

# BALANCE OF POWER IN THE PERSIAN GULF: AN IRANIAN VIEW

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Political-security arrangements in the Persian Gulf based on “balance of power” are incapable of maintaining security and stability in the region, especially since the downfall of the Baathist regime in Iraq. The balance-of-power setting is based on a zero-sum (win-lose) game, as well as the rise of the “relative power” of rival actors. Such a system generates tension, distrust, crises and wars. With the new political-security developments in post-invasion Iraq, the establishment of a system based on a “balance of security” among major regional and transregional actors is a more appropriate approach to the maintenance of stability and security in the region. Balance of security is based on a non-zero-sum (win-win) game and the rise of the “relative security” of rival actors. Such a setting generates peace and stability, cooperation, security and constructive rivalry. Iran and the United States are currently the only two regional and transregional actors that are able to conduct military operations in the Persian Gulf, as well as build political-security coalitions in the region at large. As a result, a new balance should be established between these two main actors. In this context, putting aside for the moment security threats against Iran, the redefining of Iran’s regional role in U.S. regional strategy and the eventual acceptance of Iran’s regional role are the main factors indispensable to any formulation of a sustainable political-security arrangement in the Persian Gulf.

The prevailing view in the West, especially in the United States, and in the Arab world maintains that “balance of power” is the major guarantee of security and stability in the Persian Gulf region. From this perspective, while the traditional form of balance of power between Iran and Iraq provided security for the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, it favored the interests of foreign actors, especially the United States. Proponents of such a view hold that following the overthrow of the Baathist regime in Iraq and the growth of Iran’s role and influence in the region, the international community ought to establish a new kind of balance of power to restrain the Islamic Republic of Iran, and thereby preserve the security of the region. Following its failure to redefine the position of the new Iraq in terms of a new balance of power, the United States has itself tried to play such a role in the region. U.S. efforts to minimize Iran’s role within the context of the new balance of power have consequently created another security dilemma in the

Persian Gulf. Thus, from the outset of the Iraq crisis in 2003, Iran and the United States have ceaselessly competed with one another to institutionalize and enhance their new roles in the region. Today, actions that Washington considers to be security-enhancing are regarded by Tehran as bringing insecurity to the region. Washington's continued concentration on the balance of power risks disrupting natural power equations, potentially exacerbating the conflict between Iran and the United States and other regional states. If, however, the United States can accept an Iranian role in the region's new security architecture in the form of a balance of security, Washington and Tehran could consequently establish an accommodation that might advance the interests of all concerned — both regional and transregional actors in the Persian Gulf.

## **BALANCE OF POWER**

Any regional balance of power depends heavily on great-power involvement and the ways in which such powers are engaged in regional systems. The great powers are well equipped to affect regional balances because of their superior capabilities and the local actors' dependence on stronger allies.<sup>1</sup> U.S. involvement in the Persian Gulf can be assessed in this context. Theoretically speaking, balance of power encompasses three key concepts: deterrence, containment and equilibrium.<sup>2</sup> Their application in the political-security system of the Persian Gulf can cause new rounds of tensions and rivalries in the region. They pose important questions including, first, which security threats are to be deterred? Second, which actors are to be contained? And, finally, against which regional actors is a power equilibrium to be maintained?

According to the traditional definition of balance of power, as supported by the United States and conservative Arab regimes of the Persian Gulf, the Islamic Republic of Iran is the prime source of insecurity in the region, and any regional deterrence policy should focus on preventing threats created by Iranian actions. This traditional definition maintains that the main containment policy should be pursued against actors, such as Iran, that are compatible neither with the West's political-security aims and strategies nor with the current situation. As a result, one can argue that the "dual containment" strategy, which simultaneously targeted both Iran and Iraq, and the theory of an "axis of evil," which depicted Iran as the main source of insecurity in the region, are somehow rooted in the "balance of power" system.<sup>3</sup> During the 1990s, U.S. policy sought to preserve regional stability by preventing Iran and Iraq from enhancing their power capabilities. To meet this objective, the United States employed sanctions, U.S.-sponsored weapons inspections, pressures on other foreign actors, notably China and Russia, a powerful military presence, and so forth. In its traditional setting, the balance-of-power theory was applicable to the existing power relationships between Iran and Iraq. However, following the overthrow of the Baathist regime in Iraq, the United States has been trying to locate a substitute for that regime in order to balance the increasing power of Iran. U.S. policy makers have generally regarded Saudi Arabia, Israel and Turkey as potential candidates. There is an additional option, which would entail the United States itself taking responsibility for balancing the power of Iran in the region.

