

Confrontation of the two competing strategies pursued by IR of IRAN & United State of AMERICA in the Middle-East

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Abstract: The current developments of the Mid-East region may be studied within the framework of the prevailing two competing strategies in the region: Middle-East US Strategy vs Islamic Republic Twenty-Year outlook Strategy. United States in its so called “Greater Mid-East” plan, alongside the menace arising from Sunni radicalism, construes the Shiite world as a main threat for it may turn in to a terrorist and destabilizing force, claiming that the order desired by the planners of the “Greater Mid- East plan” cannot be tolerated by this force. Strategically, this is an “Israel- oriented” order. In spite of certain modus operandi propounded in this plan i.e., helping the political, social and economic development of the region, the hidden reality behind this plan is, indeed, putting Israel as the pivot and center of that plan under the hegemonic order of the United States. On the other side, there is the Iranian Twenty – Year Development Outlook with the proposed goal of assuming “No, One Position” in the Mid-East region with its influencing indicator. This Outlook encompasses the Shiite world, as well as, those certain parts of the Sunni population that feel themselves duty-bound and observant to the anti-Israeli resistance, as the Iranian strategic depth. This confrontation has become more active due to some practical developments as follow: The practical link between the paradigm of anti-Israeli resistance and Shiite political and geo-political thought. The confrontation of the Shiite and Sunni political system- buildings after some revolutions called “Arab Spring “or “Islamic Spring” in Mid-East and North Africa regions. Confrontation of Iran and Saudi Arabia in geo-political fields of public movements (uprisings) aiming at protecting their own strategic depths, Establishment of a Shiite majority ruling in Iraq. Under these conditions, it is imperative that certain techniques be offered to modify the political and religion differences in the Islamic world and prevent undermining of Iranian strategy via using regional religious fissures through American strategy and also protect the geo-political position of the Shiite paradigm as well as boosting it through the soft and reflexive and simultaneously unity-oriented policies towards recent revolutionary developments.

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1. Introduction

Chain of developments in the Middle-East region particularly the Persian Gulf during the last two decades have put this important part of the world in the focus of many contrasts, conflicts, wars and even some collusions and conspiracies of the regional and global players. From cultural geography point of view, “ISLAM”, as well as, new wave of the indelicate Secularism of the West, has been proved as the necessary ingredients and components of the Samuel Huntington Crash of Civilizations theory. From political geography point of view, the Mid-East region is considered as one of the underdeveloped and backward areas of the world in the field of Democracy. Public demands for enjoying political rights and participation, in one hand and confrontation of the regional and ultra- regional democratic models, on the other hand, have turned this region in to an untapped

area for political challenges. In the field of geo-strategic, the struggling players of the region are pursuing the policy of consolidation and stabilization of their own positions vis-a-vis their rivals’. United States as a Superpower, is considering this key region of the world as an appropriate position for continuation of its hegemony. Iran and Saudi Arabia are managing their recent years of mutual cold war, while the minor players are thinking of creating a secure margin for their future, with serious concerns on developments of this transitional period. Finally, from economic geography point of view, the region, as the pole and center of energy, has given more complexity to different developments and provided them with a unique strategic depth.

The terror attacks of 9/11 at the first years of the third millennium acted as a catalyst in the disputes within this critical center. Though George Walker

Bush, the then neo-conservative US president, launched military campaigns toward the Middle-East to avenge the 9/11 attacks, but he was, indeed, intending to seize this opportunity to complete the unfinished mission and plan of his father and also of other extremist neo-cons, which had been designed as a new order for the Middle-East nine years earlier, but due to their defeat from Democrats in presidential election, the plan entitled “American Enterprise Project” was left unaccomplished. According to this project, for the sake of keeping its post cold war hegemony, US had to break down all the regional conflicting players within its strategic dominion via a series of military and security actions.

From the very beginning, the US- Iran confrontation, among all conflicting and non-conflicting positions in the region, seemed notable. These two regional and global powers had accumulated their thirty-five years of differences within the time limit of this changing regional situation, so that many analysts were considering this confrontation as the ultimate challenge. In the strategic American Enterprise Project, Iran, at the first stage, was supposed to be surrounded and encircled after Afghanistan and Iraq were captured. In the latter stage, the wings of this country, as a regional power had to be plucked in its strategic depth in Lebanon, Palestine and Syria, in order to prevent Iran, at the third stage and with the concentration of the policies and actions against the whole Iranian territory, from counteraction against Israel, utilizing its strategic depth in the region as a deterrent factor.

