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Assessing the Role of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps' Extraterritorial Activities in Attaining Iran's Foreign Policy Goals

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**ASSESSING THE ROLE OF THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS CORPS'
EXTRATERRITORIAL ACTIVITIES IN ATTAINING IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY**

GOALS

by

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ABSTRACT

ASSESSING THE ROLE OF THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS CORPS' EXTRATERRITORIAL ACTIVITIES IN ATTAINING IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY GOALS

Hamza Demirel
Old Dominion University, 2016
Director: Dr. Regina C. Karp

This dissertation aims at analyzing the role of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps' (IRGC) extraterritorial activities in attaining Iran's foreign policy goals. Based on observations and assessments from internal and external determinants, Iran's foreign policy goals are defined as follows: regime survival, which is an indispensable goal of Iranian foreign policy, is above everything; state security and survival; projecting power and becoming the dominant power in the region.

The regime has deliberately supported several armed non-state actors to achieve the aforementioned goals, and as seen in the case studies, the IRGC has served as a node in providing a broad range of state support.

Although the IRGC has the characteristics of conventional armed forces, its extraterritorial activities contradict the legal frame of 'use of military force' and mostly fit the characteristics of 'state sponsorship of terrorism.' Moreover, these activities challenge international norms and provoke other regional actors. This condition creates an obstacle to Iran's integration into the international system which is increasingly globalized and interconnected and an environment which is costly to live within and leaves it isolated. These attitudes paradoxically place Iran in a situation that challenges the goals of 'state security and survival' and 'becoming the regional power' in the long run. Thus, it is argued that the real reason behind the regime's insistence on this strategy is preserving the current political system

and the power of current ruling elites; in brief, it is labeled 'regime survival' in this study.

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To my wife Derya, and my children Enes, Eren, and Neda.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study examines the role of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps' (IRGC) extraterritorial activities in attaining Iran's¹ foreign policy goals. I specifically explore how the IRGC's extraterritorial activities contribute to the survival of the regime. This study will illustrate that the deployment of IRGC in operations beyond national borders not only serves foreign policy goals and interests, but also supports regime survival back at home.

The 1979 Iranian revolution does not just represent a change in political leadership. In Walt's words, it also introduced new principles of legitimacy, new symbols of authority and identity, new rules for elite recruitment and new political institutions and governmental procedures.² Although the revolution was made by a variety of segments of Iranian society, which ranged from Marxists to the liberal National Front, from secularists to Islamic activists, in the end Khomeini and his supporters hijacked it. Since the revolution, the concept of *velayat-e faqih* (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurists) that was developed by Ayatollah Khomeini has been the core of Iran's newly-established political system and ideology, which can be characterized as a blend of Persian nationalism and Khomeini's interpretation of Shiism. The revolution has influenced every aspect of life including political structure, preferences of policy makers and regional and global relations.

The new regime has a dual and unique political system; in addition to an ideological *velayat-e faqih* system, it also enjoys republican institutions. In the political structure of Iran, there is a parliament and a president, both selected by Iranian voters. There is also a Supreme

¹ The word "Iran" is the unofficial but commonly used name for the Islamic Republic of Iran, abbreviated IRI. Throughout this work, in an effort to avoid undue repetition, I will vary the nomenclature.

² Stephen M. Walt, "Revolution and War," *World Politics* 44, no. 3 (1992): 334, doi:10.2307/2010542.

Leader who is not democratically elected and ranks above the state president. The concept of *velayat-e faqih* has positioned the Supreme Leader as the temporal, spiritual and legal leader of the *ummah* (Muslim community) during the absence of the Twelfth Imam. In addition to his religious status, ultimate political power resides in the Supreme Leader: He appoints and dismisses all key senior positions - the head of the judiciary, the supreme commander of the IRGC, the supreme commander of the regular military and security services, the head of state radio and television, and the clerical jurists of the Council of the Guardian; controls all important institutions of state such as the courts, the police, the military; can veto candidates for office and veto parliamentary legislation; and approves/disapproves foreign policy initiatives.

The dual political system, the superiority of unelected institutions (in addition to the Supreme Leader, Expediency Council and Guardian Council) over elected ones, factional rivalries and powerful key individuals make strategic decision-making opaque and unpredictable. While ideology was the dominant factor in decision-making until the mid-1980s, since then pragmatism and strategies based on rational calculations have come to the fore. Although, particularly after the death of Khomeini, reformist and pragmatist policies have become dominant, the regime's core ideological principles have always remained as the limits of decision-making under the protection of the supreme leader and conservative faction. Until now, different factions' priorities based on regional and domestic concerns have placed Iranian foreign policy at different places on the scale of isolation/integration with the international system at different times.

Besides the shift back and forth between "isolation" and "integration with the international system," an expectation gap -the difference between what is expected and what is actually possible- has also been another characteristic that influences Iran's foreign policy

making. Shiite-Sunni mutual hostility, Sunni dominance in the region, Iran's comparative economic and conventional military weakness, post-revolution hostile relations with Israel and the United States (US) and potential ethnic fragmentation on the one side versus aspirations for being the regional power and leader of the Muslim world and a desire for a high profile in the global arena on the other side leads to an expectation gap originates mostly from the regime's ideology.

Reflections of these ideological motivations can be seen in Iran's relations with Shiite groups beyond national borders. Despite Muslim populations -regardless of sect differences- that initially shown considerable interest in the Revolution, the regime soon realized the inapplicability of Muslim world leadership. Thus, the regime turned its attention to Shiite groups in the region. Among those groups, the most well-known relationship has been with the Lebanese Hezbollah. The revolution had a stimulating effect on Lebanese Shiites. Besides the convergence of mutual interests and ideological affinity, Iran's ideological and material support has been a vital instrument in the movement's development. In turn, Hezbollah served Iran in various ways such as a deterrent and retaliatory force against the adversaries of Iran, a tool for projecting power, and most importantly as a laboratory for Iran's subsequent foreign engagements.

Iran's ideologically motivated relations with Shiite groups then became an outcome of strategic calculations by the regime's ruling elite. Since the deployment of an IRGC contingent in Lebanon in the early 1980s, the IRGC has been the key actor in establishing, improving and directing these groups by giving birth and providing a wide scope of support ranging from finance, know-how, military logistics, ideological and military training. Although there was not a geographical connection with Lebanon, Iran's most successful foreign involvement has been

with the Lebanese Hezbollah. Iran's engagement with the Lebanese Hezbollah has worked as a laboratory and provided very crucial experiences, which would be used in post-Saddam Iraq.

In the post-revolutionary era, the Iranian military has been composed of two main segments: regular (conventional) forces and revolutionary forces. The latter actively took on the role both as a means of securing and consolidating the revolution at home, and achieving ideological and strategic goals abroad. The IRGC's roots are based on the militias who actively supported the revolution and had unquestioning loyalty to Khomeini. Over time the IRGC has been transformed into a kind of regular military entity, which has a navy, ground forces, air force, headquarters, hierarchical structure, and different levels of military training centers. Today the IRGC is domestically an economic and political power and also has been Iran's primary mechanism for foreign extraterritorial activities. In addition to the Lebanese Hezbollah, the IRGC has relations with Shiite groups in different states such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen and Syria.

The regime saw the IRGC's extraterritorial activities as a solution to the expectation gap problem. As an invisible army, the IRGC has enabled the Regime to achieve its interests without provoking conventional military retaliation. This strategy can be characterized as asymmetric, low cost, easy to deny, and difficult to prove.

However, the strategy has provoked some regional and other international actors and Iran has been accused of being a state sponsor of terrorism. For example, according to the Global Terrorism Database, the number of Hezbollah or Hezbollah-suspected fatalities is roughly 1200 between 1983 and 2014 in 398 incidents.³ In many incidents, such as hostage taking, assassinations, subversion, bombings, aircraft hijackings, the IRGC's name is associated with

³ "Hezbollah," *Terrorist Organization Profile - START - National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism*, accessed December 7, 2015, http://www.start.umd.edu/tops/terrorist_organization_profile.asp?id=3101.

Lebanese Hezbollah.

Despite international actors' efforts concentrated on stopping Iran's nuclear weapons programs, I argue that the IRGC's extraterritorial activities are as dangerous as the possession of nuclear weapons, which, to date, have caused thousands of fatalities in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen.

Some prominent scholars believe that the further spread of nuclear weapons would have a stabilizing impact on the Middle East. Conversely, the regime's strategy of using the IRGC in extraterritorial activities for attaining foreign policy goals provokes other regional actors to adopt similar strategies, deepens the sectarian divide, and subsequently creates chronic instability in the Middle East.

Iran is the second largest economy in the Middle East and North Africa region after Saudi Arabia, which mainly depends on its hydrocarbon sector. It also has the second largest population of the region with an estimated 79 million people in 2015. It ranks second in the world in natural gas reserves and fourth in proven crude oil reserves.⁴ Its natural resources, population and the rooted tradition of statecraft that has been created over centuries naturally make Iran a potential regional power. Nevertheless, Iran's strategies challenging international norms are an obstacle to its recognition in its region and in the international arena as a legitimate regional power and impede integration into the international system. If we take into account both the regional and global consequences of this strategy, which creates a more unstable, hostile and competitive environment and conditions, in the long run the strategy has high costs for Iran.

Given this background, this study raises the following research questions: What is the role of the IRGC in Iranian foreign policy making? How and to what extent do the extraterritorial activities of the IRGC contribute to Iranian national and state interests and objectives? What

⁴ "Iran Overview," *The World Bank*, April 1, 2016, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iran/overview>.

might the broader implications of this particular case be for foreign and domestic policy-making and for domestic and regional security in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world system? This study advances two major claims: First, despite the fact that Iran has natural potential for being the regional power, its aggressive strategy that challenges international norms and provokes other regional actors is an obstacle to its integration into the international system which is increasingly globalized and interconnected. Additionally, by provoking other regional actors who are mostly Sunni, Iran creates an environment that is costly for the country to live within and highly isolating. Thus, the real reason behind the regime's insistence on this strategy is to preserving the current political system and the power of the current ruling elites; briefly it is labeled as 'the survival of the regime' in this study.

I argue that the survival of the regime is paramount and defines the limits of domestic and foreign policy-making. Second, the IRGC is the key executor and instrument of this strategy. In addition to providing security against internal and external threats, the extraterritorial activities of the IRGC helps the Iranian political leadership consolidate the Islamic regime at home. This phenomenon can be defined as 'boomerang effect.' It refers to a situation in which policies, discourse and actions in external relations also target social and political actors in the domestic sphere. In the Iranian case, IRGC activism in foreign policy also serves regime survival. Iranian political leadership considers the IRGC an instrument to safeguard the political regime against domestic threats and challenges. Regarding the nexus between domestic and foreign policy making, most analyses focus on how domestic politics shape foreign policy making. Little attention has been paid on how foreign policy-making affects domestic politics. Hence, the case of the IRGC provides a rather interesting context in which we can analyze how foreign-policy making tools and strategies can also become instruments of reinforcing the political regime.

Methodologically, the study is structured as single case study. In terms of data sources, this study utilizes the secondary literature, official publications and documents of Iranian governments, official statements of various international organizations and states, speeches by political leaders, and newspaper articles, including interviews with prominent political and military figures.

This study is not based on a single system of transliteration. The reader is asked to forgive any transliteration inconsistencies.

The study is divided into six chapters. This Introductory chapter is followed by Chapter 2. The second chapter aims to give critical background that clarifies the dynamics that today drive Iran's domestic politics and international affairs. Undoubtedly, among several factors, particularly the clerics' role in the society that has improved over time, foreign interventions, domestic events such as the 1891-92 Tobacco Movement, the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909, the Coup D'etat 1921 and most importantly the CIA/MI-6-orchestrated 1953 Coup that overthrew the democratically-elected Prime Minister and, finally, the emergence of Khomeini all created the structural roots of the 1979 Revolution. In the words of Meyer, these common historical experiences, geo-strategic circumstances and developments in society were planted deep into the collective memory of Iranians as 'lessons learnt' and 'beliefs held.'⁵ The combination of 'lessons learnt' and 'beliefs held' deeply influenced the ideology of Khomeini and subsequent Iranian political structure and policy makers' post-revolutionary worldview. Most importantly the effects of these long, short and immediate historical events can be seen in the new regime's Constitution. The goal of the second chapter is to minimize opacity by focusing on the components that are the long term, shorter term, and immediate historical, political and

⁵ Christoph O. Meyer, "Convergence Towards a European Strategic Culture? A Constructivist Framework for Explaining Changing Norms," *European Journal of International Relations* 11, no. 4 (December 2005): 525.

social events that have shaped the priorities, worldview and mindset of Iranian policy makers. Intensified focus will be on the post-Revolutionary period political structure and decision-making process. In addition to Iran's demography, geopolitical position and strategic importance, the chapter aims to draw and define Iran's position in the Muslim world and its sphere of influence in the region.

The third chapter aims to explore the characteristics of Iran's foreign policy and its foreign policy goals through analyzing internal and external determinants. To this end, the chapter introduces the key individuals and bodies in charge of Iran's foreign policy-making, including their functions, responsibilities, and limits. Additionally, to outline the characteristics of Iran's foreign policy, this chapter deals with the evolution of Iran's foreign policy under two supreme leaders; Khomeini (1980-1988) and Khamenei (1988-present); and four presidents; President Rafsanjani (1989-1997), Khatami (1997-2005), Ahmadinejad (2005-2013), and Rouhani (2013-present). The Khomeini period is addressed as a whole period during Khomeini's rule without separation of presidential periods because of his dominance over decision-making. Lastly, by analyzing the characteristics of foreign policy, explicitly stated objectives of politicians and foreign policy practices, Iran's foreign policy goals will be outlined.

In the fourth chapter, based on the findings in the previous chapter, Iran's use of the IRGC in attaining foreign policy goals will be analyzed through two cases: First, relations with the Lebanese Hezbollah and, second, Shiite groups in post-2003 occupied Iraq. In both cases, Iran's relations with the Shiite groups dates to the early days of the Revolution. Indeed, personal relations between the Iranian revolutionaries and the leaders of these Shiite movements are rooted in the pre-revolutionary era. But, these relations were institutionalized after the Revolution. Following Israel's 1982 invasion, Iran deployed its first contingent to Lebanon. The

IRGC's activities in Lebanon were Iran's first and most successful extraterritorial engagement. All forms of Iranian support have been essential to Hezbollah's long-standing success. In turn, Hezbollah served Iran in several ways. Lebanese Hezbollah became a laboratory for the IRGC's future foreign engagements particularly in post-2003 occupied Iraq and the 2011 Syria civil war. During the Iran–Iraq war, Iran and Iraqi Shiite groups actively fought against Saddam's Baathist regime. This cooperation was a part of the war, and an alliance against a common enemy. In post-2003 occupied Iraq, however, despite the fact that Iran was not a part of the conflict, as was not the case in Lebanon, it used the IRGC to shape Iraq's internal politics for its own interests. Both cases have common characteristics in terms of the strategies followed and the desired outcomes. Although the covert nature of these activities is an important obstacle to research, the IRGC's relations with Hezbollah and its activities in Iraq are relatively well-documented. Thus, both cases are very valuable for observing Iran's motivations, and the level and characteristics of the IRGC involvement in these engagements. In this context, after some background about the post-revolution military and the IRGC's establishment, structure, and responsibilities, this chapter covers two case studies; the IRGC's relations with Lebanese Hezbollah and Shiite groups in post-2003 occupied Iraq.

The fifth chapter assesses the IRGC's extraterritorial activities. The IRGC is a constitutional organization and has the characteristics of regular army structure. Generally, the conditions of the use of military force are defined by international law and norms. Owing to the IRGC's extraterritorial activities, Iran is accused of being a state sponsor of terrorism. The state sponsorship of terrorism literature gives comprehensive insights on the dynamics of state-terrorist organization relations. Thus, this chapter intends to analyze the IRGC's extraterritorial activities through the lenses of international law and state sponsorship of terrorism literature.

The following questions are the focus of the chapter: what is the status of the IRGC's extraterritorial activities within the international legal framework of use military force? What is the basis of these activities in international law? Are these activities categorized as state sponsorship of terrorism? If so, what is the regime's real motivation behind the decision to use the IRGC in extraterritorial activities, despite the risk of being labeled as a terrorism sponsor?

Since the revolution, Iran has always prioritized internal security concerns above external ones. Iran's first priority has consistently remained the survival of the regime and regime survival has been the most influential factor in the decision-making process. I argue that there is a strong connection between the IRGC's extraterritorial activities and the ruling elites' regime survival strategy. This issue has not been addressed adequately in the literature of state terrorism sponsorship, and studies on Iran and the IRGC. To fill this gap, the remaining part of the chapter will investigate the dynamics between the IRGC's extraterritorial activities and the survival of the regime, which is also the specific objective of this study.

The sixth (final) chapter will be a general conclusion, stating the main arguments of this thesis and provide a brief discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of the particular case.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND

If you want to understand today, you have to search yesterday.

Pearl S. Buck

Introduction

The strategic decision-making of Iran is shaped by its formal and informal power centers, which are quite opaque, even to its own citizens. The goal of the first chapter is to minimize this opacity by focusing on the components that are the long term, shorter term, and immediate historical, politic and social events that have created today's conditions and changed the worldview and mindset of Iranian policy makers.

The 1979 Iranian Revolution was not merely a leadership change. It also made Khomeini's ideology which is blend of his interpretation of Shiism and Persian nationalism, the dominant character of the post-revolutionary era, and has influenced every aspect of Iranian life. The revolution changed the political structure, the preferences of policy makers and the economic structure of Iran, but even more fundamentally, its culture and society.

This chapter is structured into six main topics as shown below, which aim to identify the fundamental factors that affect the post-revolutionary Iranian foreign policy mindset and subsequent decision-making. Intensified focus will be on the post-Revolutionary period political structure and decision-making process. In addition to Iran's demography, geopolitical position and strategic importance, the chapter aims to draw and define Iran's position in the Muslim world and its sphere of influence in the region. The outline of the chapter is as following;

- Demographic structure, Iran's geopolitical position, and strategic importance

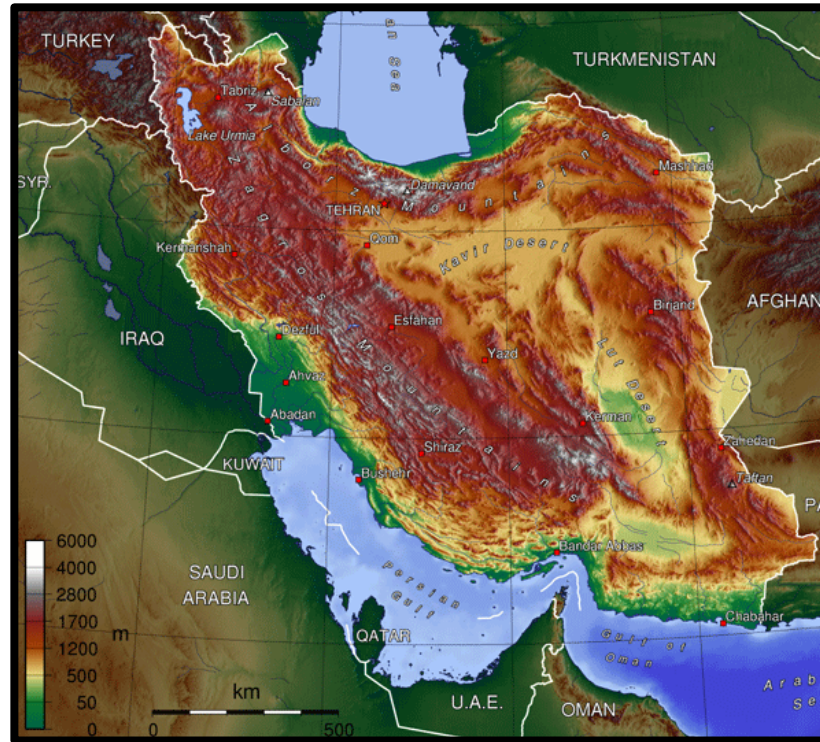
- The Roots of the 1979 revolution
- Foreign Policy of Iran after the Revolution
- Post-Revolutionary Worldview and Political Structure
- Mutual perceptions of Sunnis and Shiites
- Iran's sphere of influence.

Iran's Demographic Structure, Geopolitical Position and Strategic Importance

Iran is a Gulf and Middle East country, which is bounded by the Caspian Sea, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Persian Gulf, Iraq, Turkey, and Armenia. Iran is the 18th largest state in the world with its 1.648.000 km² area. However, only a tenth of its total area is in economic use; the rest is desert, steppe, and high mountains.¹

¹ Keith McLachlan, *The Boundaries of Modern Iran* (London: UCL Press, 1994).

Figure 1: Topographic Map of Iran



Source: University of Texas Libraries - Perry-Castañeda Map Collection²

These high mountains draw most of Iran's borders. The geographic structure of Iran looks like a bowl with a high outer rim that is formed by the Zagros, Talish, and Alburz mountain chains. Especially in the west and north, the mountains are not only high, but also extensive in ground area, while those of the south and east are narrower and lower in general, more interrupted by lowland basins, and therefore less of a barrier. The Zagros Mountains extend from northwest to southeast and occupy the entire western part of Iran as a natural wall along Iran's Iraq-Turkey border. The Talish and Alburz chains diverge from the northern Zagros in an easterly direction which are narrower, equally high and also relatively unbroken.³

² "Iran Maps - Perry-Castañeda Map Collection," University of Texas Libraries, accessed July 7, 2016, <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran.html>.

