

The U.S. Military Presence in the Middle East and Central Asia; Iran`s Security Concerns

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to describe the extensive military buildup of the United States in these regions during George W. Bush presidency (Jan 20, 2001 to Jan 20, 2009) and suggest the reasons for it. Since there were also U.S. bases in the two Caucasian states of Azerbaijan and Georgia, they are included in this study as well. The countries of these strategically important regions are not only significant for their vast oil and gas reserves but also they are seen as actual markets for American goods and services. Moreover security issue seems to be important as well. Similar to the threats posed to the security of I.R.Iran from the US presence in these regions.

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Introduction

During the Soviet era, the presence of the great powers in Central Asia was diminished due to the Communists' domination of a large part of the region and the unwillingness of the great powers (especially the United States) to clash with the Eastern superpower and recognize each other's spheres of influence. This area (except for areas under Iranian rule) was under the exclusive influence of the Soviet Union. Hence, there was relative stability in the region. But after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-cultural importance of the Central Asian region gave rise to dynamics in the region that not only competed regional and supra-regional powers. Meanwhile, the United States, under the influence of the special situation in the region, pursued policies in the region, one of the main manifestations of which was security concerns for Iran.

After the Sep11 terrorist attack a new strategy in US foreign Policy started in which the neo-cons found new opportunities under Bush presidency. The new strategy of unilateralism tried to establish US hegemony in the world particularly the most important regions i.e. the Middle East, Persian Gulf and Central Asia which can be summarized as: 1. Effective control of energy resources of the Persian Gulf and central Asia. 2. Gaining political influence in these regions to tackle the Russian and Chinese influence there even through military presence. 3. Containing states like Iran and Iraq (the so called Axis of Evil).

Apparently military presence is the hardware backup for political influence and a sign that United States is serious in her intentions in the region. It is obvious that such a military buildup

presents serious menace to national security of regional states including Iran.

Whereas, Barack Obama who entered the White House in 2009 found Central Asia and especially Afghanistan in different conditions comparing to the year 2001, so his administration pursued American grand fixed strategy to maintain American global hegemony with some different tactics. In fact, he commenced the "Policy of Change" in order to rectify the image of the United States of America which as a result of the invasion of Afghanistan and vast military presence of American troops all over the region was damaged and impaired. In addition, the U.S. Department of State with "Hillary Clinton", tried to "reset" the bilateral relations with Russia with which during Bush's presidency was impaired. Thus, in contrary to George W. Bush, the Obama administration acted multilaterally based mostly on soft power and through business and economic apparatus. The Oval Office, first and foremost set the agenda of diminishing the number of U.S. troops on the ground in Afghanistan. On the other hand, the United States accepted the Kyrgyz Parliament order to withdraw U.S. troops from Manas Air Base and left this country in 2010.

The White House in the Obama presidency also initiated "New Silk Road" and "Northern Distribution Network" (NDD) as two vast, huge business and transformational projects to enhance its non- military presence in Afghanistan nonmilitary as well as approaching China and Russia as two strategic allies and rivals in Central Asia. The United States also during Obama's presidency seriously pursued the gas and oil pipelines projects which were outside Iran and Russia's main land such as "Trans-Afghanistan Pipeline" or "Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India Pipeline" called (TAPI) and "Trans-Caspian Pipeline" in order to contain Iran and Russia economically and politically. This is based on the United States' official stated policy and the Obama energy team pursued this policy. The White House in the Obama presidency also initiated "New Silk Road" and "Northern

Distribution Network" (NDD) as two vast, huge business and transformational projects to enhance its non-military presence in Afghanistan nonmilitary as well as approaching China and Russia as two strategy (Koochkan and Sahabi, 2018: 2015).