The balance of power in the Persian Gulf was largely designed according to traditional threats that regional states perceived from one another during the Cold War and the specific circumstances dictating the great powers' presence in the region over the last four decades. Ever since Britain's withdrawal from the region in 1971, U.S. Middle East policy has been based on two strategic aims: securing the free flow of oil to the West and protecting Israel's security. During the 1970s, interstate rivalries and the threat of

Soviet proxies coming to power or influencing the pillars of Western power were perceived as the main sources of danger to the West's interests in the region. During the 1980s, the Islamic Revolution in Iran and Iran's increased influence on Islamic movements were pronounced by the West to be the main sources of instability. During the 1990s, the simultaneous containment of Iran and Iraq drove U.S. policy to sustain the balance of power and achieve its two strategic goals. Finally, during the 2000s, waging war in Afghanistan and Iraq and maintaining a regional presence were U.S. means of preserving a balance of power in order to achieve its above-mentioned goals. One can argue that such a balance-based system only exacerbated the existing differences among the regional and transregional actors.

Meanwhile, concentration on the balance of power in the Persian Gulf has proven to be an inadequate strategy. It has resulted in an extensive arms race, prepared the ground for a foreign presence — foremost, American forces — and created an array of new security dilemmas in the region. It has resulted in the dependency of regional Arab states upon a U.S. security umbrella and has escalated tensions and rivalries among the nations and states of the Persian Gulf region. One could argue that the 1980 Iran-Iraq War was, to a great extent, triggered and perpetuated by the intense arms race between Iran and Iraq during the 1970s.<sup>4</sup> One could also argue that the military and political support afforded by the major powers to Saddam Hussein during the 1980s and at the end of the Iran-Iraq War resulted in Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Subsequently, conservative Arab governments demanded U.S. assistance in order to resist the threat that the Baathist regime posed to their stability. This, in turn, necessitated the invitation to U.S. troops to enter the region, causing considerable damage to these regimes' legitimacy in the eyes of their own people. At the same time, the American political, military and economic presence in the Persian Gulf contributed to the further expansion of extremism and terrorism,<sup>5</sup> as it encouraged the Arab street to question the legitimacy of Arab regimes reckoned to be heavily dependent on the U.S. security umbrella.

These developments have resulted in insecurity, instability, continuous crises and wars, and the consequent wasting of regime resources, energy and wealth. The balance-of-power system has even had a host of damaging outcomes for the great powers, especially the United States, while its application contradicts America's so-called "democracy promotion" strategy in the Persian Gulf.

Meanwhile, the roles and status of regional and transregional actors have changed following the Iraq crisis. Significant challenges to the balance-of-power strategy in its traditional form have emerged. Since the overthrow of the Baathist regime in Iraq, it has been virtually impossible to establish a new kind of balance of power between Iraq and Iran. Developments in Iraq's structure of power and political system, including the institutionalization of the role and influence of Iraqi Shiites and Kurds, have ended in a redefinition of Iraq's internal politics and its relations with neighboring states, principally Iran. The governing and rival factions in Iraq's power structure consider and calculate their own interests vis-à-vis the establishment and conduct of relations with each of the neighboring states. Iraq seems to be moving towards a kind of internal equilibrium in order to avoid a return to extremism and militarism, particularly in its relations with Iran. On the contrary, we have witnessed both Iranian and Iraqi officials embarking on extensive initiatives for establishing close contacts and joint coalitions at the regional level. At the same time, the U.S. wars in the Persian Gulf region have set into motion a series of geopolitical developments that have redefined the roles and power of regional actors. Iran and Turkey have emerged as major regional powers, and the future of Middle East political-security development is going to hinge largely on the roles they will play.<sup>6</sup>

## U.S. STRATEGY

Proponents of the application of balance of power in the Persian Gulf argue that Washington should follow a policy that does not allow any regional actor to achieve supremacy. They argue that the United States should pursue such a policy in order to preserve its national interests and security, especially to guarantee the free flow of energy.<sup>7</sup> According to this view, the United States has had a longstanding historical presence in the Persian Gulf, and there is little reason this state of affairs ought to change. Therefore, the United States should adopt a policy that protects its regional allies with a reliable security umbrella.<sup>8</sup> According to this perspective, such a balance of power can be framed in three different ways:

