

IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY IN POST-INVASION IRAQ

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What are the roots and aims of Iran's foreign policy in post-invasion Iraq? Many scholars attribute Iran's policies to a desire to achieve national and regional interests, perceiving this policy to be mainly offensive and ideological.¹ I argue instead that the roots and aims of Iran's foreign policy are defensive, mainly pragmatic, and based on state-oriented and strategic issues. As to Iran-U.S. relations in the new Iraq, the main controversy involves different perceptions of the security challenges; actions that Washington considers to be necessary for protecting the U.S. interests in post-invasion Iraq are regarded by Tehran as undermining Iran's security and national interests. The new political-security developments in post-invasion Iraq have led Iran to seek a friendly, stable, secure and prosperous neighbor. However, the Bush administration's regional policy — largely focused on defining Iraq as a counterweight to Iran, building regional alliances against Iran, and establishing long-term military bases next to Iran's borders — has compelled Iran to oppose it.

I argue that historical views and state-oriented and strategic issues all have significant effects on Iran's foreign policy in post-invasion Iraq. I then explain that the nature of cultural and political-security characteristics of Iran's sources of power as well as the demands of the factors and principles involved in Iran-Iraq relations will inevitably force Iran to be pragmatic in its policy toward the new Iraq; ideology is only one source of Iran's power. Lastly, I argue that Iran's foreign policy is based on achieving strategic aims. It is the result of a combination of considerations aimed at producing both security and opportunities. The birth of a new Iraq demands a revision of the current regional political-security architecture, mainly based on "balance of power." By shifting Iraq to a friendly state, Iran desires to discard the traditional designation of Iraq as Iran's counterbalance in the Persian Gulf and to turn the new relations into a "balance of interests." The main conflict in Iranian-U.S. relations in post-invasion Iraq is based on redefining Iraq's political-security structure. Understanding the roots of Iran's foreign policy has important implications for the United

States and regional countries that are currently concerned about Iran's role and aims in Iraq.

VIEWS AND CONSTANTS

The Iranian View of Iraq

A major part of Iranian foreign policy toward the new Iraq is influenced by a troubled history of competition and disproportionate Sunni dominance over Iraq's natural resources, potential economic strength and key geographical position. The prevalent Iranian view is consequently one based on mistrust, to such an extent that even the removal of Saddam Hussein has not altered it. This concern was manifested in the Islamic Republic's two-pillar policy in the early days of the 2003 Iraqi crisis. On one hand, Iran opposed the American invasion and subsequent occupation. On the other, it designated Saddam's regime as a brutal one that deserved to be overthrown and punished.² Iran did not want to see a pro-American Iraqi client regime with like-minded elites that would probably act in favor of U.S. purposes and in defiance of the Islamic Republic.

A nationalist view inside Iran holds that Iranian interests are distinct from those of the Arab world, whether they are cultural, economic, political or even military. This view holds that relations between Persians and Arabs have roots in their history.³ Even today, some Iranians believe that in a possible Iran-U.S. conflict, Arab regimes will act contrary to Iran's national interests. There is, therefore, an essential irreconcilable hostility between the two sides, and Iraq is not an exception. Saddam's aggression against Iran emerged from this cultural pattern. This way of thinking exists among Iranian nationalists, political elites, intellectuals, the Iranian Diaspora and many

ordinary citizens. Another view maintains that in order to preserve Iran's pragmatic goals in the region, there should be only a reasonable level of political and security collaboration between the two sides.⁴ Some experts tend to agree that acting in favor of Arab issues, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has not only been costly to Iran's national interests, but has also resulted in little gratitude from the Arab world.⁴ Consequently, Iran should prioritize national interests as a precondition for conducting its regional and international relations. This view has theoretical bases within Iran and exists among some Iranian political elites and particularly academics and intellectuals.

There are also pan-Islamic and pragmatic views inside Iran for dealing with the Arab world. Focused on Islamic identity, one view holds that Iran should define its national interests in terms of coordination with Arab countries as an important player within the Islamic world. This standpoint maintains that the Islamic Republic needs to be directly and actively involved in all issues related to the Islamic world. Furthermore, such a view contends that the interests of the Islamic Republic demand the establishment of an enduring link with the Arab Middle East. During the first Persian Gulf War in 1990, some supporters of this way of thinking held the belief that Islamic duty required Iran to act against the United States and in favor of the Iraqi people, especially the Southern Shia.⁶

Another pragmatic view maintains that the enduring reality of the Arab world requires Iran to establish cooperation with its major representatives. Supporters of this view refer both to the demands of the constitution and to issues of geographical, cultural and religious coherence. Since the early

1990s, Iranian foreign policy has been based on confidence building and détente in the region, as practiced by the contemporary establishment, which believes in close relations with the Arab world,⁷ especially the new Iraq, given the two sides' cultural and religious similarities.

