

## **The Israeli Impact on Standing Tensions between Iran and the United States\***

**ABDOLLAH GHANBARLU†**

**Abstract:** The current mistrust long predominated over Iran-US interactions is the outcome of the condition mostly stemmed from two sides' heterogeneous political identities. Meanwhile, the role of Israel as a source of tension has also been so significant, partly because neither Islamic Republic of Iran could tolerate Israel as a regional actor, nor United States, particularly the American Jews who control US Middle East policies as the most influential lobby driving foreign policy decision making bodies, would stand indifferent toward challenges posed by Iran against its longstanding ally in the region. Today there is a very close linkage between the Israel security and allegations raised by US against Iran including alleged Iran intentions to stalemate Middle East peace process, development of weapons of mass destruction, support for terrorism as well as the violation of democracy and human rights. As such, some limited and tactical cooperation between Iran and US seems to be possible but there is no ground for these two states' relations to be normalized as long as the current US-Israel relations continue to go on.

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†Abdollah Ghanbarlu has PhD in International Relations from Tehran University. He is member of International Studies Research Group and Scientific Board of Strategic Studies Research Center, Iran.

## Introduction

The sustaining mistrust and tensions between Iran and US is one of the most remarkable dilemmas on which the foreign policy analysts and international politics researchers mostly differ. After three decades of Islamic Revolution and hostage crisis of 1979 in Tehran, there are not only any plausible signals of confidence building between two states but also the probability of some more severe scenarios and sometime even the probability of military strike is also discussed. This ongoing situation would certainly affect the national interest of both parties; however, there are some who have assumed that hostile attitude serves the advancement of national interest of both Iran and US. The main question raised to go through here is: *what is the reason for longstanding hostility and tensions between Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States?* Of course there are many variables involved, but the main hypothesis of the present paper is that Israeli regime plays the most fundamental role in the process of continuous tensions between these two states. Therefore the role of Israeli regime in these tense interactions will be analyzed.

### A. A Historical Background

The victory of Islamic Revolution of Iran in the last decades of twenty century brought up widespread reflections in the different political, economic and social areas worldwide. As asserted by many of American authorities, the emergence of Islamic Revolution and its aftershocks developed many difficulties for the United States. Gary Sick, an Iran Affairs expert and former Middle East director in US National Security Council, in his book entitled "*All Fall Down*" stated that: "since the fall of Saigon city, no event influenced United States more than Iranian Islamic Revolution". (See Alikhani, 2001:10)

The catastrophe for the US partly stemmed from the collapse of Shah's Regime, as one of the American staunch and trustful strategic allies in a country where Jimmy Carter, then US President called it "an island of stability in the troubled Middle East". The developments in post-Islamic revolution era strained Iran-US bilateral

relations. The US government admission of the ousted Shah in Oct. 23, 1979 into the United States, turned to the seizure of the American embassy in Tehran less than two weeks later, by the group named: "Muslim Students, Followers of the Imam's Line", and as a result the outcome was the severance of diplomatic relations between the two countries in April 8, 1980<sup>1</sup>. Henceforth, the US began to put pressures on Islamic Republic of Iran in form of political, military and particularly economic sanctions.

Since the Islamic Revolution, all US administrations steadily sustained the pressures on Islamic Republic of Iran. Concurrent with hostages crisis and while an extensive propaganda against Iran was going on, Jimmy Carter, then US president exerted two economic actions against Iran. President Carter, using his presidential economic authority issued the executive order 12170 on November 14, 1979, to freeze Iranian central bank's property and accounts of the Iranian government in US banks, totaling about \$8 billion US at the time. Then, on November 19 of the same year, under 4702 declaration, he called for sanctions on oil imported from Iran by US. They were additional to his later resort to a failed military operation.

During Ronald Reagan administration (1981-88), while accusing Iran as the supporter of international terrorism, United States strived to compel its allies to avoid of supplying arms to Iran during its war with Iraq. In 1982, American troops as part of peacekeeping forces in Lebanon were attacked. Later on, escalation of military conflict in the Persian Gulf, and capture of a number of Americans as hostages in Lebanon, all resulted in the issuance of executive order 12613 by Reagan administration on Oct. 29, 1987. This executive order was allegedly aiming to stop Iran's financial support for what was called terrorism and Iran's threatening military activities in the Persian Gulf.