Moreover, the Shiite issue in different circles debating “Confrontation” seemed to be notable for certain major reasons as follow:

Considering and defining new wars by George W. Bush as religious missions of the US Administration and declaring war against whatever was named by President W. Bush, as Islamic Radicalism in both Shiite and Sunni creeds. All US Administrations consider the religious ruling and theocracy in Islamic Republic of Iran as problematic in the Mid-East region.

Introduction

The Muslim population in the world has reached to more than one billion, 20 percent of which, i.e. at least two hundred millions are Shiite.

Historically, though Shiite belief has originated from Arabic nations, distinctly from Iraq, promptly spread over Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, parts of India, and some other younger Islamic countries such as Lebanon and Azerbaijan. Shiism has been principally a political and spiritual phenomenon from its creation, it was supported, however, by Iranians in the first Islamic millennium, The followers of the Shiite creed, then, relying on their belief, were

confronting with the ruling Establishments. They also aroused the public to resist against the rulers in the Safaviite period. In spite of waning of Shiite position in both Qajar and Pahlavi periods, the spiritual power and also key role of the religion in political life of the inhabitants of the Mid-East region became notable and prominent. Also, due to recent developments of the region, such as changing the ruling political system in Iraq, the victorious wars of Lebanese Hizbollah with Israel, Shiite revolutionary movements and uprisings in Bahrain & Saudi Arabia, the global attentions have been again attracted to Shiite issue. Enjoying Shiism and ultimately Islam with the power of logic in “Confrontation and Resistance” in one hand and enjoying the power of the flexibility and interaction, from other hand, separate Shiism and ultimately Islam from other creeds and beliefs.

West, is also of this belief that the Arab Shiites, being kept in poverty and impoverishment by their relevant governments and are protesting against this situation, may come to power, in result of any possible change occurring in the political situation of the countries concerned. Moreover, the Shiite population in Arab world has been strategically located in the heart of the largest Mid-East oil fields and also in the immediate vicinity of Persian Gulf oil highways. In his book of “The Arab Shi’a: The forgotten Muslims”, Graham E. Fuller opines: “Theoretically, Arab Shiites can put most of the Persian Gulf oil fields under their own control by means of the Iranian help.”³

The main question:

The continuity of crisis in the Middle-East region is the sign of Confrontation of contradicting strategies. How is this confrontation analyzed?

The secondary questions:

1. What standing the Shiite geo-politics has in this Strategic Confrontation?
2. How can the reality of Shiite geo-political be utilized as an important factor in strengthening the strategic power of Islamic Republic of Iran?

The main hypothesis:

The twenty-year outlook of Iran & US greater Mid-East plan are two major conflicting strategies in Middle-East region that confrontation and even possible interactions of the regional and global players is analyzable in this framework.

The secondary hypothesis:

As the greater Mid-East plan considers the pro-Iran Shiite radicalism as one of the main two currents of supporting and carrying threat and terrorism in the region, Shiite geo-politics is construed as the main axis of the strategic confrontation between Iran and US.

Considering the dynamism as well as the logic prevailing over the political Shiite Islam, in contrast to

the Sunni Salafi hardening and also the imperialistic and pro-Israel nature of the Greater Mid-East plan, the goals and interests of Iran and Shiite population are secured within the framework of the “soft” behavioral patterns.

Research Method: Analytic with applied perception in policy-making & strategy planning

Research Findings:

Power struggle and realism through the Shiite aspiration and right

Confrontation of both strategies i.e. US Greater Mid-East plan vs Islamic Republic of Iran’s Twenty-Year Outlook composes the fundamental reality of Mid-East developments and other policies and strategies are situated either alone or in the margin of this grave competition.

In spite of the resumption of recent US political, military and security interventions in the region through combating the Sunni Salafism and extremism, now it is pursuing the policy of utilizing Sunni geopolitics against Iran as the center of Shiite geo-politics.

