardware indirectly being sold to Iran. (The New York Times July 8, 2008. – author unknown)

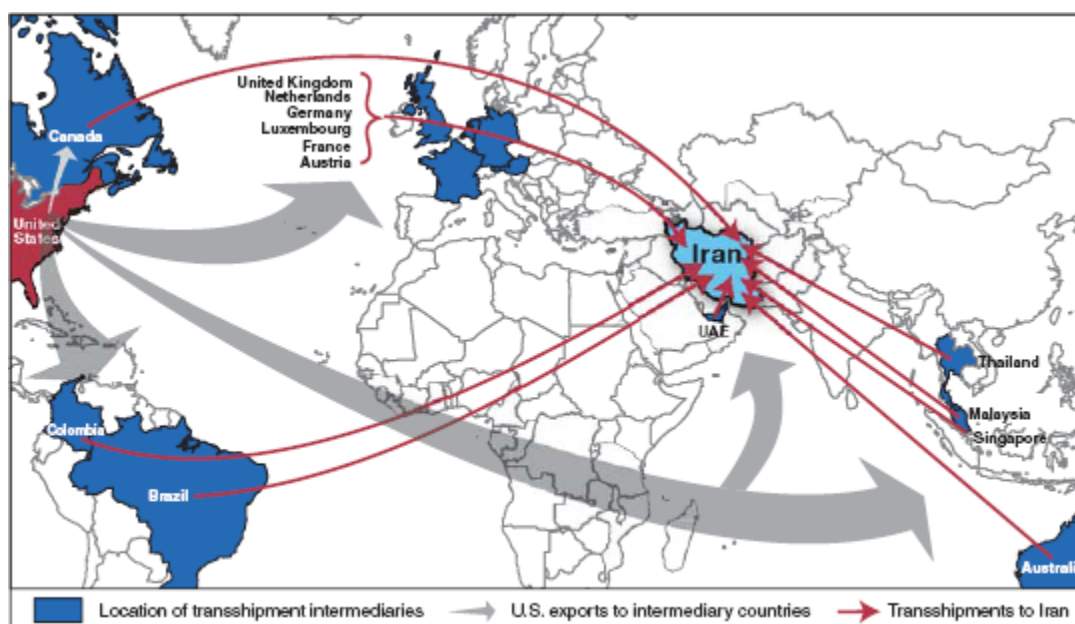
Indeed, the USGAO had reported that US military and sensitive dual-use goods have been shipped to Iran through the UAE, Malaysia, Singapore, Brazil, Colombia and Canada, Australia, Thailand and a number of European countries. (*Iran Sanctions – Complete and Timely Licensing...* [2010]: p. 15.; pp. 1-15.) The US Department of Justice has registered a number of cases in which components for F-14 fighter aircraft, F-4 fighter-bombers, F-5 fighters, “US-built military helicopters, military-grade night vision equipment, submachine guns, computers” and equipment for laboratories were sold to Iran. (*Ibid*. p. 15.)

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<sup>182</sup> It is also worth noting that the total volume of US-Iran trade amounted to \$ 247 million. *Iran Sanctions – Impact in Furthering...* [2007]: p. 27.

<sup>183</sup> See the chapter on the sanctions introduced during the Clinton administration.

**Figure 7. Illegal Transshipment Routes to Iran**



Sources: GAO analysis of Justice Department data; Map Resources (map).

Source: *Iran Sanctions – Complete and Timely Licensing Data Needed to Strengthen Enforcement of Export Restrictions*. March 2010. Report to Congressional Requesters. US Governmental Accountability Office GAO-10-375. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-10-375> Accessed: 05-12-2012

Kenneth Katzman of the Congressional Research Service writes that “*There is a consensus that U.S. and U.N. sanctions have not, to date, accomplished their core strategic objective of compelling Iran to verifiably limit its nuclear development to purely peaceful purposes. By all accounts—the United States, the P5+1, the United Nations, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)—Iran has not complied with the applicable provisions of the U.N. Security Council resolutions requiring that outcome.*” (Katzman [2012b]: p. 50.) Furthermore, Katzman’s report puts forth that there is no clear evidence to support the assumption that sanctions have slowed down the development of Iran’s nuclear program. It has not rolled back Iranian influence in the Middle East either. Iranian short and medium range ballistic missile capabilities have been improving and Tehran continued to procure ships and submarines. Thus, Iran may have been violating provisions of UNSC 1747. Iran’s human right record has not been improving either. (*Ibid.*)

Still others point out that “[...] it is not apparent that the mounting costs of sanctions have brought the clerical leadership any closer to a meaningful process of dialogue—much less serious compromises—on its nuclear programme or the other

*elements of its provocative policies.*” (Takeyh-Maloney [2011]: p. 1305.; p. 1311.) Thus, sanctions have not changed the policies of the regime.

All in all, the picture is blurred. This is underscored by a 2007 report of the USGAO, which found that almost any sanctions could be evaded if companies exported goods through third countries. The USGAO has also pointed out that foreign firms kept investing into the Iranian energy sector and the volume of trade has also been growing (see above). The report states that “*U.S. officials and experts report that U.S. sanctions have specific impacts on Iran; however, the extent of such impacts is difficult to determine.[...]However, other evidence raises questions about the extent of reported economic impacts.*” (*Iran Sanctions – Impact in Furthering...* [2007]: p. 3.) Sanctioned banks can circumvent financial sanctions by handling transactions through third financial institutions or manage transactions in currencies different from the US dollar. The other, rather surprising fact discovered by GAO was that a number of US government agencies do not actually collect data needed for feedback on the efficiency of sanctions. The report goes on to state that Iran’s international positions on the global energy market may make it nearly impossible to isolate it economically. (*Iran Sanctions – Impact in Furthering...* [2007]: pp. 2-5.)

It is perhaps safe to state that sanctions may have had some economic and social effects between 2006 and 2008, but they were definitely not enough to change the Iranian regime’s policies. Thus, in a political sense, they cannot be judged as having been efficient. However, there is no reason to believe that more crippling sanctions would have been effective. There are good reasons to believe that the stricter the sanctions are the more strategic blowback they are going to cause. In fact, Suzanne Maloney argues that crippling sanctions lead to more tensions as they weaken the Iranian economy, which provide further incentives for Iran to move ahead with nuclear weapons development for a deterrent capability. The bottom line is that Iran, if pushed against the wall, will be less risk-averse. (Maloney [2012]; Joshi [2012]; Takeyh-Maloney [2011]: p. 1312. also referenced in Joshi [2012])

What remains to be examined is the military component of containment. This dimension of the policy was based on traditional Cold War-like containment that aimed to build military “bastions” (or strengthen existing ones) around Iran by tightening the “military encirclement” of the Islamic Republic. The first signs of the military component came in the form of constant rhetorical saber rattling, which the author discussed earlier. However, the military component was more than just rhetoric. During the fall of 2006, the US media reported that the administration was planning to send an

additional aircraft carrier to the Gulf to strengthen US military presence there. The USS Stennis was to join the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower that had deployed to the Gulf area in October 2006. (Global Security [Date unknown]) Thus, containment had a military dimension from the very start. It is interesting to note again that all this happened during 2006, the year which has brought a shift in US policies.

The other military-related measure was the initiation of the Gulf Security Dialogue (GSD). The idea belonged to Assistant Secretary of State for Politico-Military Affairs John Hillen. He wanted to “get the Gulf Arabs engaged in working together in a common defense against Iran.” (Crist [2012]: p. 516.) The plan was to deter Iran, counter terrorism and promote stability in the Middle Eastern region. The backbone of this policy was selling arms to Gulf Arab states – Patriot missiles, fighter aircraft, radars and certain combat ships. Essentially, all of these were to become integrated elements of a Gulf air defense system. (Crist [2012]: pp. 516-517.)

Again, the problematic part of the concept was exactly what Nasr and Takeyh had elaborated upon in their 2008 Foreign Affairs article referenced earlier. No doubt, Gulf Arab states feared Iran and they were anxious about the growth Iran’s influence. However, the administration drew the wrong conclusion regarding the priorities of Gulf states. Their fear resulted in the exact opposite of what the US wanted: instead of forming a unitary front against Iran, some of them rather opted out *in order to avoid annoying Iran*. Oman and Qatar had quite significant economic ties to Iran and they did not want to risk their relatively good relations with the Islamic Republic. (Crist [2012]: p. 517.; Blanchard-Grimmet [2008])

Overall, the military component did not produce meaningful results but it did contribute to escalating political tensions between the US and Iran. The GSD was never really realized and no significant arms transfers took place as a result of the initiative during the tenure of office of the Bush administration. (Blanchard-Grimmet [2008]) It was more about ‘posturing’ than real actions and this corresponds with the concept of the author, which puts forth that containment was based on the implicit acknowledgment of the limits of US influence and resources. A ground military operation against Iran was out of question by 2006 as US resources were stretched too thin. The only theoretical option was airstrikes, but too many technical dilemmas were



associated with it.<sup>184</sup> (Balogh [2010a]: pp. 367-369) After the release of the 2007 NIE, which stated that Iran is likely to have halted its nuclear weapons program in 2003, it was politically unrealistic to expect that Washington was still planning on attacking Iran. (See: *Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities...* [2007]; see also: Ross; Makovsky [2009]: pp. 213-216.)

Military threats, isolation and coercion did not seem to be accomplishing their original goals – quite to the contrary, they have supported the Iranian regime by providing it with legitimacy in its fight against an ‘external enemy.’ (Nasr-Takeyh [2007])

There are certain prominent analysts who prefer some form of containment. (Pollack [2005]: pp. 412-416.; Pollack [2008] pp. 372-375.; Takeyh-Lindsay [2010b]; Clawson [2000])<sup>185</sup> However, a number of critiques point out the problems associated with this solution. Milani argues that Washington’s policy of containment leads Iran “[...] to neutralize the United States’ attempts to contain it, the Iranian government is both undermining U.S. interests and increasing its own power in the vast region that stretches from the Levant and the Persian Gulf to the Caucasus and Central Asia.” (Milani [2009]: pp. 46-47.) While the US was trying to limit Iranian influence in the region, Iran continued the development of its weapons programs and its nuclear program. (*Ibid.*) Others have noted the difficulty of defining what containment really is as so many different actors have ascribed so many different meanings to the expression. (Kaye-Lorber [2012]) Still others *point to the counterproductive* nature of containment and deterrence. Since containing Iran’s nuclear aspirations can only be successful if US threats are credible, the US will be motivated to apply force in order to prove the credibility of its deterrent. (Leverett-Leverett [2010a]. Ray Takeyh’s insightful 2006 book puts forward that:

“Since the inception of the Islamic Republic, the United States has pursued a policy of containment in various forms, essentially relying on political coercion and economic pressure to press Iran in the right direction. The failure of this policy is routinely

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<sup>184</sup> It is worth noting that most experts point out a number of technical and political difficulties associated with a potential air strike on Iran. They put forward that Iran would only redouble its efforts in order to reach nuclear weapons capability. Moreover, Iranian nuclear sites are scattered all over Iran with some being underground, thus air strikes would have to be sustained over a long period of time and they would be difficult to carry out. Bombing Iran could cause a surge in the popularity of the regime and play into the hands of radicals. Iran could attack US targets in the gulf and it may even block the Strait of Hormuz. (Balogh [2010a]: p. 368.)

<sup>185</sup> It should be noted, however, that Takeyh and Lindsay write about the implication of an Iran with nuclear weapons capability, thus, their usage of the term “containment” and “deterrence” refers to a completely different situation. (See: Takeyh-Lindsay [2010b])

documented by the U.S. State Department, which insists on issuing reports denouncing Iran as the most active state sponsor of terrorism and warning that its nuclear program is rapidly advancing toward weapons capability. The American diplomats fail to appreciate how, after twenty-seven years of sanctions and containment, Iran's misbehavior has not changed in any measurable manner. Even more curious, the failed policy of containment enjoys a wide spread bipartisan consensus, as governments as different as the Clinton and Bush administrations have largely adhered to its parameters. Although at times the Bush White House has indulged in calls of regime change, its essential policy still reflects the containment consensus. In Washington policy circles evidently nothing succeeds like failure." (Takeyh [2006]: p. 220.)

Empirical evidence tends to show that containment has either produced strategic blowback effects or it has simply been ineffective.

### **2.3.1. Explaining Outcomes – Strategic Blowback and Containment**

The US policy of containment qualifies as aggressive foreign policy behavior according to the definition applied by the dissertation. Thus, what remains to be examined is whether this caused any strategic setbacks by hindering or altogether preventing the realization of US national interests.<sup>186</sup> Again, the dissertation argues that factors on at least two levels affected the experienced outcomes:

Systemic factors:

- global distribution of power; and the
- regional distribution of power.

Sub-systemic factors:

- government policies of the US and Iran;
- perceptions; and
- domestic constituencies and political forces.

As far as the systemic level is concerned, containment was partly a result of the recognition by the Bush administration that the US pool of resources is not infinite. Military action against Iran would have cost the US dearly, but the administration also

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<sup>186</sup> Recall that US national interests under the Bush administration were defined by the dissertation as follows: defeating Islamic militancy and terrorism; rolling back the appeal of Islamic extremism by spreading US values and institutions; securing the free flow of energy from the Middle East, fostering stability in Iraq and Afghanistan and, finally, fostering stability in the Middle East partly by reaching a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. (See the beginning of this chapter.)

rejected most Iranian initiatives regarding a possible dialogue or rapprochement. Thus, the only viable action was containment. Thus, it is the limits of US global and regional power that led to the pursuit of containment. This explanation corresponds with Iran's power position at the time. Although the relative position of the two powers did not change significantly since the beginning of the Bush administration, still, Iran's latent leverage grew significantly due to changed geopolitical realities. Iran's regional reach made it a formidable challenge to US influence in the Middle East. Thus, applying the structural logic of Neoclassical Realism, it is the relative weakening of the US and the growth of Iran's regional power that led to the implicit acknowledgment of limits to US power and US efforts to contain the Islamic Republic.