- **Maintenance of a direct U.S. presence in the region.** This was, in fact, the strategy that the administration of former U.S. President George W. Bush tried to pursue by resorting to military power and regime change, and by promoting American-style democracy in the region. However, this strategy failed because the United States has been unable to control the crisis in post-invasion Iraq, where conflict continues to rage after more than seven years. As previously mentioned, moreover, the reliance upon such a strategy has created a new security dilemma between Iran and the United States, the two main actors in the region. U.S. insistence on balancing Iran's power policy in the Persian Gulf has created security dilemmas between Iran and regional Arab states, such as Saudi Arabia, which although opposed to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, finally acquiesced. A consequence of this has been the further consolidation of a heavy U.S. military presence in the region.
- **Withdrawal of American forces, leaving security affairs to regional states.** This option is actually rooted in the traditional strategy of the United States in the Persian Gulf of having regional actors accept responsibility for preserving security. The United States deployed this strategy during the Nixon administration, as it pursued the so-called "twin-pillar" policy in which Iran and Saudi Arabia operated as military and financial pillars to assure stability and thwart the radical Arab regimes that were then in the ascendance, often with overt Soviet backing.<sup>9</sup> After the advent of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, this strategy collapsed. Iran no longer sought to be allied to the West — the United States, in particular. Subsequently, the situation in the Persian Gulf region changed dramatically. For instance, the strategic interests of the United States at the moment are significantly different from those in the past. U.S. policy makers are now faced with a new elusive and destructive phenomenon: the emergence of extremism and al-Qaeda terror activities, which have introduced a volatile threat to U.S. national security in the Persian Gulf region.
- **Establishment of a new balance of power.** From this perspective, according to Stephen Walt, "If the United States is not going to try and control the Persian Gulf itself and is not going to withdraw and leave it alone entirely, then the only alternative is to try and encourage a (new) balance of power there. This is not a perfect policy, perhaps, just the best alternative."<sup>10</sup> Proponents of this strategy argue that the Iran-Iraq War eroded, to a great extent, the power of these two major states, ending in some sort of balance of power. In keeping with this line of argument, one might suggest that the United States decided not to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime in the 1990 Persian Gulf War in order to ensure the continued counterweight to Iran by the Baathist regime. However, the adoption of such a misguided strategy compelled the United States to overthrow that regime more than a decade later, in 2003, albeit

at a heavy cost. This shift in the U.S. strategy has consequently led to new crises and instabilities in the region.

## THE NEW BALANCE OF POWER

Which regional actor will be capable of balancing Iran's power in the region now that Iraq has been eliminated from contention? The United States naturally is going to focus on Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Israel. But, do any of them have the necessary determination, capability and ambition to balance Iran strategically? Turkey, governed by the moderate Islamist AK party, is determined to strengthen its relations with Iran and play a positive role. Turkey's newly introduced foreign-policy strategy is predominantly based upon cooperation with Iran on strategic matters such as energy security, regional crisis resolution, and, most importantly, Iran's nuclear program.<sup>11</sup> Turkey desires cooperative relations with Iran and so has little interest in the kind of strategic balance of power that the United States is attempting to foster in the region. For instance, Turkey has recently endeavored to perform the role of mediator between Iran and the West regarding the issue of an Iranian uranium swap in order to persuade both sides to sit down at the negotiating table.

Saudi Arabia, despite being a very important regional actor, lacks the military, political and security capabilities to strategically balance Iran's power in the region, as well as the power to build the necessary coalitions to balance Iran. In any case, the Saudis might not wish to go down this road, since at the end of the day, the two states must learn to live in the same neighborhood without constantly jockeying for position and attempting to weaken one another. Moreover, history has shown that the Saudis, for the most part, prefer to use their leverage and power behind the scenes rather than engage in public rivalry.<sup>12</sup> Developments in post-invasion Iraq offer a good illustration: Saudi political and financial support were key in the success of the non-sectarian Al Iraqiya and of Iyad Allawi in Iraq's March 2010 parliamentary elections.<sup>13</sup>

Lastly, Israel is not willing to enter into a strategic balancing of Iran in the Persian Gulf. At present, its main strategic concerns relate to the political-security issues of the Levant, including its conflicts with the Palestinians, Hezbollah and Syria. Its other main concern is Iran's nuclear activities. The Israeli regime currently experiences hostile relations with a number of Arab states and parastatal entities, and opening up a new war front with Iran could result in catastrophic consequences for Israel and the broader region. The Israelis know well that waging war against Iran will anger the Islamic world and force pro-Iranian and Muslim forces such as Hezbollah and Hamas to react against the Jewish state.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, due to the existing domestic crises such as the inability to adequately deal with Hamas and the sentiments of global public opinion with respect to its disproportionate response to the Gaza flotilla crisis, Israel is not in a position to conduct a military operation against Iran in order to balance Iran's power in the region. Taking this into account, one can suggest that the Israeli regime prefers to remain behind the United States and continue its political pressure on Iran through pro-Israeli lobbies and the manipulation of public opinion.

The American wars in the Persian Gulf have fundamentally shifted the nature of threats, power, politics, security and the roles of regional actors. For instance, the increasing influence of Iraqi Shiites in their country's political structure and Hezbollah's "victory" in its 2006 war with Israel have greatly increased Iran's regional influence, while accompanying a diminution in the ability of Israel and Saudi Arabia to project their power into the region. This, in turn, has brought about a situation whereby the

United States has no choice other than to engage in direct and strategic rivalry with Iran. From Iran's perspective, the highly visible presence of American forces in the Persian Gulf is perceived as related to attempts at balancing Iran's power in the region. Arguably, it is for just such a reason that U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has introduced a new containment policy vis-à-vis Iran, predicated upon the establishment of a "nuclear security umbrella" for the Arab states of the Persian Gulf.<sup>15</sup> Such developments attest to the emergence of a new security dilemma in which the United States has to balance Iran's power and influence on its own initiative and through direct intervention in the Persian Gulf region.