Although Trump has a different logic than Obama in the field of foreign policy, in dealing with the Middle East, he wants to place the main burden of maintaining security in the Middle East on his allies by weakening other rivals. After taking office at the White House, Trump carried out his first foreign policy measures at home under executive orders, which, although considered national and domestic, encompassed all Muslim countries, especially those in the Middle East. His first order was a 90-day visa ban and the entry of nationals of seven Muslim countries, which was met with a backlash from those countries and Muslims inside the United States. Trump believes the move is necessary to protect the United States from Muslim extremism, while his order did not include Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

US President Donald Trump recently announced in a statement that the country has put the Islamic Revolutionary Guards in the list of terrorist groups. Shortly after the United States placed the Revolutionary Guard on the terrorist list, Iran's Supreme National Security Council also introduced the US government as a supporter of terrorism. Iran also considers all US troops in the Middle East to be terrorists. By placing the Revolutionary Guard in the list of terrorist groups, it is possible for the US president to take military action against the IRGC on the Iranian soil without having violated the congressional resolution to ban unauthorized attack on Iran. Of course, this is a violation of the United Nations Charter, but it is a kind of battle without a declaration of the beginning of the war.

Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the military presence in the region of the Middle East and Central Asia, as well as to analyze the security concerns of Iran in the countries of the region. In this article first US strategy in these regions are examined and then the US military programmes are studied and finally the

threats to Iran's national security are discussed.

I. US Military Threats Foundation against Iran

The conservative system has had three main periods: First, liberal conservatism, which at the height of liberalism had lost its influence on land ownership and political and social patriarchy, embraced the principles of liberalism. Second, patriarchal conservatism, which, with the rise of interventionist governments and the crisis in the market economy, returned to the principles of patriarchy and supported the inclusive government. Third, neoconservatism, which has returned to the principles of free economy and has created a doctrine called "new right" within the framework of liberalism (Musainejad and Hosseinpour, 2008: 40). Conservative ideology evolved in the 1970s. With the onset of recession and inflation in Western countries, the effectiveness of welfare state policies became questionable, and conservatives reacted to these developments by returning to the principles of the free market system.

But Neoconservatism is not just about economics. The neoconservative system is culturally and socially conservative and advocates the preservation of natural inequalities. Politically, it strengthens order and security and maintains a strong government. Neoconservatism in international politics also relies on the idea that democracies must be able to suppress their enemies with full authority, even by force. Thus, neoconservatism is a political, social, economic, and international system that, in response to the welfare state (a post-World War II regime) in capitalist countries, has led to their turning to the right, including the neoconservatism of traditional conservative parties. (Ghafouri and Davand, 2016: 363). Thus, the use of force to establish and spread democracy is not only permissible, but necessary. They also believe that any political regime has to draw an external enemy to create national unity (Mousavishfaei, 2009: 135-134).

Therefore, the international political structure has always given rise to numerous threats against Iran. The international

system reacted dangerously to the material power of the Islamic Republic of Iran, including: Iraq imposed war on Iran; Imposition of various types of sanctions; Blocking all assets of the Central Bank and the Government of Iran in the United States; Prevent peaceful activities of the Iranian nuclear program; Iranophobia; Creating an arms race in the region; Presence of US and NATO military forces in neighboring countries; Territorial illusory claims on the three Iranian islands. (Kouzehgar Kaleji, 2012: 142-145).

II. U.S. Strategy in the Middle East And Central Asia

In the US National Security Strategy documents released before 2005, the regions of Central Asia, the Caucasus and Russia were often mentioned side by side. But in 2005, following the aftermath of 9/11 in Afghanistan and Pakistan and the US strategic need for the Central Asian region, as well as plans such as the Greater Central Asia and the New Silk Road, this traditional approach changed. And the regions of Central Asia, Afghanistan, and South Asia came together. Following these changes, the Central Asian region was separated from the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs and merged with the Bureau of South Asia. Thus, a new section entitled "Central and South Asian Administration" was formed in the organizational structure of the US State Department. "Assistant Secretary of State for Central and South Asian Affairs" is in charge of this section (Kouzehgar Kaleji, 2018).

In a strategy statement for Central Asia, Daniel Fried, Assistant Secretary for Eurasian Affairs, stated before the Subcommittee on Middle East and Central Asia of the House International Relation Committee on Oct. 27, 2005 that the United States of America pursues three sets of strategic interests in Central Asia; "Security; Energy and regional economic cooperation; and Freedom through reform." He further stated that the three sets of strategic interests are pursued "in tandem, because failure in one area will undermine the chance of success in another." Particularly after Sep. 11, 2001 the United States undertook " an ambitious forward strategy in Central Asia

(Fried,2005) and all five nations of the region Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan provided support to Operation Enduring Freedom in various forms including; bases, over flight rights and refueling facilities. These co-operations were further strengthened by participation of these countries in military training and exercises through NATO's Participation for Peace Programme (NATO,2008).