The growth of Iran's (structural) power, then, led to Iran's ability to hinder the realization of US strategic interests in the region. By choosing to reject Iranian offers to cooperate and by containing Iran's regional influence, Iran had an incentive to fight the US occupation of Iraq through supporting its own proxies. Structural and geopolitical realities explain why Iran was motivated to act as a spoiler in Iraq. Having been surrounded by US troops, Iran felt that its Iraqi presence was imperative for its own security. However, as the US aspired to roll back Iranian influence in the Middle East, Iran was even more motivated to make the US presence in Iran and Afghanistan as difficult as possible. (Parsi [2012]: pp. 5-6.)

This led to sustained Iranian support for various groups in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Gaza and the Palestinian Territories, which in turn made the realization of US interests more difficult. It made defeating Islamic militancy and extremism, as well as the spreading US values and institutions almost impossible. It also cast a shadow over the free flow of energy supplies through the Strait of Hormuz, since Iran started threatening the closure of the strait in case it was attacked. It conducted military exercises during November 2006, which demonstrated preparations for blocking the strait – roughly a month after the first carrier was dispatched to the region in October. (See: McElroy [2007]) The strategic US national interest of stabilizing Iraq and Afghanistan was successfully jeopardized by Iran from 2006 to 2009. Finally, by organizing the Annapolis conference on the Arab-Israeli conflict without inviting Iran, the US created a situation in which *Tehran had a stake in undermining the success of the process*. Furthermore, acquiring a nuclear deterrent would also be a logical response to Iran's own geopolitical situation. The bottom line is that Iran had not given up on

developing its nuclear program.<sup>187</sup> Thus, structural factors by themselves explain the outcomes.

At the sub-systemic level, US government policies led to significant setbacks. *The political element of containment proved to be the most counterproductive, thus, it caused the most significant strategic blowback effects.* Containment efforts concentrated on creating an anti-Iran consensus in the region, which clearly did not exist at the time. These US efforts led to Iranian policies aimed “at breaking out of the artificial cage” the US was trying to create in the region. But the US never really succeeded in realizing this because Iran countered these efforts. These countermeasures manifested themselves in Iranian political support for its proxies in the region as mentioned above. Occasional military threats actually played into the hands of radicals in Tehran because they provided legitimacy for those who aimed to sustain the regime by mobilizing political forces based on anti-Americanism. Political containment was pursued parallel to engaging Iran in the P5+1 framework. However, these diplomatic initiatives on Washington’s behalf were not meaningful enough to produce a breakthrough with Iran and change the overall “aggressive” and confrontational nature of US policy.

Economic containment did not reach its strategic objectives because sanctions did not change Iran’s policies. *Enforcement did not really cause significant direct blowback effects; rather, they were simply ineffective.* The volume of US-Iran trade even grew during this period and the US government maintained business relations with entities which kept dealing with Iran as well. Even US dual-use goods and military hardware made it to Iran due to flawed implementation of sanctions. Enforcement measures contributed to the weakening of companies, which were forced to leave the Iranian market only to leave an investment vacuum behind to be filled by European and other firms. (See: Katzman [2012b]: p. 42.) Sanctions had similar effects as the political segment of containment: they provided a platform for Ahmadinejad and those on the far right of the Iranian political spectrum to blame Iran’s economic hardships on sanctions. Thus, economic enforcement measures provided a “fig leaf” for hiding how inadequate the government was at managing the economy. (Katzman [2012b]: p. 52.)

Military containment (e.g. an additional US carrier task force in the Gulf) led to the escalation of tensions in the Gulf and, thus, destabilized the Gulf security situation. The other form of military containment concentrated on rallying Arab states in the Gulf

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<sup>187</sup> This does not imply that Iran’s nuclear program has military implications, but it does not close out the possibility either.

to counter Iran's influence by improving their military capabilities. The bilateral and multilateral arrangements resembled the modernized version of John Foster Dulles's "*pactomania*" as applied to the Gulf region of the 21st century. It was based on a flawed assumption, since Gulf states had difficulties in agreeing on a unitary "anti-Iran" front in the region. The prospect of selling arms to Gulf states fueled distrust and tensions between Washington and Tehran and further contributed to negative Iranian perceptions of the US.

These perceptions were further reinforced due to systematic rhetorical efforts signaling US willingness to apply force against Iran if necessary. All in all, this track of containment did not lead to direct strategic blowback, but it did contribute to a tense atmosphere in the region, which intensified Iranian efforts aiming to sabotage US efforts in the Middle East. This mutually reinforcing nature of perceptions and images of "*self*" and "*other*" have contributed to the stalemate between Iran and the US during the period examined. (See: Beeman [2008])

Domestic forces also contributed to containment – unilateral US sanctions such as the Iran Freedom Support Act renewed ILSA under the title "Iran Sanctions Act." This formed the backbone of the US ban on investment in the Iranian energy sector. Domestic political forces in Congress were successful in extending ILSA and, thus, complemented other economic containment measures of the executive branch. Again, this was an incentive for Iranian radicals who thought their political platform had been justified by repeated US efforts to isolate Iran economically.

All in all, the policy of containment closed out the option of cooperation between the US and Iran. It caused significant direct strategic blowback effects and led Iran to undermine US policies in the region through its regional network. In fact, the realization of all six key US national interests regarding the Middle East had been hindered or prevented altogether.

### 3. The Obama Administration (2009–2010)

*The highest proof of virtue is to possess boundless power without abusing it.* Lord Macaulay (Secretary at War 1839-1841) Quoted in: Daalder; Lindsay [2005], page unmarked.

The Clinton administration's approach to using US power was based on a balanced concept that recognized the many facets of modern power. President Clinton was willing to use force, but only in a limited manner. The Bush administration, on the other hand, was far more willing to rely on US force much more extensively and had a rather one dimensional (militarist) view of modern power. In this respect, Barack Hussein Obama's presidency marked a return to a more nuanced view of US power that recognized the complexities of power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, he seemed to show greater resolve when applying US military force than Clinton and he was also more willing to rely on the use of force in many respects than his democratic predecessor was. Thus, there is more continuity between the foreign policies of Obama and Bush than their political or ideological background may imply. (Balogh [2011c])

It is interesting to note that Obama is often regarded as a "law professor" due to his background in teaching constitutional law at the University of Chicago Law School and his law degree from Harvard Law School. (See: Kantor [2009]) This, however, does not cover Obama's entire experience and socialization because he also gained a degree in political science with an emphasis in international relations at Columbia University. His immigrant background and his international experience as a child provided him with a different perspective compared to that of the two previous Presidents. This obviously had an impact on how he thought of the world and foreign policy in general.<sup>188</sup>

Obama's nomination for democratic presidential candidate followed a fierce primary election fight with a prominent New York senator who had already spent eight years in the White House. Hillary Clinton was a formidable rival who enjoyed the

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<sup>188</sup> Certain authors reject the idea that Obama's immigrant background and international experience as a child had a defining impact upon his thinking. (See: Mann [2012]: pp. 72-73.) The author doubts that that was the case. Of course these personal experiences are entirely subjective, still, it is reasonable to think that Obama's earlier international experience influenced his views on the world. The author has lived abroad for almost two years altogether at the ages of 12 and 14 and can honestly say that he has been seeing the world completely differently ever since that experience.

support of the democratic establishment with connections to the “Clinton-clan”. Ending the Iraq war, defeating al Qaeda and nonproliferation were among Obama’s top national security priorities. (Washington Post, [date unknown]). Obama prevailed and beat John McCain in the national elections, becoming the first black president in the history of the US. His campaign focused on fixing the economy, reforming health care and social security, tax reform, fiscal balance, as well as withdrawing troops from Iraq.

The Obama administration took over the wheel of government amid the largest world economic crisis since the 1929-1933 great depression and a number of other international challenges were looming over the horizon. Osama bin Laden’s whereabouts and the threat of al Qaeda; instability in Iraq and Afghanistan; North Korea’s nuclear weapons program; Iran’s nuclear program; the Arab-Israeli peace process; the rise of China and an emboldened Russia are just some of the difficult issues Obama had to deal with. Upon entering office, he devised an ambitious plan promising to tackle these problems. He spoke of “a world free of nuclear weapons” in 2009; promised to pull out troops from Iraq; refocused US attention on Afghanistan and ordered the deployment of additional troops there and he also wanted to close the notorious prison in Guantanamo. (See respectively: *Remarks by President Obama*. Prague, April 5, [2009]; Cockburn [2008]; *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation...* December 1. [2009]; Mazetti; Glaberson [2009]; Harding; Traynor [2009]) A number of his initial measures proved to be highly controversial, such as backing away from missile defense plans in Central Eastern Europe. (Harding; Traynor [2009]; Magyarics [2010]) It is true that the initial expectations concerning the Obama administration’s policies were too high to begin with, and then President Obama received the Nobel Peace Prize, which further raised those expectations. Thus, expecting him to reach a breakthrough on so many fronts was unrealistic from the start.

It is difficult to define what approach the Obama administration represented during the first two years of its tenure of office, i.e. if Obama had a “grand strategy.” Many have tried to describe and label the overall approach of the administration to foreign affairs in order to find out if there was ‘an Obama doctrine’ or not. The intellectual disorder in this regard is quite obvious. One source describes the Obama doctrine as representing a middle way between the approaches of presidents Clinton and Bush. (Blake; Cillizza [2011]) Others point to Obama’s increased reliance on drone attacks as the core of his doctrine. (Rohde [2012]) Still others put forward that the

backbone of Obama's foreign policy is the kind of "new interventionism" demonstrated in Libya, which marks a departure from traditional intervention. It is based on the application of air power and limited US involvement. (Kaplan [2011]; Daalder; Stavridis [2012]; The Economist [2011]) Another author contends that the Obama doctrine is about containing China. (White [2011]) Fareed Zakaria argues that one possible definition of the concept could be the strategy of "*rebalancing*", which refers to the "*pivot to Asia*." (Zakaria [2012]; *Annual Report on Military Power of Iran* [2012]: pp. 1-4.)

Another obvious source for defining Obama's grand strategy is the May 2010 National Security Strategy. The core of this document could be conveyed as follows: multilateral cooperation and cooperation with emerging powers; managing the rise of China; limited and careful promotion of democracy, as well as selective (humanitarian) interventionism. (NSS [2010]) This corresponds with Zakaria's definition of the doctrine: '*managing the rise of emerging powers*'. (Zakaria [2012]: pp. 17-20) Only Zakaria's latter definition qualifies as a viable summary of Obama's approach to foreign affairs. Most of the other labels and definitions do not qualify for a "doctrine" because they are not broad enough to provide the administration with basic principles for engaging the world. Elliot Abrams of the Council on Foreign Relations points out that drone attacks, for example, cannot form the core of any foreign policy because it can only tackle certain challenges. (Abrams [2012]) *Thus, this dissertation argues that the Obama doctrine could be defined as accepting the changing nature of the global balance of power and managing the rise of emerging powers.* (Balogh [2012]: pp. 9-11.)<sup>189</sup> It is a careful approach designed to take note of the limits to US power. Thus, Obama was only willing to apply force if success was assured. This corresponds with the words of former British Secretary at War Lord Macaulay quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Paradoxically, power is most effective when there is no need for it to be applied to the fullest and Obama seemed to take a similar view on US power.

It is also important to note that while Clinton's foreign policy marked the basic platform for Obama, he significantly changed the way democrats related to the application of military force. Clinton was not afraid of relying on force either, but he was more hesitant at times – perhaps due to the new strategic environment following the

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<sup>189</sup> This section of the dissertation has been taken from an earlier publication of the author. See: Balogh [2012]: pp. 8-16.



collapse of the Soviet Union. Clinton's willingness to apply military force in certain situations marked a departure from the traditional view of democrats on the use of force following Vietnam. This view was based on ardent opposition of the use of force in order to avoid another Vietnam-like situation and was associated with Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern who lost the 1972 elections. From then on, Democrats looked weak on national security and this image stuck with them until Clinton. Clinton modified this picture with the Kosovo intervention. In fact, it was the Kosovo intervention that was the "archetype" of Obama's intervention in Libya. Nonetheless, it was Obama who has completely dismantled the negative image of Democrats regarding national security. The liquidation of Osama bin Laden and the intervention in Libya led to the redefinition of how Democrats related to the use of military force. (Mann [2012] pp. 13-44.)

The Obama presidency's plans regarding the Middle East included setting a new tone in rhetoric and applying a softer and more balanced tone regarding US commitment to Israel and Arab political forces. (See: *Remarks by the President on a New Beginning...* June 4. [2009]). Regarding Iran, Obama promised high level and "direct diplomacy" in order to engage the regime in Tehran. (*Barack Obama will pursue...* [2008]) He sent a video message to the Iranian people on the occasion of the Persian New Year ('Nowruz'). (*Videotaped Remarks by the President in Celebration of Nowruz*. March 20. [2009]) The White House was careful in its reactions to popular unrests in Iran following the 2009 presidential elections and Obama applied pressure on Israel in order to keep it from attacking Iran. (Beale [2009]; Benn, Mozgovaya [2009]). Thus, Obama's seemingly new approach and tone signaled a significant change.<sup>190</sup>

This chapter argues that even though Obama did change the course of US foreign policy regarding Iran, his efforts demonstrated more continuity with Bush than his initial measures implied. Still, he is the president who came closest to reaching a deal with Iran and that was due to a new approach based on more engagement and less confrontation, which corresponds with the logic of the strategic blowback theory. However, this engagement did not lead to a significant breakthrough with Iran, thus, Obama also returned to the old – and flawed – idea of containment. This hindered the realization of US national interests in the region, which are defined as follows:

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<sup>190</sup> This section has been taken from an earlier publication of the author. See: Balogh [2011c] pp. 1-2.