## BALANCE OF SECURITY

Forgoing a new and costly security rivalry between Iran and the United States requires the introduction of a new political-security arrangement based on "balance of security," whereby primary actors distance themselves from the traditional balance of power. As previously mentioned, balance of power in the Persian Gulf is *offensive* in nature and premised on an increase in the relative power of states in a zero-sum game. It is also based on political and security demands that are rooted in revisionist policies.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, the balance of security setting in the Persian Gulf is *defensive* in nature and based on the increase of states' relative security in a win-win game. It is also based on strengthening cooperation between different actors and acceptance of the status quo, while trying to rein in the latter's shortcomings. Such a balance of security must first be established between Iran and the United States, the only two actors in the Persian Gulf that have the capability to engage in military activities.

As the cases of Iraq, Afghanistan and the Levant have shown, these two actors also have the potential to make coalitions and de facto alliances. For the United States, neutralizing the security threats against Iran is key to creating sustainable peace and stability in the region and to eliciting Iran's constructive cooperation in the context of its own national security and interests. Most of Iran's policies in the Persian Gulf are reactions to U.S. saber-rattling, especially to threats made by the Bush administration as it pursued a strategy of labeling Iran as the main threat in the region — a strategy aimed at creating a new coalition between the conservative Arab states and Israel in order to achieve U.S. strategic aims in the region, especially the conclusion of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the weakness of such threats at the rhetorical level, they have continued to appear in one form or another during the Obama administration, to the extent that Iran has enhanced its "interconnected security" strategy,<sup>18</sup> which considers any threat against its security as jeopardizing the security of the entire region. Iran's numerous military maneuvers indicate the increased level of tension with America. Such a strategy, which up to now may be regarded as successful, is based on the two concepts of "deterrence" and "offensive defense" through Iran's active presence in the region's politics<sup>19</sup> and mainly adapted to balance the security threats stemming from the heavy presence of U.S. troops in the Persian Gulf region. If security threats against Iran are withdrawn, however, Iranian foreign policy will switch to a win-win calculus, with the genuine possibility of expanding regional cooperation in a scenario in which the role and influence of other regional and global actors are accepted.

The political-security developments in post-invasion Iraq have shifted the nature of the balance of power, as well as the perspectives of allies and enemy actors towards the nature of the threat. At present, the balance of power has shifted to the benefit of Iran. The power distribution in Iraq is gradually shifting towards building strategic relations with Iran. As a result, Iraq is no longer perceived as a traditional

strategic balancer of Iran. Rather, it may be viewed as a prospective friend and ally. Likewise, the United States will eventually need to set aside its policies grounded in the use of military power and engage Iran by means of a new and more subtle strategy.

Due to the complexity of political-security issues in the region, especially after the Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine wars and their effects on the Persian Gulf region, U.S. policy makers must pay greater attention to the roles of regional and rival actors, such as Iran. This strategy, a species of “smart power,” has been supported and deftly applied by the Obama administration.<sup>20</sup> The new political-security structure of the Persian Gulf region should be redefined according to new developments. As alluded to above, this would entail a redefinition of Iran’s role. The Persian Gulf is the focus of Iran’s foreign-policy and defense strategy; it is considered part of Iran’s “internal security.”<sup>21</sup> Any attempt to define Iran as a looming source of insecurity will not be to the benefit of regional or transregional actors.

Furthermore, establishing an appropriate balance of security between Tehran and Washington is crucial, as the United States is scheduled to withdraw all of its military forces from Iraq in December 2011. Here, Iran can play a pivotal role in bringing about long-term stability in Iraq in the aftermath of the complete withdrawal of U.S. troops. Some U.S. Iraq experts, considering the vital geopolitical situation of the Islamic Republic and Tehran’s extensive influence among Iraqi political factions, believe that the Obama administration should come to agreement with Iran over Iraqi political-security issues before the complete withdrawal of American forces.<sup>22</sup> Due to the distribution of power in Iraq and the ethno-religious mixture of the population, Iraqi political elites are inevitably required to move towards coalition-building. Experiences during recent years have shown that the success of a coalition government is dependent on cooperation and agreement among the dominant political parties in Iraq, especially the Shiites. Results of the March 7, 2010, parliamentary elections once again revealed the sectarian nature of power and political structure in Iraq.<sup>23</sup>

Due to its close relationships with all the major Iraqi Shiite political factions, the Islamic Republic of Iran will play a vital and significant role in the viability and longevity of coalition governments there. An example of this close relationship in action was the invitation of the representatives of major Iraqi Shiite factions to Tehran immediately after the March 7, 2010, elections.<sup>24</sup> A delegation from Al-Iraqiya, an opposing faction, also later visited Tehran. At the conclusion of these visits, Iran announced its support for a coalition government, including all major Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish factions.<sup>25</sup> As experience shows, Iran’s mediating role in bringing together the Iraqi political factions and keeping their coalition intact has been key in the prolongation and success of coalition governments in post-invasion Iraq. Iranian officials have also always shown interest in cooperating with the United States in Iraq’s political-security issues and within the context of a win-win strategy. For instance, Iran entered three rounds of constructive negotiations with the United States during the Bush II era.<sup>26</sup>