During George Bush presidency (1989-92), Iran-Iraq Arms Non-Proliferation Act was the American most noticeable measure approved by the congress on October 23, 1992. At the early stages of Bill Clinton presidency (1993-2001), through the infamous Dual Containment policy initiated by Martin Indyk, the United States exercised frustrating pressures in form of arms and economic sanctions against both Iran and Iraq governments. Iran repeatedly had

been accused of supporting terrorism, and developing weapons of mass destruction. The main policy trend in Clinton administration was focused on sanctions and negative propaganda, while the decrease of pressures in ending years of Clinton presidency did not accrue to any steps toward normalization of relations between the two parties. (US Atlantic Council, 2003)

As President George W. Bush came to power in 2001, a new phase of mistrust and challenges in Iran-US relations emerged. At the early years of Bush's presidency and in the course of US-led war in Afghanistan, some ground for cooperation appeared between these two countries but soon the long tensions were resumed. Among issues of provocation was the Karin-A incident in which US accused Iran of secretly shipping arms to Palestinians militants. Then, in January 2002 (three months after Afghanistan war) in his State of the Union Address, George W. Bush called Iran as part of the "axis of evil" alongside with Iraq and North Korea. The most prominent US accusations against Iran are focused on four areas of sponsoring terrorism, secretly trying to build nuclear weapons, the probability that Iran is attempting to stop Middle East peace process, as well as violation of human rights that all led to the extension of the past sanctions. The United States has been accusing Iran of trying to develop nuclear weapons and therefore claims that as a sign of good will Iran has to halt its uranium enrichment program and subject all its nuclear activities to the full investigations of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The re-election of George W. Bush in 2004 US presidential election - while Iran was resistant to American pressures- made American and Israel military attack to Iran a more serious scenario. But that was not the case due to the emergence of some other challenges such as intensified insecurity in Iraq, and consequently, the new waves of internal and external critics against Bush administration policies<sup>2</sup>.

Iran has always ruled out all American accusations and tried to divulge US unilateral, hegemonic and interventionist policies at international forums and to call global community to counter these approaches. Iran maintains to consider itself the victim of American interventionist policies in the region and believes part of the

challenges facing Islamic Republic of Iran, including Iran-Iraq war, arose from the US direct and indirect interventions. Iranian high rank authorities called American policies toward Iran as hostile and aggressive, and urged Iranian nation to resist against it. Iran, particularly in the case of its nuclear dossier, has repeatedly denied accusations of pursuing nuclear weapons. Iran points out that it is party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and is entitled to import nuclear reactors and other technologies under the provisions of the treaty. The IAEA has regularly inspected all of Iran's declared nuclear facilities and reported on its full compliance with the NPT. It has found no evidence of diversion to any nuclear weapon effort. Iran also allowed the IAEA to visit any site upon request and even officially declared it will welcome a consortium to administer the nuclear activities in Iran. But Iran has always insisted that it will not suspend its uranium enrichment activities. Following the unprecedented challenges facing American government during the years 2005-6 including those emerged in Iraq and Lebanon, some US authorities, while acknowledging Iran's effective role in the region, underscored the necessity of cooperation between two countries in specific cases like Iraq. Despite its limited scope and occasional nature, the idea still was welcomed by Islamic Republic of Iran.

### **B. Tensional variables in Iran-US Relations**

There are various variable in Iran-US tensional interactions of which some are stemmed from US approach in the Middle East, particularly toward Iran, and some others are emerged as a reflection of the specific approach advanced by Islamic Republic of Iran in different national, regional as well as global aspects. The conjunction of their approaches leads to mistrust and tensions between these two states. There is no precise distinction among the dependent variable of tension between Iran and the US and some independent variables as American support for some of Iranian opposition groups which resulted in the strengthening of mistrustful environment between Iran and US. Because it is per se an indicative of mistrust and tension

between the two sides. Now the major influential variables that lead to tensions in Iran-US relations will be examined.

### 1- American Approach Variables

*Support for Mohammad Reza Pahlavi:* since the end of the World War II, particularly after 1953, United States was the strongest supporter of ousted Shah of Iran. The role of America to overthrow the Mosadegh nationalist government and return of Shah from temporary exile was the key factor disappointing Iranian nation from the US. Prior to that turning point the US image was relatively more positive to the Iranians' eyes compared to other great powers in the region. The US policy on Iran in post-Mosadegh era was mainly focused on supporting the Shah. As Mark J. Gasiorowski once stated, the US strategy aimed to create political stability in Iran in the long run and to include Iran in the US global strategy to contain the (former) Soviet Union. (Alikhani, 2001: 13-14) The United States maintained its support for the Pahlavi regime in the midst of the Islamic revolution against Shah. The admission of the ousted Shah into the US exacerbated the anti-American sentiments in Iran. The move was a strong indication for Iranian revolutionaries of US malignant intention to bring back the former monarch and it led to the storming into the American embassy by Muslim students following the line of Imam Khomeini who held American diplomats hostage for more than a year. The United States broke off diplomatic ties with Iran after this incident and the outcome of these events led Iran-US relations towards a crisis in the long run<sup>3</sup>.