- defeating terrorism associated with Islamic extremism;
- rolling back Islamic militancy and extremism;
- stabilizing Iraq and Afghanistan;
- Arab-Israeli peace; and
- preventing an Iranian nuclear weapons capability.

The following chapters analyze the initial efforts to engage Iran and then the return to containment. Events are examined up to December 18, 2010 – the first wave of protests in Tunisia – which marks the beginning of popular Arab uprisings in the Middle Eastern and North African regions. This was the date chosen in the introductory chapter as the end of the period examined in the dissertation. The chapter wishes to shed light on why engagement did not bring results and what are the implications of the strategic blowback theory as applied to the Obama administration’s Iran policy.

### **3.1. Overtures of the Obama administration**

Barack Obama wished to provide an alternative to two foreign policy approaches: that of Hillary Clinton in order to beat her in the primaries and the foreign policy of the Bush administration in order to distinguish himself from the previous Republican presidency. During a televised debate on July 24 2007, Obama put forth that he would be willing to meet the leaders of Iran, North Korea, Venezuela, Cuba and Syria. He argued that not talking to them is regarded as a “punishment” by the Bush administration but he contended that this is “ridiculous.” (See: Mann [2012]: pp. 83-85.) Overall, the only position regarding Iran that could distinguish Obama from both the incumbent administration and the other Democratic candidates, was to support direct talks with Iranian leaders. There was another rationale behind supporting direct diplomacy with Iran: the fact that no US administration has ever tried high level, direct, and one-on-one diplomacy with Tehran since 1979. Thus, it seemed to make sense to add this alternative to possible options when it came to dealing with the Islamic Republic. Thus, both domestic as well as foreign policy “pressures” made promoting diplomatic talks the logical path to pursue.

As noted earlier, the Obama administration began engagement efforts by sending a direct message addressed to the Iranian people for Nowruz, the Persian New Year in March 2009. (*The President's Message to the Iranian People*. March 19. [2009]) It was an unprecedented initiative and one that raised expectations regarding a significant shift in US policies towards Iran. Obama offered dialogue if Iran was willing to “uncle its fist.” (Fawaz [2012]: p. 180.) The first official encounter between the parties took place at a conference on Afghanistan on March 31, 2009. The mood of this event suggested a positive outlook for engagement. Shortly after taking office, Obama ordered the review of US policy on Iran. Once that was concluded, Washington sent two letters to Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Khamenei responded by listing Iranian grievances but the letter did not close out the possibility of engagement. He expected a change not only in rhetoric, but also in US actions. However, the second letter was never answered probably due to the turmoil surrounding the Iranian presidential elections in June 2009. (Parsi [2012]: p. 56; pp. 100-101.)

On a multilateral level, the P5+1 made renewed efforts to make the parties return to the negotiating table after Obama entered office. The group sent another invitation to Iran offering to pursue talks on pressing issues regarding the Iranian nuclear program. Iran only responded in September with a reply that did not include the issue of its nuclear program at all, thus, this track of the discussions did not lead to any results. In June 2009, Iran requested IAEA help in providing it with fuel for one of its research reactors in Tehran (Tehran Research Reactor, TRR). This reactor produced medical isotopes for medical purposes. The US put forth another offer: if Iran handed over 1200 kg of its uranium enriched to 4% it could receive 120 kg of fuel for the TRR. (ACA [2012]) The TRR specifically needed uranium enriched at the 20% level and the US and the P5+1 offered Iran to provide it with this type of fuel.

Thus, on October 1, 2009 US representatives met Iran within the framework P5+1 format in Geneva, Switzerland. The novel element of the event was that the US and Iran were willing to meet each other one-on-one and so Under Secretary of State William Burns held talks with Iranian chief nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili. This had been the highest level discussion between the two countries since 1979. The plan that was agreed upon required Iran to provide Russia with its stocks of enriched uranium to be converted into reactor fuel by Moscow and then to be sent to France for further processing. Finally, enriched uranium would be returned to Iran for use in the TRR.

Talks continued in Vienna during October 2009. However, the deal had not worked out well as Iran rejected the idea of having to send all of its uranium stocks abroad. Furthermore, Khamenei also voiced harsh criticism concerning the talks and targeting the US. (Mann [2012]: pp. 203-204.; Borger [2009]) Obama gave Iran until December 31 2009 in order to move ahead with finding a solution to the stalemate. (Crail [2010]) This did not happen, thus, the Geneva round did not produce the results previously hoped for. (See: Sanger et al. [2009]) The last efforts at diplomacy meant using Japan and later Turkey as intermediaries between the US and Iran in order to strike a deal based on the Geneva offer. However, none of those countries succeeded. (Parsi [2012]: pp. 143-146.)

Diplomacy seemed to have failed and, furthermore, Iran announced in February 2010 that it had started enriching uranium at 19.75% levels. (BBC [2010]; Mousavian [2012b]: pp. 365-367) Furthermore, Iran organized a “counter-conference” after it was not invited to a 2010 conference on nuclear issues organized by the Obama administration in Washington, D.C. 2010 was also the year of the NPT review conference and Iran obviously wanted to demonstrate its international influence in this field. Thus, around 60 countries were said to have accepted the invitation to the Iranian nuclear summit. (Mostafavi et al. [2010])

Obama reacted carefully to events following the 2009 Iranian presidential elections in order not to alienate Iran from engaging the US. (Parsi [2012]: pp. 94-95.) However, as a result of the Iranian rejection of the P5+1 proposal and narrowing international as well as domestic political space for engagement, the US stance on Iran hardened and Washington started reducing the distance it previously kept from the Green Movement. By 2011, the brief episode of engagement was entirely over. (Mann [2012]: pp. 204-206.) By late 2010, the Obama team had a tough containment policy in place in order to up the ante on Iran. Part of this obviously had to do with the fact that by the fall of 2009, the US, UK and French intelligence services discovered a uranium facility under construction in Fordow near Qom that had not been reported to the IAEA. (Mann [2012]: p. 203.; Barzashka [2009])

The policy of engagement was regarded by many prominent analysts and experts as the only solution to the US-Iran stalemate. (See: Takeyh [2009]: pp. 263-265.; Takeyh [2006]: p. 222-226.; Kaye-Wehrey [2009] p. 46.; Maloney-Takeyh [2007]; Nasr [2008]) Even former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates was a proponent of engaging

Iran before he joined the Obama administration and former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski also supported the idea. (See: 2 U.S. ex officials ... [2004]) Colin Powell, Madeleine Albright, Warren Christopher, James Baker, as well as Henry Kissinger all expressed support for engagement at some point. (AFP [2008]) John Kerry also argued for engagement. (Kerry [2009]) Others did not think that engagement by itself could lead to success or they were at least skeptical. (Pollack [2006]: pp. 395-400.; Berman [2009]; Parasiliti [2010];) Even if opinions were divided, there seemed to have been a consensus within the “mainstream” of experts and the US foreign policy establishment that engagement was the right path to take. Still, the above experience seems to prove otherwise.

Results of the first significant Iran related initiative of the Obama administration seems to be undermining the strategic blowback hypothesis. The US administration tried what seemed to correspond with H1b, namely, the strategy of seeking the least resistance by concentrating on diplomatic talks. Furthermore, it turned out that Iran was building a new underground nuclear facility. The US pursued nonaggressive policies and still experienced blowback effects, which occurred in the form of Iranian rejections of US and international initiatives to remedy problems between the parties. Absent a deal, Iran was motivated to sustain its policies, which were essentially designed to frustrate and sabotage US policies in the region. Thus, initial steps of the Obama administration seem to be providing evidence of the strongest rebuttal of the blowback hypothesis yet. It seems as if nonaggressive approaches led to equally harsh blowback effects. However, that is not the case as the next chapter explains.

### **3.1.1. Explaining Outcomes – Strategic Blowback and the Diplomatic Opening Towards Iran**

There are a number of issues to be examined regarding President Obama’s policy of engagement with Iran. First of all, one has to see if the policy of engagement can be regarded as a nonaggressive effort. In fact, engagement was complemented with other policies and the overall effect of those different tracks led to policies at least partly aggressive. The explanation for this is the following.

All of the above implies that the Obama administration applied a genuinely different approach to what the Bush administration had been representing. That is true,

but a more nuanced understanding of how the US wished to engage Iran provides a more accurate picture. The Obama administration wished to demonstrate its willingness to talk. *Nonetheless, the team around Obama was shrewd because it did not want to talk to Iran for the sake of talking but for demonstrating US willingness to exhaust all diplomatic solutions before something tougher could take their place.* There is plenty of evidence to support this assumption.

The point person in charge of Iran policy at the National Security Council at the time was Dennis B. Ross, President Clinton's former Middle East peace negotiator with a distinguished career in government. (Scherer; Calabresi [2009]) Ross wrote a book with Middle East expert David Makovsky of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP) in 2009. The intriguing book argues that:

“Tougher policies - either military or meaningful containment - will be easier to sell internationally and domestically if we have diplomatically tried to resolve our differences with Iran in a serious and credible fashion” (Ross; Makovsky [2009]: p. 230.; Holland [2009])

In fact, the two authors devote an entire section of their book on how to engage and pressure Tehran at the same time. (Ross; Makovsky [2009]: pp. 225-233)

Opening was only a prelude to tougher policies such as sanctions. It was aiming to demonstrate the difference between the Bush and Obama administrations. Even as the US was “courting” Iran, it was preparing for possible tougher sanctions against the Islamic Republic. Obama ordered Stuart Levey of the Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence (OTFI) at the Treasury Department to work out possible scenarios for sanctioning Iran in case it was not willing to cooperate on the nuclear issue. In fact, engagement was never really “pure” in the sense that the US had always been contemplating other tracks in order to pressure Iran. (Mann [2012]: pp. 191-196; p. 203,). James Mann notes:

“From the outset, as Obama pressed forward his policy of engagement, his administration was also quietly exploring the possibilities for tightening sanctions. [...] Thus, from the start an underlying purpose of Obama's engagement policy was to help the United States win greater international support for tougher action, such as economic sanctions, than the Bush administration had been able to obtain. Indeed, Obama's initial attempts at engagement with North Korea and Iran were generally a flop: Neither was willing to rein its nuclear weapons program. But these failed efforts helped to buttress the case for international sanctions by demonstrating that engagement by itself had failed, or that it

wouldn't accomplish much. The Obama team was able to win greater European and other international support for sanctions than had ever been obtained by the Bush administration" (Mann [2012]: p. 196.)

This is entirely in harmony with Patrick Clawson's opinion:

"What we've got to do is...show the world that we're doing a heck of a lot to try and engage the Iranians." "Our principal target with these offers [to Iran] is not Iran. Our principal target with these offers is, in fact, American public opinion [and] world public opinion." (Dreyfuss [2009]: p. 7.)

Moreover, Dreyfuss references a paper that Ross has worked on together with a number of other people. This work refers to "*kinetic action*" when describing possible contingencies the US may need to respond to in the Gulf. (Coats; Robb; Makovsky et. al. [2008]: p. xii. quoted in Dreyfuss [2009]: p. 7) Based on the Wikileaks documents, Mann's account describes an event during which an official working within OTFI provided European officials with a presentation on US sanctions policies regarding Iran in London. The official noted that "engagement alone is not likely to succeed", thus applying pressure has to be a potential option. (Sanger; Glanz Becker [2010]; quoted in Mann [2012]: p. 196.; Parsi [2012]: p. 104.)<sup>191</sup> Diplomatic overtures were halfhearted in a sense, and that was enough for US initiatives to run astray. (Gerges [2012]: p. 181.) Former White House aide on Iran Gary Sick also noted that Iran would never have responded favorably to a "halfhearted" approach designed to engage as well as pressure Iran at the same time. (Peterson [2010]) An article of the Christian Science Monitor cites diplomatic cables released by Wikileaks, proving that the Obama administration was already preparing sanctions when engagement was underway. The article argues that the administration never believed sincerely that engagement would work. (*Ibid.* Leverett-Leverett [2010c]) Furthermore, the US position on the fuel swap deal became rather static – the US was not open to modifications suggested by Iran due to President Obama's restricted domestic political space. Hence, the Geneva offer became a "*take it or leave*" it proposal. (Parsi [2012]: p. 141.; p. 219-220.)

Thus, when examining the sub-systemic level of government policies, it is very important to know that "engagement" with Iran was never meant to be engagement alone. It was meant to provide Iran with carrots and sticks at the same time – thus, at least part of the policy was aggressive as defined by the dissertation. It is not entirely right to say that engagement was not meaningful on behalf of the US administration

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<sup>191</sup> This section was partly based on a section of one of the author's earlier publications. See: Balogh [2011c] pp. 3-6.

since that would be equal to saying that Obama had not altered the approach applied by the Bush administration. This would not be true. Nonetheless, it is true that the moment engagement was started different ways were also being designed to put pressure on Iran. This dualism had always been part of US-Iran policies and it partly explains why the US had not been able to engage Iran successfully.