³ WB Fisher, "The Land of Iran, Vol. 1. The Cambridge History of Iran," ed. W. B. Fisher i (1968): 6, doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521069359.

While the mountain chains along its borders provide strategic defensive terrain to Iran against any external threat, the long coastline along the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea prevent Iran from being isolated and blockaded. This geography puts Iran in a favored and privileged position to dominate land accesses to oil-producing regions of the Persian Gulf, the Middle East, and the Caspian Sea and other strategically important zones particularly Iraq, Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republics. Moreover, Iran controls the northern coast of the Strait of Hormuz, which is the sole waterway leading out of the Persian Gulf. “The Strait of Hormuz is the world's most important oil chokepoint because roughly 30% of all seaborne-traded oil flowed through the Strait of Hormuz in 2013.”⁴

Iran is the second largest economy in the Middle East and North Africa region after Saudi Arabia, and mainly depends on the hydrocarbon sector. It ranks second in the world in natural gas reserves and fourth in proven crude oil reserves.⁵

Iran is home to the region's most populous country with almost 75 million people.⁶ The Islamic Republic of Iran is ethnically, religiously and linguistically diverse-roughly 50 percent of its citizens are of non-Persian origin.

Despite its multiethnic composition and unlike many of its neighbors, Iran has had a long history as a state-as Persia, the land has been an empire or state for millennia. However, this long history has not made Iranians a nation.⁷ Persian ethnicity has been the dominant nationality and the heterogeneity within the state has not been recognized by the authorities. The absence of detailed data on ethnic, sectarian, and linguistic diversity, and their geographical distribution is a

⁴ U.S. Energy Information Administration, “World Oil Transit Chokepoints,” 2014, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/regions-topics.cfm?fips=wotc&trk=p3>.

⁵ “Iran Overview.”

⁶ Statistical Centre Of Iran, “Population,” 2011, <http://www.amar.org.ir/Default.aspx?tabid=500>.

⁷ Keith Crane, Rollie Lal, and Jeffrey Martini, *Iran's Political, Demographic, and Economic Vulnerabilities*, 2008, 37.

sign of the way authorities perceive ethnic fragmentation as a threat to Iran's unity. Thus, the ethnic composition of Iran cannot be determined precisely. The lack of precise and objective information about ethnolinguistic groups constrains researchers to a very limited number of sources that mostly depend on estimations and very old data.

One of the sources that is used widely on this issue is the Central Intelligence Agency World Fact Book. According to the World Fact Book, the estimation of Iran's ethnic distribution is as follows; Persian 61% (*includes Gilakis and Mizandranis*), Azeri 16%, Kurd 10%, Lur 6%, Baloch 2%, Arab 2%, Turkmen and Turkic tribes 2%, other 1%.⁸ Another source is Brenda Shaffer's *Borders and Brethren: Iran and the Challenge of Azerbaijani Identity*. In this book, Shaffer defines the percentage of Azerbaijanis and tribal Turks as '20-30', Kurds as 9, Baluchis as 3, Arabs as 2.5, Turkmens as 1.5.⁹ Shaffer cites this data from Shahrzad Mojab and Amir Hassanpour's article of *The Politics of Nationality and Ethnic Diversity*. Mojab and Hassanpour's ethnic distribution is roughly the same, except the distribution of Azerbaijanis that is precisely defined as 24%. Mojab and Hassanpour state that the only official data regarding ethnic and linguistic distribution dates back to 1956, which is the 'population according to language' figures released after 1956 census.¹⁰

In addition to the above mentioned references, by reviewing the literature it has been observed that Mojab and Hasspour's figures are widely shared by scholars; the central authority is dominated by Persians who constitute roughly half (51%) of Iran's population. The other half of population is classified as 24% Azeri, 8% Gilaki and Mazandarani, 7% Kurd, 3% Arab, 2%

⁸ "Iran: People and Society," *The World Factbook*, May 17, 2016, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>.

⁹ Brenda Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren: Iran and the Challenge of Azerbaijani Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 221.

¹⁰ Saeed Rahnema and Eds Sohrab Behdad, *Iran after the Revolution: Crisis of an Islamic State* (IB Tauris, 1996).

Lur, 2% Baluch, 2% Turkmen, and others (1 percent).^{11, 12, 13}

Linguistic distribution in Iran is almost the same as ethnicity: Persian (official) 53%, Azeri Turkic and Turkic dialects 18%, Kurdish 10%, Gilaki and Mazandarani 7%, Luri 6%, Baluchi 2%, Arabic 2%, other 2%.¹⁴

We can see the same opacity in the official data of religious-sectarian and linguistic composition. For these categories, there is no data published by Iranian government. However, the data of both of these categories is more consistent than the data of ethnic composition in the literature. The widely accepted percentage of Muslims is approximately 98 percent. Among Muslims, the estimate of Sunnis ranges from 5 to 9 percent, but 9 percent is broadly accepted. Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians, and Baha'is make up two percent of the total population.^{15, 16}

¹¹ Eliz Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran*, Cambridge Middle East Studies 13 (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹² Ali (ed) Gheissari, *Contemporary Iran: Economy, Society, Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹³ Alam Saleh, *Ethnic Identity and the State in Iran* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

¹⁴ CIA World FactBook, "People and Society," 2014, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran*, 9.

Table 1: Ethnic, Linguistic and Sunni-Shiite Distribution

	Ethnic Distribution	Linguistic Distribution	Sunni- Shiite Distribution	Sunni- Shiite
Persians	51	53	Shiite	%89
Gilaki and Mizandrani	8	7	Shiite	
Lur	2	6	Shiite	
Azeris	24	18	Shiite	
Arabs	3	2	Predominantly Shiite	
Kurds	7	10	Predominantly Sunni	%9
Baluchis	2	2	Sunni	
Turkmens	2	2	Sunni	
Other	1	2		%2

Source: Compiled by the author from the aforementioned studies for the ethnic distribution and the linguistic distribution, and from Sanarisan¹⁷ for the Sunni-Shiite distribution

As shown above, in contrast its ethnic diversity, Iran's religious diversity is relatively homogeneous. Including its biggest ethnic minority, Azeris, the Shiite population represents 89 percent of the total population, the 9 percent of the population that is Sunnis includes Kurds, Baluschis, and Turkmens.

¹⁷ Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran*.

Figure 2: Map of Iranian Ethno-Religious Distribution



Source: University of Texas Libraries - Perry-Castañeda Map Collection¹⁸

Shiism is a non-dominant branch of Islam, and Iran has the highest Shiite population in the Muslim world. The division of Shiism dates back to the early days of Islam. Keddie states that it was originally a political movement of followers of Ali, the son-in-law and cousin of Prophet Mohammad. They “believed that legitimate succession to Mohammad could only be in Ali’s line and that these leaders, called Imams, had divine power and knowledge.”¹⁹

However, as time passed by, this political view evolved into a new branch of Islam; Shiism. Shiism has been divided into different branches with different interpretations. Twelvers is the one that represents the overwhelming majority in Iran. They believe that their Twelfth

¹⁸ “Iran Maps - Perry-Castañeda Map Collection.”

¹⁹ Nikki Keddie, “Iran : Understanding the Enigma : A Historian ’ S View,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 2, no. 3 (1998): 4.

Imam had gone into hiding but would return as the messianic Mahdi. In the absence of the twelfth Imam, leading clerics, through their knowledge, have become the will of the Imam. This status formed a kind of clerical hierarchy embedded in the society where leading clerics, and mostly a single top leader, were accepted as the source of correct belief and action. This development has made the imams very powerful actors not only in Iran's religion history, but also in its political history. According to Keddie, "[t]he history of Iran's Shi'i clergy is unique in the Muslim world and forms a background to clerical participation in the two major twentieth-century Iranian revolutions--the constitutional revolution (1905-1911) and the Islamic Revolution (1978-79)."²⁰

The Historical Developments Before the 1979 Iranian Revolution

The 1979 Iranian Revolution is the most important turning point in Iran's late history that has put Iran in a controversial and exceptional position in the Islamic World and in the regional and global arena. After the revolution, Iran declared itself a theocratic republic guided by religious principles and named itself the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Calling the 1979 revolution 'Islamic' shouldn't bring us to the conclusion that the causes of the revolution were entirely religious. As Kimmel states, "[r]evolutions do not simply happen because of an economic crisis, or because a religious leader urges his or her followers to rebel, or because a group of people suddenly find themselves discontent with political arrangements in society, or because a nation is defeated in a war and is there for vulnerable to mass discontent – although each of these has been offered as a casual explanation of revolution."²¹ There is no doubt that Shiite clerics were very crucial actors in the making of the Iranian Revolution against

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Michael S. Kimmel, *Revolution, A Sociological Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 9.

the Shah, but not the only ones. According to Skocpol,

In Iran, uniquely, the revolution was "made" - but not, everyone will note, by any of the modern revolutionary parties on the Iranian scene: not by the Islamic guerillas or by the Marxist guerillas, or by the Communist ("Tudeh") Party, or by the secular-liberal National Front. Instead it was made through a set of cultural and organizational forms thoroughly socially embedded in the urban communal enclaves that became the centers of popular resistance to the Shah.²²

Kimmel asserts that structural roots of revolutions are deeply embedded in society's past including long term structural causes, short term events, and the immediate historical events. These three levels include the long term, structural shifts in the social foundations of the society; the short term historical events that allow these deeply settled structural forces to emerge as politically potent and begin to mobilize potential discontents; and the immediate historical events that set the entire revolutionary process in motion. These three levels, which are named as the preconditions, the precipitants, and the triggers, allow us to make an adequate analysis of 1979 revolution.²³ Analyzing the Iranian revolution through these lenses contributes to understanding the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Several long-term factors in Iranian history prepared the conditions for the revolution. Among these factors, the roles of clerics and Shiism in daily life occupy a very noticeable place.

Safavid Dynasty

The establishment of Shiism as the state religion of Iran dates back to the foundation of the Safavid Empire in 1501. Until that date, different branches of Sunni Islam were believed and practiced by the majority of the Iranian population. Under the Safavid authority Iranian society

²² Theda Skocpol, "Rentier State and Shiism in the Iranian Revolution," *Theory and Society* 11, no. 3 (1982): 275.

²³ Kimmel, *Revolution, A Sociological Interpretation*, 9.

was subjected to mass conversions to Shiism by using various assimilation strategies: “example, zeal, massacre, pillage, and torture.”²⁴ Additionally, by importing Shiite theologians and building up theological centers, Safavid Shahs tried to establish an intellectual and institutional basis for the Shiite creed in the predominantly Sunni population of Iran.²⁵

In this period, the systemic institutionalization of Shiism into the state power obviously became the priority of Safavid rulers. It was a way of controlling the society. Ashtiani states that “[a]part from the political and military structure of the Safavid state, Shiism was instrumental in giving the new Iranian nation-state a sense of political unity and cultural cohesion.”²⁶ At the same time, “the state religion provided an ideological justification and theological basis for the Safavid political power.”²⁷ In addition to surmounting the new state’s initial problems, conversion to Shiism “clearly differentiated the Safavid state from the Sunni Ottoman Empire, the major power in the Islamic world in the sixteenth century, and thus gave it territorial and political identity”²⁸ that aimed to block the expansion of Ottomans.

As Shiism became more and more institutionalized, Shiite clerics not only dominated daily religious life, but also rose to a position of political power. It was a two-way interaction: to empower clerics to spread and consolidate Shiism in the society made them more powerful in the bureaucracy of the state.^{29, 30}

The process of conversion to Shiism and its institutionalization in Iranian society was a political act not for spiritual reasons. Thus, without any doubt; this Safavid designed process

²⁴ Sandra Mackey and W. Scott Harrop, *The Iranians: Persia, Islam and the Soul of a Nation* (Penguin, 1996), 82.

²⁵ Said Amir Arjomand, “Shi’ite Islam and the Revolution in Iran,” *Government and Opposition* 16, no. 3 (1981): 295.

²⁶ Ali Ashtiani, “Cultural Formation in a Theocratic State: The Institutionalization of Shiism in Safavid Iran,” *Social Compass* 36, no. 4 (1989): 486, doi:0803973233.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Roger Savory, *Iran under the Safavids* (Cambridge University Press, 1980), 29.

²⁹ Arjomand, “Shi’ite Islam and the Revolution in Iran,” 316.

³⁰ Ashtiani, “Cultural Formation in a Theocratic State: The Institutionalization of Shiism in Safavid Iran,” 486.

made Shiism the essential ingredient not only of religious, but also social, cultural, political and even economic aspects of life.

Pre-Qajar Period

In the aftermath of the Safavid's collapse in 1722, until the establishment of the Qajar Dynasty (1785), a strong central authority, and permanently stabilized region couldn't exist under the rule of Sunni Afghans, Nader Shah and the Zand Dynasty. Barrett states that "[w]ithout a strong authoritarian state, Persia reverted to a fractured tribal society in which political power and identity reverted to political factions including the Shi'a clergy."³¹ Despite temporary stability due to the powerful personality of leaders such as Nader Shah and Karim Khan, tribally-led wars and Russian and Ottoman invasions became characteristic of this period.

In this period, the Shi'ite clergy began to lose their privileged position that was given by state authority and most of the power that was gained under the Safavids. Dorraj says that Shiism was downgraded to the status of other Islamic schools, and Shiite endowment properties were seized, which in turn weakened the power of the clerics.³² These changes compelled the Shi'ite clergy to depend on their own resources and develop an autonomous structure that could survive without government sponsorship.³³

Qajar Dynasty

After this fluctuation between stability and chaos following the Safavids, the Qajar Dynasty, whose reign stretched from 1785 to 1925, reestablished stability and reunified Iran to

³¹ Roby C Barrett, "JSOU Report 12-8 Iran : Illusion , Reality , and Interests" (Florida, 2012), 25.

³² Manochehr Dorraj, *From Zarathustra to Khomeini: Populism and Dissent in Iran* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1990), 88.

³³ Arjomand, "Shi'ite Islam and the Revolution in Iran," 305.

some extent. According to Keddie, this roughly two-century-era was a “key transitional period between pre-modern Iranian culture and society and Iran’s modern development.”³⁴

The Qajar period marked a noteworthy breakpoint in Iran’s political and social history in several important respects:

- Iran was transformed from a predominantly tribal territory into a relatively centralized monarchy.³⁵ Centralization increased but remained limited. Owing to the political and financial weaknesses of the central government, the reforms that were necessary for a strong central authority could not be fully implemented. “The vested or territorial interests of notables, tribal khans, religious figures (ulama) and others who stood to loose power if the central government became stronger”³⁶ were the chief obstacles to fully accomplish these reforms.
- In this period, relations with the West increased. The West’s colonial expansion efforts driven by their own interests and the enthusiasm of a few reform-minded Qajar politicians who believed that the country’s progress could be advanced through increasing its economic and diplomatic ties with Europe, contributed to the growth of significant political, socioeconomic, intellectual relations for Iran. In general, these factors turn Iran into a playground international rivalry and competition.³⁷ However, this environment also created strong opposition to Western imperialism.
- The independent power and wealth of the clergy that began under the Safavids became fully operative under the Qajar Dynasty. There were a number of

³⁴ Nikki Keddie, *Qajar Iran and the Rise of Reza Khan, 1796-1925* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 1999), 140.

³⁵ Mahran Kamrava, *The Political History of Modern Iran; From Tribalism to Theocracy* (Praeger, 1992), 59.

³⁶ Keddie, *Qajar Iran and the Rise of Reza Khan, 1796-1925*, 15.

³⁷ Kamrava, *The Political History of Modern Iran; From Tribalism to Theocracy*, 8.

developments strengthened the Shiite clerics. As a result of the deinstitutionalization and weakening of Shiite clergies' status in the government, the clerics developed an autonomous structure and a set of religious doctrines, which consolidated their status in social life and made it possible to survive without any government support and against any challenge by Qajar authorities.³⁸ Arjomand states that during the Qajar period, the autonomous power of the religious leaders reached its zenith.³⁹ Furthermore, 'alliances among many ulama merchants and others sometimes forced the government to change policies.'⁴⁰

The extensive network of the Shiite clergies and their direct and regular contact with the laity –in particular with the traditional merchant class–provided the institution of Shiism room to maneuver in domestic and foreign policy.⁴¹ Thus, the Shiite clergy played a prominent role in several rebellious movements: the 1891-92 Tobacco movement, the 1905-06 Constitutional Revolution, the 1951-53 Oil Nationalization Movement, and the 1979 Iranian revolution.

1891-92 Tobacco Movement

Among rebellious movements, the Tobacco movement is an important milestone in Iranian social and political history, which allowed the clerics to establish themselves as 'defenders of nationalism and independence in Iran.'⁴²

In 1892, after the Shah granted a monopoly to the British in the sale and export of tobacco in addition to the other concessions, the widely-joined opposition movement started, which included clerics, bazaar traders, intellectuals, and military officers, who saw these

³⁸ Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (Yale University Press, 1985), 144.

³⁹ Arjomand, "Shi'ite Islam and the Revolution in Iran," 296.

⁴⁰ Keddie, *Qajar Iran and the Rise of Reza Khan, 1796-1925*, 17.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Mohammad Amjad, "Shi'ism and Revolution in Iran," *Journal of Church and State* 31, no. 1 (1989): 40.

concessions as a threat to national sovereignty. To protest government policies, smoking was prohibited, and the bazaars were closed in addition to strikes and demonstrations. The Shiite leader, Ayatollah Hasan al-Shirazi, had a prominent role in the religious legitimation of the protests. He issued a fatwa against smoking tobacco. Mosques served as centers of resistance and sanctuary to protesters, and also mobilized society.⁴³ The successfully orchestrated protests, later named the Tobacco movement, led to the cancelation of the tobacco concession and embodied the cooperation between the clergy, merchants, and dissident intellectuals. The tobacco movement, which should be seen as the first sign of popular revolt against the prevailing order, was a rough rehearsal for the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1906.⁴⁴

The Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909

As a result of the Tobacco movement, the clergy and their cooperation with other discontented elements of Iranian society appeared as a noteworthy development in Iranian political history. A decade and a half later, these groups actively participated in the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909, which was a seminal event in the country's history that forced the Shah to grant a Western-style constitution including a parliament.⁴⁵ The dominant motivation for this rebellion was the public's sense that political leaders' were selling national resources for personal profit, but was not the only reason; in addition the revolutionaries wanted to replace "arbitrary power with law, representative government, and social justice and to resist the encroachment of imperial powers with conscious nationalism, popular activism, and economic

⁴³ John L. Esposito, "Tobacco Protest (Iran)," *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, 2015, www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2389?_hi=0&_pos=6.

⁴⁴ Encyclopaedia Iranica, "Constitutional Revolution," *Columbia University Center for Iranian Studies*, 1996, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/constitutional-revolution-i>.

⁴⁵ Arjomand, "Shi'ite Islam and the Revolution in Iran," 297.

independence.”⁴⁶

The revolutionaries tried to establish a strong centralized state by reducing the power of the tribes and institutionalizing modern education and judicial reforms. According to Keddie, “although internal discord and especially a Russian invasion ended this experiment in 1911, the constitution remained until a new regime replaced it in 1979.”⁴⁷

However, despite the Constitutionalists’ efforts, a strong centralized modern state could not be established. In contrast, it was followed by a period of disintegration, anarchy and the involvement of foreign powers such as Russia and England until 1921.⁴⁸

Britain’s strategic and economic interests continually evolved in the Gulf. Initially, the importance of the Gulf was dominated by the security of the principal lines of communication and supply between Britain and British India. The discovery of Persian oil in the first decade of the twentieth century, and the 1912 decision to convert the Royal Navy to one powered by oil, instead of coal, renewed the strategic value of the Gulf to London.⁴⁹

Iran's geographic importance and its oil made it indispensable for the British and Russians to dominate this state. ‘The Great Game’ referred to the strategic rivalry and conflict between the British and Russian empires for control of the Central Asia. In 1907, two imperialist powers agreed to divide Iran into three parts; a Russian zone in the north, a British zone in the south, and a neutral buffer zone between the two.⁵⁰ World War I and post-war improvements radically altered the Great Powers’ calculations in Iran. However, roughly a decade later Anglo-Russian cooperation ended with the Bolshevik revolution. With this developments, Russian

⁴⁶ Encyclopaedia Iranica, “Constitutional Revolution.”

⁴⁷ Keddie, “Iran : Understanding the Enigma : A Historian ’ S View,” 5.

⁴⁸ Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 41.

⁴⁹ W. Taylor Fain, *American Ascendance and British Retreat in the Persian Gulf Region* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 3.