*Freezing the Assets and sanctions against Iran:* After the 1979 seizure of the American Embassy in Tehran, the United States froze Iranian assets in the Federal Reserve Bank and in all other American private banks. All Iranian assets, bank deposits, and other properties in the American foreign subsidiary branches were also blocked. By the end of crisis through the signing of the Algiers Accords on January 19, 1981 which led to the release of American hostages, more than 9 billion dollars of Iranian blocked assets were released back to Iran. But some assets still were remained frozen pending for settlement of legal

claims against the Islamic Republic of Iran at Hague tribunal. (US Atlantic Council, 2003: 5-6) However, Iranian authorities are still seeking to release all Iranian assets but the US officials not only have refused to take any convincing reaction to Iranian demands but also adopted further legislation to impose more economic pressures on Iran. Such measures did not help the American leadership demands to marginalize Iran but rather enhanced Iranian mistrust toward US government.

*The United States Positions during Iran-Iraq War:* in the late 1970s the Afghanistan occupation by Soviet Union and Islamic Revolution of Iran caused some uncertainty in US foreign policy. Meanwhile, in reaction to the impact of Islamic Revolution in Iran, hostage crisis and its failed rescue operation in Tabass dessert (Operation Eagle Claw, on April 24, 1980), the US spared no effort to hit Iran political system to make up its preceding failures. Despite the diplomatic break off between the US and Iraq since 1967, the United States kept an Interest Section in Baghdad and some have believed that US encouraged Iraq in its imposed war against Iran or at least the war was desirable for Washington. Therefore US re-opened its embassy in Baghdad. The war also granted the required pretext to the United States to justify its presence in the Persian Gulf. Fearful of transnational claims of both Iran and Iraq, pursued a policy of undermining both countries' power through continuation the war without a decisive winner. (Teimori, 2004: 99) The US position during a war which left hundreds of thousands of Iranians wounded or martyred in addition to massive direct and indirect economic damages, further aggravated the Iranian mistrust towards the American intensions and strengthened the anti-American sentiments in Iran.

*The US Support for Anti-Iranian Opposition Groups:* the American support for some subversive terrorist groups against Islamic Republic of Iran, both inside and outside of Iran, was regarded by Iranians as an overt hostility. Although US pretends of following a declared policy of changing Iran's behavior, its support for terrorist and subversive groups against Iranian government suggested its inclination for regime change in Iran. For instance, Clinton administration, as Washington Post reported on December 22,1995,

under the Intelligence Power Act, approved in Congress (jointly by Senate and the House), allocated 18-20 million dollar to conduct secret operations against Islamic Republic of Iran. (Katzman, 2003:17) Although such a decision apparently was justified under the pretext of behavior change of Islamic Republic of Iran, it was evident that Iranian leadership would not budge on such moves, partly because compromise on American demands entailed fundamental changes in the nature and identity of Islamic Republic. According to the 2267 House meeting, 4 million dollar was allocated to the US departments of Trade, State and Justice to establish Radio Iran Azad (Free Iran Radio). The Radio Iran Azad, or Persian service of Radio Azadi (freedom) as American government called it, began to work on October 31, 1998 in Prague, and in December 2002 it was renamed to Radio Farda (Tomorrow). (Katzman, 2003:17) Islamic Republic of Iran has always protested the US effective role in establishing and supporting such media operating in different audio, visual or written forms, in part because such media facilitate the radical opposition groups' operations.

1-1- *The United States Decisive and Nonstop Support for Israel:* the US unexampled moral and material support for Israel has long been another root causes fueled the continuous tensions in Iran-US relations. Constant friendly relationship with Israel and considering the security challenges of this regime have been most remarkable characteristics of the US foreign policy; since the formation of Israeli regime, the United States has reiterated its seamless support of Israeli security. Such a support led some analysts to call this regime as one of US states in order to demonstrate the importance of Israeli regime to the United States<sup>4</sup>. Meanwhile the Islamic Republic of Iran since its establishment has not recognized the legitimacy of Israeli regime and regards it as occupier of Muslim lands and irreconcilable enemy of Muslims in the region. The interdependency of Israeli regime and the United States and the impact of their policies and approaches on each other are so intensive that American support for Islamic states, particularly Islamic Republic of Iran against Israeli regime seems even unthinkable. The Israeli variable in Iran-US interactions even has

influenced other tensional variables and seems to be the most significant source of tension in their relations.

## **2- The variables of Islamic Republic of Iran's approach**

*The Seizure of American Embassy in Tehran:* On November 4, 1979, the revolutionary group Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line occupied the American embassy in Tehran and took U.S. diplomats hostage. The late founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Imam Khomeini, one day after the event, in his first statement, while supporting the students' action, referred to Washington as the Great Satan and called the embassy as "Den of Espionage". (Baghi, 1997:31-32) Prime Minister Mahdi Bazargan, the head of liberal-moderate interim administration, resigned the day after. Bazargan's resignation was accepted by Imam Khomeini, and instead of introducing a new Prime Minister Imam Khomeini assigned the Revolution Council in charge of the executive affairs of the country until the first parliament was established. This event facilitated the gradual takeover of political power by the Islamists in Islamic Republic of Iran. The seizure of American embassy in Tehran and hostage taking were fatal blows to the U.S. especially from two aspects; first, it widely damaged the United States international prestige, and secondly, the anti-American Islamist group with more pessimistic views towards the United States took power in a country which used to be one of the most trustable ally of the US and the so-called "island of stability". Although the crisis came to an end with the signing of the Algiers Accords on January 19, 1981 and the hostages were released after 444 days, it left a bitter shadow over Iran-US relations ever since.