Besides engagement (i.e. the “first track”), the “second track” meant pressuring Iran by preparing tough sanctions but there was also a “third track” too. This meant covert operations designed under the Bush administration, which took the form of cyber-attacks against computers of Iranian nuclear installations and the Natanz uranium enrichment site in particular. (Sanger [2012]: p. 150) This initiative was a product of joint US-Israeli efforts to design a highly sophisticated virus, which caused centrifuges used for enrichment to blow up. The virus was later named “Stuxnet” in the media and took out approximately one fifth of Iran’s centrifuges in Natanz as a result of attacks, which began in 2010. (Sanger [2012]: pp. 188-206. Crist [2012]: p. 551.)<sup>192</sup>

Thus, with engagement having been pursued parallel to policies designed to pressure Iran, it is fair to say that *at least a part of the overall US policy was aggressive, since sanctions and covert operations count as such policies according to the terminology applied by the dissertation*. What remains to be explained is how this approach caused blowback effects. Again, factors on two different levels affected outcomes.

Systemic factors:

- global distribution of power; and
- the regional distribution of power.

Sub-systemic factors:

- government policies of the US and Iran;
- perceptions; and
- domestic constituencies and political forces.

Concerning the systemic level, it is necessary to note that the US was still the

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<sup>192</sup> It should also be noted that a series of bomb attacks were carried out against Iranian nuclear scientists, most likely by Israel’s Mossad. These attacks must have further strengthened Iranian perceptions that US efforts to engage Iran were not sincere as Israel was the ally of the US. (See: Crist [2012]: pp. 552-553.)



preeminent power in the international system, however, the development of China and other emerging economies started closing the gap between the United States and the rest. This was already the case under the Bush administration, but this tendency became even more prominent by the time Obama took office. During Obama's first year in office, US population stood at roughly 307 million people and only the Chinese, Indian and EU populations were significantly larger.<sup>193</sup> US GDP amounted to almost 14 trillion US dollars and this economic performance was only surpassed by the combined data of EU countries. Chinese output was roughly 30% –, and Japanese GDP was approximately 60 percent smaller than that of the US. Still, it should be noted that Chinese GDP more than doubled since 2003, while US economic growth began to slow significantly in the same period. However, US GDP was still more than four times larger than India's economic output.<sup>194</sup> (World Bank [2012])

GDP per capita data prove that the US was still the leading economic power in the international system in 2008. As this indicator provides a better snapshot of the domestic distribution of wealth, it is somewhat more informative. However, it should be noted that the Chinese economy did extraordinarily well in redistributing wealth as it actually doubled its GDP per capita between 2003 and 2009.<sup>195</sup> (World Bank [2012]) It is the annual growth rate of Chinese GDP that is even more astonishing. The world economic crisis was a fact by 2009 and a number of economic great powers began to experience negative growth rates, but not China. According to World Bank data, Chinese economic growth stood at 9.2% and only the Indian economy showed a similar performance. The US economy actually contracted in 2009 and the negative growth rate of US GDP was at -3,5%.<sup>196</sup> (World Bank [2012]) The US economy was particularly weak when considering the total public debt, which stood at roughly 10 trillion US dollars in January 2009. This amounted to about 104% of that year's economic output.

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<sup>193</sup> For population data for 2009 see: China: 1.331.380.000; India: 1.207.740.408; EU: 500.883.709; **US: 306.771.529**; Indonesia: 237.414.495; Brazil: 193.246.610; Russian Federation: 141.910.000. (World Bank [2012])

<sup>194</sup> For data on GDP at PPP (purchasing power parity) in current international dollars for the year 2009 see: EU: 15.575.165.310.492; **US: 13.863.600.000.000**; China: 9.066.218.749.474; Japan: 4.095.509.324.139; India: 3.727.114.702.654; Russian Federation: 2.680.824.551.723; Brazil: 2.007.583.191.879. (Numbers have been rounded.) As in the previous chapter on the Bush administration, the author chose these countries as they are among the most relevant international economic powers, thus, their standing is a relatively good indicator of the international configuration of economic power. World Databank, World Bank [2012]

<sup>195</sup> For data on GDP per capita at PPP (purchasing power parity) in current international dollars for the year 2009 see: **US: 45.192**; Japan: 32.107; EU: 31.095; Russian Federation: 18.891; China: 6.809 (Numbers have been rounded). World Databank, World Bank [2012]

<sup>196</sup> For data on annual GDP growth for the year 2009 see: China: 9.2%; India: 8.2%; Indonesia: 4.6 %; **US: -3,5%**; EU: -4.4%; Japan: -5.5%; Russian Federation: -7.8%. World Databank, World Bank [2012]

(TreasuryDirect [2009] p. 1.; Chantrill [Year unknown]) The share of exports in the US GDP amounted to 11.4%, which signaled some limited growth since 2003. However, the same data for China was 26.7 %, which even marks a slight reduction since 2003.<sup>197</sup> (World Bank [2012]) All in all, the tendency that became clearly visible by 2003<sup>198</sup> was even more apparent in 2009: the US was still the strongest economy in the international system, but its advantage was eroding.

China's military development was dramatic – its military expenditures grew by more than 100%. Beijing spent 52 billion US dollars on its military in 2003 and this sum grew to 117 billion by 2009. (SIPRI [2012]) However, US military power was still unchallenged. According to 2010 data of the IISS Military Balance, the number of US active duty personnel in the US military stood 1,5 million people – 100,000 more than in 2003. The US national defense budget appropriation reached 694 billion US dollars in 2009. (IISS [2010]: p. 31.) Thus, US forces still outnumbered and US military power outweighed every other significant military power in the international system.<sup>199</sup> (SIPRI [2012]) Furthermore, US force projection capabilities were still second to none in 2009-2010, since the US had 11 CVN type aircraft carriers.<sup>200</sup>

As far as the regional configuration of power is concerned, Iran was still one of the most influential powers in the region, however, its economic position has significantly weakened. Its population stood at 73 million, meaning that only the Egyptian population was significantly larger.<sup>201</sup> The Iranian economy was still the second largest in the Middle East and Turkey was still number one in this respect.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> For 2009 data on exports of goods and services as percentage of GDP see: Russian Federation: 35%; EU: 34%; Indonesia: 30%; China: 29.5%; Brazil: 15%; India: 14.7%; Japan: 11.8%; **US: 9.4%**. (Numbers have been rounded) World Databank, World Bank [2012]

<sup>198</sup> This year was chosen for comparing data of countries under the Bush administration as this was the year which marked the invasion of Iraq.

<sup>199</sup> According to the 2010 edition of the IISS Military Balance the other three countries possessed the following capacities in terms of active personnel: China: 2,285,000; India: 1,325,000; Russia: 1,027,000. IISS [2010]: p. 399; p. 359; p. 222. respectively. According to the SIPRI database on military expenditures the four countries spent the following amounts on their armed forces in 2009. (All data are indicated in constant 2010 billion US dollars and all numbers have been rounded.) **US: 680**; China: 117; Russia: 60; India: 46. For military expenditures as percentage of GDP for the same four countries in 2009 see: Russia: 4.3 %; **US: 4.8**; India: 2.9 %; China: 2.2%. SIPRI [2012].

<sup>200</sup> The US had 11 aircraft carriers at the time, which was more than what any country possessed during this period. See: IISS [2010]: p. 33.

<sup>201</sup> For 2009 data on population of Middle Eastern states (million people) see: Egypt: 80; **Iran: 73**; Turkey: 72; Iraq: 31; Saudi Arabia: 27; Syria: 20; Israel: 7.5; Jordan: 6; Lebanon: 4.2. (Numbers have been rounded.) World Databank, World Bank [2012]

<sup>202</sup> For 2009 data on GDP at PPP (purchasing power parity) in current international dollars for Middle Eastern countries see: Turkey: 1.038.438.711.594; **Iran: 839.571.868.205**; Saudi Arabia: 590.994.991.844; Egypt: 469.266.188.271; Israel: 190.674.499.369; Iraq: 111.345.975.174; Syria: 103.060.367.600; Lebanon: 54.704.061.814; Jordan: 34.044.419.957. (Numbers have been rounded.)

Compared to the performance of other Middle Eastern states, Iran's GDP per capita data was rather low and the performance of its export sector was quite weak too. The annual growth of the Iranian economy stood at only 1.8%, which was one of the lowest data in the region. Nonetheless, Iran's external debt stocks as percentage of GNI were also the lowest in the region in 2009 (4.1%), but the net inflows of FDI were quite low.<sup>203</sup> Thus, Iran's economy was one of the most significant ones in terms of size, but its overall performance was relatively weak in 2009. One of the most significant changes in the regional configuration of economic power was that Iraq's economic performance was improving and the Turkish economy was in recession. (World Databank, World Bank [2012])

Concerning the regional balance of military power, it is important to note that Iran's regional position has also been weakening. One reason behind this was the development of the Iraqi military, which was larger in size in 2009.<sup>204</sup> (IISS [2010]: p. 164; pp. 235-282.) The Iranian military expenditure was still the fourth largest in the region, but its military expenditure as percentage of GDP was relatively low (1.8%).<sup>205</sup> (SIPRI [2012]) Thus, a weakening economy implied a weakening military force in 2009. Part of this was probably due to the world economic crisis, sanctions and the fact that the world price of oil was relatively low by 2009.<sup>206</sup> (EIA [2012])

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World Databank, World Bank [2012]

<sup>203</sup> For 2009 data on GDP per capita at PPP (power purchasing parity) in current international dollars for various countries of the region see: Israel: 25.472; Saudi Arabia: 22.045; Turkey: 14.454; Lebanon: 13.034; **Iran**: 11.479; Egypt: 5.887; Jordan: 5.756; Syria: 5.143; Iraq: 3.581. For 2009 data export of goods and services as percentage of GDP: Jordan: 46%; Israel: 35%; Syria: 30%; Egypt: 25%; Turkey: 23%; Lebanon: 20%; Saudi Arabia: 5%. **No data were available for Iran** and Iraq. For 2009 data on the annual growth of GDP see: Lebanon: 8.5%; Syria: 6%; Jordan: 5.5%; Egypt: 4.7%; Iraq: 4.2%; **Iran**: **1.8%**; Israel: 0.8%; Saudi Arabia: 0.1%; Turkey: -4.8%; For 2009 data on external debt stocks as percentage of GNI see: Lebanon: 72%; Turkey: 48%; Jordan: 26%; Egypt: 18%; Syria: 9.7%; **Iran**: **4.1%**. No data were available for Iraq, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. For data on net inflows of FDI (balance of payments, current billion US dollars) for 2009 see: Saudi Arabia: 36458; Turkey: 8411; Egypt: 6712; Lebanon: 4804; Israel: 4438; **Iran**: **3048**; Syria: 2570; Jordan: 2414; Iraq: 1598. (Numbers have been rounded.) World Databank, World Bank [2012-2013]

<sup>204</sup> For the number of active personnel in Middle Eastern armed forces for the year 2009 see: Iraq: 578.000. **Iran**: **523.000**; Turkey: 510.600; Egypt: 468.500; Syria: 325.500; Saudi Arabia: 233.500; Israel: 176.500; Jordan: 100.500; Lebanon: 59.100. See "Middle East and North Africa" in: IISS [2010] p. 164; pp. 235-282.

<sup>205</sup> For data on military expenditures in 2010 billion US dollars for the year 2009 see: Saudi Arabia: 43.5; Turkey: 18; Israel: 14.7; **Iran**: **9.9 (IISS)**; Egypt: 4.4; Syria: 2.3; Iraq: 3; Lebanon: 1.5; Jordan: 1.5. (In case of Iran no data were available for 2009, thus, the author applied IISS data from the 2010 edition of the Military Balance.) Numbers have been rounded. SIPRI [2012]; IISS [2010]: p. 251. For data on military expenditures as percentage of GDP for 2009 see: Israel: 7%; Saudi Arabia: 11%; Syria: 4%; Jordan: 6%; Lebanon: 4.1%; Turkey: 2.6 %; Egypt: 2.1%; **Iran**: **1.8% (2008)**; Iraq: 2.5%. (In case of Iran no data were available for 2009, thus, the author applied 2008 data.) SIPRI [2012]

<sup>206</sup> According to the Energy Information Agency (EIA) the US average real "crude oil domestic first purchase prices" (1949-2011, dollars per Barrell) one Barrell of oil cost 51.35 US dollar in 2009, a sharp decrease from 2008 when real prices peaked at 86.61 per Barrell. See: EIA [2012]

Thus, Iran and the US were both relatively weaker than in 2003. This probably explains at least a part of why they were both more willing to engage each other during Obama's first months in office and even afterwards. Their relatively weak positions left them with fewer options besides engagement. Thus, structural factors and changes in the global and regional distribution of power partly explain why both powers were willing to come to the table. In and of themselves, they do not explain why diplomacy failed and, thus, caused strategic setbacks for Washington.

The final factor on the structural level was to do with regional geopolitical realities. Israel and Saudi Arabia were particularly concerned about the Iranian nuclear program with the Saudis even calling on the US to "*cut off the head of the sneak*", implying that the US should apply force to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear bomb. (See: Sanger [2012]: p. 159-160.; Crist [2012]: p. 563.; pp. Gerges [2012] pp. 181-182.) Israel and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu was particularly anxious about the new US policy on Iran. (Goldberg [2009]) Thus, those two countries and other Gulf Arab states have been pushing the US to take tougher measures against the Islamic Republic. This set a limit to US engagement efforts from the outset. (Parsi [2012]: pp. 211-213.)

