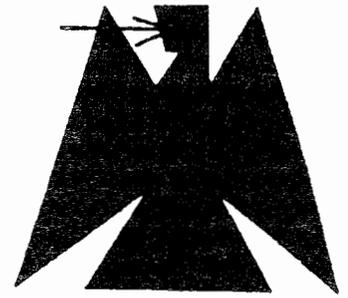


A monthly publication dedicated to the liberation and freedom of the Iranian people

# Focus on IRAN



VOLUME III, No. 4, APRIL 1996

WASHINGTON DC

PRICE \$2

*"History, in a sense, is geography in motion."*

## IRAN'S CRITICAL GEO-STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

### THE NEED FOR A SUPERIOR & CREDIBLE LEADERSHIP

Iran, because of its size, population, cultural identity, resources and its location as a historical, geographic and an economic link between East and West, in addition to bridging two vital centers of energy, namely, the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf, assumes an importance greater than ever before. Today, the overarching significance of Oil in the global economy and the concomitant rise of nationalism and religious particularism has vividly added to Iran's importance not only as a passive link, but as a key player and indeed instigator and arbiter of events transpiring in the entire adjacent region. This "adjacent" region stretches from the shores of the Mediterranean to the semi deserts of Afghanistan, and Baluchestan in Pakistan, to the towering peaks of the Caucasus to the shores of the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean. Iran in every sense of the word, is the center of this varied ~~geographical, religious, political and economic environment~~.

Moreover, few important decisions among the regional states regarding political and economic interests can be made without considering the interests and reactions of Iran. From the foregoing, it is apparent that Iran's geo-strategic location in the region places an extra-ordinary prerequisite for adeptness and ability in domestic and foreign affairs, on the shoulders of its government leaders. *Focus on Iran* believes that the current Iranian government fails miserably in that requirement.

This leadership's behavior in the past decade reflects the cleric's inability and ineptness in dealing with the outside world and addressing the needs of its people. The burden thus, placed on the Iranian government is great and considering its inability and incompetence, so is the impelling necessity of replacing it with a government that is capable of meeting the present challenge and the future needs of the nation. An essential factor bearing on the reputation and effectiveness of any future Iranian government (as well as for any other democratic government) is its credibility. This credibility

must exist both in the minds of its people and the international community. Since the clerics in Tehran, rule without the consent and will of the Iranian people, therefore they lack that vital quality and credibility. All these failures of the current government of Iran, has contributed to its apparent irrational and self-destructive behavior. In response to such short-sighted policies, Iran's leadership has not only become a "pariah" government in the global community but it is also mistrusted and extremely unpopular in the eyes of the Iranian populace.

### IRAN AS THE FOCAL POINT AND THE GEO-STRATEGIC CENTER OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE ADJACENT REGION

In order to appreciate Iran's critical and important geo-strategic location as links between East and West (the Middle East and South Asia), North and South (the Caucasus-Central Asia and the Persian Gulf) one only needs to look at the accompanying schematic diagram with its reference points (1-16) which are discussed in this issue. Perhaps, no other country in the world finds itself surrounded by as many nations and geographical points, bearing issues relevant to a nation's domestic and external security and/or survival needs. Reflecting on this geo-strategic reality, the imperative for a superior and credible national leadership for Iran becomes even more evident. *Focus on Iran*, will now illustrate this imperative by highlighting the impact of each of these 16 reference points on Iran's foreign and domestic security and national interests and, how the current regime has failed to address these issues due to its incompetence, misunderstanding, lack of breath in foreign affairs or in pursuing its narrow self-interest rather than the national interest.

*A publication of the AZADEGAN FOUNDATION, a tax-exempt, non-profit educational foundation.*

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APRIL 1996

Focus on Iran 1.