*The Islamic Republic of Iran's anti-American Approach:* since the formation of the Islamic Republic in Iran, anti-Americanism has long been the predominant discourse of Iranian government and society. Iranian leaders have always referred the United States as an archenemy and called Iranian nation to pervasively counter the United States hegemonic policies. The late founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Imam Khomeini, even fifteen years prior to the

Islamic Revolution, in the nation-wide 15 Khordad (June 1963) uprising, expressed overtly his stance as: "United States is worse than Britain, Britain is worse than United States, the Soviet Union is worse than all, and all worse than one another, but today we're encountered with the United States and its malevolence". (See Mohammadi, 1998:191) After more than three decades since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, anti-Americanism is still prevailed in its political system. This has been reflected in the statement of the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei, on June 4, 2005 at the anniversary for the demise of the late founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Imam Khomeini:

"All oppressors and despots in the human history from Pharaoh and Nimrod to Shah, Saddam or Bush, were seeking to devoid the world of religions and provide a ground for their corrupted rule on human communities. As Imam Khomeini underscored, our people have to be vigilant towards the schismatic plots of the Islam's enemies". (*Etela'at Newspaper*, No. 23357, 2005: 2)

Such stances suggest the unpopular and hateful image of the United States among the ideologues and elite of the Islamic Republic of Iran. There is no doubt that the major parts of Iranians under the guidelines of their leaderships regard the United States as their enemy and follow those guidelines. Since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, "Death to America" has been one of the slogans repeatedly chanted by Iranians.

2-1- *Islamic Republic of Iran's anti-Zionist Policies in the Region:* since 1962-63 and emergence of the Islamist uprising movements against Pahlavi Dynasty, anti-Israeli tendencies were part of their principles. Pahlavi regime had recognized Israel as a De Facto entity and set up a relative friendly relationship with this regime. After the Islamic Revolution Iran broke off its relationship with Israeli regime and handed over the former Israel embassy building to Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Support for world Muslims and Palestine at the top of them was one of main orientations by Islamic Revolution. Therefore, Iran's regional policies were mainly based on serious oppositions against Israel. Besides, the PLO alignment with

Saddam Hussein in his imposed war against Iran caused the estrangement in Iran-PLO ties; however Iran kept its anti-Israel policies and continued the moral and material support for Palestine based on other resistance groups<sup>5</sup>. There was a deep linkage between Iran anti-Israeli and anti-American policies. Israel embassy in Tehran had been occupied and submitted to the PLO prior to the seizure of the American embassy in Tehran. (Polucci, 1991:2) Such anti-Zionism is still pursued even more persistently by Islamic Republic of Iran.

### **C. Uninterruptable US-Israel links**

Before the formation of an Israeli state, the presidents of the United States supported the concept, alluded to in Britain's Balfour Declaration of 1917 on a Jewish homeland in which creation of a Jewish National home in Palestine was promised. Thereby, on May 14, 1948 and hours after the existence of Zionist entity, Harry Truman, then US president was the first to extend his recognition to the State of Israel. Hence forth, US has openly supported Zionists either in Israel or other parts of the world, although the institutionalization of this support is not that widespread.

The first Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the United States and the Israeli regime on Strategic Cooperation was signed on November 30, 1981. This document reaffirmed the common bonds of friendship between the two sides built on their existing mutual security relationship. The parties recognized the need to enhance strategic cooperation to deter all threats from the Soviet Union to the region. They also decided to establish a framework for continued consultation and cooperation to enhance their national security by deterring such threats to the whole region. (Satari, 2003: 153) The April 21, 1988 Agreement regarding joint political, security and economic cooperation between Israel and the United States is another instance that defines the strategic cooperation between them. The preamble of Agreement, while welcoming the achievements made in strategic, economic, industrial and technological cooperation, asserts on the mutual benefits of the Israel-United States Free Trade. It has taken note of United States

economic and security assistance to Israel as a major non-NATO ally of the United States. (Satari, 2003: 154)

Yet, the most recent and important agreement concluded between the United States and Israel is the US-Israel strategic Cooperation Accord signed in April 30, 1996 by then US president, Bill Clinton, and Israeli prime minister, Shimon Perez; the statement stressed on the necessity of the continuous strategic cooperation between two parties. The important points reflected in this statement emphasize on US firm commitment to Israel security and following up the Middle East peace process and minimize any costs and risks for Israel. Moreover, US would have committed itself to keep Israel's superiority and military edge over its enemies and boost the Israel's missile program. (Satari, 2003: 168-169) This statement has been the most important indication of US sensitivity towards Israel's security despite the fact that Zionist regime is the sole nuclear Middle East power and has unique conventional armaments and capabilities in the region.