In energy and economic co-operation, which is one of the three sets of American interests, efforts were made to open this region to global access and vice versa by investment, building roads and bridges "essential for revitalizing regional and global trade" and the governments of the region were encouraged "to create welcoming environments for foreign trade and investment" (Fried,2005).

Central Asia with its huge reserves of oil, gas and minerals as well as its strategic position was already a key arena of sharp rivalry between U.S.A., Russia, Europe, Japan and China. All of these major powers along with transnational corporations had been seeking alliances, concessions and pipeline routes in the Central Asian republics. In particular the size of the Chinese economy was more than doubled in 1990s and was expected to at least double again by 2010, resulting in growing oil imports from 20 to 40% by then (Chan,2001).

China had an increasingly important position in this region if not in military terms, in which Russia still dominated, but in the financial realm. China's important investments in this region had great impacts on regional infrastructure which were fundamental for the economic development of Central Asia. These investments were not only limited to the oil and gas sector but general trade had also increased. In the transport sector, which Russia traditionally controlled, China was a heavy investor as well. Although there was competition in the oil and gas sectors but in the ordinary economy Chinese merchandise dominated. In military area, which was the monopoly of Russia, China was also making its way in Central Asia (Sawnstorm, 2001).

Japan and South Korea were also interested in oil and gas pipelines to diversify the present vulnerable sea routes from the Middle East and to develop secure continental access to the Middle East and Central Asian oil and gas reserves. Moreover, Japanese corporations and banks were also attracted by the prospect of super profits from exploitation of the region's resources as much as major US and European transnationals were (Chan,2001).

The U.S. wanted to gain commercial advantages over Japan, South Korea and Europe, as well. Although they are under the same umbrella of interests and general aims but they do not have identical goals and priorities, particularly regarding commercial rivalry (Aras,1997).

Limiting Russian and Iranian influence in the region was another important consideration. Obviously Russia continued to be the most important among the regional powers. Russia had restructured Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to tighten co-operation and improved economic and political links to China and Iran, because American and European activities in Central Asia Were (and still are) seen as a menace close to its own southern borders (Aras,1997). China's rapprochement with Russia enhanced their overlapping interests in the region and they were co-operating in the *Shanghai Five* group of nations along with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. But more than economic considerations were at work, because both Russia and China were bitterly opposed to the development of an American missile defense system in Europe which would nullify their nuclear deterrence against US aggression. Consequently the two states were seeking closer relations with other key regional players such as Iran to counter US influence in Central Asia (Chan,2001).

Iran had also made initiatives towards the states of Central Asia by offering them free passage through its own territory but it lacked the capital to finance the region's needs, and thus sought a big partner like Russia, China or India in the region. Therefore possibility of Iranian alliance with them altogether or on one-to-

one basis was of grave concern to the United States. Another concern was the Iranian support for Islamist activists in the region. Thus one of the most important US policies was to contain Iran and block its power in Central Asia (Aras,1997). To have a clear perspective of U.S. economic objectives in these regions, during the presidency of George W. Bush¹ the population, territory, GNI per capita and oil & gas reserves of these countries are presented.

Country U.S. \$	population (million) (U.N. 2005-2006)	Area (sq km)	GNI per capita U.S. \$ (World Bank)
Afghanistan	26.00	652,225	N/A
Azerbaijan	8.400	86,600	1,240
Bahrain	0.754	717.00	14,370
Georgia	5.000	69,700	1,350
Iran	68.5(U.N.2006)	1,650,000	2,770
Iraq	26.5	438,317	N/A
Kazakhstan	15.4	2,700,000	2,930
Kuwait	2.7	17,818	24,040
Kyrgyzstan	5.1(U.N. 2006)	199,900	440
Oman	3.00	309,500	9,070
Qatar	0.628	11,437	N/A
Saudi Arabia	25.6	2,240,000	11,770
Tajikistan	6.3	143,100	330
Turkmenistan	5.00	488,100	1,340
United Arab Emirates	3.1	77.700	23,770
Uzbekistan	26.9	447,400	510
Yemen	21.5	536,869	600
Source: (BBC, 2006)			

