

The Iranian Project: Goals and Consequences

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses a fundamental aspect of Iran's foreign policy, primarily the so called Iran project. It encompasses three essential aspects: territorial expansion, ideological expansion and Iran's nuclear program. While the Iranian Project may seem a recent manifestation of Iran's regional ambitions, it is in fact deeply rooted in history. The current regime in Iran inherited the Shah's expansionist policy; a continuation of a tradition which began centuries ago in its history, well-rooted in the Sassanid Dynasty's expansionist tendencies across Arabia in pre-Islamic eras. On the territorial level, Iran has imposed the right to navigation in Shat Al Arab, its eastern borders with Iraq and has extended this by crossing into Iraq's territory. In addition, it has claimed sovereignty over three of UAE's islands in the Arabia Gulf. In terms of ideological expansion, Iran has been actively promoting Shi'ism and exporting its revolutionary ideology since 1979. It has actively supported Hezbollah in Lebanon and other Shi' movements across Arabia reviving old Sunni-Shi' animosities. Iran has pursued a process of destabilization in Arab countries such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Lebanon. It has substantiated its territorial and ideological claims with a commitment to nuclear arms. Iran has fully constructed a nuclear program which aims at producing nuclear weapons seeking to impose its dominance over regional affairs, therefore, prompting a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. In order to counter the threat, Arab countries led by Saudi Arabia have been actively confronting Iran in different fronts, in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen, to name a few. However, at this point this far reaching confrontation with Iran is only assembling, but it is expected to develop at a certain period of time into a direct confrontation between the two sides, which will destabilize the entire region.

Keywords: Iran, Iran Project, Ideology, territorial expansion, Gulf Cooperation Council.

DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Khalifa University of Science, Technology and Research. The work is entirely my own except where indicated by special reference in the text. Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of Khalifa University of Science, Technology and Research. No part of the thesis has been presented to any other university for any degree.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis examines the Iran Project (IP) in terms of its ideological dimension, territorial expansion and nuclear program. The IP is not a new national project, rather a continuation of Iran's hegemonic dominance in the Gulf and the Greater Middle East region over the past two millennia. However, this program with its militant dimension was articulated specifically in 2005 during the Ahmadinejad administration, which promoted turbulence, instability and dominance in the region. It has also been associated with the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. While Iran managed to manipulate the American invasion in order to topple two of its most ardent Sunni enemies, the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, it has come at a heavy cost to Iraq. Ultimately, the US withdrew from Iraq and literally handed this country to Iran in 2010. Therefore, Iran has become the primary beneficiary of the US invasion of Iraq, and therefore, has utilized its influence in Iraq to reengineer the political scene there, and expand into neighboring countries especially Syria. Iran's project has also been facilitated by the phenomenon of the Arab Spring and the instability it has brought to the region. The Arab Spring uprisings were valuable to Iran, which took credit for it from day one, claiming that it was a continuation of the Iranian Revolution, inspired by it and seeking its identical goals. Such a claim was rejected by the revolutionary forces which distanced themselves from Iran and its model of governance.

The Roots of the Iranian Project

Iran's history and imperial expansion in the Middle East, Central Asia and Eurasia continues to inspire its current foreign policy. However, several junctures in this history have had everlasting impacts on Iran's far reaching expansionist ambitions in the Middle East in particular, among which are Islamo-Persian conflicts, various wars and eventually Iran's conversion to Islam and its adoption of Shia Islam as the state ideology from 1507 onwards. This tendency was also strengthened with the triumph of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the ongoing Sunni-Shi'i rivalry since 2005.

Iran's imperial history and geostrategic location at the heart of the Middle East establishes it as a central player in the political affairs of the region. Iran's geography, terrain and location at the crossroads of major international waterways such as the Straits of Hormuz have had significant impacts on international relations throughout history. Geographically, "Iran is roughly the size of Western Europe and possesses a population that has passed the 70 million mark...Iran consists of a huge central plain ringed by mountains. The Farsis or Persians constitute approximately 55 percent of Iran's population and dominate the country's central plateau. The remaining 45 percent consists of a bewildering array of ethnic minorities, the largest of which are the Kurds, Azeris, the Arabs and the Baluchi. All retain a strong sense of ethnic identity and many harbor separatist tendencies."¹

¹ Palmer, Monte, 2007. *The Politics of the Middle East*, Thompson Wadsworth: USA, P. 262.

Palmer maintains that, Iran's ethnic composition is a demographic extension to neighboring nations and peoples. Although the Parsis are dominant in the political structure, the military and the economy, ethnic minorities are no less influential. For example, the four million Azeris are a demographic extension to the Republic of Azerbaijan and they have been influential in the history of Eurasia, Iran and Central Asia. The Kurds of Iran also view themselves as an integral part of Kurdistan, which extends from Iran to Iraq, towards Turkey and Syria, and farther into Georgia and Armenia. Its Arab population has also been influential in history establishing independent emirates in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but remaining forcefully incorporated into a central Iranian government. Iran views these minorities with great suspicion and they are deprived of their basic rights in terms of religious freedom, employment, autonomy, and language. The Baluchi are also an extension of the Pakistan and Afghanistan Baluchi populations. These ethnic groups also harbor animosity toward the Persians who dominate the state, while marginalizing other ethnic minorities. This explains why Palmer stated that, "Iran's minorities resent Persian domination and would probably revolt if the opportunity presented itself. Revolt is all the more likely because Iran's largest minorities are part of larger ethnic communities that span two or more national borders"²

Observers of Iranian foreign policies have identified several important factors influencing Iran's foreign policy. First, its "glorious" history defined in terms of imperial Iran which has dominated a large territory since the Parthian and the Sassanid. They rivaled contemporary empires such as Greece, the Romans, and the Hans of China. Their borders extended from Syria, into Iraq and Persia, towards Central Asia and to the borders of China. They have managed to combat Roman and Greek threats and send missions across the Mediterranean to battle with Greece and southern Europe. Persia has also warred with Islam and the rising Arab Empire. The first encounter with Persia came in the early years of Islam when Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) sent an emissary to invite Persia to Islam. His envoy was mistreated and ridiculed. However, within few years, the Muslim armies triumphed over the Sassanid in the Qadessia battle in Iraq in 637. The revered Caliph Omar Ibn Al Khatab was willing to live with Iran at the borders of current Iraq; however, the Iranian attempts to recapture Iraq led to a full scale invasion of Persia which eventually ended the Sassanid rule in Iran within two decades. Muslim armies utilized Iran as a staging point of departure towards Central Asia, Eurasia and the Caucuses. Islam embraced the Iranian culture, administration, bureaucracy, engineering and related civilizational innovations. However, through the Islamic reign, Persia continued to underline its distinction. Such "uniqueness" became the most defining element in Iran's modern history, i.e., adopting Shia Islam.

The second most critical element in Iran's history is adopting Shi'i Islam as the state ideology and system of governance. Iran and Iraq has become the primary arena for sectarian divide among Sunni and Shi'i Islam since the early years of the conflict in the seventh century, however, this conflict became more apparent in 1507 under the Safavids, and was later revived by the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Iran follows the Twelver branch of Shia Islam. Henry Munson in Palmer (2007) stated that, "

² Palmer, Ibid. P. 262.

Twelver Shi'is generally believe that all but the last of their twelve imams dies as martyrs-the notion of martyrdom for the cause of God being more important in Shi'ism than Sunnism. The twelfth imam is believed to have been in a state of "lesser occultation" (al-ghayba as-sughra) from about 874 through 940, during which period his wishes were transmitted to his followers by four deputies who were the only people who could see him. As of 940, he entered the state of the "greater occultation" (al-ghayba al-kubra) which will last until he returns shortly before the end of time to fill the earth with justice and equity, just as it was filled with injustice and oppression. This last imam is variously known as the imam of the age, the hidden imam and al-Mahdi, the rightly guided one."³

The Shi'i scholarship developed into a system of governance providing a sophisticated political system in which the deputy-Imam rules on behalf of the absent Mahdi until his return before the end of time. The religious establishment is entrusted with the task of choosing amongst itself an Ayatollah, or "marja'a to serve as a representative of the hidden Imam. The Ayatollah is entrusted with the power of interpreting the "text" or "Ijtihad" defined as the wishes of the hidden Imam. His wishes are binding to followers of Shi'i Islam, and there will only be one Grand Ayatollah at a time. However, he is assisted by lesser Ayatollahs' who assist him in his tasks. Ayatollah Khomeini was the most well-known marja'a in modern times.

Ayatollah Khomeini claimed the power to interpret the wishes of the hidden imam and used that power to transform Iran into the first Islamic theocracy of the modern era. He also used Iran's religious hierarchy of religious officials to hold the country together during the period of institutional collapse following the fall of the Shah's regime. It was these officials who became Iran's new bureaucracy."⁴ Khomeini was exceptionally influential in using the power of interpretation to also maintain Iran's enthusiasm for the eight year war with Iraq for, despite the fact that Iran was on the brink of collapse and bankruptcy. He managed to capture the hearts and minds of the Iranian people, and therefore, his departure was shocking to the revolution, but his deputies managed to keep it intact despite the regional and international challenges. In this aspect, the role of Ali Akhbar Hashmi Rafsanjani and Ali Khamenei's has been notable in the transitional period after the death of Khomeini.

It is essential to state here that the revival of modern Shi'i Islam in its political and militant manifestation came as a reaction to the oppressive policies of the Shah's regime in Iran. The American-Iranian and Israeli alliance produced an extreme form of repression aimed at crushing the role of the religious establishment in Iran with the creation of the SAVAK, the most repressive secret police agency in modern times. In 1953 the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) orchestrated a coup against the democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammed Mosaddeq who aimed at nationalizing the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, later British Petroleum. He also aimed at democratizing Iran along a stable and developed form of government that would control its national resources with its territory free of external intervention. These aims ran contrary to the monarchy and external interests who were

³ Palmer, Ibid. P. 263.

⁴ Palmer, Ibid. P. 264.

determined to remove him from office, eventually imposing house-arrest and causing his death in 1967. Upon the triumph of the coup against Mosaddeq, the Shah claimed imperial unlimited powers, which eventually led to extreme abuse of power, and regime collapse in 1979.

The Shah embarked on what came to be known as the White Revolution. Its political aspect entailed a distorted process of democratization in which the Shah devised a two-party system. The government and the opposition were both controlled by his own supporters and associates. However, the most significant aspect of his revolution was economic reform. Palmer stated that, "the White Revolution comprised a variety of economic and social initiatives including land reform, public ownership of industries, voting rights for women, profit sharing for workers and a literacy corps to implement compulsory education in the rural areas."⁵ His revolution was opposed primarily by the two most influential social forces in Iran; the religious establishment and land owners. Both classes viewed it as designed to undermine their power base. At this point, a powerful Ayatollah (Khomeini) emerged, leading demonstrations against the Shah. He dubbed the White Revolution as anti-Islamic in nature which sought to introduce Western education by force in Iran, in addition to tackling issues related to women's rights, and land distribution, coupled with opening Iran to Western interests, especially those of America. In response to the Shah's alliance with Israel, Khomeini led major demonstrations in 1963 leading to his exile to Najaf, a central seat of Shi'i Islam in Iraq.

Ayatollah Khomeini staged a sustained campaign against the Shah's regime from Najaf. His pamphlets and taped sermons were smuggled into Iran and distributed through the network of Bizaris who were alarmed by the Shah's actions and his SAVAK agency. Khomeini remained in Iraq for thirteen years until Saddam Hussein ordered his deportation to France under pressure from the Shah. This decision was costly to Saddam Hussein. It earned him the wrath of Ayatollah and Iran's religious establishment, besides the disapproval of the Iraqi Shi'i community and other Shi'at communities of the Gulf region. He remained in Paris until his return to Iran to lead the revolution in 1979.

The exaggeration of autocracy at home by the Shah and his regime, and his regional dominance in the Gulf region intensified conflicts at home and regional resentment to Iran. Albeit, the Shah paid no attention to either, the domestic or the regional concerns. Mackey (in Palmer, 2007) stated that, the Shah ruled Iran with an iron fist, "with absolute power came delusion of grandeur and an obsession with transforming Iran into a world power."⁶ He transferred a constitutional monarchy into an absolute rule, motivated by ambitions of great power, empowered by oil wealth. However, all dreams came to an end with the rising domestic challenge to his power and authority led by the religious establishment with an alliance with the Bizaris and other political forces that determined to bring an end to the his regime, which eventually materialized into the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Palmer (2007) concluded that, the Shah offended everybody in Iran even Westernized intelligentsia, in addition to the general populous, and the religious establishment to the extent it was "difficult to find a group that the shah had not

⁵ Palmer, Ibid. P. 264.

⁶ Ibid, Palmer, P. 269.

offended.”⁷Auggaly (2011) echoed these sentiments considering the Shah’s White Revolution in particular as fully responsible for the re-emergence of militant Shi’i Islam and its utilization in the revolutionary awakening in Iran. She continued to state that, the White Revolution was a major juncture in modern Iranian history because of the importance of the 1963 riots in opposition to the Shah’s revolution. She listed several indicators which led to the end of the state of passiveness on the part of the Iranian religious establishment. These are:

1. The death of Ayatollah Brujardi in 1963 who advocated the necessity of clergy refraining from politics. Brujardi was Marj’*e*, and therefore, his obedience is mandatory in the Shi’i thought. Thus his death paved the way for the clergy to lead protests against the Shah’s regime and the brutality of the SAVAK. They revived the concept of martyrdom in Islam and demonstrated their willingness to pay the heavy price for their active participation in the demonstrations against the Shah’s regime.
2. The despotic nature of the regime of the Shah which marginalized and excluded the civil society and the religious establishment from political participation.
3. The White Revolution which was interpreted by the clergy as un-Islamic in most of its aspect especially, land reform, women’s voting rights, canceling of taking the oath of office on the Holy Quran in the House of Representatives, revival of Farsi nationalism, changing the Islamic calendar to Shahinshahi calendar (Iranian dynastic calendar), and undermining the economic base of the religious establishment. Therefore, the Shah devoted substantial resources to strengthen state-clergy animosity, which led to the explosion, a decade later. ⁸

The triumph of the Iranian Revolution came as a collective effort by discontent public organized by major political movements on the right and the left. Nationalists and communists participated as much as the Islamists, however, Khomeini “banned his opponents, suspected and real from all political activity. This includes virtually all of the Shah’s supporters as well as members of the leftist groups who had supported the Islamic Revolution in the naïve belief that they would soon be able to wrest authority from antiquated clergy that lacked political experience.”⁹ The revolution faced tremendous challenges at home and regionally and internationally. However, by no means was it passive. Iran engaged in the war with Iraq and managed to put Iraq on the defensive for six years. Edwards and Hinchcliffe (2006) stated that Saddam Hussein had “underestimated Khomeini’s ability to unite and inspire his people to resist and defeat Iraqi aggression, motivating his troops with religious and nationalistic fervor. As the war progressed many eyewitness accounts contrasted the often suicidal fanaticism of the Iranian soldiers apparently eager to die in battle in human-wave attacks, with the more conventional tactics of

⁷ Ibid. Palmer, P. 279.

⁸ Auggaly, Shama D. 2011. *The Theory of Wilayat Al-Faqih and its Practice in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Center for Civilization for the Development of Islamic Thought, Beirut: Lebanon, P. 117.

⁹ Ibid, Palmer 273.

the obviously less committed Iraqis.”¹⁰ The Iraq triumph in the first two years of the war was overturned. “Iraq was on the defensive in the war from 1982 onwards. By contrast, Iran was occupying 800 square kilometers of Iraqi territory by October 1983. Indeed, until the last stages of the war, Iran never in any real danger of defeat had much better land engagements, also capturing the Fao in 1986.”¹¹

Iran has also attempted to destabilize neighboring Gulf countries. Khomeini authorized an attempt to overthrow the government of Bahrain, undermine Hajj season using 100,000 Iranian pilgrims, and a series of bombs which rocked Kuwait. His goal was revolutionary mobilization in the Gulf, in Iraq, and in Lebanon. Until his death, Iran was consumed with internal strife, and regional and international crises. However, the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988, a series of Iraqi mistakes provided the necessary conditions for Iran to re-emerge as a powerful regional player in Gulf and Middle Eastern politics for the first time since the early 1990s.

As for the challenge of the 1980-1988 war, Lesch and Hass stated that, although world powers remained largely neutral during this, the US support to Iraq made a difference especially after 1985 when Iranian forces were unable to repel the Iraqi invasion, but drove Iraqi forces back into Iraq and threatened southern Iraq. The stance of the international community was basically “a hands-off posture, content to see these two abominable regimes exhaust each other on the battlefield, particular since the war was having relatively little impact on oil supplies or prices. That nonchalance began to fade in 1985-1986 when Iran began to retaliate against Iraqi air attacks against its shipping in the Gulf by using mines and small armed boats against neutral shipping en route to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.”¹²

Lesch and Hass underlined the fact that, the US adopted a dual containment policy towards the two countries Iran and Iraq for various reasons. In the case of Iran, the US charged Tehran with a set of concerns:

1. Its support of international terrorism and subversion
2. Violent opposition to the Arab-Israel peace process
3. Attempting to acquire nuclear weapons.¹³

American diplomacy, however, provided some gestures of goodwill toward Iran under the Bush and Clinton administrations. However, no talks were initiated by the Bush Administration, while the Clinton Administration attempted to engage Iran, but opposition on both sides made the efforts of normalizing American-Iranian relations a challenging task.

¹⁰ Edwards-Milton, Beverly and Peter Hinchcliff, 2006. *Conflicts in the Middle East Since 1945*. Routledge: London, P. 192.

¹¹ *Ibid*, P. 192.

¹² Lesch, David, W. and Mark L. Hass, 2012. *The Middle East and the United States*, Westview: Colorado, P. 331.

¹³ *Ibid*, P.337.

Iran emerged from the war with Iraq nearly at the brink of collapse. The war challenge was coupled with the death of the Supreme Guide in 1989. Iran's economy and institutions were undermined by the war, and its populous was fatigued by a meaningless war. However, it had better prospects of stability compared to its rival, Iraq. The revolution survived the war and survived American attempts to undermine Khomeini's rule. Iran managed to reconcile modern political institutions with Shi'i religious establishments creating a dual government controlled by two major factions of the revolution, the so called moderates and conservatives. The moderates controlled the "modern" or secular government, while the conservatives controlled the religious government. In between, a set of institutions settled differences and conflicts.

The death of Ayatollah Khomeini also represented a major challenge to Iran. However, "two figures who bore primary responsibility for guiding Iran into the era of the new world order were Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the reigning president of Iran, and Hojjat al-Islam Sayyed Ali Khamenei, the newly elected Supreme Guide."¹⁴ Although both were compromised candidates, being members of the Iranian elite they had a shared goal of rebuilding Iran and its economy. They managed to use the 1990s to advance Iran's interests and rebuild its regional and international relations, while its rival Iraq descended into a state of regional wars and international invasions culminating in the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, both of which proved to be catastrophic to the region.

Research Question

This thesis examines the following question: what is the Iranian Project, its main components, goals and consequences?

The Iranian Project

This thesis aims at examining the Iranian Project in the Middle East defined in terms of its regional ambitions of dominance, ideological expansion and nuclear capabilities. Iran benefited tremendously from the 1990s at a time when the US and the world were concentrating their efforts on their wars with Iraq. The latter's invasion of Kuwait in the summer of 1990s, and its eventual defeat at the hands of the international coalitions formed by the United States to evict Iraq from Kuwait provided Iran with a valuable opportunity to rebuild itself economically, militarily and politically. Iran embarked on a process of economic reconstruction and managed to accomplish a substantial level of economic growth. On the political scene, Iran managed to construct a two-type government reconciling the religious and "secular" sectors. Militarily speaking, Iran has managed to build a nuclear program and a substantial conventional force making it the superior military power in the Gulf region.

¹⁴ Palmer 277.

Iran has also benefited from the 2000s by becoming part of the war on international terrorism. Iran promoted the removal of its two arch enemies, Saddam Hussein in Iraq and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. However, Iran's main objective was avoiding a "US attack while simultaneously preventing the US from extending its position in the Gulf region."¹⁵ While Iran welcomed an American invasion of Iraq, it had made the occupation of Iraq impossible. The US aimed at a regime change in Iran and other parts of the Middle East. "The Islamic regime in Iran was deeply entrenched and its overthrow would require a long and substantial buildup of US facilities in the region."¹⁶ The Iranian and Shi'i militia coordinated a systematic campaign of attacks on the American forces from 2003-2009, leading to the American defeat in Iraq and its eventual departure in 2010.

In the aftermath of the war in Iraq, the Middle East went through turbulence from December 2010 until the present with the so called Arab Spring. Iran claimed credit for the Arab revolutions and deemed it a triumph of the Iranian calls for revolution since 1979. Arab Spring was as rewarding to Iran as the American withdrawal from Iraq. While the US departure was coordinated with Iran, in which Iran provided the American forces with a safe haven in exchange for dominance in Iraq, the Arab Spring provided Iran with a free had of maneuverability in the entire Arab World. The collapse of the state of Iraq provided Iran's revolutionary forces with a dominant role in Iraq. It has also led to a dominance of the Shi'at community in Iraq at the expense of Sunni-Arabs and other minorities in Iraq.

On the Syrian front, the Arab Spring was catastrophic in the sense that peaceful demonstrations and calls for reform led to state disintegration, hundreds of thousands of innocent victims, and millions of refugees. Iran has become a main pillar of the war in Syria. It has provided the Syrian regime with financial resources, armaments and soldiers to fight the emerging Sunni-fighters in the country. Iran has also coordinated the network of Shi'i militia operating in Iraq and Syria in support of the Syrian regime. Not only that, but also Iran has extended its military support to the Huthi militia in Yemen. On the Gulf scene, Iran has attempted repeatedly to overthrow the government of Bahrain prompting the intervention of the Arab Shield Force to protect the monarchy. It has also supported the rebellion of the Saudi Eastern Region against the central government in Riyadh. Ultimately, Iran has managed to articulate a mission with the far-reaching aims of ideological expansion, territorial expansion and a nuclear program to ensure its hegemony in the Middle East.