Irrespective of the mentioned agreements, the United States has been the main pillar of Israeli regime's security since its very existence. In all Arab-Israeli conflicts and wars, the American government, directly or indirectly supported Israeli regime and such a move is not restricted to the Democrat or Republican parties. In the American presidential election in 2000, although most Jews inspired by Israeli considerations voted for the Democratic Party nominee, Al Gore, Bush's victory in the election had no impact on US steady support for the Israeli regime. Bush further promoted the Israeli-oriented neo-cons in his administration's key posts, leading to the deepening of ideological aspects of the American support for Israel due to high sensitivity of the neo-conservatives to the security of the Israeli regime. The September 11, 2001 attacks and the development of the "global war on Terrorism" strategy reinforced the joint US and Israeli front against radical Islamists. All in all, the friendly attitude of Bush administration toward Israel has been so bold that the majority of Israeli community including Likud Party supported Bush in 2004 presidential election. (Israelis prefer Bush over Kerry, 2004)

The United States' assistance to Israel has been enhanced, particularly after the October 1973 war; in a way that no state received such bulk of assistance from the United States during these years. The United States direct assistance to the Israeli regime by the 2003 mounted to the 140 billion US dollars. The annual American foreign direct assistance to the Israeli regime accounts for nearly 3 billion US dollars which is one-fifth of the total budget allocated for the United States foreign assistances. Put it in another way, the American assistances to the Israeli regime amount for 500 US dollars per capita. Such assistances are extended to Israeli regime despite the fact that it is an industrial and rich state of the region and its per capita income approximately equals to that of South Korea and Spain. This is the same with regards to American military assistance to the Israeli regime. For instance, it received around 3 billion US dollars to develop its weaponry systems including Lavi airplanes. US has also equipped this regime with hi-tech systems such as Blackhawk helicopters and F-16 jet fighters and provides it with secret information which US allies in NATO are deprived of it. In the process of Israeli access to the nuclear weapons technology the United States policy was compromising and even facilitatory. On the other hand, the United States' support for the Israel in the diplomatic fronts has so evident that it has used its power to veto 35 anti-Israeli resolutions at the United Nations Security Council. The direct US security support of Israeli regime in Oct. 1973 war saved it from the Soviet Union's intervention. Even though some slight disagreements may have occasionally arisen between the two sides, but in most cases the United States finally has yielded to the Israel considerations. (Mearsheimer, 2006:30-31)

#### **D. The Root of US Matchless Support for Israel**

The United States unprecedented assistances to and cooperation with the Israeli regime become problematic while they do not serve even the strategic interest of the America in the region. The assumption that Israel plays a key guarantor role for the United States strategic interest in the region seems to be misleading and imperfect.

It may be possibly true to think that during the Cold War, Israeli regime acted as American agent in the Middle East to help contain the pro-Soviet Union Arab countries including Egypt and Syria. But even American unrestricted support and military and economic aids extended to Israel at that time were costly to the United States. It left highly negative effects on the Arab nations' viewpoints towards the US regional role. The oil embargo of 1973 was one of consequences of such skepticism. Moreover, the emergence of Islamic Revolution of Iran in the 1970s highlighted the Israeli regime's failure to advance the American interest in the region. By the end of the Cold War and outbreak the war over occupation of Kuwait by Iraq, Israeli capability to meet the United States demands was so weakened than perceived, and on the contrary, Iraq's missile attacks on Tel Aviv even further increased US obligations towards Israel. Some may suggest that at least after the September 11, 2001 attacks the terrorism and attempts to develop weapons of mass destruction in Arab world signified a common threat to the United States and Israeli regime and Israel would play an effective role as the American agent in the Middle East to contain Islamist movements. Nonetheless, the emergence of such alleged threats of extremist groups and so-called rogue states per se are stemmed from American regular support for Israel. The movement of groups like Hezbollah, Hamas as well as Islamic Jihad derived from the Israel violation of their rights and interests via the American support. Anti-Americanism pursued by countries like Iran and Syria is partly rooted in such supports. Even Bin Laden in justifying the September 11 attacks referred to inexcusable support of the United States for Israeli regime. These states and groups further argue that United States despite pretending to be sensitive toward the development of weapons of mass destruction, it connives at Israeli nuclear weapons. (Mearsheimer, 2006: 32-33)

The United States' all-out support to a regime known as the occupier and aggressor to the populace of the region seems to be astonishing, since US is relied on the Middle East to meet its energy demands in the long term. It also considers the stability of this region as a high priority, and the region's markets as well as the huge investment flows from the rich states of the region in the United States

are important for US as well. Even considerations such as Jews' bitter experiences, the alleged threats imposed by the Israel's enemies in the region, and Israel democratic political system, none would justify such supports. (Mearsheimer, 2006: 34-40) Of course those factors play effective role in the United States' support for Israel, and it can strategically use its influence over Israeli regime or as bargaining chip in its interactions with regional states, but it seems such supports stem from the particular influence of the Israeli lobbies within American policy making systems. The Jews unique position in the American society and political system is based on two factors: first, the close identity linkage between Jews and American Christian society, and second the particular capacity of the Jews in the United States which provides them appropriate chance for lobbying.