## 1- THE CASPIAN SEA

The vital fishing industry on the southern beaches of the Caspian Sea is threatened in short term, with pollution from the Oil fields at Baku and others in the Western Caspian Sea and, in long term, pollution from the Volga and Ural rivers. The current regime has not pressed for an environmental compact between itself, Azarbaijan, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. The failure to do so will have significant economic consequences for the nation in the future.

## 2- TURKMENISTAN

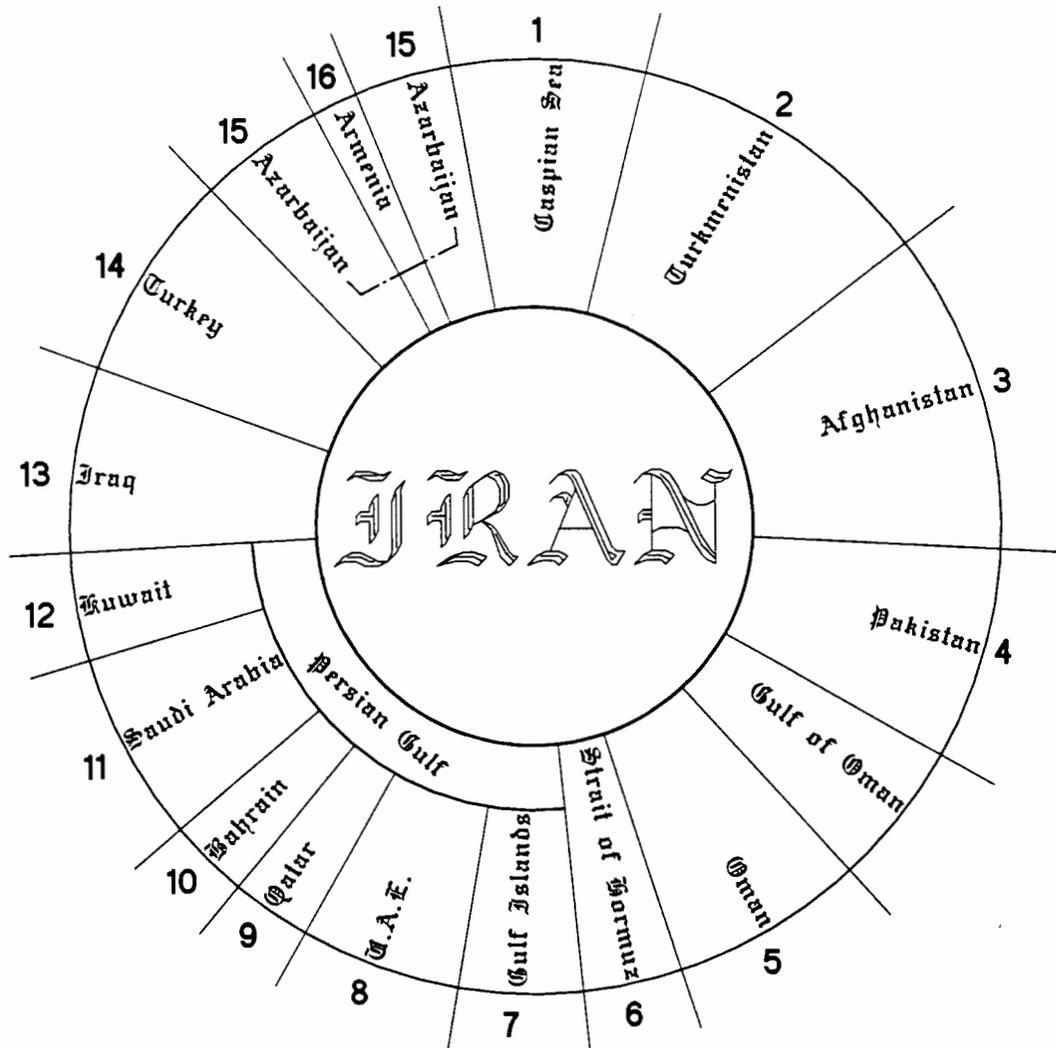
Relations with this nation at present is good. In fact, a railroad is planned to connect Ashkhabad with Mashad. The obvious conclusion upon inspection is that Mashad will be connected by Rail to Trans-Caspian Turkmenistan and by that means to points further east in the former Central Asia Republics. It would appear that the current regime hopes to reap political benefits through this rail linkage. More to the point, are the desired economic and strategic benefits, which are purchased at a price the nation most likely cannot afford, especially, the uncertain returns on this investment and the economic needs of the populace. *Focus on Iran* believes the price to be too high for the dubious future benefits.

