

# Middle Eastern Situation in a Changing World<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *With the changes of the international situation, the Obama administration has adjusted its foreign policy. Although the biggest change happens in the US Middle East policy, what has changed is not its strategy but tactics or manoeuvres. The adjusted Middle East policy is unlikely to be implemented in practice. The decline of the national power of the US weakens its leading role in the Middle East issue. Despite their recent development, hot-spot issues in the "Greater Middle East" such as the Palestine-Israel conflicts, the Afghan War, the Iraqi War and the Iranian nuclear issue shall anticipate no easy resolution because of their complexity and involution.*

**Key Words:** *International Situation; US; Policy Adjustment; Greater Middle East; Hot-spot Issues*

The international situation is undergoing changes today under the deep-felt influence brought about by the financial crisis, which first started in the US, and the consequent global economic recession. The most eye-catching changes are as follows. Firstly, the overall national strength of the only Superpower, the US, has decreased and its hegemonic status is undermined. Secondly, the rising of new countries represented by the Four Countries of "Brics" indicates changes of the national strength balance between the developing countries in the Southern hemisphere and the developed countries in the Northern hemisphere. Thirdly, new revolutions are brewing in both the international situation and the international order. Taking reality into consideration after his election, Obama has adjusted the foreign policy of his predecessor President Bush. "No nation can meet the world's challenges alone," admitted the Obama government. Meanwhile, it emphasized that "no challenge can be met without America."<sup>3</sup> On September 23, 2009, President Obama pointed out in his remarks to the United Nations General Assembly, "I took office at a time when many around the world had come to view America with skepticism and distrust. Part of this was due to misperceptions and misinformation about my country. Part of this was due to opposition to specific policies, and a belief that on certain critical issues, America has acted unilaterally,

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<sup>3</sup> Council on Foreign Relations Address by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, July 30, 2009.

without regard for the interests of others. And this has fed an almost reflexive anti-Americanism, which too often has served as an excuse for collective inaction." The above remarks suggest that American leaders have realized the ongoing changes of the international situation. No doubt that the transformation of the international situation will also go through a process of qualitative change from quantitative. At present, the US still remains a Superpower with the strongest overall national strength and a leading role in many international affairs. Yet it also faces increasing difficulties, challenges or even containment. It's a known fact that the US feels it harder to act as it pleases. To sum up, the factors that stimulated the Obama government to adjust its foreign policy are as follows. Above all, compared with when President Bush took office, the national strength of US has obviously declined. Second, the priority of the Obama administration is for the moment to tackle the financial crisis and economic recession. Third, the foreign policy of the Bush administration must be changed because it has failed in many fields and plunged the country into a predicament. Finally, Obama will for sure act differently since his liberalism is nothing like the new conservatism cherished by President Bush.

## **I. Biggest Change in US Foreign Policy: the Middle East**

### **A). Changes of US anti-terrorism policy**

The Obama administration has given up on "global anti-terrorism" and decided to redefine anti-terror war. Although it still attaches much attention to anti-terrorism, the Obama administration chooses to carry out "necessary" military actions in certain areas with limited forces. In contrast, the Bush administration gave top priority to anti-terrorism and regarded it as its security strategy, which must be realized mainly by military means and implemented across the world. The Obama administration shifted its major battlefield of anti-terrorism from Iraq to Afghanistan, pulling away its troops while deploying more troops to Afghanistan. Earlier when Obama was running for the presidency he criticized the Bush administration, arguing that the Iraq War was a mistake and Afghanistan was so overlooked that Al Qaeda remained at large and Taliban forces returned. The Obama administration insisted that anti-terrorism shall not rely merely on military means and a "dual-track" strategy must be pushed forward. In addition to military actions, "political, economic and social should join hands together to wipe out terrorism from its soil and soft power should be used to warn people to stay away from extremism."<sup>4</sup>