The author has already described the dynamic that took place on the sub-systemic level of US government policies when examining whether policies of the Obama administration could be regarded as "aggressive" towards Iran. (See above.) One direct and immediate blowback effect of the static position the US took during the Geneva and Vienna negotiations and the constant preparation for sanctions was that Iran started further enriching uranium "at the 19.75% level" by February 2010. (Parsi [2012]: p. 163.) The problem with this is that it takes much less to go from 20% to 90% - weapons grade uranium, that is, than going from 4-5 to 20%. (Fitzpatrick [2011]: p. 34.) Iran also took steps to demonstrate its international influence concerning nuclear issues by organizing a nuclear disarmament conference in Tehran in 2010. The event attracted considerable attendance, which was used by Iran for propaganda purposes. (McElroy [2010])

Furthermore, another domestic US actor has to be added to the mix of factors listed so far. Congressional political forces pushed for sanctions supported by both parties. (The Economist [2010]) Congress and domestic lobby groups, and AIPAC in particular, have been very effective at pushing for sanctions in the US legislature. Thus, a number of representatives and senators sided with AIPAC in supporting tougher

measures and limiting the political space of the White House concerning engagement. (Parsi [2012]: pp. 103-105; pp. 132-133; Gerges [2012]: p. 157-158; p. 191.) In fact, the US House of Representatives passed a resolution on gasoline sanctions on December 15, 2009. (Parsi [2012]: p. 157.)

As far as Iranian government policies are concerned, the Iranian government's harsh measures in order to crush opposition forces after the 2009 presidential elections meant that Obama had more difficulties selling the policy of engagement both at home, as well as in Europe. This caused a domestic debate, which led to a stalemate in foreign policy decision making. (Parsi [2012]: pp. 147-150.) As a result, Tehran kept delaying its response and then rejected the P5+1 offer. This meant a real strategic blowback for the US because it implied that Iranian policies designed to sabotage US policies in the Middle East would remain in place. The author contends that there are two main reasons for this rejection.

One was that Iranian political forces were themselves divided on what to respond. If "institutional resistance" played a part on the US side due to Congressional pressures, then the same factor was definitely at play in Iran too. (Gerges [2012]: p. 191.) In fact, it may well be – as some analysts point out – that Ahmadinejad actually wanted a deal in order to stabilize his position domestically. This would have helped him regain some of the legitimacy he lost during the 2009 summer presidential elections. In fact, a number of sources draw attention to this and emphasize the apparent "paralysis" of Iranian decision making as a result of domestic political divisions in the wake of the 2009 post-election turmoil. (Perthes [2010]: pp. 100-101.; also referenced in Balogh [2010a]: p. 373.; Sanger [2012]: p. 162.; Gerges [2012]: pp. 184-185; Crist [2012]: p. 549.; Parsi [2012]: pp. 147-150.)<sup>207</sup> Thus, it may be right to conclude that it was not diplomacy *per se* that failed, it may have been that *the Iranian domestic political system failed to produce a political compromise*. (Balogh [2010a]: p. 373.) Those domestic divisions, however, were at least partly results of ambivalent US policies towards Tehran and, thus, responsible for lack of a genuine will to "reward" US overtures.

Strategic blowback came not as a result of what had happened as a direct or indirect consequence of the above US policies, but rather as a result of what *had not happened*. Following an aggressive counter-offensive led by Gen. David Petraeus, then

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<sup>207</sup> Part of this section is based on one of the earlier studies by the author. See: Balogh [2010a]: p. 373.

commander of Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I), Iran's influence weakened over Iraq. However, in 2009, Iran sought to reinforce its presence and IRGC officers returned to Iraq. Knowing that the US was in the process of handing responsibility over to local authorities and forces, they could move around more freely than before. Commander of the IRGC's Quds Force Gen. Qassem Suleimani wished to weaken the US while it was preparing to withdraw, assuming that it was more vulnerable while reducing its presence in the country.<sup>208</sup> (Crist [2012]: p. 558.)

Wikileaks cables further prove the reinforcement of Iran's presence in its neighborhood. A cable dated February 21, 2010 from Baghdad provides insight into how local political forces perceive Iranian presence. Members of the local political forces in Ramadi, Anbar province, contended that Iran had been influencing Iraqi politics through dominating the Accountability and Justice Committee, the organization responsible for vetting candidates for the 2010 elections. (*PRT Anbar: Anbaris perceive...* [2010]) Another embassy cable reports of a discussion between US ambassador to Iraq Christopher Hill and the governor of Iraq's Diyala province, which sheds light on the fact that Iran became an important factor in Iraqi politics not only because of its political power, but also due to its stake in the Iraqi infrastructure. The cable notes that Diyala province receives most of its electricity through power lines from the Iranian province of Khermansah. (*PRT Diyala: Ambassador Hill...* [2010]) Another cable provides evidence of Iranian influence by recounting a conversation in which a former Iraqi representative (Mashhadani) had this to say concerning the issue:

"He stated that Iraqi candidates should criticize Iranian interference in Iraq, but claimed that they could not do so without American protection." (*Former Speaker on De-ba'athification ...* [2010])

Thus, Iran exerted influence through a coercive policy by instilling fear in those who did not support its policies.

Iran also tried to maintain influence in Afghanistan as well. In another embassy cable, a US official reported of a discussion with President Karzai's chief of staff, Omar

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<sup>208</sup> It was even reported that in 2008, Gen. Petraeus was handed a mobile that had a text message from Gen. Qassem Suleimani specifically addressed to him saying: *General Petraeus, you should know that I, Qassem Suleimani, control the policy for Iran with respect to Iraq, Lebanon, Gaza, and Afghanistan. And indeed, the ambassador in Baghdad is a Quds Force member. The individual who's going to replace him is a Quds Force member.* See: Chulov [2011].

Daudzai, who is also Afghanistan's former ambassador to Iran. The cable states that:

“He said that the Iranians no longer deny their support for the Taliban. While there is room for "indirect" U.S.-Afghan cooperation on Afghanistan, Daudzai cautioned that at best the Iranians would only "tolerate" our [the US – added by author, I.B.] presence in Afghanistan.” (*Afghanistan's Outlook on Iran ...* [2010])

Still other cables shed light on the growing influence of Iran in Afghanistan's Bamyan province and Iran's “subtle but significant” influence in the country's higher education system. (*Bamyan Governor Sarobi ...* [2009]; *Iranian Influence in Afghanistan's ...* [2009]) Iran's economic, cultural and political influence in Afghanistan has also been growing since the US interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. (Bagherpour-Farhad [2010])

Even though these cables do not necessarily reflect an Iranian influence exerted through nefarious activities, *they still attest to the fact that Iranian presence has become an integral part of the fabric of society, government and economy in both Iraq and Afghanistan.* This is the presence that is used as a hedge against US influence in both countries. (See previous chapters on the Bush administration.) However, there is also evidence of more aggressive Iranian activities in Iraq. Wikileaks war logs shed light on the fact that Iran was still involved or at least complicit in smuggling “*lethal aid*” and anti-tank grenades from Iran to Iraq in 2009. There are also reports of occasional Iranian small arms fire on US supported Iraqi forces from Iranian bases along the Iraq-Iran border. (See respectively: *MND-S: (Criminal Event)...* [2009]; *MND-S: (Friendly Action) ...* [2009]; *MND-S: (Enemy Action)...* [2009])<sup>209</sup>

This suggests that even if Iran mostly applied only political tools, its presence was still partly built on aiding paramilitary outfits capable of countering US presence. Since the US and Iran could not agree on a deal regarding Iran's nuclear program and other pressing regional issues, Iran did not change its previous policies because it still had a stake in undermining US presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the Arab-Israeli peace process. *Thus, policies aiming to cause strategic setbacks for the US remained in place.*

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<sup>209</sup> The second war log referenced here does not specifically state that the anti-tank grenades came from Iran. However, every war log released by Wikileaks includes a Google maps satellite image of the exact place of the reported event and in this case the interception happened just a few kilometers from the Iraq-Iran border, thus, there is sufficient evidence to assume that the supplies came from Iran. See: *MND-S: (Friendly Action) ...* [2009]

This is closely connected to the other reason why Iran rejected the offer of the P5+1 and this factor has to do with perceptions. Domestic Iranian disagreement was a result of the perceptions of certain political forces, which thought that the US is “setting a trap” and as long as its actions do not change, its rhetoric and initiatives cannot be trusted. To be sure and fair, part of this was just sheer populism, regime propaganda and paranoia. Still, the other part was fuelled by perceptions that the US was not really intent on a grand bargain, that changes in rhetoric had not been followed by changes in practice. (AP/The Guardian [2009]) Diplomatic overtures could not be trusted and taken for granted because they did not represent the sincere and real intentions of Washington. *However, this was partly true.* The author provided proof that détente was not necessarily pursued for the sake of a real opening, but for creating the strategic environment for tougher measures (sanctions). Thus, when Iran was criticizing the US for not being sincere when it signaled its willingness to negotiate with Iran, it was partly right. Of course, most of this had more to do with Iranian regime propaganda, but at least some of the outcome was a result of ambivalent US policies and signals elaborated upon above. Thus, old and reinforced perceptions still had a profound effect on the US-Iran relationship. (See: Crist [2012]: p. 572; Gerges [2012]: p. 156.)

The author also argues that Iran had obviously also done a lot to reinforce those negative perceptions. One such mistake was hiding the Fordow plant from the international community. This reinforced the Obama administration’s stance that engagement in and of itself cannot be effective. Thus, a fair share of the responsibility rests with Iran. Still, by applying pressure besides engagement, the Obama presidency fuelled Iran’s negative perceptions too.<sup>210</sup>

US policies failed to succeed and indirectly led to strategic blowback to the extent they were aggressive. Blowback effects were not particularly harsh because the US approach was not entirely aggressive. Thus, the biggest setback for the US was that Iran rejected the Geneva offer due to the dual track approach. Furthermore, the Iraqi war effort was winding down and Iran was more willing to wait out the remaining period of US presence in Iraq without further escalating the situation there. Tehran also knew that the Afghanistan mission would also eventually come to an end. Thus, the very fact that

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<sup>210</sup> Hiding the Fordow plant could be interpreted as a strategic blowback resulting from earlier US threats to use force against Iran. These drove Iran to take some parts of its nuclear program underground in Fordow. However, proving this connection is really difficult, thus, the author will not elaborate on this possibility.



Obama planned to withdraw made Iran *less interested* in pursuing more aggressive policies in those countries. Even if Iran maintained its presence in countries it considered strategically important, it did not escalate the situation. It rather discredited the Obama administration's engagement efforts by rejecting the P5+1 offer. *This was the biggest blowback to the Obama administration, which had invested enormous political capital into engaging Iran both at home, as well as abroad.* This hindered the realization of all US interests listed at the beginning of this chapter, particularly stopping Iran from acquiring a nuclear breakout capacity.<sup>211</sup>

Thus, the multilevel analysis based on Neoclassical Realism leads one to believe that *no opening is going to proceed if it is not a genuine opening.* There is sufficient evidence to prove the linkage between "dual track" US policies and the Iranian rejection. Mixed signals will inevitably reinforce old mindsets and play into the hands of forces determined to stop the US and Iran from remedying their problems together. *Of course, this may mean asking too much from an administration that has already gone a long way in investing domestic political capital into a much criticized policy of détente. This has to be acknowledged. It must be emphasized that Obama got closer to a compromise with Iran than any other president had before him.* (Limbert [2010]: p. 148.)

This dissertation does not wish to be biased against the US – quite to the contrary, it seeks to find what caused setbacks to the US in order to find the solution for the stalemate that has been poisoning the relationship of the two actors for more than thirty years. Neither is it true that according to the theory of strategic blowback, the US "can do no good." In fact the Obama administration started experimenting with the only solution that could work. Thus, it was on the right track initially. Still, it did not go all the way in exhausting diplomacy because of possible domestic political costs associated with pursuing negotiations without any preconditions. (See: Parsi [2012]: pp. ix-x.) However, the right conclusion from the failure of earlier overtures is not that diplomacy cannot work, and that tougher measures are needed. The right conclusion is that diplomacy should be given an extra chance because it was not pursued in the right manner and even this was enough to produce strategic blowback effects for the US.

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<sup>211</sup> The author listed the following US national interests at stake: defeating terrorism associated with Islamic extremism; rolling back Islamic militancy and extremism; stabilizing Iraq and Afghanistan; Arab-Israeli peace; preventing an Iranian nuclear weapons capability. See the introductory chapter on the Obama administration.

### 3.2. The policy of containing Iran

As the chances for successful engagement waned, the Obama presidency stepped up its efforts to isolate Iran. In doing so, it took a page from the playbook of every previous administration since President Carter – *it returned to the traditional policy of containment*. Similar to the Clinton and Bush administrations, the Obama presidency designed its policy of isolation to include a *political*, an *economic* as well as a *military* component.

Political efforts included rallying the international community to support further sanctions within the framework of the UN Security Council. The idea was to secure international support for another round of UN sanctions in order to provide a legal basis for further enforcement measures by individual nations. These efforts had two different dimensions: one aimed to gain European support for such measures and the other focused on getting Russia and China on board. It was figured that China would be more willing to accept further sanctions if Russia had agreed to them too. Thus, in order to get Russian support, Washington persuaded Israel to have Moscow vote in favor of additional sanctions and the Saudis were asked to provide China with guarantees that Chinese energy supplies from Iran would be made up for by Riyadh in case the flow of Iranian oil stopped as a result of economic enforcement measures. By March 2010 both Saudi Arabia and the UAE had stepped up their oil sales to China. (Parsi [2012]: pp. 153-154.; p. 164.) This diplomatic jockeying made another round of UN sanctions possible and UNSC 1929 was adopted on June 9 2010. (Limbert [2010]: p. 148.)