Thesis Organization

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview and introductory material on Iran's modern political structures and goals. Chapter 2 is devoted to a literature review, while Chapter 3 is devoted to research methodology. Chapter 4 is devoted to a discussion on Iran's ideological expansion

¹⁵ Palmer 281

¹⁶ Palmer, P. 281.

and the conceptualization of Shi'ism as an integral aspect of the Iranian Project. Chapter 5 is devoted to Iran's nuclear program and its attempt to develop nuclear weapons. Chapter 6 examines the practical aspect of the Iranian Project in Iraq, Syria, Bahrain, Yemen, and other parts of the Gulf region, while Chapter 7 provides concluding remarks and the prospects of stability and instability in the Middle East.¹⁷

¹⁷ Palmer, P. 281.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Iranian Project is rooted in Iran's interest in regional dominance manifested in its foreign policy toward the Gulf region. Such interests have created a security imbalance, and mistrust and conflict in the region. It has also permitted foreign intervention in the region. A GCC senior official once stated the Arab Gulf region suffers from security imbalance with Iran opposing the GCC's attempts to create a balance through military cooperation with external powers, as Iraq did previously. However, both countries provide no security alternative for the region.¹⁸

A Saudi Intelligence Chief stated that the sectarian differences in the region have been transferred into policy. If the region continues to adopt such a perspective in its foreign policies, it will lead to catastrophic consequences. He added that the Shi'i sectarian perspective in foreign policy based on historical and ideological myths as represented in the Mahdi's return and the Islamic Emirate, expresses their failure to deal with current security challenges. Additionally, Iran's intervention in Lebanon strengthens Iran's regional-sectarian dimension. He called on Iran to abandon sectarianism and closely work with Saudi Arabia to establish a viable security regime in the Middle East. Laursen added that Iran's strategic nuclear program aims at disrupting regional security, regional dominance and expansion. Cordessman identified five major Iranian security threats in the region; conventional power capabilities, asymmetrical power, proxy war, nuclear-Iran and long-range missiles, and finally religious threats and sectarian wars. He added that, although civilizational conflict is a reality, inter-Islamic collision is most likely. Abu Zayed examined the historical depth of the Iranian-Arab conflict which is rooted in pre-Islamic history intensified under the Ottoman-Svavids conflict and escalated well-into the present. In fact, Iran has managed to infiltrate Arab-Shi'i communities in its neighboring countries who have become a fifth column enabling Iran to undermine Arab nationalism and Sunni-Arab governments. Therefore, revolutionary Iran has been acting as a regional power in accordance with the enduring principles of Iran's policy towards the Arab Gulf region. The Islamic Republic of Iran's (IRI), foreign policy is similar to that of the Shah's regime in terms of being a regional power.

¹⁸ Al Attiya, Abdulrahman, *The Gulf Security System in the Arabian Gulf Region: Domestic and International Challenges*, ECSSR, 2008. P.23.

Zahed Al Sharqi highlighted a major statement made by Iranian officials declaring that the removal of the monarchic systems in the region is a necessity to establish peace and stability in the region. Al Sharqi deemed such a statement as a direct intervention in the internal affairs of the Gulf countries. It also reflects the scope of Iranian ambitions in the region, most recently demonstrated by their occupation of the Three Islands belonging to the UAE, attempts to occupy the Grand Mosque of Mecca, and their other ambitions in Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Yemen and other parts of the Arab world. Jameel Al Dyabi examined the nature of the Persian civilization highlighting the fact that Iran's strength stems from its ability to revive its Persian civilization at any time in history. Jawzi stated that Iran's attempts to spread its dominance extends beyond its traditional influence over Hezbollah in Lebanon to the Sunni clergy. The goal is to ensure the clergy's support for Hezbollah's policies in Lebanon. Al Nami reported that the Iranian-American rapprochement aims at a specific role for Iran. Its instruments include Shi'i undercurrents in the Gulf region, and the Al Qaeda organization as seen in Syria. Al Shayji has highlighted Iran's role in Syria. He added that the resolution of the Syrian crisis lies in Tehran and Washington, not in Turkey or Saudi Arabia. This only reflects the intensity of the Iranian role in the region.

Al Kaabi has stated that one of the main reasons for Iran's intervention in Syria is to guarantee Iran's expansion in the Arab world based on sectarianism. Additionally, Iran seeks to secure its influence in Lebanon and a route to the Mediterranean Sea by strengthening Hezbollah's role and influence in that country. He quoted Kassim Sulimani, the commander of Quds Brigades who stated that Iran has dominated Iraq, Lebanon and Syria. He also quoted Mahdi Taeb, Director of the Ammar Strategic Center at the Khomeini Foundation, who stated that Syria is the 35th Province of Iran (Iran's provinces total 31). Taeb's declaration reflects the Iranian project which considers Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Bahrain to be provinces to complete their 35 figure. Terry Coffel stated that the Iranian revolution appointed Iran as leader of the Islamic world and defender of the oppressed worldwide. It has also adopted the slogan of 'death to America' to mobilize popular support of anti-American forces worldwide. Moreover it has developed mechanisms of intervention in the Islamic world through the establishment of the Islamic Revolution Council entrusted with coordination of the efforts of destabilizing Islamic governments, spreading revolution and ensuring its leadership across the Islamic world. In 1981, Iranian-supported Shi'i groups in Iran initiated an uprising to topple the government; similarly Kuwait has been the arena for several military attacks. Terrorist attacks were also carried out in Saudi Arabia during the Hajji season. In Iraq the Islamic Revolutionary Council led by Mohammed Bakir Al Hakeem carried out several military attacks against the Saddam Hussein regime. In Afghanistan, the Shi'i parties enjoyed Tehran's support. Iran supported the PLO and is currently supporting Hamas. Since 1979, Iran has sent volunteers to Lebanon and Syria. In 1982, Iran organized several Shi'i groups that led to the establishment of Hezbollah, which has become dominant in Lebanon and in the region under the direct control of Hejutilislam Ali Akhbar Mhutashimi, Iran's ambassador to Damascus.

Tereta Parsi added that whenever ideological interest collides with strategic national interests in Iran, national interests prevail. This explains the fact that, ideology is a mere instrument of foreign policy rather than a core interest. The Iranian leadership does not view ideology as "abstract", rather a

necessity as the former president Rafsanjani stated. Ideology to him is flexible and enables us to choose our interest based on Islam's principles. This explains the fact that Israeli observers and politicians do not view Iran's ambitions as driven by ideology, but by national interests.

Territorial Components of the Iranian Project

Iran's project extends to the United Arab Emirates and therefore is threatening to the UAE's national security in particular, in addition to its threat to the Arab Gulf region at large. Riyadh Alreis (2000) stated that the Iranian control of the Three Islands was inherited from the Shah's era during which he claimed territorial sovereignty over Bahrain, however this issue was settled with the aid of UK in 1971. Accordingly, the Shah recognized the independence of Bahrain, and the federal nature of the newly emerging United Arab Emirates, in exchange for control of the Three Islands. However, the Iranian threat has continued to be a most critical challenge to the UAE, as it was for the Emirate of Sharjah in the pre-independence era. Alrise highlighted the fact that, Iran under the revolution has also managed to penetrate the Shi'i communities in the Gulf region. It has managed to convert them into a Fifth Column utilized to "undermine Arab nationalism and destabilize Sunni-conservative government in the Arab Gulf. Therefore, since the revolution, Iran has begun acting as a regional power in a similar fashion to the scenario followed by its previous regime."¹⁹

Jameel Althebani (2011) emphasized the fact that, the presidential campaign of Ahmadinejad in 2005 and his eventual two-terms in office revived the ultra-conservative tendencies within the Iranian ruling establishment. He predicted that, Ahmadinejad will certainly "destroy the Iranian people's accomplishments and undermine Iran's neighborly ties with the region."²⁰ Althebani continued to say that, Ahmadinejad's domestic and foreign policy was designed to impoverish Iran and undermine its regional cooperation to the extent that, his regime "represented the most serious security threat to the Arab Gulf countries and the region at large because of his relentless quest for exporting the Khomeini Revolution. This is in addition to his efforts to change the structure and identity of some societies and his constant support of extremism in the region."²¹

Althebani (2011) continued to say that Iran's regional ambitions go far beyond undermining regional stability, aiming at settlements in the Arab world and especially in the Gulf region. Iran aims are exporting revolution and promoting local support for its goals. In so doing, Iran "provides support to militant organizations and manipulates religious and sectarian differences in some Arab countries such as Lebanon and lately Yemen through the Huwthis."²² Althebani continued to say that Iran has continued its quest for influence in the region over Palestine and using the Palestinian Question to

¹⁹ Alreis, Riyadh, 2000. *Quran and the Sword: Iran from the Shah to Khatami*, Riad El-Rayyes Books, Beirut: Lebanon, P 11.

²⁰ Althebani, Jameel (2011). *Iran: The Sattanic Dance*, Obekan: Riyadh, P. 11.

²¹ Althebani, Jameel (2011). *Iran: The Sattanic Dance*, Obekan: Riyadh, P. 12.

²² Althebani, Jameel (2011). *Iran: The Sattanic Dance*, Obekan: Riyadh, P. 66.

penetrate the resistance movement. He stated that, Iran is “in hot pursuit to control Hamas in Iraq through its support to Shi’i militias especially in the south to undermine the stability of Iraq.”²³ He went even further to state that, for the sake of advancing its interests in the region, Iran does not hesitate even to form alliances with terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. He established a connection between Al Qaeda and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard aimed at undermining the regional stability of key countries in the Arab Gulf region especially Saudi Arabia. Althebani relied on credible American and British sources who had interrogated members of Al Qaeda captured in Iraq, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and other parts of the region who stated clearly that Iran funds their activities in the region. Althebani therefore stated that, it is no wonder that the US has kept Iran’s name on the list of countries supporting international terrorism.

Iran’s support to Al Qaeda aims at promoting “extremism” in the region especially among the Sunni Islam side, which will most certainly mobilize Western resistance to Sunnis around the world. On the other hand, Iran also aims to present itself as “moderate” when compared with “extremist” Sunni Muslims, and therefore has joined the Western coalition in fighting Islamic terrorism, as we see clearly in the case of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. Iran is viewed as “part of the solution” while in fact, Iran is the source of the problem. It has facilitated the movement of Al Qaeda elements from Afghanistan through Iran to Iraq where they have established an Al Qaeda’s branch and have gone on, at a later stage, to produce the extremes of the Islamic State.

Althebani (2011) found that Iran follows a set of instruments and methods in advancing its interests in the region such as support to militant organizations in general (Huwthis, Hezbollah, Hamas), and the media in particular. Iran takes advantage of the Arab man in the street’s opposition to the US because of its blind support to Israel and their settlement policies. However, Althebani (2011) emphasizes the importance of Iranian “settlements” in the Arab world, especially in southern Iraq, as a major instrument in advancing the Iranian Project. In fact, he made a comparison between the Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories and Iran’s settlements in southern Iraq. He even stated that Iran’s settlements are “much more threatening than Israeli settlements since their aim is to undermine the Iraqi social fabric leading to internal conflicts.”²⁴ He condemned Iran’s relentless attempts to advance its national interests by manipulating the Arab opinion on the street, using the Arab people and their lands to do so. He also highlighted the fact that Iran has established a strong support among journalists who defend Iran’s interests and “beatify” its interests among the Arab populous. He concluded that, “Iranian interests and intensions are equivalent to the Israeli threat, and if Arabs don’t unite in discourse and action, Iran would be able to control the region.”²⁵

Althebani (2011) concluded that, “there is no doubt that the Iranian threat is clear to all observers.”²⁶ Althebani’s concern of Iranian infiltration of the region is echoed by Burhan Ghalyoon (2005) who

²³ Althebani, Jameel (2011). Iran: The Sattanic Dance, Obekan: Riyadh, P. 67.

²⁴ Althebani, Jameel (2011). Iran: The Sattanic Dance, Obekan: Riyadh, P. 69.

²⁵ Althebani, Jameel (2011). Iran: The Sattanic Dance, Obekan: Riyadh, P. 67.

²⁶ Althebani, Jameel (2011). Iran: The Sattanic Dance, Obekan: Riyadh, P. 187.

warned of the consequences of the Sunni-Shi'i divide and Iraq's ethnic composition in the state and society. In fact, this division with a near total absence of a working constitution has made Iraq vulnerable to the Iranian threat since the American invasion of Iraq in 2003.²⁷ Iran has managed to take advantage of the American presence in Iraq and fully utilize it for its national interests. Saddam Hussein's regime was the last modern Arab fortress standing in front of the modern Persian expansionist policies in the Arab world.

Thierry Coville (2008) considered the revolutionary expansion as a major instrument for revolutionary survival in Iran itself.²⁸ Obviously Coville perceives Iran's foreign policy as an extension to its domestic politics, and therefore, for the Iranian regime to survive domestic opposition it directs its energies towards exporting the revolution primarily "by force". Coville drew attention to the fact that, although there was excitement about the Iranian Revolution, it failed to articulate an international Islamic movement supportive of Iran's global project in the 1980s. Therefore, the Islamic World in particular was not supportive of the revolutionary Iran's worldview, nor was supportive of its perspective on the Iran-Iraq War either. It is evident that Iran has managed to overcome some of these foreign policy impediments and since 2005, it has succeeded in articulating an Iranian Project with a revolutionary outlook as we see currently in Yemen, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere. However, before reaching this point of expansion in the region, Iranian-Arab Gulf relations were pragmatic and cooperative in nature in the aftermath of the catastrophic Gulf War. The Gulf countries had realized that the security threat in the early 1990s was Iraq not Iran, specifically the Saddam Hussein regime. In early 1991, Saudi-Iranian diplomatic relations were re-established, and ties with Kuwait resumed. In addition Iranian-Omani relations were strengthened and those with Qatar as well. The Iranian-UAE's relations were also boosted in the 1990s and 2000s with increasing trade relations with Dubai in particular. In the area of regional security, Iran's pragmatic politics toward the small Gulf countries allowed it to portray itself as the defender of their interests. However, the destruction of Iraq and the absence of the Saddam regime presented a valuable opportunity for Iran to expand its influence in the region on a wider scale than ever before. This trend was also boosted by the Arab Spring wars and conflicts, in which Iran seems to be one of the few countries who have remained intact. Iran's intervention in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Lebanon is a clear indication of Iran's revolutionary expansion towards dominance on a regional scale.

Ibrahim Aref (2010) seems to agree fully with the trend that holds the Ahmadinejad administration responsible for the advancement of the Iranian Project. The cover page of his book entitled 'The Iranian Secret Plans in the Arab World' is an image of Ahmadinejad with missiles and jetfighters heading towards the Arab countries. Aref identified the idea of establishing an international Islamic Army as a fundamental goal of the Iranian Revolution. Clearly, the spread of militant organizations, militias and armies around the Arab world is a clear indication of the realization of the Iranian dream. Hezbollah's branches in Lebanon, Bahrain, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, in addition to the Huwthi militia and the countless

²⁷ Ghalyoon, Burhan, 2005. *Arabs and World Transformation from the Collapse of the Berlin Wall to the Fall of Baghdad*, Arab Cultural Center: Beirut, P. 314.

²⁸ Coville, Thierry, 2008. *Iran: the Invisible Revolution*, Al-Farabi Publishing House, Beirut: Lebanon, P. 358.

number of militias terrorizing Sunnis in Iraq is also another indication of the triumph of revolutionary Iran across the Arab World.

Aref (2010), highlighted the fact that the Iranian Constitution in its preamble stated clearly that “the obligation of the Islamic Republic Army and the Revolutionary Guard is not only to protect the republic and its borders, but also shoulders an “ideological” responsibility worldwide.”²⁹ He also identified Iran’s diplomatic missions around the world as responsible for the realization of the Iranian goals, i.e., the Iranian Project. In fact, Iran’s cultural missions in the Arab world have been identified as instruments of ideological expansion. This explains the fact that even countries sympathetic to Iran’s foreign policy such as Sudan have ordered the closure of Iran’s cultural mission and the deportation of its personnel. Ibrahim Aref has also identified death squads as major instruments in annihilating those Arab intellectuals opposing the advancement of the Iranian plans across the Arab world. Death squads are active in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and elsewhere. He also identified the construction of military bases and revolutionary-militant armies and organizations in Iraq as responsible for the deaths of thousands of innocent Iraqi-Sunni citizens. In fact, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and Kuds Forces have established a permanent presence in Iraq and have become a dominant force in the country. Their commanders, forces and cadres are running the military scene in Iraq, and therefore, have strengthened Shi’i dominance over the politics of Iraq since the departure of the United States in 2010.

Ibrahim Aref (2010) discussed in detail the obligations of the Kuds Forces and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, which can be summed up as: collecting intelligence in Arab countries, supporting revolutionary movements in the region, the Islamic world, and non-Islamic countries, annihilating the opponents of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, and training the next generation leaders of the revolutionary movements for the sake of the establishment of an “Islamic” regime of governance.³⁰ Additionally, the Kuds Force’s objectives also extend to forming intervention forces in Iraq, providing support to loyal local forces in Iraq, carrying out sabotage and terrorist missions against terrorist organizations in Iraq such as Al Qaeda, Ansar Al Islam, and other organizations. This support includes training, ammunitions, weapons, travel-documents, and logistical and financial support. Furthermore, the aim of the Kuds Forces is to extend the construction of a loyal regime in Iraq modeled after Iran, i.e. Wilati Al Faqih, a theological state. Other goals include the infiltration of security agencies, governmental apparatuses and governmental entities in Iraq in particular, carrying out intelligence missions against Iranian opposition in Iraq (Mujhede E Khalag). He also highlighted the Kuds Force aims of establishing strong ties with the Iraqi government, Iraqi political parties and organizations aiming at influencing Iraq’s policy to bring it in line with Iran’s foreign policy.

²⁹ Aref, Ibrahim, 2010. *Iran’s Secret Schemes in the Arab World*, Ward Island Publishers: Cairo- Egypt, P. 17.

³⁰ Aref, Ibrahim, 2010. *Iran’s Secret Schemes in the Arab World*, Ward Island Publishers: Cairo- Egypt, P. 70-71.

Ibrahim Aref (2010) has also underlined the role of the Kuds Force in providing security and support to Iranians visiting Iraq's Shi'i holy shrines. Additionally the force realizes the importance of control over the Iraqi media such as newspapers, television stations, newsletters, and website news. He also identified instruments such as financial support and intimidation as major methods in advancing Iran's interests in the country. It is obvious that Iran views Iraq as the main staging point of expansion across the Arab world. From Iraq, Iran aims to extend its influence to Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and the United Arab Emirates.³¹

In his book 'Arabs and the Challenges of the Greater Middle East', Tawfeq Almadeni (2010, 325) examined the threats facing the Arab world. He listed colonialism, Israel, and the US and Turkish policy in the region. However, when addressing Iran's foreign policy in the Middle East Almadeni appears to be sympathetic to Iran's interests in the region and its alliance with the Syrian regime in particular in advancing their bilateral interest in the Arab world. In fact, he praises their distinguished bilateral relations as central to "undermining imperial projects" in the region. He identified the Ba'th regime in Iraq as their common enemy and the American presence in Iraq as threatening to Syria and Iran's national interests. The US identified both countries as supportive of international terrorism, and therefore, both aimed at undermining the US occupation of Iraq. Almadeni (2010, 328) identified Iran's nuclear program as central to its regional and international status. He stated that, "Iran's nuclear program aims at turning Iran into a nuclear power in the Middle East...such project will compel the United States to accept Iran as an influential regional power and therefore, accept Iran's influence and interests in the region."³²

Almadeni (2010) expressed clearly Iran's utilization of the "Israeli factor" in its nuclear ambitions. He portrayed Iran's nuclear program as the most serious threat to Israel, making it the "Israeli number one enemy."³³ He highlighted the fact that, Iran's nuclear ambitions were boosted by the ascendance of Ahmadinejad to the presidency in 2005, and his uncompromising approach to Iran's rights to develop its nuclear program. He also underlined that there is an Iranian consensus over the nuclear program and its importance to Iran. Almadeni (2010) defended Iran's right to develop its strategic nuclear program, stating that Iran has not deviated from the norm in reference to other countries pursuing the nuclear choice such as India, Pakistan and other countries.³⁴

Probably, Iran's infiltration of Arab public opinion and its place at the center of power politics in the Arab world is one of the most alarming aspects of Almadeni's discussion on Iran's influence in the Arab world. He stated that (2010, 331) that Iran has implanted supporters in key decision making positions in

31 Aref, Ibrahim, 2010. *Iran's Secret Schemes in the Arab World*, Ward Island Publishers: Cairo- Egypt, P. 72.

32 Almadeni, Tawfeeq, 2010. *The Arabs and the Greater Middle East Challenge*, Arab Union Publishing House, Damascus-Syria, P. 325.

33 Almadeni, Tawfeeq, 2010. *The Arabs and the Greater Middle East Challenge*, Arab Union Publishing House, Damascus-Syria, P. 328.

34 Almadeni, Tawfeeq, 2010. *The Arabs and the Greater Middle East Challenge*, Arab Union Publishing House, Damascus-Syria, P. 330.

the Arab countries enabling Tehran to utilize them in any future conflict that may arise with super powers in the region. Ultimately, Almadeni (2010) concluded that Iran's aim from its active involvement in regional conflicts is regime-survival, protection of its national interests, and US recognition of Iran as a regional power.³⁵ The Iran-Western standoff over its nuclear program is central to resolving key conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine. Should Iran be able to develop its nuclear program and be recognized as a regional power, then it will assume an even wider role in resolving region conflicts. However, Almadeni's sympathetic view of Iran's narrative does not necessarily lead to stability; rather, Iran's ambitions in the region have no limits. They resemble Iran's historical-imperial goals that will not be satisfied with anything less than total dominance in the Arab world and beyond.

Military spending, armament and military industry is an integral aspect of the Iranian Project. Almarhoon, (2012) concentrated on the military aspect of Iran's regional power capabilities. He examined the increasing Iranian trend of devoting large funds for weapon-purchasing. For example he stated that Iran spent \$12.23 billion in 2006, \$10.15 billion in 2007 and \$9.17 billion in 2008.³⁶ In fact, latest figures reported on Iran's military spending support Almarhoon's views on the importance of military spending vis a vis Iran's regional power projections. He highlighted the fact that Iran has purchased Russian jetfighters worth hundreds of millions of dollars to boost its air force capabilities. Additionally, Iran has strengthened its missile capabilities relying on purchases from Russia and China, in addition to its own military industries. Iran has also boosted its conventional force with over half a million regular army, supported by the Revolutionary Guards, Kuds Force, Basijis, etc.