### **B). US paying more attentions to diplomacy, political negotiation, contact and dialogue**

"Carrot and stick", a combination of rewards and punishment has been a

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<sup>4</sup> "US to Enforce a 'Dual-Track' Anti-terrorism Strategy," *People's Daily*, August 8, 2009.

traditional foreign policy of US. The Bush administration, addicted to the use of force, often threw about the "stick" to take "preemptive action". To execute its "regime change" policy, it launched two wars in succession, bringing wars to the Middle East and the world and also dragging US into a predicament. All this has damaged the image of US very badly. American Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stressed the use of "smart power", saying, "smart power means a combination of diplomatic, economic, military and legal power."<sup>5</sup> US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates also said that the Iraq intelligence mistake reminds the American president that he'd better be more careful before he decides to take any "preemptive action"<sup>6</sup>. After taking office, Obama reiterated that US would extend a democratic hand if Iranian leaders could unclench their fist. Of course, the Obama administration has not and will unlikely abandon the use of force. It has been proved by its deploying more troops to Afghanistan and threatening to impose tougher sanctions on Iran. "The United States has the right to take unilateral actions against those countries which intend to undermine our goals," said Obama. In other words, the Obama administration will pick up sanctions, regime change or military actions if necessary but with more caution than the Bush administration in terms of the use of force.

### **C). US trying to improve its relations with Arab countries and the Islam world**

After 9/11, President Bush declared a global war against terrorism and pledged to launch a "New Crusade" against the "Islam-Fascism", criticizing Islam in public for terrorism. He also made it a point that the absence of democracy is the root of terrorism in the Middle East area. In order to promote "democracy" and eradicate terrorism in the Middle East, the Bush administration launched and vigorously implemented the "Greater Middle East Initiative". The Bush administration started the War in Afghanistan and later the War in Iraq, taking sides for Israel but neglecting the Palestine issue as it had been. What the Bush administration had done resulted in strong anti-Americanism among the Arab and Islamic people who had had a grudge against US. Since the "Greater Middle East Initiative" threatened the reign of leaders of major Arab states such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, which had been on good terms with US, it would draw ill feeling in these countries for sure. For some time US has been utterly deserted and isolated in the Arab-Islam world. Obama gave an interview to an Arab TV station just days after taking office. With some self-criticism, he admitted that the United States had been pointing fingers at the Arab world since the beginning and said that US should listen to others first.<sup>7</sup> On June 4, 2009 Obama delivered a speech at Cairo University during his visit to Egypt and set forth that US was seeking a new beginning between the United States and Muslim countries. He said, "I've come here

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<sup>5</sup> "Hillary: US needs smart power," *Xinmin Evening News*, January 14, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> "US Is Careful with Preventative Action," *Reference News*, March 14, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> "No More Pointing Fingers at the Middle East," *Xinmin Evening News*, January 28, 2009.

to Cairo to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and mutual respect, and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive and need not be in competition." "...firm in my belief that the interests we share as human beings are far more powerful than the forces that drive us apart." "And I consider it part of my responsibility as President of the United States to fight against negative stereotypes of Islam wherever they appear." <sup>8</sup>He made it clear that his administration will not label terrorism on Islam and emphasized that US"... will do so in partnership with Muslim communities which are also threatened," and make efforts so "the extremists are isolated and unwelcome in Muslim communities."<sup>9</sup> The Obama administration will continue to propagandize and promote American democracy and freedom although it has ceased to carry on with the "Greater Middle East Initiative" by force. He highlighted that "democracy cannot be imposed on by any nation from the outside" and "Each country will pursue a path rooted in the culture of its people and in its past traditions."<sup>10</sup>

**D). US seeking cooperation and support from allies, large states, the UN and large regional states and treating unilateralism with caution**