In this competition the software strategies may secure the interests and goals of the Shiite geo-politics more than the hardware ones. ” Violence, aggression, threat, and power-oriented play” are considered as the instruments of American Strategies versus “Tolerance, Interaction and also role- playing based on international laws” as the instruments of Iranian Strategy.

The Greater Middle – East region plan, enjoys a double nature of superficial and hidden dimensions, in which factors such as building democracy and development in the Islamic world are construed as the superficial and publically-declared dimension vs. factors such as consolidation and cementing US hegemony along with the strengthening of the power and security of Israel that are considered as the hidden, strategic and undeclared dimension of the plan. In spite of altered nature of the US competition with other re-structured powers of the East such as Russia and China, Western hegemonic power is pursuing the ultimate goal of complete reining of the Middle-East region within its own future strategic framework, so that the conflicting powers have no opportunity to renew a fresh confrontation of cold war- style in this critical region of the world.

Considering the weakness of the thinking foundations and also inflexibility of the political structures of the Sunni societies on the one hand and the dynamic, progressive and forward-looking foundations of Shiite communities on the other hand, it is clear that the political and superficial dimension of the said plan (The greater Mid-East region), in line with the both goals and interests of the Shiism, is of predominance over its strategic dimension.

The analysis

1. The beginning of 20 years of Strategic Confrontation:

The year 2005 can be relatively named as the simultaneous starting point for execution of the two major strategies of the Mid-East region i.e. “The Iranian 20-Year Outlook Development “ and “ The US Plan of Greater Middle-East” region.

Accessing to the strategic goal of “the no. 1 position in the Mid-East region” in both projects turns them inevitably into the major competitors in regional developments. The notable and vivid goal of the Iranian Outlook is that, Islamic Republic will be the First Power of the region in the final year of the execution of this long term project. This supremacy should definitely be applicable and standardized in all scientific, cultural, political, economic and defense fields. On the other hand, the Greater Mid-East plan, with no declared aim, pursues the same, but of course, confrontational goal. This plan is in fact, in continuity of the same democratization process through American model that was in top agenda of US officials in the post cold war area. In other words, all US presidents from both Democratic and Republican parties, in spite of their procedural differences showed sufficient adhesion to the advancement of this political strategy of United States while starting 21th. Century. According to the US strategy for the 21th. century, each and every instrument, even military one, should be utilized to keep the hegemony of that power.

2. Co-ordination with the action plan against Iran, completion of the unfinished project of American Enterprise.

In the year 1991, George Bush Administration, through the action plan of Enterprise Institute, named overtly Islamic Republic of Iran as the final goal of the US administration’s chain of actions for interference in and overthrowing. According to this plan that was given to Defense Ministry (Pentagon) for execution, United States should manage to clip Iran’s wings in its depth in Palestine, Lebanon and Syria through joint military actions with its regional allies such as Israel, just after military aggression and establishing its own military bases in Iraq and Afghanistan and in the final stage, manage to attack Iran. Thus, different scenarios of action against Iran are formed within this framework.⁴

The defeat of George Bush (The Father) after US attack on Iraq, caused discontinuing of the plan execution by the Republicans. But just eight years later, Republicans resumed power with George W. Bush as US President, failing Democratization policy of Bill Clinton. Republicans, however, put the completion of the unfinished project of “Enterprise” on their top agenda again, using 9/11 terror attacks as a catalyst. So that, the wars of US and Israel against Iraq,

Afghanistan, Palestine, Lebanon, and also their support to violent events in Syria cannot be assessed beyond the realm of the strategic confrontation of Iran and United States.

The geopolitical position of “Sunnis” in Iran- US strategic confrontation.

Generally, three kinds of political players are recognizable in “Sunni” geopolitics:

Governments and political officials of Arab States.

