

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

CONFRONTATION OVER ACCOMMODATION
U.S. FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD IRAN
2001-2016

by

CARLA MARIA EMANUEL ISSA

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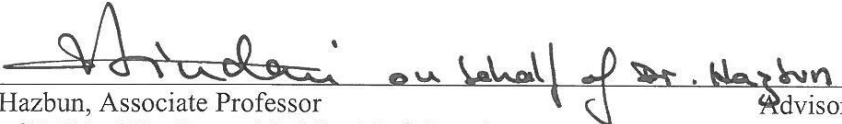
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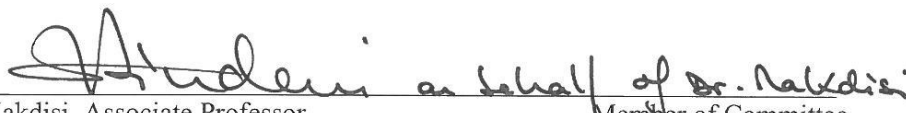
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Since 1979, U.S. foreign policy toward Iran has been defined by confrontation, containment and isolation. This thesis presents a collection of arguments made by selected scholars that called for an alternative policy option, referred to here as accommodation. There are various degrees of positive relations, but the body of scholars largely recommends accommodation policy as being the foundation for further relations.

In summation, the arguments find that a greater accommodation of Iran's interests in the region might better serve America's interests in the region than its policies of confrontation. The thesis offers a survey of arguments for greater accommodation made by selected policy makers, analysts, and scholars from both the United States and Iran during the period from 2001 through the end of the Obama administration in 2016. The timing of the arguments occurred during three key phases, when U.S. policy makers considered possible shifts in American regional policy toward the Middle East.

The first phase was the immediate post-September 11th era, the second between 2005-2007 at the height of the sectarian civil war in Iraq when calls were frequent for a rethinking of U.S. regional policy and the third period was during the Obama presidency, which promoted shifting away from excessive military engagement in the Middle East. This thesis outlines the arguments made for greater accommodation toward Iran during each time period and assesses the counter-factual case for the opportunities missed.

In general the logic for greater accommodation is based on the idea that normalized relations with Iran would serve American security interests as Iran, with its own recognized regional role, would be more willing to act as a stabilizing regional power by managing conflicts and states under its sphere of influence rather than directing its efforts to destabilize forces allied to the United States and seek leverage by any means to roll back America's influence in the region.

Keywords: United States, foreign policy, Iran, accommodation, Islamic Revolution

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Détente: A period of lessening tension between two major national powers, or a policy designed to lessen that tension. Détente presupposes that the two powers will continue to disagree but seeks to reduce the occasions of conflict.¹

Rapprochement: A closer approach of two groups to each other. *Rapprochement*, a French term, is often applied to two nations, especially ones that become reconciled after relations between them have worsened.²

Accommodation: adjustment, as of differences or to new circumstances; adaptation, settlement, or reconciliation³

Normalization: to establish or resume relations in a normal manner, as between countries.⁴

Entente: an arrangement or understanding between two or more nations agreeing to follow a particular policy with regard to affairs of international concern.⁵

Engagement: a pledge; an obligation or agreement⁶

Confrontation: an open conflict of opposing ideas, forces⁷

Deterrence: As a military strategy, deterrence is a strategy intended to dissuade an adversary from taking an action not yet started, or to prevent them from doing something that another state desires (Keane 2005).

¹ The American Heritage New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, Third Edition

² Ibid

³ ibid

⁴ ibid

⁵ ibid

⁶ ibid

⁷ ibid

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

A. Between Mistrust and Accommodation

Over three decades of mistrust, sporadic contact and a litany of misunderstandings characterize the relationship between the United States and Iran. Since 1979, formal diplomatic relations between the two countries has been severed and since 1953 there has been a prevailing air of mistrust amongst the Iranian people about America's intentions with regards to Iran's government. However, the relationship has not always been characterized the way it is today. Historically, Iran was home to the first oil well in the Middle East and the country currently sits on some of the world's largest oil and natural gas reserves (Organization of the Oil Exporting Countries (OPEC) 2016). Coupled with Iran's geostrategic location, it is a natural regional power and therefore a player that cannot be sidelined or ignored. Just as the United States defines its role in the Middle East through its key relations with Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, Iran defines its role through alliances with Syria, *Hezb'Allah* in Lebanon as well as proxy militias that operate in Iraq as well as in Yemen. These relationships have been points of contention and they continue to serve as obstacles in achieving a stable regional cooperation.

There are multiple policy areas where cooperation between the United States and Iran could play a constructive role. As such, there are major regional questions that have yet to be answered such as Afghanistan's future, as both Iran and the United States reject the legitimacy of the Taliban as a ruling party. Similarly in Iraq and Syria, Iran has interests in preserving their sphere of influence in those countries, while the United States would like to see these countries stabilized so as to avoid future issues with what the West sees as

a hotbed for fomenting terrorist organizations. Furthermore, in terms of regional security, it would not be in the security interests of the United States to see either of these states becoming more politically fragmented. Iran's role is critical for both Syria and Iraq as they can either serve as a destabilizing force or one that can help to mend the situations and pressure the current respective governments to cooperate.

Recognizing points of cooperation and mutual interests between the United States and Iran, an obstacle is the tension amongst allies in the Middle East who do not wish to see the United States and Iran approach accommodation, or further. These regional allies do not want to see the careful balance of power in the region turned on its head, and thus potentially in favor of Iran. However, I argue that challenges to a change of leadership in Syria and Egypt and those that have already occurred in Iraq have already shifted this balance. As such, wars and proxy conflicts are being fought and exacerbated in an attempt for states with the upper hand to preserve the status quo. The reality is that the uncompromising nature of both Iran and the United States heightens the potential for a military confrontation. Such a confrontation would have dire economic consequences on the world's energy markets, as well as a large humanitarian cost in a region that is far too used to such. The U.S.-Iranian relationship remaining unchanged at best means that the United States remains involved in geopolitical affairs, which historically has caused a great deal of blowback. Continuing in a confrontational manner nearly guarantees continued instability in the Persian Gulf, which could have an affect on the security of the flow of energy through strategic trading points. There are also security aspects related to weapons of mass destruction, continuing extremism and violence, and unrestrained Iranian influence over weak states such as Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan and Syria, which has historically

polarized the region. The region as well as countries' international allies may be unwilling to delve into another war should these two states continue to pass as ships in the night.

Given these circumstances an important question to ask is if confrontation is the only way or if there is an alternative? This thesis will provide some alternative possibilities for relations between the United States and Iran and why those policies should be undertaken as opposed to the current trajectory. The arguments presented in the subsequent chapters will dive into some of the works by scholars and policymakers who advocated for policies that are degrees of accommodation, engagement, *détente*, *rapprochement* and normalization. As a note, the glossary included in this thesis outlines the textbook definitions for various policy options as different terms are sometimes used interchangeably to mean one policy, when in fact a policy of *détente* has different approaches and potential outcomes than a policy of *entente* for instance. Through the modern history of U.S.-Iranian relations' policies of *détente*, *rapprochement*, and accommodation have been pursued and it is important to understand the difference. In order for the United States to best secure its interests in the Middle East, a minimum policy of normalization should have been taken and pursued, according to this group of scholars.

B. Selected Scholars

The scholars I selected each represent a different, but important, faction of this conversation from policymaking officials, to academic scholars as well as a voice from the Iranian foreign policy community. The arguments I selected present what I find to be some of the most coherent work when it comes to exploring various angles of the United States and Iranian foreign policy question. All of these scholars exhibit the crucial understanding

of the history of relations and how that history has impacted the current relationship. Additionally, the policies they propose are rooted in the want for improved relations based on what they each perceive to be in the national interests of both countries.

This thesis includes a history of relations, the specified time periods, which I will discuss, as well as the scholars and policymakers who were presenting and advocating for these alternative policies. The voices I chose to focus on, Dr. Trita Parsi an Iranian-Swedish scholar, Dr. Seyed Hossain Moussavian, an Iranian diplomat and scholar and Flynt and Hillary Mann Leverett, American policymakers and former White House officials. These four voices present supporting arguments for why the United States should have taken different approaches and what those could be yet they each come from varying backgrounds. Their advocacy for policies of normalization, détente, rapprochement and accommodation, consider all of these factors and are thus the most sound options from which I could present why it is necessary that the United States pursue accommodation with Iran in order to secure its own interests, which should include instituting ways for regional actors to manage regional affairs.

Since 1979, the only policy that has been taken toward Iran has been that of confrontation. In part, misunderstanding, misperception and missed opportunities have ensured that this policy prevailed in spite of areas of mutual interest and potential cooperation. The potential explanations for such will be outlined in detail in chapter five. What the missed opportunities are attributed to extend beyond just mistrust, as America's alliances with regional actors who do not wish to see accommodation from Iran are factors. Iranian diplomat and scholar Seyed Hossein Mousavian outlines the following, from the American perspective, the major aspects for having tense relations are attributed to Iran's

provocation of anti-Americanism, the potential export of the Revolution in one of the most geostrategic regions in the world and how that affects America's preferences of America's alliances, Iran's threat in affecting the Arab-Israeli peace process and consequently Israel's security, Iran's pursuit of their nuclear program, serving as a "sponsor for terrorism" and the state's human rights abuses. From the Iranian perspective, America's language in adopting a humiliating approach toward Iran, pursuing agendas for regional hegemony that excludes Iran's role as a regional power, sidelining Iran's interest in securing their own regional interests in various matters, and America's orchestration of international coercive policies against Iran are the main areas that preclude Iranian leaders from being conciliatory toward the United States (Mousavian 2014, 10). A well-rounded understanding of Iranian history, culture, society and most importantly the Iranian policy-making system is rare and often misunderstood or blatantly mischaracterized, according to Mousavian (Mousavian 2014, 12).

Another scholar whose analysis also produces recommendations for an alternative policy approach is Iranian-Swedish analyst and scholar Trita Parsi who has spent nearly two decades researching, writing and speaking on Iranian affairs. He has authored three books on Iranian foreign policy as it relates to Israel and also the United States. Parsi currently serves as the President of the National Iranian-American Council whose mission is to advocate for greater understanding and dialogue between Iran and the United States. Through his work he has identified what he terms the "Arab Option", which highlights Iran's Arab tilt in its foreign policy. This particularly arose after 1979 as a potential tool of Iranian foreign policy. This stems from a belief that for Iran's sustainability and regional leadership to expand, it must be accepted and supported by its Arab neighbors (Parsi 2006,

493). However, in order for Iran to have good working relations with its Arab neighbors, it would have to have good relations with Israel as well as the United States. We will see in the coming pages how these relationships are intricately tied together and even how these relationships affect the larger picture in terms of altering U.S.-Iranian relations.

Parsi's other arguments are predicated on the delicacy of the United States and Iran's relationship (2014). He calls for normalizing relations so the United States can begin to offload responsibility for the management of regional affairs onto local actors. With less control in America's hands, problems become more localized and are seen as less of a result of American policies and involvement and thus reducing blowback. In analyzing the scope of modern U.S.-Iranian relations with respect to American involvement in the region, it would seem to benefit the United States to not choose sides when it comes to preference for Israel, Saudi Arabia or any other singular actor. Doing so historically has not always produced desirable outcomes or situations that have been easy to manage.

C. Theory

The limitations of the theory of mistrust and misunderstanding is the fact that there are other drivers behind U.S. foreign policy than famously misunderstanding nations and thus make bad policy. While this work is a policy analysis and how the voices of these scholars fit into a larger conversation, the scholars' views can be ascribed to particular international relations' schools.

In Robert Jervis' seminal 1976 book *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* he states, "it is often impossible to explain crucial decisions and policies without reference to the decision-makers' beliefs about the world and their images of others" (Jervis

1976, 2). Worst-case assumptions and the interests of groups with a stake in this relationship have further exacerbated relations. Mousavian claims that this "gap has been a cause of misanalysis, followed by the adoption of U.S. establishment policies that have failed to achieve their objectives. Furthermore, these policies have elevated hostilities between the two countries while creating and perpetuating a state of non-compromise between them" (Mousavian 2014, 2). Former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice echoes these sentiments as she once remarked,

I think...Iran is a very opaque place and it's political system I don't understand very well...and I'll just say one thing, one of the downsides of not having been in Iran...is that we don't really have people who know Iran inside our own system...So that's a problem for us...(Wall Street Journal, 2007).

Mousavian notes that since the Iranian Revolution there have been numerous opportunities for both countries to resolve the conflict, including several attempts at rapprochement due to every president of the United States pursuing some sort of reconciliation attempt suggesting the ongoing desire for there to be better relations. Famously misunderstanding the political culture and dynamics for both countries means overriding mistrust and numerous misunderstandings. With time, it becomes increasingly evident that the alternative options, if continuously ignored, will inevitably invite war and further destruction. Based on American foreign policy as it is related to its alliances with Israel and Saudi Arabia, war and division may be desirable for those relationships, but I argue the United States should balance its relations and cease from choosing sides, as having done so

in the past has not always produced desirable outcomes. Acting otherwise will nearly ensure continued military involvement in the region.

One of the foundational international relations theories that the work of Trita Parsi as well as Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer's book, mentioned in chapter four, applies to that of realism. A realist's construction of the world and the international system is based on the idea that the world is anarchic. The system is composed of states, and thus also governed by states. There is ultimately no higher power that governs the state system and therefore it is up to the states to act within their own interests. More importantly, states do not subordinate their interests to the interests of other states (Brown 1992, 12). More specifically, the points Walt and Mearsheimer refer to stem from the school of offensive realism, which builds on the foundation of classical realism, but finds that the great powers within the system will pursue hegemony while remaining mistrustful of the intentions of other states (Dunne, Kurki and Smith, 2010, 78).

There is also the theory of constructivism to consider. Constructivism builds on the theory of realism, but rather than seeing the anarchic system as a basis for how relations are organized, constructivism finds the culture, attitudes and other human actions within nations to have an affect on relationships (Hopf 1998, 171). In the case of Iran and the United States, the prevalence of mistrust and misunderstanding as a reason why policy is stagnant or misguided would seem to apply. Where I find constructivism to be limiting is in the instances where attitudes within countries do not appear to impact relations. Such is the case with the United States and Saudi Arabia. The United States proposes to have a regard for human rights, democratic ideals and such. Saudi Arabia is not a country whose government holds either of these Western concepts in a high regard. Although a Western

organization and conception, Human Rights Watch finds Saudi Arabia to be in violation of the executions it carries out as well as its system regarding male guardianship (Human Rights Watch 2017). These are concepts Americans would discredit, and yet relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia are strong given that the two share mutual geopolitical, economic and security interests. I find that a combination of both theories applies in the case of U.S.-Iranian relations.

