

Ali Fathollah-Nejad (SOAS): 'Ambivalent Episodes in Iran's Post-"9/11" Foreign Policy'

This paper will be dealing with Iran's security perceptions and foreign policy after "9/11". In a first part, Iran's ambivalent role and stance in regard to the "Neoconservative Wars" waged against Afghanistan and Iraq between the autumn of 2001 and the spring of 2003 will be assessed. Here it will be argued that Tehran was finding itself in a situation of "security dilemma", when on the one hand it was threatened by U.S. military "regime change" while on the other both U.S.-led wars of aggression toppled neighbouring regimes (i.e. Saddam Hussein and Taliban ones) which were considered enemies of Iran. In the second part, the focus will be on the period after 2004 with Washington's "Iraqi quagmire" materializing, accompanied by calls for a more "realist" Middle East policy (cf. the so-called Baker-Hamilton report) and with the rising regional influence of Iran, especially in post-Saddam Iraq. Here the contours of a new U.S.-Iranian "cold war" in West Asia will be delineated. Reasons for Iran's newly-found geopolitical self-confidence will be given: The U.S. eliminated Iran's foes in Iraq and Afghanistan, which resulted in a balance-of-power shift in favour of Tehran. Iran's regional partners are all "winners": (1) Iraq's Shia political groups that had been supported by Iran for decades are now dominant in the post-invasion Iraqi state; (2) In Lebanon, Iran has intimate links to the country's perhaps most influential political entity, Hezbollah; (3) In Palestine, Iran's partner is Hamas which won the elections in 2006.

During that same period, the international conflict around Iran – the so-called "nuclear crisis" – majorly influenced the perception of Iran's foreign policies. That international controversy, it will be argued, blocked any steps towards regional cooperation and security. It will be concluded that the security prospects for the region are quite dim, considering the unchanged nature of the political strategy pursued by the "Atlantic Alliance" and increasingly so supported other major powers (such as Russia) against Iran ("coercive diplomacy") and the on-going destabilization by Washington's "AfPak" and other war fronts in the region and Israel's continued aggressive policies *vis-à-vis* the Palestinians and Lebanon.