The Obama administration has realized that unilateralism can bring neither popularity nor solutions to the difficulties it faces. During the war in Afghanistan, the United States had to persuade other NATO members to deploy more troops; it also needed the cooperation of Pakistan, Russia and Central Asian countries and even a logistic channel in Iran. In regard to the Iran nuclear issue, it needed not only the support of UK, France and Germany but also the cooperation of China and Russia. After the pulling out of American troops, the situation in Iraq would never go stable without the cooperation of neighboring states of Iraq. In the absence of international support and the recognition of Arab countries, the peace talk between Palestine and Israel would not be a success. In terms of anti-terrorism, the United States needs even more understanding and support of Arab countries and the Islamic world. It must be noted that the precondition that US should keep its leadership and other countries should support its policies would still be there even if it turned to "multilateralism".

**E). US adjusting priority list of Greater Middle East hot-spots**

The willful ignorance of the Bush administration toward Palestine met with strong dissatisfaction in the Arab-Islam world and criticism in the international community. Not until the end of his tenure as president did Bush decide to call the Annapolis Middle East Peace Conference. Yet Bush did achieve something in terms

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<sup>8</sup> Remarks by Obama on a New Beginning, June 8, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Remarks of Obama to the General Assembly of UN, September 28, 2009.

of Palestine-Israel peace talks. As President of US, he was the first to put forward a "two-state solution" for the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts. Taking over this solution, President Obama named a Special Envoy for the Middle East three days after he became president. The second visit Hillary Clinton made as Secretary of State was to the Middle East. With a more positive attitude toward Palestine-Israel peace talks, the Obama administration hopes to improve the image of US in the Arab-Islam world. Shifting its focus of anti-terrorism to Afghanistan, the Obama administration urged Pakistan to cooperate with American military actions in Afghanistan and later on announced an "Afghanistan-Pakistan Strategy". The concept of Greater Middle East relates Afghanistan, Pakistan and even Central Asian areas to the hot-spots in the Middle East. Stability in Afghanistan has now become top priority of US. President Obama reiterated in his speech during the UN general assembly that US would end the war in Iraq responsibly and would not "give up" Iraq. The United States now concerns mainly about Iran among all the hot-spots. On the one hand, US objects Iran's nuclear weapon ambitions; on the other hand, it worries more over Iran's increasing influence in the Middle East, which might interrupt or damage its Middle East strategy.

## **II. Evaluation of US Middle East Policy Adjustment**

### **A). Policy adjustment instead of strategy adjustment**

Taking 9/11 as an excuse and pretext, the Bush administration launched a global war on terrorism. It overthrew the Taliban regime in Afghanistan then invaded Iraq. If it were not for the predicament US found itself stuck in, the flames of war could spread further. The Bush administration took the trouble to smash the old in the Middle East and imposed American democracy so as to strengthen the hegemony of US in the area. Well, Obama tried to stabilize the situation in the Middle East by emphasizing diplomacy, negotiation and dialogue and ease up conflicts by extending friendship to the Arab-Islam world and improving the image of US, in the hope of turning around its situation in the Middle East and maintaining its leadership and hegemony in this region. To make sure of its control and hegemony in the Middle East has been the consistent strategic goal of all previous American governments, which remains unchanged and may continue to be so for quite some time. What President Obama has changed is simply the ways of achieving this goal.

### **B). The Middle East still important in the global strategy of US**

The Middle East has been playing an important role in the global strategy of US. President Bush gave priority to anti-terrorism and nuclear non-proliferation in the US security strategy and foreign policy, while regarded the Middle East as the key area in this regard. The theory about "US strategy shift" is by no means

groundless. However, it's a known fact that the focus of US anti-terrorism has moved to Afghanistan and the United States pays more attention to the nuclear issue in Iran than that in DPRK. Obama has made repeated promises about promoting the Palestine-Israel peace talks and he is expected to stick to his commitment. Although US will pull out of Iraq sooner or later, it cannot turn a blind eye to the worsening situation in Iraq. There's no easy solution to any hot-spot in the Greater Middle East and the pressure on US shows no sign of decrease. It seems too early to assert that US strategy has moved eastward. Even if it happens, US will never give up this area considering the rich oil and gas resources and the significant strategic position of the Middle East. The hot-spots in the Greater Middle East are still playing an important part in US security strategy and foreign policy. The United States will continue to inject considerable military and diplomatic forces in this area.