Whatever approach one favors, Iraq, because of its sources of power and politics, remains a significant factor in determining Iran's national-security interests. Though Iraq is an Arab country, its recent issues and problems have influenced Iran's (and Turkey's) national security.

Constants in Iran-Iraq Relations

Although, with the new political-security developments after the 2003 war, Iran-Iraq relations are friendly and based on ideology and culture, strategic issues still determine their level and pace. Irrespective of the nature of the government in Iraq, Tehran-Baghdad relations are influenced by a few constants.

Iraq's ethnic geopolitics: Iran's security has always faced a considerable challenge from the ethno-political divisions that characterize the Iraqi polity. Not only does it comprise three distinct communities, but these communities have perhaps never been so conscious of their differences as they are today. During the years following Iraq's independence, the presence of independent identities — such as Kurdish, Sunni and Shia — and the question of how to balance them, have resulted in tensions on domestic and regional levels. Preserving Iraq's territorial integrity in the face of these complexities will remain one of Iran's main security concerns. At present, the chief aim of Iran's policy in post-invasion Iraq is to maintain Iraq's national unity.

Regional rivalry: Another parameter

for analyzing Iran's relations with the new Iraq is their past regional rivalry. Iran and Iraq are considered the two core regional states, both enjoying a great deal of economic, political and cultural promise. This wealth of resources has produced rivalry. In fact, Iraq's prospects for power, which had been combined with the adventurous nature of the Baath regime, resulted in Iraq's aggression against Iran. The central issue is how the two countries might mitigate this state of affairs. During the past years, the policies of the foreign powers, most notably those of the United States, have also had negative effects on mutual relations. Given the current differences between Iran and the United States concerning Iraq, one could reasonably argue that the current policy of balancing Iran off against Iraq would lead to a new round of competition, not only between Iran and Iraq, but between Iran and other major regional actors such as Saudi Arabia.⁸

The past unresolved issues: The Iran-Iraq War caused some challenges that remain to be resolved, including war-related economic and legal issues. These are currently centered on two vital matters: first, the issue of war compensation; and second, the 1975 Algiers Treaty. How the future Iraqi government deals with these state-related issues is important for Iran. The official UN estimate for war reparations is \$149 billion, while the informal estimate suggested by Iran, considering the war's direct and indirect effects, reaches \$1 trillion.⁹ Although Iran as of yet has not broached the issue of reparations, and has even suggested some financial aid to the new Iraqi government,¹⁰ this issue is still very much alive inside Iran and will ultimately impact the Iranian government's

policy towards Iraq. The second significant issue relates to the 1975 Algiers Treaty and how the new Iraqi government deals with it. The Baathist regime's resentment and desire to repudiate this treaty were among the reasons Iraq decided to go to war against Iran. Today, despite the two sides' good relations, this issue still has the potential to inflame tensions between the two countries.¹¹

FACTORS AND PRINCIPLES

Iran's policy in post-invasion Iraq is influenced by various factors and principles. It is also dictated by the region's power politics. In this respect, the nature of the political-security as well as ethnic, cultural and historical characteristics in Iran-Iraq relations will inevitably force Iran to be pragmatic.

Iranian Society in General

Many at the grassroots level of Iranian society want good, stable relations between Iran and Iraq because of their cultural-religious priorities, which include having the freedom to visit the sacred cities of Karbala and Najaf. This strong interest exists on the Iraqi side, too. In summer 2006, for instance, some 3,000 visas were issued daily by Iranian consulates in Baghdad, Basra and Najaf for Iraqi pilgrims to visit Mashhad and Qom and other sacred places inside Iran.¹² Since the opening of borders following the removal of the Baathist regime, the Iranian government has been under pressure to preserve an adequate amount of cooperation with Iraqi authorities to secure the routes of pilgrims to the Shia areas and to provide public services. Simultaneously, the families of those who lost their lives in the Iran-Iraq War would like the government to pursue a

policy towards Iraq that ensures that the victims were not killed in vain. It is worth noting that the painful memory of the war pervades Iranian society, thus affecting policy options. Trade with Iraq is also a priority. Iranian merchants and businessmen consider certain parts of Iraq, especially predominantly Shia areas such as Basra, to be ideal markets for Iranian exports. Some estimates consider the range of economic activities about \$5 billion annually.¹³