Contrary to the broad pressures and repression imposed against Jews in some regions like Europe and Russia in the past, the anti-Jewish sentiments were not that common in the United States. After the World War II and the birth of the Israeli regime, the West strongly criticized the treatments violently conducted toward Jews, and then later spared no effort to defend the Israel existence. Some Jewish circles forged a concept under the title of Judo-Christian identity and gradually strengthened it in the American society in such a way that some movements including "Christian Zionism" with strong Jewish orientations influenced the American government policy making structures. During the Carter administration, since 1974 such circles got further momentum in US political system, and currently the United States Middle East policies are strongly influenced by Jewish lobby in the US. To this group of Christian Zionists, the aggregation of Jews, creation of Israeli state, reconstruction of Jewish historical shrines, and so forth are the preconditions required for the reappearance of Jesus Christ. They assume Muslims as the common enemy of the both Christians and Jews, and as obstacles to the reappearance of Jesus Christ. (Ghanbarlo, 2004: 5-6) The extensive propagation conducted by the Christian Zionists led to intensified public pressures on American Muslims after the September 11 attacks. These terrorist attacks provided these groups with new pretext to introduce Islam as a brusque religion, lead

the American society to take more anti-Islamic attitudes, and fake out common threats to Christians and Jews, and make their fabricated linkage even stronger. In effect, the number of the American Muslims is as twice as American Jews but the identity inter-dependencies of Christian and Jews are much stronger than those of Muslims.

Yet, even more significant than given identity inter-dependencies, is the effective role of Zionist lobby in the United States that drives the America's Middle East policies in favor of Israel. The Zionist lobby in the United States is including of several branches which enjoy a unique position in terms of influence and direct ties with American policy making system. The effective lobbying of American Jews historically dates back to the formation of the Israel regime which coincided with the rise of the United States as a global superpower. The lobby, well informed that the newly shaped Israel would be subject to the Muslim states offences in the region, was so worried to be left alone by the United States and therefore the survival of Israel gets existentially threatened. As such, they spared no effort and instruments to redirect and shape the American Middle East policy in the line with the interest of Israel. Today, the Zionist lobby is so influential and its support would play a determinant role in winning the election. Therefore, party candidates compete to gain their support in the elections. Consequently, the American presidents, particularly in their first term of presidency, find no other alternative but to support the interest of Jews and Israel. (Ghanbarlo, 2004: 5-6)

The Zionist lobby's major sources of power and influence stem from their Unitarianism culture, organizational power, the high level of education and intellectuality, the effective influence in the public media, and strong presence in the Congress and administration. (Ghanbarlo, 2004: 6-12) A pro-Israel lobby group named the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) is the most influential among the effective Jews organizations. The group, known as the agent and spokesman of Israeli policies in the United States, is so influential and powerful that the American administrations have harmonized their Middle East policies with its demands. The main objectives the group is seeking for are:

1- To promote the US-Israel strategic-security cooperation;

2- To harmonize American policies with Israel to advance the Arab-Israeli peace process to the benefit of Israel, especially with regard to the capital status of Jerusalem , and

To keep continuing the American aids to Israel and extension of economic and technical cooperation between US and Israel. (Ghanbarlo, 2004: 7-8)

The Zionist lobby in the United States is extremely susceptible and vigilant to the American Middle East policies. It introduces Islamic Republic of Iran as an imminence threat to the security of Israel and therefore urges the American foreign policy to impose pressures and sanctions on Iran. The elite of the American political system are directly acting as the patron of the Israeli regime. For instance, the dual containment initiative, designed to put pressure on both Iran and Iraq as the two main US rivals, had been first developed by a Jewish called Martin Indyk and pursued seriously by the American government in Clinton administration. He was once responsible for the Middle Eastern policies in the National Security Council during Clinton presidency. During the president Bush tenure, the role of some influential Jews including Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, Elliot Abrams and Ari Fleischer in designing the American Middle East policies - especially in attacking Iraq and imposing pressures on Iran and Syria- was augmented. (Ghanbarlo, 2004: 14-21) The Jewish lobby in the United States either those in government or Congress, or those acting independently as non-governmental organizations are always seeking to intensify the stances taken by the American government toward Islamic Republic of Iran, and embrace any chance to take advantages of the tensions between these two states.