Mohammed Syed Rasas (2013) highlighted the ideological aspect of Iran's regional and international influence. He discussed Iran's influence not only on Shi'i political movements, but also on Sunni movements especially the Muslim Brotherhood. His interest in examining the Iranian-Muslim Brotherhood relations was triggered by the warm welcome that President Mohammed Morsi received in the Iranian media upon his election in 2010. He traced back the influence of revolutionary Iran on leading figures of the Moslem Brotherhood in Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, Morocco and elsewhere. The Iranian Revolution has "inspired Islamists in which they saw an Imam with a turban was able to topple a dictatorial regime, an agent of imperialism."³⁷ Mohammed Syed Rasas (2013) quoted Rachid Ganouchi; the leader of Enahhda Party of Tunisia once stating that, the "most important thing that the Iranian Revolution presented to us is that the conflict is between the oppressed and the oppressors. This is another perspective from an Islamic point of view, on the nature of conflict, that is, it is a class conflict between the rich and the poor."³⁸ The Iranian Revolution has most certainly influenced the Islamic movement especially on the Sunnis side, who have been in fierce battle with Arab nationalism and Marxism since the 1920s. The Islamic Awakening process and the Islamic Resurgence movement were inspired by the triumph of the Iranian revolution. The Sunni movement felt a tremendous sense of

35 Almadeni, Tawfeeq, 2010. *The Arabs and the Greater Middle East Challenge*, Arab Union Publishing House, Damascus-Syria, P. 333.

36 Almarhoon, Abduljalil Z. *Armaments in the Gulf and Neighboring Countries*, Aljazeera Center for Studies, Doha: Qatar, P. 98.

37 Mohammed Syed Rasas, 2013. *The Muslim Brotherhood and Khomeini-Khamenei Iran*, Jadawel: Beirut, P. 115.

38 Mohammed Syed Rasas, 2013. *The Muslim Brotherhood and Khomeini-Khamenei Iran*, Jadawel: Beirut, P. 115.

failure and they were determined to succeed in their struggle against nationalist, socialist and Marxists governments across the Arab world. Khomeini's literature spread all over the Arab world and roused the Sunni-Islamists. The Muslim Brotherhood organized the youth and constructed a sophisticated organization with a wide range of social networks, educational systems, economic bases and political wings. Their work began bearing fruit as early as the end of the 1990s, and materialized into electoral and revolutionary triumphs with the Arab Spring paradigm. It is no wonder that Iran has claimed the credit for Arab Spring, which is a partially accurate point of view.

Almesbar (2011) tackled the sectarian aspect of the Iranian Project highlighting the fact that, Iran has systematically revived the sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shi'i Islam.³⁹ While the conflict in the early days of Islam was political in nature dealing with the process of political succession after Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), modern sectarianism has become ideological, lethal, brutal and bloody. Its manifestations have currently become clear in Iraq over the past ten years and in Syria since 2011. The next cycle of violence is heading towards the Gulf region, beginning with the conflict in Yemen that threatens the stability of the entire region. Almesbar (2011) examined sectarianism in Iraq and the impact of modern colonialism on the division between Muslims, in addition to the impact of the US invasion of Iraq and its aftermath, which led to unprecedented levels of violence among Muslims. Among the hundreds of ethnic and religious groups in Iraq, Almesbar identified the Sunni-Shi'i conflict as the "most lethal conflict in Iraq". However, the situation is worth examining. Vali Nasr in Almesbar (2011) stated that Sunni-Shi'i relations had reached a point of balance throughout modern history until the American invasion of Iraq in 2003.⁴⁰ America's animosity toward Sunni-Islam and its alliance with Shi'i-Islam tipped the balance in favor of Shi'ism to cover the entire region from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and towards Syria. What America did is basically revive political Shi'ism in Iraq, disrupt the historical balance of power between Sunni and Shi'i Islam and hand over Iraq to Iran in 2010.

Almesbar has also paid attention to the demographic factor of Sunni and Shi'i Islam in the Gulf region. Shi'at communities in the region make up less than 40% at most estimates, although they may be the majority in small countries like Bahrain. In 2011, Shi'at communities were estimated at 4.5 million in the Gulf region, half of whom (2.7 million) were residing in the Eastern part of Saudi Arabia, while the rest were in the other Gulf countries. Kuwait is the home to 25% of Shi'i community, Qatar to 16%, while Oman has 5%, and 6% of the UAE population belong to Shi'i Islam. The demographic factor is exceptionally critical when it comes to identity and loyalty. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Kingdom of Bahrain have accused their Shi'i communities of external loyalties, i.e., loyalty to Iran, rather than their home country. However, despite the militant views prevailing in the current interactions between states across the Gulf and the Shi'i communities, there are some Shi'i voices that call for political participation not exclusion. Almesbar examined the view of Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani who called for Shi'i participation in the political process in Iraq which led to their dominance in 2005 at that time as

³⁹ Almesbar Studies and Research Center, 2011. *Sectarianism: the Revival of the Sleeping Tribulation*, Dubai: UAE, P. 25.

⁴⁰ Almesbar Studies and Research Center, 2011. *Sectarianism: the Revival of the Sleeping Tribulation*, Dubai: UAE, P. 86.

Sunnis rejected the elections and refrained from participation. Al-Sistani also encouraged the Shi'i community in Bahrain to take part in the parliamentary elections of 2006, and called for reason to prevail in the most recent clashes in Bahrain since March 14, 2011.

Stephen Kinzer (2010) examined the complex relationship between the United States and Iran on one side, and the US and Turkey on the other side. His objective was to examine the depth of the American intervention in these two countries and their political choices since World War II. As for Iran, he stated that the 1953 CIA orchestrated coup against Mohammed Mosadeq was one of the most noticeable events in the 20th Century.⁴¹ It had led to restoring the Shah's regime and the emergence of an unprecedented dictatorial regime in Iran's modern history. Iranians had held the US responsible for the destruction of their nascent process of democracy in the 1950s, and therefore had enhanced the conflict between the state and society which led to the Iranian Revolution at a later date. The US opposed the revolution and supported Iraq in its war with Iran. Kinzer listed the Iranian grievances against the US and the modern narrative of their bilateral relations since then. Such a long list of grievances has made the US a natural enemy of the Iranian Revolution and its leadership. Khomeini called America, the Great Satan.

Anthony Cordesman examined the balance of power in the Gulf region in a landmark manuscript published by the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research. In answering a question on whether Iran is a weak or dominant country in the region, he stated that, it's neither. However, most certainly Iran has "capabilities to act as saboteur" in the region. He ruled out the possibility of a hegemonic Iran unless major power centers in the region are reduced to minimum levels of power.⁴² However, if Cordesman meant Iraq, the answer is affirmative. We have to take into consideration that he wrote this piece in 2008 at a time when the US was still sinking in the swamps of Iraq. There was also the potential of an Iraqi revival in post American withdrawal, but the withdrawal enhanced Iran's position vis a vis Iraq. Iran became the only beneficiary of the American withdrawal from the country. Currently, Iran is dominant over Iraq politically, militarily, and economically. Iran is Iraq's largest trading partner, and its armed forces have free movement across the Iraqi territory. The historical disputes between the two sides, specifically the border issue has been resolved in favor of Iran by the Maliki government, although Saddam Hussein fought a brutal eight years war to deter the Iranian threat beyond the Western shore of Shat Al Arab. Ultimately, the current political developments across the Middle East including state disintegration and collapse and civil wars, make Iran most definitely a dominant power in the Middle East. This view does not mean challengers cannot create a state of power play or balance with Iran if they wished to do so. Saudi Arabia could lead a coalition of Gulf and non-Gulf Arab countries to balance the Iranian threat. In fact, the Gulf countries themselves have also been increasing their military spending, implementing closer security and military coordination, alliance formation and boosting the Peninsula Defense Shield Force. Their most successful intervention came on

⁴¹ Kinzer, Stephen, 2010. *Reset: Iran, Turkey and America's Future*. Times Books: NY.

⁴² Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2008. *Arab Gulf Security System: Domestic and External Challenges*, ECSSR: Abu Dhabi, P. 57.

March 14, 2011 in Bahrain in the prevention of the collapse of the monarchy at a time when Iran was providing a wide range of support to regime opposition, primarily from the Shi'i community.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This thesis examines the Iranian project in terms of its existence, goals and instruments. Its main sources are primarily manuscripts and articles produced by area specialist and scholars in Gulf Studies, Iranian studies, and Iranian foreign policy. Its main method is content analysis, and the researcher's reasoning of the current state of affairs prevailing on the Middle Eastern political scene vis a vis Iran's ambitions, territorial expansion, ideological expansion and nuclear program. This well-articulated project is clearly conspicuous in the region as never before, especially in modern history, although its dominance in the Gulf region, and some parts of the Middle East and Central Asia are well-rooted in Iran's imperial history. In order to analyze the Iranian Project, this thesis sets forth a concise research question and utilizes available methods in social sciences to answer it.

Research Goals

This thesis aims to accomplish the following goals:

1. Examine the Iranian Project and its impact on region stability and instability in the Middle East and the Gulf region in particular.
2. Examine the components of the Iranian Project, namely territorial expansion, ideological expansion and its nuclear program.
3. Examine the Gulf region's attempts to counter the Iranian threat on their own, within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), or through their alliances. The GCC on its own is obviously unable to counter Iran's threat. This explains the fact that the international community has become party to the conflicts of the region because of Iran's intervention in particular. As for the Iranian nuclear program, the GCC on its own has no power to counter the threat or deter it. The US, the UN, the EU, and China have been active participants in resolving the standoff with Iran over the past decade.

Research Question

This thesis examines the following question: what is the Iranian Project, its main components, goals and consequences?

Initially, this thesis is constructed on the premise that, yes there is a clear Iranian project deeply rooted in Iran's ancient and modern history which continues the ambition of dominance in the Middle East. Additionally, this thesis is based on the assumption that Iran's Project consists of the following components:

First, the ideological dimension

Second, the territorial-expansionist policy

Third, Iran's nuclear program

In the coming three chapters and the following sections, this thesis will examine each component and its contribution to the general Iranian project. It will discuss the ideological dimension of the project which is rooted in Shi'i thought that goes back to the 7th Century. Specifically, it briefly examines the Sunni-Shi'i conflicts and their impact on the modern history of the Islamic world. It also examines Iran's articulation of Shi'ism as a theory of governance and a state system since 1507 during the Savvaidis era, and later on with the triumph of the Iranian Revolution in 1979. As far as territorial expansion is concerned, imperial Iran has never hidden its goals of territorial expansion toward Iraq, Syria, Bahrain, Yemen and other parts of the Arab world. Iraq fought a fierce war for eight years with Iran between 1980-1988 to establish the border at Shat Al Arab as the border with Iran. However, the successes made by Saddam Hussein's government were overturned by the US invasion and the subsequent Shi'i governments in Iraq, which redrew the border in favor of Iran. The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to make territorial claims over Bahrain and other parts of the Gulf as well, especially the Three UAE Islands. Finally, Iran's overall project is underpinned by a nuclear program that aims at producing strategic weapons to strengthen Iran's dominance in the Middle East. This explains the fact why such a project is highly resisted worldwide. It is also resisted by regional powers especially in Saudi Arabia, who view the project as an existential threat.

This thesis also examines the reaction of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to the Iranian project. The GCC countries have articulated a set of responses to any Iranian threat to their territorial integrity and sovereignty relying primarily on their own capabilities. They also have built strategic alliances with NATO and with the US to counter Iran's threat. In terms of Iran's nuclear program, the GCC supports the international efforts to end the program and establish a nuclear free zone-Middle East region. Methodologically speaking, this section of the thesis will rely on sources from the GCC including summit-materials, statements, and publications.

Research Hypothesis

This thesis examines the following hypothesis: it is most likely that the well-articulated Iranian Project will succeed. Chambliss defined a hypothesis as a “tentative statement about empirical reality involving a relationship between two or more variables.”⁴³ Therefore, the aim is to examine how Iran articulates its project and how successful will it be. Obviously, Iran has achieved remarkable levels of success in all aspects of its project; its territorial modifications and expansions, its ideological dominance in the Middle East and its nuclear program that has far-reaching impacts on regional and international security.

Theory and Iran’s Project

This thesis is guided by the realist approach, the liberal institutional approach and the constructivist school of thought as the main paradigms in interpreting the existence of the Iranian Project. Iran’s policy in the Middle East is inspired primarily by the realist approach which promotes the idea that power is the paramount concern for a state to advance its national interests. Within this line of thinking, Iran has constructed a solid system of armaments of conventional and non-conventional levels. Since its “friends” are limited in the region, it has relied primarily on itself to advance its regional interest. From a realist point of view, this is a reaction to a self-help system where a state relies on its capabilities to accomplish its national interests defined in pure terms as “power” politics.

The realist school of thought assumes that international relations “can best be explained by the choices of states operating as autonomous actors rationally pursuing their own interests in an international system of sovereign states without central authority.”⁴⁴ Iran’s foreign policy towards the Gulf region and the Greater Middle East clearly endorses power politics especially in areas of conflict such as Syria, Iraq and Yemen. Not only that, but Iran has demonstrated interest in territorial expansion which brings into question the realist assumption in reference to Iran’s recognition of the sovereignty of some of its neighbors especially Bahrain, Syria and Iraq. While its territorial expansion is an indication of power politics, it remains a contradiction with its international commitment as a member of inter-state sovereign international relations. It also alludes to the fact that realism is also an inadequate tool to explain Iran’s international relations, since it excludes the role of ideology in foreign policy as something which does not pertain to Iran’s case. Ideology defined in terms of “Shi’i” Islam is a fundamental aspect of Iran’s foreign policy.

Realism assumes anarchy, and the anarchic nature of international relations. Therefore, states rely on themselves to advance their own national interests defined in terms of power politics. As far as Iran is concerned, it goes far beyond the realist understanding of anarchy, which means an absence of an entity over the state to compel members of the international system to behave in a certain manner. Iran

⁴³ Chambliss Daniel F. and Russell K. Schutt, 2010. Making Sense of the Social World: Methods of Investigation, Pine Forge Press: Washington, P. 26.

⁴⁴ Goldstein, Joshua S. and Jon C. Pevehouse, 2008. International Relations, Pearson-Longman, NY. P. 45.

literally views regional politics in particular as “anarchic” and chaotic. In fact, Iran itself has been the main cause of anarchy and chaos in the region as demonstrated clearly in Iraq and Yemen. Iran has also constructed militia organizations in Lebanon, Yemen and Iraq that have undermined the state then replaced it. Therefore, Iran seeks the elimination of a fundamental aspect of world politics, the state itself. If the state becomes irrelevant in the Middle East, then it will be replaced by a transnational ideology, leading therefore into another domain of analysis; the liberal institutional approach rather than the realist, since the fundamental aspect of the realist is marginalized, which is the state.

Goldstein and Pevehouse (2008) define anarchy stating that it is a “term that implies not complete chaos or absence of structure and rules, but the lack of a central government that can enforce rules.”⁴⁵ Within this line of thinking, Iran has been condemning the international system since 1979 as hostile to its national interests. Therefore, it rejects the rules of the system and its outcome. It also seeks to replace it with another system that is conducive to its national interests. i.e., since the system is anarchic in nature then Iran should rely on its power capabilities to advance its interest and construct a regional clientele, and alliances. Clearly, Iran has made substantial level of progress on both fronts. Furthermore, “power is a much broader concept than just military force. Power consists of the economic, political, psychological and military tools.”⁴⁶

The realist approach has also advocated the theme that world peace, regional peace and stability are best maintained with a balance of power. “The term balance of power refers to the general concept of one or more states’ power being used to balance that of another state or group of states.”⁴⁷

Accordingly, Iraq has served as a balancer with Iran since the 1950s, but this balance was undermined in 1991 when Iraq invaded Kuwait, which led ultimately to the destruction of Iraq’s military capabilities. Iraq managed during eight years of war with Iran in the 1980s (1980-1988) to keep Iran in its place, however, the imbalance of regional politics has led to a deterioration of Iraq’s power capabilities since 1991, and its total collapse in 2003 after the US invasion. Saudi Arabia had attempted to convince the US not to invade Iraq for the sake of keeping Iran’s power in check. When the US rejected Saudi Arabia’s reasoning, the occupation of Iraq eliminated Iran’s arch enemy, Saddam Hussein and his regime. This therefore disrupted the balance of power in the region as never seen before. In 1932 Iraq had built up its national army, the most influential force in the Middle East which the US destroyed in 2003.

Saudi Arabia has also attempted to balance Iran’s threat on its own and collectively through the GCC and the Desert Shield Force. This force has had some success as when it intervened in Bahrain in March 2011 to deter a collapse of the monarchy. Additionally, Saudi Arabia has also strengthened its regional and international alliances to counter the Iranian threat. The US has reiterated its unwavering commitment to Gulf security, as did NATO, China, India and even Russia. However, the latest developments on the

⁴⁵ Goldstein, Joshua S. and Jon C. Pevehouse, 2008. *International Relations*, Pearson-Longman, NY. P. 49.

⁴⁶ Roskin, Michael G. and Nicholas O. Berry. *The New World of International Relations*, Longman: NY, P. 22.

⁴⁷ Goldstein, Joshua S. and Jon C. Pevehouse, 2008. *International Relations*, Pearson-Longman, NY. P. 51.

Gulf scene and the Middle East war theater have changed the alliance formations and power politics in the region. While the Saudi alliance has suffered major setbacks in Syria, Iraq and Yemen, the Iranian coalition is advancing its interests undeterred, not only in these countries but also in Bahrain, and Afghanistan. Currently, Saudi Arabia is trying to re-configure its alliance to contain the Iranian threat especially in Yemen in southern Arabia. The Huthi militia is advancing closer to Saudi southern borders, which means direct military confrontations with a militia that has taken over the Yemeni state. Saudi Arabia is strengthening its historical ties with Pakistan and Jordan, two reliable security and military oriented nations. Jordan and Pakistan are committed to Gulf security. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait have also been attempting to solicit a firm commitment from the Egyptian military to Gulf security. While the Egyptian leadership reiterates frequently its commitment to Gulf security, its armed forces are not in a position to operate outside Egypt because of its own domestic security needs after the 2011 revolution. Additionally, the Egyptian army and armed forces are embroiled in the Libyan conflict and its combat with terrorist organizations operating in the Sinai Peninsula.

The Iranian-Saudi rivalry, conflicts, proxy wars and ideological discord are the most apparent aspects of the Iranian Project. From a realist perspective, Saudi-Iranian national interests have been heading towards a collision since the early days of the Iranian Revolution. Saddam Hussein's intervention to deter Iran's threat was essential to protect Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries. However, the 2003 American invasion of Iraq and the collapse of its Ba'th regime brought the Iranian threat to the doorsteps of Saudi Arabia. Not only that, but it also expanded into the Saudi territory. This rivalry is supported by the realist approach. For example, E.H. Carr examined, as far back as WWII, the nature of rivalry and intentional relations, which are built on disharmony of interests. Carr stated that natural harmony of interests does not exist in intentional relations.⁴⁸ This explains the fact that the long simmering Saudi-Iranian collision is currently being played out in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon and even Central Asia. However, Iran is most certainly winning the battle if not the war.

The second school of thought that is relevant in helping to explain Iran's Project is the liberal institutional approach. This approach assumes nation-states advance their national interests through membership in regional and international organizations. This is in addition to following rules defined in terms of international regimes that channel the interaction of states in a constructive manner, which leads to a state of peace rather than the continuity of war and conflict as the realists assume. International regimes are fundamental aspects of this paradigm. They are "a set of rules, norms, and procedures around which the expectations of actors converge on a certain issue area."⁴⁹ It is certainly true that Iran is an active member of several international and regional state-organizations such as the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic States. However, a critical analysis of Iran's foreign policy would clearly reveal its lack of commitment to the UN's charter especially its articles on non-intervention in the internal affairs of sovereign states, such as Bahrain who

48 Goldstein, Joshua S. and Jon C. Pevehouse, 2008. *International Relations*, Pearson-Longman, NY. P. 38.

49 Goldstein, Joshua S. and Jon C. Pevehouse, 2008. *International Relations*, Pearson-Longman, NY. P. 87.

stands equal to Iran, the US, China and other countries in the eyes of the UN's charter. Additionally, Iran's undermining of the states of Yemen, Lebanon and Iraq and its territorial expansion toward Syria has undermined fundamental aspects of international regimes and international relations, i.e., territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Iran's lack of commitment to international relations, as expressed in the liberal institutional approach, explains the fact that its standoff with the International Atomic Energy Agency and Western countries over the past decade is dragging the region into a new kind of arms race, i.e. nuclear armament. Iran has also attempted repeatedly to undermine the international financial system through the elimination of the dollar-base of its oil exports. While the nuclear standoff has brought the region to the brink of war on many occasions, withdrawing from the international financial system would not be in Iran's best interests either. Its major trade partners such as China and India oppose such a step which would make it difficult for them to conduct trade with Iran especially if paying gold for oil, instead of dollars or Euros.

The ideological aspect of liberal institutionalism is a fundamental aspect of Iran's foreign policy towards the region. Liberal institutionalisms recognize the role of ideology, norms and values and their impact on the international relations of member states, while realism only recognizes a unified state with a unified foreign policy. Accordingly, Iran has utilized its ideology of Shiism in its regional and international relations to advance its national interests. It has also constructed its own network of institutions that carry out its project in the Middle East. While a significant aspect of this network is military in nature, the advancement of ideology is most certainly important in this regard. Shiism is inspiring Iran's foreign policy and mobilizing Shi'i communities in the Gulf region, in Iraq, Syria and as far as Africa.

The third school of thought that explains Iran's Project is the constructivist approach. Constructivism emphasizes the importance of historical narrative, norms, values and identities and their impact on international relations. Within this line of thinking, Iran identifies itself with the narrative of Shi'i communities in the Middle East, most of whom are receptive to Iran's intervention in the internal affairs of its neighbors in support of these communities. The most striking case that is clearly undermining regional stability is Iran's support of Hezbollah which has become a major player in regional and international relations. Hezbollah has extended its influence not only to Syria, but also to the heartland of Iraq. Therefore, Iran's territorial influence extends from its borders westward toward Iraq and into the heartland of Syria toward the Mediterranean. It also extends to communities in Kuwait, eastern Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, Oman and into Yemen. The most catastrophic aspect of this narrative is Iran's support of the Huwthi militia which is identified with Iran ideologically, militarily and politically. The Huwthi aim is to establish the Islamic Republic of Yemen, a model of governance similar to Iran, ruled by the supreme guide.

Data Collection

This thesis will rely primarily on qualitative research methodology. Chambliss and Schutt define qualitative research methodology as follows “refers to several distinct research activities: participant observation, intensive interviewing, and focus group.”⁵⁰ This thesis utilizes observation and analysis of Iran’s foreign policy towards the Gulf region in particular. This researcher’s naval and military background assists in this aspect. The researcher will also rely on literature written on the topic in addition to his own analysis of the developments on the Gulf scene and Iran’s active involvement in the political developments of the region.