⁵⁰ Peter Avery et al., *The Cambridge History of Iran* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 427.

imperialism was removed from the picture. Subsequently, the possible expansion of the Bolshevik revolution was seen as a threat and “Britain was favorably disposed toward the creation of a strong nationalist state to withstand the threat of Bolshevism.”⁵¹

The agreement of 1919 between Iran and Britain was designed to strengthen the central government and make Iran a virtual British protectorate. Despite British pressure for implementation, it was not ratified by the Iranian parliament (Majles). Britain’s efforts and a new Russian intervention in northern Iran provoked the Iranian people and also increased instability in the state.⁵² Many, including local British officials, feared that the withdrawal of British troops from Northern Persia would be followed by an attack on Tehran with Bolshevik backing and looked for preventive measures.⁵³ During the great destruction of World War I, the imperialist powers’ struggles over Iran and its use as a battlefield increased nationalist and democratic sentiment among Iranians.⁵⁴

The Coup D'etat-1921

Under these circumstances in 1921, Reza Khan, an army officer, and Sayyed Zia, a journalist, initiated a successful coup d’état. In 1925, continuing instability and chaos in Iran allowed Reza Khan to assume authority. He had himself named Shah, ‘styling himself a cosmopolitan Persian King in the 2,500-year-old image of Cyrus the Great.’⁵⁵ Thus, formally the Qajar dynasty was replaced by the new Pahlavi dynasty. The coup not only prevented the spread of revolutionary Bolshevism, but also opened a new era of modernization and state centralization

⁵¹ Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran*, 59.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 60.

⁵³ Encyclopaedia Iranica, “Constitutional Revolution.”

⁵⁴ Keddie, “Iran : Understanding the Enigma : A Historian ’ S View,” 5.

⁵⁵ Theda Skocpol, “Rentier State and Shi’a Islam in the Iranian Revolution,” *Theory and Society* 11, no. 3 (1982): 265.

in Iran.

1925-1941 Reza Khan Period

Reza Shah wanted to create a Western-style modern state under his autocratic power by establishing a powerful central state with modern fiscal and economic tools, a modernized judiciary, education, health and transportation systems, the establishment of industry and large-scale corporations and, most importantly, a modern and powerful military.

During his reign, Reza Shah stressed nationalism and “Iran gained greater national unity and autonomy than ever before in modern times.”⁵⁶ According to Abidi, his most significant contribution to Iran was that he enabled the country to continue to exist as a single unit.⁵⁷

Arjomond states that the modernization programs of the Pahlavi era also entailed the significant secularization of Iranian culture.

New branches of learning, the history of pre-Islamic Iran, Ferdawsi's Epic of the Kings, and the secular nationalist ideology of the Pahlavi state were propagated by the new system of national education in the 1930s. This ideology bypassed constitutionalism and was emphatically monarchist, as best illustrated by the order of the three words in the motto it inscribed in the minds of the whole generation of its school children: God, the King, the Fatherland. Perhaps the most spectacular aspect of the state promoted secularization of culture was the unveiling of women in 1935, a forced but nevertheless courageous break with the Islamic tradition.⁵⁸

Nonetheless, the Shah's modernization program and his nationalist policies disturbed two parties. Within Iran, on the one hand, the clergy, the traditional business class (the *bazaari* merchants) and tribal leaders saw modernization as a direct threat to their status in society. On

⁵⁶ Ibid., 269.

⁵⁷ A. H. H. Abidi, “The Iranian Revolution: Its Origins and Dimensions,” *International Studies* 18, no. 2 (1979): 130.

⁵⁸ Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran*, 68.

the other hand, the British viewed the Shah's nationalist policies as a potential threat to their economic interests in the AIOC (Anglo-Persian Oil Company).⁵⁹

Since first discovering oil in the early years of the twentieth century, the British maintained control of Iranian oil through the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), which strengthened British economic and military power rather than improving Iranian socioeconomic life. As Kinzer explains, the AIOC was an immensely profitable company, with the Abadan refinery constituting Britain's largest overseas asset and the largest installation of its kind in the world. While the refinery produced enormous profits and provided fuel for the Royal Navy, Iran owned only 20% of the company.⁶⁰ British monopoly on the production and sale of Iranian oil maintained British leverage over Iranian politicians and society.

After World War II broke out, Reza Shah declared a policy of neutrality; however, increasingly close relations with Germany made the Allies anxious. As stated by Kinzer "[w]estern leaders feared that the Nazis were planning to use Iran as a platform for an attack across the Soviet Union's southern border that would greatly complicate the Allied war effort."⁶¹ Therefore, the Allies invaded Iran in August 1941 and Reza Shah was forced to abdicate. This ended Reza Shah's reign and started the era of Mohammad Reza (his eldest son), which would be ended by the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

To fund Iranian modernization with oil revenue, the National Front demanded the nationalization of the oil industry throughout the late 1940s. In particular, Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh was a passionate figure in the nationalization struggle. He believed no country could be independent without economic independence. According to him, "[t]he moral aspect of oil

⁵⁹ Barrett, "JSOU Report 12-8 Iran : Illusion , Reality , and Interests," 32.

⁶⁰ Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (John Wiley & Sons, 2003), 107.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

nationalization is more important than its economic aspect."⁶² This issue caused a great debate in the *Majlis* (parliament). After the assassination of Prime Minister General Ali Razmara who opposed nationalization for technical reasons, the *Majlis* nationalized foreign oil interests under the insistence of the National Front on 20 March 1951. Almost a month later, Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh was nominated for the position of Prime Minister, and was elected by a majority of the *Majlis*.⁶³

The nationalization of the oil industry, Mossadegh's populist brand of nationalism and the advent of the Tudeh (a well-organized and disciplined Communist Party) resulted in the alienation of the Shah and the army. As Mosaddegh's power grew, the neo-patrimonial power of the Shah was restricted and he was reduced to a constitutional monarch and a ceremonial figurehead.⁶⁴ These changes also were seen as direct threats to British interests.

After the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, the issue was raised at the United Nations, although some in the British government wanted to invade Iran as a response. The British government perceived that it would not be easy to solve this problem in the UN and decided to convince the U.S. government for a joint operation. The British government knew that their transatlantic allies would not participate in a plan that was motivated purely by British oil and economic interests, so instead they emphasized the Communist threat. Eventually, Operation Ajax, which comprised propaganda, provocations, demonstrations, and bribery, and employed agents of influence, dissident military leaders, and paid protestors, was created. On August 19, 1953, with CIA/MI6-orchestrated support, under General Fazollah Zahedi's leadership, a coup

⁶² Amin Saikal, *The Rise and Fall of the Shah: Iran from Autocracy to Religious Rule* (Princeton University Press, 2009), 40.

⁶³ Ali M. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 125.

⁶⁴ Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran*, 72.

was carried out.⁶⁵ The 1953 coup removed democratically elected Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh from power. Then the Shah of Iran, Mohammed Reza, was installed as an absolute monarch and became a reliable ally of the United States.

1953-1979 Mohammed Reza Period

With the support of the U.S., in 1963, the Shah announced the modernization program called the “White Revolution”. It included land reform, the privatization of state-owned enterprises and a profit-sharing plan for industrial workers, etc. Additionally, the program increased women's minimum legal marriage age to 18, improved women's legal rights in divorce and granted women the right to vote. These reforms brought the Shah into conflict with the clergy.⁶⁶ Khomeini, who harshly criticized as land reform and votes for women, came to prominence during this conflict. After that time, Khomeini would be one of the most influential figures in modern Iran history. Due to his opposition, in 1964 he was sent into exile in Turkey and subsequently Iraq. Some of the fashionable Leftist and Third Worldist ideology of the time influenced him during his exile. In 1970, he devised a clerical government as an alternative to monarchy. This would, ultimately, pave the way to his Supreme Leadership.⁶⁷

With the rise in oil prices in 1973–1974, Iran’s annual revenue increased “from about US \$1bn to about US \$25bn.”⁶⁸ By starting industrial and military modernization with this revenue, Abidi states that, Mohammed Reza initiated a series of measures aimed at transforming his nation from the preparatory phase of the “White Revolution” to the grand era of the “Great Civilization.” However, almost 18 months later, world demand for Iranian oil contracted, and

⁶⁵ Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men*, 265.

⁶⁶ Nikki Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (Yale University Press, 2006), 92.

⁶⁷ James Buchan, “The Iranian Revolution of 1979,” *Asian Affairs* 44, no. 3 (November 2013): 420, doi:10.1080/03068374.2013.826016.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 421.

many projects had to be cut and workers lost their jobs. Thus, the Shah's dream ended in the chaos of inflation, port congestion, and shortages of basic goods and services.⁶⁹

These changes led to a variety of social problems in Iran. In addition to economic chaos and suppression of society, the Shah's populist policies such as the new calendar dating from Cyrus the Great caused the Shah's prestige loose. Discontent with the Shah's policies was spreading through various segments of Iranian society. After that time, protests and major demonstrations against the government became increasingly common, and several sequential events triggered the turmoil.

First, Khomeini's son, Mostafa, was accidentally killed in Karbala on 23 October 1977, and it was widely suspected that he was killed by SAVAK, the Shah's security service.⁷⁰

Second, an insulting article published in a January 1978 issue of the newspaper Ettelaat, accused Khomeini of being an Indian agent of the British. The seminary town of Qom, which was the center of Khomeini's supporters, reacted very severely to this article. Uprisings spread to several cities, tens of people died, and the army was deployed for the first time.⁷¹

Last and the worst of the incidents, on 19 August 1978, militants set fire to the first floor corridor of the Rex Cinema in Abadan. More than 400 people died, suffocated by the fumes. Shiite clergy under Khomeini's leadership and the liberal opposition claimed that the fire was the work of SAVAK and was designed to discredit the religious protest.⁷²

All of these issues fueled the revolutionary movement gave the most prominent role to Khomeini, who was in Najaf, Iraq at this time. Mohammed Reza's first reaction was to dismiss premier Amouzegar and replace him with Jafar Sharif Emami. Although Emami tried to calm the

⁶⁹ Abidi, "The Iranian Revolution: Its Origins and Dimensions," 137.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 139.

⁷¹ Buchan, "The Iranian Revolution of 1979," 422.

⁷² Homa Katouzian, *Iran: Politics, History and Literature* (Routledge, 2013), 103.

religious opposition by taking some measures such as rescinding the imperial calendar and closing casinos, he could not break the momentum of the demonstrations. The lack of improvement pushed PM Emami to attempt to silence Khomeini. Because of pressure from Iranian officials, the Iraqi government increased the pressure on Khomeini. Khomeini found a solution by going to France where he was safer than in other countries of the region and where Iranians could stay for 90 days without a visa.⁷³ In France, Khomeini kept severe opposition alive by doing print and broadcast interviews, and sending messages to his supporters.

Meanwhile in Iran, the weakness of Emami government led the Shah to form a military government to end the chaos. Initially, the government was successful to some extent, however, the month of Moharram, when Iranians traditionally mourn the death in the battle of the Prophet's grandson, Hosein, protests and street marches intensified. According to Buchan, "those marches were a decisive rejection of the monarchy and an endorsement of Khomeini as the undisputed leader of the rebellion. The Left and the liberals convinced themselves that Khomeini and the clergy would mobilize the masses and then somehow leave the modern classes to establish the new government."⁷⁴

In the end, Reza Shah was convinced to temporarily leave Iran for Egypt believing his absence might soothe the protests and chaos. Despite attempts to stop him, Khomeini returned to Iran on February 1st, 1979 and ten days later, on February 11, the power in Iran switched to "the coalition of Khomeini and his followers, including clericals, lay religious figures led by Barzagan, and for a time, a few lay National Front and other ministers, notably Dr. Karim Sanjabi."⁷⁵

Keddie states that at the beginning Khomeini and the clergy seemed reluctant to govern

⁷³ Buchan, "The Iranian Revolution of 1979," 424.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 425.

⁷⁵ Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, 239.

the state. Khomeini's appointment of the non-clerical Mehdi Bazargan as Prime Minister and support of Bani Sadr in the first presidential elections can be seen as proof of this perspective.⁷⁶ However, immediately after eliminating their common enemy, ideological differences surfaced amongst the revolutionary partners. Rather than returning to their mosques, Khomeini and many clerics began to take steps to increase their power and to control the government. President Bani Sadr and PM Bazargan were driven from office.⁷⁷ According to Keddie, some opposition Iranians saw this as Khomeini's hijack of the revolution.⁷⁸ Thus, Pahlavi family rule ended, and the era of Khomeini and his clerics started. Buchan well sums up Pahlavi family rule periods:

Both Reza and Mohammed Reza claimed to be constitutional monarchs, but both sought absolute rule: Reza from the late 1920s till his abdication in 1941, and Mohammed Reza from 1964 until the end of 1978. Thus, even as their schools, factories and model armies were creating a new middle class, they refused to admit that class to power. During those periods of absolute rule, Parliament, the Press and intellectual life were suppressed. The Pahlavi Court took on a composite, or Ruritanian, character. Their reforms brought both Shahs into conflict with the Shia clergy, which had long seen itself as the guardian of Iranian character and traditions. There was nothing new in that. What was new was the character and will of Ruhollah Khomeini.⁷⁹

Thus the Pahlavis' suppressive and autocratic rule was replaced by the rule of Khomeini. "The decade of Khomeini's rule was marked by the ever-growing power of his followers and elimination, often by violence and despite resistance, of opposition groups, and by increasing enforcement of ideological and behavioral controls on the population."⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Ibid., 241–242.

⁷⁷ John L. Esposito, "Contemporary Islam: Reformation or Revolution?," in *The Oxford History of Islam*, 1999, 643–90.

⁷⁸ Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, 241.

⁷⁹ Buchan, "The Iranian Revolution of 1979," 420.

⁸⁰ Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, 241.

The Causes of the 1979 Iranian Revolution

Sociological and Political Causes

Skocpol puts different and more comprehensive perspectives on the causes of the Iranian Revolution. First, in general, the Iranian revolution can be regarded as a result of an excessively rapid period of modernization. During both Shahs' reign, and particularly, the later Shah period, Iranian society saw "land reform, massive migrations from countryside to cities and towns (above all to Teheran), unprecedentedly rapid industrialization, and the sudden expansion of modern primary, secondary, and university education."⁸¹ Excessively rapid social change and additionally, a mismanaged economic policy increased the discontent of Iranian society with the Shah. As stated by Skocpol "the Revolution was straightforwardly the product of societal disruption, social disorientation, and universal frustration with the pace of change,"⁸² but this was one aspect of the revolution. Because "disruption and discontent alone do not give people the collective organizational capacities and the autonomous resources that they need to sustain resistance to political and economic power holders."⁸³

Second, remarkably, the Shah's army and police were ineffective in preventing the revolution, even though immense investment had been made in the modernization of both organizations.⁸⁴

Third, Skocpol's last departure from other theorists is the concept that 'revolutions come, not made.' According to Skocpol, the Iranian revolution "did not just come; it was deliberately and coherently made - specifically in its opening phase, the overthrow of the old regime.' It was

⁸¹ Skocpol, "Rentier State and Shi'a Islam in the Iranian Revolution," 266.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 267.

made by ‘a mass-based social movement aiming to overthrow the old order.’⁸⁵ Undoubtedly; the revolution was not made by a single segment of Iranian society; the segments ranged from Marxist to the liberal National Front, from secularists to Islamic activists. It was made “through a set of cultural and organizational forms thoroughly socially embedded in the urban communal enclaves that became the centers of popular resistance to the Shah.”⁸⁶

The Role of Shiism and Clergy in the Revolution

During both Shahs’ period, the clergy perceived that the modernization policies and reforms had significantly weakened the foundation of the religious institutions and their influence on Iranian culture. Land reform, the loss of judicial and educational functions, the loss of control of religious endowments, and an increasing number of well-educated secular competitors caused the clergy to fear the permanent loss of their historically important social functions and their power in society. This led the Shiite clergy to react and to be the most influential actor in the revolution.

Shiite clergy mosque network that had been rooted in Iranian communities since the Qajar Dynasty served as centers for propaganda, mobilization, and organization of urban mass movement and gave moral-religious justification to the struggle against the Shah. Additionally, as Esposito states, “Shiite Islam provided a common set of symbols, historical identity, and values - an indigenous, non-Western alternative. Shiite belief provided the basis for an ideological framework for opposition and protest against oppression and injustice.”⁸⁷

In *Islam and Democracy*, Esposito and Voll highlight Shiism’s role in Iranian politics and

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 275.

⁸⁷ Esposito, “Contemporary Islam: Reformation or Revolution?,” 663.

society as well in its latest revolution.

Shiism has been integral to Iranian identity and a source of a political legitimacy since the sixteenth century when it was declared the state religion of Iran. Shia Islam has been embroiled in politics from its origins, and as such provides history and system of the belief that can be interpreted and used in political crisis. In Iranian History, “Twelver Shiism (Ithna Ashari) has often been apolitical, finding a tolerable accommodation with the state. However, at critical points throughout history, Shia belief, leadership, and institutions have played an important role in Iranian politics and society. Shiism has been interpreted and utilized to safeguard national identity and independence and to mobilize popular support.”⁸⁸

The replacement of one set of rulers or a ruler by another doesn’t solely mean a revolution. A revolution is more than this. According to Walt, “revolutions redefine the political community within a given territory by creating a "new state" that rests on principles and procedures that are a sharp departure from those of the old regime.”⁸⁹

Walt’s definition of ‘a sharp departure from those of the old regime’ totally explains what happened in Iran during the 1979 Revolution. Following the revolution, Shiite doctrines have formed the basis of all facets of life: the political, educational, legal, social, and religious.

Post-Revolutionary Worldview and Political Structure

Velayat-e Faqih

After the revolution, the concept of *velayat-e faqih* that was developed by Ayatollah Khomeini has been the basis of Iran’s political system. The origin of *velayat-e faqih* dates back to the debate between the *akhbari* and *usuli* schools of Shiism in the 18th century. The *akhbari* school asserts that since the disappearance of the twelfth imam, the Quran and the hadith

⁸⁸ John L. Esposito and John Obert Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 1996), 53.

⁸⁹ Stephen M Walt, “Revolution and War,” *World Politics* 44, no. 3 (1992): 140.

(sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad) were sufficient for Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and there was no need for the leadership of the *mojtahed* (highest learned clergy who have the authority to make *ijtihad* (interpretation of the religion)). Conversely, the supporters of the *usuli* school believe in the necessity of *ijtihad* and that the leadership of the *mojtahed* need to update interpretations depending on current circumstances. The debate between the *akhbari* and *usuli* schools ended in the late eighteenth century with the victory of the latter. This dynamic created the Shiite clerical hierarchy in Iranian society and gave the right of *ijtihad* to only the *mojtahed* or to the ayatollah, whose interpretations had to be followed by each believer. This highest rank of Twelver Shiites who execute sharia later called *marja-e taqlid* (religious authority followed as the source of emulation). Additionally, *zakat* (religious tax) and the *khums* (which is one fifth of the annual net profit of a Shiite Muslim) enhanced the financial autonomy of the clergy and their status in the society. According to Eva Patricia Rakel these four developments politicized Shiism and increased the clergies power in Iran;

1. The triumph of *usuli* school
2. *Ijtihad*
3. *Marja-e taqlid*, and
4. The *khums*.⁹⁰

In this context, the concept of *velayat-e faqih* states that the supreme leader is the temporal, spiritual and legal leader of the *ummah* (muslim community) during the absence of the Twelfth Imam. *Velayat-e faqih* has provided the ideological justification for the regime's political reconstruction. Iran's interpretation of Shiism has shaped the worldview of Iranian decision makers; thus it is almost impossible to separate the government's decision-making from

⁹⁰ Eva Patricia Rakel, "The Iranian Political Elite , State and Society Relations, and Foreign Relations since the Islamic Revolution" 2008, 47.

its religious principles. And this is also guaranteed by the 1979 constitution.

Article 177: The contents of the Articles of the Constitution related to the Islamic character of the political system; the basis of all the rules and regulations according to Islamic criteria; the religious footing; the objectives of the Islamic Republic of Iran; the democratic character of the government; the wilayat al-'mr the Imamate of Ummah; and the administration of the affairs of the country based on national referenda, official religion of Iran [Islam] and the school [Twelver Ja'fari] are unalterable.⁹¹

Political Structure

The concept of *velayat-e faqih* is not the sole character of the power structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It has a dual and unique political system; in addition to deriving its legitimacy from the *velayat-e faqih* system, Iran enjoys republican institutions inherited and adapted from the constitution of 1906.

In terms of regime type, there is opacity whether Iran has a democratic or authoritarian or totalitarian regime. Linz contrasted each regime with reference to five characteristics:

- The selection of leaders through elections,
- The degree of pluralism,
- The nature of participation,
- The scope of the regime's ideology,
- The degree to which the political system is institutionalized.⁹²

In terms of these characteristics, it is not easy to place Iran into a particular regime type. According to Chehabi, "Iran, like totalitarian regimes, proclaims absolute supremacy over the public life of an ideology; like authoritarian regimes it permits a limited degree of pluralism, and

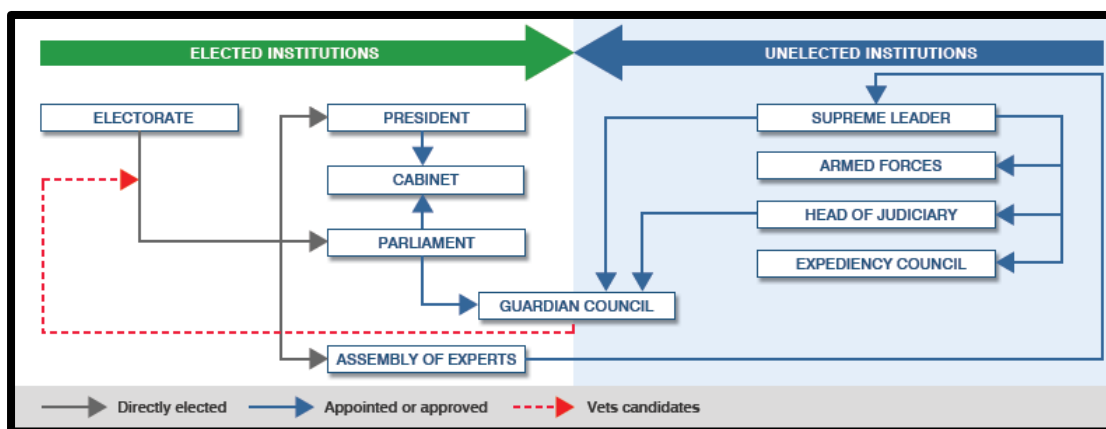
⁹¹ "Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Islamic Republic of Iran Permanent Mission to the United Nations*, accessed May 26, 2016, <http://iran-un.org/en/constitution/>.