Academic Elites and Intellectuals

Given the historical background and the record of threats from Iraq, academic elites and intellectuals have maintained their traditional stance that Iraq could again pose a strategic threat if its political issues are not handled with care. They believe that Iran needs to work with the new Iraqi government — whether dominated by Shia, Sunnis or Kurds — in order to counter the threat of a potentially hostile and rearmed neighbor. According to this view, Iraq's economic, geopolitical and cultural significance is such that it will always present a potential threat to Iran's national security. Thus, the intellectuals believe that it is critical for Iran to establish relations with Iraq that will make it as little disposed as possible to endanger Iran's regional interests.¹⁴ Meanwhile, establishing positive ties with the new Iraq could be a significant point of convergence between Iran and the United States, and could assist Iran's efforts in balancing its role and power with the rest of the Arab world.

Executive Political, Military and Religious Elites

These elites believe that post-invasion Iraq presents a combination of challenges

and opportunities. Iran's Iraq policy is formulated in Iran's National Security Council, where all governmental bodies have representatives and seek to balance one another. Undoubtedly, the Iranian government would like to see a secure, stable, balanced and united Iraq. Spreading insecurity in Iraq, as Iranian officials have always asserted, would mean insecurity for Iran.¹⁵ On the Iranian side, there is great motivation to help secure Iraq, while at the same time addressing Iran's security concerns and strategic interests. These concerns are mainly focused on the presence of U.S. troops in Iraq and their long-term strategy of establishing military bases. There are also security concerns regarding the opposition groups inside Iraq that are operating against Iran.¹⁶ This issue has been one of the main concerns of the Iranian government in any political-security agreement with the Iraqi government.

Principles

Iran and Iraqi factions: Iran's relations with the Iraqi factions are based on some principles and realities. As to the Shia factions, there exist differences between these groups toward Iraq's polity and foreign relations. Since the onset of the crisis, the discrepancies over issues such as "federalism," "the foreign troop presence" and "dealing with Iran" have weakened the unity among Shia factions. The Sadrists are strongly opposed to any idea of federalism. Al Dawa, as expressed by Prime Minister Maliki in an interview in late 2007, follows a policy of federalism with a strong state capable of controlling all Iraqi issues. In contrast, the Islamic Supreme Council for Iraq (ISCI), according to its leaders, would welcome the idea

of federalism and a reduction of the central government's power.¹⁷ As to the presence of foreign troops, the Sadrists see troop withdrawal as necessary for acquiring "sustainable security." In contrast, Al Dawa and ISCI welcome the continuation of the troops' presence for achieving security and combating Sunni extremism.

In addition, although the Shia factions have different stances on conducting relations with Iran, all Islamic Shia factions (ISCI, Dawa, the Sadrists) seek a role for Iran. Being encircled in a Sunni neighborhood, having less than sympathetic neighboring states, and trying to balance its domestic politics and regional relations, a Shiite government of any kind would inevitably require Iran's political support. In other words, demand by the Iraqi Shia for expanded ties and new political, cultural and economic interactions with Iran arises from the region's political realities. Some assessments even go further and argue that the Shia factions in Iraq are temporarily looking for new allies. As Gregory Gause has said, "Once Iraq gets settled down, they (the Shia) are going to assert their state interests. But in their current struggle they need a regional ally."¹⁸

Given the above-mentioned factors, and to preserve its national and security interests, Iran has attempted to build balanced relations with all Shia factions. As to the Sadrist group, Tehran's occasional relations with the Sadrist faction are primarily tactical and short term. Such contacts exist foremost with an eye to undermining the unilateral U.S. policy of excluding Iran from the domain of Iraqi politics. Iran's role and policy in the Basra crisis in March 2008 is a good example.¹⁹ Meanwhile, the Sadrist faction has never expressed any sense of building strategic

relations with Iran; it has always expressed its fervent Arab nationalist sentiments.²⁰ It is certainly conducive to the Sadrist faction's interests to continue relations with Iran, which are largely related to the balance of political forces and the faction's survival in the new Iraq's power division.²¹ Neither Iran nor the Sadrist faction has so far revealed the magnitude or real aims behind this relationship. Both sides perceive it as provisioned for the time of insecurity; the continuation of this relationship is strategically incompatible with the two sides' aims, principles and identities in the long term. Their relationship lacks strategic logic.