## 3- AFGHANISTAN:

By its ineptness and lack of long range vision, the clerical leadership has become involved in the "Afghan Quagmire", namely by attempting to insinuate its influence in Kabul at the potential cost of deteriorating relations with Pakistan and a large emigre population of Afghans in the Khorasan province. The "Taleban" who became an important factor in Afghanistan's policy in the last two years, for political and strategic reasons, have been supported by Pakistan. It would be more prudent and rational, if not more to the nation's long term interests, if the ruling clerics remained aloof from the political turmoil in Afghanistan till "the dust settles".

## 4- PAKISTAN:

Relations with Pakistan which indeed as allies in CENTO in the height of the Cold War, had been close and cordial for decades, has significantly cooled within the past year. The clerics' support of the Kabul War Lords against the Pakistani supported Taleban Sunnis, along with the ostentatious rapprochement with India, has further exacerbated the distance between Tehran and Islamabad. The consequences of this cooling relationship is yet to be seen both in terms of benefits for Iran from India and possible problems



Schematic diagram illustrating Iran's geo-strategic center of importance

with the Baluchis in both Iranian and Pakistani Baluchestan. With all of its other external and domestic problems, Iran can ill afford to bring about a hostile Pakistan on its Southeastern frontiers.

## 5- OMAN:

Relations with Oman seem to be relatively on a friendly basis, with a mutual desire to maintain calm and unobstructed passage in the Strait of Hormuz, for the benefit of both nations. It should be emphasized that, this mutual interest is to permit the uninterrupted flow of Oil through the Strait -- an economic necessity for Iran, a strategic and political necessity for Oman.

## 6- THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ:

The current regime realizes the economic necessity of keeping the Strait of Hormuz open for its own Oil exports; its problem is how to deal with the Oil exports of states deemed hostile at present or in the future. The Tehran leadership must foresee that any attempt on their part to interfere with flow of Oil through the Strait would incur the military intervention of the U.S.A. and other major military powers. *Focus on Iran* believes that the present clerical regime would not be capable of dealing with a crisis involving the Strait of Hormuz. Rather than pursuing a rational policy concerning an uninterrupted Oil flow through an internationally respected water-way, the current leadership is likely to pursue a course inimical to the national security interests of Iran. Islamic Republic's reputation as a "Pariah State" would most likely limit its ability to formulate an internationally acceptable policy in regards to the Strait of Hormuz which could concurrently be beneficial to Iran's security interests.

## 7 & 8 - THE PERSIAN GULF ISLANDS AND THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES:

The issue of Iran's sovereignty over the small Persian Gulf islands, namely the Lesser and the Greater Tumbs and Abu Musa, are intervened by the U.A.E. and hence, for the sake of our discussion, are considered collectively. The value of the Islands as a source of off-shore Oil deposits has greatly enhanced their political and economic importance. The issue here is not sovereignty but rather the ineptness of the Tehran regime in its handling of the Islands' recognized sovereignty. It should be noted that since November 1971, when Great Britain, the Sheikh of Sharja and Iran agreed on Iran's sovereignty over the Islands, the issue was tacitly recognized by the international community. For misguided reasons, the clerics in Iran have possibly re-introduced the issue for domestic political purposes. By doing so they have not permitted the "sleeping dogs to lie" which, would have been the prudent and insightful course. Now it has become an issue of conflict with the U.A.E., with the international community not necessarily supporting the assumed uncontested sovereignty of Iran over these Islands. The dispute over the Islands need not have occurred. Once again Iran's national interest has been jeopardized by the incompetence of the clerical regime and their lack of comprehension of the international community's temper, especially in regards to a vital area such as the Persian Gulf.