D. Chapter Outline

Chapter two will cover the history of relations between the United States and Iran, which will give the much necessary context for understanding what are the origins of the conflict between the United States and Iran. This history will cover events from the middle of the 20th century through 2001, when the events of September 11th prompted changes in the foreign policy of the United States toward the Middle East. This rendering will provide the necessary backdrop for understanding where chapter two picks up on the U.S.-Iranian relationship as of 2001, when American involvement in the Middle East entered a tumultuous period.

Chapter two will delve into the first period immediately after September 11th 2001 when the attacks prompted the Bush administration to take actions in the Middle East that have produced a change in the balance of power. I argue that the removal of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and the installation of a government in Baghdad that falls under the influence of the Iranian government, has altered the balance of power in the region, exacerbating some of the conflicts we are witnessing today in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. During this period, the arguments for pursuing normalization with Iran were based on the

United States and Iran's mutual interests in eradicating the Taliban from Afghanistan. Iran has long sought to accomplish this and the events of September 11th showed the United States that this was necessary in order to prevent potential terrorist attacks in the future.

Iranian cooperation with the United States was strong and thus there were some voices that advocated for using mutual interests and cooperation as a basis for pursuing renewed relations. However, some other voices that had neoconservative leanings within the Bush administration were stronger and thus drowned out the more practical voices. We will see how the neoconservative underpinning in U.S. foreign policy shaped the invasion of Iraq and policy thereafter. An important event, and ultimately a missed opportunity, that occurred was the reception of what is known as the "Iran Memo". An offer from Tehran to compromise on some main points of contention was sent to Washington and ultimately disregarded by the Bush administration. In all, this chapter covers the critical events following the September 11th attacks, which were the U.S. war in Afghanistan in late 2001 as well as the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Iran's assistance and hindrance in both cases had serious implications on the overall relationship.

Chapter three will cover the period between 2005-2007 when America's war in Iraq was experiencing increasing difficulty. Iran was increasing its activity via militias in attempts to diminish America's success in remodeling Iraq to preferences that may be contrary to Iran's. This was a period when scholars as well as commissions by the U.S. government were advocating for different policies toward Iran due to the events unfolding on the ground. Some voices in the Bush administration hinted toward Iran being America's next target after Iraq, but instead the geopolitical outcomes of the U.S. invasion of Iraq have strengthened Iran. Iran's emboldened position and thus its ability to serve as a regional

power is thus harder to suppress. The Iraq Study Group, commissioned in 2006 and the 2007 National Intelligence Estimate both produced recommendations that the United States should reassess its position vis-à-vis Iran as remaining confrontational may not be otherwise beneficial in tamping down what is perceived by these scholars as terrorism and thus also securing stability in the region.

Chapter four covers the period that began with the election of former President Barack Obama in 2008. His worldviews differed from that of his predecessor, especially those toward the America's role in the Middle East. With Obama came the opportunity for different relations with Iran and during his presidency Secretary of State John Kerry pursued discussions with Iran and world powers in an attempt to address Iran's nuclear issue. The P5+1, referring to the United Nations Security Council's five permanent members, China, Russia, France, the United Kingdom and the United States, plus Germany held negotiations between the Council and Iran that ultimately produced an agreement on Iran's nuclear activities in 2015. Obama's desire to chart a different path with Iran and thus avoid military confrontation was a major achievement during his presidency.

Finally, chapter five will present some possible explanations of why the alternative policies that were looked at were not taken or fully realized. As the scholars argue, there were various opportunities, and attempts at resolving previous misunderstandings and finding a way forward, so why has it been that relations remain poor? A preliminary hypothesis I work on is that a misunderstanding, or otherwise general disagreement, over each country's interests plays into the idea that these two nations have nothing in common. When it comes to foreign policy, values and national ideology need not converge in order to pursue common aims and interests though. In addition to misunderstanding there is the

permeating influence of American allies who's own disagreements with Iran pressure the United States to think twice before being able to reassess its own relations with Iran. All of this presents itself differently at different times, which means that prevailing circumstances at the time has thus prevented the relationship from being anything other than largely confrontational.

These time periods were chosen because the amalgamation of events that occurred during these periods coupled with the scholarly voices calling for different relations with Iran presented some of the best opportunities for accommodation or something even more fruitful. While there were certainly periods of potential cooperation prior to 2001, the necessity did not seem as urgent due to the ease with which the United States could influence events and change upon the Middle East. After September 11th and arguably the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Arab allies became increasingly wary of American intentions and the ease with which the United States could take selfishly wanton actions benefiting its own interests became more challenged.

E. Limitations to this Research

A limitation pertaining to this study to take note of is that there is a breadth of international relations theory to explore as far as how theoretical frameworks apply to the foreign of the United States. This work does not include particular international relations theoretical frameworks, although the work of the scholars certainly fits into particular theories and worldviews. Understanding the basis for United States' foreign policy as it relates to the institutions that craft such within the United States as well as what drivers influence policy are also factors. Across the foreign policy world there are many scholars,

policy makers, commentators and otherwise that may have opinions on this relationship, however I have limited this study due to the reasons I outline as far as the backgrounds of these selected scholars as well as the time periods I found important to assess. This work highlights a view of voices with ideas about how the relationship between Iran and the United States could be different and why. The conclusion notes further avenues of study that would enhance the understanding of both United States' foreign policy more broadly and as it specifically pertains to Iran and the Middle East.

CHAPTER II

A HISTORY OF U.S.-IRANIAN RELATIONS

The history of U.S-Iranian relations was not always as bad as they are today. Relaying the modern history of U.S.-Iranian relations will help to illustrate a picture of why the concepts of mistrust and misunderstanding has given reasons for the United States to maintain a policy of confrontation toward Iran, especially following the events of 1979. While there are additional factors related to the United States' alliances with Israel and Saudi Arabia, understanding the history of events, missteps and attempts is important background information for analysis on what has gone wrong and what the way forward could be. There are three periods of importance by which we can categorize these events. The first is the late 1800's-1953, the second from 1953 until 1979, and then from 1979 through the present day. The details that will follow will highlight why these periods are defined as they are.

From the end of the 1800's to 1953 the United States' role in Iran was a welcomed one as they were seen to help mitigate the influence that took place on Iranian soil from the Germans, Soviets and the British. The United States and Iran enjoyed a period of positive diplomatic relations marked by cooperation in economic relations, American investment in the future of the modern Iranian state as well as Iran serving as a strong American ally during the early Cold War period with the former Soviet Union. The Americans helped to broker the 1942 Tripartite Agreement signed between the Allied forces and Tehran (US Department of State 1942, 249). The Treaty stipulated that when the war was over the Allied forces would remove their troops and provide adequate reparations for using Iran's territory and resources in their war arena. Another important event in this period occurred

in 1943 when the first U.S. troops landed on Iranian soil to assist in securing supply routes to the Soviet Union. This is important because it marked the event in which the United States' went from having a hands-off approach to Iran to being directly involved in affairs (Maglietta 2002).

Entering the middle period in relations, the U.S.-Iranian relationship was initially characterized by the United States intending to pursue ends toward Iran's independence and sovereignty from England the USSR, however after the end of World War II, the United States' own role in the world changed promoting a rethinking of policy toward Iran. As the United States stepped into a role of serving as a global superpower, it realized the importance of Iran's energy resources (oil and later, natural gas), their geostrategic location between eastern and western Asia, most importantly the Soviet Union, and also being situated just north of the Persian Gulf. It was not ignored that the Persian's possess a long history of conquest and it was perceived that this could translate well for the United States in the new Cold War. The shift from European powers in the region, namely Britain and France, to the United States was an opportunity for the region to break from colonial subjugation. However, the United States own struggles with the Soviet Union and securing resources in the region for their own benefit led the United States to take on a role that was similar to Britain's where Iran was at the will of the interests and therefore policies of subjugation of the client state.

A. 1953 and the Coup of Mossadegh

From the 1949-1953 Iran saw the rise of a new nationalist movement, which was led Mohammad Mossadegh, a longtime nationalist and lawyer by training. As Iranian

historian Ervand Abrahamian notes, "Mossadegh championed two major causes: strict constitutionalism at home and an equally strict policy of "negative equilibrium" abroad to assure independence from foreign domination" (Abrahamian 2008, 114). Based on these aims, Mossadegh found that it was necessary to nationalize Iran's oil, within the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, as he found that other powers were endangering national sovereignty.

This period is decisively marked with the 1953 coup d'état that occurred at the behest of the British and with the help of the Americans, which overthrew Iran's first democratically elected official. Due to an ongoing struggle between the British and Iran over Iran's oil and the concessions that flowed from it, Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh was popularly elected on the platform that he was to nationalize the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) and forge a new agreement where Iran would retain the majority of profits from the sale of its oil rather than those going to the British as they had been since the early 19th Century. According to the US Ambassador at the time, Mossadegh was backed by at least 95 per cent of Iranians (Bellaigue 2012, 165). This was not ideal for the British and they decided to remove the Prime Minister from his position after negotiations for the Shah to do so he failed. When the British came to enlist the help of their American counterparts, President Truman famously asserted, "We don't overthrow governments; the United States has never done this before, and we're not going to start now" (Kinzer 2008, 3).

However, due to the United States' interest in staving off Soviet expansion and the purported links between Mossadegh and the *Tudeh* Party in Iran that was left-leaning (Communist), the British convinced President Truman that Mossadegh presented a threat in

that regard and would have to go. Moreover, the coup took place in order to preserve and strengthen America's relationship with the Shah of Iran, the increasingly unpopular and authoritarian leader that was sidelined by Mossadegh. This event still marks what many Iranians will point to as one of the first and main events in the mistrust that has characterized this relationship. As Mousavian notes, "the coup d'état was the single most pivotal event in shaping US-Iranian relations for decades to come" (Mousavian 2014, 24). This is the event that would serve, as the beginning of the end for the Shah as the humiliation and frustration felt by Iranians toward their leadership's intransience with the United States would lay the foundation for the anti-Americanism that would ultimately produce the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The United States and Iran cemented its patron client relationship. This would become a deeply unpopular position for many Iranians as this type of relationship invited in unrestrained American involvement in Iran's domestic affairs. With support from the United States, the Shah imprisoned and killed Mossadegh's supporters silenced all other dissent and ensured Mossadegh spent the rest of his life under house arrest in his home in Ahmadabad.

Dating back to 1953, even prior, the United States missed an opportunity in helping to broker a different path for Iran. In knowing the usual lines of rhetoric used against Iran today such as being a violator of human rights, maintaining a theocratic based government, sponsoring terrorism, and other such charges, participating in the removal of a popularly elected official is just one action that has changed the course of history for the region and also for the U.S.-Iranian relationship. Mousavian notes, "Democracy was not an option available to the Iranian people and neither was national autonomy...to the Iranians, the only system of government acceptable to the West seems to be Mohammed Reza Pahlavi's

client state, which invested its petro-dollars in favor of Western interests, obeyed policies imposed from outside, and only entertained reforms that either further his interests or did not conflict with his authoritarian rule" (Maleki and Tirman 2014, 39). This event is believed to have had a significant impact on how Iranians view the United States and its role as it relates to their own government.

The Shah and the United States moved quickly to act on the events that erred in their favor after Mossadegh was deposed. The United States reaped the benefits of the oil consortium, gaining a 40% concession and thus cementing the United States' dependence on Iran for oil, which also invited greater involvement in Iranian domestic affairs (Keddie and Richard, 1981, 142). Additionally, the Shah created the *Sazeman-e Ettela'at va Amniyat-e Keshvar* (SAVAK), which was a vital component in the Shah's power apparatus. The SAVAK was Iran's intelligence and security arm up until the Revolution when it was dissolved. Although the Shah worked to consolidate his power, President Kennedy advised him that he had to make concessions as far as implementing social reforms. The wealth gained from the sale of oil and good relations with the West meant the country was prosperous, but this wealth was highly concentrated in the hands of the regime and those close to the regime. The reforms would come to be known as the "White Revolution", which was rejected by many Iranians for being based on Western standards in the legal and educational sectors. The Shah's misreading of the identity of his own people led him to attempt to exclude the country's Islamic, or more Shariatic, identity through the ban of women wearing the *hijab* in this period. It was the Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini who voiced his disagreement with these reforms, arguing that the reforms were stripping the country of its important cultural and religious identity.

The early 1960's saw the consolidation of the Shah's power and authoritarianism over Iran as well as the emergence of Khomeini's religious rhetoric. Loyalists to the Shah and those who turned toward the religious establishment would create a rift in Iran throughout the next two decades. As the country was struggling with defining its identity, the Americans had effectively consolidated Iran as an important strategic ally. Ties between the two nations economically, politically and militarily were solidified in hopes of keeping the Soviet Union from attempting the same and gaining greater ground westward. Greater American involvement in Iran meant a Westernization of policies and harsher measures from the security forces within Iran to help keep Iranians loyal to the regime. It was not so much the character of the regime that drove Iranians toward Khomeini and the religious establishment, but rather the manner in which many Iranians were living destitute. The reforms of the White Revolution that intended to bolster Iranians pocketbooks had failed due to poor management of oil revenues and general corruption. Coupled with attempts to strip Iranians of their Islamic and Persian identity in exchange for serving as pawns in America's Cold War led many to join the revolutionary movement. Fresh in the minds of Iranians was still America's involvement in removing their democratically elected prime minister in exchange for solidifying the Shah's authoritarian power effectively making Iran a puppet dictatorship. This had a harsh effect on the psyche of Iranians who came from a long lineage of Persians who had resisted foreign conquest from many empires and dynasties.

The events prior to the 1979 Islamic Revolution were based on the patron-client relationship between Iran and the United States. The text refers to points where Persian history and the will to resist foreign domination was important and played a factor in the

people having a will that is different from the role the government was taking vis-à-vis its relationship with the United States. The events to come, the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the subsequent hostage crisis will have a significant impact on the relationship, as relations would come to be severed.

B. The 1979 Islamic Revolution

In 1977, just a year before the Revolution occurred; the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) produced a study that aimed to analyze the stability of the Shah's regime. The study stated, "The Shah seems to have no health or political problems at present that will prevent him from being the dominant figure in Iran into and possibly through the 1980's" (Carter 1982, 438). One year later, a movement comprised of millions of Iranians overthrew the Shah based on conditions that were brewing for years. Iranians wanted self-determination and independence from all foreign powers in conjunction with a state that was more egalitarian. Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was the figure that would capture the revolution and serve as the new head of state. Khomeini's history with regard to the United States and their role in Iran was that this was a foreign power operating in internal Iranian affairs and this should be antithesis to the Iranian government's aims.