⁹² Juan José Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 53–58.

like democracies it holds elections.”⁹³

In the political structure of Iran, there is a parliament and a president, both selected by Iranian voters. However, it also has a supreme leader who is both more powerful than the president and not democratically elected. Moreover, the unelected institutions of Iran's government are more powerful than the elected ones.

Figure 3: Political Structure of Iran



Source: BBC News, 2009⁹⁴

The structure of Iran's political system contains two power centers; formal (as mentioned above) and informal which are “a multitude loosely connected and generally fiercely competitive power centers.”⁹⁵ Whereas the formal power centers are grounded in the Constitution and can be seen as a concrete structure, the informal power centers are different political factions of the political elite that are embedded in the concrete power structure; “such as the heads and members

⁹³ H. E. Chehabi, “The Political Regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Comparative Perspective,” *Government and Opposition* 36, no. 1 (2001): 48.

⁹⁴ “Guide: How Iran Is Ruled,” *BBC*, June 9, 2009, sec. Middle East, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8051750.stm#assembly.

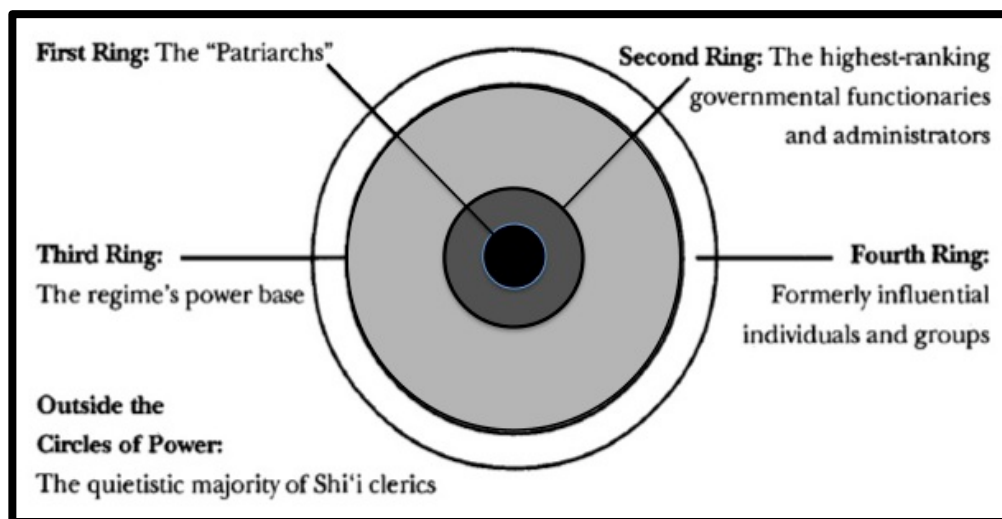
⁹⁵ Wilfried Buchta, *Who Rules Iran* (Washington DC: The Washington Institute for Near Eastern Policy and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2000), 6.

of state institutions, religious-political associations, religious foundations, and paramilitary organizations; those individuals that directly or indirectly participate in the decision-making process in Iran and/or in the ideological discourse.”⁹⁶

Informal Power Structure

Buchta describes the informal power structure by using a model made up of four concentric rings. In this model, the power of each faction increases in size from the inner to the outer circles.

Figure 4: The Informal Power Structure in Iran



Source: Buchta, 1999⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Raket, "The Iranian Political Elite, State and Society Relations, and Foreign Relations since the Islamic Revolution," 79.

⁹⁷ Wilfried Buchta, *Who Rules Iran? : The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1999).

The First Ring: Patriarchs (Conservatives)

This group represents the regime's most powerful decision-making body that controls not only their own ring of power, but also a large portion of the remaining political spheres. It includes the most influential political clerics from the executive, judicial, and legislative branches; the Council of Guardians; the Assembly of Experts; and the Society of Teachers of Qom Theological Colleges.⁹⁸ According to Rakel, since the revolution, conservatives have controlled the politics, the military and economic system.⁹⁹

The Second Ring: This group includes representatives from the executive, judicial, and legislative branches, provincial governors; mayors of major cities and technocrats. They are the ideologically right-wing traditionalist.¹⁰⁰

The Third Ring: (The Power Base of the Regime) This group includes revolutionary institutions, religious security forces, law enforcement forces, committees, IRGC, revolutionary newspapers, and the media. It is dominated by ideologically left-wing Islamicists and right-wing traditionalists.¹⁰¹

The Fourth Ring: (Formerly Influential Individuals and Groups) Buchta states that this ring includes the "semi-opposition" who are positioned between the regime and civil society and whose goal is the peaceful reform of the system from the inside.¹⁰²

Formal Power Structure

The formal power centers consist of the president, the cabinet, the parliament, the

⁹⁸ Buchta, *Who Rules Iran*, 6–9.

⁹⁹ Rakel, "The Iranian Political Elite, State and Society Relations, and Foreign Relations since the Islamic Revolution," 67.

¹⁰⁰ Buchta, *Who Rules Iran*, 7–9.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

assembly of experts, the guardian council, the supreme leader, the head of the judiciary, the armed forces, and the expediency council. The responsibilities and functions of these institutions briefly will be explained in this section.

The Supreme Leader

The Supreme Leader is the most powerful institution in the newly established political system, which is based on the Khomeini's politico-religious theory of *velayat-e faqih*. According to the article 110 of the constitution, the important duties and powers of the Supreme Leader are as follows:

- Assuming supreme command of the armed forces.
- Declaration of war and peace, and the mobilization of the armed forces.
- Appointment, dismissal, and acceptance of resignation of:
 - Six clerical jurists in the Guardian Council (six laymen, six clerical jurists),
 - The supreme judicial authority of the country,
 - The head of the radio and television network of the Islamic Republic of Iran,
 - The chief of the joint staff,
 - The chief commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps.
 - The supreme commanders of the armed forces.
- Signing the decree formalizing the election of the President of the Republic by the people. The suitability of candidates for the Presidency of the Republic, with respect to the qualifications specified in the Constitution, must be confirmed before elections take place by the Guardian Council; and, in the case of the first term [of the Presidency], by the Leadership;

- Dismissal of the President of the Republic, with due regard for the interests of the country, after the Supreme Court holds him guilty of the violation of his constitutional duties, or after a vote of the Islamic Consultative Assembly testifying to his incompetence on the basis of Article 89 of the Constitution.^{103, 104}

The Parliament

The members of the parliament are elected by popular vote every four years. Although article 56 of the constitution emphasizes the absolute sovereignty of God, it also explicitly states that Parliament is the trustee of this sovereignty. The following are the Parliament's important functions;

- Drafting legislation (Articles 71-75 of the Constitution);
- Ratifying international treaties (Article 77);
- Approving state-of-emergency declarations (Article 79) and loans (Article 80);
- Examining and approving the annual state budget (Article 52);
- Moreover, if necessary, removing from office the state president and his appointed ministers.¹⁰⁵

The President

The president is elected for four years and no more than two consecutive terms. The Guardian Council vets all presidential candidates. The president is the second most powerful official in the Iranian political system, “but his influence is primarily over the social, cultural,

¹⁰³ “Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

¹⁰⁴ Buchta, *Who Rules Iran*, 46.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

and economic policies of the country.” According to Buchta, it is a false belief that the executive plays a dominant role in setting domestic and foreign policy, which originates from the high public profile of the president and other representatives of the executive in the media and at international conferences. The Supreme Leader controls the armed forces and makes decisions on security, defense and major foreign policy issues. Buchta states that Iran's presidency is unlike any other in many respects;

- A supreme religious authority who is not elected by the people approves the president who is elected by the people,
- The state executive does not have control over the armed forces,
- The entire executive branch is subordinate to a religious authority.¹⁰⁶

The Council of Guardians

It consists of twelve jurists (six theologians appointed by the Supreme Leader and six jurists nominated by the judiciary and approved by parliament) who determine the compatibility with sharia of laws passed by the Parliament. The council has the power to veto laws if they consider the laws inconsistent with the constitution and Islamic law.¹⁰⁷

The Assembly of Expert

Consists of 86 members who are elected for an eight-year term. The responsibilities of the Assembly of Experts are to appoint and monitor the Supreme Leader. The assembly gathers at least once a year. Most importantly, according to Article 111, the assembly has the right to “remove the supreme leader if he becomes unable to fulfill his duties, if he loses one or more of

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 59.

the qualifications necessary to perform in his office, or if it is revealed that he never possessed these qualifications in the first place.”¹⁰⁸

The Expediency Council

The Supreme Leader appoints its thirty-one members, who are prominent religious, social and political figures. It has a mediation role in disputes between the parliament and the Guardian Council. There are two Constitutional Responsibilities of the Expediency Council:

- Advise the supreme leader in all matters related to the leader's right to establish guidelines for the overall policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran (de facto, not invoked until 1997).
- Discern the supreme interest of the system through ultimate arbitration in cases in which the legislative authority of Parliament is overruled by a veto of the Council of Guardians.¹⁰⁹

Armed Forces

The armed forces comprise the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the regular forces under the Joint Armed Forces General Staff. The regular forces (the Artesh) are responsible for defending Iran's borders and maintaining internal order. Both the Artesh and IRGC are comprised of army, navy and air force.¹¹⁰

As is stated in Article 150 of 1979 Constitution, “[t]he Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, organized in the early days of the triumph of the Revolution, is to be maintained so that it may

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 61.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 65–71.

continue in its role of guarding the Revolution and its achievements.”¹¹¹ The reason behind the establishment of IRGC was Khomeini’s concerns about the loyalty of the Shah’s military.

The Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC-QF) is an elite unit that “conducts clandestine operations outside Iran; provides training, financial, and other support to Islamic militant groups; and collects strategic and military intelligence...”¹¹² All leading army and Revolutionary Guard commanders are appointed by the Supreme Leader.

Foreign Policy of Iran after the Revolution

This topic will be addressed broadly in Section 3. Here, the Iranian Revolution’s initial effects on foreign policy are described.

The revolution altered not only Iran’s internal dynamics, but also led to a dramatic change in the Iranian foreign policy outlook. Iranian foreign policy adopted two principles just after the revolution: “Neither East nor West” and “Export of the Revolution, based on the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran rejected an alliance with both the US (West) and USSR (East), two superpowers of the Cold War period and tried instead to achieve unity with other Muslim countries. Several articles of the Constitution mention Iran’s foreign policy preferences;

Article 152: The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based upon the rejection of all forms of domination, both the exertion of it and submission to it, the preservation of the independence of the country in all respects and its territorial integrity, the defense of the rights of all Muslims, nonalignment with respect to the hegemonist superpowers, and the maintenance of mutually peaceful relations with all non-belligerent States.

¹¹¹ “Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

¹¹² Steven R Ward, *Immortal: A Military History of Iran and Its Armed Forces* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 303.

Article 153: Any form of agreement resulting in foreign control over the natural resources, economy, army, or culture of the country, as well as other aspects of the national life, is forbidden.

Article 154: The Islamic Republic of Iran has as its ideal human felicity throughout human society, and considers the attainment of independence, freedom, and rule of justice and truth to be the right of all people of the world. Accordingly, while scrupulously refraining from all forms of interference in the internal affairs of other nations, it supports the just struggles of the mustad'afun against the mustakbirun in every corner of the globe.¹¹³

These articles draw attention to the basics in the conduct of Iranian foreign policy. These are ‘sovereignty’, ‘independence’, ‘peaceful relations with states that are not hostile to Iran or Islam in general’ and ‘opposition to any form of intervention and subjugation.’

Article 11: In accordance with the sacred verse of the Koran "This your community is a single community, and I am your Lord, so worship Me" [21:92], all Muslims form a single nation, and the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran have the duty of formulating its general policies with a view to cultivating the friendship and unity of all Muslim peoples, and it must constantly strive to bring about the political, economic, and cultural unity of the Islamic world.¹¹⁴

In article 11 Iran emphasizes the unity of the Islamic world. The new leadership viewed its victory as a model for imitation by other Muslim countries and aimed to universalize its revolutionary appeal by exporting it. However, in the first decade after the Revolution, there was no success institutionalizing revolution abroad. According to Olivier Roy, there were two causes in the failure of the revolution to export itself abroad: “First the revolution was unable to transcend the Shi’a-Sunni divide to any substantial degree. ... Secondly, the revolution was carried unanimously by all Shi’a, even if the majority of non-Iranian Shi’a did feel solidarity.”¹¹⁵

¹¹³ “Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Olivier Roy, “The Impact of Iranian Revolution on the Middle East,” in *The Shi’a Worlds and Iran* (Saqi, 2010), 30.

Without any doubt, Khomeini's success created admiration in Muslim countries, but mutual suspicions between parties and deep religious and political divisions, even in Shiite World, prevented other countries from accepting Khomeini's leadership.

Mutual Perceptions between Sunnis and Shiites

At this point, in order to understand the level of the schism in Islam, we look at the distribution of the two major Islamic sects. According to Pew Research Center, Shiites constitute 10-13% of the total Muslim population. Almost 75% of the total Shiite population live in Iran, Pakistan, India and Iraq. Shiite Muslims make up a majority of the total population in four countries: Iran (where ~93% of Muslims are Shiite), Azerbaijan (~70%), Bahrain (~70%) and Iraq (~67%).¹¹⁶

These two main sects of Islam divide into branches. Sunnism includes followers of the *Hanafi*, *Shafi*, *Maliki* and *Hanbali* (Wahhabi or Salafi movement) schools of Islamic jurisprudence. Shiism includes Twelvers (*Ithna Asharis*), Seveners (Ismailis), *Zaydis* and *Alawis* as shown below

The Sunni- Shiite divide is not just a simple differing interpretation of Islam; it is also a result of a 1,400-year old political disagreement. The world's 1.6 billion Muslims all agree that 'there is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah (*Shahada*-the declaration of faith). Muhammad is the last prophet of Allah who has brought the final revelation.' To make this profession of faith is the first prerequisite for those who wants to become a Muslim. While Sunnis believe that Quran, the practice of the Prophet and his teachings (the sunnah) are sufficient to live Islam, the Shiites believe that ayatollahs are divinely guided and considered as

¹¹⁶ Pew Research Center, "Mapping the Global Muslim Population," *Pew Research Center*, 2009, <http://www.pewforum.org/2009/10/07/mapping-the-global-muslim-population/>.

the only legitimate interpreters of the Quran. Furthermore, the Shiites see their ayatollahs as reflections of God on earth. The perceived exaggerated status of Ali and of ayatollahs have led Sunnis to accuse Shiites of heresy.

Analyzing the mutual acceptance of the two principal sects helps to clarify the level of division and the nature of contemporary relations. A Pew Research Center analysis makes crystal clear the level of mutual acceptance between two main sects of Islam.

According to the Pew Research Center survey, the acceptance of Sunnis is universally very high; the answer to the question of whether Sunnis are Muslims is ‘yes’ by more than half of respondents in 17 of the 23 countries. For instance, in three countries with significant Shiite population -Iraq (~67%), Lebanon (~50%) and Azerbaijan (~70%)- the majority agree that Sunnis are members of the Islamic community.¹¹⁷

Table 2: The Acceptance of Sunnis as Muslims in the States that Have Shiite Majorities

	% of Shiites in the Total Population	% of the acceptance of Sunnis as Muslims
Iraq	~67	99
Lebanon	~50	97
Azerbaijan	~70	78

Source: Pew Research Center, 2012¹¹⁸

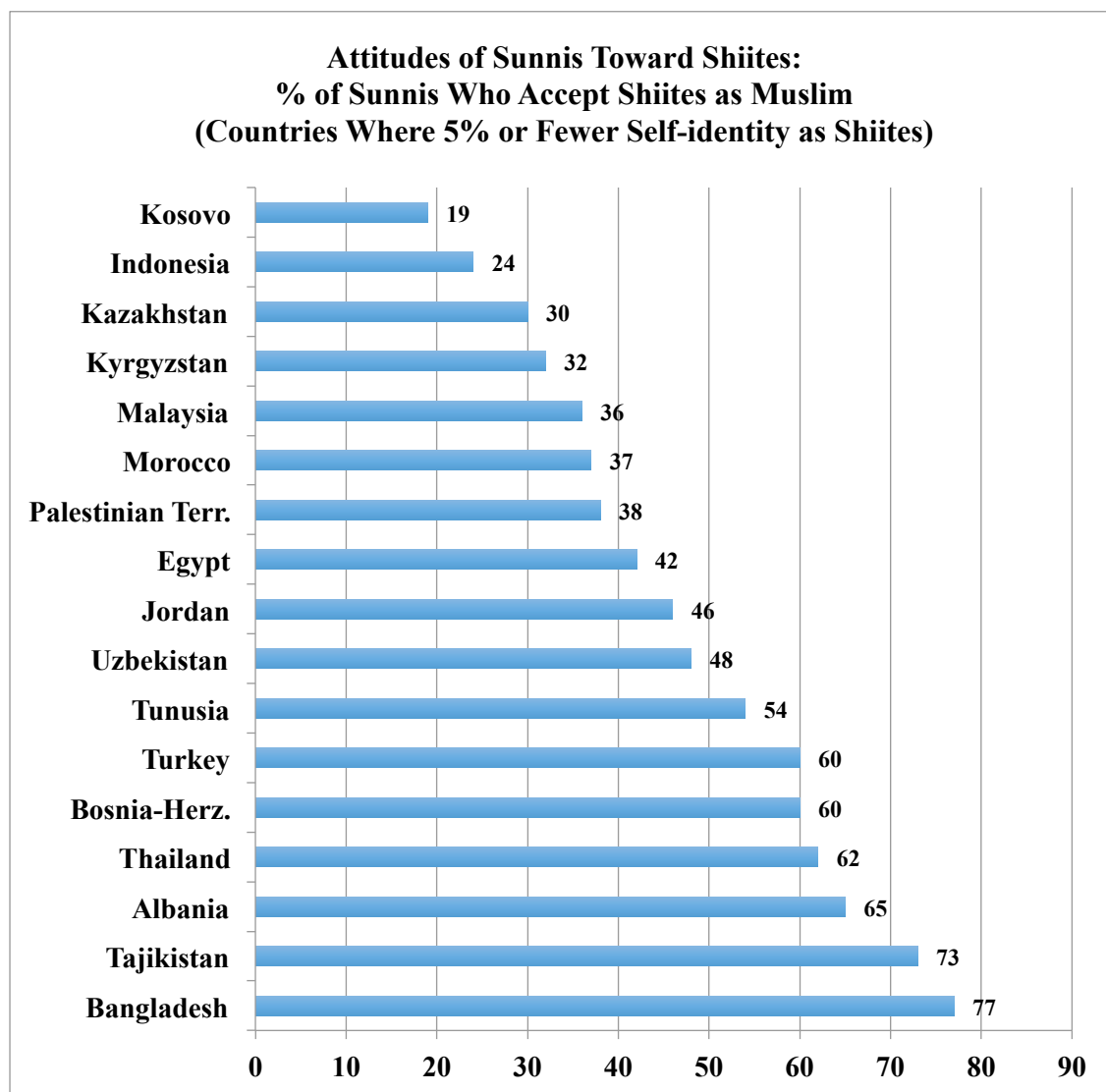
The acceptance of Sunnis as Muslims even in Shiite dominant states is very high. However, the converse is not nearly as true. In 11 of the 23 countries, the acceptance of Shiites as Muslims is not higher than %50 of total respondents. This value is lower particularly in

¹¹⁷ Pew Research Center, “The World’s Muslims: Unity and Diversity,” *Pew Research Center*, 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/08/09/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-executive-summary/>.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

countries where Shiites 5% or less of the population.¹¹⁹

Figure 5: Percentage of Sunnis Who Accept Shiites as Muslim (Countries Where 5% or Fewer Self-identity as Shiites)



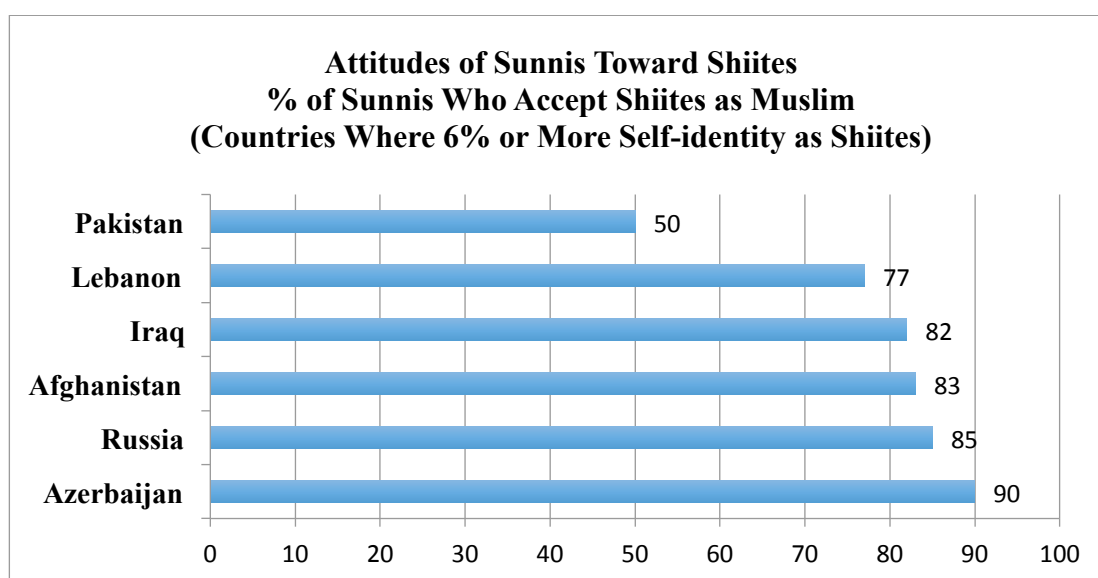
Source: Pew Research Center, 2012¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

Unsurprisingly, in countries where 6% or more of Muslims self-identify as Shiite, the acceptance of Shiites as Muslims is higher. It ranges from 90% in Azerbaijan, to 85% in Russia, to 83% in Afghanistan, to 82% in Iraq, to 77% to Lebanon. The sole exception is Pakistan where the approximate percentage of the Shiite population constitutes 10-15%, and half of the correspondents from Pakistan recognize Shiites as Muslims.¹²¹

Figure 6: Percentage of Sunnis (Countries Where 6% or More Self-identity as Shiites)



Source: Pew Research Center, 2012¹²²

In the context of the survey, if we focus on the countries that are in the Iran's region and possibly related to it, Jordan, the Palestinian territories, and Egypt, majorities of the populations do not accept Shiites as Muslim.