## **IRAN’S NUCLEAR DILEMMA**

A burning question is, of course, how the maintenance of the balance of security can be made compatible with Iran’s nuclear program. Balance of security is substantively based on the concepts of conventional threat and deterrence. But the real challenge here relates to the issue of whether to include “intentions” from states’ assessment of the probability of hegemony.<sup>27</sup> In other words, the concept of threat and deterrence inhere in conventional power alone, and large concentrations of material capabilities should spark balancing behavior regardless of intentions. Regarding Iran’s nuclear program, the main

controversy relates to Iran's intentions. According to the Western view that is supported by the United States, conservative Arab regimes in the region and Israel, the main aim of Iran's nuclear activities is "weaponization" and nuclear "deterrence." If Iran were to obtain a nuclear weapon, this would throw out of balance the traditional power equilibrium, not just in the Persian Gulf, but in the Middle East at large. Iran would be able to enhance regional coalitions and de facto alliances with friendly states and political factions such as Syria, Hezbollah, Hamas and Iraqi Shiites. Such a condition would jeopardize the peace process between Israel and Palestine, and consequently weaken the moderates.

The main goal of this strategy is to keep the balance of power intact by containing Iran's increased role and power in the Middle East, with the Persian Gulf at its center. From the Western and especially the U.S. perspective, the preservation of the existing political-security trends in the Middle East will require containing Iran, and this is impossible without containing Iran's nuclear aspirations.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, introducing Iran as the main source of threat in the region will benefit Western interests. Such a strategy will keep intact the existing coalition of the Arab conservative regimes and Israel under the leadership of the United States. It will also add to the existing strategic political-security and economic dependency of the Arab states of the region on the West and the United States. This is the reason Secretary Clinton offered the U.S. nuclear security umbrella to the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. Similarly, the exclusion of Iran (and North Korea) from the U.S. nuclear-deterrent policy spelled out in President Obama's Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) is somehow linked to the issue of containing the expansion of Iran's role in the region and preserving the balance of power. By focusing on the necessity of deterring Iran by all possible means, including nuclear deterrence, one of the main goals of the new U.S. nuclear posture is to reiterate the U.S. commitment to protect the Arab states of the Persian Gulf from any future security threats.

By contrast, the Iranian explanation of its nuclear program finds its provenance in the balance of security and is said to have two chief aims: the "peaceful" use of nuclear energy and piecemeal global and Middle East nuclear disarmament. Iran's rhetorical and diplomatic efforts at all-out nuclear disarmament are meant to show that it precludes the concept of deterrence from its nuclear program. The concept of deterrence in Iran's defense strategy is only based on conventional military potentials and material capabilities. Tehran argues that nuclear weaponization will not bring security and cannot be used as a means of deterrence. President Ahmadinejad reiterated this policy<sup>29</sup> during the Tehran Nuclear Disarmament Conference (April 17-18, 2010), and Supreme Leader Grand Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, in a letter addressed to the conference, declared the use of nuclear weapons *haram* (religiously banned).<sup>30</sup>

In this context, Iran's nuclear activities and its efforts to master the independent nuclear fuel cycle ought not to be seen as related to the issue of deterrence. Iran's nuclear program, dating back to 1974, is aimed at diversifying energy sources and accessing reliable energy resources other than fossil fuels. This makes pre-eminent sense, given fluctuating energy prices and their negative impact on the Iranian economy, in tandem with the need to preserve existing hydrocarbon energy for future generations. Also relevant are issues of technological progress, as well as the national pride and status resulting from joining the nuclear club.<sup>31</sup> It was in this context that Iran initiated the Middle East Nuclear Disarmament Plan in 1974. Today, this strategy remains the backbone of Iran's nuclear program.

Iran is a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and insists that it is in full compliance with the demands set down by the IAEA.<sup>32</sup> The Iran-Turkey-Brazil uranium-swap deal (May

17, 2010) is an example in which Iran took into consideration all of the demands and concerns of the West for the sake of resuming nuclear negotiations. This agreement was in fact a massive step taken by Iran towards building trust with the international community, especially the United States.<sup>33</sup> In a recent development, and despite the adoption of UNSC sanctions resolution 1929, Iran agreed that talks regarding its nuclear program will start on September 2010.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, it argues that the main sources of insecurity in the region are the policies of foreign actors attempting to intervene in the affairs of regional states in pursuit of self-aggrandizement and to benefit their national interests and security. Meanwhile, the Israeli regime's possession of some 100-400 nuclear warheads<sup>35</sup> is seen as the main source of insecurity and the reason for the failure of all earlier moves toward regional disarmament. Viewed in this context, an important aim of Iran's nuclear program is the elimination of nuclear weapons and all-out nuclear disarmament in the Middle East and the subsystem of the Persian Gulf.