The Islamic Revolution ushered in a hybrid regime that harnesses Islamic principles while also incorporating democratic elements such as presidential elections. With all of the current social and economic problems that were present in Iran, what the new government did was encompass a wide spectrum of people from varying political, socio-economic and social backgrounds to come together under one unifying principle, which was Islam. From the decadence of a small portion of Iranians, all would be encompassed in the notion of an

Islamic Republic that was enshrined from the revolutionary chant, "*Esteghlal, Azadi, Jomhuri-e-Eslami*", meaning independence, freedom and Islamic Republic. It is important to note here that it was not the Islamic Revolution itself that caused the United States and Iran to sever ties with one another. Part of the mischaracterization of the relationship between the two nations is painting the picture that the change in the Iranian government is what broke relations. The transition period is marked by several important dates that help to establish how U.S.-Iranian relations were altered due to this major event. In January of 1979 the Shah and his family left Iran and it was not until February 1, 1979 that Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini returned to Iran as the leader of the revolution. The Iranians approved a national referendum on establishing the Islamic Republic on April 1, 1979. The United States, under the Carter administration, still held diplomatic relations with Iran during this time as the state was in transition (Mousavian 2014, 32). Khomeini also did not ban relations with the United States, only South Africa, as an apartheid regime, and Israel.

However, the hostage crisis, detailed in the following pages, will be a solidifying event in the relationship between the United States and Iran as it is characterized today.

C. The 444-Day Crisis

Just ten months after the revolution, on November 4, 1979, a group of students stormed the American Embassy in Tehran seizing fifty-two American hostages in what would become known as the Iranian Hostage Crisis of 1979. Mousavian notes, "This was the beginning of a new era in the relationship between Iran and the United States, characterized by intense hostility and mistrust" (Mousavian 2014, 32). These mutual

sentiments of hatred and mistrust resulted in both governments trying to justify destructive policies carried out in an effort to cripple the capabilities of the other to do harm.

The hostage crisis dragged out for 444 days during which President Carter had the option of utilizing the United States' military to exert pressure on the Republic. In 2010, former President Carter was interviewed by the Washington Post where he stated, "I could have ordered massive destruction in Iran but this would have resulted in the deaths of thousands of innocent Iranians and certainly our hostages would have been assassinated" (Carter 2010, 11). The hostages were eventually all released, but the United States and Iran have not held official diplomatic relations since. Carter's methodology was concerned with the protection of the United States' global influence, security, strength, ideals and integrity.

D. U.S.-Iranian Relations since 1979

The 1980's saw a litany of events that furthered the mistrust between the two countries. Following the hostage crisis, the United States instituted a new policy toward Iran that was that of dual containment. Not only did Iran have a new regime in 1979, but its neighbor Iraq, witnessed a coup and a new leader as well. The dual containment policy would engage Iraq under Saddam Hussein and the Islamic regime in Iran in conflict due to differing national interests as well as American meddling. The two nations engaging in conflict, the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) would balance each other in a sense ensuring neither became too powerful in the region (Pelletiere 1999). Throughout the 1980's there have been numerous incidents where Iran has held that American involvement in events such as the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), the USS Vincennes' downing of Iran Air Flight 655 (1988), the destruction of Iranian oil platforms (1986/87), a litany of sanctions beginning in

1996 under President Clinton and continuing through today, attempts at regime change through the funding of covert groups and also international banking restrictions that have constricted the Iranian economy has created an overall aura of anti-Americanism amongst segments of the Iranian government due to a belief that the Americans aim to bring down the Islamic Republic. All these actions were largely undertaken with the intention to not allow Iran to become too powerful in the region. While that can be taken to mean something quite broad, it simply means that an Iranian regime that is bogged down in various crises, will not be in the position to overtake neighboring governments, such as exporting its revolution to Iraq, and challenging important American allies such as Saudi Arabia. When Iran began to make gains in their war with Iraq, the conflict went from being regional to international in bringing in American involvement in order to prevent the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

In 1985, the United States and Iran were presented with the possibility of having to work together on the issue of American hostages being held by *Hezb'Allah* in Lebanon. Then speaker of the Iranian Parliament, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, signaled goodwill to the United States and thus attempting a *détente*. The year prior, Iran was designated as a State Sponsor of Terrorism by the U.S. State Department and an embargo had been placed against Iran. In order to secure the freedom of the American hostages, President Reagan had arranged an arms deal, thus violating the embargo. This would come to be known as the Iran-Contra Affair, one that serves as a missed opportunity for Iran and the United States to broker healthier relations. When Reagan addressed his nation he stated, "My purpose, was to send a signal that the United States was prepared to replace the animosity between the US and Iran with a new relationship..." (Reagan 1986). In dealing with Iran,

the United States was violating its own laws by then dealing with *Hezb'Allah* in Lebanon, a group the United States' themselves declared as a terrorist organization. The United States' Arab allies not only have an animosity toward Iran, but also its proxies in the region so the revelation that the United States was working with these groups made them appear hypocritical and untrustworthy, not to mention unreliable as these allies rely on the United States to secure their interests, which are contrary to those of Iran. In order to recover from this, the United States took a much more hardliner position toward Iran to restore its credibility with its allies and also domestically toward its own people.

The United States government finds that so called "Iranian state-sponsored terrorism" caused the Beirut Barracks Bombing, the bombing of the American Embassy in Beirut (1983) and the downing of Pan-Am Flight 103 (Lockerbie Bombing 1988). Overall support for militant groups like *Hezb'Allah* in Lebanon and Hamas in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, violations of human rights related to the regular detention of journalists and state executions, cyber attacks and denouncing the state of Israel as ongoing reasons for measures such as sanctions and isolation (The Iranian History, 2011). Despite these points of contention, there are areas related to regional security, curbing the proliferation of terrorism from al-Qaeda and its affiliates and pursuit of the "Middle East peace process" where Iran and the United States have converging interests. The mid to late 1990's saw a slight shift as the Iran-Iraq war ended in 1988 and the fall of the Soviet Union was becoming imminent. A new strategy toward the Middle East, and Iran specifically, was crafted based on aggressive containment (Pelletiere 1999).

With the end of the Cold War, the usefulness of Israel as a pillar of American foreign policy in the region would come into question. This question would begin to play

out in events as the United States was taking actions so as to reorder its policy toward the Middle East. As Iran and Saudi Arabia were looking to reorder their own policies toward one another, the region witnessed the Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia in 1996. Prior to this Iran and the United States were pursuing a *détente* policy that was abruptly stopped as Iran was blamed for the bombing. This additional accusation was seen by Tehran as yet another excuse to claim the current regime was unsuitable to work with and work therefore has to be removed. Due to the deaths of 19 American soldiers in the bombing, the United States had to take a serious approach in condemning the attackers. While Clinton looked to warm relations with Iran and both sides were willing to end the atmosphere of hostility, this event scuttled any talks.

Additionally, in 1997, a reformist candidate, Mohammad Khatami, won Iran's presidency, taking the world by surprise. Khatami believed in the ideas of *détente*. However, Parsi indicates, "America's perception of Khatami in 1997 was a carbon copy of Tehran's later perception of Obama: at the end of the day, the structures of the Islamic Republic of Iran were believed to be incapable of permitting any meaningful change" (Parsi, 2012, 42). It would take a few years for another opportunity to present itself to renew relations. As the Clinton administration was coming to a close, Secretary of State Madeline Albright presented an overture to Tehran to "plant the seeds of a new relationship" that was described by Mousavian as the "boldest attempt to date by the U.S. government" (Mousavian 2014, 158). As Obama would do in 2008, Albright also used the Iranian New Year to wish all Iranians and Iranian-Americans a happy *Nowruz*. Additionally, it was in this infamous speech that Albright admitted, "the United States played a significant role in the 1953 overthrow of Iran's popular Prime Minister

Mohammad Mossadegh" noting "it is easy to see why many Iranians continue to resent this intervention by America in their internal affairs" (Albright 2000). Albright went on to recognize the United States' complicity in working with the Shah, against the will of many Iranians. Albright echoed President Clinton in saying, "the United States must bear its fair share of responsibility for the problems that have arisen in Iranian-US relations" (Albright, 2000). Ultimately, Albright advocated, "On behalf of the government and the people of the United States, I call upon Iran to join us in writing a new chapter in our shared history" (Albright 2000). The Iranians were hopeful, however were concerned that the United States held that continued nuclear productivity and support for terrorist activities would prevent "normal ties, and until these policies change, our principal sanctions will remain" (Albright 2000). In an additional mark against the overture, Albright remarked, "despite the trend towards democracy, control over the military, judiciary, courts and police remains in unelected hands" (Albright 2000). This is ultimately what continues to prevent a sustained warming of relations, the unwillingness to accept Iran's government, a theocratic system led by the Supreme Leader, who holds institutions under his control. Iranians have long held that the contentions they have in bettering relations with the United States must include an acceptance of their government, sovereignty and legitimacy.

The Clinton Administration saw both Iran and Iraq as rogue states and other options as far as regime overthrow were untenable so sanctions regimes against both states ensued while also necessitating a military presence that was stationed in Saudi Arabia (Mirhosseini 2014). It was during the presidency of Bill Clinton that various attacks increased exponentially and the U.S. government accused Iran of being behind them all. From the killing of dissidents in Europe throughout the 1980's and 1990's to suicide bombings within

Israel, these attacks always occurred during pivotal points in rapprochement efforts. Thus talks were consistently derailed and one has to question whether it was truly a faction of the Iranian government behind these attacks, while others were behind talks with the United States, or whether it was another party with an interest to see continued strained relations between Iran and the United States. Consequently, with the events of September 11th and a Republican surrounded by neoconservatives in power, attacks were limited as the United States was circling around the prospect of attacking Iran. Then again with the presidency of Barack Obama, and at least with the rhetorical willingness present to approach Iran again, attacks in Iraq, Afghanistan and also against Ambassador Adel Al-Jubeir of Saudi Arabia on U.S. soil occurred. Iran was blamed for all of these instances even though the Iranian regime has categorically denied any involvement.

From the Iranian point of view, Tehran has offered concessions related to the nuclear issue by reducing uranium enrichment, opening sites to international inspectors while working alongside American interests in Afghanistan. Even with hardliner candidates in power such as Ahmadinejad, rapprochement efforts were pursued by Iran. As Mousavian notes, "What could Iran have gained by committing such gross acts of terrorism, other than more international isolation and increased hostility from the United States. The only rational explanation is that either a) the episodes are fabrications to isolate Iran even further or b) it was a false flag operation by the ultimate beneficiaries of such a terror plot" (Mousavian 2014, 242). Not only were opportunities missed, but also mistrust grew and consistent misreading of events and situations has been a factor in relations being strained further.

E. The Reasons for U.S.-Iranian Disagreement

Based on this history of relations we can see where the relationship between the United States and Iran today is one of mistrust and hostility. These feelings largely began with the 1953 overthrow of Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953 and were cemented with a break in U.S.-Iranian relations in 1979 after the hostage crisis occurred.

The United States' Grand Strategy in the Middle East is driven by two main goals, the security of energy resources and the safety of sea-lanes for the steady flow of oil; as well as the security of Israel. Mousavian describes the element of energy security as "paramount to the strategic thinking of the United States since at least the 1940s" (Mousavian 2014, 186). While some analysts argue that the United States' dependence on Middle East oil and other energy can be reduced due to its own reserves of both oil and natural gas, this cannot be the case. Even if amounts were extracted from other parts of the world, any instability in the overall energy market creates a rise in prices worldwide. This in turn affects the economies of major players and thus causes a disruption, regardless of where oil is being extracted or purchased. The United States' is also not only concerned for itself, it has both an obligation and an interest to protect the economies of its allies including the European Union and allies in Asia (Friedman 2011). Any instability in the region causes speculators to speculate against the market causing a price surge. Additionally, relations between Iran and its neighbors are important given that one player cannot emerge as a dominant power in the Middle East thus allowing for the possibility to dictate anything contrary to American interests.

According to Mousavian, the main points of disagreement between the United States and Iran are 1) Iran's nuclear program, its sponsorship of terrorism in the region, 2) their domestic human rights record, and 3) their refusal to recognize Israel's right to exist. The Americans claim that Iran has hindered the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, and greater regional peace, by arming militant groups such as Hamas in the Occupied Territories, Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Alternatively, on the Iranian side, Mousavian succinctly outlines the Supreme Leader's claims against the United States in four major interrelated elements. When the Islamic Republic of Iran was established in 1979 it was as a hybrid regime between a theocracy and a democracy. As Ervand Abrahamian outlines, the 1979 Iranian Constitution endowed the Supreme Leader with wide-ranging authority. He is the figure that mediates between the different authorities and ultimately the Supreme Leader guides policy making (Abrahamian 2008, 164). Therefore, the opinions and beliefs held by the Ayatollah ultimately affect policy and actions of the government.

Of the four grievances held by the Ayatollah toward the United States, the first is that the Ayatollah largely believes that despite which political party is in power and what political ideology may be followed at the time, the United States ultimately wishes to see the downfall of the Islamic Republic of Iran in place of a *Pax Americana* type system, one that is subordinate to the policies and interests of the United States, similar to that at the time of the Shah. The belief that the Islamic Republic is not legitimate and not regarded as such within the international system is a major point of contention.

The second point is that the Ayatollah finds that the pro-Israel lobby overwhelmingly dominates US foreign policy. He sees how U.S. politicians, even up to the

president, are co-opted by the financially powerful and therefore influential lobby that directs U.S. policy abroad toward beneficial aims and interests for the Zionists, rather than the Americans.

The third element is a general mistrust of the ways and intentions of the United States. For instance, when the US Embassy in Tehran was seized in 1979, documents uncovered within showed various ways in which the United States Central Intelligence Agency was conducting espionage and fostering covert members inside Iran's new government and army.

The fourth and final element is attributed to what the Ayatollah believes is an inflated ego as he finds the United States to be addicted to hegemony. For instance, the European Union works with the United States for its own aims and benefits in a sort of mutually beneficial economic and political relationship that is underpinned by similar values and traditions of liberalism. Otherwise, the Ayatollah accuses the United States of implementing a "lord-serf" type of relationship whereby the United States co-opts other nations to abide by policies because there is an international hierarchy by which the United States dominates and controls. Furthermore, he believes this is the only type of relationship that would be acceptable and Iran aims to flout those options by opposing to conform to Western liberal traditions or to be co-opted into an inconvenient relationship. By viewing the way in which the U.S. Congress and other government members approach Iran, it is in a manner of force or coercion and almost always based on Iran having to adopt ways or conditions that are established by the United States.

Aside from the points that Mousavian highlights, which include some Western-related rhetoric as far as human rights are concerned, there are the geopolitical issues that

may cause hesitation or serve as a compelling argument for why relations should improve. Parsi's arguments, outlined in the following chapters, will highlight the geopolitical considerations and why alliances in the Middle East may hinder progress on the front for positive U.S.-Iranian relations.

Considering the many points of disagreement, those that are based on deep-seated mistrust and misperceptions, it is important to showcase those that press for a policy of accommodation, in spite of these issues between the two countries. Through the scholars that we will see in the following chapters, it is argued that the policy of accommodation is not only wise given the United States and Iran's overlapping interests, but furthermore, it is necessary from 2005 on, as the threat of Iran continuing to destabilize Iraq, and thus the region, was too prevalent.