1. Visit the Pennwell Corporation website for updated information: [https:// www.eia.gov/ international/overview/world](https://www.eia.gov/international/overview/world) or: <https://www.worldometers.info/>

Country	Oil & Gas Reserves Oil (Billion Barrels)	Gas (Trillion Cubic Feet)
Azerbaijan	7.000	30.000
Bahrain	0.125	3.250
Iran	136.270	974.000
Iraq	115.000	112.000
Kazakhstan	30.000	100.000
Kuwait	101.500	55.000
Oman	5.500	30.000
Qatar	15.207	910.000
Saudi Arabia	262.300	240.000
Turkmenistan	0.6000	100.000
United Arab Emirates	97.800	214.000
Uzbekistan	0.594	65.000
Yemen	3.000	16.900
Total	774.968	2850.150
World Total	1,317.44	6182692

Source: Pennwell Corporation,2006

Military buildup: The US was not only quick to recognize the newly independent republics of Central Asia after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, and to establish different kinds of link with them, but also it started building up its military bases there, in addition to already existing bases in the Middle East after the USSR invaded Afghanistan and particularly after Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990. The US military buildup was further expanded in the Middle East and especially Central Asia after Sep.11, 2001 terrorist attack (Fried,2005) and the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. There were then US military bases in Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Georgia, Iraq, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan and Yemen, and agreements had been made with Kazakhstan and Tajikistan to use airfields for military operations which might later develop into US bases. Even neutral Turkmenistan had granted permission for military over flights

(Maitra,2005). Moreover, all the states of Central Asia and Caucasia had joined NATO's Partnership for Peace Programme on individual and collective basis.

In addition to the existing bases the US was also setting up nine new bases in Afghanistan in provinces of Helmand, Heart, Nimrouz, Balkh, Khost and Paktia. Indeed all these bases were at the crossroads of three major areas: Middle East, Central and South Asia, which were not only rich in oil, gas and other minerals but also at the meeting points of three growing powers- China, India and Russia. Thus Central Asia, Caucasia, all of Iran, the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz and northern Arabia up to Yemen's Socotra Island came under operational scope of the US Air Force, which not only provided the US with commanding position regarding India and western China (Maitra, 2005) but also a higher position in its rivalry with Russia, China, European states and Japan in these regions.

White House officials believe that the United States, because of its universal values and norms, is the only power that deserves to lead the world and must defend justice and freedom in the world. The realization of the American hegemonic dream required the conditions that were concentrated more than any other region of the world in the Middle East. Of the US military bases, Washington has more than 50 military bases in Central Asia and the Middle East. Therefore, it is important to know the US military bases in these areas, given the growing threats to the country, and the use of space statistics can help us better understand these bases. The data show that the bases with a distance of less than 620 km to the borders of Iran, have been created mostly with the aim of covering and direct control over the territory of Iran, and in contrast to the bases with a distance of more than 620 km from the borders of Iran, US support and other goals have been established in the region (Mohammadpur and Atar, 2018: 377).

III. Threats against the Iran national security

The system of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which has had the anti-hegemonic nature since its inception, is one of the obstacles to normalizing relations between Iran and the United States. In fact, a revolution that is counter to the domination of great powers is unlikely to be easily influenced by American strategic culture. The features of American strategic culture are: intolerance of independent powers, hostility to non-liberal governments unless their foreign policy is dependent on the United States (Leverett, 2013: 333-335). Consequently, the US imperialist tendencies in the Middle East have forced Iran's leaders to consider those who oppose its policies as Satan. One of the best examples of the problem of refusing and abandoning non-liberal systems is the order that has emerged since the revolution in Iran and through the Islamic Republic of Iran - the convergence of democratic institutions with the sovereignty of Islam that has come with an independent foreign policy. In our view, we are faced with two strategic cultures, both of which are based on conflicting ideological foundations: one has a dominant nature, and the other is the nature of resistance to domination. Thus, one of the issues that we will continue to face in the coming years is the Islamic Republic's opposition to the policy of American intervention and domination in the world and specifically in the Middle East (Chitsazian and Shafaie, 2018: 47).