**C). The Middle East policy of Obama unlikely to be fully implemented**

As a whole, the policies of the Obama administration, if carried out in order, should contribute to the stability of the Middle East for the moment except that the war in Afghanistan will aggravate and tension may increase in the long run. Nevertheless, the policies ever announced by US have always turned out to be somewhat different in practice. Firstly, US has not and is unlikely to give up its "leadership" and its strategic goal of hegemony across the world. This means it is impossible for US to treat other countries equally, respect each other and not to interfere with internal affairs or others. Second, there's strong domestic opposition against the foreign policy of the Obama administration and especially its adjustment of US Middle East policy. Third, the decline of the national strength of US has weakened its leadership. US seems lack of ability to promote the solution of hot-spot issues in the Greater Middle East.

**D). Hot-spot issues tough to solve and unstable factors in the Middle East**

The Palestine-Israel conflicts, the nuclear issue in Iran, the chaos in Iraq and the war in Afghanistan are all age-long problems, entangled with various conflicts and disputes. It is really difficult to solve any of them. The Middle East states, inconfident about the credibility of the US policy adjustment, prefer to wait and see. Actually US has never been able to control the hot-spot issues in the Greater Middle East, many of which may even get hotter. It's rather difficult to realize comprehensive stability in the Middle East.

**E). US coworking and fighting with other powers in the Middle East**

On the one hand, US needs the support and cooperation of other powers; on the other hand, it fears the increasing influence of other powers may undermine its leadership in the Middle East. European countries, allies of US, also have

disagreement or conflicts with US in regard to hot-spot issues in the Middle East. For instance, European countries have made it clear that they are against the use of force in Iran. In terms of the Palestine-Israel conflicts, they are stricter with Israel. As for the Afghan issue, they have more to concern so they are unwilling to get their country involved in too many military missions. In their cooperation with US, the European powers have lost no chance of raising their voice and influence in the Middle East and more economic gains. With the recovery of its national strength, Russia tries to return to the Middle East. It has quite a lot of disputes and disagreements with US over interests and policy-making although they do have some interests in common. The anti-Americanism among the Arab-Islam people once surged because of the Middle East policy of the Bush administration. In March 2008, a survey of six Arab countries including Saudi Arabia and Egypt by the University of Maryland and Zogby International showed that 83% of Arabs held an unfavorable attitude toward US.<sup>11</sup> In June 2009, a public opinion poll in 11 Arab countries conducted by Gallup showed that the approval ratings of Obama were up 17% and 19% in Egypt and Saudi Arabia respectively from the last measurements of Bush's term. However, his approval ratings in these countries were only 29% and 25% respectively.<sup>12</sup> The Obama administration still has a long way to go before it can fundamentally improve the image of US in the Arab-Islamic world. Although the Arab countries are all suspicious about US, they also depend on the latter. They try to avoid any head-on confrontation with US. So they fear that Iran may possess nuclear weapons but also make it explicit that they disapprove the use of force on Iran. Besides, they've already refused to join the "moderate national league" which aims at isolating Iran. At the same time, they declare that they object Iran's nuclear ambitions. They criticize US for taking sides with Israel yet also hopes US can compel Israel to solve the Palestine problem. They welcome the pulling out of American troops from Iraq while they are afraid a civil war might break out in Iraq, which will be a threat to the stability of this area. Although the Arab countries have shown a stronger wish for boosting their strength through concerted efforts, they often find their actions interrupted by their disagreements. Focusing on their ties with US, they also engaged themselves in all-round diplomacy and attach much importance to their relations with China and other Asian countries.