This research also aims at an in-depth analysis of the Iranian Project. Chambliss and Schutt stated that, “there are two approaches to analyzing qualitative data: the deductive, or the hypothesis-testing approach and the inductive or exploratory approach.”⁵¹ The aim is to explore Iran’s Project with its three dimensions, the ideological, territorial and strategic-nuclear aspect. However, this thesis is also motivated by the assumption that the success of the Iranian Revolution has had far-reaching consequences on international relations since 1979. Therefore, the more success Iran accomplishes in advancing its revolutionary goals, the more it intervenes in regional affairs of the Middle East.

Chambliss and Schutt (2010) listed several research methods associated with the qualitative approach which this research intends to utilize. He listed five instruments: documentation of data, and data collection, conceptualizing and coding, examining relationships to show how concepts influence factors, authenticating conclusions and reflexivity.⁵² Accordingly, this thesis will conceptualize the primary terminology used in this study and how it is related to each other, and therefore, their impact on the research topic which is Iran’s Project.

Concept Definition

Chambliss and Schutt (2010) stated that, “identifying and refining important concepts are a key part of the iterative process of qualitative research.”⁵³ He continued to further elaborate on the role of the researcher vis vis concepts, stating that “the researcher was first alerted to a concept by observations in the field, then refined his understanding of the concept by investigating its meaning. By observing the concept’s frequency of use, he came to realize its importance. Finally, he incorporated the concept into

⁵⁰ Chambliss Daniel F. and Russell K. Schutt, 2010. Making Sense of the Social World: Methods of Investigation, Pine Forge Press: Washington, P. 222.

⁵¹ Chambliss Daniel F. and Russell K. Schutt, 2010. Making Sense of the Social World: Methods of Investigation, Pine Forge Press: Washington, P. 241.

⁵² Chambliss Daniel F. and Russell K. Schutt, 2010. Making Sense of the Social World: Methods of Investigation, Pine Forge Press: Washington, P. 253.

⁵³ Chambliss Daniel F. and Russell K. Schutt, 2010. Making Sense of the Social World: Methods of Investigation, Pine Forge Press: Washington, P. 256.

an explanatory model of student-patient relationship.”⁵⁴ In relating to Chambliss and Schutt’s statements to this thesis, I have been able as an active observer of Iran’s foreign policy toward the Gulf region, to witness the consistency of the use of the Iranian Project as a concept over the past three decades. This is the very reason that attracted me to research this topic. My aim is also to elaborate on the complex network of concepts that are associated with the Iranian Project and their role in Iran’s overall international relations. Ultimately, my goal is to understand Iran’s Project in the Gulf region, its major concepts, instruments, and methods then attempt to design counter-methods to deter Iran’s threat to the Gulf region.

Iran’s Project

In this study, the Iranian Project (IP) refers to Iran’s efforts of dominance in the Middle East region and the Gulf in particular, utilizing three methods; ideological expansionism, territorial expansion, and strategic -nuclear armament.

Gulf Region

The context of the Iranian Project is primarily the Gulf region which includes Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, Oman, and Yemen. However, Iran’s ambitious foreign policy goals extend far beyond the Gulf region to Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine. It also extends into Central Asia, which includes Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan, in addition to Eurasia, especially Azerbaijan.

Ideological Expansion

In this study, ideological expansion refers to Iran’s utilization of Shi’i Islam defined in terms of the Twelver School of Thought to advance its national interests defined in terms of hegemony and dominance in the Middle East.

⁵⁴ Chambliss Daniel F. and Russell K. Schutt, 2010. Making Sense of the Social World: Methods of Investigation, Pine Forge Press: Washington, P. 256.

Territorial Expansion

Territorial expansion is an integral aspect of the Iranian Project. It refers to Iran's attempts to control Iraqi territories plus the absorption of the entire Kingdom of Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates' Three Islands, Greater Tunab, Lesser Tunab and Abu Musa. Metaphorically, territorial expansion also means hegemony in some parts of the Gulf region such as Yemen, and ideologically it means reviving Sunni-Shi'i division. Therefore, Iran is extending its influence ideologically and territorially, making these two aspects the two faces of one coin.

Iran's Nuclear Project

Iran's Nuclear Program refers to its technical capacity for producing, manufacturing, enriching and testing a strategic weapon defined in terms of a nuclear bomb. Iran showed interest in developing the nuclear option as far back as the 1950s. In the mid 1960s-1970s, Iran received substantial support from the United States, France, and the UK to develop its own nuclear capabilities. However, in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution, and since the early 1990s, Iran has strengthened its nuclear cooperation with Russia, Ukraine, and China. Iran's nuclear program is certainly an integral aspect of its project aiming at projecting Great Power capabilities to ensure its dominance in regional affairs, its regime survival and deter rival powers.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated the research methods to be utilized to answer the main research question in terms of the existence of an Iranian Project and its components. It has also provided an overview to the theoretical approaches in the field of international relations that would assist us in understanding Iran's regional policy, its foreign policy goals and equipping us better to predict the future of Iran's foreign policy toward the Middle East. In particular, this chapter has underlined the fact that realism appeals the most to Iran since it has utilized power in particular to advance its policy goals in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and most recently in Yemen. It has provided military support and engaged in a proxy war with its rival Saudi Arabia in each of these countries. Iran has also utilized ideology as an integral aspect of its project. Shi'i Islam has become part of the conflict equation in the Middle East rather than being an element of peace and stability. Shi'ism has also become exceptionally militant and violent at the same level as the Sunni extremists such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. Such escalation of conflict between Sunni and Shi'i Islam indicates that the conflict in the region will continue for many decades to come.

Chapter 4: The Ideological Dimension

The anxiety prevalent in the region, and the perpetuity of mistrust in Iran's foreign policy towards the Gulf Arab countries, creates regional instability. The essence of such anxiety stems from the ideological dimension of the Iranian Project which is deeply rooted in the "Safavids" historical aims of regional and international dominance. The same project was revived in the Iranian modern state, before and after the revolution in 1979. However, the revolution highlighted the ideological dimension, and added to it by exporting the Iranian revolutionary model as articulated by Khomeini's leadership. This regime viewed exporting revolution as an instrument to accomplish Iran's far-reaching goal. The revolution also revived the Persian imperial goals, with Shi'ism as the center of the project in the region. Shi'ism is promoted through a politically-driven agenda and acts pragmatically moving cleverly between the Persian "dream" and the international threat to the region.

Careful observers of Iran's movement globally, would easily find that, Iran has an international project based on missionary-Shi'ism extending from the Middle East to the Far East and as far as Latin America, albeit its main objective is dominance in the Arabian Peninsula in particular, the Arab world and the Islamic world as well. Additionally, political historians on Iranian discourse would have discerned the depth of the Iranian project centuries ago towards the Gulf region in particular. For example, in 1822, Persia objected officially to the British agreement with Bahrain's Sheikh, based on the claim that at that time Bahrain was part of Persian territory. Persia then asked the British Government to permit its control over the Island of Bahrain. However, the British Foreign Office denied any Persian territorial claims over Bahrain or any other part of the Gulf region. The Persian Prime Minister responded in a memorandum sent to the British Government which reflects long-term Iranian ambitions in the region which continue until today. In fact, this has represented the intellectual framework for foreign policy makers since then. He clearly stated that, "the dominant view of the successive Persian governments is that "the Persian Gulf" extends from Shat Al Arab to Mascot including all islands, and ports without exception"⁵⁵

The Ideological Roots of the Persian Project

The historical roots of the Iranian Project (IP) and dominance over the region is deeply rooted in the Sassanid era, though Ismaeel Shah Al Safavid was the ruler who constructed an applicable Persian political project according to a far-reaching strategy depending on a special ideological-Persian tendency which included the entire Persian territory. He also articulated the Velāyat-e Faqīh theory in the political sphere. The main principle of the Velāyat-e Faqīh theory is a divine post for the Imam who rules on behalf of the Prophet (PBUH), and the Prophet is God's deputy on earth. Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) died in 632, and was succeeded by the Shi'I thought with Imams. The seventh of them, Imam Mahdi disappeared in 874 but will return before the end of time to establish justice on earth. The Mahdi is

⁵⁵ British Foreign Office at: www.fco.gov.uk

referred to as the hidden Imam. In his absence the state needed a ruler. This was the Velāyat-e Faqīh, the inspired jurist. The hidden Imam continues to receive God's authority since he has been alive since the eighth century and will eventually return. However, his authority is currently transferred to his deputies, and this is what we are witnessing in current Iran. The hidden Imam's deputies are acting on his behalf.⁵⁶ Primarily, Khamenei, the Supreme Guide is the Vali -e Faqīh, the inspired jurist-ruler.

It is essential to state here, that in 1501 (R 1501-1524,) Shah Ismaeel Al Safavid declared Shi'ism as a formal state-ideology for political reasons to deal specifically with the expansion of the Safavids state and its conflict with the Ottoman Empire, a Sunni-Hanafi Empire, well-rooted in the Turkish ethnicity espoused with Sunni culture. In evaluating the Savvaid's movement, it is found that it relied primarily on ethnic-Persian nationalism and Shi'ism. The movement highlighted its intellectual discourse masked with political goals in a religious context. It was also presented in a unitary framework. The outcome of such thinking is the fact that these ideas and religious principles are ingrained in the hearts and minds of the Persian people, and well-connected to the Prophethood. Its main objective is enhancing this "deceptive" mechanism, although the main goal is a Shi'i-sectarianism, an ethnic and a political movement utilizing Shi'ism to wrap up sectarianism within a spiritual mask. The movement articulated influential instruments. These included modifying Islamic discourse plus the role of the Prophet's character and that of Imam Ali to serve as enduring figures of a new religious discourse sectarian and ethnic, led by a fascist leadership believing in the superiority of Persia as a nation, and Persians as a superior people.

The Ideological Foundations of the Iranian Project:

1. Velāyat-e Faqīh and its Religious and Political Dimension

The Safavid-Shi'ism believes in the centrality of the House of the Prophet (PBUH), referred to as Al Al Bayt in Islam as a religion and as a system of governance. After the passing of the prophet the leadership mantle is confined to his house through his daughter Fatima and her husband, Imam Ali and their decedents to the end of life. In the absence of the Imam, who disappeared in 874, the inspired jurist rules on his behalf in what is known as "the State of the Hidden Imam". The main aim of this state is to govern on behalf of the hidden Imam until his return with one main goal, to establish justice against the forces of "darkness". The later are identified as Jews and Nawasebs (Sunnis) Muslims. As far as the Nawasebs are concerned, the declaration of animosity towards them comes from their opposition to the rule of the decedents of Imam Ali, while the declaration of animosity toward Jews is taken as granted. Therefore, Sunni Muslims and Jews are the declared enemies of Shi'a Islam.

The principle of Velāyat-e faqīh is viewed as a politically functional and practical method of governance which translates into political institutions as is the case in current Iran. However, a careful examination

⁵⁶ Al Musawi, Musa, 1989. Shi'a and Reform: the conflict between Shi'ism and Shi'tization. Al Zahra'a Media: Cairo, P. 23.

of the principle would find that it is constructed on two myths ingrained in the subconscious of Shi'i thought as a fundamental frame of reference, referred to in Shi'ism as "Maraje'e.

The first myth is the demise of Imam Hussein and the return of the Hidden Mahdi (Imam). Machiavelli once said, "people make history by creating a myth first."⁵⁷ This is exactly what the Persians have made. They have utilized pseudo religious-political myths effectively. These myths have always succeeded in mobilizing spontaneous sentiments in the irrational sub-consciousness especially in facing blurred conditions; therefore, people have become captives of such myths. This is also apparent in the collective behavior of Shia'ts during the Ashura annual anniversary, during which self-flagellation with machetes, knives and chains is used to inflict pain and suffering on themselves. The purpose is to demonstrate the feeling of guilt due to their failure to assist Imam Hussein in his time of need. The myths have also been utilized effectively in the mobilization of hundreds of thousands of fighters during the Iran-Iraq war, in which Khomeini had issued titles and keys to heaven for each fighter who dies in the battlefield.

The role of myth becomes institutionalized when the Supreme Guide controls collective psychology. This resulted in the exploitation of the Shi'ism creed into a functional creed tightly woven into a political myth with the aim of state control. The myth becomes reality, stimulating collective power, and a thirst for authority until it finds a suitable atmosphere for its manifestation. The essence of the political myth is the reconstruction of human behavior in a manner that facilitates control of the public by the few, the political leaders. At this point, the myth has become reality as it has become strong and influential to the extent it cannot be subjected to logical criterion, the believable and the unbelievable. Consequently, it cannot be deconstructed based on evidence, logic and reason.

Observers to the development of the Shi'i myth of Imam Hussein's death would find that two currents merged together to create this myth. These are the Persian-Savvaids (fundamentalists), and the Arab-Alwaits (Ikhbari) sect which holds on to the persistence of the Imam's death inflamed partially for the sake of using it as a mobilizing force for collective action. Ultimately, it aims at inflaming popular sentiments. However, the Iranian fundamentalist school of thought utilized the death of Imam Hussein politically and ideologically. In so doing, it represents an identical image to that of the Messiah's death, and the Al Al bayt Holocaust. It uses these to feed the collective reason towards a certain objective, the political objective of the state. The worship ceremonies at the Hussieniant (temples) are manufactured out of animosity, the adverse, the "other", i.e., Sunnis-Nassibis. The Hussieniant rituals of sadness, lament for the hero-victim who sacrifices himself for the sake of his followers. Heaven is promised for anyone reflecting sadness over his demise and fate, praying for him and for his offspring to be among the soldiers of the hidden Mahdi who will revenge his death. The Mahdi will revive the killers of Imam Hussein from their tombs, killing Arabs, and crucifying the Prophet's companions, and the offspring of Arabs.

⁵⁷ Machiavelli, Niccolo, 1992. *The Prince*, Dover Publishers: London, P. 19.

Apparently, these myths have succeeded in nurturing the Shi'i population successively throughout hundreds of generations creating hatred of the killers of Imam Hussein and their offspring. The Shi-mind continues to be fed with a sense of revenge whenever the Imam's death is observed annually. This results in strengthening the hatred to the "other", making them appear as enemies of Al Al Bayt, stigmatizing them as Nawaseb and Wahhabis, i.e., Arabs and Sunnis.

2. The Ideological and Functional Dimension of the Mahdi Return

The popular believe in the return of the Mahdi is based on the rationale that there must be a deputy for the Prophet (PBUH). He should assume the Prophethood's authority in the areas of legislation and command obedience. According to the Twelver-Shia't, the institution of the Imamate is divine; therefore, Imam Ali Ibn Abi Taleb the successor of the Prophet is divine, and that the Imamate is inherited by his offspring until the end of time. The Imamate is delivered from Ali to his Hussain passing the Imamt to Hussein's offspring but excluding his brother Hassan and his offspring. The reason for this is that Hussein's wife was a Persian Princess, whereas Hassan's children come from an Arab mother and were therefore excluded. The functional aspect is apparent throughout history. The most recent manifestation is the Shia't celebration of the execution of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, the capital city of the Mahdi. Saddam was the main symbol of modern Sunni-Islam. The Shia'ts also considered him as a continuation of the Umayyad rulers, who engaged in major battles with Imam Ali. Additionally, the current Iraqi scene alludes to the fact that Shi'i forces are laying the ground for the return of the Mahdi, establishing an army after his name, led by Mu'qtada Al Sader. The myth and narrative have become reality in the minds of the contemporary population of Shia't communities. Their manifestation is the ongoing battles between Sunnis and Shia'ts in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain.

The Mahdi Army has become a prelude to hasten the return of the Mahdi. Ayatollah Ali Sistani once said on the day of Saddam's execution, "a blessed day, a great day in the life of the House of the Prophet". Other Shi'i media outlets have reported that Mugtada Al Sader, the commander of the Mahdi Army, deemed Saddam's execution as a sacrifice, on the Eid Sacrifice day. In this, he managed on his own to defeat the Sunni world with one strike, Saddam's execution. Iranian media have echoed the same line of thinking, describing the execution of President Saddam Hussein as a necessary act, carried out on the first day of the Eid of Sacrifice so as for Sunnis to lament and experience sadness during their day. Some might view such a narrative as a sort of myth that cannot be used to judge the Iranian regime; however, we must understand that it is a matter of creed well-ingrained in the Shi'i mentality. Ali Kurani, a Shi'at theoretician "Shi'l and Hadith sources agree on the return of the Mahdi in the aftermath of preparation stage, which lays the necessary grounds for his return. The carriers of the Black Flags from Iran preparing for his arrival, and the establishment of his kingdom".

The appearance of the Mahdi in the Shi'i narrative in Iran represents a concrete symbol for the Iranian Revolution and its leadership. The Mahdi is the real leader for the revolution and the state. He also lives in the collective psyche, seen in the names of streets, shops-signs, and state institutions. Ali Korani

stated that, in the Founders State, Iran is divided into two stages. First, the beginning of the movement from the hands of a man from Qum City (Khomeini), and secondly, the appearance of two characters, the Khomeini and his army commander named Shu'eb bin Saleh. Kurani suggested that, the Man of Qum could be Imam Khomeini, and the Khomeini is the current Guide of the Iranian Revolution, Ali Khamenei, while Shue'b ben Saleh is the Iranian president. With this, the myth is completed thus leading to sectarian war. We can witness this in the current sectarian conflict in Iraq.

3. The Road Map of the Mahdi Reappearance Era

According to Shi'i thought, the functional and political aspect of the creed is practically apparent in the current Iranian geostrategic maneuverability. This is driven by a religious project guided by the Shi'i road map based on the process of construction of the Mahdi state. Khorani stated that "the people of the orient (Iranians), should be present in the potential sites of the Mahdi's reappearance such as Hejaz (Saudi Arabia), Yemen, Iraq, and the Levant which include Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. It extends as far as Morocco and Egypt.⁵⁸ It is therefore incumbent upon the founders (Iranians) to set forth the necessary conditions for his advent from his sanctuary including assistance to the divine wisdom to allow the Mahdi to reappear. This therefore is the transferring of the prophecy from theory to practice. Iran lies in the Eastern part of the Arabia Peninsula, the home of black banners and the man from Qum, Khomeini, has already appeared calling for justice.

The Levant is the last site of the Umayyad rule. It represents the last line of Arab defense and opposition to the Iranian founders. Iraq will produce more fighters on the side of the Mahdi. Hejaz is the home place for the advent of the Mahdi, and the home of his movement. Yemen is the main pillar of support to the "founding" state (Iran). Egyptian is the home for the deputies and ministers of Mahdi. Upon analyzing this road map, it appears as a blueprint for the implementation of the current Shi'i plan in Arab world. For example, Iran has consolidated its control over Iraq and spread its sectarian conflict. The daily genocide of the Sunni Muslims is an indication of a systemic process of transforming Iraq into a Shi'i state. The spirit of sectarianism has also spread to the region in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, and other countries. This process began over a decade ago, with the aim of forming Shi'i militant and sectarian political movements across the region. Their main intellectual thought is built on the Shi'i political discourse aimed at producing the Shi'i Nation. The same trend is obvious in the Levant countries, where Hezbollah has become a dominant political and military force. In Syria, Iran has become a decision-maker and dominant in their politics, in addition to its political influence over Hamas. Yemen has become the most active front in which the Houthis are waging a major combat against the state, the Sunni majority, and neighboring Saudi Arabia. As for Egypt, it also has a special place in the Iranian Project, illustrated when Iran cheered the fall of the Mubarak regime and supported the Muslim Brotherhood in order to establish a foothold in this country. Its

⁵⁸ Ali Alkowrani, 2004. *Era of the Appearance*, Almahajjt Al baydah Publishing House, Beirut, P. 159

objective was not realized due to the political changes which have occurred in Egypt since July 3, 2013. However, Iran has reached out to the new regime and attempts to infiltrate it.

The panoramic image of the Iranian-Shi'i expansion in the region's map shows a simple belt wound all around the Hejaz region (Saudi Arabia), for the sake of control over the potential site of the Mahdi's reappearance. This trend explains the fact that Iran has utilized its strategic, logistical and political power to serve its supreme ideological and political goals. The Iranian religious establishment has mobilized intellectuals to produce the necessary mechanisms for exporting its revolution to neighboring countries and strengthen its influence across the Arab world, including Africa.

4. The Khomeini Road Map for Regional Expansion

On the Eve of the success of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Khomeini stated that, the revolution will not be confined to Iran; rather it will spread to the Gulf region, Iraq, Lebanon and the entire region. In his post-revolution rhetoric the terminology of revolution-expansion was a main theme. He stated, "We work diligently on exporting our revolution worldwide."⁵⁹ His statements should not have been taken as revolutionary rhetoric but rather a road map for Iran's expansionist strategy. His platform was supported by an ideological framework inspired by the obligation towards the theory of preparation for the Mahdi's Return. Obviously, it is clear that the functional aspect of the Iranian creed is utilized to guide revolutionary expansion in the region. It also highlights the practical implementation of ideology. At a later stage, the second Guide Ali Khamenei responded in an interview in reference to his socio-economic and political program after the departure of Khomeini, that "his first goal is the spread of Islamic-political and revolutionary awareness among the Iranian people".⁶⁰

The revolutionary expansion theory conceptualized by Khomeini allegedly aims at establishing internationally just government functions as a substitute government for the Mahdi. This is the main aspect of a government which serves the oppressed Shi'i worldwide. In understanding this theory, we find that revolutionary expansion becomes the main pillar of Iran's foreign policy. It also utilizes all necessary ways and means to accomplish this goal. Khomeini stressed in his book exporting the Islamic Revolution and the aim of the revolutionary expansion, that religion and logic necessitates that we should not abandon corrupted Islamic governments to impede Islam's jurisprudence. We have no option but to destroy such corrupted regimes. That is an obligation incumbent upon all Muslims for the purpose of spreading the Islamic revolution on behalf of the hidden Imam, who serves as the deputy of

⁵⁹ Khomeini Heritage Institute, 1997. Exporting the Revolution, Heritage Institute Publishing House, Tehran, P. 125.