As to relations with ISCI and Al Dawa, Iran has always stated its support for the Al-Maliki government and the moderate factions.²² They pursue a long-term policy of improving strategic relations with Iran, for balancing their power status inside Iraq and enhancing their government's relations at the regional and international levels. Meanwhile, because of their long-term presence in Iran through their time of exile, these groups and their leaders have strong organizational, emotional and intellectual relations with Iran's executive political-security elites. During the Iran-Iraq War, it was only ISCI that did not fight on the side of the Baathist regime.²³ Therefore, Iranians have faith and trust in these factions.

As to the secular Shia factions such as the groups related to Iyyad Allawi and Ahmad Chalabi, Iran's main concerns relate to their dependency on the United States as well as their Baathist and nationalist backgrounds. From Iran's perspective, by enhancing such Baathist and secular elements in Iraq's power structure, the United States is attempting to balance

Iran's role in the new Iraq. Meanwhile, these groups would welcome close relations with the Sunni states of the region and act in favor of empowering the U.S. role and influence in Iraq. Lastly, these factions follow policies such as retaining a U.S. troop presence and acting in favor of establishing U.S. military bases in Iraq, contradicting Iran's national-security and strategic interests. Iran's main policy since the start of the crisis in 2003 has been to advance balanced relations with all Shia factions, focusing on supporting the moderate Islamic factions such as ISCI and Al Dawa at the level of Iraqi governing elites.

As to the Sunni factions, the disproportionate presence of Sunnis at the top levels of government for many years, and their tendency to foment Arab nationalism, was costly for Iran. This led Iraqi governments, particularly the Baathist regime, to adopt a posture of antagonism that eventually culminated in the 1981 Iran-Iraq War.²⁴ This sense of enmity exists even today among the Sunnis. Therefore, Iran's main concerns toward the Sunni faction relate to any possible attempt to lead Iran-Iraq relations again to a new kind of rivalry. From Iran's perspective, a different Iraq requires the Sunnis' share of power to be redefined and balanced by Shia and Kurdish factions. Iran supports the moderate Sunni factions that have less enmity toward Iran. As for the Kurds, the record shows that the main challenge comes from their efforts to establish an autonomous and sovereign state. Since 1991, the Kurds have indeed achieved a great deal — a de facto state.²⁵ With these new circumstances, a momentous opportunity has emerged for moving towards an independent Kurdistan. To Iran, the main peril comes not only from Iraq's possible

disintegration, but also from the plausible coalition of such a government with other regional states and outside powers, particularly Israel and the United States. Such a development, in so far as these states pose a threat to Iran, would jeopardize Iran's national interests and pave the way for new instability and tension on Iran's borders.²⁶ Iran's policy toward the Kurds is to empower their position at the national level with an eye to balancing their interests through the Shia groups.

Ideology and pragmatism: Some experts tend to perceive ideology to be paramount in Iran's policy towards the new Iraq.²⁷ In supporting this argument, they point to Iran's close relations with the Iraqi Shia factions, especially the Sadrist movement. They also cite Iran's attempts to build close relations at the level of the Shia masses, often casting Iran in the leading role in the construction of a "Shia Crescent."²⁸ Although ideology is an extremely important factor in Iran's foreign policy, the role that it plays in this particular relationship serves more pragmatic and strategic purposes. As mentioned earlier, Tehran's occasional relations with the Sadrist faction are primarily tactical and short term, for the particular times of insecurity.²⁹ The issue of building closer relations with the Iraqi Shia factions, due to their shared cultural-religious identity at the levels of both ordinary people and executive elites, is compelling. However, the genuine prospect of establishing a Shia ideological coalition is yet to be institutionalized in either Iranian or Arab societies, including Iraqi society, and therefore has little weight in regulating Iran's foreign policy.

The ideological and pragmatic aspects of Iran's foreign policy may converge in

the new Iraq, yet Iran's intricate geopolitics compel Iran to act pragmatically.³⁰ In contrast to the first decade of the Islamic Republic, when Iran's foreign policy was mainly defined according to ideological precepts, this time the factor of ideology is placed in the service of Iran's national interests and as a means of achieving the objectives of national security and other interests. The nature and substance of current challenges and opportunities in Iraq force Iran to be pragmatic. Because of pressing dangers emanating from security threats in its immediate environment — growing instability, civil and religious wars and ethnic conflicts — and the involvement of all layers of Iranian society, the Islamic Republic of Iran has to be realistic. Ideology serves as only one element of national power and as an optimizing mechanism in the regulating of foreign policy. Iran's actions are dictated more by security concerns than expansionist designs.