### **III. The Outlook of the Four Major Hot-spot Issues in the Greater Middle East**

#### **A). The Afghan war not to end soon**

American soldiers have been fighting in Afghanistan for eight years, yet they

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<sup>11</sup> "83% Arabs Dislike US," *Global Times*, April 21, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> "Laden Criticizes Obama's Middle East Visit," *Global Times*, June 4, 2009.

have neither caught Osama bin Laden the leader of al-Qaeda nor prevented Taliban from returning. Now the Taliban has established permanent presence in 54% of Afghanistan and frequent exposure in another 38% of the land. The number of its armed forces has reached 25,000, three times more than that of 2006. In March 2009 the Obama administration made "a new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan", the focused goal of which is to "disrupt, dismantle and defeat al Qaeda and its extremist ally, the Taliban." US has decided to add 21,000 soldiers to Afghanistan so the number of American soldiers deployed in the country will have reached 68,000 by the end of this year. US requested its European allies to add more troops yet these allies showed little interest. It's possible the total number of European troops in Afghanistan will amount to 35,000. US plans to increase the number of Afghan troops to 1,340,000 and the number of police army to 82,000 by 2011. Considering the growth of Taliban forces in Pakistan and their cooperation with the Taliban forces in Afghanistan, US urges Pakistan to attack the Taliban forces in Pakistan. US admits that the issue in Afghanistan cannot be solved simply by force and military efforts must be accompanied by non-military support. Above all, US plans to invest 1.5 billion dollars each year over the next five years in construction of schools, hospitals and roads and companies and \$170million aid money to the displaced in Pakistan, and 2.8 billion dollars to help Afghans develop their economy. Secondly, US intends to buy popular support in Afghanistan. David Petraeus, commander of US Central Command, insisted on making it known that "American troops come to Afghanistan and Iraq to offer a service but not to conquer."<sup>13</sup> During the "Operation Strike of the Sword" conducted in July 2009, American troops did not return to the camp as ever. Instead, they stayed to protect the local people from the Taliban forces. American troops also tried to better their relations with tribal leaders. Thirdly, US tries to enhance the administration of the Afghan government. Fourthly, US spares no efforts to divide the Taliban, seeking cooperation with the moderate elements of the Taliban. Finally, a ban on the plantation of opium has been issued to cut the financial sources of the Taliban. The "New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan" has been in practice for over six months but the situation in Afghanistan shows no sign of recovery. Half a year may not be enough to testify the effect of a new strategy yet the truth is that many difficulties the American troops are facing in Afghanistan cannot be solved even after a rather long time. Considering the arid, rugged terrain and the fact that the Taliban is mingled with tribal forces and the masses, it is pretty difficult to eliminate the armed forces of the Taliban through military missions. About 30% of the population of Afghanistan live below the international poverty line and the unemployment rate amounts to as high as 40%. It's extremely difficult to get its economy back to track or improve the living conditions of the Afghan people. All

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<sup>13</sup> Petraeus: "US Troops Service Provider not Conqueror in Afghanistan and Iraq," *Reference News*, June 16, 2009.



attempts to ban the plantation of opium came to avail, let alone the huge amount of money and human resources needed to burn opium is beyond Afghanistan at present. Now that some American troops are stationed in the troubled region, US suffers from a lack of troops in Afghanistan and, at the same time, greater casualties. In order to reduce casualties, the American troops would often carry out air raids, which, in return, often led to accidental civilian casualties. As a result, US became even less popular among the highly indignant and vengeful masses. The 2009 presidential election in Afghanistan has shown how difficult it is to establish a clean and powerful government in the country. The efforts to win the support of the moderate forces in the Taliban have been fruitless so far. In fact, the above mentioned goals all require long time and relentless efforts. It's almost impossible for the Afghan people to regard US or the occupying army of NATO as their "service providers". According to a report of Phoenix Satellite TV station, some Afghan people miss the early years of the Taliban's rule during which they were at least safe. The top commander of American forces in Afghanistan Stanley McChrystal admitted that the Taliban is taking the wind of American efforts and expanding geographically from the previous southern provinces to the populated northern and western areas so that American troops had to make repeated strategy changes. He also explicitly stated that he needs additional troops within the next year or else the conflict in Afghanistan "will likely result in failure."<sup>14</sup> He has required the Obama administration to add 45,000 soldiers to Afghanistan.