## 9- QATAR:

Relations with Qatar are friendly since both countries share a common antipathy towards the Saudi Arabia, albeit for significantly different reasons.

The current regime has supported Qatar in its "on again -- off again" border dispute. From Riyadh's point of view, this border dispute is but a minor distraction in its overall Persian Gulf foreign policy and strategic outlook. For the Islamic Republic to become involved in such a relatively minor problem, is to waste important diplomatic resources at a future time when Saudi Arabia's friendship and support might be needed, as for example, against a resurgent and belligerent Iraq. Once again this behavior reflects the short-sightedness and the sheer level of mis-understanding of important and critical foreign policy matters by the Mullahs' regime in Tehran.

## 10- BAHRAIN:

Iran's relations with Bahrain are unnecessarily convoluted and seemingly Machiavellian. In the far distant past, namely from the time of the Sassanid Emperor Shapur II in the 4th century A.D. up until the time of Fat'h Ali Shah Qajar, "Persia" laid claim to the Island but, in the modern era, Iran along with the international community and the United Nations in 1971, has recognized Bahrain's independence. The current clerical leadership has, on several occasions hinted at its reassertion of claims to Bahrain, perhaps to reinforce its sovereignty over the disputed Persian Gulf Islands. In this "tit - for - tat" game, Islamic Republic would not only lose all the historical credibility and control Iran has had over these Persian Gulf Islands but would become even more isolated in the international arena for undertaking such a scheme. The lesson of the Persian Gulf crisis of 1990 to 1991 over Kuwait should be borne in the minds of the clerics in Tehran. Bahrain like Kuwait has many powerful allies who, would not permit Islamic Republic's intimidations and threats to come to fruition.

## 11- SAUDI ARABIA:

It is not surprising and indeed understandable that Islamic Republic and Saudi Arabia would be rivals for hegemony over the Persian Gulf. The two nations represent centers of their respective Islamic sects (Sunni Saudi Arabia - Shiite Iran). They share economic supremacy with their respective petroleum production. Each shares world attention because of their economic and strategic importance. The small but significant number of Shiite workers (around 10 percent) in the Oil fields area, represent to the habitually reclusive and suspicious Saudi leadership, a security threat which became a reality with the abortive attempt to seize the great mosque at Mecca, after the Ayatollahs' accession to power. The need for amicable relations and cooperation between Iran and the Saudi regime would in many ways benefit Iran far more than the Saudis, especially strategically and economically. In the latter case, a cooperative relationship could have positive results in stabilizing, if not raising, the Oil prices in OPEC. Certainly, Iran would be a financial beneficiary of such a cooperative effort. Strategically, regional peace and political stability are vital to both nations. Islamic Republic's support of terrorism and interference in the region's national / domestic affairs can bring nothing but eventual harm to Iran. In this matter, the Saudis are most concerned and reactive to Tehran's foreign machinations, fearful that in the end their regime would be subject to religious or political undermining. This state of affairs has caused the Saudi government to invest billions of dollars for defense and the United States intervention in the Persian Gulf. Because of their mis-guided foreign policy, the clerics have brought about mistrust and anxieties in Riyadh along with the resultant arms race which is potentially detrimental to all nations of the region and perhaps more so for the Islamic Republic itself.