AIMS AND STRATEGIES

Security Challenges

The political-security developments in post-invasion Iraq have raised new security challenges for Iran in two ways: first, the direct presence of U.S. forces on Iran's immediate borders, coupled with the possibility of new U.S. military bases; and second, the threats that have emerged from broader geopolitical changes and the shifting security-political environment in the region.

The most significant factors concerning Iran's new security challenge are the U.S. military presence next to Iran's national borders and U.S. aims and strategies. Although Iran was greatly relieved to see the Taliban and Saddam regimes removed from power,³¹ there was none-

theless a sense that a new and possibly greater security threat had replaced them: U.S. administration officials and military forces, determined to implement the Bush administration's preemptive doctrine vis-à-vis Iran. The new circumstances saw the United States position itself as a "balancer," reflecting the high likelihood of an indefinite U.S. military presence on Iran's immediate borders.³² Since 9/11, the Bush administration's regional policy has focused on isolating Iran in its geopolitical sphere, building unfriendly regional alliances against it and pursuing a policy of "regime change."³³ This has forced Iran to confront the United States in the region.

New Political-Security Arrangements

The political-security system in the Persian Gulf was designed chiefly for traditional threats, based on conditions in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.³⁴ Policies such as "balance of power" and "dual containment" were based only on the demands and interests of transregional players. In other words, third-party interests have been the main components of such a security system.³⁵ Traditionally, stability was defined as the creation of a balance between Iran and Iraq. This line of thinking was based on an evaluation of the two sides' various economic, cultural, military and ideological strengths. Supported by U.S. regional policies, one of the main justifications advanced by the shah's regime for Iran's growing military expenditures was the fact that they were necessary to stave off the threat posed by the Baath regime.³⁶ Saddam Hussein, likewise, naming himself the guardian of the Arab world's eastern gate, justified his growing military costs to be necessary for blocking Iranian influence in the region.

This ultimately led to an intense arms race and distrust between Iran and Iraq, culminating in a full-fledged war.

With the new developments, such an arrangement that multiplies the causes of tension and mistrust among the regional states and is based on mutual misperceptions about the roles, positions and aims of the other countries is not in conformity with regional realities. In addition, as demonstrated during the crises of the last few years, namely the first and second Persian Gulf wars, it lacks efficacy.³⁷ For the same reason, the current conditions and realities of the region demand new regional security arrangements. Instead of focusing on differences, any new security arrangement must primarily be based on a new definition of the nature of the threat and a precise understanding of the aims of all players, identifying and working on common security concerns and interests. The birth of a new Iraq demands a revision of the current regional political-security architecture, especially in the Persian Gulf. Most of Iran's foreign-currency earnings derive from the export of energy through the Persian Gulf.³⁸ Meanwhile, the region is also Iran's main route of international trade and communication and the starting point for Iran's international relations. The establishment of a new Iraq with a different power dynamic, featuring empowered Shia factions, has presented new possibilities for Iranian foreign policy in the region.³⁹

Economic Opportunities

Another aim of Iran's policy towards Iraq is to create economic-cultural and political opportunities. Iraq's trade was traditionally oriented to the Arab world

through Jordan in the west and Turkey and the Soviet bloc countries in the north. In the new circumstances, a reorientation to Iran and the east as well, owing to Iraq's long borders with Iran and cultural-societal commonalities, could play a major role for increasing economic and cultural-political exchanges. More diverse exchanges with the neighboring countries will further mutual interactions, leading to an appropriate level of political-security relations. Today, Iran, on account of its great economic potential, is in the best position to fill the demands of regional markets, creating economic opportunities for Iranian trading companies and young industries. The transit of energy sources; the geopolitics of pipelines and other sources of energy transference; and fulfilling the economic demands of regional markets in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and the Persian Gulf are all significant parts of Iran's regional presence. Greater economic activity requires applying pragmatic foreign policy to the establishment of close political-strategic relations with neighboring governments.