Lastly, Iran's nuclear strategy aims at creating a win-win balance of security. From Iran's perspective, the region's access to nuclear energy will be a major step towards achieving sustainable security.<sup>36</sup> In recent decades, the main reason behind starting wars and spreading tensions and crises in the region was foreign actors' desire to gain access to the sources of energy in the region. The region's access to nuclear energy will prevent further traditional conventional rivalries, which consumed a major part of the region's resources and energy for purchasing military hardware and the creation of political-security coalitions and alliances. This will itself be a major step toward sustainable economic development in the region.

Meanwhile, imagining the region without fossil-fuel resources in the coming decades will draw a dark cloud over the region's growing economic prospects, and this will ultimately lead the Arab states of the Persian Gulf to turn to the use of nuclear energy. On the basis of such a calculation, Arab states of the Persian Gulf such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar have realized that the acquisition of nuclear energy is necessary for their countries' sustainable development, and consequently signed a series of nuclear agreements with France.<sup>37</sup> According to one of these agreements, the UAE's first nuclear reactor will be inaugurated in the city of Abu Dhabi by 2017. Therefore, since the Arab states of the region seek to attain nuclear energy, they have essentially recognized Iran's legitimate rights for making use of peaceful nuclear energy.<sup>38</sup>

## **COLLECTIVE SECURITY**

Only when the existing bilateral security threats between Iran and the United States are balanced in the Persian Gulf will the establishment of a self-sustaining and peaceful political-security architecture based on a "balance of interests" be feasible. By stressing the collective security of all regional and transregional actors, the concept of balance of interests highlights the themes of energy security, collective security and economic interdependence of regional and transregional actors, with a general emphasis on commonalities and common interests. Meanwhile, new security measures ought to be based on a new definition and a more appropriate assessment of the real nature and sources of threats, as well as a more adequate acknowledgment of the main actors' roles. Realization of such a system will also require an evolution in the evaluation and conceptualization of longstanding and emerging threats. It will also require the development of new definitions for regional security challenges.

Irrespective of a potential change in the orientation, perception and conduct by actors vis-à-vis one another's roles and participation, a balance-of-interests arrangement in the Persian Gulf requires a serious

consideration of major issues: the inclusion of all major regional and transregional actors, the identification of the shared contexts of political-security threats, regional cooperation to reduce the role of foreign military forces, and the creation of mutual economic interdependence among major regional actors. The exclusion of pivotal actors such as Iran and Iraq in the past, together with defining a “threatening” role for them, has in the past been a major source of tension and rivalry. Given the political-security developments in post-invasion Iraq, continuing to pursue such a policy is neither feasible nor accepted by the main actors, namely Iran and Iraq. As the Iraq crisis has borne out, the logic of the security needs in the region is the localization of political-security arrangements. A move towards proportionality in the regional distribution of power and the convergence of common interests and attainments, integrating roles for all relevant actors commensurate with their sources of power, will be vital to any successful political-security architecture.

Meanwhile, a significant amount of political and security energy has been spent confronting the threats introduced by transregional actors, especially the United States. Some analysts agree that the active and highly visible presence of U.S. military forces in the region throughout the 1990s entailed incalculable security and political costs. It exacerbated the rifts and mistrust of regional states, some consequences of which include the preponderance of a regional arms race and threats emanating from increased terrorist operations, which continue to challenge the legitimacy of a number of Sunni Arab regimes. For example, al-Qaeda justifies its terrorist actions in Saudi Arabia and Jordan on the pretext of combating U.S. “puppet regimes” that have provided political, security and economic grounds for a protracted foreign presence in Islamic countries.<sup>39</sup>

Under the balance-of-power system, the main focus is on the conflicts of interests and existing discrepancies among Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. But, as argued, the nature of various threats in the current regional scenario has changed. Therefore, there is a need for mutual cooperation to confront new threats whose main costs are endured by the whole region. A redefinition of the chief regional actors’ threat perceptions to such an end is therefore more than worthwhile. For Iran, the threats are generally seen to emanate from Israeli military adventurism and the U.S. military presence on its national borders. As a consequence, Iran perceives the threats in a broad strategic framework. In contrast, the Arab states of the Persian Gulf view the security threat as deriving in large part from Iran’s growing role in the region.