This part of Sunni geopolitics is represented by Arab League in international arena and Persian Gulf Cooperation Council at regional level. Arab governments are in the fields relevant to the “ Power” are considered as supporters of the American Strategy, but in the software politics they are considered as the weak points of that strategy. In the power equations, they often either act as members of the NATO plan of “Cooperation for peace” or have signed military and security agreements with US. Saudi Arabia is considered as the West safety valve against the political tides and fluctuations of the oil and energy sectors and Egypt was meant to be as a major obstacle facing Islamic radical movements against Israel, the role faced by Egypt revolutionary government as a precondition to be accepted by the West. And also Iraq in Saddam period was supposed to restrain Iran militarily, so one of the reasons Iraq encountered with the rage and indignation of the West, as well as, Arab reactionary governments was nonperforming of this role in the long term.⁵

The friendly governments are considered as weak points of US regional policy within the framework of international standards, since duality and divergence in strategic coordination of the Arab undemocratic rulers and systems with US, in one hand, and public democratic demands for political participation in these countries, from the other hand, have caused the Greater Mid East plan to be internally paradoxical.

b. The people in the Arab countries that generally have had democratic concerns just and after the Islamic (or Arab) spring began. This part of the population in Arab States are considered as the main addressee of the said plan, and of the Islamic Revolution Pattern and also Iran’s political Islam. Indeed they have mostly turned into a serious (virtual) reality in regional developments, using figurative space.

When discussing on political positions of the Arab nations, the friendly states are considered as the weak points of the US regional policy, both within the standards frameworks and according to the Greater Middle East Plan.

b. Extremist terrorism, Al Qaeda, Taliban, armed militia in Iraq and north Africa, Jondollah in eastern Iran and

Terror acts of these groups from explosion of trade towers in New York City to suicide attacks and specially the utilizing any ruling and security vacuum in Islamic countries have turned this collection in to a de facto threat in Middle East and North Africa.

In contrast, the Shiite geo-politics lacks the required capacity and conditions for forming terror attacks ideologically, philosophically, religiously and even with view to its strategic vision, in spite of present analysis within the Greater Mid-East plan. As an indicator, among 42 terror groups stipulated in annual reports of US Foreign Ministry, there are 27 Islamic groups from which only one group i.e. Lebanese Hizbollah is Shiite.

In this direction, US managed to choose a new definition for its political behavior, referred to by George W. Bush in his January 27 speech: “As we are confronting with the militant Sunnis, we also manage to combat the militant Shiites”. Thenceforth, from American viewpoint, there are both moderate and radical forces in the region and US shall confront the militant groups with the help of the moderates. According to the plan of Greater Mid-East region, moderate forces or states are those who have accepted the circumstances and necessities of this plan and have adjusted their own foreign strategies based on US ultra-regional strategy. In fact, joining some Arab states to US anti-Iranian policies occurred within the framework of the ultimatum-oriented call by George W. Bush.

There is, however, another analysis in this regard, according to which, US can pursue different policies in various countries based on diversities in the goals of the varied Shiite groups and communities. According to this analysis, Shiite minorities have politically reformatory demands that can be met within the framework of the goals concerning the reform of the political structure of the Greater Mid-East plan. So, through approaching these communities, the Sunni Salafi States can be forced to reform their political structure and also the political motions of Shiites can be prevented from being monopolized and becoming radicalized by Iran.⁶

This conception, however, can be influenced by certain time conditions. Graham Fuller, former director general for planning of CIA was among the proponents of this strategy. He presented his relevant report (strategy) in 2003. In the same year, in spite of defeating Taliban, US was involved in combating Al-Qaeda and Taliban terrorism in Afghanistan, while the American war and capture of Iraq had suffered ambiguous circumstances through revengeful actions by Arab Sunni minority affiliated to Saddam. Moreover, some Arab states such as Saudi Arabia and also some Sunni ideological leaders, and especially religious schools (seminaries) keep doing whatever

was considered by the West as terrorist training and protection act. But just after relative passing and conquering both Iraq and Afghanistan embankments, Iran and its strategic depth in near borders of Israel put in the focus of attacks. Anti-Shiite policies strengthened and Arab conservative and reactionary leaders were encouraged to participate at this final battle in support of the West. As a matter of fact, recent developments of the Middle-East region have activated the fissure of the US-Iran Confrontation for another time. This confrontation is rooted in the Islamic Revolution in 1979 by which Iran exited from the strategic domain of the West through a movement motivated by political Islam. Since then, US pursue the policy of returning Iran to its former strategic domain. Since the victory of the Iranian Islamic revolution and especially since the imposed war by Iraq and its western and Arab allies against Iran, the Islamic Republic adjusted its foreign policy and defense strategy in line with the analysis of “inevitability of the future confrontations with ultra-regional foes”. This feature together with the nature of the ultra-national pattern of the Islamic Republic paved the way for development of the country strategic depth. While the inability of the Middle – East peace process strategy in ending the Arab-Israel tensions caused Iranian foreign policy strategy to find serious proponents among Sunni communities of states like Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt and Syria alongside the Shiite populations of the region.⁷