Iran-U.S. Conflict in Post-Invasion Iraq

The Bush administration's attempt to establish a new political-security order in the region by installing like-minded elites in Iraq or transforming Iraq into a potential model of democracy for Iran is perceived as contrary to Iran's national interests because it allows for further U.S. penetration and influence in the region. Not only do these policies endanger Iran's national security; they further demonize Iran in its own neighborhood, especially in the Persian Gulf. Therefore, actions that Washington considers to be security-

enhancing are simultaneously regarded by Tehran as fostering insecurity. The current U.S. military presence and its long-term goals of establishing military bases in Iraq, on the one hand, and the legitimate security concerns that have emerged from the changing nature of the regional political-security system, on the other, have compelled Iran to reject cooperation with the United States to secure the region.

Following the Bush administration's inability to end the Iraqi crisis and Iran's rising role, especially since 2005, U.S. policy has focused on illustrating that Iran, with its opportunistic ambitions, would try to fill the power vacuum in post-invasion Iraq, and that this situation would change the regional power structure. The administration's "regime change" policy undertaken in Afghanistan and Iraq has only benefited Iran.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, post-invasion Iraq as well as post-war (2006) Lebanon have produced situations enhancing the Shia role in the power structure of the region. And Iran's nuclear program has elevated Iran's role in various other regional issues. This situation, in turn, will disturb the traditional balance of power, altering the interests of the United States and its allies in the region.⁴¹ The new policy seeks, therefore, to prevent the evolution of Iran's regional role by any conceivable means, including supporting the like-minded Shia and Sunni elites in Iraq and building a coalition with the Arab Sunni states of the region to minimize Iran's role in the domain of Iraq's politics. As Secretary Rice recently put it, "If we do not get it right in Iraq, if we leave Iraq prematurely, then we are going to empower Iran."⁴³ Blaming Iran as the main cause of the continued instability in Iraq is the new strategy of the Bush administra-

tion, aiming to encourage the concerned Arab Sunni states of the region, especially Saudi Arabia, to take a more effective role in Iraq, such as opening embassies, in order to block Iran's increased role.

From Iran's perspective, the United States is attempting to redress the region's political-security system based on a new kind of balance of power. This policy still has strong proponents in the United States and the Arab Sunni world. Yet, given the recent political-security changes, one should argue that such a policy is no longer compatible with Iran-Iraq relations. With Iraq's traditional military threat diminished, post-invasion Iraq poses different challenges and opportunities to Iran's national interests. Meanwhile, new security threats have emerged around the spread of insecurity and instability, ethnic geopolitical rivalries, Sunni extremism, religious and civil war, and the probability of territorial disintegration. Tackling these challenges requires establishing close relations and cooperation at the state level. Meanwhile, Iran defines the new Iraq as its top-priority national-security interest and thus cannot live with an Iraq under its traditional order.⁴⁵ The current conflict between Iran and the United States is, therefore, based on defining the new political-security arrangements in post-invasion Iraq. Three rounds of direct talks have so far been effective in bringing closer the two sides' demands and security concerns. These talks should continue in the future.

CONCLUSION

The nature of the issues will force Iran to be pragmatic in its policies in post-invasion Iraq. Given the fluctuating nature of regional issues and the interests of outside powers, especially the United

States, state-oriented and strategic issues will take center stage. Most of Iran's policies toward the new Iraq are defensive and can be evaluated as pre-emptive in order to tackle the new political-security challenges. The current challenge between Iran and the United States in post-invasion Iraq is based on their roles in the region. Compromise should, therefore, concern redefining the role and place of the new Iraq in the region. Iran's interest in direct talks with the United States on Iraq's security is a strategic one, related to the future of Iran-Iraq relations and its implications for Iran's national security and interests.

In the short term, Iran's major foreign-policy challenge is how to defuse the threats from two new developments: first, the direct presence of U.S. forces on Iran's immediate borders coupled with the possibility of new military bases; and second, the threats that have emerged from broader geopolitical changes and the shifting structure of the security-political environment in the region, especially in Iraq. To tackle these threats, Iran has advanced a policy of building close relations with all Shia factions. Iran's relations with the Sadrist group exist for the particular time of insecurity and to defuse U.S. attempts to minimize Iran's role in its own security environment. In the long term, Iran's main strategy is to build close relations with moderate Shia factions that believe in establishing strategic relations with Iran. This is a policy by which Iran will be able to redefine the traditional characterization of Iraq's function as a counterweight to Iran and shift the region's traditional balance of power into a new policy based on "balance of interests." Establishing a friendly coalition with Iraq

will relieve Iran's military and diplomatic burden in favor of economic development. It will pre-empt any future challenges that might emerge from overall geopolitical changes in the region, especially in Iraq. Most significantly, such a policy will remove Iran from its current passive status to a more active position in the Persian Gulf political-security architecture. Iran has legitimate national-security concerns as well as economic and cultural-religious interests in post-invasion Iraq.