⁶⁰ Khomeini Heritage Institute, 1997. Exporting the Revolution, Heritage Institute Publishing House, Tehran, P. 159.

the Prophet. Obedience to the hidden Imam is incumbent on all. Therefore, the rule of Vilait Faigh serves as the deputy hidden-Imam. Therefore, he is also God's deputy on Earth.⁶¹

The Islamic government in Iran is simply the main pillar of the international Islamic government led by Velāyat-e faqīh. He is viewed as the commander who implements God's rule on earth, and his authorities are unlimited. He is able even to disband some of the Five Pillars of Islam, if he sees they are in contrast with Islam's interests, i.e., the interest of the Iranian government. This principle is highlighted in the Iranian constitution in article 5, Section 1 which states "the believe in the Imamate, the continuity of Imam Leadership and its main role in the perpetuity of the Islam's revolution."⁶² The regional and international practical aspect of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and what gives it the religious right as a religious obligation is covered in article 5 section 3 which states the need for "combating colonialism and foreign influence globally". Additionally, article 16 of the same section recommends that foreign policy should be guided by Islam's principles and the "brotherly" obligations toward all Muslims, i.e., Shi'i communities worldwide and the protection of the oppressed worldwide. Furthermore, article 144 begins with the word "must" which means "order". "The Islamic Republic of Iran must have a people's-ideological army, staffed with fitting personnel, who believe in the objectives of the Islamic revolution and are willing to sacrifice themselves for its success."⁶³ Simultaneously, the aforementioned article stipulates the armed forces creed as the construction of an army is based on creed and belief. Therefore, the army's capability and structure is channeled to accomplish the previous goals. The army's mission extends beyond the classic duty of national defense to spreading the divine mission worldwide i.e., Jihad for the sake of God to implement the Velāyat-e faqīh rule on earth.

Observers of the Iranian Revolution and its aftermath would find that the aforementioned strategy was substantiated in various ways and means in addition to policies and structures to ensure its success domestically and internationally. Its unifying theme is revolutionary expansion, clearly manifested in Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Kuwait, Bahrain and Yemen in the post-revolution era. Furthermore, Iran extends ties with anti-Sunni regime movements globally. Currently, this is apparent in its support to anti-regime opposition in Bahrain and Yemen. Hezbollah is the best example in its attempts to undermine the state authority in Lebanon. Iran's intervention has never stopped at the borders of Lebanon, on the contrary, it has widened the wedge between the Palestinians supporting Hamas against the PLO. Hamas has established domination in Gaza. The Palestinian Question continues to be exploited by the Iranian leadership to show that Iran is the leading power on the central issue of Palestine.

5. The Protocols of Iranian Elders

⁶¹ Amani Fahmi, 2010. *The World Constitutions*, National Translating Center, Tehran, P.74.

⁶² Khomeini Heritage Institute, 1997. *Exporting the Revolution*, Heritage Institute Publishing House, Tehran, P. 20.

⁶³ Khomeini Heritage Institute, 1997. *Exporting the Revolution*, Heritage Institute Publishing House, Tehran, P. 74.

Since 1979, the transformation of Iran into an Islamic system, Khomeini's strategy has focused on Shi'i Islam, and the safeguarding of the revolution. After him, another stage was guided by Ali Akbar Rafsanjani focusing on establishing the face of the new Iran. It has provided a general framework for Iran's international relations. Khatamei is another ruler described as wise with an open mind, and widely accepted domestically and internationally. His role was rebuilding Iran internally and reforming its image globally. Ahmadinejad came to complement the most important aspect of the Iranian project, its military power and capabilities. The goal was to present Iran as a regional power that cannot be sidelined globally.

It is evident that Iran as a nation has deep civilizational roots which assist in constructing far-reaching strategies, rather than the spontaneous policies that characterize regional politics. Additionally, observers to the Iranian project since the revolution would find that, every step has a part to play in the overall project according to the Protocols of Iran's' Elders' thought. It also follows specific channels and mechanisms built upon a religious doctrine highlighting the fact that the authority of the Islamic Republic of Iran has unlimited appeal, worldwide. It also follows the traditional and historical narrative of the Iranian Empire centered in Iran and having influence worldwide as the ideal Islamic state and the center of the leadership of the Islamic world. Ultimately, the Protocols of Iranian Elders is based upon several principles:

First: The Islamic Nationalism Theory

Mahdi Bazargan, the first Prime Minister of Iran after the fall of the Shah's regime is considered to be the founding father of the Islamic Nationalism Theory. This is based on religious creed revolving around Shi'i-Jaffari thought. It believes in the necessity of utilizing all resources for the purpose of achieving the national interests of Iran through the use of Islam as a general umbrella to achieve this goal.

Second: The Khomeini Revolutionary Expansion Theory

Khomeini believed in the total elimination of all borders and obstacles, with full freedom and the use of all ways and means to establish an international government centered in Iran. Iran is a state with a universal mission which is the establishment of the foretold Mahdi state. Some of the obligations of this state include supporting the cause of justice for the globally oppressed. Therefore, the principle of revolutionary expansion becomes a main pillar of Iran's international relations. This theme was the center of Khomeini's public discourse. In an interview conducted in 1978, Khomeini was asked if he thought that the events pertaining to Iran would have some ramifications in Turkey. He replied that, the "sacred Iranian process of renaissance is Islamic in nature, therefore, it is natural that all Muslims interact with it. Islamic renaissance has no borders".⁶⁴ On the occasion of International Jerusalem Day on August 1st, 1981, Khomeini said "everyone knows that the great and unique Iranian revolution is characterized with great idols, the same values inspired the prophets. We hope that, this revolution is

⁶⁴ Khomeini Heritage Institute, 1997. Exporting the Revolution, Heritage Institute Publishing House, Tehran, P. 159.

the divine spark that stirs rebellions among the oppressed globally. Their revolts are preludes to the arrival of God's deputy on earth", i.e., the Mahdi.

What Khomeini stated is a clear indication of the Iranian project. The revolution is not confined to Iran's borders. Contrary, it has far-reaching goals across the region in particular neighboring monarchic systems in the Gulf region. In so doing, the Iranian Revolution is comparable to divine messages. He also made out that himself and his revolution were the spark that will promote the global revolution led by the oppressed. As for the sectarian-Shi'i-Twelve thought and the belief in the Founders State, he said at the end of a speech "the revolution is well-connected with the arrival of Mahid and his revolution and our lives are devoted in sacrifice of his return"⁶⁵. Therefore, the main aim of the revolution is expansionism beyond the "center" state, Iran, while its overall goal is preparation for the Mahdi state. Therefore, the Iranian revolution is a Shi'i - religious borderless revolution aimed at exterminating all opposing thought and entities. Its geographical context however is Sunni-Islam which is the main hurdle to its expansion, therefore, the ultimate aim of such a revolution is to overcome such obstacles, by force if necessary.

In 1980, Khomeini addressed participants on Jerusalem International Day. He clarified his views on exporting the revolution stating that, "we mean to export the values of the revolution across the Islamic world".⁶⁶ What is alarming about the Iranian project is that, it is not liberation as claimed, rather a spreading of culture and values, i.e., Shi'tization mired with Persian-Safavid values. He also aimed at erasing Arab-Islamic culture, therefore, he preached a new Islam as if the Arabian Peninsula including the holy cities of Mecca and Medina lay under non- Islamic rule. In the practical implementation of Khomeini's thought and his preaching against imperialism and colonialism, we also find that a great disparity between theory and the practice of elites exists. While Khomeini preached the values of coexistence, justice for the oppressed, and anti-imperialism, we find that, Iran under his leadership continued the previous government's imperial policies. For example, on the eve of the British withdrawal from the Gulf region in 1971, the Shah's imperial forces occupied three UAE islands, and therefore, came the revolution of "justice and freedom" as preached by Khamenei to endorse such occupation. Additionally, Khamenei rejected even the idea of mere discussion with the UAE about the future of the three islands. Not only that, but he reinvigorated the idea of the annexation of Bahrain to Iran. Astoundingly, Iran under Khamenei provided substantial support to Cuba and Nicaragua, while providing no support to the Afghani resistance against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.⁶⁷ That is a clear indication that Shi'i Iran is unwilling to support Sunni-Islam, but on the contrary, is willing to support opponent of Sunni-Islam including the United States. Iran provided substantial material support

⁶⁵ Khomeini Heritage Institute, 1997. Exporting the Revolution, Heritage Institute Publishing House, Tehran, P. 159.

⁶⁶ Khomeini Heritage Institute, 1997. Exporting the Revolution, Heritage Institute Publishing House, Tehran, P. 159.

⁶⁷ Terry Cofel, 2008. The Hidden Revolution, Alfarabi Publishing House, Beirut, P. 21.

to facilitate the American occupation of Afghanistan and the destruction of the Sunni-Talban regime in Afghanistan, as it did similarly in Iraq.

Iran continued to work diligently on accomplishing its goals defined in terms of exporting the revolution. Iran constantly developed new methods of revolutionary expansion in the region. The declared goal was ideological and financial support to global Islamic movements and anti-Western governments, in addition to movements combating “corrupt” Islamic governments. However, such support was aimed at neighboring Sunni-Islamic countries. Tehran established the so called “The Islamic Revolution Council” entrusted with coordinating sabotage actions to undermine the stability of the region. In Bahrain, Shi-movements supported by Iran, initiated the 1981 uprising, which continues to the present day. Kuwait became an arena for several insurrections and assassination attempts. The Hajj season in Saudi Arabia was the arena for confrontation between Iranian agents and Saudi security forces. The Shi’i Higher Council in Iraq which was based in Tehran led by Mohammed Bakir Al Hakeem carried out several attacks against Saddam Hussein’s regime. Its military wing continues to play a major role in Iraq, and is a major instrument of Iran.

Third: Um Al Qur’a Theory (UAQT)

Mohamed Larejani in his book ‘Conversation in the National Strategy’ presented his so called Um Al-Qura Theory as a roadmap for Iran’s foreign policy towards neighboring Arab and Islamic countries based on his expansionist sectarian thought.⁶⁸ Larijani is the main pillar of Iran’s foreign policy think tank and decision making. The theory assumes that Qum, the center of the Shi’i thought becomes Um Al Qara, a Quranic terminology referring to the holy city of Mecca, the seat of Islam. In fact, understanding the theory is a key to understanding the overall Shi’i-Persian project. It is built upon an extremist project and has aspirations based on the exclusionary of the other, i.e., Sunni-Muslims. UAQT is also a contemporary attempt to reinvigorate a previous project, which is the revolutionary expansion as preached previously by Khamenei. Larijani added to this a Persian-nationalist perspective which is currently apparent in Iran’s domestic and foreign policy.

In light of UAQT, it is necessary to re-examine some of the events, theories, and projects pertaining to Iran’s political, security and expansionism. Such projects are clearly tied tightly into the current developments on the Arab and Islamic scene. Practically speaking, the Arab countries have become the center of Iran’s attention. Iran is deeply involved in the Gulf region, a geographic-space representing the center of the practical implementation of this theory. Larijani is a senior Iranian expert in physics. He is the Director of the Science Studies Institute. He was the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs under the Khamenei Administration. Larijani’s theory believes that, the city of Qum should replace the holy city of Mecca and Iran must be the center of Um Al Qura and the Vali Faqigh should be the Caliph.

The Pillars of Um Al Qur’a Theory

⁶⁸ Haadef Alshamari, 2007. The fifty Fifth plan and its Reflection at the Kingdom of Bahrain, Al Farabi Publishing House, Beirut, P. 56.

1. Iran is the home country of Tehran and Qum, the political and religious capital cities shouldering major responsibilities. Therefore, all Muslims must be obedient to Vali Faqih, Qum would be the Um Al Qura, Dar al Islam- (home of Islam), and this will not be accomplished unless Iran controls Mecca and Medina, the center of Sunni Islam. Iran follows the theory literally in the sense of constructing superior military capabilities in its antagonistic policies toward the region. In addition it has clear intentions of intervention in the internal affairs of the region such as its influence in Bahrain, Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, Gaza Strip and other parts of the Middle East.
2. Secondly, the UAQT states that Iran accepts the current political borders because it is forced to do so. However, Iran must work diligently to remove such borders even if it takes the use of force, but at the suitable time.
3. The Vilaiti Faqih is a main pillar in leading the Islamic world. He is the deputy of Mahdi, therefore, Khomeini -Iran is the first stage of Islamic unity. Therefore, Um Al Qura (Qum city), shoulders this responsibility and Khamenei is the person in charge of implementing the theory.

Overall, there are two interrelated objectives among the Iranian elite. They are the safeguarding of Um Al Qura and the implementation of exporting the revolution. Therefore, this theory is currently the guiding framework of the current Iranian foreign policy, defense policy, media, and public guidance. It has become more than a theory, but is an Iranian national project with far-reaching goals domestically and internationally.

Um Al Qur'a Theory in Iran's Foreign Policy

In light of the UAQT, Iran's foreign policy is based upon three major principles:

1. Iran is an Islamic state, based on Islam's principles; therefore, the preservation of its Islamic regime is incumbent on all. Iran's status also must be highlighted as the center of the Islamic world. Iran's foreign policy establishment needs to understand their position as a distinguished nation at the center of the Islamic world.
2. Iran's national security does not begin or end at Iran's borders, rather it extends to the Gulf countries which are being used as military bases for external powers to attack Iran. The UAQT advocates the necessity of defending Iran's national security by all means regardless of revolutionary or moral values.
3. With regards to regional expansion, the UAQT is based on the idea that Iran is the only Islamic country that has the right and capability to lead the Islamic world, as Iranian leaders believe it is the only country which has a "real" Islamic system. Additionally, Iran has a deep history of civilization which strengthens the Iranian belief as a superior nation in comparison with the Arab people.

4. Iran's 20 Years Strategic Plan highlighted the necessity of Iran's assumption of its role in the region, which requires increasing power capabilities to become a central power able to dominate the Arab-Middle East. The theory's context is South-West Asia (Arab World), aiming at the Arab region. The document also highlights Iran's leadership role in the political, economic and security of the region, side by side with some regional powers. It also recommends avoiding confrontation with Great Powers in the region, with the exception where clear rivalry over Iran's vital interests cannot be avoided.

Abu Al Hasan bani Sader, Iran's first revolutionary president once said, "Khomeini wanted to establish a Shi'i belt to control the Islamic world, composed of Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. Iran is to utilize its presence, its oil reserves and the Persian Gulf to control the entire Islamic world."⁶⁹ This is clearly evident in Iran's struggle to rescue the Syrian regime, in addition to support of Hezbollah to become its arm in the region. The belt is completed with Iran's control over Iraq through a loyal government and the Shi'i militia.

Conclusion

The ideological base for the Iranian project is well-rooted in Shi'i thought. It is also rooted in Persian civilization, culture and history. Its aim is to underline the fact that Iran is a leading Islamic country, expansionist in nature. It has also articulated a new religion totally different from main stream Islam. This is based on Persian history, values, traditions and customs. Shi'ism is constructed on the animosity towards the other, i.e. the "Sunnis", and the extermination of Sunni thought that disbelieves in the Iranian project. Additionally, its intellectual bases such as the UAQT have become guiding principles of Iran's foreign policy since 1979. It advocates Iran's military superiority, and dominance in the Gulf region, the Middle East and the entire Islamic world. Astoundingly, the project is also well-rooted in myth and reality.

⁶⁹ Al Jazeera, 2000. Especial Visit, Al Jazeera website.

Chapter 5: The Iranian Nuclear Program

The Iranian nuclear program is an integral element of the Iranian Project (IP). The question remains, does Iran have a nuclear program which aims to expand its influence and power projection in the region. The initial answer is affirmative. In the following section, an overview of Iran's nuclear program, its development, goals, capabilities, scope, reactors and facilities will be provided.

Iran's Nuclear Program: an Overview

The development of nuclear weapons and their first use in World War II against Japan alerted the international community to the devastating impact of such weapons; however, it brought some optimism about the potential use of nuclear energy in peaceful fields. Iran was one of the very early countries that had shown interest in nuclear energy. Syed Hossein Mousavian (2012) traces the origins of Iran's nuclear program to the 1950s: "the year 1956 is considered the starting point of Iran's interest in nuclear energy. It was then that the Iranian government's negotiations with the White House resulted in the first agreement for a nonmilitary use of nuclear energy, which was concluded in 1957...the agreement, which laid a framework for nuclear collaboration between Iran and the United States, consisted of a preamble and eleven articles that were ratified by the National Consultative Assembly on February 1, 1959."⁷⁰ He continued to state that, the nuclear partnership was "made possible by the general alignment between Tehran's and Washington's economic and political interests, and in the spirit of the American Atoms for Peace Initiative, the agreement laid the foundation for a nuclear Iran."⁷¹ Mousavian also stated that, the United States assisted other members of the Central Treaty Organization based in Baghdad (CENTO), which included Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan, UK, Iran and the US, assisting them in their nuclear ambitions. He added that, "the Nuclear Science Institute of CENTO was relocated from Baghdad to Tehran in 1957 and based at the University of Tehran. The Institute admitted students from Iran and other countries, including Turkey and Pakistan, and was the forerunner to the Tehran Nuclear Research Center."⁷² The center was inaugurated by the Shah himself and supported by President John F. Kennedy and his administration which endorsed the construction of the five-megawatt research reactor. Currently, the reactor, known as the Tehran Research Reactor (TRR), is the main pillar of Iran's nuclear program. It uses highly enriched uranium to produce radioactive isotopes for medical uses and plutonium production. The Tehran reactor was completed and became operational in November 1967, after six years of construction. When the Non-Proliferation Treaty was completed in 1968 and was open for signatures, Iran signed it on the very first day for signatures. Mousavian confirmed that, "the United States delivered 5.54 kg of highly enriched uranium and 112 grams of plutonium to University of Tehran in 1967."⁷³

In order to ensure the sustainability of Iran's nuclear program, the Shah had signed agreements with several countries. In 1972, a scientific cooperation agreement was signed with Canada to assist Iran in developing its nuclear energy sector and provide assistance in "nuclear equipment,

⁷⁰ Mousavian, Syed Hossein, 2012. *The Iranian Nuclear Crisis: A Memoir*, The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: Washington DC, 41.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, P. 41.

⁷² *Ibid*, P. 41.

⁷³ *Ibid*, P. 41.

materials, and facilities.”⁷⁴ However, in 1973-1974, Iran’s oil revenue tripled because of the oil embargo imposed by Arab countries on the West because of the 1973 War. The accumulation of funds and the drastic increase of oil revenue encouraged the Shah’s government to increase its investment in the nuclear sector. It was reported that “with the U.S. encouragement, the Shah in March 1974 announced plans to generate 23,000 MW of nuclear energy within twenty years, beginning with the two reactors at Bushehr, and to acquire a full nuclear fuel-cycle including facilities to enrich uranium, fabricate fuel, and reprocess spent fuel.”⁷⁵ Towards this end, Iran signed an agreement with Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to educate thousands of Iranian students in nuclear energy in order to man its ambitious nuclear programs. Most of the current Iranian nuclear scientists were educated on this program, and other related programs. To organize its activities in the nuclear sphere, Iran established the Iran Atomic Energy Organization (IAEO) in 1974. The organization “was charged with developing civilian nuclear science and technology, building the country’s nuclear infrastructure, and managing international nuclear cooperation and representation, including through the International Atomic Energy Agency.”⁷⁶

Before the eruption of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Mousavian stated that, “Western countries, including the United States, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Canada, by and large supported Iran’s nuclear activities, indeed, they competed for lucrative nuclear projects to nuclearize Iran.”⁷⁷ Furthermore, the US was more than willing to accommodate Iranian demands for plutonium reprocessing which produces the key ingredient of a bomb. However, in the aftermath of the revolution, the US suspended all nuclear agreements with Iran. Other countries such as France, Germany, UK and Canada followed suit at a later stage.

One of the major obstacles to the advancement of the Iranian nuclear program was the Iraqi invasion in 1980. Iraq, with tacit support from the US and the Gulf countries hoped to end the revolution in its infancy and halt its threat. However, Mousavian in relying on IAEA sources stated that Iran “was able to acquire key components from the A.Q. Khan network, a nuclear supply complex operating from within Pakistan’s uranium enrichment establishment. The components included technical drawings for a P-1 centrifuge and a design for a gas centrifuge enrichment plant.”⁷⁸ In the 1990s, Iran signed a ten-year nuclear cooperation agreement with China. Accordingly, China agreed to “build a 27 MW research reactor and to supply additional

⁷⁴ Ibid, P. 41.

⁷⁵ Ibid, P. 41.

⁷⁶ Ibid, P. 43.

⁷⁷ Ibid, P. 47.

⁷⁸ Ibid, P. 53.

calutrons and other uranium enrichment technology.”⁷⁹ However, due to surmountable pressure on China, “in December 1991, China withdrew its offer to sell Iran a nuclear reactor.”⁸⁰ However, Iran continued to receive external support from countries like Argentina which signed agreements with Iran in 1987-1988. Surprisingly, reports surfaced in 2006 on this Iranian-Argentinean nuclear cooperation. Argentina had supplied 19.75 percent low-enriched uranium to fuel the Tehran Nuclear Reactor. Additionally, Iran signed agreements with the Soviet Union in 1989, and with Russia and other former Soviet Republics in the 1990s. This decade was at the heart of Iran’s nuclear activity, during which Iran solicited the support of all willing countries and relied on its own expertise for development, much to the astonishment of the world which discovered in 2002 that Iran had a well-established nuclear program.

Ray Takeyh (2012) describes Iran as “a country determined to preserve for itself the option of acquiring nuclear weapons capabilities at some future date.”⁸¹ Takyeh sounds cautious in his assessment of Iran’s capability due to the secrecy surrounding the program, the lack of credible intelligence and the uncertainty in assessing Iran’s over all nuclear capabilities. However, Bruno Pellaud highlighted the role of the Nixon Administration, and Kissinger’s in particular, in assisting Iran to build its nuclear program in 1974.⁸² This administration had no major objections even to providing Iran with reprocessing capabilities, however, Kissinger suggested the establishment of a multinational reprocessing capability, something Iran was willing to consider. However, Takyeh considers Iran’s quest for a nuclear program as inspired by its heavy losses and casualties suffered during the eight years war with Iraq. Iran reached the conclusion that, if it had had the nuclear option, the war would not have lasted that long, nor would Iran suffered massive casualties. In summary, it could have been resolved swiftly. Therefore, during the period from 1988-2002, Iran’s strategy was to develop nuclear capability in a discrete manner, without attracting the attention of US, or the IAEA. While Iran largely succeeded in its efforts, the world was stunned to learn in 2002 of the extent of such a program due to intelligence offered by Iranian opposition groups. The information provided triggered the IAEA, the US, and Israel in particular, to examine Iran’s nuclear capability, which was shocking to all observers. While the reformist government of Mohammad Khatami was willing to negotiate a settlement to the looming crisis with the West over its nuclear program, the American invasion of Iraq, and the Bush Administration’s intervention in the 2005 elections in Iran, produced an ultra-conservative Administration in Iran with the election of Ahmadinejad, that made

⁷⁹ Ibid, P. 54.

⁸⁰ Ibid, P. 54.