A further sign of containment efforts and the end of the engagement policy was that the US was not sincerely interested in a direct and negotiated solution anymore. When Turkey and Brazil succeeded in striking a fuel swap deal based on the same terms as the Geneva offer on May 17, 2010, Washington dismissed the result despite signs that Brazil and Turkey struck a deal based on previous “instructions” by *President Obama himself*. The US was determined to pass another sanctions resolution by then. (Parsi [2012]: pp. 193-199, Starr [2010]: p. 121.; *Joint Declaration by Iran, Turkey and Brazil*. 17 May [2010])

Parallel to these diplomatic efforts, Obama put pressure on Iran by applying tougher rhetoric. In his State of the Union Address on January 27, 2010, Obama noted:

“That's why the international community is more united and the Islamic Republic of *Iran*

*is more isolated.* [Emphasis added by author – I.B.] And as Iran's leaders continue to ignore their obligations, there should be no doubt: They, too, will face growing consequences. That is a promise.” (*State of the Union address by Barack Obama.* January 27. [2010])

A year later he added that sanctions put in place by the US and its allies are results of diplomatic measures. This attests to the fact that Washington had given up engagement for containment. (*State of the Union address by Barack Obama.* January 25. [2011]) Obama’s rhetoric became tougher as the US distanced itself from a diplomatic solution. In his speech before the AIPAC Policy Conference – the annual conference of the most influential Israeli lobby group – Obama pointed out that he was determined to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons:

“You also see our commitment to our shared security in our determination to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. (Applause.) Here in the United States, we’ve imposed the toughest sanctions ever on the Iranian regime. (Applause.) At the United Nations, under our leadership, we’ve secured the most comprehensive international sanctions on the regime, which have been joined by allies and partners around the world. Today, Iran is virtually cut off from large parts of the international financial system, and we’re going to keep up the pressure. So let me be absolutely clear — we remain committed to preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. (Applause.)” (*Transcript of Obama’s Remarks to AIPAC.* May 22. [2011])

Engagement morphed into rhetorical pressure and it was a prelude to pursuing tougher measures, such as international and national sanctions. This formed the *economic* dimension of containment. The first part of this initiative was to have the UNSC adopt another round of sanctions. The author already mentioned the efforts to rally international support for the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1929. This was the toughest of all sanctions passed against Iran so far. The resolution focused on banning missile technology exports headed for Iran and it also prohibited the Islamic Republic from “acquiring commercial interest in uranium mining or producing nuclear materials in other countries.” (Starr [2010]: p. 121.) The provisions also extended already existing travel sanctions and required states to search ships heading towards or coming from Iran in case they suspected that such ships carried prohibited items. Furthermore, the IRGC and the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) were also further targeted and states were instructed not to provide these entities with financial or insurance services. No Iranian bank was allowed to operate within the territory of any other UN member state and no financial institution could engage in business within the Islamic Republic. (*Ibid.*; *Resolution 1929... UNSC* [2010])

Once international sanctions were passed at the UN, the US Congress moved to add its own enforcement measures to the existing list. Thus, on July 1 2010, President Obama signed into law the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act (CISADA). (Public Law 111-195-July 1. [2010]) Even before CISADA was adopted by Congress, at least two laws aimed at curbing gasoline sales to Iran.<sup>212</sup> This included the strictest US sanctions up until then. First, CISADA amended the “triggers” of the Iran Sanctions Act – it slightly modified the definition of “investment” in Iran’s energy sector to include the construction of pipelines to and through Iran, as well as contracts for developing energy projects. It banned the sale of hardware for use in Iran’s energy sector in case the deal was part of an investment project. All of these provisions were basically later included in CISADA itself. CISADA sanctions gasoline sales to Iran worth over a million US dollars or 5 million within a year. It also bans the sale of any equipment, which assists Iran in making or acquiring refined oil products. CISADA added three new possible forms of sanctions to the already existing six options under ISA.<sup>213</sup> (See the previous chapters on ISA.) Instead of requiring the administration to apply at least two of the six options against a violator of ISA, CISADA requires that the government use three of altogether nine options. CISADA further amended ISA to require firms entering contracts with the US government to verify that they are not violating ISA. The law also changed the system of waivers and exemptions somewhat and put forth that sanctions on selling gasoline and hardware related to gasoline would only terminate if it could be established that Iran did not pursue WMDs anymore and was removed from the State Department’s list containing states sponsoring terrorism. CISADA also restored a strict ban on exports to and imports from Iran since a number of trade and investments bans had been relaxed between 1999 and 2010. As far as banking sanctions are concerned, US banks are barred from handling accounts with entities deemed to be carrying out considerable financial

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<sup>212</sup> This included the “Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2010”. (P.L. 111-85- Oct. 28, 2009) which banned the purchase of oil for the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve from firms, which sold Iran refined petroleum worth over one million US dollars. Furthermore, the “Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2010” (P.L. 111-117-Dec. 16, 2009.) prohibited Ex-Im Bank credits to companies selling refined petroleum products to Iran. (Katzman [2012c]: p. 4.; P.L. 111-85- Oct. 28. [2009]; P.L. 111-117-Dec. 16. [2009])

<sup>213</sup> Those three are the following:

- a ban on foreign exchange transactions by the violator;
- a ban on payments or providing credits to the violator by US financial institutions; and
- “prohibition of the sanctioned entity from acquiring, holding, using, or trading any U.S.-based property which the sanctioned entity has a financial interest in.” (Katzman [2012c]: pp. 7-8.)

transactions for specific Iranian entities and the IRGC in particular. Moreover, shares of entities investing in Iran's energy sector may be subject to divestment. CISADA also contained provisions on the protection of human rights in Iran and included other efforts to increase Iranian access to internet and various means of communication.<sup>214</sup> New sanctions also altered and made stricter the rules of investigation of violations under ISA (the earlier set of sanctions introduced by the US in August 1996, see previous chapters.) According to provisions of the law, it is to remain in force until December 31, 2016. (Katzman [2012c]: pp. 3-9.; p. 20.; pp. 26-27.; pp. 31-34.)

However, one of the most effective ways of harming Iranian economic interests was to informally deter banks from dealing with entities assumed to be directly or indirectly involved in aiding illicit conduct related to Iran's nuclear program. The father of this approach was Stuart Levey, Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence at the Department of the Treasury and a Republican holdover from the Bush administration. The idea behind his design was that large international banks could not afford to lose their good reputation on the global market, plus they did not want to be subject to US sanctions, thus, they would take measures to cut ties with Iran and its affiliates. In fact, this plan worked so well, that, much to Levey's surprise, it caused a "snowball effect" by a growing number of financial institutions toeing the line.<sup>215</sup> (Mann [2012]: pp. 194-196.; Ross [2007]: pp. 316-317)

*Political* and *economic* isolation was complemented by the *military* dimension of containment. One of the most important military measures aimed at neutralizing the threat of Iranian ballistic missile capabilities. On January 21, 2010, head of CENTCOM General Petraeus announced that the US has deployed eight Patriot missile batteries in the Gulf region in Kuwait, the UAE, as well as Bahrain. Some Gulf states also started buying advanced missile and radar technology. Furthermore, the February 2010 Pentagon report on ballistic missile defense placed an emphasis on defense against Iranian capabilities. The US aimed to establish a "layered land and sea system" for intercepting Iranian ballistic missiles. Washington had also placed additional Patriot missile batteries in the region and deployed Aegis type radar vessels. Furthermore, a

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<sup>214</sup> Other measures also aimed at expanding access to internet communication networks. Katzman [2012c]: pp. 32-33.

<sup>215</sup> These efforts have also been documented by embassy cables released by Wikileaks. One embassy cable from Kabul reports on the efforts of Assistant Secretary of State for Terrorism Financing David Cohen to persuade banks in Afghanistan to be careful when dealing with Iranian banks. (*Corrected Copy: Treasury A/S Cohen...* [2010])

new “Integrated Air Defense Center for Excellence” was established with US support in Abu Dhabi. The Center focused on training and exercising in preparation for a potential missile attack. Adding to the importance of the military dimension, confrontation between the US and Iranian navies in the Strait of Hormuz were regular. Furthermore, systematic planning was underway in order to devise a strategy against Iran’s unconventional military capabilities. Even though US military engagement in Iraq was nearing its end and the same was planned for Afghanistan, the US still intended to station forty thousand military personnel in the Gulf area “*chiefly to contain Iran.*” (Crist [2012]: pp. 557-561; p. 569.) Thus, the US kept pursuing the policy based on the Gulf Security Dialogue designed by the Bush administration. It offered to improve the military capabilities of Gulf allies by selling military hardware to them with planned deals worth 120 billion US dollars altogether. (Katzman [2010]: p. 53.)

Thus, by the end of 2010, a tough containment policy was in place with three different components. It was a shift in strategy that was already underway when Iran and the P5+1 gathered in Geneva in fall 2009, but its full implementation was yet to take place. Only the June 9 UNSC resolutions and the July enactment of CISADA signaled that diplomacy was over for good.

The immediate response of Iran to the passing of new sanctions at the UN was to deny nuclear inspectors access to its nuclear sites in June 2010. (Sanger-Healy [2010]) Ahmadinejad threatened to retaliate in case Iranian ships were searched and signaled that Iran would not engage in talks with great powers over its nuclear program until August, 2010. Moreover, a commander of the IRGC said that Iran would retaliate by action in the Strait of Hormuz in case its ships were searched. (Erdbrink [2010]) Ahmadinejad further threatened to ban US and Western products in Iran as a response to sanctions. (LaFranchi [2010]) Then in April and May 2010, Iran conducted two large military exercises in the Strait of Hormuz. (Frayner [2010]) Even though most of these measures were mere threats, they also signaled that Iran is willing to escalate the situation, which ran contrary to US interests. Furthermore, in February 2010, the IAEA released a report on the Iranian nuclear file essentially saying that the Iranian nuclear program may have military implications. (See: *Implementation of the NPT ...* Gov/2010/10 IAEA February 18. [2010]: pp. 8-10)

As far as the *political element* of containment is concerned, a number of experts still supported the policy of containment. (Reardon [2012]; Fitzpatrick [2011]; Zakaria

[2009]) Zbigniew Brzezinski also talked favorably of the initiative but still others were skeptical, e.g. Brent Scowcroft. (Sanger [2010]) Certain well known analysts pointed out the inherent problem in trying to create a US-led alliance between Israel and Arab states in order to contain Iran. (Leverett, H.M. [2010]) Such criticism has also been emphasized by other experts as well. (Nasr-Taheyh [2008]; Nasr [2011]; Bromund-Phillips [2011]) Still other authors argue that Iran's influence kept growing despite sanctions and efforts to contain it. (Choksy [2010]) Robert Dreyfuss of *The Nation* contends that containing Iran is not only ineffective, it is also counterproductive:

“The fact is that the resolution will make it harder, not easier to achieve a diplomatic breakthrough on Iran's nuclear program. That's because it will make it more difficult for Iran's fractious leadership to make any conciliatory move without appearing to be caving in to international pressure. [...] Since military action has been ruled out, the choice are between diplomacy and containment of a post-nuclear Iran. In that choice, the sanctions are irrelevant. But they do make the diplomacy a lot harder.” (Dreyfuss [2010])

*This is the most important reason why containment is counterproductive.* The author acknowledges that containment has had significant effects. But when coupled with diplomacy, it is counterproductive because *it prevents diplomacy from succeeding and that is exactly what happened under the first two years of the Obama administration's tenure of office.* This has discouraged Iran during its own domestic political turmoil and it provided an incentive to maintain policies designed to harass US presence in the region. *“If the subsequent talks were successful and Iran agreed to the swap, it would be a major accomplishment that would set back Iran's breakout capability while creating more space and promise for additional diplomacy, which in turn could lead to significant positive reverberations in Iraq and Afghanistan.”* (Parsi [2012]: pp. 131-132.)

A former member of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Hossein Mousavian argues that there are essentially two domestic political forces in Iran. One believes that a negotiated settlement of the US-Iran conflict is possible while the other does not. By introducing new sanctions, the US has indirectly *“proved the second school right.”* (Mousavian [2012a])

The biggest problem with the ‘containment debate’ is that the possibility of containing a nuclear Iran has entered the discourse on the US-Iran stalemate inherently suggesting that this is the only future option. (See: Lindsay-Takeyh [2010b]; Lindsay-Takeyh [2010a]; Edelman-Krepinevich-Montgomery [2011]; Adamsky et al. [2011];

Posen et al. [2011]; Waltz [2012]) This is particularly counterproductive, as this discussion is *not based on present realities* and focuses the mainstream debate on one potential outcome without ignoring other possible options and the present situation.

The *economic* dimension of containment has equally been contentious. The reason is that the results of the sanctions policy have been mixed at best. Some argue that new sanctions introduced by Obama are effective indeed. (Askari [2010]; Levitt [2010]; Pletka [2009]) On the other hand, a Wall Street Journal op-ed points out that some of Iran's most important trading partners get exemptions from sanctions making the arrangement ineffective. (The Wall Street Journal [2012]) Other prominent analysts have also pointed out that sanctions are not likely to work for various reasons. (Leverett [2009]; Wall [2010]; Joyner [2010]; Oxford Analytica [2010]; Salehi-Isfahani [2009] Thompson [2010]) The bottom line is that up to the end of the period examined in the dissertation (December 18, 2010) no significant change has been realized in Iran's behavior and strategy. It is true that containment and sanctions have significantly limited Iran's economy, military buildup and political influence, but Tehran had not changed its policies. (Pollack [2010]: p. 209.) This suggests that even if sanctions are debated, there seems to be a consensus among a number of experts that sanctions are not likely to change Iran's policies.

The *military component* is a logical way of hedging against an Iranian military threat, but it also has the potential to backfire. Robert Reardon of RAND Corporation puts forth that even though containment could be effective, it may also create setbacks:

“Measures intended to deter a potentially nuclear-armed Iran could actually create greater incentives for Iran to weaponize in the first place. Specifically, efforts to improve the defensive capabilities of U.S. regional allies and deter Iranian aggression in the region may increase Iran's perception of regional threats, and trigger a security dilemma. Even measures that may be intended as purely defensive, such as the deployment of missile defenses, could increase Iran's perception of a threat. Iran could view efforts to improve the regional defenses of U.S. forces and U.S. allies as preparations for Iranian retaliation after an impending attack. Any negative shift in the regional balance of power risks providing Tehran with an incentive to weaponize.” (Reardon [2012]: p. 148.)