The literature that considers the arguments for the accommodation and engagement policies will cover the period from early 2000 through to the present day beginning with the time of 2001, after the attacks of September 11th when the time for criticizing U.S. policy in the Middle East was ripe. Many figures within policy circles were especially critical toward Iran as there were circles advocating for confrontation and even war while others advocating for diplomacy.

The second period that will be viewed dates from 2005-2007 when civil war erupted in Iraq, due to the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. The country was becoming fractured and harder for the Americans to manage due to Iranian involvement in trying to push the Americans and their coalition partners out. We will see that the accommodation arguments and reports support diplomacy with Iran as a means of stabilizing Iraq around this period.

The third period is 2009; just after the Obama administration assumes office and

declares reasons for a different approach with Iran based on the reality unfolding in the Middle East. Each time period and the analysis intertwined with it will be presented within its own chapter, each presenting the time period, the arguments for accommodation or engagement and the circumstances as to what were leading these voices to advocate for these policies.

CHAPTER III

2001 THE BEGINNING OF A "NEW" MIDDLE EAST

The figures present in the Bush administration that advocated for war in the Middle East with states such as Iraq and Iran became prominent after the attacks of September 11th. These policies stood until a new twist occurred in 2001 when President George W. Bush, responded to the terrorist attacks of September 11th. The British-American thinker Bernard Lewis wrote "The Roots of Muslim Rage" in 1990, which was later developed by Samuel P. Huntington into the "Clash of Civilizations". In 2004, Lewis was invited to the White House to brief the administration on the idea of why "Muslims hate us" (Waldman 2004). His discourse presented a worldview that the "other" in this case, Muslims, hated Americans and the only way to overcome that was through war and the eventual annihilation or submission of the other. George W. Bush's rhetoric largely pinned Iran as a proponent of espousing hateful rhetoric toward America and the West, presenting something similar to the Manichean War in which the United States represented the "good" and Iran the "evil". A poor political situation or relations hardly constitutes an entirely problematic civilization. There is actually a great deal of exchange via civilizations between not just Iran, but the Middle East and the United States. As Supreme Leader Khomeini outlined in his proposal of "dialogue among civilizations", there can be an "exchange of professors, scholars, writers, tourists, artists and journalists" (Mousavian 2014, 152). Even within a civilization, that of Iran, the "political and social structure is shaped by two popular opposing camps: modernists and traditionalists shaping a clash of two civilizations *within* a civilization" (Mousavian 2014, 162). Despite these factors

representing a thread of potential collaboration, none of this fell in line with the ideological underpinnings, which would become policies during the Bush administration.

A policy cornerstone of this period was using war and violence to transform the Middle East to what would purportedly be democratic and therefore more peaceful. This included the Islamic Republic of Iran, a place many of Bush's advisors considered one of the most dangerous. While this policy was not stated outright the policy of preemptive action was outlined in the 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States. The Strategy outlines, "the need to take anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy's attack...the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively" (National Security Strategy 2002, 15). Neo-conservative figures such as Paul Wolfowitz, John Bolton and Elliot Abrams would take prominent positions in the Bush administration. These figures would wield influence over Vice President Dick Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, advocating for tougher policies toward Iraq and Iran, which would ultimately improve security for Israel. (Clarke, Halper 2005). Due to the neoconservative figures present in the administration, it would not follow that Bush would have reconciled with Iran. However, this is untrue due to covert discussions that were taking place even after Bush's "axis of evil" speech that Iran deemed to be the final nail in the coffin.

Policy figures such as Hillary Mann Leverett, the White House National Security Secretary and her Iranian counterpart Ambassador Zarif were still working toward a path of reconciliation when an incident occurred whereby Iran was accused of selling weapons to Palestinians in what would become known as the "Karine A Affair". This would not seem logical as Yasser Arafat; the leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)

supported Saddam Hussein and Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War and worsened relations by signing the Oslo Peace Accords in 1993, which Tehran saw as a betrayal to the Palestinian cause. Radical factions within Iran saw Arafat as a traitor and not someone who was truly working for the Palestinian cause. When assessing benefits and opportunities it is important to look at who would benefit from rapprochement between the United States and Iran and then consequently who would stand to lose from improved relations. The answer, to the latter and more important question is Israel. While this has failed to be proven, one of the victims of the "Karine A. affair" was the opportunity for U.S.-Iran détente as well as the moderate political current running through Iran that sought to improve relations with the United States.

To add to Iran's disappointment of being sidelined after the Bonn Conference, accused of selling weapons to an enemy and stagnating improved relations with the West; there was the revelation that Iran was pursuing a nuclear weapons program. The affair that has lasted until today over Iran's nuclear weapons program is a critical point for the Israelis and therefore the Americans when it comes to assessing relations with Iran. In August 2002, just six months before the United States would invade Iraq, Iran's undeclared nuclear facilities in Natanz were revealed. The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Mohammad ElBaradei was sent to Iran to uncover the extent of production within the facilities and reported an increase of 5 percent in uranium enrichment. For nuclear weapons production, enrichment is typically around 90 percent purity or more. International parties from the United States to the E3 (Germany, France and the UK) compelled Iran to suspend enrichment, which Iran found to be against its sovereign and inalienable right to nuclear technology under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The

Treaty allows for the, "inalienable right of all parties to the Treaty to develop, research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination" (United Nations 2005).

With the drumbeats of war beating strong for Iraq, some voices for more confrontational policies toward Iran grew. Policy and scholarly circles also included voices that supported a path with Iran that did not involve confrontation. Issues related to terrorism, as well as the chaos in Iraq as a result of the invasion in 2003 led some to recognize where Iran and the United States could normalize relations to help achieve cooperation on converging areas of interest. Those voices were from a diverse background of government officials such as Flynt and Hillary Mann Leverett as well as non-officials including Trita Parsi, Robert D. Kaplan, Stephen Kinzer, Karim Sadjadpour, Hossein Mousavian and Kenneth Pollack who all began arguing for such normalization policies.

As we will see, some of these individuals worked for the Bush administration while others are experts within prominent American think tanks such as the Hudson Institute or the Carnegie Endowment for International peace. Collectively, the arguments made by these individuals are that policies toward accommodation are in the interest of American security. While US scholars and policy makers' perception of American security differs according to the framework they use to analyze U.S. interests, they agree on the general aims of American foreign policy such as economic success, protecting allies and stopping nuclear proliferation. A theme that emerged within the arguments of Robert D. Kaplan and Trita Parsi was that under the Obama administration, an establishment of diplomatic relations with Iran could allow them to be used as a regional power that could manage the

region along with other powers such as Turkey so the United States focus could be toward East Asia.

A. The 2003 Invasion of Iraq and the "Iran Memo"

A major development during this time was the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which raised alarms in Tehran as potentially serving as the next target for the United States. In May 2003, the Swiss Ambassador serving in Tehran sent a communication to Washington that would become known as the "Iran Memo". The memo outlined three points the Iranians were proposing to concede to the United States and its allies in a bid to stop a potential attack and further sanctions. The proposal included the Iranians fully disclosing to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) any weapons of mass destruction, stopping support for terrorism, presumably coordination with *Hezb'Allah* and coordinating with Western stabilization policies in Iraq (Iran Roadmap, 2003). In exchange for these concessions, Iran wanted the United States to end its sanctions, stop any external support aimed at regime change inside Iran, and allow Iran to pursue peaceful nuclear technology and its wider regional security interests. Those involved with advocacy for the memo include the president of the National American Iranian Council (NIAC) Trita Parsi. Between late March and April 2003, the Americans conducted a swift bombing campaign in Baghdad. Thus, when the memo was presented in May 2003, the Bush Administration presumably dismissed the memo given that the Americans had the upper hand and did not need to negotiate with Iran (Kessler, 2006). It needs to be considered that the Iranians may have felt compelled to show they were willing to cooperate with the Americans in an effort

to forestall or avoid the potential of Iran serving as the United States' next target. The show of force that occurred in Baghdad may have also served as a warning to Iran.

The neoconservative policies of the Bush administration closely align with the interests and policies of Israel. In a 2003 article, the Carnegie Endowment's Vice President and nuclear strategy scholar George Perkovich, argued, "the U.S. doctrine of pre-emption paired with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's aggressive security policy may intensify Iranian security officials' quest for a nuclear deterrent" (Perkovich 2003, 65). He further called for a clarification of intentions between the United States and Iran as many questions arose during this time regarding security in the region. Perkovich recommends the following questions to be addressed. First, the United States should clarify what policies they would prompt toward their Gulf allies of Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Qatar and Kuwait to grant Iran a prominent place in the Gulf given their ambitions, history and new positioning as a result of the invasion of Iraq. Second, if the United States were to decrease its involvement in the region, per Iranian demands, what protections would those countries have against Iranian aggression? Third, if the United States and Israel were to enforce that Iran end its pursuit of nuclear energy, what assurances would Iran have that they do not need this deterrent given Israeli aggression? Fourth, what security relations would the United States help establish between Iran and Iraq given the history of bad relations due to the war from 1980-1988 (Perkovich 2003, 65)? This question is however negated due to the overarching influence Iran has in Iraq due to the religious configuration of the Sunni versus Shi'a population in Iraq. Perkovich recognizes that the removal of Saddam Hussein opens the door for the United States, Iran and neighboring states to "chart a safer, more secure course for Persian Gulf relations" (Perkovich 2003, 65.)

The Neoconservative voices within the Bush administration used the events of September 11th to argue why reordering the Middle East was necessary given the threats of terrorism, the instability of certain allies as well as the need to preserve Israel's security. Those voices drowned out more practical ones who urged restraint when it came to increased American involvement, especially where it was unwarranted in Iraq, at least when considering the power of the United Nations Security Council rulings and thus international law. The urgency to react as a result of the attacks meant that planning for all possible outcomes when invading Iraq meant the aftermath was poorly planned and not well-managed. While President Bush outlined what he perceived to be an "axis of evil", the actions taken in Iraq ended up making Iran the largest beneficiary of American actions.

The next chapter will look at the arguments made during the period of 2005-2007, which are partially based on the findings and recommendations from the 2006 Iraq Study Group report and the 2007 National Intelligence Assessment, both of which ultimately called for the necessity of different relations toward Iran.

CHAPTER IV

2005-2007 THE IRAQI QUAGMIRE

When former President Bush declared victory in Iraq mere weeks after the war began, the administration did not foresee nor plan for the situation that would produce the quagmire it would be involved in. By 2005, a civil war had broken out in Iraq as different sectarian groups were vying for the power vacuum left with Saddam Hussein's removal. This was a time when the Bush administration was faced with the fact that it had altered the balance of power in the region from a largely Sunni-dominated scene with powerful states like Egypt and Saudi Arabia to one with Iran emboldened due to its gains in Iraq. Events on the ground highlighted that the Americans were losing control in Iraq and the Iranians were winning due to activities pursued through militias.

The period between 2005-2007 is critical for assessing opportunities and missed opportunities as the reports, detailed in the following pages, show calls from policymakers and scholars who were highlighting not the convenience of working with Iran, but the necessity given all that was going wrong in Iraq.

A. 2006 The Baker-Hamilton Iraq Study Group

Sectarian violence in Iraq was rampant as the Kurdish in the North, the Shi'a in the South, and a mix of both Sunni and Shi'a in the center were vying for power after Saddam Hussein fell. Attacks were occurring daily and Americans soldiers were returning home in body bags, something the American public had been largely shielded from since Vietnam. The United States Congress commissioned a bi-partisan report that would seek to uncover how American interests in Iraq could be secured and preserved. Issued in December 2006,

the Baker-Hamilton Iraq Study Group was set out with a diverse set of panelists who conducted their research through interviews, meetings and high-level consultations with hundreds of high-ranking government officials, military officers, academics and NGO members. The report outlines how American-Iranian cooperation in order to achieve aims in Iraq (Baker and Hamilton, 2006, P. 36-7). Future security and stability in Iraq is tied to the ability for regional players such as Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia. The ISG outlines the reasons for which the United States should engage with Iran and even Syria in diplomatic talks, as it is in the mutual interests of all these parties that a deteriorating situation in Iraq does not destabilize its neighbors. On points related to stabilizing Kurdish populations in Iraq, Iran and Turkey as well as sidelining the Taliban in Afghanistan, there are multiple areas of common interests and therefore the potential for cooperation to achieve mutual goals. One of the main authors of this study was Benjamin Rhodes, now a key figure in the Obama Administration. Additional reports and calls for reconciliation were to follow only placing additional pressure on the Bush administration to chart a different course with regards to its Middle East policy. Boldly, the report ended up concluding, "with regard to US-Iran relations it is recommended to engage the Iran constructively due to Iran's ability to influence events in Iraq and Syria" (Baker and Hamilton 2006, xx).

B. The 2007 National Intelligence Estimate

In 2007, the "National Intelligence Estimate on Iran's Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities", study was conducted by the National Intelligence Council (NIC). This report found that it was imperative for the United States to work with Iran in order to curb the threats the violence in Iraq was producing. The Bush administration's policies of potentially

targeting Iran or otherwise ignoring its gestures for normalization had now become impossible to ignore. The Council states, "Since its formation in 1973, the National Intelligence Council (NIC) has served as a bridge between the intelligence and policy communities, a source of deep substantive expertise on critical national security issues, and as a focal point for Intelligence Community collaboration" (National Intelligence Council 2007, 2). The Estimate builds on one previously done in 2005, which still seeks to uncover what Iran's intentions are toward developing nuclear weapons, what factors are aiding in that decision both internally and externally, what are Iran's range of actions concerning development and what are Iran's current projected capability to develop, all over the course of the next decade. The Estimate found that the NIC judge's with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program (National Intelligence Council 2007, 6). It is further judged with moderate-to-high confidence that Tehran is at minimum keeping the option open to develop nuclear weapons. The NIC's assessment also finds that in 2003 Iran halted the program in response to international pressure, which indicates Tehran's decisions are guided by a cost-benefit approach rather than a rush to a weapon irrespective of the political, economic and military costs (National Intelligence Council 2007, 7). The Estimate's findings thereby halted any evidence the Bush administration could use to warrant an attack on Iran. While Bush's hands were tied as far as a military option, which did not stop him from publicly denouncing the Iranian regime and reiterating that America's hope in the region was for brutal regimes to fall in Damascus and Tehran. Bush otherwise halted further talks with Iran prompting Iran to intensify its activities against American forces in Iraq through Shi'a militias thus heightening the conflict on the ground.

C. The Necessity of Pursuing a Different Path

By the middle of 2007, the situation in Iraq had reached a low point and the Bush administration was forced to communicate with Iran. Through Ambassador Ryan Crocker in Iraq, he reached out to his counterpart Ambassador Hassan Kazemi-Qomi for talks that would be hosted in Baghdad. This meeting would mark the first official talks held between Iran and the United States since the Algiers Accord in 1981. The talks produced optimism and the conclusion was that Iran was willing to train and equip the Iraqi security forces in order to create a new military and security structure, the one previously was dismantled by the Americans in a de-Ba'athification process (Semple 2007).