81. Ray Takyeh in Elliot Abrams et al. 2012. Iran: The Nuclear Challenger,” *Council on Foreign Relations: Washington, D.C.* P. 1.

⁸² Bruno Pellaud in Elliot Abrams et al. 2012. Iran: The Nuclear Challenger,” *Council on Foreign Relations: Washington, D.C.* P. 54.

developing Iran's nuclear capability a priority at all costs. Therefore, between 2005-2013, the confrontation between Iran and the West was open to all options. The US, Israel, France, Saudi Arabia and Britain took the extreme stance of demanding an immediate end to Iran's nuclear program, or else Iran would suffer a devastating attack. Other countries such as China and Russia understood Iran's concerns and agreed with the German proposal of a negotiated end to the standoff, which paid off a decade later in November 2013, when the P5+1 reached an interim agreement with Iran, in the hope of concluding a permanent settlement to the crisis in 2014.

The size and potential of the Iranian projects alarmed the international community as never before. Krause and Mallory stated that Iran's "nuclear program has been the cause of one of the most extended international crises of the past decade. It has the combined potential of derailing the global nuclear non-proliferation regime and of upsetting the already feeble regional security balance in the Middle East"⁸³ They summed up Iran's nuclear program stating that Iran has: a sizeable enrichment program pursuing a heavy-water moderated natural uranium reactor, expressed interest in technology which might be used for separation of plutonium from spent fuel, is involved in acquiring nuclear weapons technology, carried out most of its Research and Development (R&D) efforts in secrecy, not been forthcoming in declaring its capabilities and nuclear assets, and the fact that Iran is pursuing ballistic missile technology.⁸⁴ In dealing with such a challenge and this continued crisis, Therese Delpech examined the diplomacy option and its usefulness in producing constructive dialogue and results. She revived the efforts made by the US, Europe and the IAEA since early 1990s, reaching the conclusion that, inconsistency in dealing with Iran only escalated the situation. The "problem has all along been lack of purpose and lack of clarity, both needed to craft a credible policy. This policy should be easy to read, should provide confidence to friends and allies, and should show resolve to Iran."⁸⁵ The Western and American confusion and inconsistency in dealing with the Iranian threat alarmed their traditional allies in the region who lost confidence in the US, top of the list was Saudi Arabia, Israel, Jordan and the Gulf countries.

While President Mohammad Khatami showed interest in working with the international community to ease the tension over Iran's nuclear program, the election of right-wing President Ahmadinejad in 2005-2013 put an end to any hope of bringing an optimal outcome to the

⁸³ Krause and Mallory in Elliot Abrams et al. 2012. Iran: The Nuclear Challenger," *Council on Foreign Relations*: Washington, D.C, P. 11.

⁸⁴ Krause and Mallory in Elliot Abrams et al. 2012. Iran: The Nuclear Challenger," *Council on Foreign Relations*: Washington, D.C, P. 13.

⁸⁵ Krause and Mallory in Elliot Abrams et al. 2012. Iran: The Nuclear Challenger," *Council on Foreign Relations*: Washington, D.C. P. 48.

confrontation between Iran and the international community. In this period, Israel, France, and the US took the extreme position of readiness to bomb Iranian nuclear facilities, while other leading powers such as Russia, China, and Germany preferred a diplomatic solution to the standoff. In dealing with the standoff in and around 2003, Pellaud believed that, the lack of direct contacts between what was known as the EU3 (France, Germany and the UK) and Iran, in addition to the traditional animosity between the US and Iran, have complicated the efforts of containing the emerging Iranian threat.⁸⁶ Additionally, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 only convinced Iran to speed up its development of a nuclear deterrent. Iran concluded that the lesson of the US invasion is to produce a nuclear deterrent to protect yourself, otherwise, you will be next in line for regime-change. This explains the fact of Iran's main goal being to make the price of occupying Iraq very heavy on the US, and thus they would emerge as the beneficiary. Iran accomplished all of its goals and utilized the US to remove its two foes on its borders, the Taliban regime, and Saddam Hussein. On its own, Iran would have never been able to deal with this challenge.

Pellaud provided several scenarios for resolving the crisis, which include acceptance by Iran of total suspension of nuclear enrichment, limited enrichment, constrained enrichment, and shared enrichment. Each of such proposals is a daunting task including confidence-building measures, which were most absent from the scene. Sokolski stated that, for many "Iran already has become a virtual nuclear state"⁸⁷ Sokolski concluded in "regrettable tone", that, "we can't reverse history. Short of a major war or regime change, the opportunities to keep Iran from going nuclear may be all but exhausted at this point."⁸⁸

Chipman in ECSSR stated that, "Iran continued to present a defiant image to the international community on the nuclear issue."⁸⁹ He concluded that "there is still time to achieve diplomatic solution to the Iran nuclear issue, or, to continue to delay and frustrate Iranian efforts to acquire nuclear weapons and accompanying delivery system."⁹⁰ Chipman believes that the delaying mechanisms are not mere tactics, but a strategic choice in the hope of internal changes in Iran that might alter the domestic political scene so as to permit a different sort of

⁸⁶ Krause and Mallory in Elliot Abrams et al. 2012. *Iran: The Nuclear Challenger,* Council on Foreign Relations: Washington, D.C. P. 57.

⁸⁷ Henry Sokolski, in Elliot Abrams et al, 2012. *Iran: The Nuclear Challenger,* Council on Foreign Relations: Washington, D.C. P. 82.

⁸⁸ Henry Sokolski, in Elliot Abrams et al, 2012. *Iran: The Nuclear Challenger,* Council on Foreign Relations: Washington, D.C. P.95.

⁸⁹ The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research (ECSSR), *Global Strategic Developments: A Futuristic Vision*, 2012: Abu Dhabi- UAE, P. 139.

⁹⁰ The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research (ECSSR), *Global Strategic Developments: A Futuristic Vision*, 2012: Abu Dhabi- UAE, P. 158.

engagement with Iran. Chipman advocated the emergence of an Iranian leadership that is more reflective of popular opinion and will be more inclined to engage constructively with the international community, and therefore integrate Iran into the international community. An open Iran, with a verifiable peaceful nuclear energy will not be widely opposed, in comparison to a secretive country discreetly developing a program identified as a major threat to international peace. Chipman agrees that, the continued Iranian defiance in the nuclear sphere will only motivate regional powers such as Saudi Arabia to pursue a nuclear program of its own to balance the Iranian threat.

William Harting quoted Christopher Clay (2004) at the Center for Contemporary Conflict that “Iran was Pakistan’s first major customer and Libya was its most recent.” Commenting on the A.Q. Khan’s network’s role in proliferation, while the Khan network might have smuggled nuclear components to Iran, Pakistan’s government would not have approved of such a step given the fact that the two countries are rivals on many issues.”⁹¹

Meghan L. O’Sullivan examined the appeal of a sanction-led solution to Iran’s nuclear threat. She stated that, “sanctions offer the possibility of achieving an acceptable outcome without military force and its numerous uncertainties and unintended consequences.”⁹² The sanctions regime is not new in the American foreign policy towards Iran, but began with the Carter Administration. Not only that, but also the United Nations and the European countries have imposed stringent regime-sanction on Iran which paid off in 2012, 2013 and beyond. “The UN has imposed sanctions on Iran related to WMD infrastructure, frozen the assets of individuals and banks associated with the Revolutionary Guard, and called for travel bans on designated individuals.”⁹³ O’Sullivan concluded that, “sanctions do seem to have contributed to Iran’s willingness to return to the negotiating table with the P5+1 in April, 2012.”⁹⁴

Richard Falkenrath examined the prospects of a negotiated outcome to the standoff with Iran. Falkenrath concluded that “at present –for the Ahmadinejad Administration-, based on historical records, the prospect that the current Iranian government, with its nationalist ideology and domestic instability will consent to any significant, verifiable curtailment of its program, to give itself the option of constructing nuclear weapons, is effectively zero.”⁹⁵

⁹¹ Williams, Paul D. 2005. Security Studies: An Introduction, Routledge: London, P. 358.

⁹² Meghan L. O’Sullivan in Robert D. Blackwill, 2012. Iran: the Nuclear Challenge, Council on Foreign Relations: Washington DC, P. 13.

⁹³ Meghan L. O’Sullivan in Robert D. Blackwill, 2012. Iran: the Nuclear Challenge, Council on Foreign Relations: Washington DC, P. 14.

⁹⁴ Meghan L. O’Sullivan in Robert D. Blackwill, 2012. Iran: the Nuclear Challenge, Council on Foreign Relations: Washington DC, P. 16.

⁹⁵ Richard Falkenrath in Robert D. Blackwill, 2012. Iran: the Nuclear Challenge, Council on Foreign Relations: Washington DC, P. 25.

Mathew Korenig examined the Israel military option towards the Iranian nuclear program. He concluded that an Israeli attack might cause minor damage to Iran's nuclear program, "yet unleashes the full range of downside consequences. It is the fear of this latter scenario that one must also carefully consider the advantages and disadvantages of the other options."⁹⁶ Robert D. Blackwill examined the prospects of a US attack on Iran and concluded that, "if U.S. vital national interests are severely threatened by Iranian acquisition of latent or actual nuclear weapons capability, the American presidency should not be paralyzed by either the complexities or the possible length of a conflict with Iran."⁹⁷ Elliott Abrams examined the prospect of regime change. He stated that, "years of American efforts to change the behavior of the Islamic Republic of Iran have met with almost uniform failure."⁹⁸ He advocated regime change with all the risks associated with the option. He concluded that, "the task today is to judge the risks and rewards of various forms of regime change policy against the challenges posed by the Islamic Republic."⁹⁹ However, Robert Danin explored the world scene with Iran armed with a nuclear bomb. He stated that, "Iran's nuclear developments could spur other Middle East countries to see how they might acquire nuclear capabilities. Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE have all expressed a desire to develop nuclear energy programs."¹⁰⁰ He concluded that, "Iran with the bomb would drastically change the Middle East. The Iranian regime would likely feel emboldened and be prone to increase its efforts to stir up Shiite populations in the Gulf and trouble elsewhere. Iran might also feel emboldened to exert its influence in other ways, including militarily."¹⁰¹

There has been a new set of literature examining the impact of domestic politics on Iran's nuclear program. The impact of internal politics on Iran has been a primary aspect of its nuclear ambitions since the 1950s. The Shah wanted his White Revolution to be empowered by nuclear energy to produce electricity, and to use it for peaceful purposes, in addition to consolidating the power of the state empowered by a nuclear program supported by his Western allies, especially the United States. The Islamic Revolution that toppled his regime was also seeking the same power and prestige associated with a nuclear program. Its goal was to consolidate its power, ensure the survival of the regime, and project power regionally and internationally commensurate with Iran's historical and civilizational depth as a superpower. For example, Sharam Chubin examined the alleged popularity of Iran's nuclear program among the Iranian people, regime type, regime-behavior, regime-identity and the regime's-image domestically and internationally. He found that, "Iran's nuclear program enjoyed the support of

96 Mathew Korenig in Robert D. Blackwill, 2012. *Iran: the Nuclear Challenge*, Council on Foreign Relations: Washington DC, P. 33.

97 Robert D. Blackwill in Robert D. Blackwill, 2012. *Iran: the Nuclear Challenge*, Council on Foreign Relations: Washington DC, P. 42.

98 Elliott Abrams in Robert D. Blackwill, 2012. *Iran: the Nuclear Challenge*, Council on Foreign Relations: Washington DC, P. 43.

99 Elliott Abrams in Robert D. Blackwill, 2012. *Iran: the Nuclear Challenge*, Council on Foreign Relations: Washington DC, P. 50.

100 Robert Danin in Robert D. Blackwill, 2012. *Iran: the Nuclear Challenge*, Council on Foreign Relations: Washington DC, P. 54.

101 Robert Danin in Robert D. Blackwill, 2012. *Iran: the Nuclear Challenge*, Council on Foreign Relations: Washington DC, P. 58.

all elements within the elite; it would be the first issue to have done so since the inception of the Islamic Republic of Iran.”¹⁰² Chubin examined the domestic engagement in the program and its defense of Iran’s right for nuclear energy. He found that, in the first period of the program from 1987-2002, the program was not controversial or a main issue on Iran’s domestic agenda. Iranians perceived it as a better alternative of energy source to their current energy problem. However, in 2002, when the depth of the program was revealed and Iran was subjected to IAEA’s Non-Compliance criticism, and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Iranian government and people became alarmed by the looming threat. The reformist government of Khatami accepted the IAEA’s demands for verification, suspended enrichment efforts and accepted compromise with the US and the international community, simultaneously, preserving its right for nuclear energy consistent with its commitment to NPT back in 1968, which provided all signatories with the right to pursue a peaceful nuclear programs with the assistance and supervision of the IAEA. However, the pace of developments associated with the US invasion of Iraq, and the election of Ahmadinejad, an ultraconservative, ended any hopes of compromise. It was clear that the world was in a showdown with Iran. The crisis escalated for ten years, during which both Iran and the international community were unable to reach any substantial agreement on Iran’s program until the election of a reformist government in June, 2013. During this period, Iran was subjected to a stringent economic sanctions regime, while the US and Israel drew up plans and scenarios of potential attack on Iran’s nuclear program. Chubin recommended that the international community understand what he calls the various shades of Iran’s political spectrum vis a vis its nuclear program. There are those who support the program for “civilizational” reasons, others for energy and electricity, others support for nuclear weapons to confront the West. However, understanding such diversity and manipulating it, will most certainly have a major impact on dealings with the Iranian public opinion and turning them against their government. It is obvious that the 2013 June elections did just that, when Iranians came out in support of a reformist candidate who seeks compromise and lifting of the sanctions imposed on Iran for over ten years.

The imposition of sanctions on Iran by the US, the UN and the EU in particular, promoted some observers to examine its impact on bringing Iran into compliance with its international obligation toward the non-proliferation regime. Keith Crane stated that, sanctions were imposed on Iran because it “has failed to notify the International Atomic Energy Agency of a number of its activities involving nuclear fuel enrichment. It is in violation of its obligations

¹⁰² Sharam Chubin in Joachim Krause, 2012. *Iran’s Nuclear Programme: Strategic Implications*, Routledge: London, P. 99.

under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).”¹⁰³ Crane examined the UN’s sanctions-regime which was issued in UN Security Council Resolution No. 1737, passed on December 6, 2006. The resolution “blocks the import and export of “sensitive nuclear material and equipment from and to Iran.”¹⁰⁴ A second set of sanctions were imposed on Iran in UNSCR 1747 passed in March 2007. It called on member states to freeze the assets of specific people and institutions involved in Iran’s nuclear program. In 2008, the UNSCR passed Resolution 1803 which called on states to scrutinize the financial dealings of Iranian banks to ensure that Iran’s financial institutions are not financing or trading in any activity related to Iran’s nuclear program. Additionally, the UNSCR passed in June 2010, Resolution 1929 which prohibited Iran from buying heavy weapons such as attack helicopters and missiles. It also tightened the financial sanctions on Iran, and named the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps as subject to its sanctions. It also named various companies, and listed them as included in the sanctions. The United States issued on Iran the widest regime-sanctions ever to be imposed on a country. Probably, the most prominent aspect of the program, was financial sanctions on banks and corporations that assist Iran in its nuclear activities. The EU imposed also a wide range of sanctions and enforced the UN and US sanctions given the fact that, Iran has established a strong network of trade with European countries and corporations over the past two decades, in the so called Reconstruction which began in 1989. Crane concluded that, “sanctions have inflicted some economic costs, most notably those pertaining to banking, natural gas liquidification technology, dual-use technologies, and civilian aircraft parts. They also appear to have irritated members of the Iranian elite, not always a bad outcome. Economic sanctions have sent signals to the Iranian leadership. Judging by recent political debates in Iran, sanctions have triggered a discussion within the Iranian elites.”¹⁰⁵ In fact, observers believe that, the defeat of the conservatives in the 2013 June presidential elections in Iran was promoted by their failure in dealing with the international community over a decade, during which sanctions were tightened. The election of Ruhanni, a moderate reformist president is bringing hope that sanctions would be lifted in exchange for compliance with Iran’s obligations to NPT.

Kristen Wiegand reached similar conclusions to Crane, stating that, even though the previous administration of Ahmadinejad continued to deny the impacts of the sanctions on Iran, apparently sanctions have had serious impacts on Iran’s financial sector, and oil and gas in particular. Wiegand concluded that, “the stakes would be high and risky for militarily striking

103 Keith Crane in Joachim Krause, 2012. *Iran’s Nuclear Programme: Strategic Implications*, Routledge: London, P. 111.

104 Keith Crane in Joachim Krause, 2012. *Iran’s Nuclear Programme: Strategic Implications*, Routledge: London, P. 111.

105 Keith Crane in Joachim Krause, 2012. *Iran’s Nuclear Programme: Strategic Implications*, Routledge: London, P. 120.

Iran to set back its nuclear program, but the stakes and risks would likely even be higher were Iran allowed to acquire a nuclear weapons arsenal. The use of military force on balance therefore, would be a useful and indispensable policy option for the international community.”¹⁰⁶ Aside from economic sanctions and military attacks, some observers examined the question of what would happen if Iran join the nuclear club, and how would Iran behave. Karl-Heinz Kamp stated that, a nuclear Iran will influence NATO security arrangements. It “would force NATO members to assess missile defense for what it is in conceptual terms-one additional firewall or line of defense to the system.”¹⁰⁷ It will trigger a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. In fact, it has already done just that. Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Jordan, the UAE and even smaller countries such as Bahrain have expressed interests in nuclear programs. The options are also open for nuclear deterrence, and balance in the Middle East, similar to those of the Soviet-US, and NATO-Warsaw nuclear balance system. A nuclear Iran will most likely behave in the status quo preserving regime-survival for many decades to come. Within the same line of thinking, Christopher A. Ford explored Iran’s nuclear future examining several scenarios. He recognized the difficulty of forecasting the future of a nuclear Iran, ranging from the catastrophically extreme prediction that Iran would become a belligerent power, or alternatively would develop within the parameters of moderation acting responsibly as a member of the nuclear club. He concluded that, while a nuclear Iran “would seem to present a challenge to the integrity of the non-proliferation regime, it bears emphasis that such a scenario need not necessarily result in a catastrophically dramatic recasting of regional alliances, power dynamics and identity complexes. An armed Iran that for some reason becomes a status quo power and is perceived as no longer being a threat to its neighbors after having seized its atom-filled geopolitical place in the sun.”¹⁰⁸ On the extreme right, a nuclear Iran also “seems likely to present grave challenges to international peace and security.”¹⁰⁹

Regional Response to a Nuclear Iran

An integral aspect of the Iranian Project is its impact on its region, the Gulf in particular, and the Middle East at large. On a closer regional perspective, Iran’s nuclear program will most certainly

¹⁰⁶ Kristen Wiegand in Keith Crane in Joachim Krause, 2012. *Iran’s Nuclear Programme: Strategic Implications*, Routledge: London, P.154.

¹⁰⁷ Kristen Wiegand in Keith Crane in Joachim Krause, 2012. *Iran’s Nuclear Programme: Strategic Implications*, Routledge: London, P.170.

¹⁰⁸ Christopher A. Ford in Keith Crane in Joachim Krause, 2012. *Iran’s Nuclear Programme: Strategic Implications*, Routledge: London, P.182.

¹⁰⁹ Christopher A. Ford in Keith Crane in Joachim Krause, 2012. *Iran’s Nuclear Programme: Strategic Implications*, Routledge: London, P.183.

trigger a nuclear race in the Gulf region, which has already started. This section examines some aspects of that race in terms of the emerging nuclear programs in the United Arab Emirates, and in Saudi Arabia in particular.

The United Arab Emirates

Probably, no country in the region has suffered from Iranian incursions as much as the United Arab Emirates. Iran has occupied three UAE islands since 1971, and all attempts to resolve the dispute peacefully through mediation and arbitration have failed. However, a nuclear Iran would not only seal the fate of the islands, but will guarantee an Iranian hegemony over the gulf region for generations to come. This explains the fact that the UAE has expressed genuine interest in developing its nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, however, if its territorial integrity is threatened, the UAE will certainly explore developing a nuclear deterrent. The UAE is endowed with large oil and natural gas reserves, making the country among the richest states in the world. While the UAE can rely on gas and oil to produce electricity, the increasing demand for national electricity consumption is drastically increasing, and this therefore has made it incumbent upon the government to explore alternative energy sources. Additionally, the UAE is exceptionally poor in water resources, and therefore, needs a consistent source of energy to operate its water desalination stations spread along its coastal regions.

Elements of the UAE Nuclear Program

The UAE expressed genuine interest in a nuclear program in 2008, and since then its government has taken all steps necessary to construct an operational nuclear program by 2017. In so doing the UAE seems to enjoy the support of all concerned parties; the IAEA, the United States, the EU, South Korea, China, Russia, France and Canada. The UAE's ratification of the NPT and its joining the IAEA in 1976, a few years after its 1971 independence, plus its ratification of all IAEA's protocols, have made the country eligible for the support of the agency in developing its peaceful nuclear program. Additionally, the UAE is actively involved in "six active Technical Cooperation Projects (TC), with the IAEA, and has completed ten projects since joining the IAEA in 1976."¹¹⁰

110. Lindsay Windsor and Carol Kessler, *Technical and Political Assessment of Peaceful Nuclear Power Program Prospects in North Africa and the Middle East*, Pacific Northwest Center for Global Security (Washington DC, 2007) 129.

Nuclear Cooperation and Providers

The main world leading nuclear powers are supportive of the UAE's bid for a peaceful nuclear program. The UAE's government has signed a \$20 billion contract with a South Korean consortium to build four commercial nuclear reactors. Additionally, influential American nuclear corporations such as Westinghouse are highly involved in the UAE's nuclear program with the support of the American government and relevant agencies. Moreover, the UAE has invested tremendously in the national capacity building project, in which a nuclear engineering department has been established at Khalifa University for Science, Technology and Research to train nationals in the nuclear sphere. Other prominent universities and colleges in the country are producing quality graduates in the areas of physics, chemistry, aerospace engineering, electrical, civil, biomedical engineering sciences and non-technology fields.