## 12- KUWAIT:

Iran's relations with Kuwait are at the most "friendly", much of it based on their mutual concern for Saddam Huseyn's future hostile intentions. It would seem that the clerical leadership missed a golden opportunity during the Persian Gulf crisis of 1990 - 1991 to lend its moral support, at the minimum, to Kuwait - the victim of Iraqi aggression which Iran itself experienced a decade earlier. Because of lack of "political foresight and knowledge of the international temper", it failed to react. In some quarters the charge of cowardice has been placed on Iran, a charge which the noble, enduring and courageous people of Iran do not deserve. If Tehran sought Baghdad's gratefulness and reward for its "neutrality" and for its objections over the United States involvement, the trophies earned have not yet been forthcoming.

## 13- IRAQ:

Since the 1988 cease-fire after an 8 year war with Iraq, Iran's relations with the latter have taken unpredictable and at times irrational turns. One is led to believe that Tehran has done its utmost to carry Baghdad's favor at almost any cost and, without apparent benefits. *Focus on Iran* surmises that the clerical leadership believes (and erroneously so) that its reconciliation with Baghdad would possibly create an Anti-Western Axis which would ultimately include Syria. This axis would thereby threaten Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and certainly Kuwait. Tehran might calculate that a friendly relationship with Baghdad will solve the Kurdish problem redounding both countries. In either case, if indeed these are Tehran's motives for its friendly relations with Iraq, they are doomed to fail. In the first place, the likelihood of Damascus and Baghdad reaching an accord is null considering the irreconcilable split in the Baathist political environment and Syria's priority of negotiating the return of the Golan Heights for an Israeli quid-pro-quo, namely the suppression of the clerics' backed Hizballah terrorists in Southern Lebanon. In this event Syria is likely to reach an accord with Israel and the United States, at the expense of its close relationship with the Islamic Republic. It should be noted these warm ties have cooled over the past few years which may further indicate Damascus jettisoning the Mullahs in Tehran for more favorable relations with the USA. Secondly, regarding the Kurdish issue, the Kurds of Iraq are under U.N. protection and are not likely to be entrusted to Saddam Huseyn's mercy. Iran's Kurds are different and their issues ought to be attended to in an alternative mode by a humane national Iranian leadership. Tehran's flirtation with the pariah regime in Baghdad could not bring long lasting benefits to the country other than further isolation from the international community. There is nothing to be gained by an alliance with an outlaw regime. If the current Tehran government should bring about a coalition or alliance with Iraq, it would indeed be the reincarnation of the sinister Axis of the World War II era.

## 14- TURKEY:

Among all of Iran's neighbors, Turkey has the most powerful military force and is closest to the West (through NATO). Iran's relations with Turkey, since the break-up of the Ottoman Empire, have been correct and for the most part friendly. They share, to a certain degree, the issue of the Kurds' and desire for stability in their adjacent regions. Over the years both nations have participated in mutually beneficial trade and commerce as well as uninterrupted cross border transit of

people and goods. During the cold war both nations shared the concern and defense of their respective borders with the Soviet Union. Today the long standing amity may be threatened by Tehran's interference in Ankara's domestic affairs. The recent elections in Turkey, which has seen the defeat of the secular pro-Western "True Path" Party of Prime Minister Tansu Ciller and the slim victory of the Islamic fundamentalist "Refah - Welfare" Party. There is evidence that many Iranian financial and political resources are backing the "Refah" Party. It should be noted that to date, the "Refah" Party has been unable to form a coalition with the other pro-Western secular parties. The "Refah" has only 21 % of the Parliament seats, far less than the required ruling majority. It is of vital concern to regional peace, stability and the global democratic interest that, Turkey's government remain a secular democratic one, free of the radical influence and/or interference of the clerics in Tehran. Should the "Refah" Party succeed to form a coalition government in time, the coalition partners are likely to be destroyed resulting in a fundamentalist radical dictatorship.