### **B). The Palestine-Israel peace talks not restarted yet**

Despite the efforts of the Obama administration, the Palestine-Israel peace talks are not restarted yet. The major reason lies in the tough stand of the Israeli government with Benjamin Netanyahu as the Prime Minister. The Right Wing forces swept Israel during the general election in February 2009 and Netanyahu took office as Prime Minister on March 31, and then established an extreme right-wing government. As his government refused to accept the two-state solution or stop building new Jewish settlements, the Palestine-Israel peace talks couldn't start anew. Early in March, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton reiterated on her visit to Israel that the two-state solution would be unavoidable and the establishment of a Palestinian state would be beneficial to Israel. On many occasions President Obama has stated that "the two-state solution for the peaceful coexistence of both Israelis and Palestinians" is "in Israel's interest, Palestine's interest, America's interest, and the world's interest" and "The United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements."<sup>15</sup> The European Union, the Arab League and the international community have all increased their pressure on the Netanyahu administration. On

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<sup>14</sup> "Without More Troops to Afghanistan the War Likely a Failure," *Reference News*, September 22, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Remarks by Obama on a New Beginning, June 8, 2009.

<http://www.commondreams.org/headline/2009/06/04-0>

April 26 Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi made a five-point proposal to push forward the Middle East peace process on his visit to four Middle Eastern countries. His third point was that China believes the two-state solution should be maintained and calls for an early establishment of an independent Palestinian state and the two countries of Palestine and Israel to live in harmony. On June 14, Netanyahu said that Israel could accept a "demilitarized Palestinian state". He added that it must also promise to take necessary steps to guarantee the security of Israel and recognize the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state. He also emphasized that Jerusalem would be the sole capital of Israel and Israel would not build more Jewish settlements or expand the built settlements but the "natural growth" of present settlements must be allowed. Besides, the refugee problem must be solved outside the territory of Israel.<sup>16</sup> Although this statement was welcomed by both US and other Western countries, Palestine and Arab countries dismissed it as "sabotaging" peace efforts, paralyzing all efforts being made and challenging the Arab world and American positions. On September 22, President Obama met in New York with Netanyahu and Mamoud Abbas and attended the press conference after their talk. The US media did not believe their talk had made any essential progress.<sup>17</sup> The reasons why the Palestine-Israel peace talks failed to restart vary. First of all, although the Obama administration showed a clear enough attitude, US had not taken any effective measure against Israel. Secondly, the Obama administration has not worked out the specific content or a feasible road map for the two-state solution yet. Thirdly, taking the security of Israel into account, the right-wing in Israel found a better excuse for a tougher stand as it had witnessed the influence of Iran increasing in the Middle East, the forces of Hezbollah and Hamas growing and the corresponding adjustment of US Middle East policy. Fourthly, the uncertainty of restarting the peace talks increased because the hostility between Fatah and Hamas in Palestine was evident. It is reported the Obama administration will soon launch an executive plan for solving the Palestine-Israel conflict and restart the peace talks within this year.