¹ For a very recent comprehensive study on the role of ideology in Iran-new Iraq relations, see Ray Takeyh, "Iran's New Iraq," *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 62, No. 1, Winter 2008.

² Javad Vaeidi, "Exemplary War," *The Diplomatic Hamshahri* (in Persian), No. 2, December 2003.

³ For further information, see Graham Fuller, *The Center of the Universe* (Markaz Publications, 1994), pp. 43-48.

⁴ Mahmood Sariolghalam, "The Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: A Theoretical Renewal and a Paradigm for Coalition," *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 3, Winter 2002, pp. 67-83.

⁵ Ahmad Naghibzadeh, "Rectification of Iran's Foreign Policy Shortcomings during Khatami's Presidency," *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 3, Winter 2002, pp. 85-100.

⁶ This line of thinking, which is sometimes called Ultra-left, refers to pan-Islamic thinkers in Iran such as Mohtashamipoure, the founder of the Shia movement in Lebanon.

⁷ Kayhan Barzegar, "Détente in Khatami's Foreign Policy and Its Impact on Improvement of Iran-Saudi Relations," *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 2, Fall 2000, pp. 155-178.

⁸ This policy is exactly what some neoconservatives in the Bush administration hoped to do. They expressly stated that, with a Shiite-empowered majority, Najaf would be able to emerge as the center of the Shiite world; thereby undercutting Qom and so Iran in the process. This, of course, greatly backfired.

⁹ Kayhan Barzegar, "The New Iraqi Challenge to Iran," *Heartland, The Iranian Hub*, No. 10, 2004, p. 81.

¹⁰ President Ahmadinejad, during his recent trip to Iraq, pledged one-billion dollars finance to the Iraqi government.

¹¹ Iraqi President Jalal Talebani's recent remarks that Iraq will not recognize the 1975 Algiers Treaty, and the intense reactions inside Iran to them, show how sensitive this issue is in Iran. For some reactions inside Iran on this, see Bahamn Aghai Diba, "Iran and Iraq: 1975 Treaty and Talebani," January 1, 2008, at http://www.iranian.ws/iran_news; "Iran Warns Iraq about Violation of Border Accord," February 4, 2008, www.englishfarsnews.com.

¹² Interview with Asghar Khaji, former representative of Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Iraqi affairs. For further information, see also Baztab site (in Persian) at www.baztab.com September 2006.

¹³ See <http://www.rajanews.com/NEWS/?15413/917/2007>, cited from the Associated Press. For further information on Iran-Iraq trade relations, see *Iran-Iraq Trade Analysis: Existing Trade and Potential Opportunities*, research conducted by SCN Firm, Tehran, September 2005, available at www.AraEnterprise.com.

¹⁴ For further information on the positions of Iranian academics and intellectuals in this regard, see Ahmad Naghibzadeh, "Rectification of Iran's Foreign Policy Shortcomings during Khatami's Presidency," pp. 85-100.

¹⁵ See "Iran's Spiritual Leader Backs Talks with U.S. on Iraq," at <http://www.ndtv.com/convergence/ndtv/story>; and "Ahmadinejad: Iraq's Security Is Iran's Security," at <http://www.democrats.com/node/10044>.

¹⁶ These opposition groups include the MKO and PEJAK, which are operating from inside Iraq's soil.

¹⁷ Reidur Visser, "Maliki, Hakim, and Iran's Role in the Basra Fighting," April 9, 2008, at <http://www.historiae.org>.

¹⁸ Gregory Gause, "Symposium on the Emerging Shia Crescent: Implications for the Middle East and U.S. Policy," June 5, 2006, Council of Foreign Relations, www.cfr.org.

¹⁹ See Dilip Hiro, "Wining Iraq without Losing to Iran," April 25, 2008, at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/print.asp?page=2008\04\25\story_25-4-2008_pg3_6.

²⁰ "Whose Side Are They All On," *The Economist*, May 8, 2008, at <http://www.economist.com>.

²¹ See Kamal Nazar Yasin, "Iraq: The Tangled Web of Shia Politics," *ISN Security Watch*, May 21, 2008, at <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/news/sw/details.cfm?ID=18844>.