US historian Toby C. Jones notes the “[US – added by author, I.B.] *experiment in militarizing the region has made it more volatile, less free, and more costly to American interests and values*” (Jones [2011]) This is yet another testament to the fact that the military component of containment hinders US national interests by creating circumstances conducive to instability and confrontation. Jonathan Rue's *Foreign Affairs* article underscores Jones's argument by shedding light on the rapid development



of the Iranian navy recently. (Rue [2011])

Thus, even if every component of containment provides a platform for debate, still, a great number of prominent experts and voices point out that containment is either ineffective, or even worse, it is counterproductive.

### **3.2.1. Explaining Outcomes – Strategic Blowback as a Result of Containment**

According to the terminology of the dissertation, the Obama administration's efforts at containment qualify for an aggressive US policy. The question is whether containment efforts have generated any strategic setbacks for the US. Again, the author applies the multilevel analysis suggested by Neoclassical Realism, meaning that the following factors influenced the outcomes of containment:

Systemic factors:

- global distribution of power; and
- the regional distribution of power.

Sub-systemic factors:

- government policies of the US and Iran;
- perceptions; and
- domestic constituencies and political forces.

As far as the global and regional balance of power is concerned, structural factors and regional geopolitical realities provided a mixed picture. The US was drawing down and had less direct influence over Iraqi events but it was also strengthening its position in Afghanistan. Still, Iran knew that both missions would eventually end in a couple of years' time, thus, it was in a winning position overall. This confidence was coupled with the fact that US efforts to rally great powers and regional allies to confront Iran and support tough sanctions, as well as other measures convinced Iran that US overtures were never really sincere. Thus, international structural realities pushed Iran towards confrontation and away from reconciliation even if the regional configuration of power was favorable for Iran's position.

On the sub-systemic level, the Obama administration's return to containment

either failed to produce any meaningful results or they led to strategic setbacks. Although China agreed to significantly cut back its oil imports from Iran, it began increasing its Iranian imports by 2011 causing a 30% increase compared to 2010. (Ma [2012]) Sanctions caused Iran to engage in saber rattling and escalate the political discourse by threatening to initiate actions in the Strait of Hormuz. Iranian military exercises also added to tensions in the region. However, Iranian threats were obviously not the most important sources of strategic blowback. Rather, the blowback came in the form of sustained Iranian policies aimed at undermining US influence in the Middle East and hedging against a potential military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities. The February 2010 IAEA report proves that Iran had not abandoned its policies. It is true that the report was released before the US actually returned to containment during the summer of 2010, but the last report released by the IAEA before the end of the period examined here (December 18, 2010) equally confirmed that Iran's program may have had military implications. (*Implementation of the NPT...* Gov/2010/62 IAEA November 23. [2010]: pp. 7-8.) Prominent Iran expert Shahram Chubin's assessment of the effectiveness of sanctions is instructive here:

"[Chubin] said the accumulation of sanctions is "exacting a price on the Iranians, but it is not going to change its policies." (Kessler [2010])

As the author argued in the previous chapter on engagement, *blowback was a result of not what Iran had done, rather, what it had not changed*. Iran maintained its regional initiatives and influence in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Palestine. (See: Addis et al. [2010]; Ross [2007]: p. 307) As former US National Security Council Officials Hillary and Mann Leverett note in their Foreign Policy article rejecting prominent Iran expert Karim Sajjadpour's call for containment:

"If the Obama administration had the kind of strategic seriousness toward Iran shown by those Nixon-era officials in their dealings with China, Washington would use a comprehensive realignment of U.S.-Iranian relations to channel the Islamic Republic's regional influence to support important U.S. interests in Afghanistan, Iraq, or Israel and Palestine." (Leverett-Leverett [2010b])

The authors also go on to conclude that containment can actually *provoke a war in the region*.

A further sign of potential setback is the belated realization that despite

sanctions and pressure, some segments of Iran's military capabilities have developed relatively unhindered, while the world was solely focused on the nuclear file in the past decade.

As far as perceptions are concerned, the return to containment is the best example of the phenomenon described by Dennis Ross and cited earlier by the author. Ross argued that cognitive dissonance has a special role in foreign policy, meaning that decision makers tend to look for patterns that fit their previous perceptions and constructions and ignore behavior that does not correspond with earlier experience. (Parsi [2007]: p. 152.) This is particularly true for the transition from engagement to containment. For a moment, both sides thought that they could deconstruct the atmosphere of distrust and negative image of the other. However, as Iran rejected the Geneva offer, the US felt that its old images of a hostile Iran were reinforced. As a result, Obama had to push for sanctions partly due to domestic and external pressures. This push reinforced earlier negative Iranian perceptions of the US and assumed that the real US is the one that tries to contain Iran, not the one that bets on negotiations.

Finally, domestic political constituencies played an important role again. The author has described how AIPAC and Congress pushed for sanctions and forced the US to return to the path of containment. Blowback was partly a result of US containment policies, which gave credit to Iranian hardliners who were against engagement anyway.

The period between the start of containment and the end of the examined period is too short for proving that setbacks occurred *specifically because of containment*. It is also true that there is not enough direct evidence to support the blowback hypothesis. *Thus, there is only contextual and indirect evidence of the relationship suggested. This means that the hypothesis may work in this case too, but it is quite difficult to prove it.* Containment probably hindered realization of all five strategic US interests in the region as defined by the author at the beginning of the chapter on the Obama administration. Sustained Iranian policies in the region made it harder to fight terrorism associated with Islamic extremism and to roll back Islamic militancy. It made stabilizing Iraq and Afghanistan more difficult, it assumed that Iran would continue to play the Islamic card in the Arab-Israeli peace process, and it made stopping Iran from going nuclear less likely. However, the linkages are difficult to prove.

### III. CONCLUSION – A CASE FOR A STRATEGY OF SEEKING THE LEAST RESISTENCE

This dissertation has put forward that aggressive US policies towards Iran cause strategic blowbacks, which hinder the realization of US national interests in the Middle East and parts of Central Asia. The thesis tested the blowback hypothesis (H1) by applying the theory to the timespan between 1993 and 2010. It has reviewed virtually all major US initiatives related to Iran: The Oslo process, the policy of dual containment, détente under President Khatami, the Bush doctrine and the return to containment, and engagement and containment in the first two years of the Obama administration. The timespan embraces 17 years and seven policy initiatives – a sample sufficient for identifying any patterns.

The author has found that the relationship between aggressive US policies and blowback effects is particularly strong in case of the first six policies examined. Those policy initiatives cover the Clinton and Bush administrations and partly the Obama presidency. The *Oslo process* under the Clinton administration was partly designed for isolating Iran. This policy was augmented when Martin Indyk introduced the *policy of dual containment*. Both initiatives rested on the assumption that barring Iran from participation in regional arrangements would hinder its ability to meddle in regional conflicts. Since Iran was never given a seat at the table, it had incentives to act as a spoiler and so it did. Support for terrorism and hindering the Arab-Israeli process, which indirectly contributed to the emergence of circumstances conducive to the second intifada, came as results of trying to contain Iran. The Khatami presidency's détente could have led to reconciliation between Washington and Tehran, however, Israel, AIPAC and other domestic political forces in Congress pushed the administration towards keeping up the effort at containing Iran. The US only offered symbolic gestures, which were not enough to justify Khatami's policies at home. Halfhearted responses and domestic as well as external pressures in the US tied President Clinton's hands. This, in turn tied Khatami's hands in his own domestic political arena.

The strongest evidence of the relationship suggested by the hypothesis is provided by blowback effects under the Bush administration. The Bush presidency

applied a relatively simplistic approach to international relations based on the extensive reliance on the use of force. Iran was encircled as a consequence of implementing the *Bush doctrine* and this provided Tehran with incentives to weaken the US in both Iraq and Afghanistan. When Iran offered a constructive proposal, the US rejected it punishing even the Swiss ambassador acting as an intermediary. Thus, Iran contributed to escalating the Iraqi situation from 2004 to at least 2006. The US administration realized it does not have enough resources needed for fully implementing the Bush doctrine, thus, it returned to a policy of *containment* introducing sanctions against Iran and countering its influence by improving military capabilities of Gulf allies. However, containment under President Bush was based on the same flawed assumption put forward by the Clinton presidency, namely, that it was possible to forge an anti-Iran consensus in the region instead of an anti-Israel one. Both presidencies were aiming to persuade Arab allies that Iran was the real problem in the region. Even if those states were afraid of Iran, they were not willing to confront it openly, but they all agreed on countering Israel. Iran was aware of this division and it used it to promote its own goals by supporting its regional proxies. It sustained its nuclear program and elected a hardliner to power in 2005.

Engagement under the Obama administration was coupled with an initiative deemed aggressive by the dissertation – containment. The combined pursuit of engagement and containment produced blowback effects, the two most important of which were the Iranian rejection of the Geneva fuel swap deal and the decision to enrich uranium at the 19.75% level. The other important setback was the fact that Iran had not changed its policies. Absent a deal, Iran was motivated to further undermine US policies in the wider Middle East.

These six initiatives demonstrate a strong and (direct) relationship between US aggressive approaches and blowback effects. The final and seventh item of the set examined – the policy of containment under Obama – shows a weak linkage between aggressive US policies and blowback effects. These effects were identifiable, but they were not particularly harsh or as significant as in the case of previous policies examined and at the end of 2012 Iran even showed willingness to negotiate. (See: Cooper-Landler [2012]) The evidence presented is overwhelmingly circumstantial and indirect, thus, it is difficult to tell whether the relatively minimal blowback effect occurred because of containment *per se*. One possible reason is that the author examined only the short

period between the (re)introduction of containment in June 2010 and the start of the Tunisian demonstrations (December 18, 2010), since the latter date had been defined as the end of the time interval researched in the dissertation.

*This means that in six out of seven cases the hypothesis provides a good explanation of why the realization of US national interests suffered difficulties.* The final policy examined does not provide sufficient evidence of the relationship suggested by the dissertation. Expressed in numbers, this is approximately an 86% accuracy. *Thus, 86% of the time it held that the tougher policies the US pursued toward Iran (Xa), the more likely it was to suffer unintended consequences (Yb).*

Inverse logic leads one to believe that a Strategy of Seeking the Least Resistance (SSLR) could be the best possible strategy for finding a solution to the US-Iran stalemate (H1b). ***Since aggressive strategies have not worked out, a good case can be made that nonaggressive tools should be given priority.*** The one tool that this leaves the US with is diplomacy without any sort of pressure. In fact, the Obama administration started off right – engagement was the way to go forward. To the extent it was pursued, it did produce some limited results such as the negotiations themselves and an initial Iranian agreement to the Geneva offer. However, as pressure was also applied, Iran thought that it was falling for a trap set by the US and that US overtures were never really sincere. It has to be emphasized that it was not the Obama administration *per se* who made a mistake. The case was that domestic and foreign circumstances limited Obama's maneuvering space. (See: Parsi [2012])

Arguing for a SSLR does not mean that such an approach will inevitably and automatically lead to a solution. However, it does mean that it could create the *circumstances conducive to a solution. The difference between the two is essential for understanding the limits of both H1a and H1b.*

Obviously, a number of questions arise concerning the SSLR concept. First, doesn't the concept of "pure diplomacy" or "diplomacy alone" go against the entire concept of strategic thought and grand strategic thought in particular, both of which focus on an ideal combination of a number of tools in order to reach certain goals? Doesn't the US make itself (look) weak by denouncing other tools for pressuring Tehran? It is true that an ideal combination of tools is always the key to achieving specific foreign policy objectives. The US-Iran stalemate, however, is different. The

author argues that there are only three options on Iran: airstrikes, containment and engagement. Containment has been pursued by just about every US administration since 1979 without causing a significant change in Iranian policies. It is interesting that whenever a given US administration failed at implementing its individual grand design on Iran or the Middle East in general, it always returned to the strategy of containment. This is particularly the case with the three presidencies examined in this thesis.

Airstrikes on Iranian nuclear facilities and other military installations is another *theoretical* option. However, as the author pointed out earlier, there is a strong consensus among mainstream experts that a military solution to the present stalemate would have disastrous regional consequences, thus, it is not a viable option. (See also: [Balogh [2010a]).

The only strategy that has not been tried yet is “diplomacy alone.” No one sat down to talk with Iran so far without applying some form of pressure. Containment is unable to produce real results apart from significantly weakening Iran and the military option is not a realistic one. Furthermore, a combination of different tools (e.g. pressure and engagement) has not yielded returns either. This leaves the US with only one viable strategy: *the policy of pursuing “diplomacy alone.”* This would also entail the lifting of some of the tougher sanctions as suggested by others. (Parsi-Marashi [2012]) This would deprive Iranian hardliners of their talking point regarding “real change for real change”, meaning that as long as real actions are not taken, rhetoric is not enough by itself.

SSLR is proven right indirectly due to the fact that aggressive strategies do not work and the fact that it has not been tried yet. Thus, H1b is proven right because H1a is proven right. By logically closing out other possibilities, *theoretically* only one possible path may work and that is the SSLR. *Essentially, SSLR is not entirely different from H1a – H1b is the inverse of H1a.* Of course, in reality, H1b may be difficult to prove right because there is no empirical evidence, since no one has ever tried easing the pressure on Iran while pursuing diplomacy at the same time. Additionally, the counterproductive nature of pursuing aggressive policies does not necessarily mean that pursuing nonaggressive policies will be effective and successful. But that is not what H1a and H1b are about – *H1a and H1b only propose that nonaggressive policies produce circumstances conducive to realizing US national interests.* Thus, in a logical and strictly theoretical sense, H1b is proven right.