At the same time an unprecedented book was published by foreign policy scholars John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy", which concluded that the "foreign policy of the United States is due almost entirely to U.S. domestic politics and especially to the politics of the Israel lobby" (Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, 1). The significance of this work at this point in time, and in conjunction with the limited talks being held with Iran, is that Middle East politics were taking a dramatic shift at this time. With the invasion of Iraq toppling Saddam Hussein, the balance of power in the region had shifted, and perhaps in a way that could be beneficial to the working relations between the United States and Iran. For the policies and procedures toward the Middle East up until this point had been to work with allies in the region that September 11th and other events were showing that not all are viable long-term allies for the United States in securing their interests in the region. When assessing those interests, the security of Israel is a main pillar, however this work by Mearsheimer and Walt highlights whether or not that policy is one that actually helps to secure other interests or instead threatens the

security of such. Questioning the viability of an "Israel first" policy helps to inadvertently reassess the policy of the United States toward Iran as a major point of contention for Iran is the United States' support of Israel and a main contention for the United States toward Iran is their support for anti-Israeli coalitions such as Hamas and *Hezb'Allah*. The irony underpinning the time of this publication on Israel and U.S. foreign policy should not be mitigated here, as works of this sort are hardly made public.

An additional factor during this period is oil. Not just the presence of oil in Iran, but the price, production capacity of all OPEC members and the events of the period between 2005-2007. The global demand for oil was 85 million barrels per day, with Iran exporting 2.7 million barrels per day. With an international embargo against Iran, a military attack or the threat of Tehran removing its production within the market, prices would increase 30 percent and reach the oil shocks of the 1973 and 1979 energy crises (Dickey 2006, 38). An unnamed but influential oil industry analyst in the United States stated, "Right now, the Iranians are in a strong position and they know it. The tight market and high prices provide them not only with a shield but with the high cards giving them the leverage they did not have a couple of years ago" (Dickey 2006, 39). Iran's energy exports to the European Union and China coupled with its spending on nuclear activities with Russia makes this an international issue, thus rendering any United Nations Security Council decision for action against Iran a split given the individual interests of the actors within the Council. In this situation the United States looks to its partner in Riyadh to increase their supply in the market and thus negate any supply from Iran rendering the oil markets less vulnerable. In this case, Saudi Arabia planned a \$50 billion program to reassert their power in the markets slotted for 2009 giving Tehran a window of a couple years to profit from its current

situation both economically and politically. In that time Tehran ramped up its weapons program and situated itself for the negotiation that would come with President Obama in 2009 (Dickey 2006, 39).

Additionally in 2007, the European Union's efforts to curb Tehran's nuclear ambitions were waning. The United States and other interested parties looked toward sanctions as the next measure to coerce Iran to halt its pursuit of nuclear energy. Barring sanctions having their desired effect, the options would be a military strike or the often foregone option of diplomacy. Ted Galen Carpenter, a defense expert with the Cato Institute, a Republic leaning institution, highlights traditional regime hawks such as William Kristol and Charles Krauthammer who both advocate for the United States to strike Iran. Krauthammer goes as far to recognize that "attacking Iran would produce extremely unpleasant consequences while still favoring that course as the alleged lesser of two evils" (Carpenter 2007, 15). The costs of an attack are somewhat calculated as there is the risk, if not eventuality, that the price of oil will skyrocket, triggering a global economic recession and that Iran could retaliate against a strike by closing the Strait of Hormuz where 40 percent of the world's oil exports flow through. Iran's asymmetric defense capabilities would be utilized through its militias in Iraq who would wreak havoc against the American army there causing the loss of lives (Carpenter 2007, 16). The idea that Krauthammer and other hawks hold is that a strike against Iran will enrage the Iranian people and cause them to rise up against their government for bringing this destruction upon them.

However, history has shown that countries the United States has attacked, from Vietnam to Serbia, the people have rallied around the government rather than against it.

Shirin Ebadi, an Iranian lawyer and Nobel Prize Laureate for her human rights work, expressed the view of her and her fellow citizens in stating, "we will defend our country till the last drop of blood" highlighting how the government is merely an extension of the country and the country will be protected by its people regardless of their opinions of the regime (Carpenter 2007, 16). Rather than attack Iran and bring about highly undesirable consequences, Carpenter suggests that the United States pursue the path that was followed in the 1970's toward China, which was saddled with an even more extremist regime than Iran's is today. Mao Zedong's statements toward the United States that China would outlast the United States in a nuclear war of attrition actually drove the Soviet Union closer to the United States during the Cold War. Additionally, Nixon began his rapprochement with China while they were undergoing the Cultural Revolution while simultaneously developing nuclear weapons. Considering the litany of undesirable issues present in this scenario, the United States and Beijing have managed to work with one another on key issues over the past three decades. Restraining from military action during a time when some within the administrations argued for it has led to positive exercise of restraint and thus has created precedent for where this success could be repeated with Iran.

Deterrence at minimum is certainly possible and Carpenter advocates for this approach, as it is more realistic and less dangerous than preventive war. Moreover, deterrence policy is the minimum working basis and the United States should otherwise make a serious diplomatic effort to get Iran to just abandon its nuclear pursuits. This would not have to be backed by serious assurances that the neither United States nor Israel would use its offensive capabilities against Iran. Iran is pursuing its own deterrence by potentially developing nuclear weapons, as it would have good reason to believe it needs such

capabilities as it has seen the United States invade Iraq, Afghanistan as well as seven other instances since the end of the Cold War in 1991. None of those countries held nuclear capabilities and Tehran could reasonably calculate that possessing the capability of such would deter a potential attack. Regionally, the acquisition of such could also alter relations between other nuclear powers, as was the case between India and China once India became nuclear (Mohan 2004). Ultimately, the idea would be to deter Iran from nuclear pursuits rather than accommodating it once it has achieved such. While the reasons why Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons capability are presumed, Carpenter argues that those reasons cannot be fully understood without offering type of grand bargain. Failing success on that front, there is the option of deterrence and as a last resort the pursuit of the military option (Carpenter 2007, 27).

Other advocates of an alternative policy toward Tehran include Trita Parsi. Also recognizing the weight of Israel on the U.S.-Iranian relationship, Parsi argues that regional integration through engagement and dialogue is the one policy that has not been pursued. Following the line that Nixon took toward China in the 1970's, Iran is not a country that can be contained indefinitely. The country has legitimate aspirations and regional ambitions as an economic and military power just based on the fact that it is home to the world's second largest oil and natural gas reserves. Militarily, the country has never been invaded by another nation and Iran has managed to create proxies throughout the Middle East that allow it to avoid being engaged militarily with another state. When Iran is sidelined from normal channels such as regional groups as well as international venues such as the United Nations, the regime utilizes its proxies to obtain security and interests. Parsi argues that it is geopolitical imbalances that fuel this conflict not unmovable

ideological ones. Pitting Sunnis against Shi'a and Muslims against Jews is a complete misreading of history and foreign relations. Iran and Israel did not oppose one another in their foreign policies until 1991 when the world shifted from a bi-polar order to a uni-polar one. The divergence occurred due to security interests and not based on religious ideologies.

Another fundamental misreading is assuming that if the current Iranian regime was replaced by a fully democratic and liberal regime that it would somehow not want to claim a hegemonic position in the region. Is the fact that regional allies and the United States take issue with Iran's ambitions to be a regional power because of its current government structure or because under any pretenses this would not be acceptable as the regional powers are Israel and Saudi Arabia. An additional point for reflection on the note of democracy, if the United States worked to remove a democratically elected leader in Iran in favor of an increasingly unpopular figure, what security do Iranians have that whomever they may elect today would be supported by the United States. Further to this, Iran is unique in its government configuration as Iranians do elect their president, and have since the time of the 1979 Revolution, however those candidates are vetted by the Ayatollah. Nevertheless, Mousavian notes in another work of his, "to the Iranians, the only system is government acceptable to the West seems to be Mohammed Reza Pahlavi's client state, which invested its petro-dollars in favor of Western interests, obeyed policies imposed from outside, and only entertained reforms that either furthered his interests or did not conflict with his authoritarian rule. Democracy was not an option available to the Iranian people and neither was national autonomy" (Maleki, Tirman 2014, 39).

The arguments for accommodation during this period are largely built upon the actions Iran took after September 11th. Scholar Ephraim Kam is a Middle East security studies specialist especially when it comes to the Persian Gulf. In a compilation of dialogues and studies on the United States' and Iran's relationship, "U.S.-Iran Misperceptions", Kam notes that Iran's productive efforts not only show their ability to work with the United States, but also the areas in which interests overlap (Maleki and Tirman 2014, 68). Analysts find no logical conclusions for why the two countries continue to undermine one another and avoid further instances where mutual collaboration can win mutually beneficial outcomes. Kam underpins his argument by also raising when Nixon went to China. Ideologically, historically and politically, the United States and China had nothing to do with one another but the reality of China being effectively contained by the United States was impossible. Additionally, the benefits of bringing China in from the cold were increasing whereas the cost of keeping them there was also increasing (Maleki and Tirman 2014, 86). Kam ultimately concludes that the threat of China during a time of an ideological battle between communism and liberalism or democracy, was higher for both China and the Soviet Union than the threat Iran poses today.

The threats Iranian involvement posed due to their gains in Iraq not only concerned the United States, as it wished for a different course of events. American allies in Israel and Saudi Arabia as well as its periphery allies in the Gulf region had become concerned with the United States ability to contain Iran and thus had taken measures of its own supporting militia groups. The inability for the Bush administration to see past its own ideological idiocies about democracy promotion in a region with much different circumstances than the West meant it was blind to realizing the cooperation that was possible with Iran. If not

based on mutual interests then it was otherwise necessary, as a military confrontation was becoming a real possibility as Iran restarted its enrichment of uranium.

However, what is the prevailing reason why the United States' did not pursue a different path with Iran given changing realities after the September 11th attacks? A reality during the period of the Bush administration was the prevalence of neoconservative ideology in configuring policy toward the Middle East. In a 2007 article, "What Ails the Neocons?" Flynt Leverett noted, "the rigidity of the neoconservative credo is preventing the Bush administration from pursuing serious strategic engagement with Iran and Syria, taking a more realistic approach to the Palestinian question or doing other things the United States urgently needs to do if it is to dig itself out of the hole in which neoconservatives have put it" (Leverett 2007, 8).

In *A Single Roll of the Dice: Obama's Diplomacy with Iran*, Parsi echoes the complications the neoconservative ideology presented, "the neoconservative philosophy, views the United States as the source of legitimacy at home and abroad, dictated that talking to the autocratic rulers in Tehran would help legitimize Iran's theocratic and repressive government (Parsi 2012, 7). That refusal to address the reality that the invasion of Iraq strengthened Iran meant that during the Bush presidency, Iran amassed more than 8,000 centrifuges for its nuclear program and expanded its influence heavily across Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon. The scholars that produced the Iraq Study Group report, discussed earlier in this chapter, also echoed these sentiments. The events that would occur under the presidency of Barack Obama, and detailed by Parsi in the aforementioned book will be assessed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER V

2008 BARACK OBAMA AND THE "PIVOT TO ASIA"

The election of President Barack Obama did not only bring the promise of hope and change for Americans, but a man with the middle name Hussein, also brought the hope of a different path with respect to relations with the Middle East. Obama advocated for a platform for renewed relations and even engagement with Iran without preconditions. This chapter will evaluate the Obama administration's engagement with Iran due allegations that Iran may have renewed its nuclear activities. Obama would be faced with whether continuing a policy of confrontation would be the right prescription, or if engagement or another approach would be the way. Obama's worldview considered that the Middle East was not as strategically important as previous administrations placed upon it and that instead a policy of a "pivot to Asia" would better poise the United States to deal with coming conflicts and concerns given China's economic rise. In order to do so, affairs in the Middle East would have to be better managed so conflicts would not continue to rise that would draw the United States in. This would certainly concern Iran, as scholars have argued that a positive point in dealing with Iran would be to use them as a local actor to manage affairs so the United States would not have to as closely (Friedman 2014).

Two months into Obama's presidency, he attempted to reach out to the Iranians by congratulating them and wishing them a Happy *Nowruz*. As Secretary Albright did before him, the message did not just stop at a congratulations, but asked for renewed relations with Iran all the while reminding the Islamic Republic that certain conditions had to be met. President Obama distinguished between the Iranian people and the Iranian regime and asked for a new beginning, but one that would necessitate the Iranian regime ending its

support for terrorism and the pursuit of arms. Obama was unprecedented in addressing both the Iranian government as well as the Iranian people rather than driving a wedge between the two as Obama's predecessors have repeatedly done.

While Ayatollah Khomeini condemned President Obama's message as a "velvet glove concealing a cast iron hand" and resisting the policy of threats and enticement, Ahmadinejad pursued sending a message to the new administration (Khamenei 2009). With the approval of Khomeini, Ahmadinejad sent a letter through Mohamed ElBaradei reiterating Iran's willingness to "engage in bilateral negotiations, without conditions, on the basis of mutual respect" (ElBaradei 2011, 295). With the ability to cooperate on multiple fronts where American was facing hardships and interests for the United States and Iran were aligned such as in Iraq and Afghanistan, the time was ripe with possibility. However, like his predecessor, President Obama ignored Ahmadinejad and wrote directly to Ayatollah Khamenei expressing their willingness to engage in bilateral talks with the intention to improve relations while finding a resolution to the nuclear dispute and regional calamities. This was an offer for détente and Iran accepted it. The highest leaders of the United States and Iran were now exchanging letters, unprecedented since the Islamic Revolution. As both administrations were preparing secretaries to facilitate talks, Iran was hosting its 2009 presidential elections, one that would produce accusations of fraud and precipitate what would become known as the "Green Movement". In line with regular American rhetoric toward political freedoms for Iranians, the United States supported the will of certain liberal factions who were against the results of the election that upheld another term for Ahmadinejad. When the United States reached out and stated that they are against the crackdown security forces had on quelling the protests against the results,

President Obama was cementing longstanding mistrust that Ayatollah Khamenei and others held in believing that the United States was always working to bring down the regime.⁸ Within the context of renewed relations with Iran, this path would not be pursued if Obama's worldview, his view of America's role in the world and his view of what purposes American relations with the Middle East serve varied from the previous administration. Under President Obama, U.S. policy shifted away from the period of direct intervention in the Middle East as "the U.S. is determined to retain its role as a key player in East Asia in the wake of China's rise and the changing face of the world's economy to a pacific focus" (Ben-Ami 2013). Pivoting toward Asia would require granting regional powers in the Middle East a little more autonomy to manage their own affairs within parameters set out by the United States. The failure to do so, as has been witnessed, requires attention and resources to remain focused in the region (Ben-Ami 2013). It is within the worldview that current relations with Middle East allies are unsustainable moving forward with the threat of a rising China. Within the considerations of a realist's view of the world, Obama views Iran as a legitimate player in the region and thus an asset when it comes to dealing with Asia. It is within this context that confidence-building measures with Tehran began in late 2009. While the details of the P5+1 nuclear negotiations are not the focus of this paper, the

⁸ See also:

Abdo, Genevieve. "Green Movement 2.0". *Foreign Affairs*. 18 February 2011.