## 15- AZARBAIJAN:

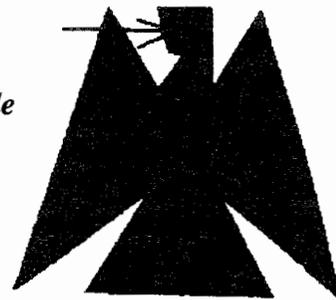
Since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, the Tehran leadership, instead of establishing a rational relationship which relies on historical and cultural ties, has pursued a policy of becoming involved in the domestic affairs of the newly created Republic at Baku. Since the population of Azarbaijan is predominantly Shiite, the task for the clerics in Tehran, on the surface, could not be an arduous one. The desire of any religious or political entity to wish for a neighboring state to share its values, is comprehensible. In this instance, however, the clerics' involvement in Baku will be eventually resented and anti-Iranian reaction would manifest itself. It must be remembered that Northwestern Iran has a large Azari community which could become a problem if a hostile regime in Baku should come to power. The Mullahs in Tehran should bear this in mind for the long term consequences, if their current policy fails in Azarbaijan.

## 16- ARMENIA:

The short 30 mile border with Armenia wedged in between the Azari enclaves of Nakhchevan and Azarbaijan, reflects some degree of importance of Christian Armenia to Iran. The border region is extremely rugged with no cross-border land routes. Economic and social interaction between the two nations are not substantial and therefore no forcible problems is likely by the clerical leadership.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the current clerical regime has only a few points on its circumferential frontier where it maintains friendly and non-controversial relations (i.e. Oman, Kuwait, and Armenia). Among the other 13 points on its periphery, the clerical government finds itself risking ventures ranging from local domestic interference to threatening regional political stability and military security. In the latter case, even risking the military intervention of the Great Powers. In all these cases little benefit is seen for the Iranian nation and its people given the risks and costs to Iran. *Focus on Iran* is of the opinion that the current benighted leadership in Tehran, is either blind to the dangers facing Iran due to its vile policies towards its neighbors or, is taking calculated risks in pursuit of unwise and unrealistic goals. If past history were to be the guide, then it may be judged that this is the behavior of totalitarian regimes which ultimately causes their own downfall.

# Focus on IRAN



VOLUME IV, No. 11 NOVEMBER 1997

WASHINGTON D.C.

PRICE: \$2

*"Turkestan, Afghanistan, Transcaucasia, Persia - to many these words breathe only a sense of utter remoteness, or a memory of strange vicissitudes and of moribund romance. To me, I confess, they are the pieces on a chessboard upon which is played out a game for the domination of the World."*

**George Lord Curzon, viceroy of India (1899-1905)**

## IRAN - THE PIVOT OF EURASIAN CORRIDOR

*From Dr. Assad Homayoun's speech at Strategy'97 Conference  
Washington, DC. September 22-24, 1997*

Northern Tier states of the Middle East comprised of Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkey, on the southern periphery of former USSR, are gaining much importance in international politics. They enjoy unique geopolitical, and economic position in the "Eurasian Corridor", or between East and West, and Iran among them, is a land bridge between the two important energy zones of the Caspian and the Persian Gulf. These three countries have over 2700 miles of boundaries with Asiatic side of the former Soviet Union.

Now there is no Soviet Union, but the newly independent States which lie between Russia and Northern Tier States, in the coming decade will hold the promise of offering the industrial world an alternative source of energy. In the Northern Tier, in spite of the fact that Afghanistan is still in a state of civil war, its geopolitical value is undeniable. Turkey lacks a direct geographical link with Turkic-speaking

states of the region, but because of the political system, free market economy, close political and military relationship with the West, it is the center of attraction to the governments and the people of Caucasus and Central Asia. Since diffusion of power from Moscow and fall of the Soviet Union, these peripheral border states have been looking to the United States, and the industrial/developing world for reconstruction and development.

First, the Central Asia and Caucasus in a way have become part of the Middle East, with over 65 million Muslims reentering the broader Muslim world. And, as result of disintegration of Soviet Union those states have been brought to the religious, political, economic and strategic environment of the Middle East.