The main challenge facing the United Arab Emirates is the dilemma of peaceful use vs. strategic military program, and at what stage should the UAE think of producing a nuclear deterrent. In judging other countries experiences, we find that, all members of the nuclear club claimed that their nuclear programs were designed for peaceful purposes, India, France, Britain, Pakistan, etc. Other countries who are endowed with the knowledge and expertise to develop nuclear program such as Japan, and South Korea in particular, continue to claim that there is no need for them to resort to nuclear options unless their national interests are clearly threatened by a rogue country such as North Korea. However, if their national security and territorial integrity are threatened, they are capable of producing nuclear weapons in record time, at a very short notice. As far as the UAE is concerned, if its peaceful nuclear program yields reprocessing and enrichment capabilities, and if the UAE finds itself threatened, there is no doubt that it will consider seriously producing a nuclear deterrent to deter aggression. Therefore, the UAE has all the necessary components of a nuclear program assembled; technical expertise, IAEA's support, the support of many nuclear countries, the financial base to support the construction of the program, and governmental and popular support of its people and the GCC as well.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia and Iran are considered to be arch-rivals and sometime enemies. While Saudi Arabia is the home of Sunni-Islam, and the home of two of the three holiest shrines in Islam, Iran considers itself as the seat of Shi'i Islam. Both countries are oil producers and the largest in

terms of population in the gulf region. While Iran started four decades ago experimenting with nuclear energy, Saudi Arabia has just begun, though it enjoys the support of major world powers. Saudi scientists, graduates of leading American and European nuclear institutions, are currently leading its growing program. They have engaged in training and research with their counterparts from the US, Britain, France, Russia, China, Jordan, Egypt, and South Korea. Saudi Arabia has all the necessary components for a successful nuclear program compared to Iran. International support, the availability of scientists and the abundance of uranium, and its abundant wealth enables the country to accomplish a nuclear option in at a much faster pace than Iran, should the decision to do so be taken by the its government.

In terms of uranium deposits, Saudi Arabia similar to Jordan is very rich in phosphate resources which are rich in uranium deposits. While Saudi Arabia is rich in oil resources, its purpose is to devote its oil and gas for export purposes, simultaneously producing nuclear energy to meet the biggest demands for water desalination and electricity consumption. However, since 2002, Saudi Arabia has been exceptionally alarmed about Iran's intentions and its systematic efforts to produce nuclear weapons. This marks the growing interest of the Saudi government in a nuclear capability. Publically, Saudi officially continues to advocate total elimination of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, however, privately, they realize that Saudi Arabia has no choice but to develop a nuclear deterrent should Iran be allowed to do so. Saudi Arabia has called publically upon the US to strike Iranian nuclear facilities and severely punish Iran for its clandestine nuclear program.

The Saudis and the Israelis are leading the hard-line approach to Iran's nuclear ambitions, while the US, and Turkey in particular, continue to advocate a diplomatic approach to the standoff. While Saudi Arabia abides by international regimes and protocols governing the development and use of nuclear energy, it blames the IAEA, the US and the EU in particular for their systematic failure to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons that will threaten the security and stability of the entire region. Saudi Arabia sees a nuclear-Iran as an existential threat similar to the way the Israelis view Iran's nuclear program. Saudi Arabia is a large country, therefore even if a nuclear confrontation occurred between the two countries, this would not end life as we know it in Saudi Arabia, while on the other hand it might, if an attack was launched against Israel. However in the nuclear sphere, there is no chance for marginal errors. Saudi Arabia wants threat ended, and immediately. If the international community is unable to deal with it, then it should be ready to accept new members to the nuclear club from the Gulf region, namely Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Saudi Arabia also feels that the security of the entire gulf region is contingent on its own security, and its military capabilities.

The GCC is militarily vulnerable to Iranian attacks on both levels, conventional and non-conventional, and therefore, there must be a balancing strategy to bring about equilibrium to the Iranian-Gulf security scene. While doing so, Saudi Arabia reminds the world that, it joined the IAEA in 1962, signed all conventions and protocols governing nuclear energy. In exchange, while Iran signed them, it does not abide by its obligations and commitments towards international peace and regional stability.

Overall, the decision to go nuclear or not remains political. If Saudi Arabia decided to pursue a nuclear program, it has all the needed components for such a scheme. It has the highly educated manpower to man its reactors, the financial ability to purchase the most advanced reactor designs, large territory to test and experiment, and overall enjoys the support of many countries that would like to tap into the Saudi nuclear market namely China, South Korea, France, and the United States. It is essential to state here that Saudi Arabia has assisted Pakistan in developing its own nuclear program since the 1960s. Pakistan with its nuclear and conventional weapons and well-trained armed forces are largely viewed as an insurance policy. Saudi Arabia can count on Pakistan in several ways, such as moving of Pakistan's nuclear assets to Saudi Arabia, or assisting Saudi Arabia to develop its own nuclear program in a record time. The most recent high-level senior-officials visits which occurred in winter 2014 are viewed within this perspective. In terms of Iran, a Saudi-Pakistan alliance is a sufficient deterrent and a major instrument for balancing the regional security system in the Gulf and the Greater Middle East region.

Conclusion:

The Iranian Nuclear program represents a major pillar of the Iranian Project. Its clandestine nature confirms regional and international concerns about its purposes. Iran seeks to produce nuclear weapons not electricity. It seeks to dominate the gulf region and the Middle East at large, and therefore accomplish its territorial expansion goals and ideological influence. As we have seen over the past ten years, Iran has benefited tremendously from the American invasion of Iraq and the destruction of her two enemies, namely, Saddam Hussein and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. When the US seriously botched its mission in Iraq and withdrew in 2010, Iran received Iraq on a golden plate, and therefore became an integral player in Iraqi politics and managed to impose its will in modifying the Shat Al Arab waterway borders with Iraq. Since 2011, Iran has also intervened on the side of the Syrian regime in the ongoing civil war in Syria. Iran continues to occupy the UAE's Three Islands and has rejected all UAE gestures to resolve

the dispute over the islands. Iran's belligerence in Bahrain, Kuwait, Yemen, Lebanon, Syria and elsewhere has made it clear that, Iran seeks a nuclear weapon to impose its will on the region. While doing so, Iran is dragging the region into a new nuclear arms race, escalating instability in the Middle East and the Gulf Region in particular.

Chapter 6: The Implementation of the Iranian Project

This chapter examines the practical aspect of the Iranian Project in terms of its implementation on regional and international levels. It provides a general overview of Iran's expansion in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, and Bahrain and its ongoing interests in the Gulf region.

The Iranian Occupation of the UAE's Islands

Iran occupies three of UAE's islands, Abu Musa, Lesser Tunab and Greater Tunab. In 1819, the three islands were included in a treaty between the Arab Gulf rulers and Britain. Iran, the most dominant regional power then failed in two attempts to occupy the islands in 1904 and in 1963. It had also attempted to annex Bahrain; however, its inhabitants voted for retaining its Arab identity and therefore,

managed to ensure Bahrain's independence, although Iran continued to claim the island as part of its territory. In 1970, the Shah announced his intention to invade the three islands due to his anxiety over the consequences of the establishment of the United Arab Emirates. He attempted to convince the governor of Ras Al Khiema (RAK) to sell Lesser and Greater Tunabs or lease them to Iran, however, RAK's ruler Saqer Bin Sultan Al Qasmi rejected the offer. Nevertheless, the ruler of Sharjah agreed with Iran on shared sovereignty over Abu Musa due to his inability to secure Arab support to his position on the island.

On November 30, 1971, Iran took the drastic step, five days before the departure of the British forces from the region, of sending her forces to occupy Lesser and Greater Tunabs. Simultaneously, she sent forces to Abu Musa. The Iranian agreement with the ruler of Sharjah was preserved until the end of the first Gulf War between Iraq and Iran. The Islamic Republic announced in the early 1990s, the expansion of the use of the islands especially in Abu Musa with the stationing of anti-ship missiles, a base for the Revolutionary Guard, and a naval force. Iranians began harassing the Arab educational mission on the Island of Abu Musa and prevented their visit to the Island without an Iranian visa. Additionally, Arab inhabitants were pressurized into accepting either Iranian citizenship, or being deported.

Occupation and Settlement

Settlement building is a colonial instrument that Iran had repeatedly condemned in the case of the Israeli settlements in Palestine; however, Iran followed an identical colonial settlement policy in the three islands. Mohammed Saeedi offered this analogy of the two cases. Iran's insistence on settlement building on Abu Musa in particular is a serious challenge to the UAE's sovereignty and territorial integrity and to the Gulf region at large. Iran goes much further than that, including attempts to destabilize the Arab Gulf countries, interfere in their internal affairs, support violent opposition and repeatedly attempts to undermine economic growth in the region.¹¹¹

Iran's goals also go much further than occupation of the islands per se, rather they send a clear message to Saudi Arabia and the US in particular that Iran is much closer than they imagine when it comes to gulf security and dominance. Iran seeks also to enhance its regional dominance and territorial presence closer to the borders of the Gulf countries. Iran seeks to convince the Gulf region and the US that no security arrangements would succeed without her inclusion, at a time when Iraq is totally marginalized from the security equation.

Iran also attempts to establish the three islands as a base for its expansionist policies in the gulf region. It also seeks to spread its cultural colonization of the islands changing their Arab identity and manipulating their history. The UAE realizes the far reaching consequences of this Iranian occupation

¹¹¹ Mohammed Saeedi, 2013. Hormuz Strait and the Iranian-American Conflict, Alfarabi Publishing House, Beirut, 95.

and its threat to Arab national security. Therefore, Iran's expansionism and occupation in the Gulf region requires an Arab response.

Iran's Occupation of Iraq

The Persian interests in Iraq are deeply rooted in history. Their bilateral relations are mired with suspicion, animosity and a deep interest in keeping Iraq a weak and dysfunctional country. Iran has never enjoyed "good" or friendly ties with Iraq from the Sassanid's, Safavids, and successive dynasties including the Shah's regime and the current Islamic republic. Despite the bias against Iraq as reported by many area specialists who held Iraq fully responsible for the Iraq-Iran War, Iran was not innocent in this conflict. Iran manipulated Iraq and forced it into the war. In its aftermath, and during the Iraq war in Kuwait, Saddam Hussein sent 3/4th of his air force as "trust" in the "Muslim" neighboring country, which were seized by Islamic republic. Iran had also coordinated with Washington in invading Iraq, and has been attempting to dismantle this state since 2003.

The Iranian Role in the American Occupation of Iraq

Iran played an essential role in facilitating the American-British occupation of Iraq in 2003. Despite Washington's accusations of Iran being supportive of international terrorism, and developing a nuclear project, Iranian-American coordination in the invasion of Iraq was essential to ensure its success. Tehran viewed the invasion as necessary to accomplish a strategic goal declared by Khomeini, that of toppling the Saddam Hussein regime.

Iran had been involved in the construction of the Iraqi High Revolutionary Council led by the Hakim family since 1982. The Iranian intelligence agency and revolutionary guards trained the Shi'i militia that took part in the 2003 invasion. Iran hosted Ahmed Japalbi, a CIA operative and his collaborators. Iran hosted the Iraqi opposition and coordinated their roles in the invasion of Iraq including Shi'i religious and secular forces. Its main aim was to establish a Shi'i state in Iraq, an extension to Iran in the region.

Iran participated in the invasion of Iraq sending revolutionary guards and its militia, in addition to Iraq-Shi'i militia trained in Iraq since the 1980s. Iran's intelligence undermined Iraq, including its attempts at recruiting and organizing of resistance efforts to the post-US invasion. Iran took advantage of the invasion murdering Iraqi pilots, participating therefore in its defeat in the 1980s, in addition to annihilating the Iraqi scientists constructing Iraq's military industry. While Iran had a clear project in Iraq, the US was unable to establish order which led to failure of its occupation and its eventual defeat in Iraq.

Iran's Current Role in Iraq

Iran has infiltrated the entire country of Iraq, transferring it into an Iranian protectorate. This destruction of Iraq includes:

1. Facilitating the destruction of Iraq's oil pipelines and industry. Iran provided explosives for insurgents to destroy Iraq's oil industry.
2. Saboteurs sent to Iraq to sabotage its infrastructure.
3. Recruitment of informants throughout the country.
4. Iranian criminals utilizing Iraq as a market for their drugs and exporting them through Iraq to neighboring countries.
5. The Sunni-transfer project in which Iran aims at deporting Sunnis in Iraq to neighboring countries to ensure Shi'i dominance in the country.

Iran's intervention in Lebanon

Lebanon's civil war (1974-1992) provided Iran with a valuable opportunity to infiltrate the country. Musa Alsader was a major figure in Lebanon's civil war. He managed to monopolize the Shi'i representation during the civil war. He supported the Palestinian national movement and the Palestinians in Lebanon. However, the intervention of the Syrian regime in the Lebanese civil war with their anti-Palestinian sentiments, led Hafez Asad to plot with the Israelis and the Americans to evict the Palestinians from Lebanon. Although Musa Alsader disappeared during an official visit to Libya in August 1987, he dramatically influenced the Amal Movement, by contributing to its establishment and leadership. His disappearance shocked the movement and permitted Iran and Syria in particular to manipulate the movement leading to its split in 1982. The Iranian Revolution was influential in manipulating Amal and the political developments in Lebanon since 1979. Tehran's main aim was to export the revolution, and Lebanon was a ripe environment for such an influence. Iran's ambitions of dominance in the Arab world have also influenced its policy toward Lebanon.

Iran began expanding its influence in Lebanon through the revolution's first ambassador in Damascus Ayatollah Ali Akbar Muhtashimi, who aimed at splitting the Amal Movement. He motivated some of its leadership to establish a new party, on the grounds of accusing Amal of being secular without

ideological-Shi'i grounds. Iran accused the General Secretary of Amal, Nabeeh Beri of being secular and sympathetic to the political process in Lebanon. Iran wanted a different movement, more religious and less accommodating, i.e., Hezbollah.

In 1982, Iran took the major decision to establish Hezbollah through splitting the Amal Movement. Iran's ambassador to Lebanon, Musa Ruhanni was instructed to provide support to Hussein Mussawi, a member of Amal's Steering Committee. Mussawi announced his split from Amal leading a new wing called the Amal Islamic Movement, soon after renamed Hezbollah. The party's establishment was also in response to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Iran put its weight behind the movement making it the representative of the Shi'at committee in Lebanon, therefore, attempting to marginalize the original Amal Movement. In addition to Iran, the Syrian regime of Hafez Asad played an influential role in the establishment of Hezbollah. Syria, which had enjoyed a military presence in Lebanon since 1976, provided the new party with all the necessary support needed in order to become, until this day, an influential entity in the Lebanese political scene.

Iran provided Hezbollah with political, ideological and military support. Between 1982-1985, it was estimated that 4000 members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards (IRG) resided in the Baka'a region of Lebanon. The IRG made up the religious, military and security wings of the party. Therefore, by 1985, Hezbollah was fully established with an Iranian identity.¹¹²

Hezbollah's methods, identity and goals are Iranian in nature. It is similar to other parties created by Iran such as the Da'wa Party of Iraq. In terms of the party's construction, it adopts the Shi'i Imami thought and is fully committed to the 12th Shi'i School of thought. It also believes the Vilati Faqih represented by Ayatollah Khomeini and his successor Ali Khamenei. Hezbollah also is committed to implementing the Iranian Project and receives its instructions directly from Iran. Hezbollah is also committed to an Iranian style of government in Lebanon. Therefore, Hezbollah aims at the construction of a state in Lebanon similar to that of the Vali Faqih representative in Iran.

Hezbollah's identity and loyalty is also Iranian in nature. Hezbollah was clear on its identity from the outset. The party has made public three documents since 1985 on the identity of the party and its aims. On February 16, 1985, the party published a communiqué named the Open Letter, dealing primarily with its identity as a Shi'i inspired party. Secondly, Hasan Nasrullah also issued a document in February 2006 to highlight its identity. In 2009, he also issued a communiqué highlighting the intellectual and ideological identity of Hezbollah.

In terms of its intervention in Lebanon via Hezbollah, Iran has established Hezbollah as a dominant political force in Lebanon. The party has disrupted the political structure of Lebanon and prevented her from establishing a structured political process. Hezbollah implements the Iranian policy towards Israel and towards the Arab countries around Lebanon. Tehran has also proudly announced its dominance in Lebanon's political process. The current vacuum in the Lebanese presidency is fully attributed to Iran's

¹¹² Na'em Kassim, 1985. Hezbollah, P.

intervention in the internal affairs of Lebanon. Hezbollah serves as a client for Iran and has undermined Lebanon's stability. The proxy war waged by Iran and Israel in Lebanon has undermined Lebanon and made it a dysfunctional failed state.

The Iranian Intervention in Syria

Iran's influence in Syria preceded the revolution in 1979, though the revolution strengthened it. The Shah regime's infiltration of the Arab world came through the Syrian front, at a time when Arab nationalism represented a major obstacle to Iran's ambitions in the Arab world. However, right after the success of the Iranian Revolution, the two sides initiated a process of cooperation culminating in a strategic partnership three decades later. With Syrian support, Iran also strengthened the consensus of the Arab world against Iraq in its war against Iran. Their ties were also strengthened in the 1990s in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, and due to the fact that Syria's friends were limited. Iran at this time was also under sanctions and lived in isolation. However, Iran managed to rebuild itself and expand its ties worldwide and Syria benefited from its partnership with Iran. The latter invested billions of dollars in the Syrian economy. Both countries signed several agreements on infrastructure projects, such as banking, oil and gas and human development. Iran's infiltration of Syria was consolidated under the current conditions of civil war.

The Arab Spring began in Syria in the Spring of 2011, in which Syrians demanded reform. However, the regime response was overwhelming force against unarmed civilians. While the majority of the world condemned the regime's use of extreme violence against its people, Iran embraced the regime. In response, Asad's regime handed Iran the keys to Syria's economy and military affairs, to the extent that Syria has become an Iranian province in which Iranian armed forces are currently leading the war against the revolutionaries. Syria has literally come under Iranian occupation.

At the outset of the revolution, Syrians began spotting Iranian Revolutionary Guards among the regime's forces, in addition to Iranian forces joining the Shabeha; a paramilitary organization utilizing maximum force and torture against the Syrian people. The war in Syria is managed, funded and orchestrated by Iranian military personnel in addition to Hezbollah forces. Had it not been for Iran's intervention in the war, the Asad regime could have fallen as early as the summer of 2011. Therefore, the Iranian presence in Syria has totally altered the nature of the alliance. It is no longer a partnership between two sovereign states; rather, it is the occupation of the foreign government of Syria by another state. This occupation of Syria is currently leading to gross human rights violations including torture, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

Iran's support of the Syrian regime is well connected with its strategic interest in the Middle East at large. If the regime falls, then Iran's access to Lebanon would be closed. Iran will not be able to provide Hezbollah with weapon shipments. The latter will not be in a position to equalize the equation should

Israel decide to attack Iran's nuclear facilities. Therefore, Iran will continue to defend Assad's regime even if it leads to dividing the country.

Iran's Intervention in Sudan

Africa has a special place in Iran's foreign policy, and the Sudan is at the heart of its ambitions in the continent. Sudan's strategic location in the Arab world, its proximity to Egypt, and its ties with Africa at large makes it a priority for Iran's influence. Egypt and Sudan have mutual interdependence, and both countries influence the two important international waterways, the Suez Canal and the Aden Straits. The two straits control most of the global oil exports and international trade.

Sudan has also become a new arena for the Iranian-Israeli conflict in Africa and in the Sudan in particular. Israel is anxious about the development of the Sudanese-Iranian relations. Their bilateral ties have become comprehensive in nature and this threatens Israel's interest in Africa. Iran has a menu of interest in Africa, some of which are missionary in nature pertaining to the spread of Shi'ism, in addition to trade and defense. In Sudan, Iran has opened a transitional route to the exporting of arms to the continent. Additionally, Iran has been building arms factories in Sudan to reach consumers in Africa. This explains Israel's recent attacks on Sudanese targets. The Israeli media reported that, Sudanese President Al Basheer had agreed to allow Iran to build a military base close to the Red Sea. Israelis are fearful that Iran will station missiles there which could reach every target in Israel. Additionally, Israel is fearful of Sudan being used to ship Iranian made weapons to Gaza. Furthermore because of its wealth, Israel considers Sudan as one of the most important Arab countries, and a major threat to its existence. This explains the fact that Israel been involved in attempts by all possible means to split the Sudan into two countries and weaken northern Sudan. It has a strategic partnership with South Sudan based primarily on defense, and similar aims. Its purpose is to utilize South Sudan to infiltrate the continent and observe Sudanese-Iranian cooperation more closely.

Iran's Goals in Sudan

Tehran aims at influencing the political developments in Egypt, and the Gulf countries in particular, through the Sudanese route. It seeks to contain Egypt and the Gulf region through the control of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Sudan has provided concessions to Iran not only on the territorial level but also from an ideological perspective of Iran's project. Shi'ism is spreading through Africa in general and Sudan in particular through Khartoum, though the government of Sudan has begun relaying the nature of the threat leading to the closure of Iran's cultural mission in the country in 2014.

Iran's second aim is to control international trade and influence its flow through the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Thirdly, Tehran aims at using these waterways to provide weapons to its sleeping cells in

the region during times of confrontation such as in the current war in Yemen. While Iran has not been fully successful in constructing popular bases through ideological and soft power means, such as in the case of Lebanon, Syria, Iraq or Yemen, it aims at the military option in the case of Egypt, Sudan and Saudi Arabia in particular. This means Iran seeks to provide military support to its clients in these regions when the conditions are ripe, in order to destabilize these countries and replace their current governments with loyal clients, as in the case of Syria.

Iran considers Sudan as its gateway to Egypt. In the case of Cairo, Iran has reiterated its opposition to the Camp David Accords with Israel since 1987. Tehran has attempted constantly to improve its ties with Cairo seeking normalization since 2011, and has drastically increased cooperation with President Mohammed Morsi. Tehran has also attempted and has largely been successful in establishing strong ties with the military coup authorities in Cairo. Iran aims at spreading Shi'ism in Egypt, the historical home of the Fatimid-shi'i state of the 11th Century. An Iranian foothold in Sudan will most certainly lead to a stronger presence in Egypt and revive Sunni-Shi'i conflicts in the region, in North Africa and the continent at large.

Iran's Intervention in Yemen

The question that can be raised is why Yemen is important to the Iranian project, and what does Iran need from Yemen. Yemen has a peculiar religious and historical importance to Iran. Yemen represents the southern gate of Arabia, the Arabian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula. Yemen's importance also stems from its strategic location in control of the Aden Straits, the Horn of Africa, and the Gulf of Oman, all of which control the flow of over 3.2 million barrels of oil per day. Iran also realizes the fact that Yemen has the demographic concentration lacking in the Arab Gulf states which face demographic challenges. Iran also views Yemen as an alternative scene of a proxy war with its rival, Saudi Arabia. The current escalation of the war in Yemen between the Shi'i Houthi forces and the Sunnis is an indication of the escalation of the conflicts in Syria as well, and the opening of new fronts of war and discord in the region.