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iran/2011-02-18/green-movement-20>

Phillips, James. "Iran's Green Movement Revives, Energized by Egyptian's Revolt". Heritage Foundation. 18 February 2011. <http://dailysignal.com/2011/02/18/irans-green-movement-revives-energized-by-egyptian-revolt/>.

Reynolds, James. "US Showed Support for Iran Protestors: Clinton". BBC. 15 February, 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12460170>

Takeyh, Ray. "The US Must Empower the Green Movement". *Council on Foreign Relations*. 17 February 2011. <http://www.cfr.org/iran/us-must-empower-green-movement/p24155>.

overall theme of Israeli involvement to eradicate any potential successes made on the engagement front is important.

A. Iran's Nuclear File

Iran has possessed the capacity to produce nuclear energy since the early 1970's when the Shah of Iran "launched an ambitious nuclear program aimed at acquiring nuclear power reactors and the full panoply of associated technologies, including dual use fuel cycle facilities that could be used for weapons purposes" (Maleki, Tirman 2014, 71). Started with funds and materials from the United States, it stopped with the onset of the 1979 Revolution. The Islamic Republic under the new regime, soon picked up the program again, however now that it was in the hands of alleged extremists, the program was not seen as tolerable.

In Miller and Bunn's "American Perceptions of Iran" they detail the perceptions of Iran as the "nuclear menace" concluding that the nuclear issue intersects with the question of American perceptions of Iran in three significant ways. The first is that Iran's behavior has reinforced many of the negative impressions America has of Iran due to repeated violations of safeguards and agreements. Due to the fact that it was revealed that the nuclear program had begun to enrich uranium, America feels Iran was intentionally hiding this fact and thus is untrustworthy. Additionally, Iran's persistence to pursue the continuation of its nuclear program highlights what America perceives to be aggression and regional hegemonic ambitions. In totality, the United Nations has not found Iran to be in violation of its obligations to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in its entirety and Iran has open its facilities to inspectors ensuring that progress toward nuclear energy for civilian

purposes, and that only, can be monitored. What the United States perceives as Iranian aggression is in fact Iran's sovereign right to pursue this technology as other countries have. Unfortunately for the United States, it has not has its way with Iran as it is used to having when it threatens other countries with sanctions, war and other threats.

With regard to the nuclear issue in Iran, a brief timeline here will serve as an introduction to the current issues being discussed in the coming paragraphs. In 2002 an Iranian opposition group claimed that the Iranians had re-started nuclear activities and were therefore allegedly in violation of certain terms and conditions. Due to these violations the United Nations ratified four rounds of sanctions on Iran between 2006-2010 and added sanctions on the financial sector in 2012 (BBC 2014).

While the Europeans were previously in negotiations with Tehran over their nuclear program, the Americans sought to take over those talks via the dual-track approach. This approach would essentially have two tracks, talks and incentives, which would run parallel. Obama was not on his own in this process as the Europeans had been and still were deeply divided on how to pressure Tehran on the nuclear issue. Obama would not only be dealing with American public opinion toward Iran and the attitudes of Iranians in Iran toward America, but also a trove of opinions from France to the United Kingdom. Trita Parsi notes, "Although more than two years had passed since the previous United Nations Security Council sanctions resolution had been imposed on Iran, Tehran had nevertheless continued with its nuclear program. It was time for new punitive measures, decision makers in Paris reasoned" (Parsi 2012, 13). As Obama was looking to unclench the fist, President Sarkozy in France was looking to strengthen the grip. "Going hawkish on the European side while Obama was stretching out his hand would certainly undermine the credibility of

the outstretched hand" (Parsi 2012, 13). Iranians were both relieved and enthused with Obama's election with one merchant noting, "The Democrats are a people who do not like war, If Obama wins, he will the way to negotiations with Iran" (Parsi 2012, 35). Nonetheless, the outlook for renewed relations was rosy as the Iranians took Obama's election as a fresh breath and took to hear that "Obama" in Farsi translates to 'he is with us' (Parsi 2012, 31).

Talks hardly began without preconditions. For the Americans, the preconditions were to halt the enrichment of uranium and also ceasing any and all activities related to its militias. These demands meant that Iran had to make vast changes in its own foreign policy just to have a seat at the table with the Americans. In addition to the American's demands was the threat of military action from Israel. While Obama and his team were preparing talks, Israel's insistence on the military option directly undermined Obama's diplomacy efforts. In order to even establish the climate for diplomatic talks, the two sides were evaluating each other's sincerity in approaching this monumental event. Parsi notes, "Mistrust was elevated under the Bush administration due to the insistence of the military option always being on the table" (Parsi 2012, 51). The problem thus is obviously cyclical as the constant threat of military attack or invasion by either Israel or the United States is one of the prevailing reasons the Republic feels additional defense mechanisms are necessary. Israel's insistence that this threat is always present is two-fold according to Parsi, first, it sought to realign or liken Obama's position with that of the Bush administration, where diplomacy was treated with suspicion and skepticism and the military confrontation was viewed as a policy option with guaranteed success. Second, the pressure of military action ensured that diplomacy would fail simply because it is denying

the time and space it would need to succeed. Thus, for the Obama administration, devising a new path with Iran was very much about balancing America's relationship with Israel with its aspirations for a renewed relationship with Iran.

B. Reassessing the U.S.-Iranian Relationship

When the United States continuously makes statements showing support for civil factions within Iran that are against the current regime the current government has no choice but to assume that anti-regime groups are being helped by the United States. People who work in policy circles in Washington D.C. regularly author pieces that advocate for the United States to push for a new regime in Iran such as The Council on Foreign Relations' President Richard Haas who wrote, "Regime Change is the Only Way to Stop Iran" (2010). Many of these scholars' statements are not because Iran is fundamentally evil, and cannot be worked with, but because they have been conditioned to believe this to be true. Given the ambiguity surrounding America's renewed intentions to talk to Iran, many are simply apprehensive and untrustworthy of any successes as there is no clarity on the end goal. Parsi highlights, "America's desired nuclear endgame was closely linked to the lack of clarity in the review on the larger endgame with Iran—what end state in U.S.-Iran relations was Washington seeking, and what form would it have to take to be acceptable to both countries as well as to Washington's regional allies? (Parsi 2012, 60). The presence of many questions surrounding not only how America's relationship with Iran would change but how the relationships between the United States and its Gulf allies would change and consequently how their relationships with Iran would also change. Additionally, are we aware of what Iran's endgame is? What would renewed relations with the United States

bring other than the benefit of the international economy being opened up? Without viable answers to these questions and explanations as far as a timeline and contingency plans should anything become sidetracked it seemed unrealistic that diplomacy could even be achieved as the ends were not clear enough to justify the means.

Across this time period, a less popular argument, but one worth looking at is whether Iran serves as a more natural ally to the United States than Saudi Arabia. While a dichotomy need not exist as in choosing only one or the other, there are considerations of the future viability of stable relations based on the feasibility of the current regimes withstanding political dissent and also weathering economic and regional upheaval. While this is terminology a scholar such as Kaplan uses, "Americans would be more comfortable in Tehran than they would be in Riyadh", the question of what a natural ally is needs to be addressed (Kaplan 2015). The United States certainly has a history of working with the leaders necessary to secure what its perceived interests are in the realms of economic stability and security and that is irrespective of qualities such as ideology or the type of government a country is classified as. There are long-term questions related to stability in Saudi Arabia in a post-rentier era, and how the state will evolve to stop the windfall that will be had when oil is no longer a source of income. How Saudi Arabians react to their government due to changing internal dynamics as a result of this reality is to be seen. However, this potentiality does not necessitate a position of the United States flip-flopping from longstanding American-Saudi Arabian cooperation on multiple fronts, to the United States abandoning its key Gulf partner for Iran.

Stephen Kinzer's argument for stabilizing relations with Iran in, "Reset Middle East" rests on American security concerns in the region from "pacifying Iraq, stabilizing

Lebanon, ending the Israel-Palestinian stalemate, weakening Islamic fundamentalism, crushing al-Qaeda, moderating nuclear competition and reducing the threat of future wars" (Kinzer 2011, 206). All considerations reside in securing American interests in exchange for the United States negotiating with Iran demands for legitimacy and what it believes is its sovereign right to pursue its interests in developing a nuclear program for civilian purposes and securing its interests in the region, which includes its right to defense from other players in the region who seeks to harm Iran's position. Kinzer also argues that Iran can and should be enlisted to defeat common enemies like al-Qaeda and its offshoots.

Remembering the events of the previous chapter, as Iran was consolidating power in Iraq, the regime in Iran was emboldened. In a visit in October 2010 to Saudi Arabia, Parsi found officials complaining that the United States, "gave Iraq to Iran on a golden platter" thus allowing Iran to establish hegemony in the region. Some officials ventured that this could not simply be an unintended consequence of an ill thought out war, but rather that the Bush administration was secretly colluding with the rulers in Tehran (Parsi 2012, 14).

Due to the events of September 11th, and Saudi Arabia's arguably loose affiliation with the attacks, some scholars such as Stephen Kinzer argue that a reassessment of policy with the United States' current allies is necessary. In a 2011 article, "Kingdom Come" Kinzer argued against a shift or realignment in regards to United States policy toward the Middle East with respect to Saudi Arabia, but he does state that "hedging its' [the United States] bets" would not hurt (Kinzer 2011, 16). Wikileaks cables made clear that Saudis constitute the most significant source of funding to Sunni terrorist groups worldwide, many of which the United States works to eliminate. Given changing dynamics Kinzer argues,

"the United States might consider whether its hostility to Iran makes strategic sense given that the United States and Iran align on issues related to terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan" (Kinzer, 2011, 17).

However, Kinzer's position on working with Iran also shows up in this context as he argues that Saudi Arabia and Israel have shortcomings when it comes to serving American interests, and those can be made up by cooperation with Iran (Kinzer, 2006). He does not advocate for a breaking of relations with Cold War partners like Israel and Saudi Arabia, but rather the possibility to work with others where interests align. Inimical to American interests is the ongoing backlash from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as well as the existence and dissemination of *Wahhabi* fundamentalism and Kinzer argues that to break away from that history is for the United States to break from conventional wisdom on foreign policy.

In order to establish a basis for cooperation, confidence-building measures were necessary and those measures ended up being limited to the nuclear file. Rather than using areas where interests overlapped such as in Afghanistan or Iraq, the negotiations turned into a single bargaining variable that Iran did not agree with. When Iran proposed additional areas of cooperation through an expanded agenda, the United States viewed this as Iran playing for time to hide or continue any nuclear fuel activities. Parsi notes, "had the agenda been wider from the outset, progress on one issue could have been used to break the deadlock on another issue" (Parsi 2012, 220). Confidence building measures, even related to the nuclear issue, became American demands and preconditions to continue and thus ended up failing.

The inability to build the confidence necessary for successful diplomacy meant that mistrust grew rather than subsided. The lack of political will and the ever-present air of mistrust did not necessarily mean the want for a diplomatic breakthrough was impossible, it just was at this point in time given other surrounding circumstances. These circumstances could certainly point to the prevailing issues surrounding geopolitics in the region being factors. Parsi notes, "Obama's opposition to war, it was said, was due not to a desire for peace but rather to America's lack of capability for war as a result of its engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan" (Parsi 2012, 214). The inability for the United States to take military action against Iran, and thus dissuade Israel from taking any unilateral action is perhaps what saved any hope of continuing diplomacy. Mistrust and misunderstanding led the Iranians to refrain from allowing Obama space for engagement as the endgame was not clear, the position of dealing with the United States was not popular and thus being able to sell outreach from a president that could not be trusted to the Ayatollahs was not an attractive deal.

With the internal pressure of a re-election campaign, Obama had to manage any desire for diplomacy with Iran with the need to maintain popular ratings at home, especially amongst the few constituencies with interests where it matters. Those interest groups have an adverse interest when it comes to Iran and thus any positive outcome with Iran had to wait until Obama's re-election. With Obama's re-election cemented, it came on the heels of an Arab region in upheaval. The dynamic transformation that took place, bringing down regimes that had been in place for decades, had a fundamental effect on what was possible, or even now necessary for the United States and Iran. Tehran looked to the flailing American puppet regimes as a sign that Arab public opinion was becoming

further anti-American and thus presented the opportunity for Iran's own dynamic shift in the region. The aftermath from the fall of Saddam Hussein repeated itself in 2011 when Hosni Mubarak fell from power with little consolation from President Obama. The Saudi monarchy took Obama's support for the Egyptian people over supporting the longstanding dictator as a direct threat to the viability of the Saudi regime as the United States was to guarantee all aspects of the Kingdom's security including that of regional allies. In neighboring Bahrain, a Shi'a uprising against the Bahraini monarchy, staunchly aligned with Saudi Arabia due to its Sunni configuration, prompted Saudi Arabia to crush the uprising for fear of Bahrain being led by a Shiite government and thus allowing Iran to expand its influence into the Gulf. Given these dynamics the United States no longer had the option of continuing with the status quo as that was completely upended. The United States was now facing the inevitability that it would have to balance its relations and interests with the current events on the ground.

The instability and uncertainty that the events of the "Arab Spring" brought, coupled with Congress' imposition of sanctions against Iran in 2011 as well as Saudi Arabia manipulating the price of oil, meant that the Iranian economy was constrained and thus in need of finding a solution at some point that would not further hinder the economy. The Obama administration was willing to reach out to the Iranians, albeit with conditions, however the pressure the Iranians felt in order to meet those conditions made the opportunity to come to the negotiating table difficult. The window for opportunity is consistently small and concise as there are the realities of the political environments in both countries to take note of. The politically conservative crowd in Iran has built a reputation based on the premise of rejecting American conciliation. Continuing to resist that is part of

the allure of the current regime. Alternatively, in the United States, the Republicans are patently against any form of reconciliation with Iran, as the United States' alliance with Israel precludes any accommodation or rapprochement with Iran. Yet, despite the multitude of constraints, an agreement was reached in 2015 between Iran and the P5+1 on the nuclear issue.

With all of these opportunities for misunderstanding, and America's increasing independence on oil imported from the Persian Gulf, a question to ask is, "would the United States be better off reducing the region's strategic significance?" This was one of President Obama's main questions with regard to policy toward the Middle East. However, the answer is no. Even in the instance the United States did not require oil imports from the Gulf, its allies do and will continue to. Additionally, any instability in oil prices due to events in the Gulf affects markets worldwide, such as the case of the oil embargo in 1973 when Saudi Arabia's actions over a dispute with Israel resulted in the price of oil skyrocketing.