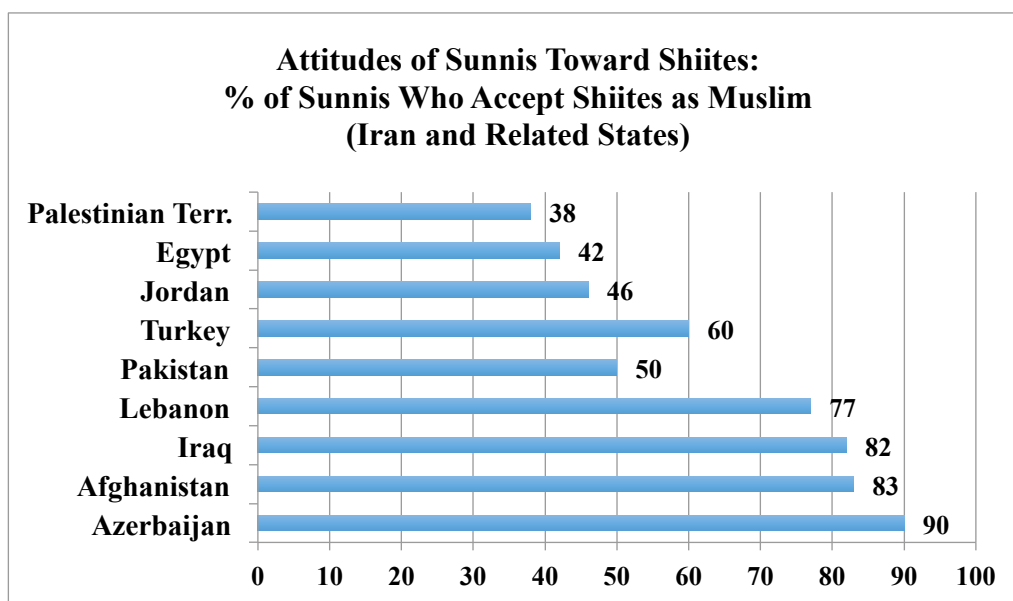
From these findings, it can be said that in those where there is a substantial Shiite population mutual recognition between Sunnis and Shiites is higher. On the other hand, Sunni

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

dominant countries have a significant bias against accepting Shiites as Muslims.

Figure 7: Percentage of Sunnis Who Accept Shiites as Muslim (Iran and Related States)



Source: Pew Research Center, 2012¹²³

Without question, the Iranian Revolution created initial enthusiasm among other Muslim nations, but after a time, Khomeini's call for Islamic upheaval did not appeal broadly to Arab Muslims. Sunnis' psychological resistance stems from the 1,400-year old religious-political Sunni–Shiite divide but was not the only reason for the failure of the revolution to export itself abroad. The start of the Iran–Iraq war in 1980, just after the Iranian Revolution, deepened the split between Iran and the Sunni-dominated Arab world. According to Roy, this dynamic created another geostrategic factor: 'Persians' against 'Arabs.' He states "two vectors interacted here: for the Arabs, Arab and Sunni solidarity; for all Sunni Islamists, condemnation of millenarist Shiite

¹²³ Ibid.

theories and role of the imam and as such, of Khomeini.”¹²⁴

Iran’s expansionist ambitions were seen as a threat by Sunnis and thus triggered sectarian tensions between Shiite and Sunnis. To balance this threat Sunni dominant states, namely Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, encouraged the development of Sunni movements whose inspiration was Salafist. Increasing the influence of Salafist and Wahhabi sects was intended to isolate the Shiite and caused them “to lose all hope to reach out to Sunnis, but *to face* the emergence of a Sunni religious movement that was both radical and anti- Shiite.”¹²⁵ The Revolution unquestionably moved different Islamic groups from a phase of quiet passivity into activism.

In the meantime, Iran gave up expansionism and began to follow a more pragmatic policy. Instead of expansionism, Iran supports Shiite movements in neighboring states. Iran’s support for Hezbollah has increased Iran’s weight in the regional balance of power.

The Taif agreement brought an end to the Lebanese sectarian civil war and made it possible for Hezbollah to enter into Lebanese politics. This ‘revealed the foreign policy shift of Iran, which strove for rapprochement with the conservative Arab states during Rafsanjani’s presidency.’¹²⁶

Additionally, after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, the US-led ‘war on terror’ removed Iran’s two principal enemies; Saddam Hussein’s Sunni-dominated regime in Iraq and the Sunni fundamentalist regime of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Thus, inadvertently, Iran gained an active transnational role in the regional power vacuum.

Salamay and Othman argue that “the so-called ‘war on terror’ has, in effect, not only removed key obstacles from the path of an expansionist Iranian foreign policy agenda but has

¹²⁴ Roy, “The Impact of Iranian Revolution on the Middle East,” 29.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 41.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

also provided a rational pretext to justify the revival of an ideological Shiite agenda.”¹²⁷

At the same time, despite a sectarian divide, Tehran has always supported the Sunni Palestinian cause to position itself as a defender of the Muslim world.

The pro-Iranian Shiite domination of political power in Iraq, the relations with the Alawite Shiite Assad regime and the success of Lebanese Shiite Hezbollah reinforced the power of Shiites from the Mediterranean to Pakistan. Naturally, several Sunni leaders have urged the West to counter the expansion of Iran’s sphere of influence and its rising power in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.

Conclusion

With the 1979 Revolution, Iran drastically changed from being a secular and autocratic monarchy to an Islamic Republic. In Iran, the Revolution did not simply result in a change of leadership, it also completely transformed Iran’s foreign policy and international standing. The revolution made Iran prominent on the international scene but also severely isolated the country.

As Skocpol states the 1979 Revolution did not occur as commonly thought, it was made by ‘a set of cultural and organizational forms systematically socially embedded in the society,’ that developed over the course of Iranian history. In a series of events, the Tobacco Monopoly revolt (1890-1891), the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1906), the Oil Nationalization Movement of Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh (1951-1953), and the Iranian Islamic Revolution (1978-1979), which were all reactions to foreign influence over Iran and the exploitation of its wealth and resources by foreign powers.

The clergy and Shiism have played a disproportionate role in these reactions. Since 1501,

¹²⁷ Imad Salamey and Zanoobia Othman, “Shia Revival and Welayat Al-Faqih in the Making of Iranian Foreign Policy,” *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 12, no. 2 (2011): 211, doi:10.1080/21567689.2011.591983.

when Shiism became the state religion along with the compulsory conversion of the Iranian people to Shiism as a political reaction against the expansion of foreign influence, Shiism and the clergy have been significant actors in Iranian politics, which has also diminished the potential fragility of an ethnically heterogeneous nation.

The 1979 Iranian revolution created a hybrid and a unique political system. In addition to the democratic elements of the newly established regime, the clergy's influential role in society was institutionalized as the concept of *velayet-e faqih* in the political structure. The dominant role of the appointed political institutions controlled by the clergy over the elected political institutions has been the key feature of Iranian politics.

The 1979 revolution altered not only Iran's internal dynamics but also led to a dramatic change in Iranian foreign policy. Iranian foreign policy switched from pro-Western bias to one that is fundamentally anti-Western, anti-US and anti-Israel.

After the revolution, the fundamental principles driving the conduct of Iranian foreign policy can be summarized as 'sovereignty', 'independence', 'peaceful relations with states that are not hostile to Iran or to Islam in general', 'opposition to any form of intervention and subjugation' and, particularly, two principles, 'neither east nor west' and 'export of the revolution' which became the primary goals of Iranian foreign policy. While the former principal can be characterized as pacific, the latter principal envisions activist goal, which have provoked Sunni states in the region.

Without any doubt, the Iranian revolution initially created enthusiasm among many Muslim nations, but after a time, Khomeini's call for Islamic upheaval did not appeal to Arab and Sunni Muslims. In light of Pew Research Center research, it can be said that the rift between Sunni and Shiite Islam does not originate simply from a different interpretation of Islam. There is

a longtime historical rivalry and hostility between them. While the acceptance of Sunnis as Muslims is very high even in Shiite dominant states, the acceptance of Shiites as Muslims is relatively low in the Muslim world. As noted in the survey, in 11 of the 23 majority Muslim countries, the acceptance of Shiites as Muslims is not higher than 50% of total respondents.¹²⁸ This figure is very important in understanding the rift between two sects. The Iran–Iraq war was another factor which deepened the rift, particularly among Arabs. The war emphasized nationalist goals, in the sense of ‘Persians against Arabs.’

In the meantime, Iran understood the limits of expansionist policies because of the latent hostility of Sunni Arab states for religious reasons and the psychological barrier of Arab versus Persian nationalism. Nevertheless, Iran supplemented a rational and pragmatic foreign policy pre-revolution with more ideologically driven policies. Iran chose to support indigenous Shiite movements in other states to amplify its influence in the region. Due to Iran’s dominant states in the Shiite world, and because it is religiously well-institutionalized and organized, Iran sees itself as the natural leader of the Shiites. Although rational and pragmatic policies are deployed by the ruling elites, the presumption of Shiite Islamic leadership and deeply held anti-Western, anti-US and anti-Israel beliefs will continue to have a significant impact on Iranian foreign policy.

¹²⁸ Pew Research Center, “The World’s Muslims: Unity and Diversity.”

CHAPTER III

CONCEPTUALIZING IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

GOALS

Introduction

Hill defines foreign policy as a “purposive action with the view towards promoting the interests of a single political community or state.”¹ This “purposive action” may be a product of a state’s internal agenda, as well as a response to other actors’ actions in the external world. As stated by Hunter, there are two determinants of purposive action: internal and external. The interaction between state’s domestic needs and realities, and the features of the external environment within which they operate, determines the pattern of a state’s external behavior; to wit, the state’s foreign policy.²

This chapter will discuss the characteristics and determinants of Iran’s foreign policy, as well as its foreign policy goals. To this end, the chapter is divided into the following sections;

- Foreign policy decision-making: key individuals and bodies. This section introduces key individuals and bodies in charge of Iran’s foreign policy making, including their functions, responsibilities, and limits.
- Evolution of Iranian foreign policy and the emergence of factions. This section deals with the evolution of Iran’s foreign policy since the revolution and the factions that have emerged under the rule of two supreme leaders (Khomeini (1980-1989) and Khamenei (1989-present)), and four presidents (Rafsanjani

¹ Christopher Hill, *The Changing Politics of Foreign Policy* (Houndmills England ; New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 285.

² Shireen Hunter, *Iran’s Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era : Resisting the New International Order* (Santa Barbara, Calif: Praeger, 2010), 17.

(1989-1997), Khatami (1997-2005), Ahmadinejad (2005-2013), and Rouhani (2013-present)). In this evolution, the roles of domestic, regional and global improvements, the roles of factions and the limits of ideology and pragmatism are examined. The Khomeini period is addressed as a whole period under Khomeini's rule without inclusion of presidential periods during his rule because of Khomeini's control of decision-making.

- The characteristics of Iranian foreign policy and its foreign policy goals. This final section describes the characteristics of Iran's foreign policy and foreign policy goals.

Foreign Policy Decision-Making and Key Individuals and Bodies in Charge of Foreign Policy

Iranian foreign policy decision-making is complex and multi-faceted due to the dual structure of the state's post-revolutionary political system. In addition to theocratic and republican features of the political system, the state's formal and informal power centers create different and often conflicting goals in foreign policy making. The most important components of the formal power structure are the Supreme Leader, the President, the Foreign Minister, the Council of the Guardian, the Expediency Council, The Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), and the Parliament, which are responsible for Iranian foreign policy and impact decision-making.

The Supreme Leader is constitutionally the 'guardian jurist' and 'leader of the Islamic revolution,' and ranks above the state's President. Posch states that the Bureau of the Supreme Leader is regarded as the country's real power center. The office is an active at all levels of

policy-making, including foreign policy.³ The Supreme Leader approves or disapproves foreign policy initiatives and has the final say in foreign policy decision-making.

Although the Supreme Leader is the most prominent and powerful political figure in Iran, foreign policy-making also depends on the President. Particularly after 1989, on the basis of the constitution, the President and his office have gained an increased role in foreign policy making.⁴ According to Article 125 of the Iranian constitution, “[t]he President or his legal representative has the authority to sign treaties, protocols, contracts, and agreements concluded by the Iranian government with other governments, as well as agreements pertaining to international organizations, after obtaining the approval of the Islamic Consultative Assembly.”⁵ The only limitation is that the President must be in agreement with the Supreme Leader. This constitutional subordination to the Supreme Leader is the most serious structural impediment constraining the Iranian President’s powers.⁶

The foreign minister is responsible for the conduct of Iran’s foreign policy and implementing decisions approved by the Supreme Leader, but has a very limited role in determining policies and strategies.

The parliament (the Majlis) does not interfere in the executive’s foreign policy decision-making. However, the parliament discusses foreign policies and deputies individually can make public statements on policies. Additionally, in order to sign international agreements, treaties,

³ Walter Posch, *The Third World, Global Islam and Pragmatism: The Making of Iranian Foreign Policy* (Stiftung Wiss. und Politik, 2013), 11.

⁴ Eva Patricia Rakel, *Power, Islam, and Political Elite in Iran : A Study on the Iranian Political Elite from Khomeini to Ahmadinejad / by Eva Patricia Rakel.*, International Comparative Social Studies ; v. 18 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2009), 147.

⁵ “The Constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran,” accessed August 17, 2015, http://www.iranchamber.com/government/laws/constitution_ch09.php.

⁶ Mahmood Monshipouri and Manochehr Dorraj, “Iran’s Foreign Policy: A Shifting Strategic Landscape,” *Middle East Policy* 20, no. 4 (2013): 134.

memoranda of understanding, etc., the government needs the approval of the Majlis.⁷

The President and the parliament are constrained by the Guardian Council. The Guardian Council, which examines all laws passed by the parliament, is one of the most powerful bodies within the Iranian political structure. The council has the power to veto laws if it considers them inconsistent with the constitution and Islamic law.⁸ Thus, its role in foreign policy making is to ensure that foreign policy decisions are compatible with the constitution and Islamic law. Taking into account that half of the council's members are appointed by the Supreme Leader, it is clear that the Supreme Leader's influence on decision-making is not limited merely to 'approve/disapprove' authorization.

The Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) is another of the key institutions in which foreign policy is debated. Institutionally, the SNSC is responsible for coordinating, facilitating and streamlining activities on security and foreign policy.⁹ Article 176 of Iran's Constitution gives emphasis to the following responsibilities: "safeguarding the national interests and preserving the Islamic Revolution, territorial integrity, and national sovereignty."¹⁰ The SNSC is chaired by the President and includes the most important representatives of the military (the General Staff, the IRGC) and the secret service, the foreign minister, representatives of the Supreme Leader, and other ministers as required.^{11 12} The SNSC deals with highly sensitive security issues such as US-Iran relations and the nuclear dossier.

Another body in charge of foreign policy making decision-making is the Expediency Council. It was set up in 1988 by Ayatollah Khomeini because of stalemates between Parliament

⁷ Raketel, *Power, Islam, and Political Elite in Iran*, 2009, 147.

⁸ Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?*, 59.

⁹ Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era*, 30.

¹⁰ "The Constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran."

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Posch, *The Third World, Global Islam and Pragmatism*, 9.

and the Guardian Council. It was charged with mediating disputes between the two bodies. In April 1989, Khomeini ordered the revision of the 1979 Constitution to address the issues of leadership and constitutional recognition of the new Expediency Council.¹³

The Expediency Council is charged with the role of “determin[ing] expediency in cases in which there is a conflict between parliamentary legislation and the opinion of the Guardian Council.” The Expediency Council also responsible for “determining the general policies of the System” and “solving the challenges of the country,” as well as consulting on important issues that “are referred to it by the Leader” and “in consideration of the complete set of regulations outlined in the Constitution” as a “supreme consultative council for the Leadership of the System of the Islamic Republic of Iran.”¹⁴

As an advisory body to the Supreme Leader and a mediator between the Guardian Council and the Parliament, the Expediency Council “designs the Grand Strategy for the Iranian regime, and proposes guidelines for foreign policy.”¹⁵

Foreign policy in Iran is not formulated and conducted only by the President, his cabinet, and the Foreign Ministry. As stated by Warnaar, foreign policy “is a product of negotiation and competition among various powerful individuals and institutions.”¹⁶ At present, at least seven power centers can be identified as having input on foreign policy decision-making; the Supreme Leader, the President, the Foreign Minister, the Guardian Council, the Expediency Council, the SNSC, and the Parliament. While the most influential of these is the Supreme Leader (who must approve any final foreign policy decision), the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) and

¹³ Ali Gheissari, ed., *Contemporary Iran : Economy, Society, Politics* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 247.

¹⁴ “Iran Data Portal - Expediency Council Internal Bylaws,” accessed August 17, 2015, <http://www.princeton.edu/irandataportal/laws/institutionsgovernance/expediency-bylaws/>.

¹⁵ Abbas Maleki, “Decision Making in Iran’s Foreign Policy: A Heuristic Approach,” *Journal of Social Affairs* 73 (2002): 7.

¹⁶ Maaïke Warnaar, *Iranian Foreign Policy during Ahmadinejad : Ideology and Actions* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 3.

the Expediency Council also have significant influence on the basic direction of Iran's foreign policy and key foreign policy issues.

In this complex structure of foreign policy decision-making, the Supreme Leader occupies a central role. Posch explains the foreign policy decision-making mechanism as follows:

- Foreign policy analysis and the real opinion-forming process take place within the formal institutions.
- The decision-making process takes place formally (institutions) and informally (political networks) within the political elites, to which not only active but also former politicians belong, as do “non-political” clerics.
- The final decision is formulated by the Supreme Leader as a consensus reached by the political elite.¹⁷

As Posch states, in addition to the formal power structure, there are also informal power centers that impact the direction of Iran's foreign policy. In Iran’s political system, there are no conventional legal political parties. It is instead a system in which different political factions of the political elite represent different approaches to foreign policy.

The elaborate system of checks and balances, the inter-agency and factional rivalries, the veto power of the Supreme Leader, and ideological precepts make foreign policy decision-making inherently complicated and difficult to execute.^{18 19}

¹⁷ Posch, *The Third World, Global Islam and Pragmatism*, 7.

¹⁸ Hunter, *Iran’s Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era*, 30.

¹⁹ Anoushiravan Ehteshami, “Iran’s International Posture after the Fall of Baghdad,” *Middle East Journal* 58, no. 2 (April 1, 2004): 179–94.

Evolution of Iranian Foreign Policy and the Emergence of Factions

Since the mid-1980s, the Iranian political elite has gradually factionalized. Different approaches to policy-making and rivalries for power have created these factions. Saikal maintains that by 1987, three very loosely bonded factions, representing different approaches to policies, economics, sociocultural issues, and foreign relations, emerged on the scene: conservative, reformist and pragmatist.²⁰ As noted by Smith, this degree of political diversity did not disturb Khomeini, so long as the factions remained loyal to him and to certain fundamental principles of revolutionary Iran. Even after the death of Khomeini, the factions refrained from violating these principles. They have been aware that “their survival depended on the continuity of the regime and that their differences in approach to Iran’s Islamic transformation had to take secondary importance.”²¹ Thus, while there is a consensus on these principles among the factions, their differences stem from how they view how the principles should be put into practice.