²² Iran's recent successful mediation (March 30, 2008) between the Al-Maliki government and Shiite militias in embattled Sadr City in Baghdad is a sign of Iran's pragmatic policy to establish strategic relations with the current Shia governing elites in Iraq; see "Iran Helped Prod al-Sadr Cease-fire," *cnn.com*, at <http://cnn.site.printthis.clickability.com>.

²³ Visser, note 17.

²⁴ Barzegar, "The New Iraqi Challenge to Iran," pp. 82-83.

²⁵ See Gareth R.V. Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan, Political Development and Emergent Democracy* (RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), pp. 28, 83.

²⁶ For further information about the impact of the continuation of the Kurds' autonomy on Iran's national interests, see Barzegar, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-87; also, for a general view on Iraq's possible fragmentation and its regional impacts, see "Iraq in Transition: Vortex or Catalyst?" Chatham House, Middle East Programme, September 2004.

²⁷ Ray Takeyh, "Iran's New Iraq," *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 62, No. 1, Winter 2008.

²⁸ Kayhan Barzegar, "The Shia Factor," *Heartland: Eurasian Review of Geopolitics* (The Pakistani Boomerang Issue) Vol. 1, 2008, pp. 76-83, at http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/18228/shia_factor.html.

²⁹ The Basra region has a strategic importance for Iran's national security. The most outstanding parts of the Iran-Iraq War happened in this region. By playing an active role in the Basra crisis in March 2008, Iran reiterated that it will not tolerate ignoring its role in this strategic place at the mouth of the Persian Gulf.

³⁰ On the issue of ideology and pragmatism in Iran's foreign policy, see R. K. Ramazani, "Ideology and Pragmatism in Iran's Foreign Policy," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 58, No. 4, Fall 2004.

³¹ Referring to Zalmay Khalilzad's recent remarks at Columbia University. See "Iran Should be Thankful to U.S.," February 2, 2008, at <http://www.panarmenian.net/news/eng/?nid=24729>.

³² Kaveh L Afrasiabi, "Iran Tries to Make Up Lost Ground," February 4, 2008, at www.atimes.com.

³³ See George W. Bush's speech at the National Endowment for Democracy at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html.

³⁴ Kayhan Barzegar, "Understanding the Roots of Iranian Foreign Policy in the New Iraq," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 12, No. 20, Summer 2005.

³⁵ Interview with Asghar Khaji, Iran's former ambassador to Saudi Arabia, *Hamshahri Diplomatic* (in Persian), July 2006, pp. 10-12.

³⁶ For further information, see Asaddollah Alam, *The Diaries of Alam* (Maziyar Publication, 2003).

³⁷ Kayhan Barzegar, "Stephen Walt on Iran, the U.S., and the New Balance of Power in the Persian Gulf," August 5, 2008, at www.belfercenter.org.

³⁸ See "Iran Energy Data, Statistics and Analysis — Oil, Gas, Electricity, Coal," at www.eia.doe.gov.

³⁹ President Ahmadinejad's recent visit to Iraq in March 2008 is a historical event and a turning point in advancing mutual relations.

⁴⁰ Referring to Zalmay Khalilzad's recent remarks at Columbia University. See "Iran Should be Thankful to U.S.," February 2, 2008, <http://www.panarmenian.net/news/eng/?nid=24729>.

⁴¹ This school of thought is the official line of the neoconservatives in the Bush administration. Dick Cheney, vice president, and John Bolton, former U.S. ambassador to the UN, are two significant representatives of this line. The American Enterprise Institute and The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) are two leading institutes that pictured Iran in this way; see Michael Rubin, "Iranian Strategy in Iraq," American Enterprise Institute, July 16, 2007.

⁴² "Roundtable Interview with Ambassador Ryan Crocker," April 11, 2008, at http://iraq.usembassy.gov/remarks_04112008.html.

⁴³ Ann Ringstrom and Susan Cornwell, "U.S., Iran and Arab Neighbors to Meet on Iraq," Reuters, May 26, 2008, http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080526/ts_nm/iraq_conference.

⁴⁴ In testimony to the Senate in April 2008, General David Patraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker blamed Iran for the Basra defeat (March 2008) and Iraq's continued insecurity in general, at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=89490001>.

⁴⁵ Javad Vaedi, former deputy for international relations on Iran's National Security Council, at <http://www.farsnews.net/printable.php?nn=8701250720>.