The author believes Islamic Republic of Iran according to principles and structures of the revolution has affected transformation of Islamic Resistance through three ways in West Asia. First, Iran has strengthened the foundations of resistance in Lebanon. Iran also has supported Islamic movements in the region, such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad movement. Second, the Islamic Republic of Iran has tried to unite movements and NGOs to counter the Neo-conservatism in West Asia. Third, values and fundamental belief in the Islamic Revolution discourse has created a huge revolution in the field of Islamic resistance. This is exactly what may be the root of the military struggle between the United

States and Iran in the future. Therefore, the U.S. military presence in the Middle East and Central Asia will threaten Iran, which will lead to containment of Iran.

As part of the containment project, the United States seeks to strengthen centrifugal tendencies in West Asian countries by fomenting social and ethnic crises, in order to implement the project of Balkanization of countries such as Iran (the axis of Islamic resistance) in the long run. . This is important for upsetting the balance of regional power in favor of the Zionist regime and paving the way for the realization of the "Greater Israel" project. In the case of countries opposed to reform, the United States wants to guarantee the implementation of dictated reforms from abroad and to destroy the identity and culture of these countries (Dehshiri, 2004: 124-125).

U.S Military presence in Afghanistan: The US presence in Afghanistan due to its proximity and cultural and political commonalities between Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran directly affects the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The presence of Taliban forces in Afghanistan and ideological confrontations and the support of some countries in the region posed a threat to the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, from the very beginning, the confrontations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States in Afghanistan became apparent over time. The security problems of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the part of Afghanistan before September 11, 2001 had their strengths and weaknesses and included various dimensions. With the US presence in Afghanistan and the occupation of this country, on the one hand, past threats from Iran's neighborhood with Afghanistan, such as the issue of drugs and refugees, faced various fluctuations, and on the other hand, new threats emerged in other areas. The US presence in Afghanistan was irrelevant.

By invading Afghanistan the United States has an upper hand in controlling the huge energy resources of Central Asia which is landlocked, and so there are several plans to transfer oil and gas

through pipe lines via Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Indian Ocean, bypassing Iran as the most viable route, to decrease the influence and economic advantages Iran could otherwise enjoy. It seems that physical presence in military form is a classical strategy of guaranteeing influence. This is why America arranged for the most extensive availability of troops of US and NATO allies in Afghanistan. This military buildup presents two security menaces to Iran. First north-eastern parts of Iran are within US access in case of a military showdown with Iran and second the mere presence of US and western troops stimulate potential development of fundamentalism, terrorism and instability near eastern borders of Iran (Shafiei et al, 2013:111).

A former US Air Force officer has stated that one of the main reasons for Washington's military presence in Afghanistan is to contain Iran, because that country is a source of concern to Israel. Karen Kwiatkowski stated that the reason for the US military presence in Afghanistan is Iran. He added: "The United States wants to be in an operational position to somehow threaten (Iran) and show that it is implementing its threats." (Aria news, 07/01/2019).

Pakistan: It is reported that in early 2002 more than 30,000 US troops were stationed in Pakistan and US Air force has access to four bases in Baluchistan State of Pakistan close to south-eastern borders of Iran (Davand, 2014:120). Therefore the eastern borders are open to attack by American troops as well (Ahmadpour et al, 2011:32). Indirectly, US military presence in Pakistan threatens Iran. Because terrorist groups may have access to nuclear weapons.

The 9/11 incident made the Western countries more concerned about the possibility that "the rise of political instability in Pakistan could not only lead to building nuclear weapons in this country, but also bring about risks such as dangerous and vulnerable nuclear materials being stolen by extremist groups" (Mustafa, 2013: 2). From the perspective of the Western countries, Pakistan is a suitable place for fundamentalist

organizations seeking nuclear weapons and materials, since first of all, the central government is not able to fully monitor all the country and second, there is evidence that many extremist organizations have penetrated Pakistan's security system (Goldberg & Ambinder, 2011).