The factions have emerged and transformed under the rule of two Supreme Leaders, Khomeini (1980-1989) and Khamenei (1989-present), and four presidents; Rafsanjani (1989-1997), Khatami (1997-2005), Ahmadinejad (2005-2013), and Rouhani (2013-present). Three factions have emerged on the scene. Factionalism in Iranian politics and its effects on policy-making is addressed under the leadership periods in the remaining section.

Khomeini Period

Walt argues that revolutionary foreign policy is primarily “a result of the ideology of the

²⁰ Amin Saikal, “The Roots of Iran’s Election Crisis,” *Survival* 51, no. 5 (November 1, 2009): 94, doi:10.1080/00396330903309873.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

revolutionary movement.”²² Without a doubt, the 1979 Iranian Constitution reflects the worldview of its founder, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. This worldview is responsible for the revolutionary aspects of the state ideology and subsequently the revolutionary foreign policy. Following the revolution, due to an ideology that is a blend of Persian nationalism and Khomeini’s interpretation of Shiism, Iranian foreign policy moved from a status quo pro-western ideology to an ideologically and revolutionary anti-western one. The key revolutionary aspects that have shaped Iran’s foreign policy can be traced through the following statements in the constitution;

- Framing the foreign policy of the country on the basis of Islamic criteria,
- The expansion and strengthening of Islamic brotherhood and public cooperation among all the people,
- The complete elimination of imperialism and the prevention of foreign influence,
- All Muslims form a single nation, and the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has the duty of formulating its general policies with a view to cultivating the friendship and unity of all Muslim peoples,
- Rejection of all forms of domination,
- The preservation of the independence of the country in all respects and its territorial integrity,
- The defense of the rights of all Muslims, non-alignment with respect to the hegemonic superpowers,
- The maintenance of mutually peaceful relations with all non-belligerent States,
- Any form of agreement resulting in foreign control over the natural resources,

²² Stephen M. Walt, *Revolution and War*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 325.

economy, army, or culture of the country, as well as other aspects of national life, is forbidden,

- The attainment of independence, freedom, and rule of justice and truth to be the right of all people of the world. Accordingly, while scrupulously refraining from all forms of interference in the internal affairs of other nations, it supports the just struggles of the mustad'afun (oppressed) against the mustakbirun (oppressors) in every corner of the globe.²³

In the light of these key aspects of the constitution, the key characteristics of Iran's revolutionary foreign policy can be listed briefly as follows: rejection of all forms of domination, preservation of independence, non-alignment, equality, resistance, anti-imperialism, nationalism, self-sufficiency, establishment of relations with peace-seeking states, Islamic unity and responsibility for other Muslim and 'oppressed' nations.

In the early days of the Islamic Revolution, these characteristics were crystallized as two main policies; 'Neither East nor West' and the 'Export of the Revolution.' The former policy did not mean only being an independent foreign policy-maker, but also non-involvement in the expensive military/security struggle between the East and the West and the improvement of relationships with Muslim and non-Muslim regional neighbors.²⁴ Thus, Iran positioned itself in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) where it could pursue these post-revolutionary goals.

However, several unpredictable post-Revolution events deeply impacted the implementation of the aforementioned policies; namely, the American hostage crisis, the Iran-Iraq war, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. As a result of these events, Iran's relations with

²³ "The Constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran," chap. 3, 11, 152–154.

²⁴ Houman A. Sadri, "Iran and the Caucasus States in the 21st Century: A Study of Foreign Policy Goals and Means," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 14, no. 3 (September 1, 2012): 383, doi:10.1080/19448953.2012.720787.

the United States and the West has become a defining paradigm of Iranian foreign policy.²⁵

The US/West's attitudes during Iran–Iraq war, including the West's "closed eyes" to Iraq's chemical weapon usage, the US's attacks on Iranian oil rigs in the Persian Gulf in 1987, and the shooting down of an Iranian civilian commercial airliner in 1988, created a measure of distrust and anger in Iran toward the United States and the West that has never dissipated. Furthermore, the Cold War conditions and 'Neither East nor West' policy totally isolated Iran at the regional and global level.

Likewise, the policy of the 'Export of the Islamic Revolution' failed too. The revolution initially created enthusiasm among Muslim nations, but after a time the call for Islamic upheaval did not resonate with the Muslim world. Raket argues that there are two main reasons for the failure:

- (1) The mainly Sunni populations in the Persian Gulf states had no interest in following the Iranian Shi'ite Islamic revolution;
- (2) Iran's interest in overthrowing other governments declined, due to its own problems, such as the war with Iraq and the domestic economic crisis.²⁶

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Sunni–Shiite divide is not simply due to a different interpretation of Islam. There also is a deep rift in mutual acceptance between Sunnis and Shiites. This divide deepened as a result of Iran's ambition to spread its revolution into Muslim states and its assertion of Muslims unity under its own leadership. The commencement of the Iran–Iraq war in 1980, which created a sense of 'Persians against Arabs,' further deepened the split. These policies and events have fueled sectarian conflict between Sunnis and Shiites, creating a hostile environment for Iran and increasing its isolation.

²⁵ Posch, *The Third World, Global Islam and Pragmatism*, 16.

²⁶ Raket, *Power, Islam, and Political Elite in Iran*, 2009, 151.

In the meantime, Khomeini and the ruling elite realized the impracticability of these expansionist and ideological policies. These political failures, combined with economic challenges, gradually pushed Iran to adopt a more pragmatist approach in foreign policy making.

According to Ehteshami, there were two main political factions during the first decade of the revolution: the Conservative faction and the Radical Left.²⁷ With Khomeini's elimination of the secular and liberal Islamic social forces from power, the Radical left faction became dominant just after the revolution. It held the view of a very strict isolationist policy towards the West, a dogmatic policy based on state-controlled and egalitarian economic policy and export of the Revolution.²⁸

In the mid-1980s, a more pragmatic domestic and foreign policy orientation gradually emerged because of the pressure of economic strain, the collapse in oil prices, the question of whether the revolution could still be exported by Iran without conflict, and harsh conditions of the war with Iraq. Therefore, as stated by Sadri "from 1985 to the death of Khomeini in 1989, the Islamic Republic held more talks with both the East and the West and began to increase economic relations without compromising its overall commitment to self-reliance and determination."²⁹

The transition from ideologically driven foreign policy to pragmatism can be exemplified in the case of Iran's arms deal with the United States and recognition of UN Resolution 598 in 1988 (calling for a ceasefire between Iran and Iraq). As noted by Ramazani, the secret purchase of arms from the United States and Israel was the most striking example of pragmatism

²⁷ Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Islamic Fundamentalism and Political Islam," *Issues in World Politics*, 1997, 31.

²⁸ Raket, *Power, Islam, and Political Elite in Iran*, 2009, 151.

²⁹ Sadri, "Iran and the Caucasus States in the 21st Century," 384.

trumping ideology in Iran's foreign policy during Khomeini's lifetime.³⁰ To defend Iran against Iraqi aggression and to meet Iran's arms needs, Khomeini believed that a deal with even the 'the Great Satan' (the US) and 'the lesser Satan' (Israel) was advisable.³¹

The realities of international politics, and the need for foreign capital and technical expertise to carry out economic reconstruction, convinced Khomeini to temper the ideological principles of the early days of the Islamic Republic, which were mainly isolationist, confrontational, and influenced by his own interpretation of Shiite doctrine.

The end of the costly Iran–Iraq war, the death of Khomeini, the collapse of the bipolar international system, and the failure of expansionist policies pushed Iran to reevaluate its domestic and foreign policy orientation. Pragmatists and reformists' measures were proposed against revolutionary policies in order to enhance domestic and regional stability and to integrate Iran into the international system. However, anti-Americanism, anti-Zionism and the presumption of leadership in Muslim world (at least in rhetoric) have remained important pillars of Iranian state ideology as a heritage of the first decade of the revolution.

Khamenei Period

After Khomeini's death, the Assembly of Experts appointed the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, who played an important role in the Revolution and served as the president for two successive terms from 1981 to 1989.³²

Khamenei is not as charismatic and powerful as Ayatollah Khomeini, but has substantial

³⁰ R. K. Ramazani, "Ideology and Pragmatism in Iran's Foreign Policy," *Middle East Journal* 58, no. 4 (October 1, 2004): 556.

³¹ R. K. Ramazani, "Reflections on Iran's Foreign Policy: Spiritual Pragmatism," *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs* 1, no. 1 (2010): 58.

³² Akbar Ganji, "Who Is Ali Khamenei: The Worldview of Iran's Supreme Leader," *Foreign Affairs*, October 2013, 247.

influence in the government. Constitutionally, his power is undebatable, and the dominance of the Supreme Leader in Iranian politics has continued. He continues to control important institutions such as the courts, military, and media by appointing the heads of the judiciary, state radio and television, the regular armed forces and the IRGC. Moreover, he is still very influential on the Guardian Council, which has authority over parliamentary decisions and the selection of electoral candidates. These constitutional powers make the power of the Supreme Leader unchallengeable, whomever is appointed to this position.

Since becoming the Supreme Leader, Khamenei has tended to follow Khomeini's principles instead of initiating his own. While he has been trying to balance ideology and the realities of international politics, he has avoided both confrontation and accommodation with the West in general.

When he was president, Khamenei launched an 'open door' policy in 1984 and stated, "Iran seeks to have rational, sound and healthy relations with all countries."³³ Khamenei's primary criteria for good relations were reciprocity and mutual respect. As stated by Ganji, without any doubt he is quite rational; however his deeply rooted views and suspicion of the US's intentions toward the Islamic Republic have been an obstacle to any serious improvement in the relationship between Iran and West, particularly with the United States.³⁴

Despite Khamenei's rooted anti-Western and anti-imperial views, pragmatist approaches have been employed during his Supreme Leadership. In order to achieve foreign policy goals, this was inevitable. Accordingly, Islamic ideology has become less significant in policy-making.

Khamenei's lack of authority has affected domestic political improvements as well as foreign policymaking. He was not able to suppress different factional approaches and impose

³³ Ramazani, "Reflections on Iran's Foreign Policy," 59.

³⁴ Ganji, "Who Is Ali Khamenei," 25.

consensus. Thus, Khamenei followed Khomeini's tendency to seek conciliation among factions. Particularly with the election of Khatami, his reformist domestic and foreign policies during his presidency were seen as threats to the ideological basis of the regime by the Supreme Leader and conservatives. This concern was doubled with regional developments. Khatami period developments will be addressed broadly in the following section.

Rafsanjani Period

In 1989, Hashemi Rafsanjani won the presidential election and became the first President of Khamenei's era. Following the death of Khomeini, Rafsanjani has been one of the most influential actors in Iranian politics. The 1989 amendment of the Iranian constitution that gave the President more decision-making power and made him an important actor in setting the direction of Iranian foreign policy.

President Rafsanjani abandoned Khomeini's foreign policy and its adherence to isolationism. According to Soltani and Amiri, Rafsanjani's foreign policy had two pillars:

- Solving economic problems that the Iran-Iraq war had caused.
- Improving Iran's relations with other countries.³⁵

These two pillars were interconnected. The reconstruction of Iran's economy necessitated improving Iran relations with other countries in order to get more foreign investments to develop the Iranian economy. To balance the traditional principles of Iran and the necessities and realities of international politics, he followed a pragmatist policy.

Therefore, during his presidency, Rafsanjani attempted to improve Iran's relationship with European countries that had two permanent members on the UN Security Council. He

³⁵ Fakhreddin Soltani and Reza Ekhtiari Amiri, "Foreign Policy of Iran after Islamic Revolution," *Journal of Politics and Law* 3 (2010): 203.

aimed to make Iran's economy open to European countries. He also tried to improve hostile relations with Sunni Arab states, such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and the smaller Gulf monarchies. Moreover, Iran expanded relations with Russia, as well as the newly independent republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus after the fall of Soviet Union. Ramazani states that "with no ideological baggage he emphasized Iran's common interests in culture, economic development and trade with these states."³⁶ Additionally he moderated pressures on Iranian society in domestic politics. All these policies have been seen as the constructive improvements by West.³⁷

In general, it can be said that Iran's foreign policy under Rafsanjani was based on pragmatic approaches that took into account geopolitical necessities and Iran's economic and socio-cultural needs.

During Rafsanjani presidency, as Rakel states, a power struggle existed between three factions, the Conservative faction, the Radical left faction, and the Pragmatist faction that had parted from the Conservative faction. In time, the Radical Left faction was eliminated from power and the rivalry remained only between the Conservative and the Pragmatist factions. The Conservative faction accepted liberal economic measures, but opposed Rafsanjani's pragmatic foreign policy and liberal approaches on socio-economic issues.³⁸ Liberal socio-economic measures and a pragmatic foreign policy did not cause much concern for Khamenei; instead he took a mediator role between the factions.

³⁶ Ramazani, "Reflections on Iran's Foreign Policy," 59.

³⁷ Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era*, 228.

³⁸ Rakel, *Power, Islam, and Political Elite in Iran*, 2009, 67.

Khatami Period

In the May 1997 elections, Mohammad Khatami was elected President of the Islamic Republic. He kept Rafsanjani's pragmatist foreign policy approach and focused more on domestic issues. Khatami, as the leading actor of the Reformist faction, attempted to avoid past ideological priorities. Instead he tried to improve basic principles of a democratic political system, such as freedom of speech, the rule of law, civil society and pluralism.³⁹ Needless to say, his reformist agenda that advocated these democratic values was "an unprecedented bid for reintegration of the Iranian society into the modern international system."⁴⁰ In Ramazani's words "democracy at home and peace abroad were two sides of the same coin."⁴¹

In addition to political reforms in domestic affairs, Khatami's presidency inaugurated important changes in Iranian foreign policy. The post-Soviet and post-Iran–Iraq war environment was the main reason for this policy reorientation. Afghanistan and Pakistan were in chaos and challenged by Wahhabist religious fanaticism. The newly independent states of Central Asia and the Caucasus were trying to overcome weak social, political and economic conditions. Iraq was suffering from sectarian and ethnic tensions. There were very hostile relations with pro-American Sunni regimes.⁴² Last and most importantly, there was the growing US presence in the region.

To minimize uncertainties in this chaotic environment, Khatami promoted a strategy for improving Iran's regional and international relations. According to Ramazani, this strategy consisted of three general components, "decontainment, deterrence, and détente." In Ramazani's

³⁹ Soltani and Amiri, "Foreign Policy of Iran after Islamic Revolution," 203.

⁴⁰ Ramazani, "Ideology and Pragmatism in Iran's Foreign Policy," 557.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Imad Salamey and Zanoobia Othman, "Shia Revival and Welayat Al-Faqih in the Making of Iranian Foreign Policy," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 12, no. 2 (June 1, 2011): 203.

words:

Decontainment aims at circumventing the American policy of isolating Iran economically, diplomatically, and militarily across the world. Deterrence aims at sufficient military capability to deter any other act of aggression such as Iraq's against Iran, especially in its now even more dangerous neighborhood," to use Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright's words. India, Israel, and Pakistan are three nuclear powers in the vicinity of Iran. And detente aims not only at assisting the other two goals of Iranian foreign policy but also at overcoming the deepening pains of what President Khatami calls Iran's 'sick economy.'⁴³

On the basis of this strategy, Khatami tried to behave less ideologically and promote relations with European countries, the stability of the region, and active participation in international organizations.

According to Soltani and Amiri "[d]etente policy caused European countries to change their policy towards Iran; they tried to convince the United States to change its offensive policy. Changing European attitudes toward Iran strengthened Iran's position and power in the region...⁴⁴ Khatami's government also initiated additional efforts to improve relations with the US.

In the aftermath of 9/11, within hours after the attacks by al-Qaeda extremists, Khatami condemned the attack. As noted by Ramazani "Khamenei was the first cleric in the Muslim world to call for 'holy war' (jihad) against terrorism as a 'global scourge,' and many Iranians held candlelight vigils for the American victims of terrorism."⁴⁵ The Khatami government cooperated with the US against the Taliban regime, which had harbored the anti-American al-Qaeda terrorists in Afghanistan. Relations between the United States and Iran seemed to be warming up. However, following President Bush's 2002 "Axis of Evil" speech in which "the U.S. charges Iran with sponsoring terrorism, pursuing weapons of mass destruction, exerting a

⁴³ Rouhollah K. Ramazani, *Independence without Freedom: Iran's Foreign Policy* / R. K. Ramazani. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013, 2013), 173.

⁴⁴ Soltani and Amiri, "Foreign Policy of Iran after Islamic Revolution," 203.

⁴⁵ Ramazani, "Reflections on Iran's Foreign Policy," 62.

destabilizing influence in western Afghanistan, and possibly harboring Al Qaeda fugitives,”⁴⁶ Khatami’s moderate domestic and international stance received its first major setback and opened a new era in Iran’s international relations. After the speech, US–Iran relations entered a long period of stalemate.⁴⁷

Until 2005, the end of Khatami’s second term, thanks to Khatami’s moderate domestic and international stance and despite the “Axis of Evil” speech, the Khatami administration skillfully managed to handle the nuclear issue by negotiating with European powers. No additional sanctions were imposed on Iran. These policies produced economic growth to some extent.

From 1997 to 2005, during Khatami’s two terms, rivalries took place among the Conservative faction, the Pragmatist faction, and the Reformist faction. Khatami institutionalized the Reformist faction that had emerged out of the Radical Left faction when it had ceased to exist. During his presidency, his preferences were to improve basic principles of the democratic political system, reintegrate Iranian society into the modern international system, and subsequently to save Iran from economic crisis by focusing on the expansion of trade, cooperative security measures, and diplomatic dialogue. While the Conservatives priorities were to preserve and even strengthen the regime, the Reformists were mainly concerned with improving the country’s position in the global economy and international system.⁴⁸

However, Khatami could not be successful in continuing his moderate domestic and foreign policy, and he lost the support of the Iranian population despite a modest economic recovery, mainly because of resistance to these reforms by the Conservative faction. The

⁴⁶ “Iran And The Axis Of Evil - How Iran Entered The Axis,” accessed August 18, 2015, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/tehran/axis/map.html>.

⁴⁷ Ramazani, “Reflections on Iran’s Foreign Policy,” 62.

⁴⁸ Raket, *Power, Islam, and Political Elite in Iran*, 2009, 167.

Conservative faction feared losing its power and thought the regime was under threat and thus supported Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the presidential elections of 2005.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

Since the end of the Iran–Iraq War, Iran’s foreign policy switched to one that prioritized cooperation and interaction with the West from one that was isolationist. Economic-political realities and civil society demands necessitated this transition during the Rafsanjani (1989-1997) and Khatami (1997-2005) administrations.

When President Ahmadinejad won the presidential election in 2005, he introduced a new tone in Iranian foreign policy orientation that rejected the foreign policy based on cooperation and interaction with the West that was followed by the two previous Presidents of Iran. Instead, he adopted a foreign policy based on confrontation with the West and interaction with other states.

His confrontationist approach aggressively criticized the status quo of the international system, the dominant powers of this system (the West, particularly Israel and the United States). According to him, during the Cold War international organizations were tools of the superpowers for shaping the international environment according to their interests, and the end of the Cold War did not change the nature of the international system.^{49, 50}

Ahmadinejad also tried to create a balance against the heavy US presence in the region, and its alliance with Israel. He tried to improve diplomatic and friendly relations with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries, continued the strategic alliance with Syria, and supported

⁴⁹ Soltani and Amiri, “Foreign Policy of Iran after Islamic Revolution,” 204.

⁵⁰ Amir M. Haji-Yousefi, “Iran’s Foreign Policy during Ahmadinejad: From Confrontation to Accommodation,” *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations* 9, no. 2 (2010): 11.

Hezbollah in Lebanon. To these ends, he intensely used anti-Israel rhetoric.

In addition to neighboring states, he aimed for active interaction with Islamic and Third World countries.⁵¹ He tried to strengthen ties with Latin American and African states such as “Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Senegal, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, by signing important cooperation, commercial and strategic contracts.”⁵²

Furthermore, Iran joined as an observer to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which aims to promote regional intergovernmental security. The goal of this policy was to improve closer ties with major countries like China and Russia, which are two permanent members of the UN Security Council. Iran’s involvement in the SCO, and subsequently improving good political and economic relations with China and Russia, empowered it in the UN and helped it to overcome the challenges confronting Iran resulting from Western-imposed economic sanctions.⁵³

During Ahmadinejad’s presidency, relations with Israel and debates on Iran’s nuclear program became prevailing topics. These two issues also shaped relations with the US. Needless to say, Israel has been viewed as an enemy of Iran since the Islamic Revolution; however, Ahmadinejad increased tensions radically and aggressively. He officially denied the Holocaust and announced “the plan of wiping Israel off from the map.” He criticized the restrictions placed on Iran’s development of nuclear weapons and declared that Iran would continue its nuclear programs.⁵⁴

The US’s setbacks in both Iraq and Afghanistan and the emergence of strong world criticisms of the US invasion of Iraq strengthened the Iranian regional position. After the 2005

⁵¹ Ibid., 13.