There is one more caveat to H1b as applied to the US and Iran. Neoclassical Realism suggests that domestic political constituencies have special relevance in influencing foreign policies. An SSLR can only work if the domestic political situation in both the US and Iran is permissive in that regard. Diplomatic engagement coupled with the easing of pressure on Iran can be suitable for accommodating certain US and Iranian constituencies, however, there will always be significant domestic political forces, which will not support such solutions. (Parsi [2012]) This defines the domestic political limits of applying the SSLR-approach. Furthermore, the assumption that only negotiations may resolve the two countries' dispute also means that Neoclassical Realism has its limits. The inherent assumption behind the prospective success of talks is that direct contacts may help change the mindset of the players. Thus, the final steps toward full reconciliation may at least partly be explained by applying a constructive lens.

Finally, one also has to address the possibilities of the general application of H1a-b and the blowback hypothesis in general. Can H1 be applied in general, meaning that aggressive policies do not pay off and the SSLR has a universal applicability? The answer to this is that H1 can be applied universally, however, only with significant caveats. It is the philosophy behind H1 that has universal implications. This is to say that it is obviously desirable to follow a strategy which seeks to avoid resistance in general. Thus, the philosophy behind H1 could provide a general guidance for foreign policy makers.

This, however, does not mean that relying on the use of force or other forms of aggressive behavior in international relations should not be part of national foreign policy tools – *quite to the contrary*. Indeed, in some cases the SSLR will imply applying force, provided that the costs and consequences are carefully calculated and considered durable. *Thus, the blowback hypothesis is not a pacifist approach to international relations*. There will be a great number of cases in which the application of force by a state against another will make sense because the attacker will not suffer long term blowback effects. However, the exact implications of applying the theory to other cases needs to be further researched. There could be a point of inflection, beyond which costs associated with aggressive policies and applying force could turn into payoffs – e.g. the application of force by a great power against a middle or a small power not possessing resources of strategic importance (e.g. oil, natural gas, minerals and other raw



materials). The difference with the US-Iran relationship is that Iran is still deeply embedded in the regional and global economy despite all the sanctions and containment. Thus, the first blowback effect of any military action against Iran would be steeply and rapidly increasing world oil prices. Furthermore, Iran is also an important part of the Middle Eastern social and political fabric; hence, in Iran's case there is no inflection point beyond which the escalation of pressure and force could bring positive results.

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Overall, the author found that the blowback hypothesis has a significant relevance in explaining why the US has not succeeded in remedying problems of the US-Iran relationship so far. The author has to emphasize that a fair share of the responsibility for lack of a solution to the stalemate belongs to Iran. The thesis highlighted how Iranian nefarious activities reduced the chances of resolving the conflict between the two entities. However, this dissertation examined the Iran policy of the US, thus, the US perspective prevailed throughout the research. The author applied a critical approach to US Iran policies in order to try and find the solution to one of the most vexing foreign and security policy dilemmas of contemporary international relations. The main driving force behind this dissertation was not to criticize the US. Rather, the objective was to provide an objective analysis and a possible explanation of what kept the two sides from resolving their conflicts so far. The author sincerely hopes that he succeeded in contributing to the present theoretical debate on the US-Iran stalemate and the discipline of strategic thought in general.

## Appendix: Relevant Speeches of President George W. Bush Mentioning Iran 2001–2009 in Chronological Order

**Speeches from 2001 to the March 16, 2006 release of the 2006 US National Security Strategy**

*Text of Bush's address.* September 11, 2001. CNN US. [http://articles.cnn.com/2001-09-11/us/bush.speech.text\\_1\\_attacks-deadly-terrorist-acts-despicable-acts?\\_s=PM:US](http://articles.cnn.com/2001-09-11/us/bush.speech.text_1_attacks-deadly-terrorist-acts-despicable-acts?_s=PM:US) Accessed: 27-08-2012

*Transcript of President Bush's address to a joint session of Congress on Thursday night,* September 20, 2001. September 21, 2001. CNN US <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/> Accessed: 27-08-2012

*State of the Union address by George W. Bush.* Washington, D.C., January 29, 2002. [http://articles.cnn.com/2002-01-29/politics/bush.speech.txt\\_1\\_firefighter-returns-terrorist-training-camps-interim-leader?\\_s=PM:ALLPOLITICS](http://articles.cnn.com/2002-01-29/politics/bush.speech.txt_1_firefighter-returns-terrorist-training-camps-interim-leader?_s=PM:ALLPOLITICS) Accessed: 28-08-2012

*Text of Bush's Speech at West Point.* June 1, 2002, *The New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/06/01/international/02PTX-WEB.html?pagewanted=all> Accessed: 28-08-2012

*State of the Union Address by George W. Bush.* Washington, DC, January 28, 2003. Speeches from George W. Bush's First Term, Presidential Rhetoric <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/01.28.03.html> Accessed: 05-10-2012

*Freedom in Iraq and Middle East: Address at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy* by George W. Bush. Washington, D.C., November 6, 2003. Speeches from George W. Bush's First Term, Presidential Rhetoric <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/11.06.03.html> Accessed: 05-10-2012

*Address at Whitehall Palace by George W. Bush.* London, England November 19, 2003. Speeches from George W. Bush's First Term, Presidential Rhetoric. <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/11.19.03.html> Accessed: 05-10-2012

- State of the Union Address* by George W. Bush.  
Washington, DC, January 20, 2004. Speeches from George W. Bush's First Term, Presidential Rhetoric.  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/01.20.04.html> Accessed: 05-10-2012
- Speech to the Republican Governors Association* by George W. Bush.  
Washington, DC, February 23, 2004. Speeches from George W. Bush's First Term, Presidential Rhetoric.  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/02.23.04.html> Accessed: 05-10-2012
- Defending the War – Speech* by George W. Bush.  
Kuztown, PA  
July 9, 2004. Speeches from George W. Bush's First Term, Presidential Rhetoric. <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/07.09.04.html>  
Accessed: 05-10-2012
- Defending the War – Speech* by George W. Bush.  
Oak Ridge, TN  
July 12, 2004. Speeches from George W. Bush's First Term, Presidential Rhetoric. <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/07.12.04.html>  
Accessed: 05-10-2012
- State of the Union Address* by George W. Bush.  
Washington, DC,  
February 2, 2005 Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric.  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/02.02.05.html> Accessed: 05-10-2012
- Speech at the National Defense University* by George W. Bush.  
Fort Lesley J. McNair  
March 8, 2005. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric.  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/03.08.05.html> Accessed: 05-10-2012
- Speech at the National Endowment for Democracy* by George W. Bush.  
Washington, DC,  
October 6, 2005. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric.  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/10.06.05.html> Accessed: 05-10-2012
- Veterans Day Address: Defending the War – Speech* by George W. Bush.  
Tobyhanna, Pennsylvania, November 11, 2005. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric.  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/11.11.05.html> Accessed: 05-10-2012

*The Struggle for Democracy in Iraq: Speech to the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia* by George W. Bush. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, December 12, 2005. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric. <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/12.12.05.html> Accessed: 05-10-2012

*State of the Union Address* by George W. Bush. Washington, DC, January 31, 2006. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric. <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/01.31.06.html> Accessed: 05-10-2012

*The 2006 Agenda: Address at the Grand Ole Opry* by George W. Bush. Nashville, Tennessee, February 1, 2006. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric. <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/02.01.06.html> Accessed: 05-10-2012

*Status of the War on Terror: Address to the National Guard* – Speech by George W. Bush. Washington, DC, February 9, 2006. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric. <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/02.09.06.html> Accessed: 05-10-2012

*Violence in Iraq & The War on Terror: Address to the American Legion* – Speech by George W. Bush. Washington, DC, February 24, 2006. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric. <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/02.24.06.html> Accessed: 05-10-2012

*The U.S., India, and Nuclear Technology: Address in New Delhi* – Speech by George W. Bush. New Delhi, India, March 3, 2006. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric. <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/03.03.06.html> Accessed: 05-10-2012

*Focus on Iraq: Address to the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies* – Speech by George W. Bush. Washington, DC, March 13, 2006. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric. <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/03.13.06.html> Accessed: 05-10-2012

**Speeches from the March 16, 2006 release of the 2006 US National Security Strategy to 2009**

*The United States, China, and the Global Economy: The Remarks of President Bush and President Hu of the People's Republic of China* – Speech by George W. Bush. Washington, DC, April 20, 2006. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric. <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/04.20.06.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012

*Conflict in the Middle East: News Conference with President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice* – Speech by George W. Bush. Crawford, Texas, August 7, 2006. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric. <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/08.07.06.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012

*Foreign Policy and the International Situation: News Conference at the State Department* – Speech by George W. Bush. Washington, DC, August 14, 2006. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric. <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/08.14.06.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012

*The War on Terror, Iraq, and Lebanon: The President's Press Conference* – Speech by George W. Bush. Washington, DC, August 21, 2006. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric. <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/08.21.06.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012

*Address to the American Legion National Convention* – Speech by George W. Bush. Salt Lake City, Utah, August 31, 2006. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric. <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/08.31.06.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012

*Iran & The War on Terror: Address to the Military Officers Association of America* – Speech by George W. Bush. Washington, DC, September 5, 2006. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric. <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/09.05.06.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012

- 9/11 Retrospective: Address in Atlanta* – Speech by George W. Bush, Atlanta, Georgia, September 7, 2006. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric. <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/09.07.06.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012
- An Appeal to Muslims: Address to the United Nations* – Speech by George W. Bush, New York, New York, September 19, 2006. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric. <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/09.19.06.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012
- Statement on North Korea's Nuclear Test* – Speech by George W. Bush, Washington, DC, October 9, 2006. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric. <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/10.09.06.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012
- Press Conference with British Prime Minister Tony Blair* – Speech by George W. Bush, Washington, DC, December 7, 2006. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric. <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/12.07.06.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012
- The New Strategy in Iraq: Primetime Address to the Nation* – Speech by George W. Bush, Washington, DC, January 10, 2007. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric. <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/01.10.07.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012
- The New Strategy in Iraq: Address to Troops* – Speech by George W. Bush, Fort Benning, Georgia, January 11, 2007. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric. <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/01.11.07.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012
- 2007 State of the Union Address* – Speech by George W. Bush, Washington, DC, January 23, 2007. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric. <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/01.11.07.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012
- Iraq & Iran: The President's Press Conference* – Speech by George W. Bush, Manassas, Virginia, February 14, 2007. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric. <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/02.14.07.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012

*The War and Caring for American Soldiers: Remarks at the American Legion 47th National Conference* – Speech by George W. Bush, Washington, DC, March 6, 2007. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric.  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/03.06.07.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012

*The Troop Deadline, the War, and the Economy: Address to the National Cattlemen's Beef Association* – Speech by George W. Bush, Washington, DC, March 28, 2007. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric.  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/03.28.07.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012

*Remarks at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* – Speech by George W. Bush, Washington, DC, April 18, 2007. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric.  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/04.18.07.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012

*Terror & Iraq: Address to the World Affairs Council of Western Michigan* – Speech by George W. Bush, East Grand Rapids, Michigan, April 20, 2007. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric.  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/04.20.07.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012

*The Coming Election: Remarks to Republican National Committee* – Speech by George W. Bush, Washington, DC, May 10, 2007. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric.  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/05.10.07.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012

*The Iraq War and Osama bin Laden: Commencement Address at the United States Coast Guard Academy* – Speech by George W. Bush, New London, Connecticut, May 23, 2007. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric.  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/05.23.07.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012

*Address on Freedom in the Czech Republic* – Speech by George W. Bush, Prague, Czech Republic, June 5, 2007. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric.  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/06.05.07.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012

*Remarks on Congress & the Iraq Progress Report* – Speech by George W. Bush, Cleveland, Ohio, July 10, 2007. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric.  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/07.10.07.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012

*Press Conference: Iraq Benchmark Report* – Speech by George W. Bush, Washington, DC, July 12, 2007. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric.  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/07.12.07.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012

*The Progress and Future of the "Surge": Primetime Address to the Nation* – Speech by George W. Bush, Washington, DC, September 13, 2007. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric.  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/09.13.07.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012

*Address to the United Nations* – Speech by George W. Bush, New York, New York, September 25, 2007. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric.  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/09.25.07.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012

*Missile Defense & the War on Terror: Address at the National Defense University* – Speech by George W. Bush, Washington, DC, October 23, 2007. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric.  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/10.23.07.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012

*The Threat of Iran: The President's Press Conference* – Speech by George W. Bush, Washington, DC, December 4, 2007. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric.  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/12.04.07.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012

*Press Conference with Prime Minister Olmert of Israel* – Speech by George W. Bush, Jerusalem, January 9, 2008. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric.  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/01.09.08.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012



- America & the Middle East: Address in the United Arab Emirates* – Speech by George W. Bush, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates January 13, 2008. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric.  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/01.13.08.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012
- 2008 State of the Union Address* – Speech by George W. Bush, Washington, DC, January 28, 2008. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric.  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/01.28.08.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012
- Fighting Terror in 2008 & Beyond: Address in Las Vegas* – Speech by George W. Bush, Las Vegas, Nevada January 31, 2008. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric.  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/01.31.08.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012
- Five Years in Iraq: Address at the Pentagon* – Speech by George W. Bush, Arlington, Virginia, March 19, 2008. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric.  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/03.19.08.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012
- More on Iraq: Address at the National Museum of the United States Air Force* – Speech by George W. Bush, Dayton, Ohio March 27, 2008. Speeches from George W. Bush's Second Term, Presidential Rhetoric.  
<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/03.27.08.html> Accessed: 30-11-2012
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