Al-Qaeda has endeavored to access nuclear weapons at several points in recent history. On early December 1998, Al-Qaeda revealed a determination to obtain atomic bombs for the extensive destruction of atheists (the Westerns). This group believes that possessing atomic bombs is a religious duty, which according to some is the reason for Al-Qaeda's attempt to establish relationships with South Asia for obtaining nuclear materials, as well as its effort to purchase a nuclear warhead from Chechen rebels in Russia. After the September 11th incident, Bin Laden threatened to attack the United States with chemical, nuclear and biological weapons, if the United States used its weapons against Bin Laden's group or teammates. Therefore, the fact that none of the extremists have yet carried out an atomic attack on the West does not guarantee that such attacks from Al-Qaeda and other extremists in Pakistan will not happen in the future (Bokhari, 2006: 31-32).

Iraq: After the invasion of Iraq in 2003 western and southwestern borders of Iran are also vulnerable to US and British attacks which constitute serious threats to Iran's security both militarily and by terrorism of fundamental groups like Al-Qaeda. More than 100,000 US troops have access to almost all military bases in Iraq. Considering that Turkey is a member of NATO, we can say that all western borders of the country are also under direct threat by the US troops which may be used against nuclear facilities in Iran (Sohrabi, 2017:61).

The United States also uses its military to support ISIS against Iran. The main goal of the United States in bringing terrorists back to the field and continuing the attacks is not limited to putting more pressure on the popular mobilization organizations on the battlefield, and they are trying to put the representatives of the

Resistance Front in the political arena and surrender. They seek to seize power completely in Iraq, and one of the consequences could be the repeal of the law on the expulsion of foreign troops from Iraq. With the withdrawal of the popular mobilization forces from these important and strategic areas, the secret elements of ISIL can maneuver more and multiply their power and will no longer be under pressure, and the way will be opened for the Americans to move in these areas as well. They are located in these places. Some experts believe that the issue of the withdrawal of foreign troops from Iraq, and in particular the US military, has caused concern and dissatisfaction in Washington in recent months, especially by some Shiite political and military groups. Because they do not want to empty the field in favor of Iran and gain more power of Shiite military groups in Iraq. For this reason, the United States intends to find a reason to continue its presence in Iraq by reactivating ISIS and creating insecurity (Irna, 2020).

The Persian Gulf: Bahrain, Qatar and the Emirate are among the most important Persian Gulf states where US military bases are located. The US Fifth Fleet in Bahrain, Al Udeid Military Base in Qatar and Al Dhafra Air Base in the UAE will be specifically mentioned here.

The Fifth Fleet is a numbered fleet of the United States Navy. It has been responsible for naval forces in the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, Arabian Sea, and parts of the Indian Ocean since 1995 after a 48-year hiatus. It shares a commander and headquarters with U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) in Bahrain. Established in 1944, the Fifth Fleet conducted extensive operations against Japanese forces in the Central Pacific during World War II. World War II ended in 1945, and the Fifth Fleet was deactivated in 1947. It remained inactive until 1995, when it was reactivated and assumed its current responsibilities (Wikipedia, (a) 2021). Al Udeid Air Base is one of two military bases southwest of Doha, Qatar, also known as Abu Nakhlah Airport. It houses Qatar Air Force, United States Air Force, Royal Air Force, and other Gulf War Coalition personnel and assets. It is

host to a forward headquarters of United States Central Command, headquarters of United States Air Forces Central Command, No. 83 Expeditionary Air Group RAF, and the 379th Air Expeditionary Wing of the USAF (Wikipedia, (b) 2021). Al Dhafra Air Base (IATA: DHF, ICAO: OMAM) is a military installation in the United Arab Emirates. The base is located approximately 20 mi (32 km) south of Abu Dhabi and is operated by the United Arab Emirates Air Force. The US and French air forces are also stationed at the base. The American RQ-4 Global Hawk drone, which was destroyed by the IRGC, had taken off from the base (Wikipedia, (c) 2021).

The most important US military threats and capabilities in the Persian Gulf to counter the IAEA include: US superspectral technology, unmanned spy planes, US use of military bases in the region, strategic aircraft, US military capabilities in the use of smart weapons, aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines, the deployment of the US Navy in the Persian Gulf, reconnaissance aircraft and flying radars, US military aggression against all sensitive military and civilian centers of the Islamic Republic of Iran, cruise missiles and Smart bombs (Moradian and Sadeghi, 2013: 146).