⁵² Ibid., 12.

⁵³ Nasser Saghafi-Ameri, “Iranian Foreign Policy: Concurrence of Ideology and Pragmatism,” *Middle East Institute Viewpoints: The Iranian Revolution at 30* (2009).

⁵⁴ Soltani and Amiri, “Foreign Policy of Iran after Islamic Revolution,” 205.

election, the rise of pro-Iranian Shiites to power in Iraq paved the way for gaining regional dominance.

During Ahmadinejad's presidency, Iran's foreign policy resembled the policies of the Revolution's early years. He seemed to be "a hardliner á la Khomeini and used a very hostile tone, especially against the US and Europe, and also Israel."⁵⁵ Ahmadinejad adopted a more confrontational, assertive and active foreign policy in order for Iran to become a regional hegemon. The IRGC was a very influential actor in this strategy. The IRGC's role in these developments was indisputably important and undeniable.

However, this new strategy not only deepened hostile relations with the US and Israel but also provoked Sunni-Arab states who were concerned about Ahmadinejad's nuclear ambitions and support for Shiite groups.

With Ahmadinejad's presidency, the faction of Neo-Conservatives came to the power.⁵⁶ Ahmadinejad presented himself as the true follower of Khomeini and revitalized the conservative faction in a new form. During the past four periods under the leaderships of Rafsanjani and Khatami (who were the heads of the Pragmatist and Reformist factions), the conservatives' influence waned. However, for the first time since Khomeini's death, the Neo-Conservatives – the new form of the conservative faction– seized power. According to Saikal, by "claiming that the United States and its allies, especially Israel, were determined to destroy the Islamic regime," Ahmadinejad tried to build Iran's military and nuclear power and maintain support for Iran's partners, including Syria, Lebanon's Hezbollah, and proxies in Iraq.⁵⁷

Despite his confrontational and aggressive foreign policy populism, rising inflation and

⁵⁵ Barry Rubin, "Iran: The Rise of a Regional Power," 186, accessed August 17, 2015, <http://www.rubincenter.org/meria/2006/09/Rubin.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Raket, *Power, Islam, and Political Elite in Iran*, 2009, 177.

⁵⁷ Saikal, "The Roots of Iran's Election Crisis," 97.

unemployment, UN sanctions over Iran's nuclear program, discontent with the regime's tight rule, and Khamenei's turning a "blind eye" to Ahmadinejad's policies, resulted in criticisms of Ahmadinejad by the Pragmatist and Reformist factions. Saikal argues that "as his factional opponents intensified their criticism, Ahmadinejad adopted a more authoritarian attitude, pursuing more populist measures and treating his critics with disdain."⁵⁸

Rouhani Period

Ahmadinejad's chronic combative rhetoric with the West, the government's increasing pressures on society and the erosion of basic rights and freedoms, Iran's ailing economy caused by the imposition of sanctions by the West and the government's inability to manage the economy effectively resulted in bitterness and unhappiness among the Iranian people. Thus, public discontent prepared the way for Rouhani's victory in the 2013 election. According to Monshipouri;

Rouhani's victory in Iran's 2013 presidential election is a clear protest vote against his predecessor's management of the country's relations with the Western world. Although Rouhani's support for broader social freedoms, as well as his advocacy for women's rights, rendered him a favorite candidate for change, undoubtedly economic insecurity – caused by the imposition of sanctions by the Western world in reaction to Iran's nuclear program – was a key factor in his victory.⁵⁹

Rouhani won 51 percent of all the votes cast in the first round against five conservative rivals.⁶⁰ His election was a reaffirmation of the demand for a more moderate and sensible course in both domestic and foreign policy. Rouhani embraced reformist rhetoric during his campaign

⁵⁸ Ibid., 98.

⁵⁹ Mahmood Monshipouri, "Rouhani's Election: Promise of Change or More of the Same?," *Insight Turkey* 15, no. 3 (2013), http://file.insightturkey.com/Files/Pdf/15_03_2013_monshipouri.pdf.

⁶⁰ Mohammad Javad Zarif, "What Iran Really Wants," *Foreign Affairs*, June 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iran/2014-04-17/what-iran-really-wants>.

as “[h]e questioned the necessity of the expanding security state and the constant oversight of student and civil society associations by the security agencies. He spoke of the need for greater freedom of press and speech and devoted attention to women’s rights issues.”⁶¹

Since Hassan Rouhani came to power in summer 2013, Iranian foreign policy has undergone a significant shift. Significant progress on nuclear talks and a noticeable detente with the West and the region has been observed so far.

According to Zarif, the Foreign Minister of Rouhani administration, the new foreign policy of Iran can be described as follows:

Rouhani’s foreign policy platform was based on a principled, sober, and wise critique of the conduct of foreign relations during the preceding eight years under the previous administration. Rouhani promised to remedy the unacceptable state of affairs through a major overhaul of the country’s foreign policy. The changes he proposed demonstrated a realistic understanding of the contemporary international order, the current external challenges facing the Islamic Republic, and what it will take to restore Iran’s relations with the world to a state of normalcy. Rouhani also called for a discourse of ‘prudent moderation.’ This vision aims to move Iran away from confrontation and toward dialogue, constructive interaction, and understanding, all with an eye to safeguarding national security, elevating the stature of Iran, and achieving long-term comprehensive development. Prudent moderation is an approach based on realism, self-confidence, realistic idealism, and constructive engagement.⁶²

Even though Rouhani, as stated by Maloney, is “a blunt pragmatist with plenty of experience maneuvering within Iran’s theocratic system,”⁶³ he seems more visible and active in policy making. Nevertheless, it is still the Supreme Leader, Khamenei, who has the final word on important foreign policy decisions.

⁶¹ Shaul Bakhash, “Rouhani’s Surprising Election,” Viewpoints (Washington, DC: Wilson Center, June 2013), http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/rouhanis_surprising_election_0.pdf.

⁶² Zarif, “What Iran Really Wants.”

⁶³ Suzanne Maloney, “Why Rouhani Won -- And Why Khamenei Let Him,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 16, 2013, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iran/2013-06-16/why-rouhani-won-and-why-khamenei-let-him>.

Factions and their Worldview

Conservatives

According to Saikal, the conservatives advocated “a patriarchal Islamic government; consolidation of the revolution’s gains; preservation of a traditional style of life; promotion of self-sufficiency, with no dependence on the outside world; cultural purity; and social conformity.”⁶⁴ Preservation of the current political system and consolidation of the revolution’s gains have been the primary objectives for the Conservatives. Conservatives have seen the West as the primary threat to their ideology and viewed it as antithetical to the West. They strictly reject what they perceive to be defining principles of Western culture: “materialism, secularism, immorality, and the separation of religion from politics”⁶⁵ For the conservatives, their opposition the West has been at the core of their ideology.

As the oldest and founding faction, the Conservative faction of the political elite has dominated the most influential positions in Iran’s political, the military, and the economic system.⁶⁶

Pragmatists

As stated by Ramazani, pragmatism is the “opposite of principle,” whether it is religious, moral or ideological.⁶⁷ In this sense, there is no absolute right and wrong, good and evil, in pragmatism. Worth is determined by desired practical consequences.

⁶⁴ Saikal, “The Roots of Iran’s Election Crisis,” 94.

⁶⁵ Mark L. Haas, *The Clash of Ideologies : Middle Eastern Politics and American Security* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 68–69.

⁶⁶ Raket, *Power, Islam, and Political Elite in Iran*, 2009, 79.

⁶⁷ Ramazani, “Reflections on Iran’s Foreign Policy,” 55.

The pragmatist camp, which stood between the conservative and reformist factions, includes elitist groups organized around former President Hashemi Rafsanjani.⁶⁸ While the Pragmatists were close to the Conservatives in their socio-cultural ideas, in contrast to the Conservatives, they believe in economic modernization from above, and favor technical and economic relations with the West, including the United States.⁶⁹⁷⁰ They do not have serious interest in the democratization of politics, and take hard-line positions on sensitive ideological issues such as Iran–US relations and the Arab–Israeli issue.⁷¹ In terms of foreign policy issues, they have a more moderate stance than the Conservative faction.

Reformists

The reformist faction, which coalesced around Khatami, advocated “promotion of civil society, relaxation of political and social control, economic openness, cultural renaissance and more interaction with the outside world.”⁷² They emphasized the necessity of a pluralist and democratic Islamic political system. According to Khatami, reformists’ core political goal was to “introduce to the world the model of religious democracy.”⁷³ Reformists have been “questioning the entire concept of Iran being in conflict with the West and demand a limit to religious authorities’ interference in political affairs.”⁷⁴ However, these demands do not mean that reformists are liberals in the Western sense. According to Haas, reformists “are trying to find a balance between liberal values and the Islamist system that has existed in Iran since 1979,” and

⁶⁸ Hossein Seifzadeh, “The Landscape of Factional Politics In Iran,” 61, accessed August 17, 2015, http://www.parstimes.com/history/factional_politics.html.

⁶⁹ Saikal, “The Roots of Iran’s Election Crisis,” 95.

⁷⁰ Raket, *Power, Islam, and Political Elite in Iran*, 2009, 51.

⁷¹ Seifzadeh, “The Landscape of Factional Politics In Iran.”

⁷² Saikal, “The Roots of Iran’s Election Crisis,” 94.

⁷³ Meir Litvak, Iran: The Clerical Debate on Democracy and Islam,» in Joshua Teitelbaum, ed., *Political Liberalization in the Persian Gulf* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 278. quoted in Joshua Teitelbaum, *Political Liberalization in the Persian Gulf* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 278.

⁷⁴ Salamey and Othman, “Shia Revival and Welayat Al-Faqih in the Making of Iranian Foreign Policy,” 205.

“[t]he ideological distance dividing *reformists* from Western regimes, however, is much smaller than the ideological gap separating Iranian conservatives from these states.”⁷⁵

All in all, in terms of foreign policy, two main groups can be identified. The first group is the Conservatives who strictly follow Khomeini’s ideology and reject the concept of improving relations with the West. The second group, which comprises the Pragmatist and Reformist factions, has a pragmatic foreign policy approach. Instead of an absolutely ideologically driven foreign policy, this group advocates softening the radical tone, improving relations with the West, and integrating into the international system.

The Limits of Ideology and Pragmatism

Revolutionary governments in their early days have a strong tendency toward ideological approaches to domestic and foreign policy. Walt cites from North’s *Structure and Change in Economic History* (New York: Norton, 1981, p.53) that ideology serves "to energize groups to behave contrary to a simple, hedonistic individual calculus of costs and benefits . . . since neither maintenance of the existing order nor its overthrow is possible without such behavior."⁷⁶ To this end, according to Walt, revolutionary ideologies tend to emphasize three key themes.

- Revolutionary groups usually portray their opponents as intrinsically evil and incapable of meaningful reform.
- Victory is inevitable.
- Our Revolution has universal meaning.⁷⁷

We can observe each of these three themes in statements by Khomeini in the early

⁷⁵ Haas, *The Clash of Ideologies*, 71.

⁷⁶ Walt, *Revolution and War*, 337.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

periods of the Iranian revolution. Ayatollah Khomeini used these themes to consolidate the revolution. The first theme was initially used against the Shah at the domestic level, and then the US and Israel became the next “evils” at the global and regional levels.

In terms of foreign policy, the third theme was particularly constituted in one of two pillars of Khomeini’s policies, which were “Export of the Revolution” and “Neither East nor West.”

Walt argues that “[i]n the extreme case, the ideology may go so far as to reject the nation-state as a legitimate political unit and call for the eventual elimination of the state-system itself. ... Khomeini's version of Shiite theology foresaw the eventual establishment of a global Muslim community (*ummah*) following the abolition of the ‘un-Islamic’ nation-state system.”⁷⁸ The structure of the international system was perceived to be unjust, and needed to be replaced by a true Islamic order, which would be (by definition) just, fair and virtuous.⁷⁹ Thus, the regime was founded on Khomeini’s version of Shiism, and the basis of the new state was ideological.

With the second policy, “Neither East nor West”, the Regime challenged both superpowers of the Cold War period, the USSR, and the US. This policy did not mean only being an independent foreign policy maker, but also avoiding involvement in the expensive military/security struggle between the East and the West and improving relationships with Muslim and non-Muslim regional neighbors.

Both policies were reflections of key aspects of the foreign policy rooted in the revolutionary Constitution. These key aspects of Iran’s revolutionary foreign policy can concisely be listed as follows: non-domination, independence, non-alignment, equality, resistance, anti-imperialism, nationalism, self-sufficiency, establishment of relations with peace-

⁷⁸ Ibid., 339.

⁷⁹ Mehdi Mozaffari, “Iran’s Ideological Foreign Policy | Foundation for Iranian Studies,” *Dounation For Iranian Studies*, March 24, 2010, <http://www.fis-iran.org/en/irannameh/volxxv/3-political-crisis/mozaffari>.

seeking states, Islamic unity and responsibility for other Muslim and “oppressed” nations. Independence has been the basic feature of foreign policy; it can be said that it has been an obsession to some extent. According to Moshirzadeh, Iranian ambition for independence is based on three major resources: “Iran’s glorious past; historical victimization by the invaders; and (semi)-colonial/imperial encounters”⁸⁰ These motivations based on experiences throughout its history caused an overemphasizing of the characteristics of non-domination, anti-imperialism, self-sufficiency, and non-alignment in the early days of the revolution. However, while most of these aspects are shared by most states, overemphasizing them did not fit the realities of the outside world, particularly the aspects which originated from the ideological basis of the Regime. These overemphasized characteristics isolated Iran from the international system and blocked integration into it.

In the meantime, Iran began to suffer from the results of these policies and understand their inapplicability. In the mid-1980s, a more pragmatic domestic and foreign policy orientation gradually emerged because of the pressures of economic strain, the question of whether the revolution could still be exported by Iran without conflict, and the harsh conditions of the war with Iraq.

According to Ramazani, the secret purchase of arms from the United States and Israel was the most striking example of shifting to pragmatic policies over ideological influences in Iran's foreign policy during Khomeini's lifetime.⁸¹

The following cases also illustrate how pragmatism has gradually become one of the basic characters of Iranian foreign policy:

- Khomeini’s decision to end the war based on the UN Security Council’s cease-

⁸⁰ Homeira Moshirzadeh, “Discursive Foundations of Iran’s Nuclear Policy,” *Security Dialogue* 38, no. 4 (2007): 529.

⁸¹ Ramazani, “Ideology and Pragmatism in Iran’s Foreign Policy,” 556.

- fire, Resolution 598, in 1988.
- Iran's cooperation with the United States to remove the Taliban government in Afghanistan and later to topple the Saddam regime in Iraq.
 - Iran's condemnation of the terrorist attacks on America on September 11, 2001. "Khamenei was the first cleric in the Muslim world to call for 'holy war' (jihad) against terrorism as a 'global scourge,' and many Iranians held candlelight vigils for the American victims of terrorism."⁸²
 - "Formally and publicly withdrawing Iran's support for the fatwa on the author of *the Satanic Verses*."⁸³
 - "Iran's mediation in the civil war between the Islamist opposition and the Russian backed government of Tajikistan."⁸⁴
 - The policy of neutrality in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia, a Christian state, and the Republic of Azerbaijan, an Islamic state with a Shi'a majority.⁸⁵
 - Iran's disregard of the Chechen struggles against Russia.

Sadjadpour's following words also clearly shows the level of pragmatism:

Though justice, Islamic solidarity, and independence are invoked to defend the Palestinian cause, the Chechen cause is studiously ignored for fear of antagonizing Russia. Muslim unity is invoked to support Hamas and Hizbollah, yet Iran supported Christian Armenia in its war against Shi'i Muslim Azerbaijan. Iran denounces the

⁸² Ramazani, "Reflections on Iran's Foreign Policy," 62.

⁸³ Adam Tarock, *Iran's Foreign Policy since 1990: Pragmatism Supersedes Islamic Ideology* (Commack, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 1999), 1.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Andrew Parasilliti, "The Iranian Revolution at 30," Viewpoints, The Middle East Institute Viewpoints (The Middle East Institute, January 2009), 137, <http://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/publications/2009.01.The%20Iranian%20Revolution%20at%2030.pdf>.

United States for its ‘godlessness’ and lax social values, yet forms close alliances with socialist governments in Venezuela and Cuba.⁸⁶

Domestic pressures and geopolitical factors convinced Iranian leaders to balance their ideological and pragmatist approaches to foreign policy.

In the adoption of pragmatism, domestic challenges, which mostly originated from economic conditions, were a motivating factor as well. In addition to the cost of an eight-year war, Iran’s ideologically international isolation affected the Iranian economy desperately. This situation deteriorated with decreasing oil prices. According to Maloney;

The costs were enormous: Productivity plummeted. Urban poverty doubled. Real per capita income dropped by 45 percent since the revolution. And price controls and strict rationing of basic consumer goods failed to prevent rampant inflation. Meanwhile, the factional battles over the economy polarized the political environment and eroded what was left of the private sector.⁸⁷

The deteriorating economy explains Khomeini’s acceptance of ceasefire Resolution 598 in 1988 and the tempering of Khamenei’s ideological approach. Thus, the cease-fire and Khomeini's death in 1989 facilitated a major shift in Iran's domestic and foreign policies. Rafsanjani, as an influential actor of the post-Khomeini period, loudly emphasized the necessity of integration in the international system and the fundamental reorientation and liberalization of Iran's economy.⁸⁸

The death of Khomeini opened more room for pragmatist maneuvers not only for Rafsanjani but also for the following presidents. As noted by Ramazani,

⁸⁶ Karim Sadjadpour, “Reading Khamenei: The World View of Iran’s Most Powerful Leader” (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009), http://carnegieendowment.org/files/sadjadpour_iran_final2.pdf.

⁸⁷ Suzanne Maloney, “The Revolutionary Economy | The Iran Primer,” accessed August 17, 2015, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/revolutionary-economy>.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Rafsanjani did not hesitate to forego Islamic doctrines if it were practically necessary, Khatami struck relative balance between the two, and although Ahmadinejad has produced an image of recalcitrance, he has not been able to disregard the imperative of practical necessity, or, in other words, to ignore the institutional imperatives of complex domestic politics or the demands of the international constituency.⁸⁹

Besides domestic factors, geopolitical improvements also pushed Iranian leaders to revise the ideological basis of their strategic outlook. The following cases increased threat perceptions, as well as opportunities for Iran:

- The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War in 1991,
- The Kuwaiti crisis leading to the Gulf War and a larger US military presence in the region since 1990,
- Overthrow of Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 1991,
- The U.S.-led invasion of Iraq and overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

Iran readjusted its foreign policy according to this new world and regional order. While the increasing US presence in the region caused a great hesitation because of Iran's conventional military weakness and potentially being the next target of the US, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the overthrow of the Taliban and Saddam regimes also created an opportunity for expanding its sphere of influence.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Iran realized that outreach to the newly independent states situated to the north of Iran that have Shiite populations could minimize Iran's political isolation. Additionally, the overthrow of Saddam and the Taliban regime by the US eliminated Iran's two most immediate sworn enemies that confine its east and west borders. On the other hand, after the removal of these two regimes, because of the presence of the US military in Iraq and Afghanistan, Iran felt like 'a cat on a hot tin roof.' Although Iran cooperated

⁸⁹ Ramazani, "Reflections on Iran's Foreign Policy," 85.

with the US against the two regimes, Iranian policymakers felt concerned that their country would be the next target of the US for a regime change.

Along these lines, regional changes and feeling vulnerable forced the Rafsanjani and Khatami administrations to adopt a coalition-making policy and conciliatory tone. Dehghani states that “in this period, Iran tried to find some friends in the international scene and develop its relations with other countries, particularly its neighbors, so that it could diminish its external threats.”⁹⁰ Needless to say, economic recovery efforts were also a significant factor in improving relations with other countries. It meant “to slowly start getting back into international trade and the globalization world order.”⁹¹ During the Hashemi and Khatami Administrations, Khamenei did not oppose their policies, for the sake of national interest, internal stability, the recovery of Iran’s economy, and balancing external threats.

Despite the “axis of evil” speech, Khatami did not end efforts to improve relations with the US. However, a permanent conciliation between them could not be achieved. For the US, the Hostage Crisis; for Iran, the US/West siding with Iraq during Iran–Iraq war, the US attacking Iranian oil rigs in the Persian Gulf in 1987 and shooting down an Iranian passenger plane in 1988, the west’s closed eyes to Iraq’s chemical weapon usage, and lastly being labeled as a member of ‘axis of evil,’ were deeply rooted in the memories of both sides. Furthermore, U.S. relations with Israel has been one of the main obstacles to Iran-US rapprochement.

With Ahmadinejad’s presidency, Iranian foreign policy shifted to an aggressive tone. He condemned the policies of his predecessors. Although Ahmadinejad followed the same goals as his predecessors, he preferred a more radical, aggressive and an alternative approach. In alliance-

⁹⁰ Dehghani, Jalal (2007), “Discourse of Justice-oriented Fundamentalism in Ahmadinejad’s Foreign Policy”, *Journal of Political Knowledge* (in Persian), No. 5, Spring and Summer. quoted in Haji-Yousefi, “Iran’s Foreign Policy during Ahmadinejad,” 5.