C. "Going To Tehran": The Leveretts' Argument

Former administration officials, Hillary Mann Leverett and Flynt Leverett believe that previous presidents have taken an incorrect approach to Iran and saw the Obama administration as an opportunity for that to change. In 2008 in an article titled, "The Grand Bargain" both Leveretts' argue that the discussion surround policy toward Iran is "reminiscent of a debate over how to discipline badly behaved children" (Leverett Leverett 2008, 31). The hard line approach, and the camp supporting such policy, of "sparing the rod and spoiling the child" argues, "the immature polity must be coerced into more

appropriate behavior" (Leverett and Leverett 2008, 31). Alternatively, the side that supports engagement advocates to "build a child's self-esteem" through cajoling Iran into different and better behaviors through various enticements. Like other pro-engagement advocates, the Leveretts' liken the situation with Iran, and the solution, to that of China. Furthermore, it is not a "nice to have" option as rapprochement with Iran was under the Clinton or Bush administrations, but is now elevated to a "must have" option due to Iran's position geographically and the two wars the United States is fighting in Iran's backyard.

Flynt Leverett, voices specific concerns regarding misunderstandings in a 2010 article, "Who's Misreading Tehran?" During the events of the 2009 Iranian elections, he characterized the American media as having "got the story of Iranian politics over the last year spectacularly wrong...not due to reporting constraints, but willfully bad journalism and analysis, motivated in at least some cases by writers' personal political agendas" (Leverett 2010, 15). Continued misunderstanding and the manufacturing of misinformation lead to a misreading of events on the ground during the re-election of Ahmadinejad led to a replication of "myths similar to "social facts" like Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction before the 2003 invasion of Iraq" (Leverett 2010, 15). Leverett's contention to stop a "tragic repetition of history" requires people to be prepared to "abandon self-gratifying and self-serving illusions about Iran and look reality squarely in the face" (Leverett 2010, 15).

Ultimately, the Leveretts' conclude that neither approach suffices as Iran is a serious contender, both regionally and internationally, and for the new president to deny this new reality would be to deny that this actor can "profoundly undermine, or help advance, many of the United State's most vital strategic objectives" (Leverett and Leverett 2008, 31). The

rationale for a new U.S. policy toward Iran is found in the model that Nixon used toward China. The Leveretts' argue that President Obama should use the backdrop of engaging the Islamic Republic on the basis of its interests in order to reach a broad-based strategic understanding with Tehran. This would redirect the Islamic Republic's influence to support U.S. interests and policies, rather than exercising that influence to work against those interests. The precedent with China shows that decades of U.S. efforts to weaken, isolate, press and cajole China did not change the regime nor the regime's intentions, thus Nixon chose an alternative course which would align interests rather than cause further ill manifestations. It is important to note that the Leveretts' argue for engagement and not détente as they find the latter policy simply will not be an effective strategy for defending and enhancing American interests or those of America's allies. Specifically, the Islamic Republic relies heavily on its use of proxy actors to supplement what it lacks in conventional military power employing an asymmetric national security strategy. The United States is thus unable to fully utilize Iran's neighbors against the Republic. Additionally, pursuing only a path of détente does not lead to a full picture of where bilateral relations between the two parties will go and thus a terrorist attack, angry statement or another event can be used by Washington to end any current cooperation and go back to the imposition of sanctions, as has been the case in many past instances.

The Leveretts' have more extensively outlined their reasoning and framework for engaging with Iran in *Going to Tehran*. The pursuit of a U.S.-Iranian grand bargain should start with the definition of a strategic framework for improving relations between the two parties that is similar to the Shanghai Communiqué that was used for U.S.-China rapprochement. They outline three sets of issues that would need to be addressed at

minimum beginning with U.S. security interests that includes stopping any nuclear enrichment, the use of proxy groups that the U.S. classifies as terrorist threats, Tehran's opposition to the Arab-Israeli peace process as well as Iran's oppositional roles in Iraq and Afghanistan. The second point regards Iran's security interests which include the United States extending a security agreement to the Islamic Republic, the lifting of all unilateral and multilateral sanctions and acknowledging the Republic's role regionally and internationally. The third and last point should address a cooperative approach to regional security that does not find the two state's actions and efforts undermining one another when in fact there is a serious amount of overlap in interests (Leverett and Leverett 2008, 128).

With the Leveretts' argument for basing a strategy with Iran on that, which was done for China, there is the basis and outline for what a reformed policy with Iran could look like. Recent history has already shown what confronting Iran looks like and subsequently what happens in neighboring states as far as sectarian violence in Iraq, heavy involvement in Iran drawing in international actors with their own interests as well as uncertainty in Lebanon due to the presence of *Hezb'Allah*, on Israel's borders.

In opposition to the Leveretts' argument for accommodation is Iranian scholar and commentator Reza Aslan who finds that the socio-economic conditions that led to the 2009 Green Revolution mean that the conditions for change in Iran are not as they seem. In "What We Got Wrong", Aslan notes, "to talk about Iran as though it has been unaltered by the events of the last year—is, to paraphrase the Leveretts, willfully bad analysis, motivated by a personal political agenda" (Leverett and Leverett 2010, 15).

Ultimately, the policies advocated by the Leveretts' or any of the other voices were not taken, as nuclear negotiations with Iran were ongoing. The agreement reached between

the P5+1 in 2015, has eased some of the pressure, and somewhat sidelined the possibility of a war between Iran and the United States, at least formally. However, the uncertainty of the interests of the new U.S. administration does leave that option on the table meaning that Iran is not reducing its involvement in proxy conflicts. The three periods presented in the previous chapters summarizes the main arguments and policies for alternatives with Iran, while the following chapter will summarize the perceived reasons for why these policies were never pursued or not fully realized.

CHAPTER VI MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Reading the events of past decades, and taking a closer look at certain events of the periods that brought upon the revolution and then the period proceeding where various retaliatory events took place, it is clear that the issue of mistrust is prevalent. Given the power of the United States within the international system, politically and economically, consistently misinterpreting actions from the Iranian regime has led to retaliatory actions that have further cemented poor relations and given reason for the Iranian regime to continue nefarious activities. The United States operates as a power that actively seeks to impose its will upon other nations and Iran is simply a nation that has a lengthy history of resisting foreign domination and intervention. Mousavian stresses this idea when he says; "In-depth knowledge of Iranian history and culture would have revealed US shortsightedness. They should have known that disdain for foreign domination would dramatically damage US interests in the long term (Mousavian 2014, 44).

Mistrust is a prominent characteristic of the relationship between the United States and Iran. Reducing the event of the U.S. Embassy takeover and the hostage crisis to the details allows one to take a magnifying glass and see how events preceding this watershed moment led to the takeover and then depleted relations afterward. The 1953 coup was still fresh in the minds of Iranians as both the removal of the democratically elected Mossadegh and then the subsequent aid to swiftly bring the Shah back to his throne after Mossadegh was removed, left the possibility open for the Shah to return to Iran once again. After the Shah left Iran in 1979, he was admitted into the United States by the Carter administration on the humanitarian basis that he needed medical treatment. However, Iranian minister

Ebrahim Yazdi, advised the United States' chief of the Iranian desk at the U.S. State Department, "you are playing with fire" (Farhang 1993, 155). American moves after the Revolution were analyzed against the backdrop of their actions in the previous decades that led to increased involvement in Iranian affairs. Iranians saw the American Embassy as a continued presence and therefore a place by which to conduct additional moves against the will of the Iranian people. Mistrust and misperception played a hand in the hostage crisis eventually happening due to Iranians believing the American presence would potentially bring an additional coup and the Americans not understanding how to handle the new regime's perceptions and needs from the American relationship post-Revolution. As Anthony Cordesman and others have maintained, "both sides harbor both legitimate and exaggerated grievances that have reinforced mutual mistrust. This mistrust now affects every aspect of US-Iranian competition over energy, economics, trade, sanctions and the nuclear issue" (Cordesman 2011).

Prior to the tragedy of September 11th, the time was ripe within Iran to better relations with the United States as reformists were in power within the parliament. Quietly, there were meetings held between Iran and the United States, with the help of German and Italian counterparts, on issues related to Afghanistan such as drug trafficking and terrorism. Both the Taliban and al-Qaeda were mutual enemies of Iran and the United States. When the September 11th attacks struck, Iran was one of the first nations to denounce the attacks and offer condolences to the nation and its victims. Soon after, the United States responded with an invasion in Afghanistan against the Taliban, and Iran was ready to fight alongside the American coalition. Iran helped to unseat the Taliban with their forces, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and later arrested and extradited 500 al-Qaeda

fighters who fled to Iran. For the post-Taliban phase in Afghanistan, Iran additionally helped to broker the Bonn Conference by which American Ambassador James Dobbins and Iranian counterpart Ambassador Javad Zarif helped bring a presidential candidate forward that was mutually agreeable for both Iran and the United States. It would seem that this point in time, cooperation was increasing and interests were at least marginally aligned, but the, former President Bush made his now infamous 2002 State of the Union Address where he declared Iraq, Iran and North Korea as constituting and "axis of evil". Former President Khatami declared, "I am confident that Bush put the final nail in the coffin of Iran-US relations" and added, "any improvement in relations must be ruled out, at least during my presidency, and any attempt at rapprochement bearing meaningful fruit would be impossible for the next decade" (Mousavian 2014, 169).

Six months after this speech, the United States invaded Iraq, Iran's neighbor. The Iranians calculated that an American success in Iraq would mean the United States would have a prime position by which they could attack Iran from. Additionally, a successful invasion of Iraq, overthrow of Saddam Hussein and an installation of a puppet regime would mean further involvement in the region. While the Iranians were watching what was happening in Iraq, the case of the "Iran Memo" emerged in 2003, just weeks after the Iraq invasion. The Iranians authored a memo to the United States government outlining concessions they were willing to make in order to achieve a grand bargain. Iran would agree to address the points of terrorism including support for *Hezb'Allah*, weapons of mass destruction and ending opposition to the peace process between the Palestinians and Israel. In exchange, the Iranians asked the Americans to end hostilities by lifting sanctions and ending its ambitions for regime change. Given that the United States and Iran do not hold

official relations, the letter had to be sent through an emissary, which was the Swiss Ambassador, serving as the American presence in Tehran. Ambassador Tim Guldemann ensured the letter reached the State Department and later the White House who would completely reject it questioning the validity of the proposal and overconfidently assuming their quick defeat of Saddam Hussein in Iraq meant that Iran served no purpose and therefore no concessions had to be made toward their position.

The major miscalculations by the United States in Iraq are becoming well documented, however a foundational misunderstanding and what led the United States to hand Iraq to Iran on a silver platter was ignoring the fact that Iraq was a majority Shi'a country. With the help of certain Iranian factions, Iraq's new government, one closely aligned with Iran shifted the regional balance of power away from Saudi Arabia and toward Iran. The United States' hope was that Iraq would crystallize into a pillar of democracy thus influencing its neighbors to turn democratic creating a "democratic domino effect" in the region. Instead of these countries aligning in their newfound democratization, they aligned in their natural histories. Iraq and Iran were modern political enemies, aided by the United States' fueling the fire, but historically the countries have a religious and cultural exchange that has forged strong bonds. Mousavian documents these bonds well, "Thirteen hundred years of ideological exchanges with the Iraqi Shiite majority plus two decades of political and military relationships with the most powerful dissident currents in Iraq afforded Iran a unique position to exercise its influence immediately after the backbone of the Ba'athist government was broken as a result of the American-led invasion" (Mousavian 2014, 195). Scholar Vali Nasr also documents Iran's rise in *The Shi'a Revival*, "The Shi'a ascendancy in Iraq is supported by and is in turn bolstering another important development in the Middle

East: the emergence of Iran as a regional power" (Nasr 2006, 212). While Iran gained from the United States' miscalculations and inflated ambitions in Iraq, this is actually an opportunity to improve relations.

Within the nuclear issue there existed an opportunity to resolve the dispute over whether Iran was enriching uranium for the future of creating nuclear weapons. To further this, Iran offered a set of unprecedented measures to first ensure transparency in its nuclear sites and secondly to provide guarantees that it would not take any fuel enrichment toward weaponization. The West demanded that Iran halt enrichment completely, thus violating the country's right to enrich for peaceful purposes, resulting in Iran to deny complying. The inability to compromise led to sanctions and punitive measures being taken as well as building the mistrust in showing that even when Iran is making concessions there is an insistence to pressure the regime to take actions it is not legally bound to accept. From the Iranian perspective, other countries such as Israel, India and Pakistan were all able to enrich and to create nuclear weapons programs without punitive measures or all out war. Ultimately, ElBaradei concluded that this was a missed opportunity for the West,

"The Iranians were willing in 2003, but the administration of then US President George W. Bush was not...I adhere strictly to the facts, and part of that is that the Americans and the Europeans withheld important documents and information from us. They weren't interested in a compromise with the government in Tehran, but regime change—by any means necessary" (ElBaradei 2011).

While Iran's reformist currents were working toward reconciliation with the West and largely the United States, America's uncompromising stance and their insistence upon suspending any nuclear enrichment was sending a message to Iran that there was only one

way to operate at that would be at the behest of the United States. What the United States and Iran lost in this opportunity, at this point in time, turned out to be a win for Iran's conservatives including upcoming President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Ahmadinejad would profit from the price of oil reaching record levels in 2005, thus profiting Iran handsomely and allowing them to put funding toward decreasing American influence in the region. Given the hardliner ideology behind this regime this was particularly disruptive and avoidable considering the opportunities on the table for a different path. Despite the rhetoric however, Ahmadinejad and his administration that left the door ajar for something to come made plenty of expressions.

A. Why Not Accommodation?

Considering the weight of history and half-realized attempts at any level of reconciliation with Iran, we have to ask why policies of accommodation, rapprochement and détente were not fully explored. One argument is whether a "clash of civilizations," scenario is present which Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington find applicable to Iran and the United States given their assessments of the liberal values system of the United States and Iran's ideological base rooted in Islam being antagonistic. However, this is an insufficient explanation given that the United States has fostered close relations with multiple other states whose systems are rooted in Islamic laws and values such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Turkey and Qatar, withholding mention of Islamic states in Southeast Asia. All of these examples restrict Western democratic political freedoms, to varying degrees, such as having protections for human rights, institutionalized elections and a free and independent press system. Almost

all are ruled through constitutional monarchies or are otherwise dictatorships and those states that do hold elections such as Turkey and Egypt cannot be said to have free and fair participation.

Another explanation is that like-minded states that have similar ideological backgrounds work with one another. While this may be true for some states, such as Saudi Arabia aligning with Sunni led states like The United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, and opposing Shi'a led ones like Iran, this is not always clear cut as interests often prevail over ideology. In the case of Iran, their foreign policy is characterized and documented as choosing pragmatic positions over ideological ones. Mousavian notes, "Iran has chosen to align with Armenia, predominantly Christian, over Azerbaijan, predominantly Shi'a, due to particular interests" (Mousavian 2014, 263). Additionally, communism has been an enemy of the Islamic Republic even before Iran was an Islamic Republic. However, Iran still has good relations with China and North Korea, countries whose foundations are built on the pillars of communism. Therefore, this explanation does not fully explain why the United States and Iran have dodged one another.