So, some thinkers like “Valliollah Nasr” and “Francois Thule, opined that Iran to America is considered as a greater threat than atomic bomb or any de facto threat to Israel, because Iran is playing the role of monitoring and managing the populations and communities opposing the US hegemonic strategy in the Middle East. This is a strategic opportunity never attained by any conflicting power but the Communist former Russia. In Thule’s opinion, in a region that is unique from geo-political, geo-energy and relevant economy and trade point of view, Iran is playing the chief role of the Islamic awakening and even playing more important role of being as the third world speaker. Graham Fuller names Iran as the “world Kiblah” and also the American anti-Islam scholar, Martin Cramer, warns against the “Shiism” rebellious capacities, referring to the Iranian revolution background and claiming the country’s foreign policy as radical.⁸

“Foazi Gergis” and “Esposito” are of this belief that Iranian Shiism due to enjoying a dynamic cultural and revolutionary ideology has the capacity to assume and play the role of stimulating the feelings, pride and political behaviors of the Muslim communities and just for this reason, has been able to incite the

sensitivities of the West.⁹

Discussion

35 years of US-Iran conflicting foreign policies has led to the maintaining, cementing and highlighting the philosophical, ideological and strategic challenges between political Islam, in one hand and US secular pattern as well as hard and rough foreign policy on the other hand. Sunni Salafism failure in Afghanistan, Iraq and also occurring some revolutions and reforms imposed on a huge part of the Arab Middle-East countries, though, have provided new spaces for Iran and Shiites in the region, in ultra-regional level, however, both Iran and the West front, leading by US, are approaching a de facto and inevitable confrontation.

Under this condition, the US elite are of diverse opinions on both hard and soft options, i.e trade, economic and diplomatic instruments vs military ones. Despite, no war has yet occurred between the two countries, but military action against Iran, has always had staunch proponents in the US.¹⁰

In the year of US election, there was no calculation of turning “Iran” issue into the main subject of US foreign policy. After winning of Barak Hussein Obama, the approach of patience, along with the policy of imposing pressure and sanctions against Iran were adopted. Recent Iranian presidential elections, however, has brought up a critical atmosphere for the country, whose analysis, is out of patience here. Generally speaking, these elections have provided two acknowledgeable achievements for Iranians:

1. demonstration of a decent and ripen democracy in the Mid-East region, just in a situation that some states from Turkey and Egypt to Arab conservative kingdoms are encountering serious political crisis.

Public votes to political change which clearly indicates the full capacity of the elites of the Iranian political system. The prevailing analysis after the election was summarized in this expression : “such people and such government and president like this cannot be ignored “. Under current conditions, not only the limited space in support of the alleged Israeli military action against Iran was interrupted, but also, serious doubts toward the continuation of the US-oriented sanctions imposed by the West against Iran were appeared. Yet, under inevitable situations, with any competition in the software fields, the more power for maneuvering and action for Iran will be available. This capacity is defendable within the elements as follow:

Different indications related to the development process of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the peace time after Iran – Iraq war were promoted. Specially, 24