In addition, under the mediation of Egypt, the two major parties in Palestine have conducted several talks and reached a wide range of agreements on unity but failed to come to the final agreement. The leader of Hamas Ismail Haniyeh said in his letter, dated September 22, to the Secretary General of UN that his government would like to establish an independent Palestinian state in accordance with the borderline before the outbreak of the Six Day War of 1967 but its capital must be Jerusalem.<sup>18</sup> That means the attitude of Hamas has also changed. In a word, to restart the peace talks is a general trend welcomed by all. However, the severe disputes and intertwined conflicts between Palestine and Israel and the external elements mean that the peace talks will take a long time and unavoidably meet

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<sup>16</sup> "Israeli Prime Minister: A Demilitarized Palestinian State is Acceptable," *People's Daily*, June 16, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> "Palestine and Israel Agreed on a New Round of Peace Talks," *People's Daily*, September 24, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

with setbacks and recurrences.

### **C). Security worsening in Iraq**

On February 27, 2009, President Obama announced a plan to withdraw most combat troops from Iraq before August 31, 2010 and the remaining 35,000 to 50,000 troops left behind to train Iraqi forces and conduct anti-terrorism missions by the end of 2011. Firstly, the decision was made to fulfill his promise during his presidential campaign and win popularity of the people. Secondly, to shift the focus of anti-terrorism from Iraq to Afghanistan, Obama needed to redeploy the troops before he could add more to Afghanistan. Thirdly, US must tighten the purse strings due to the financial crisis and economic recession. Additionally, the addition of troops to Iraq in 2007 proved to be effective to some extent and security in Iraq was obviously improved in 2008 so the pulling out of troops from Iraq became possible. Nevertheless, an upsurge of violence appeared when US announced its pullback plan. In spite of the change, US troops had withdrawn from towns and cities of Iraq by June 30 according to the plan. Iraq declared June 30 the "National Sovereignty Day", a public holiday. The Iraqi people took to the streets, singing and dancing, to celebrate the pullback of US troops, which again showed the negative attitude of the Iraqi people toward a foreign occupation army. In September President Obama repeated in his remarks to the UN General Assembly that US troops would withdraw from Iraq as planned. Now whether the security in Iraq will get worse has become a new concern. Iraq is a country with complicated relations between nationalities and different sects. The US-led war in Iraq smashed the traditional balance. In order to overthrow the Saddam regime, US relied on the support of the Kurds in the north and helped the Shia Muslims in the south to fight mainly with the Sunni Muslims. Being included as the enemy of US, the political and military elites of the Sunni Muslims turned out to be the main force against US in Iraq. Together with the infiltrated "al-Qaeda" members, they engaged themselves in violence against US. Apart from their strong anti-Americanism, a good number of Shi'ite Muslims were in close ties with Iran. Despite the fact that they grew stronger due to the invasion of US, they did not accept the occupation of US army. The Mahadi Army led by Muqtada al-Sadr is a major representative or such a force. The highly autonomous and armed Kurds in the north have disputes with Arabs over the rule of the oil-rich Kirkuk. As the Shi'ite Muslims are stronger than the Sunnis in politics, the latter had a strong sense of alienation. The relations among the three forces are rather complicated because of the national, sect and party conflicts between them. These forces, under the banner of a nationality or sect, are all prepared to plunder the most interests after the pullback of US troops. Besides, the neighbor countries of Iraq have a considerable impact on the political situation of Iraq. Therefore, nobody is optimistic about the stability in Iraq after the pullback of US troops. US, at the

same time, faces a dilemma, i.e., how to pull out Iraq while maintaining the stability and its control of Iraq.