In the end, no sustainable and harmonious regional system can achieve longevity without building political-security and economic interdependence among the region’s main actors. Because insecurity and instability in the region would be costly for both regional and transregional actors, they may induce them to alleviate tensions for their own benefit. Meanwhile, establishment of strategic relations among the region’s economies — including the creation of a common market to encourage commerce, services and technology exchange, the extension of oil and gas pipelines, the utilization of port facilities for joint ventures, the interconnection of banking systems, the promotion of trade and tourism, the establishment of joint shipping lines and air cargo companies, the removal of tariffs and customs duties and so forth — could provide grounds for economic interdependence with potentially transformative results. Such policies would, in turn, make countries accountable and responsible for upholding stability in the context of a collective-security system.

## **CONCLUSION**

The pursuit and implementation of a balance-of-power system in the Persian Gulf region has resulted in regional insecurity, confrontation, instability and tension, which have wasted resources, energies and wealth. The balance-of-power system has even had damaging outcomes for the United States. As long as there are continuous wars, crises and tensions in the region, it will remain a difficult and precarious environment for the United States to address regional crises such as the Israel-Palestinian peace process, democracy promotion and the establishment of sustainable peace and stability in the region, especially in the cases of Iraq and Afghanistan. As a result of new geopolitical developments in post-invasion Iraq, the system has ceased to be practical or workable and thus will have to give way to a solution that better reflects these new developments. Despite the fact that this strategy has come to naught, U.S. policy makers still consider it to be effective and may continue to pursue it.

Political developments in Iraq have changed the nature of power and politics in the Persian Gulf. This transformation is due to a shift in the balance of power, as well as a shift in the perspectives of allied and hostile actors toward the nature of the threats facing the region. The formation of a new regional political-security arrangement premised on the “balance of security” is inevitable. Such a political-security system would be defensive in nature and would result in greater regional cooperation and constructive rivalries. A new balance must first be established between Iran and the United States, the two powers able to engage in serious military operations and posing the most serious regional threats to one another. Divesting U.S. strategy towards Iran of its threatening and aggressive posturing is crucial.

Finally, the establishment of a balance of interests among regional and transregional actors will better serve to bring sustainable peace and security to the Persian Gulf. Instead of focusing on differences, a new security arrangement should primarily be based on a new definition of the nature of the threat, a precise understanding of the aims of all involved players, and an identification of common security concerns and interests. The need for cooperation among regional and transregional actors is not only desirable but, in the longer term, inevitable. With such new geopolitical changes, no regional security arrangements will succeed without the mutual cooperation of the main regional and transregional actors of the Persian Gulf region.

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Miller, “The International System and Regional Balance in the Middle East,” in *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*, T.V Paul, James J. Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann, eds. (Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 240.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>3</sup> William B. Quandt, “Security Arrangements in the Persian Gulf,” in Geoffrey Kemp and Janice Stein, eds., *Powderkeg in the Middle East* (Washington , D.C.: Association for the Advancement of Science, 1995), pp. 323-324.

<sup>4</sup> One of the main justifications advanced by the shah’s regime for Iran’s growing military expenditures was the fact that they were necessary to balance the threat posed by the Baathist regime. For further information, see Asaddollah Alam, *The Diaries of Alam* (Maziyar Publication, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> See Stephen Zunes, “U.S. Policy toward Political Islam,” *Foreign Policy in Focus*, September 12, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> Owen Matthews and Christopher Dickey, “Triumph of the Turks,” *Newsweek*, December 7, 2009, pp. 31-33.

<sup>7</sup> See Nicholas Burns, “Nicholas Burns, Former Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Speaks on the Future of the U.S.–Iran Relationship,” Press Release, Harvard University and Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, March, 11, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Walt, “How Not to Contain Iran,” *Foreign Policy*, March 5, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Regarding the aims and strategies of the United States in deploying this policy, see Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf* (Routledge, 2006), pp. 12-14.

<sup>10</sup> See Kayhan Barzegar, “Stephen Walt on the U.S., Iran, and the New Balance of Power in the Persian Gulf,” August 5, 2008, at: <http://www.belfercenter.org>.

<sup>11</sup> Ahmet Davutoglu, “Turkey-EU Relations: An Asset for Regional and Global Peace,” Lecture presented at the Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue, October 15, 2008; and Bulent Aras, “Turkey’s Soft Power,” *guardian.co.uk*, April 14, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> See Riyadh Mohammed, "The Heart of Allawi's Win," *The New York Times*, March 29, 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Roger Cohen, "Iran in Its Intricacy," *The New York Times*, March 4, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Mark Landler, "Clinton Raises U.S. Concerns of Military Power in Iran," *The New York Times*, February 15, 2010; David Blair, "Hillary Clinton Vows to Protect (Persian) Gulf States from Iran," telegraph.co.uk, July 22, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> See Jason W. Davidson, *The Origin of Revisionist and Status-quo States* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> For an elaboration on this argument, see Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett at [www.raceforiran.com](http://www.raceforiran.com).