Iran's intervention in Yemen is no longer a covert act engineered by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and Iran's intelligence agencies, as reported by Yemeni or Gulf security agencies, rather it is a matter taken as granted. In October 2012, the Yemeni President Hadi, accused Iran of undermining the Yemeni government in order to control the strategic straits of Aden. He called on the international community to mobilize to resist the Iranian plot. In a lecture he gave at the Woodrow Wilson institute in Washington DC, on September 28, 2012, he stated that, "one of the main challenges faced by Yemen is the Iranian intervention". He added that, Iran's goal is to balance its immanent loss of the Syrian regime with the control of Yemen because of its strategic location in the Gulf region and the Horn of Africa. It lies in between the oil-rich countries in the Gulf and the Horn of Africa. Its main goal is to contain Saudi Arabia within the Shi'i Built Project. He also added that, Iran has boosted its military support to political and militant movements, in addition to the recruitment of resurging networks in Yemen and the Gulf region. The Yemeni intelligence agencies broke six intelligence networks in Yemen alone who had been gathering information for Iran. President Hadi also in a joint press conference with the German

Chancellor, Merkel on October 4, 2012, reiterated his accusations to Iran of its support to separatists in Yemen. In southern Yemen, he stated that, there were two political currents, the peaceful and the militant. The militants are supported by Iran and demand separation and dividing of Yemen by force. Yemen's foreign affairs minister highlighted the fact that, the Huwthis of Yemen are well-linked with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. He also repeatedly warned the international community of Iran's substantial intervention in Yemen, and that, such intervention undermines the stability of the region. Abdulla Al-Fakeeh, a leading academic figure in Yemen stated that, "Iran's current intervention in Yemen in the political, media, and security affairs is not a secret. Iran takes advantage of the weakness of the Yemeni government especially the division among its armed forces, political forces, southern opposition, and the militant Huwthis and Al Qaeda, to establish a foothold in Yemen by all means including coordination with Al Qaeda."

Iran's main instrument in Yemen is the Huwthis movement. The movement plays a central role in Yemen's politics. It has allowed Iran's influence in Yemen to become dominant. This explains the fact why Iran has strengthened its presence in Yemen since the advent of the Arab Spring. It has highlighted movement politically and militarily, in addition to media support. Some reports indicated that, Iran has rented two islands from Eritrea (Dahlak) used for smuggling weapons to Yemen through the Port of Medi under the Huwthis control. Iranian naval forces participating in combating piracy in the Horn of Africa are also engaged in smuggling weapons to the Huwthis. Strafford Studies Center found that Iran uses the Eritrean islands to store weapons and smuggle them to Yemen. Between 2011-2012, Iran has intensified its contacts with the Huwthis leadership, and increased its logistical and intelligence support in order to increase its influence in the Middle East.

Political speaking, Iran seeks to influence the Yemeni political scene through its contacts with all political forces, on the right or the left, and from the north to the south. Iran coordinates between southerners in Yemen and the leftists forces participating in the Yemeni revolution with the purpose of finding a common ground with the Huwthis as representatives of Iran in Yemen. Leftists are traditional enemies of the Islah and Salfi movements in Yemen, two Sunni currents. This has resulted in a major division among the revolutionary forces in reference to the GCC-Initiative. Iran also supports several parties in Yemen with financial resources. It also facilitates the organization of conferences and supervises the coordination between Huwthis and the Ali Abdullah Saleh's forces.

Roots of Iran's Intervention in Yemen

Yemen has a special place in Iran's religious and historical narrative. Ideologically speaking, the Iranian religious establishment believes that Yemen is well connected to the so called Suffiani Revolution led by a person identified as a Yemeni descendent of Zayed Ibn Ali. His advent and revolution slightly precedes the return of the Mahdi, a major pillar in Shi'i thought. Politically speaking, Persians believe that Yemen was a Persian province. However, Sunni Arabs believe it was an occupied country and Islam liberated it

from the Sassanid-Persians. In modern times, Iran's intervention in Yemen began in the early 1990s, shortly after the unification of north and south Yemen, and intensified after the bloody 1994 civil war. In 1997 an alliance between the former president Saleh and the Huthi-Shi'i sects began forming. Saleh's purpose was to create a balance of power between the Sunnis in Yemen represented by the Islah movement, and the Huthis representative of Shi'ism in Yemen. However, when the Huthis rebelled against Saleh in 2004, he confronted them and accused Iran of arming them and destabilizing Yemen. Saleh fought three wars with the Huthis between 2004 and 2009. He took advantage of the Iranian threat to solicit GCC financial support for Yemen, most of which went into his personal accounts in Europe, as the United Nations has recently revealed . His personal wealth exceeds \$70 billion at a time when over 80% of Yemenis live below the poverty line. Due to the changes which occurred in Yemen because of the Arab Spring revolution, President Hadi who succeeded Saleh, has repeatedly made accusations about Iran concerning its continued intervention in Yemen's internal affairs since 2012. This intervention intensified two years later, in September 2014, with the Huthis taking over the entire Yemeni government. The Huthis conducted a coup and placed Hadi and his government under house arrest.

Iran's objectives in Yemen have far reaching impacts on the Yemen itself, on the Gulf region, and on the world at large. Yemen is part of Iran's Project aimed at exporting the Iranian Revolution and reviving Sunni-Shi'i sectarianism in southern Arabia. Iran's aim is gradual expansion toward Saudi's southern borders. Yemen occupies a strategic location enjoying total control of the Aden Straits and the waterways towards the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Oman. Iran has established a strong intelligence network gathering information on navigation in these strategic waterways to be utilized in its upcoming confrontation with Saudi Arabia and the West.

On the political scene, Iran invited President Hadi of Yemen to the Non-Aligned Movement Conference held in Tehran in October 2012. Hadi was enticed with a comprehensive economic package aimed at facilitating Iran's infiltration of Yemen, a package he could not have accepted. Iran realized that its best way to gain control of Yemen was through the Huthi militia. Therefore, it began supplying the Huthis with weapons, ammunition, intelligence and equipment, in addition to training in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria. By September 2014, the Huthis were ready to occupy Yemen and therefore accomplish Iran's aim of creating a sphere of influence in southern Arabia that is until Saudi Arabia decided to act against Huthis in March 2015.

Iran's Objectives in Yemen

Iran's intervention in Yemen aims at:

1. The revival of the Persian-Sassanid Empire. This would mean that any success in Yemen would be most certainly considered as a victory of Persian nationalism over Arab nationalism. Persians accuse the Arabs of spreading Islam by force, and therefore, they seek to correct this assumption by subduing the Arabs to Persian rule as was the case before Islam.

2. Division of Yemen. Iran seeks dividing the country into north and south as was the case before 1994. It aims at direct control of the north through the Huthis, and indirect control over the south aimed at controlling the Aden Straits. Iran already has near total control over the Straits of Hormuz and has set its sights on Aden, the Horn of Africa, the Gulf of Oman and the Indian Ocean.
3. The Huthis are an instrument of Iran's expansion in Yemen. Iran aims at building the Huthi militia into an instrumental power player in Yemen. For this purpose, it has provided the militia with financial support, weapons, intelligence, training and political support. The Huthis are under the supervision of Iran's Revolutionary Guard.

Iran's Intervention in Bahrain

The Iranian intervention in Bahrain is not something new, rather it has become customary practice in Iran's policy toward the Kingdom over the past hundred years or so. More recently, Iran has been intervening in the internal affairs of Bahrain through religious affiliation and their commitment to Shi'i Islam. In fact, Iran has become a major obstacle to the national dialogue that seeks peaceful coexistence between Sunnis and Shi'ats in this country.

Below is a list of Iran's intervention in Bahrain's internal affairs:

1. In 1919, it was reported that some unrest had occurred in the Emirate of Bahrain, some voices in Iran called for the appointment of a representative in Iran's parliament.
2. In 1922, the British Consulate reported that Iranian passport officials had confiscated the passports of Bahraini citizens visiting Iran on the grounds that they were Iranian citizens.
3. In 1923, the Iranian Counsel in Najaf (Iraq) instructed Bahraini citizens to register their names at the Iranian Consulate.
4. In 1927, Iran objected to an accord signed by King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud and Britain in reference to Bahrain, claiming that such an accord was a violation to its sovereignty. In the same year, Iran sent its own agents to destabilize Bahrain and mobilize rebellions against its rulers. It had also previously attempted to revive sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shi'i. In response, the British Political Officer sent a telegram to London stating that, "Bahrain has become a base for Iranian plots and Iranian immigration must be stopped." A few years later, in 1934 Iran objected to an oil exploration agreement signed by Bahrain and foreign oil companies stating that, it had been signed without its approval. In the 1930s, Iran intensified immigration to Bahrain leading the government of Bahrain to issue the Nationalization Law to curb Iranian immigration to its kingdom.

5. In 1945, Iran's Minister of Foreign Affairs asked American oil companies to halt their operations in Bahrain and observe Iran's rights in the island. A year later, the Iranian Parliament declared Iran's intention to exercise its sovereignty over Bahrain. In 1951, Iran's Ministry of Education made a curriculum change listing Bahrain as an Iranian province, while the Iranian government announced Bahrain as part of its provisional division and designated two parliamentary seats for the island. Under the Shah's government and towards the closing days of the British colonial rule in the island, his government declared Bahrain as its 14th Province. It had also established a powerful network of merchants aiming at grassroots support to its claims for the Island. The Iranian Revolution was no less enthusiastic to the annexation of Bahrain. This issue was on the top of its list for revolutionary expansion. After the revolution in 1979, Iran announced its revolutionary expansion into Bahrain in the same year, most notably through its attempted coup in Bahrain in 1982. The Iranian plots however against the Kingdom of Bahrain never stopped. In 1996, Bahrain announced the unearthing of a secret organization named Hezbollah-Bahrain which aimed at toppling its government. Senior Iranian officials continued to claim Bahrain as an integral part of Iran. Most recently, Ahmadinejad, the Iranian President condemned the GCC's intervention in Bahrain and described it as a failed attempt. Larijani, the political adviser to the Supreme Guide also warned the GCC of the consequences of their intervention in Bahrain threatening that this would not pass without an Iranian response. In fact, Iran has instructed its media empire to fabricate facts about Bahrain especially through its Al Alam Satellite TV and Press TV.

Iran's Instruments of Intervention in Bahrain

Iran has devised several methods to destabilize Bahrain. Taking advantage of trade between the two countries, Iran has managed to smuggle a substantial amount of weapons there. It has also supported Hezbollah-Bahrain and the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain. These movements rejected the reform efforts made by the Bahraini king in 2000, a comprehensive process of political accommodation in the country. It then however revised its position, establishing the so called the National Coalition, which voted in favor of the reforms. Nevertheless, Hezbollah of Bahrain, which is part of the international Hezbollah movement, has been responsible for several attacks targeting the government and its security agencies.

Iran has objected loudly to the GCC's intervention in Bahrain, condemning the unification-proposed by the GCC project, repeatedly destabilizing the Bahraini government, and warning the GCC against the annexation of Bahrain or proposed unity projects with the island. Finally, Iran does not recognize the GCC as a regional organization, systematically destabilizing other GCC governments in addition to that of Bahrain. In response, the GCC has been silent on Iran's expansionist policy in the Gulf region, and beyond. This trend however has changed recently with the decisive operations led by Saudi Arabia against the Huthis militia, Iran's local subsidiary in Yemen. If this trend continues, Iran's threat in the region will most certainly shrink.

Iran's Intervention in Saudi Arabia

Iran's repeated intervention and attempts to destabilize Saudi Arabia are associated with the Iranian Revolution in particular. The Shah's government on the other hand had better ties with the Kingdom compared with the revolutionary regime. Saudi Arabia's stability is of paramount importance to world stability and economic prosperity. There are two fundamental aspects to this issue. First, Saudi Arabia is the home of two of the most sacred Islamic shrines and is the birth place of Islam. Every year, Saudi Arabia receives millions of Muslims visiting the two shrines either at the Hajj or Omrah seasons. Hajj itself "is one of five pillars (basic tenets) of Islam. All adult believers who are able must perform Hajj at least once in their lifetime."¹¹³ Secondly, Saudi Arabia is "the most important oil-producing state in the world today. It has more than one-fourth of the world's oil reserves."¹¹⁴ These two factors therefore make Saudi Arabia a natural competitor to Iran on religious-ideological grounds, and at the level of energy security. Saudi Arabia is the home of Sunni-Islam, while Iran is the home of Shi-Islam, two contending sects warring since the early years of Islam.

The Iranian intervention in Saudi Arabia includes the following aspects:

1. Infiltration of Eastern Saudi Arabia through the Shi'i minority. Tehran claims that it supports the "oppressed", i.e., Shi'i in Saudi Arabia.
2. Regional context and Saudi Arabia's security. Iran has failed drastically in its direct intervention in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, it has followed a regional policy aimed at destabilizing Saudi Arabia and containing this through Yemen, and Bahrain in particular.
3. Using the Hajj season to destabilize Saudi Arabia through the Iranian and Lebanese pilgrims. Saudi Arabia however, has responded harshly in order to establish peace during the Hajj season.
4. Utilizing its media arm which includes Press TV, Al Alam TV, and Al Mannaer of Hezbollah TV, and other countless numbers of satellite TV stations to destabilize Saudi Arabia and spread falsehood in terms of its treatment of the Shi'i in Eastern Arabia.
5. Iran has joined the intentional coalition against international terrorism, portraying itself as a combative country to the so called "Sunni" terrorism attributed to Saudi Arabia in particular. It is essential to state that Iran is still on the list of countries supporting international terrorism including Al Qaeda, Hezbollah and other terrorist organizations. Iran has hosted the Al Qaeda leadership since the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, and has utilized them to carry out terrorist attacks against Saudi Arabia.

¹¹³ David E. Long, 1997. *The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, University Press of Florida: Gainesville, P. 93.

¹¹⁴ David E. Long, 1997. *The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, University Press of Florida: Gainesville, P. 58.

Iran's Influence in the Gaza Strip

The Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) announced in its early days a fundamental policy change towards Israel. During the Shah's era, Israeli-Iranian relations were strategic in nature. Most recently, the IRI has expanded its influence in the Gaza Strip in particular, to the extent that it has been described as "external intervention" in the internal affairs of the Palestinian territories. This influence represented a challenge to local, regional and international players vis a vis the Arab-Israeli conflict. On one hand, it represents a strategic expansion of Iran's influence, on the other hand, Iran seeks no war with Israel.

Iran's influence and combative nature is most noticeable in its involvement in resistance movements at a time when Arab support of these movements has shrunk drastically. This influence is also associated with the current state of destabilization in the Middle East, the Sunni-Shi'i conflict and the Iranian-Western standoff over its nuclear program. Iran seeks to utilize its "regional" card in reaching a settlement with the West over its nuclear program. It also seeks to gain the support of the Arab proletariat and Arab public opinion through its symbolic support to the resistance.

Iran's support to the resistance movements includes financial support, diplomatic and military support. Its financial support in particular aims at undermining the camp of moderate Arab countries (Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt) that seek a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Iran's perspective is to convince the Arab side of the futility of the peace process, although Iran aims at no confrontation with Israel. Finally, it is essential to state here that a noticeable process of "Shi'atization" is spreading in Gaza, an alarming indicator at a time when the Sunni-Shi'i conflict is raging in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Prospects

This thesis concludes that the Middle East region represents a cornerstone in Iran's international relations. Iran realizes that its role and international stature is solely based on its geostrategic status in the region. The Middle East is the beginning point for establishing its place on the international scene, and the arena that motivates it to rebuild its glorious past. For many decades, Iran's foreign policy makers abandoned the idea of building strong ties within the region, due to the incompatibility of their cultures, ambitions and socio-economic structure. However, Iran realized that due to this mistaken view, its policy had become reactive rather than proactive, which weakened its regional and international standing. Iran's decision makers have also realized that the Middle East, in the aftermath of September 11 and the US occupation of Iraq in 2003, is undergoing a transitional period towards a new political and security system in which regional rivals are competing over active regional roles. Iran, as a regional power seeks to increase its regional cooperation, regional power capabilities, and regional coalition building. Its main goal is to enhance its regional role. An example of this is Iran's replacement of the US in Iraq which is now evident in the case of its dominance in this country.

In order to accomplish such a mission, Iran itself needed to highlight the regional aspect of its foreign policy. Iran began considering the prospects of articulating a balance in the process of the geopolitical, cultural and security changes occurring in the region. The Iranian foreign policy has begun reflecting this perspective since the advent of Arab Spring in particular. Iran also seeks a balance in its relations with the different regimes in the region. Decision makers have also realized that ignoring regionalism has led to the creation of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the Afghanistan civil war, and increasing security threats from the Great Powers. On the other side, highlighting a regional perspective in political, economic and security areas with neighboring countries, would provide Iran with an important opportunity to assume an active role and exercise its influence in regional economic, political and security spheres. It could also limit future security threats from external powers as generally it would enable Iran to maneuver with Super Powers such as the US. Therefore, during the Shah reign there was no concentration on regionalism, due to the fact that the Shah regime was unconvinced of the necessity of strong regional ties. Therefore, at that time, Iran's economic, political and even security role was

viewed as marginal. Therefore, when the Shah attempted to mediate the Arab-Israeli conflict he involved Iran in unnecessary regional conflicts which did not serve Iran's strategic or national interests. On the other hand, the Soviet Union was in total control of Central Asia, and Iran was unable to influence this region, despite having had strong historical and cultural ties there. The Shah's regime was not convinced of the importance of Iran's role in the region or creed, as being important instruments for its foreign policy. However ultimately, Iran concentrated on geopolitical changes, and therefore, the Gulf region became the center of Iran's security, political and economic interests.

The Islamic Revolution and the advent of their ascent as a theocratic regime denotes a major shift in Iran's foreign policy as regionalism became the center of this policy driven by an ideological perspective. Since the revolution concentrates on Shi'ism, therefore, Iran had no choice but to get involved in regional and Islamic affairs. The new regime viewed regional issues as a way of strengthening Iran's foreign policy rather than as a liability. Middle East affairs such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, and confrontation with the US and its allies in the region, have become major issues on Iran's foreign policy agenda. This has tied Iran into the politics of regional affairs as never before. Iran has shifted from one extreme to another, from neglecting regional affairs to becoming since 1979, the most active player on this stage. Additionally, the demise of the Soviet Union enhanced this trend in Iran's foreign policy. This is driven by historical, civilizational and cultural ties with Central Asia in particular. The Caucuses and Central Asia are cultural extensions to the Middle East, therefore, this made it incumbent on Iran to incorporate such perspectives in its foreign policy. Iran has engaged in a fierce competition with Russia and Turkey over sociocultural and economic matters pertaining to Central Asia. Equally, Iran's active role in Central Asia has influenced its views on Turkey and Iraq since these countries have also become essential in its foreign policy.

September 11, 2001, and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 sparked a fundamental shift in Iran's foreign policy promoting concentration on regional security and regional political affairs. The American forces in Iraq and the security threats it brought to Iran's security and national interests, the increasing role of the Shi'i community in Iraq, and the Kurdish regional government all made it incumbent on Iran to establish a foothold in Iraq's political establishment. For this reason, Iran has devoted all necessary resources to ensure major influence in future Iraqi affairs, and thus control the process of decision making in this country. In return, political developments on the Iraqi scene have impacted regional security affairs influencing the role of the Arab states. This explains the reason why Iran has become deeply involved in every country in the region, undermining their stability and territorial integrity, especially in the Gulf region.

The current Iranian presence in Iraq aims at enhancing political and security systems with the purpose of serving Iran's national interests, in this transitional period, then moving towards the establishment of a New Middle East. Ultimately, Iran's concentration on regional affairs encompasses multidimensional areas; geographical, political, civilizational, and security, which have become the main pillar of Iran's foreign policy.

In addition, this thesis has identified the essential elements of Iran's Project and its regional policy in terms of:

1. A strong national state of Iran. Iranian decision makers believe that Iran is a strong national state with deep roots in its Persian history and with an important influential regional role. Iran is a major component in the history of the Middle East civilization, with remarkable contributions made to world civilization. The Iranian historical and cultural model is unique in the sense that it is based on territorial unity, independence, and progress and development, as features of the state. Because of such elements, Iran has maintained its independence throughout history, though it has been subjected to foreign domination.
2. The geopolitical identity of Iran, which refers to the nature of the regional system, is that Iran is an active member. Her historical, political and security features have enabled her to build bridges with all countries in the region. In addition, Iran serves as a cultural bridge between the Middle East and the Arab world with Central Asia including the Caucuses. Each of these regions occupies a central role in Iran's foreign policy. From a historical and cultural perspective, Iran's influence on the region extends from Tajikistan to the Maldives, and from Burma to Tehran.
3. Shi'ism and nationalism have been major components of Iran's foreign policy since the Savvaivds. Even the Shah's regime, secular in nature, utilized Shi'ism to extend its influence in the region. After the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, Shi'ism has become an important element in governance in the Middle East, and a dominant element in the designing and executing of Iran's foreign policy in the region. This in itself has strengthened Iran's role and influence in the region especially in the areas of security and politics. The most obvious examples are those of Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Lebanon. In the case of Iraq, Shi'ism as a dominant political force has played a significant role in reducing the American threat to Iran. Not only that, but also it led ultimately to the defeat of America and their withdrawal from Iraq. Iraq has also been transformed from animosity to becoming a strategic ally of Iran, and therefore, marginalizing its own role and future threat to Iran.

Recommendations

On the policy level, this thesis recommends:

1. Active coordination between the GCC countries is implemented to counter the Iranian threat. The current response to GCC-Iranian confrontation in Yemen is essential to contain Iran's expansionism in the Gulf region.
2. Expanding of GCC-international alliances to contain Iran's threat. This entails coordination with traditional allies such as the US and Europe incorporating leading Islamic countries in Asia and Africa in the alliance. Countries such as Turkey, Pakistan, Malaysia, Sudan, and Nigeria are essential for the success of the operation.

3. Supporting Sunni communities in Iraq, Iran, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen.
4. Building bridges with military commanders in these countries and strengthening their positions. The aim is to solidify a military front able to counter Iran's threat.

Future Research

This study highlights the necessity of expanding research on the topic of Iran's Project and its impacts on the Arab World in particular. Thorough examination of the methods and instruments of the IP, its goals and accomplishments are necessary, and ways of countering this project in each Arab country. Other questions such as the impact of US-Iranian relations on Iran's regional aims are important, particularly as the US seems to be willing to compromise its historical ties with the Arab countries for the sake of improving its ties with Iran. Additionally it is essential to examine areas such as the containment of Iran and the role of Turkey, Pakistan and other countries as well.

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