Secondly, the Northern Tier, Central Asia and Caucasus indeed form a corridor or "Eurasian Corridor", that has

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become the stage of a new "Great Game", another contest to influence the region. (the "Great Game", was a serious conflict which occurred in 19th century among Britain, Russia and Germany for domination of the Central Asia). The rules and players have changed, but the aim remains the same; namely, winning of trade, access to natural resources, political influence and protection of national security. As history records, the region has been the birthplace of upheavals. For, Central Asia is the heart of Asia, the vast, seasoned heart of the greatest continent on earth, whose stability and well-being, the lives of countless millions depend on. A brief glance at the region's past history shows that, when the heart is disturbed the entire body is affected. Whenever Central Asia has been moved, history has been made. This vast region has reemerged as one of the most politically and economically important regions of the globe. It has become an arena of rivalries, internally and externally, for a source of cheap energy for most of the industrial world.

Finally, this region also is plagued with domestic internal and external, ethnic and religious conflicts and instability. On a per capita basis, the Middle East is the most heavily armed region (with conventional and weapons of mass destruction) in the world. And most importantly, as history shows, resolution of conflicts in this region, from ancient to present time, has been mostly resolved through war rather than diplomacy and peace.

## NEW INTEREST IN THE REGION

The industrial and industrializing world are becoming deeply interested in this area for several reasons:

- Access to oil and gas resources,
- Filling the political vacuum left by the Soviets.
- Sustaining the balance of power in the Eurasian mainland in view of growing Chinese power in Pacific and Indian Ocean, and reemergence of Russian influence in the former republics. Equilibrium of power in Eurasia continues to be the key to the "peace evolution" of the international system. As Alfred Mahan, whose writings had much impact on American strategic thinking, in his book, "The Influence of Sea Power Upon History" recommends, the world balance of power depends on control of Eurasian land mass and as history demonstrates, control of the 'sea approaches' to Eurasia will be decisive in sustaining a balance of power in the land mass.
- Moreover, the US would like to have another source of energy and less reliance on the Persian Gulf oil, even though the U.S. seeks other sources of energy in Latin America, reality is that the Middle East will provide the major source

of energy for U.S. and the rest of the industrial world. Some American experts and former defense and foreign policy officials are in favor of more U.S. policy in the region. Former Defense Secretary Casper Weinberger, has pointed out that US access to the Caspian oil is more important to long term US strategic interest than the expansion of NATO. As Undersecretary of State Stuart Eisenstat on July 26 said "*it is essential that U.S. have a pro-active policy to assure that Caucasus and Central Asia remain free of Iranian influence... A political vacuum would only give Iran the opportunity to fill it. We must not create this situation*".

Five Countries, around the Caspian (Azarbaijan, Russia, Kazakstan, Turkmenestan and Iran) share oil in and around the Caspian that is second to the Persian gulf reserves. Currently billions of dollars of investment from American, Japanese and European oil companies are flowing to the Caspian.

The problem is that, countries around the Caspian are land locked. Furthermore, they are susceptible to current clerical regime's propaganda and religious subversion.

## IRAN'S ROLE AND POSITION

The role of Iran in this vast region's future for better or worse, is pivotal, and in any future scenario it will be the dominant force. But till now, the current regime of the clerics has failed to fulfill its potential as a regional stabilizing influence and example of constructive government.

Iran has borders with 15 countries in the region. It is the preeminent power of the Caspian and the Persian Gulf region. Because of its size, population (almost 70 millions), natural resources, strategic location as a historical, geographical and economic link between East and West, the Persian Gulf and the Caspian region along with a strong cultural identity, Iran is central to peace and stability of the Middle East, Caucasus, Central Asia (once known simply as Turkestan) and especially the war torn Afghanistan. Iran indeed is a bridge in "Eurasian Corridor", and natural transit link and shortest route between the Caspian and the open seas. It also has major oil terminals and facilities.