<sup>18</sup> This defense strategy has repeatedly been asserted by Iran's high-ranking official such as Supreme Leader Grand Ayatollah Khamenei, Speaker of the Majlis Ali Larijani, Secretary of the National Security Council Saeed Jalili, and head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps [IRGC] Major General Jaafari. See "Iran's Leader Warns U.S. against Attack," MSNBC.com, February 8, 2007, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/17042605/>; "Iran: Middle East Security at Risk," CNN.com, February 8, 2007, [www.cnn.com/2007/world/meast/11/22/iran.nuclear/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2007/world/meast/11/22/iran.nuclear/index.html); and "IRGC Commander Gen. Mohammad Jaafari: If Attacked, Iran Will Target U.S. Forces in Neighboring Countries," MEMRI Special Dispatch, No. 1833, February 8, 2008, [http://www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page\\_archives&Area\\_sd&ID\\_SP183308](http://www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page_archives&Area_sd&ID_SP183308).

<sup>19</sup> Kayhan Barzegar, "Iran's Foreign Policy Strategy after Saddam," *The Washington Quarterly*, January 2010, pp. 175-176,185.

<sup>20</sup> See Richard L. Armitage and Joseph S. Nye, *CSIC Commission on Smart Power* (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> Kayhan Barzegar, "Analyzing Iran's Foreign Policy by Offensive and Defensive Realism Theory," *International Quarterly of Foreign Relations* (in Persian), Vol.1, No. 1, Spring 2009, pp. 128, 132-135.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Dreyfuss, "Obama, Iran and Iraq," *The Nation*, March 5, 2010 ; Ben Katcher, "Iran Needs a U.S.-Iran Deal," [www.raceforiran](http://www.raceforiran.com), March 5, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> See Deborah Amos, "Iraq's Political Chess Game," *Khaleej Times* (online), March 21, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Rod Nordland,"Iran Plays Host to Delegations after Iraq Elections," *The New York Times*, April 1, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Reza Amirmoghadam, "Only with a Coalition Government Iraq Can Pass through the Current Situation" (in Persian), *Fars News Agency*, April 26, 2010 (Ordibehesht 6, 1389).

<sup>26</sup> Kayhan Barzegar, "Iran's Foreign Policy in Post-Invasion Iraq," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 15, No.4, Winter 2008, p. 56.

<sup>27</sup> William C. Wohlforth, "Revisiting Balance of Power Theory in Central Eurasia," in *Balance Of Power Theory and Practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, op. cit., p. 215. Many neorealists such as Kenneth Waltz exclude "intentions" from their assessment of the probability of hegemony. See Wohlforth, op.cit., pp. 215-16.

<sup>28</sup> See Noam Chomsky "The Iranian Threat," June 29, 2010, <http://www.zcommunications.org/the-iranian-threat-by-noam-chomsky>.

<sup>29</sup> See the speech of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad at the International Conference on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation, Tehran, April 17-18, 2010, available at <http://www.mfa.gov.ir/cms/cms/Tehranicd/en/Files/Ahmadinejad>.

<sup>30</sup> See the message of Supreme Leader Grand Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei to the International Conference on Nuclear Disarmament, Tehran, April 17, 2010, available at <http://www.mfa.gov.ir/cms/cms/Tehranicd/en/Files/SupremeLeader>.

<sup>31</sup> Mehdi Askarieh, "A Case for Sustainable Development of Nuclear Energy and a Brief Account of Iran's Nuclear Programs," in Homa Katouzian and Hossein Shahidi, *Iran in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Routledge, 2008), p. 189.

<sup>32</sup> See CBS News interview with Ali Akbar Salehi, Chief of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, April 13, 2010, at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/04/13/world/main6390463.shtml>.

<sup>33</sup> Kayhan Barzegar, "Continuing the Win-Win Game," *Iranian Diplomacy*, June 17, 2010, <http://irdiplomacy.ir/index.php?Lang=en&Page=21&TypeId=&ArticleId=7826&BranchId=44&Action=ArticleBodyView>.

<sup>34</sup> See Robert Dreyfuss, "United States, Iran to Restart Talks," *The Nation*, July 29, 2010.

<sup>35</sup> Chuck Freilich, "Decision Time in Jerusalem," *Journal of International Security Affairs*, No.18, Spring 2010, p. 55.

<sup>36</sup> Remarks expressed by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad at the International Conference on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation, Tehran, April 17-18, 2010.

<sup>37</sup> See Mattew Fuhrmann, "Oil for Nukes — Mostly a Bad Idea," *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 29, 2008.

<sup>38</sup> Kayhan Barzegar, "Atom for Sustainable Development and Prestige," Center for Middle East Strategic Studies, <http://fa.merc.ir>; *IRNA*, (Iranian News Agency), <http://www.irna.ir/View/FullStory/?NewsId=1198763>.

<sup>39</sup> For an elaboration on this point, see Kayhan Barzegar, "New Terrorism and Human Security in the Middle East: Diverging Perceptions," in Georg Frerks and Berma Klein, eds., *Human Security and International Insecurity* (Wageningen Academic Publishers, 2007), pp. 131-34.