#### **D. The US-Israel Common Grounds in Containing Islamic Republic of Iran**

The variables contributing to the severity of the Iran-US interactions were discussed earlier. Any talk of revision towards Israel is totally out of question, since the Islamic Republic of Iran with its

special nature and identity would never recognize an Israeli state and this is the principle problem facing the United States Middle East policy. But for the time being, some extent of détente in Iran-US relations, at least occasionally is feasible. The United States sees the Islamic Republic of Iran as a serious threat to the Israel security, and therefore, would never leave its longstanding ally alone. As a result, the United States has put a détente or developing normal ties with Iran under the condition that Iran refrains from any action threatening the Israel's security. Precisely looking at the major misperceptions and impediments in Iran-US relationship directly or indirectly suggests the question of the Israel security.

**Middle East Peace Process:** Middle East peace process is an idea as old as the age of the Israel. Furthermore, given the intensified conflict and tensions between Israel and Arabs after the 1967 war, a lasting and stable peace appeared to be an imperative more than ever. The first Intifadah in the late 1980s suggested the need for a more serious will to tackle the current difficulties. After the Kuwait war in early 1990s, in which the Israel and some other Arab states including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Syria faced a common enemy, the US and Israel found a good chance to advance their peace plans, especially when Palestinian Liberation Organization put itself in the line with Iraq and that damaged its reputation before other Arab nations. After the war, president Bush, the father, promised the United States will do all it could to fill the gap between Israel and Arab states as well as between Israel and Palestinians. Soon after, the Middle East peace process conference held on October 30, 1991 in Madrid, and later face to face talks were arranged in Washington. Prior to the peace process negotiations, Arabs states conditioned the talks upon the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 concluded in 1967 and 1973 wars, a precondition which was accepted by Israel. (Schulzinger, 1990:636) There were some relative successes at the beginning but later on it was postponed, since the harsh opposition of radical circles inside Israeli regime led to the assassination of Isaac Rabin by a Jewish terrorist, and there has been no positive outcome so far. Despite these clear facts, US still accuse

Iran of disrupting the peace process through supporting the Palestinian resistant movements, Lebanese Hezbollah and Syria. (Council on Foreign Relations, 2004:35-36)

1- **Terrorism:** Iran has been accused of association with terrorism since the birth of the Islamic Republic in 1979. According to the claims by the U.S. Department of State, Iran remained the most active state sponsor of terrorism. The bulk of accusations of Iran's support for terrorists is focused on Tehran's backing of Hezbollah and the Palestinian freedom fighter groups of Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

They have also raised the allegation of Iranian links to the explosion of Jewish center in Argentina in 1990s. After all, the US accusations against Iran mainly based on support of anti-Israeli activities of Lebanese Hezbollah and Palestinian groups, since US and Israel attribute the terrorist label to arm resistance groups fighting against Israeli regime. Nevertheless, the Islamic Republic of Iran always asserts itself as a victim of terrorism and opposing to any kind and form of terrorism and rule out its spiritual supports being set forth as support of terrorism. Since Iran believes that resistance movements like Hezbollah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad are not terrorists and their activities are clear manifestations of fighting to defend their rights and recapture their occupied territories.

Nevertheless the United States still insists on its unfounded allegations and based on a US legal act, even assume Iran responsible for all the Americans killed, wounded or abducted in occupied territories and Lebanon. The cost of such claims is estimated more than one billion US dollar by the year 2004. (Council on Foreign Relations, 2004:37) In fact, the real aim behind the US accusations against Iran stems from a strategy to dissuade Iran of backing the resistance movements and by weakening the Arab and Palestinian positions against Israel, they could impose the Israel's desirable terms and conditions on them. Iran always withstands all baseless accusations and has put them in trouble in reaching their ominous goals.

**Weapons of Mass destruction:** one of other accusations made against Iran deals with allegation over efforts to acquire nuclear

weapons. More than anything else in this regard, the Iranian peaceful nuclear program is the source of conflict between the two countries. The Iranian nuclear program has a long history, originated in 1957 based on a civil nuclear cooperation agreement between Iran and the US. In the first paragraph of this agreement, peaceful utilization of nuclear energy has been underscored as universal need and right of entire human community. One year later, Iran joined the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and in 1967 the US provided Iran with a 5 Mega Watt experimental nuclear reactor which started to work at Tehran University. (Basiri & Ghasemi, 2006: 106-105) Then, as a matter of good will, Iran became a member of Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Iran's peaceful program was later discontinued after the Islamic Revolution and it resumed the reconstruction of Bushehr nuclear reactor after the end of Iraq war and during the 1990s by the cooperation of Russia. In post-revolution era, due to Iran's opposition to the US and Israeli policies, they tried to agitate the international community over Iran's peaceful nuclear program. The US government during Clinton administration while accusing Iran to try for acquisition of nuclear weapons, pushed many countries including Russia to refrain from giving dual use technologies to Iran. The White House during George W. Bush intensified the US pressures and alongside with its European allies tried to deprive Iran of its inalienable rights and suspend its uranium enrichment facility. Finally the Iranian nuclear dossier has been referred to the United Nations Security Council and under the pressures of some great powers with Iran's due resistance, three sets of sanctions approved to stop Iran's uranium enrichment activities. Meanwhile, the role of the Zionist lobby to impose pressure on Iran is undeniable and moreover the Israeli authorities have always clearly stated that they would not tolerate their enemy to have access even to the peaceful nuclear energy. (Gaffney, 2004: 74) Indeed one of the main concerns of the United States is the security of the Israeli regime. That's why despite the all-out efforts of Islamic Republic of Iran to show its good will including the full cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency as well as inviting international firms to involve in its nuclear

activities, there is still no sign of ease in positions taken by the United States.