The fact remains that Iran's government is controlled by fundamentalist and anti-US regime elements and there is no indication that the regime will moderate itself. There is no sign that Iran will change its political behavior and cooperate with the west. The clerical regime has based its policy on ideology. The rule of "Velayat-e-Faghih" (rule of

Supreme Theologian) will continue its support of international terrorism, anti-peace activities and its drive to build weapons of mass destruction. If there is a change, it will be in tactics and method for buying time and strategic gain. Therefore, the source of concern and instability will remain with us until there is a real change toward reason and moderation in Iran. As an Iranian, I share a profound concern with millions of Iranian people both within and outside the country, for the lack of perception and neglectful policy of the present regime.

Strategic cooperation between Tehran and Moscow, and Tehran and Beijing is yet another source of concern.

Iran has developed a close relationship, i.e. military and economic agreements with Russia and China and North Korea; receives sophisticated arms from those countries and facilitates their influence and expansion in the region.

Also, there is a growing strategic relation between Syria and the clerical regime of Tehran. On the other hand, relations between Baghdad and Damascus are improving fast. Some among the ruling clerics in Tehran are in favor of Tehran-Damascus-Baghdad cooperation and an anti-US, anti-Israel, anti-moderate Arab states alliance.

It is apparent that Iran's geo-strategic location in the region has placed an extra-ordinary prerequisite for adeptness and ability in domestic and foreign affairs on the shoulders of its leadership. I believe that the current regime of clerics fails miserably in that requirement. The political behavior of the Mullahs, in domestic and foreign affairs, in the past 18 years, reflect their incapability and incompetence in addressing the needs of the people and dealing with the outside world. Their policy has brought nothing but misery for the people of Iran and isolation of the country as a "pariah" state. The rule of the clerics, without consent of the people and lack of credibility as well as quality, has lost not only the confidence of the people, but, the trust of the global community as well.

## NEW PRESIDENT AND OLD POLICY

Dissatisfaction of the people caused them in last May's presidential election to vote for Mr. Mohammad Khatami a so-called moderate (compared to the other candidates) to initiate a change towards reason. The election took place in an environment where freedom of assembly, free press, an independent legal system and active political parties were

non-existent and women were not allowed to be candidates, but people participated and the big turnout nonetheless prevented the tampering with the vote count. As a result, Mr. Khatami was elected as the fifth president of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khatami took office in August 3, and until now, he has not taken a single step in the direction of domestic or foreign policy, to end repression and assuage suffering of the people or to end isolation of Iran. He is dominated by ruling radical clerics, assuming in fact he is not an integral part of them.

Another point is that the power resides with the Supreme Leader, it is the leader who decides on important external and internal matters.

Therefore, I believe the present system of the Supreme Theologian will not work in the direction of peace. Iran, with its present leadership, cannot play its proper role in the Middle East which strategically and economically has become extremely important.

It has been shown that 'critical dialogue' which some experts and European governments persistently suggest, will not work and will not change the behavior of the current regime of Tehran. Neither do I believe that military action suggested by some, will have any chances to succeed. Military action could bring undesirable results and indeed strengthen the position of radical clerics.

Since the people of Iran are against the absolute rule of the clerics, the only solution will be the support of the people and a moderate nationalist element to replace the present regime with a responsible representative one that contributes to peace, equilibrium and stability of the region. I believe the people of Iran are waiting and watching Mr. Khatami carefully. If he fails his promises and succumbs to the will of the Supreme leader, as has been the case, they must decide to go after another leader, a truly national leader who could commit himself to the freedom of people and regional stability.

For the next foreseeable future, oil will remain an important source of energy. Therefore, not only stability of the Persian Gulf will remain vital to the US interest, but access to the Caspian Sea oil will also gain importance in the U.S. strategic agenda. In view of forgoing facts, I believe a stable, moderate, secular and democratic regime in Tehran can contribute significantly to the stability of this volcanic region.