#### **D). Iran to be a major target of US**

After becoming president of US, Obama has repeatedly revealed his willingness for face-to-face talks with Iran. On March 20, 2009, the new year's eve in Iran, Obama sent the message again. He said, "So in this season of new beginnings I would like to speak clearly to Iran's leaders. We have serious differences that have grown over time. My administration is now committed to diplomacy that addresses the full range of issues before us, and to pursuing constructive ties among the United States, Iran and the international community." Iran welcomed this announcement and an agreement on talks with US was reached in Iran. In response, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said the next day, "I see no change in US policy toward Iran. Iran will change its policy if the United States does so as well."<sup>19</sup> Despite the following friendliness, the talk failed to begin. One possible reason is that both believed it would be better for the talk to start after the Iranian presidential election to be held on June 12. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was re-elected with a surprising high number of votes. The other candidate, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, the reformist candidate who was the last Prime Minister in Iran accused the Iranian government of manipulating the election and refused to accept the election result. Mousavi's supporters again took to the streets and the clash with police caused some casualties. Some Western media and other forces stirred up the trouble, in the hope of transforming the protests into some "color revolution". Some European leaders sharply criticized the Iranian government for controlling the election and containing democracy. In the first place, US refrained to make any comments. Later, the attitude of US turned tough under both domestic pressure and external pressure, which then met with violent reaction of Iran. On August 5 Nejad took office as president-elect. On August 22 the disturbance about the presidential election died down as the biggest supporter of Mousavi, ex-president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, called for the political organizations which resisted the election result to obey the order of the supreme leader Khamenei about ending the political chaos. On September 9 Manouchehr Mottaki, Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, handed over its new package of proposals about relevant international affairs to the US government and the ambassadors of Russia, China, UK, France and Germany to Tehran. The six powers held talks with Iranian negotiators in Geneva on October 1 on Tehran's package of proposals. Earlier before the talks, Iran announced the construction of the second enrichment plant and reiterated that the plant was open to inspection by IAEA. During the talks Iran also agreed on Iranian uranium being sent to a third country to be enriched. The Assistant Secretary of State William Burns and

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<sup>19</sup> "Afghanistan Draws World's Attention Again," *People's Daily*, January 22, 2009.

Iran's top nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili held talks in Geneva, the first time senior officials of US and Iran held face-to-face talks about the nuclear issue. Iran and six world powers agreed to hold another round of talks before the end of the month and both sides expressed a positive view over the talks. On October 12 Hillary Clinton revealed that US would conduct a "dual" strategy of engagement and sanctions on Iran and US would impose even more severe sanctions on Iran in case diplomatic efforts would prove to be useless in the following weeks.<sup>20</sup>

The essence of Iran's nuclear issue is the Iran-US relation. Iran has fallen foul of US for 30 years or so. The previous US governments have resorted to every conceivable means, isolating, overthrowing, sanctioning, threatening to use force, to name a few, on the Islamic regime of Iran but to no avail. All these attempts have failed to either overturn the Iranian government or alter Iran's policy orientation. The Bush administration launched the war in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq and got rid of two major enemies of Iran, the Taliban regime and the Saddam regime. As a result, Iran took the opportunity to grow stronger and increase its influence on Afghanistan and Iraq. As Hezbollah and Hamas forces, supported by Iran, continued to expand, Iran's influence on the Palestine-Israel conflict and Lebanon was on the rise. Iran has been coming down hard on Israel while Israel has been the cornerstone of US Middle East strategy. Rich in oil and gas, Iran does not hide its ambition of becoming a regional power. It has been a national policy of Iran to possess nuclear technology. In spite of the structural conflicts between Iran and US, there's also room for compromise. To deal with the hot-spot issues in the Greater Middle East, US is in need of the cooperation of Iran, without which, some argue, the US Middle East strategy wouldn't go anywhere. This theory has its grounds. However, Iran must ease up its relation with US so as to shake off the pressure of sanctions and enhance its international environment. For the sake of the stability in the Middle East and world peace, dialogue instead of confrontation, diplomatic instead of military means and compromise instead of sanctions are a better choice for both US and Iran. Although the Iran-US relation has showed a sign of easing up, both sides keep running foul of each other out of extreme mutual mistrust. The nuclear issue in Iran and the Iran-US conflict may be alleviated but may not be solved with ease.

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<sup>20</sup> "Nuclear Issue in Iran: Diplomacy Still Offers Hope," *People's Daily*, October 14, 2009.