Azerbaijan and Georgia: After the collapse of the Soviet Union and independence of the Caucasian states of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia US, other western countries and Israel have tried to fill the power vacuum in the area. They have established vast economic, political and military ties with Georgia and Azerbaijan to curtail Russia and Iran's influence there. Especially important for Iran is extensive military agreements with and presence of American and Israeli military advisers and a number of military bases they are either using or are allowed to use in these two countries which may in any conflict be used against Iran (Hakim, Jafari Valadani; 2015:55).

The United States has been one of the most influential trans-regional actors and has played an important role in this region. According to this view, the United States, which seeks to expand

its hegemony in the world as part of its hegemonic strategy, cannot be indifferent to this region, which is the center of Eurasia. The strategic importance of this region is such that it is surrounded by a wide range of nuclear or potential nuclear powers, namely Russia, China, Pakistan and India. The Republic of Azerbaijan is located in the heart of this region, quite strategically, and this geographical feature has given it a privileged position compared to other countries. It is because of this geopolitical position of the Republic of Azerbaijan that Iran, the Ottomans and Russia have been at loggerheads over the region at various times. This time, the United States is trying to use its strategic position for its hegemonic goals. The position of the Republic of Azerbaijan, given its proximity to Iran and Russia, its location on the shores of the Caspian Sea and its ownership of significant oil and gas reserves, has attracted the attention of the United States. The Republic of Azerbaijan shares a 279-kilometer border with the Russian Federation to the north, including the border with the North Caucasus republics; This is a point that is very important for Russia's national security and is full of important conflicts that act like fire under the ashes in the current situation. The Republic of Azerbaijan has a very important position in the US security perspective, and as mentioned, its strategic position has created additional motivation for its politicians. Given this strategic situation, Hillary Clinton stated during her recent visit to Baku: "The Republic of Azerbaijan is the key king by which Washington can easily achieve its goals in the region." In any case, the United States is pursuing long-term security-military interests in the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the need of the Republic of Azerbaijan for US support can facilitate the US military presence in this country (Hamshahri, 31/07/2010).

Conclusion

Washington's outlook for engagement and intervention in the region changed dramatically after 9/11. Undoubtedly, as in the past decade, there was still interest in pursuing a political and

economic reform agenda, but military and security considerations became key elements of US policy toward Central Asia. Logistical requirements Supporting the United States' extensive operations in Afghanistan and, as a result, its heavy reliance on access to military facilities in the region took precedence over its commitment to political and economic reform and human rights. The United States enhanced the importance of security cooperation with major countries in the region and, more broadly, the US geopolitical position in Central Asia. Central Asia has become a region with marginal status and importance as one of the top priorities of the United States' strategy, although its importance was primarily due to its contribution to the stability of Afghanistan rather than to its own priority.¹

It is clear that such an extensive presence had different reasons in addition to the existence of huge oil and gas reserves in the Middle East, Central Asia and Caspian Sea regions. The states of these regions were developing and underdeveloped which were actual markets for American goods and services and thus to be open to the US access. Moreover in the era of globalization, which demands free and fluent flow of capital anywhere in the world where there are ample cheap labor and raw materials, these areas were most appealing and therefore rivalry with China and Russia apart from rivalry with other western industrial countries and Japan on these issues were important factors for the US extensive presence in these areas. Of course, another important matter was the containment of Iran which is the only country opposing American influence and interests in these regions. It is clear that the American bases closed the circle around Iran which is a potential threat against the national security of Iran in case of any military showdown. Moreover the mere presence of American forces around the country increases political instability and tension on the periphery of the Iranian borders, so to create a security dilemma identical to the Soviet position during the cold

1. See (Rumer and others, 2016)

war.

So, in brief, the threats of the American military presence against Iran are almost entirely in the region. These restrictions include the US military presence in Afghanistan, the most important of which are the spread of extremism, the spread of terrorist movements and the escalation of spy activities in the region. In connection with Pakistan, the most important threat is the siege of the eastern and southeast borders by the United States. In the case of the western borders, Iraq and Turkey are the options that the United States can attack against its nuclear facilities. In the context of Central Asia, the main danger of the US military presence in this region being coalition against Iran within the framework of NATO is the restriction of Russia (the strategic alliance of Iran), and also that the Caspian Sea can serve as a base for attack to Iran.

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