If ideology is not a resounding factor in why positive policies have not been pursued toward Iran, then another explanation could be that the United States' relationship with Israel is a factor. Parsi documents the history of relations between Iran and Israel in *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of the U.S., Iran and Israel*, documenting that relations between Iran and Israel during the reign of the Shah and for some time afterward were quite strong. He further highlights the relationship between Iran and Israel in *A Single Roll of the Dice: Obama's Diplomacy with Iran* again highlighting the importance of Israel in these triangular relations, "what changed the

nature of the Israeli-Iranian relations from a tacit alliance to open enmity was not the Iranian Revolution of 1979, but the geopolitical changes that swept through the Middle East in the early 1990's" (Parsi 2012, 22). While Iran has thus experienced poor relations with Israel for the better part of two decades, having poor ties or opposition to Israel is not a factor that would deny also having an alliance with the United States. Both Saudi Arabia and Pakistan deny Israel's existence, but both of these states have strong relationships with the United States.

The declining use of any geostrategic benefit from Israel for the United States has declined since the 1990's. With the defeat of the Soviet Union, Israel's use and lobbying power has become an American domestic anomaly. With the end of the Soviet Union and the collapse of Iraqi military strength after the 1991 Persian Gulf War, Israel now had the threat of Iran. Parsi notes, "New geopolitical conditions necessitated new strategies and policies given that the end of the Cold War had put Israel's strategic utility to the United States under question" (Parsi 2012, 23). Israel's aim during this period was to further cement the perception that Iran was a rogue state in the minds of the Americans. While this is a struggle for power within the region, the conflict between Israel and Iran is framed as a religious issue. Despite the fact that millions of Iranian Jews have chosen to stay in Iran rather than move to the world's only Jewish state, Israel ensure that the world, and the United States in particular, "would not see the Israeli-Iranian conflict as one between two rivals for preeminence in a region that lacked a clear pecking order. Rather, Israel framed the clash as one between the sole democracy in the Middle East and a theocracy that hated everything the West stood for" (Parsi 2012, 25). Ultimately, the Americans becoming closer to the Iranians is a potentiality Israel seeks to undermine.

Preferably, "U.S.-Iran enmity that would boil over into a military clash is optimal as all outcomes of U.S.-Iran negotiations threaten Israel's current status" (Parsi 2012, 26).

The strong presence of Israeli interests influencing the foreign policy of the United States cannot be denied as a thorn in the relationship between Iran and the United States. Relations with Israel and the peace process are factors cited for both sides. As Ephraim Kam noted, "Since 1993, every Israeli prime minister has cited Iran as the gravest strategic threat to Israel and to Middle East stability" (Kam 2013, 62). Note the length of positive relations between Iran and Israel since Israel's inception in 1948, and then since the 1979 Islamic Revolution and this period in 1993. 1993 marks a decisive turn, as this was when the Oslo Accords took place between the Palestinians via the Palestinian Liberal Organization (PLO) and Israel at Camp David. Iran condemned the PLO for capitulating to the Israelis and thereby selling out the Palestinian cause.

Other factors would have to consider the history of relations between the two countries. The factor of mistrust is not one that can be ignored. Building off of that would be the other factors such as Israel's unwillingness to work with the current Iranian regime and thus prohibiting the United States from doing so also. A full out military confrontation between Iran and the United States has been avoided thus far, but should tensions increase without the viability of diplomatic procedures to stave off confrontation, a regional war will ensue. It will be a regional war due to the spider web of connections that exist across multiple Middle Eastern nations. As scholar Tamim al-Barghouti recently discussed with me, an attack on Iran by the United States, or an affiliate could result in *Hezb'Allah* attacking Israel. Israel would retaliate on Lebanon and assuming Bashar al Assad is still in power in Syria, Syria would be drawn in on

Hezb'Allah's side (Tamim al Barghouti, private conversation, November 10, 2016). These scenarios can be avoided however and as Mousavian documents, this will only be realized through improved relations (Mousavian 2014, 270-274).

Not only do the United States' regional allies who are opponents of Iran pose complications for improved relations with Iran, but a combination of deep mistrust, misperceptions and consistent misreading of events have and will continue to prevent the establishment of positive and enduring negotiations between the two states. The factor of mistrust often prevents the two sides from even reaching the negotiation table. Without confidence building measures, and sustained ones, talks on any point of contention and possible collaboration cannot occur. Either side has not learned the lessons of history and both have legitimate grievances that need to be overcome. Given the way the United States has conducted policy toward other states such as Iraq, using them when it was convenient and dismantling the Iraqi regime without legitimate cause, when that was convenient, Iran has little incentive to trust the United States is serious about any moves it may initiate. However, if Iran or the United States and their respective allies expect to mitigate regional conflicts such as those in Syria and Yemen, the two sides will be forced to come together to cooperate on those issues at minimum. Continuing down the path of being wary of accepting new realities in the Middle East simply is not sustainable, as the American invasion of Iraq did irrevocably alter Iran's future. Proxy wars in Syria, Yemen and Lebanon can and will continue, but not indefinitely. As Parsi notes, "Iran's rise has left Israel and many Arab states fearing U.S.-Iran accommodation more than a U.S.-Iran war...but hopeless resistance against these new realities will only further exacerbate the difficulties America faces" (Parsi 2007, xii).

There is a litany of missed opportunities over the course of United States-Iranian relations. When one party was ready to come to the table and reconcile, the other was not ready or willing, when one took the courage to outstretch their hand, the other recoiled at the thought, it was one step forward and two steps back. One chance after another, these two countries missed opportunity after opportunity to really lay their cards on the table and be ready to deal a new hand.

CHAPTER VII CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

Unresolved mistrust has hampered both sides from pursuing the range of options available. A failure to understand simple necessities that each party finds vital has resulted in a miscalculation of not only intentions, but then botched outcomes. As Mousavian noted, "What the Iranians as a whole seek is international recognition of their right to live as an independent state" (Mousavian 2014, 148). The unwillingness of the United States to accept this request or rather this reality, as all states are sovereign entities under international law, is just one of many reasons why there have been perpetually bad relations.

In chapter two, the important history of relations helps to frame what some of the issues is as the more recent periods are evaluated. From 2001, when the events of September 11th prompted actions from the United States toward Iran that have inevitably caused changes in the region, up through the presidency of Barack Obama beginning in 2008. Seminal in establishing the case for U.S.-Iranian cooperation was Mousavian's research as he presents the full scope that includes history as well as considerations from both the United States and Iran's perspectives. He highlights the internal dynamics of Iran, which he finds as a basis for positive relations between the United States in Iran by first carefully constructing the history between the United States and Iran and what event(s) led to the state of relations that is a focus for the past decades. As Mousavian's foreword noted, former ambassador Thomas Pickering iterates that the future of the Middle East is tied as intricately to Iran as it is to Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel (Mousavian 2014, Foreword). As an American diplomat, Pickering recognizes the same instances noted by other scholars

where interests converge such as over al-Qaeda related terrorism and regional security as it is related to Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Mousavian argues that the trajectory of Iran-US relations has an impact on key issues such as the stability of the Persian Gulf, the future of extremism, the fallout of the Arab uprisings and also the "destiny of a Middle East that is free from weapons of mass destruction (Mousavian 2014, P. 1).

Chapter three, delved into the first period immediately after September 11th 2001 when those events prompted the Bush administration to take actions in the Middle East that would alter Iran's position. There was a focus on the United States and Iran's mutual interests in eradicating the Taliban from Afghanistan, which led to calls for policies of normalization. Iranian cooperation was strong however; neoconservative voices in the Bush administration were stronger and thus drowned out the any cooperation and the more practical voices that saw opportunities with Iran. The benefits of accommodation range from economic to political interests, most especially securing stability in Iraq and Syria. From the period of 2001 and the following 2003 invasion of Iraq, the nucleus of the Middle East has descended into a chaotic and fractious reality where Iran has served as a destabilizing force rather than anyone's partner, thus inviting calls for accommodation of Iran that would grow in the following periods. Missed opportunities existed during this era as the Iranians had reached out via the 2003 "Iran Memo". The potential to alter relations during that critical time and perhaps avoid some of the violence that would occur via militias in Iraq was possible, but overlooked.

Chapter four covered the period between 2005-2007 when America's war in Iraq was experience increasing difficulty due to Iran's actions in attempting to diminish America's success in remodeling Iraq to its own liking. This was a period when scholars as

well as commissions by the U.S. government were advocating for different policies toward Iran due to the events unfolding on the ground. The advocates for different policies partially arose from the 2006 Iraq Study Group Report, which found that the invasion of Iraq and the prolonged occupation were impacting the oil industry, sectarian relations with neighbors as well as the Kurdish population domestically and that Iraq's neighbors were at risk of spillover violence. The subsequent 2007 National Intelligence Estimate ultimately advised that the United States accommodate Iran due to the events occurring in Iraq, much of which had to do with Iranian activities deliberately trying to thwart American efforts.

The new reality was that there was a shift in the balance of power in the region and this had unleashed a level of violence that the United States' and local forces could not curtail or contain. Through the removal of Saddam Hussein and then the Iraqi government that would follow, the Iranians gained a foothold in Iraq that has only increased over time. While they have expended an immense amount of blood and treasure, the Iranians have managed to tilt the balance of power in their favor, and the repercussions of that are currently playing out from Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen.

The last period in chapter five covered the election of former President Barack Obama in 2008. His worldviews differed from that of his predecessor, especially those toward the America's role in the Middle East. These views and the presumed policies that would follow brought hope that relations with Iran would improve. What was only recently finalized, the P5+1 Nuclear Agreement between Iran, the permanent United Nations Security Council members plus Germany, has allowed for the easing of international sanctions against Iran and opened the door for potential further cooperation and

negotiation. What will become of the agreement and the potential for future accommodation or rapprochement is to be seen.

Throughout these periods, what permeated were consistent instances of missed opportunities. Historically, Iran and the United States have shared interests, bore the potential for positive economic trade and thus could have furthered points when willing parties wanted to increase relations. However, dynamics and realities such as the United States' solid relationship with Israel, as well as miscalculations and concerns of mistrust on both sides scuttled opportunities that may have altered relations between the two nations.

Perhaps the lenses of those advocating for policies of accommodation were too rosy. In a presentation on Western Asia and North Africa at Abu Dhabi's Delma Institute, Director and Analyst Mishaal al Gergawi noted that Saudi Arabia excels during periods of order while Iran excels during periods of disorder (Mishaal al Gergawi, personal conversation, April 6, 2017). Given the ebb and flow of not only regional, but also international political and economic situations, it may just be that the balance in the Middle East will have a flow rather than be static. It is plausible to conclude that the waves of order and disorder will continue even if the United States were to have improved relations with Iran, because in doing so relations with Israel and Saudi Arabia will be tested. As those allies begin to feel insecure with Iran's gain in security, the security dilemma goes that their perceived insecurities will thus prompt an increase in defensive capabilities, which could range from anything acquired tangibly to intangible actions and maneuvers. What is more concrete than attempting to forecast the region's balance of power and stability is assuring that the course of history between the United States and Iran has been tense, and the tension has endured largely because there is a failure from the United States to accept Iran's

legitimacy as a regional power and Iran has failed to meet the demands of the United States, as the regime argues they are not in line with the values and interests of the state. As this thesis outlined, there were many times the United States was willing to reconcile and then certain events occurred that ultimately derailed talks. Then there were times the Iranians reached out to the United States such as with the "Iran Memo" in 2003, and during the presidencies of reformist presidents, Khatami and Rafsanjani, and the United States was unwilling to reassess the relations. The relationship is inherently imbalanced as the diplomatic weight the United States has within the international system is far greater than that of Iran's.

As the Leveretts' noted, prior to the Shanghai Communiqué, the relationship between China and the United States was damaged and presented few areas of obvious cooperation. Yet it took one uniting president to see that the long-term interests of the United States could be tied to a foe and a different foreign policy through rapprochement would be necessary. While the world thought Obama would unite the Americans and Iranians, this reality still has yet to come full circle, but the potential for such remains.

As quoted in the beginning of this text, Mousavian claims, "the gap [in knowledge] has been a cause of misanalysis, followed by the adoption of U.S. establishment policies that have failed to achieve their objectives. Furthermore, these policies have elevated hostilities between the two countries while creating and perpetuating a state of non-compromise between them" (Mousavian 2014, 2). While this does not serve as a full explanation for why relations are strained, or seemingly immovable thus far, this would be attributed to a constructivist's view of this particular issue. There is still the issue of how

other theories apply such as that of realism and offensive realism given that constructivist theory does not fully explain this case.

Further avenues of research include studying this case further as it is situated within theories of international relations. Analyzing the bases for U.S. foreign policy and how they may be attributed to particular schools can help to dissect this case. Also, analyzing the drivers for U.S. foreign policy from the institutions to other actors and factors would add to an understanding in this relationship, as there certainly is not just one factor. In earlier chapters, the Supreme Leader was quoted as believing the U.S. administration has only one party and the actual political parties are all ultimately attributed to the same goals. If this is true then another avenue can be an analysis of how little or how much policy, towards Iran in this case, changes from one administration to the next. This thesis does highlight various presidencies and what policies they aimed to take; however an understanding of what was guiding those ideas would add context and depth. With mentioning U.S. presidencies, that of Donald J. Trump has yet to play out. His rhetoric toward Iran is confrontational and thus there could be a coming clash or withdrawal from participation in the 2015 nuclear agreement between the P5+1. What direction this presidency will take toward Iran is yet to be seen, but thus far President Trump has been more willing to confront actors in the Middle East, such as Syria, where previously former President Obama was reticent in acting. For Iran, this style could have complications.

The implications of U.S. foreign policy toward Iran, and consequently Iranian foreign policy toward the region and as that is related to the United States, on its current trajectory can certainly end in military confrontation. Already there are proxy conflicts being fought in neighboring countries and there is the addition of cyber warfare as well.

The main point of this research is to highlight that there are policy alternatives and perhaps there is sound reasoning to pursue such as this selected group of scholars has outlined. As this thesis has outlined, there has been opportunities for the two countries to work on common objectives, and the current events in the Middle East still present the opportunities for positive collaboration to achieve mutual interests. As highlighted in previous chapters, there are obstacles in this relationship from the pervasive issues of mistrust and misunderstanding as well as the United States' alliances with Middle East partners that currently are unwilling to work with Iran and do not want to see the United States do so either. Until the United States takes a more broad approach in its Middle East policy that balances relations and also recognizes the advantages to working with a country like Iran to achieve common security and economic objectives, the current policy will remain confrontational, and as I argue not in the best interests of the parties involved.

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