**Democracy and Human rights:** the promotion and support for human rights and democratic political systems has been the core mission of American political elite since the independency of the United States in 1776. President Woodrow Wilson was the first during the World War I, while adopting an international peace with democratic mechanisms (inspired by Philosophers like Emanuel Kant), endeavored unsuccessfully to put democracy and human rights in the United States foreign policy agenda at global level. After the end of the World War I and appearance of the America as a global super power, US was introduced as the core of the free world. However, quite a few of its allies were among the authoritarian regimes. Even after the end of the Cold War, while the United States tried to enhance and deepen democracy and human rights through international bodies and introduces itself as the leading supporter of democratic values in the world. Yet, many US friends and allies are underdeveloped politically and the reality is that the American attitude to this issue due to many reasons has been selective. (Ghanbarlo, 2005:16-17) Today, the US accuses Iranian government of violating human rights and of failing to observe democracy in Iran, while it established very close and friendly relationships with nearly all authoritarian states in the region including the Persian Gulf southern Kingdoms.

Therefore, many believe that US does not have any real intention or program of democratization in the region, but would like to see a government in Iran in concordance with US interest in the region and recognize the Zionist entity. They assume their desirable regime in Iran would establish relationship with Israeli regime. That is the reason why Israel in a harmonious tone with US, accuses Iran of violation of human rights and democracy. In pursuant of the strategy to change the regime in Iran, US has provisioned several schemes under various names and titles. The controversial "Greater Middle East" plan including Arab world plus Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey and Israel was initially set to pave the ground for a crackdown on revolutionary Islam in the region. Although US could not deliver

this plan due to high domestic and international critics, its main targets were Iran and other countries discordant with the US interests in the region and quite to the contrary, Israel was eagerly looking to its implementation.<sup>6</sup> All in all, it seems the United States' pressures posed on Iran to change its political system best serve the Israel interest. Therefore, Israel's support for such pressures is something natural.

### **Conclusion**

All four issues discussed above (Iran's alleged development of nuclear weapons, Iran's purported support of terrorism, Iran's suspected intentions for disrupting the Middle East peace process, and Iran's supposed discrimination and misogynistic social policies) are areas of extreme sources of mistrust and tensions between Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States.

The general message this paper is going to deliver is not to introduce Israel as the only source of mistrust and tensions in Iran-US relations, but it rather argues that main existing complications in Iran-US relations are linked to the regional objectives and interests of the Israeli regime this way or other. Since United States' Middle East policies are deeply under the influence and control of powerful American Jewish lobby, the normalization of Iran-US relations seems at least in the foreseeable future, to be far reaching. All declared and practical positions taken by the United States towards Iran since the very establishment of Islamic Republic have been in favor of Zionists' demands. The United States would not be able to advance its interest in this region without guaranteeing the Israel security. Therefore, even though Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States could supposedly come to an agreement on Iran's nuclear programs or they could take some cooperative steps in Iraq, still the removal of tensions and mistrust long predominated over their relations is impossible in the near future. Although some limited and tactical cooperation is imaginable, the zero-sum game ruling their interactions suggests that settlement of outstanding conflicts may connote retreat of one side.

Therefore talking of a strategic plan to peacefully settlement of such conflicts, at least at present, would yield no result.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the events appeared at the time of US embassy seizure in Tehran see: *Iran Farda Monthly Journal*, Vol 42, Special Session, pp. 27-29.

<sup>2</sup> For more discussion on Iran-US relations during George W. Bush presidency see:

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<sup>3</sup> For more discussion on hostage taking in Iran and its affects on Iran-US relations see: Bill, James. (1992) *The Lion and The Eagle*, translated by Mahvash Gholami, Tehran: Kobeh, pp. 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> For more information on United States-Israel linkages see: Tehran Abrare Moaser Cultural Institute non-governmental Foreign Policy Council for International Research and Studies, *The US Book (3): Iran-Israel Relations*, Tehran: Tehran Abrare Moaser Cultural Institute for International Research and Studies, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> For more studies see: Ehteshami, Anoushirvan. (1999) *Islamic Republic of Iran's Foreign Policy during Construction Period*, translated by Ebrahim Motaghi and Zohreh Postinchi, Tehran: Islamic Revolution Documents Center, pp. 82-65.

<sup>6</sup> For more information on Iran in the great Middle East plan see: Dehghani, Seyed Jalal. (2004) "The Greater Middle East Plan and Islamic Republic of Iran's National Security", *Strategic Studies*, No. 25.