years after the war, certain elements such as cementing the development infrastructures of elite training, security, trade and transit, the favorable situation of the neighborhood with the countries and regions like Iraq, Turkey, Central Asia, Caucuses, and definitely the unique position of Iran in the global stabilized energy market have paved the way for realization of the Iranian 20-Year Outlook plan. Upon ending the Iraqi imposed war against Iran, the Islamic Republic, through adopting proper policies, refrained from entering in to 3 battlefields: a) The coalition war with Iraq in 1991, b) stimulating the fight against Taliban in Afghanistan in 1994 and recent Israeli war against Lebanon aimed at Hizbollah destruction known as 33-day war. In spite of the difference between the current situation and the three foresaid periods, with refraining from increasing the crises and while keeping the necessary defense readiness, this period can be passed. Indeed, with respect to the prolonging of the “taboo-like” crisis between Iran and US, the strong points of some regional competing players (such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and even Pakistan) toward Iran and also some weak points in public diplomacy and détente policy of Iran’s foreign policy, the issue of the “tension with West” has been exaggerated in number of indications, while, the main threats facing the interests of the West, such as Salafism, Arab undemocratic political systems, and suicide terrorism have been covered by Iranian issue. Both Iraq and Afghanistan developments have showed that dragging the West into the ambit of its own real challenge causes forming a kind of “co-beneficiary” foreign policy between Iran and West.¹¹, though the both parties were not able to utilize their parallel interests in the past crises as a foundation stone for establishing mutual new and fresh ties.

The US plan of “Greater Middle-East” region has very usable appropriate capacities for Iranian foreign policy. “Democratization” in Arab countries have to be turned in to a definitive process. Of course, doubts about the chief goals of the hegemonic power of the US in this plan continuing from the past are undeniable.¹², but the experiences of the countries like Iraq, Afghanistan, Egypt, Tunisia and Bahrain shows that any kind of revolutionary and democratic change in Arab world will result in strengthening the existential space of the Iranian foreign policy. The current situation of the Middle-East region is comparable with the ones of the 1970 decade, in which United States within the framework of the Carter Human Rights doctrine provided a situation in international arena, utilized by Iranian then revolutionaries. Now, the Iranian Islamic Revolution has brought US toward adopting the policy of supporting these regional reformist and revolutionary developments in a conservative manner. Prevailing

paradigms, however, show that US have to tolerate some parts of the consequences of the reforms declared in the Greater Mid-East plan inevitably. Moreover, regional developments, like Iraq issue, have to be surveyed in two steps. The first one is the collapse of the traditional structures as the parallel goal of both Iran and US, and the second step is presenting the substitute paradigms and patterns that is considered as the stage of natural competition of the political paradigms which are intrinsically void of hardware wars, practical consequences of which are considered to be in line with the Islamic Republic political aims due to its more proximities to Islamic countries.

Within the framework of these developments, “Shiism” as a part of the Islamic Republic strategic depth will be provided with a better existential space. The nature of the Shiite goals in different Islamic countries are reformatory. For instance, in contrast to Libya and Syria cases, in Bahrain, Shiites, in spite of their majority population, have prevented their motion of democracy seeking to be diverted toward armed actions. Considering the internal situation of this small country as well as the regional and international conditions, this strategy, will finally result in the recognition of the Shiite population rights there. Adopting any tough strategy, by Islamic Republic, in respect to the developments of the countries with influential Shiite majority or minority will lead to distancing of these populations from their political aims. During last two years, on this pretext, certain suppressive policies have been adopted against Shiite revolutionaries in Bahrain, while the ultimate common aim of the both Sunni and Shiite populations in Islamic world is a definite political desire and adjusting or changing this obvious reality in to a religious rift is considered a reactionary and Salafi strategy and plan of action.

Iran should manage to turn strengthening of the indicators of the “Religious Democracy” in to the axis of its soft strategy towards Islamic world. The need and desire for democracy and political participation is a real, dynamic, continual and enthusiastic demand among the Muslim people, and the youth, in particular, which has practically turned in to an irreversible current. The American plan of the Greater Middle-East region has, indeed, no capacity to meet this genuine demand. Because in this plan, democracy is merely a superficial and sham cover and crust of the “Israel-oriented” strategy of the West in which the western models like in Turkey is not also able to influence this current deeply. The soft and non-confrontational export of the Iranian religious democracy can be used as a winning card to influence future developments. In order for this important point to be realized, it is necessary to consider following

delicate issues: Refraining from changing the public demand for political participation and democracy seeking process in to sectarian conflicts between Shiite and Sunni communities and also refraining from progressivism and Salafism.

Realization and applying the religious democracy doctrine in the Islamic Republic, with respect to its claim of being a model and pattern for regional countries and also refraining from differences and disputes which may undermine the constitutional and electoral infrastructures of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Keeping a delicate balance between the foreign policy based on détente with Islamic countries and presenting the paradigm of the religious democracy for the people of these countries.

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