⁹¹ Salamey and Othman, “Shia Revival and Welayat Al-Faqih in the Making of Iranian Foreign Policy,” 211.

making policy, he chose China and Russia in lieu of the West. He also tried to develop good relations with regional actors, as well as South American and African states, as an alternative strategy. During his presidency, relations with Israel and debates on Iran's nuclear program became prevailing topics. He did not step back on the nuclear issues and the sponsorship of terrorism. These strategies were a reaction to increasing presence of the US in the region and regime change debates, and aimed to deter a possible Israel-US attack. He also tried to minimize Iran's isolation through improving good relations with other states. It was a way of bypassing the US hegemony.

During Ahmadinejad's presidency, his foreign policy orientation was mostly rational in its own right. Ahmadinejad's confrontational, assertive and active foreign policy aimed to preserve Iran's survival and security in the region and to increase Iran's visibility at the international level. Ahmadinejad's approach also deeply affected the domestic dynamics, which will be addressed broadly in the following chapters.

Ahmadinejad's foreign policy was more consistent with Khamenei's approach, and in-line with the conservative faction.

Iran's abandonment of its claim of be the leader of all Muslims as well as the abandonment of its policy of 'Export of the Revolution' Iran expanding its sphere of influence through intensifying its relations with Shiite groups, Syria, and Iraq. After the withdrawal of US troops, the subsequent power vacuum that emerged in the region gave this opportunity to Iran during Ahmadinejad administration.

The economic and social results of Ahmadinejad's confrontational and assertive foreign policy were no longer sustainable. Thus, Rouhani won the 2013 election against five conservative rivals. Since Hassan Rouhani came to power, Iranian foreign policy has undergone

a significant shift. In the conduct of foreign relations, the Rouhani administration has adopted an approach of “prudent moderation” that is based on realism, self-confidence, realistic idealism, and constructive engagement. Very significant progress has been made on nuclear talks, and there has been a noticeable detente with the West and the region. “On July 14, 2015, after 20 months of negotiations, Iran and six states led by the United States reached a historic accord to significantly limit Tehran’s nuclear ability for more than a decade in return for lifting international oil and financial sanctions.”⁹²

Perhaps this recent improvement in relations can be viewed as the second most important example of Iran’s pragmatist policies (after the secret purchase of arms from the United States and Israel during Iran–Iraq war). Iran sat at the same table and reached a deal with the “Great Satan.” The Supreme Leader, Khamenei, justified this policy as follows:

We do not negotiate with the U.S. about different global and regional issues, ... We do not negotiate about bilateral issues. Sometimes, in some exceptional cases, like the nuclear case, and due to the expediency, we may negotiate.⁹³

Before Khomeini died, his supreme political position provided him with an opportunity to institutionalize “expediency” as the main operational principle guiding Iran’s domestic and foreign policy decision-making. He ordered the establishment of ‘The Expedience Council’ in 1988 to operationalize the principle of expediency. This principle then has become a “justification for the often extreme means used by the regime to stay in power.”⁹⁴ In this respect, according to the expediency principle, when an incompatibility arises, political considerations

⁹² Jethro Mullen and Nic Robertson, “Landmark Deal Reached on Iran Nuclear Program,” *CNN*, n.d., <http://www.cnn.com/2015/07/14/politics/iran-nuclear-deal/>.

⁹³ Thomas Erdbrink, “Ayatollah Khamenei, Backing Iran Negotiators, Endorses Nuclear Deal,” *The New York Times*, July 18, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/19/world/middleeast/ayatollah-ali-khamenei-of-iran-backs-negotiators-and-doesnt-criticize-nuclear-deal.html?_r=1.

⁹⁴ Michael Eisenstadt and Mehdi Khalaji, “Nuclear Fatwa: Religion and Politics in Iran’s Proliferation Strategy,” *Policy Focus* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2011), ix, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus115.pdf>.

take priority over religious precepts.

Ghobadzadeh states that “Iran's ruling clergy opted to overlook religious precepts in favor of political considerations. ... Regardless of different approaches, there has been a consensus regarding the two overarching categorizations: 'constant precepts' and 'variable precepts'. As the titles suggest, while the former refers to those precepts which are applicable to every place and era, the latter represents those which can be adjusted based on different circumstances. Khomeini bypassed this traditional categorization by authorizing the state to change each and every one of the religious precepts.”⁹⁵

In Khomeini’s conceptualization of expediency, we can see the limits, which are broader than what we think, in his own words;

A government which is a branch of the Prophet Mohammad's absolute guardianship is one of the primary Islamic precepts and takes priority over all subsidiary precepts, even over praying, fasting and pilgrimage ... if necessary, [a] governor can close or destroy mosques ... the government can unilaterally terminate its religious agreements with the people if an agreement violates the expedience of the country or Islam. And [it] can abandon every commandment- both worshipping and non-worshipping precepts- which is against the expedience of Islam.⁹⁶

According to Khomeini’s expediency principle, even fundamental religious practices such as worshipping can be excluded. Thus, in contrast to common belief, gradually Iran’s radical ideology has been replaced with the pragmatism that is still “driven by the cold calculations of regime survival and national interests”⁹⁷ as stated by Nasr. However, this does not mean that ideology has totally been disregarded.

⁹⁵ Naser Ghobadzadeh, “Religious Secularity: an Emerging Backlash to The Islamic State in Iran,” n.d., http://sydney.edu.au/arts/research/rss/downloads/documents/006_Naser_Ghobadzadeh_RELIGIOUS_SECULARITY_AN_caEMERGING_BACKLASH_TO_THE_ISLAMIC_STATE_IN_IRAN.pdf.

⁹⁶ (Khomeini, R. (2006a) *Sahifeh Nour* (Book of Light), V.20, Tehran: Moasseh Tanzim va Nashre Asare Imam: 170-71). quoted in *Ibid*.

⁹⁷ Amos Yadlin et al., *Can the World Tolerate an Iran with Nuclear Weapons?: The Munk Debate on Iran*, ed. Ruyard Griffiths, Reprint edition (Toronto, ON: House of Anansi Press, 2013), 12.

In Lieu of a Conclusion: The Characteristics of Iranian Foreign Policy and Iran's Foreign Policy Goals

Iran's foreign policy is generally labeled as ideological, irrational, unpredictable and offensive. However, if we take into account all the internal and external determinants of Iran's foreign policy, it is difficult to justify these descriptions.

Iran's geographical and demographic realities, historical experiences (lessons learned), post-revolutionary ideology which is a blend of nationalism and Khomeini's interpretation of Shiism (beliefs held), post-revolutionary political structure and decision-making process, national interests, immediate domestic needs, ruling elites' priorities (ideological/individual), regional improvements and threat perceptions directly or indirectly impact Iran's external actions and behavior.

The Characteristics of Iranian Foreign Policy

The characteristics of Iran's foreign policy can be summarized as followings:

Regime Survival - The Sine Qua Non

In either domestic or foreign policy decision-making, ensuring 'regime survival' is the top priority and supreme value the revolutionary Iran. This is the most important goal of Khomeini's ideology and the political system created by Khomeini. As stated earlier, this priority was defined in Khomeini's words as follows; "[a] government which is a branch of the Prophet Mohammad's absolute guardianship is one of the primary Islamic precepts and takes

priority over all subsidiary precepts, even over praying, fasting and pilgrimage...”⁹⁸

In the words of Stanley, Khomeini’s formulation regarding the survival of the regime is as follows: “the regime is the embodiment of Shia Islam’s authority on Earth and to abandon it would be to abandon the will of God. Thus, the survival of this government and its form is an existential imperative as well as an expression of self-interest and Iranian nationalism.”⁹⁹

Pre-revolutionary experiences, as well as geopolitical and demographic circumstances, have been important in defining this priority. In short, some of those are set forth below:

- Being an ethnic and religious minority in the Muslim world,
- Powerful external threats (living under the shadow of stronger powers like the Ottoman Empire, Great Britain and the Russian Empire)
- Colonial policies, and foreign interventions in domestic politics (the strategic rivalry and conflict in Iran between the British and Russian empires before World War I, the occupation of Iran during World War II, removing the democratically-elected Iranian Prime Minister by a 1953 CIA/MI6-sponsored coup.)
- Iran’s heterogeneous population.

Among these, the overthrow of the democratically elected Iranian Prime Minister by a 1953 CIA/MI6-sponsored coup particularly affected the collective memory of Iranians.

Furthermore, post-revolutionary domestic and external events (such as ethnic uprisings, coup attempts, factionalism, the Iran–Iraq War, the West’s support for Iraq during the war, relations with the US and Israel, the US’s increasing presence in the region and potential US military intervention, and regime change debates) fueled hypersensitivity about the survival of

⁹⁸(Khomeini, R. (2006a) *Sahifeh Nour (Book of Light)*, V.20, Tehran: Moasseh Tanzim va Nashre Asare Imam: 170-71). quoted in Ghobadzadeh, “Religious Secularity: An Emerging Backlash to The Islamic State in Iran.”

⁹⁹ Willis Stanley, “The Strategic Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran” (Defense Threat Reduction Agency Advanced Systems and Concepts Office, August 31, 2006), 4, <https://fas.org/irp/agency/dod/dtra/iran.pdf>.

the regime. Despite the institutionalization of the revolution to some extent after the mid -1980s, regime survival has always remained as the top priority of the ruling elites, and this priority has deeply influenced foreign and domestic policy making.

Decision-Making, Key Individuals and Bodies in Charge of Foreign Policy Making

Hunter states that “the character of states’ political systems and their decision-making apparatus and processes greatly influence their external behavior.”¹⁰⁰

The Iranian political system is designed to prevent any individual, institution, or faction from dominating the system, and to insulate the regime against internal and external threats. The task of the preservation of the regime is the *raison d’être* of the Supreme Leader, the IRGC, the Guardian Council, and the Expediency Council. The power of the Supreme Leader and these institutions’ influence on decision-making creates an elaborate system of checks and balances, which seeks to ensure the regime’s survival and to maintain the status quo.

The establishment of the Expediency Council was a strong sign of Khomeini’s efforts to structure the system according to this priority. To prevent a potential political dispute that might harm the regime’s legitimacy, Khomeini established the Expediency Council in 1988 to mediate disputes between the Parliament and the Guardian Council.

There are at least seven power centers in the system of checks and balances that have an influence on foreign policy making; the Supreme Leader, the President, the Foreign Minister, the Guardian Council, the Expediency Council, The Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), and the Parliament. While the most influential of these is the Supreme Leader who confirms the final decisions on foreign policy issues, The Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) and the

¹⁰⁰ Hunter, *Iran’s Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era*, 20.

Expediency Council also have significant influence on the basic direction of Iran's foreign policy and key foreign policy issues.

Factions

Factions as a form of political diversity did not disturb Khomeini, so long as they remained loyal to him and to certain fundamental principles of his ideology. Khamenei followed this approach in the post-Khomeini period. However, after the election of Khatami in 1997, his reformist domestic and foreign policies were perceived as a threat to the regime, and viewed as potentially eroding ideological precepts of the revolution.

The unprecedented character of the 2009 election and its immediate aftermath when hundreds of thousands of protestors occupied the streets to protest the manipulation of the election results, showed how factional disputes can destabilize the system, and ironically how the most powerful faction – which appeared to be the Conservatives- was the least institutionally organized of the factions.¹⁰¹ The consensus among the factions on the revolutionary precepts did not seem to the conservatives as sufficient protection for the regime's survival. The factional disputes were viewed as a potential threat to the regime unless the conservatives were powerful enough as to control and shape domestic politics. Thus, this led to the conservatives' efforts to concentrate their power.

Currently, in terms of foreign policy, two main groups can be distinguished. The first group is the Conservatives who strictly follow Khomeini's ideology. The second group, which comprises the Pragmatist and Reformist factions, has a more pragmatic foreign policy approach. Instead of absolute ideologically driven foreign policy, this group advocates to soften the radical

¹⁰¹ Mehran Kamrava, "The 2009 Elections and Iran's Changing Political Landscape," *Orbis* 54, no. 3 (2010): 400–403.

tone, to improve the relations with the West, and integrate Iran into the international system. On the other hand, as the oldest faction, the Conservatives have dominated the most influential positions in the political structure. At the same time, this faction's worldview overlaps with the Supreme Leader, Khamenei. Taken together, the Conservatives are still the most influential faction in decision-making.

The Degree of Ideology and Pragmatism

The 1979 Revolution completely transformed Iran's foreign policy and international standing. In addition to Khomeini's interpretation of Shiism, pre-revolutionary historical experiences, geopolitical and domestic circumstances had been influential in shaping ideological views. Iran's new constitution was prepared in this framework of 'lessons learned' and 'beliefs held.' The new regime's fundamental constitutional principles are crafted as follows: rejection of all forms of domination, preservation of independence, non-alignment, equality, resistance, anti-imperialism, nationalism, self-sufficiency, the establishment of relations with peace-seeker states, and Islamic unity and responsibility of other Muslim and 'oppressed' nations. In the early days of the Islamic Revolution, these principles were crystallized as two primary policies; 'Neither East nor West' and 'Export of the Revolution.' However, these policies resulted in isolation from the international system and poor conflictual relations with the Sunni Arab states, which also subsequently increased Iran's isolation. Domestic and international events, such as the high cost of the Iran–Iraq war, the death of Khomeini, the collapse of the bipolar international system, the need for foreign capital and technical expertise to carry out economic reconstruction, combined with the poor results of these policies, pushed Iran to reevaluate its foreign policy orientation. The regime abandoned some of its more unrealistic ideological

policies. Iranian rulers tried to find a middle path between realism and ideology. In the words of Ehteshami and Zweiri “[t]he tension between realism and idealism leads to pragmatism, which provides a middle path to explain foreign policies. It breaks down the realist-idealist dichotomy and emphasizes the necessity for states to respond to the realities of world politics.”¹⁰²

Pragmatists and reformists measures were proposed to enhance domestic and regional stability and to integrate Iran into the international system. Thus, Iran would enable to overcome the pressure of economic strain.

Hunter states that “[i]n ideological systems, the fortunes of the leadership are based on the maintenance of the ideology, hence the need to justify all decisions in ideological terms.”¹⁰³ In this sense, just before the death of Khomeini, the expediency principle was institutionalized to take the role of justification of decisions that contradicted ideology. With respect to this, there are many important decisions in which it can be observed that Iran adopted a more pragmatic and expediency-oriented approach to meet the requirements of the international system.

In a nutshell, in contrast to common belief, Iran’s radical ideology gradually has been replaced with a pragmatism that is “driven by the cold calculations of regime survival and national interests”¹⁰⁴ as stated by Nasr. However, it does not mean ideology has totally been disregarded. Anti-Americanism, anti-Zionism and the presumption of leadership in the Muslim world (at least in rhetoric) have remained as important pillars of Iranian state ideology and as a heritage of Khomeini. Along these lines, although ideology has ceased to play a dominant role in Iran's foreign policy making, ideological considerations and rhetoric still can be observed in both domestic and foreign policy-making to the extent they serve the regime’s interests.

¹⁰² Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Mahjoob Zweiri, *Iran’s Foreign Policy: From Khatami to Ahmadinejad* (Sussex Academic Press, 2011), 29.

¹⁰³ Hunter, *Iran’s Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era*, 22.

¹⁰⁴ Yadlin et al., *Can the World Tolerate an Iran with Nuclear Weapons?*, 12.

Reactionary Foreign Policy

Iranian foreign policy making has been sensitive and responsive to domestic, regional and global improvements. Economic challenges and social demands have always been influential in the country's policy shifts. We can observe this in two of the regime's most important decisions;

- The acceptance of ceasefire resolution 598 in 1988
- (due to the unbearable economic and social consequences of the Iran–Iraq war)
- Nuclear agreement in 2015.
- (The economic and social results of Ahmadinejad's confrontational and assertive foreign policy prepared the victory of the reformist Rouhani, and subsequently the nuclear agreement.)

In both decisions, economic strains and public reactions had an impact. In this sense, it can be said that as the cost of ideological policies became unbearable, changes become inevitable in Iran's policy-making.

Besides domestic factors, global and regional events such as a larger US military presence in the region since 1990, the overthrow of the Taliban Regime in Afghanistan in 2001, and the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq and overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003, showed how Iran's foreign policy is reactionary. Iranian rulers have always been alert to regional developments. Besides taking measures against immediate threats, Iranian rulers are quick to take advantage of a power vacuum to enlarge the country's sphere of influence.

For instance, the West's turning a "blind eye" to Iraq's chemical weapon usage during the Iran–Iraq War pushed Iran to reevaluate its approach to WMD. Although Khomeini stated that WMD were immoral and that they violated the Koran's prohibition against the use of

poison, he sought to ensure that Iran did not remain as vulnerable as it was during Iraq's chemical attacks against Iran. The speaker of the Majlis and commander-in-chief of Iran's military at that time, Rafsanjani, at the end of the war (October 1988) said that;

Chemical and biological weapons are poor man's atomic bombs and can easily be produced. We should at least consider them for our defense. Although the use of such weapons is inhuman, the war taught us that international laws are only scraps of paper. With regard to chemical, bacteriological, and radiological weapons training, it was made very clear during the [Iran-Iraq] war that these weapons are very decisive. It was also made clear that the moral teachings of the world are not very effective when war reaches a serious stage and the world does not respect its own resolutions and closes its eyes to the violations and all the aggressions which are committed on the battlefield. We should fully equip ourselves both in the offensive and defensive use of chemical, bacteriological, and radiological weapons. From now on you should make use of the opportunity and perform this task.¹⁰⁵

To sum up, Iran's foreign policy is a product of many factors; revolutionary ideology, interagency and factional rivalry, ruler's threat perceptions, national interests, regional and global improvements, and public opinion. Iranian leaders' employment of balance-of-threat and balance-of-power calculations can be viewed as a reactionary foreign policy. While increasing US presence in the region caused great anxiety because of Iran's conventional military weakness and potentially being the next target of the US; the collapse of the Soviet Union and the overthrow of the Taliban and Saddam Regimes created the opportunity for expanding Iran's sphere of influence. In reaction to these developments, Iran pursued alliance-making and deterrent measures including nuclear weapon and ballistic missiles program; on the other hand, Iran never neglected to take advantage a power vacuum to expand its sphere of influence through Shiite proxies.

¹⁰⁵ Kori N. Schake, *The Strategic Implications of a Nuclear-Armed Iran*, McNair Papers ; No. 64 (Washington, DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, 2001), 3.

Implications for Iran's Foreign Policy Goals

As discussed above, the forces that impact Iran's foreign policy-making can be identified as follows: the design of the political structure, key individuals and bodies in charge of foreign policy-making, the constitutional framework of foreign policy, core ideological principles, factions' approaches to foreign affairs, and Iranian leaders' statements and reactions to internal and external events based on threat perceptions and national interests.

Based on all these internal and external determinants of Iran's foreign policy making that are addressed earlier in this chapter, Iran's foreign policy goals can be summarized as follows:

- Regime survival, which is an indispensable goal of Iranian foreign policy,
- State security and survival (the defense of Iranian territory against external threats),
- Projecting power and becoming the dominant power in the region.

Iran's aspiration of being a regional hegemon is not a new phenomenon. Thaler states that "[t]he elite of the Islamic Republic of Iran perceive Iran as the natural, indispensable, and leading power of the Middle East, even of the Muslim world."¹⁰⁶ The strong sense of identity originates from its grand imperial past and civilization. In pre and post-revolutionary periods, a combination of the strong sense of Shiite and Persian identity, the colonial policies and interventions of the Great Powers and feelings of victimization and insecurity provoked the Iranian quest to become a regional power. As officially outlined in Iran's "Twenty-Year Vision Document," by 2025, Iran aims to be the leading nation in the region as an economic and

¹⁰⁶ David E. Thaler, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics* (Rand Corporation, 2010), xii.

technological power.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Monir Sadat Madarshahi, "Iran's 'Twenty-Year Vision Document': An Outlook on Science and Technology," *Iranian Studies* 45, no. 5 (September 1, 2012): 619, doi:10.1080/00210862.2012.703486.

CHAPTER IV
THE IRGC'S EXTRATERRITORIAL ACTIVITIES: LEBANESE HEZBOLLAH AND
SHIITE GROUPS IN POST-2003 OCCUPIED IRAQ

Introduction

Iran employs a number of different tools in attaining its foreign policy goals. Among them, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC- Pasdaran Enqelab-e-Islam) and Quds Force (IRGC-QF) occupy a crucial place. In the post-revolutionary era, the Iranian military is composed of two main segments: regular (conventional) forces and revolutionary forces. The latter actively took the roles of securing and consolidating the revolution at home, and achieving ideological and strategic goals abroad. The IRGC's roots depended on the militias that actively supported the revolution and had unquestionable loyalty to Khomeini. Over time, the IRGC has been transformed into a type of regular military entity with a navy, ground forces, air force, headquarters, hierarchical structure and different levels of military training centers. Today, the IRGC is domestically an economic and political power and also has been Iran's primary mechanism for extraterritorial activities which is very uncommon in terms of the usual 'use of military force.'

In this chapter, Iran's use of the IRGC (including the IRGC-QF) in attaining its foreign policy goals will be addressed through two cases: its relations with Lebanese Hezbollah and Shiite groups in post-2003 occupied Iraq.

By giving birth and with a wide scope of support ranging from finance, know-how, military logistics, ideological and military training, Iran's ideological original motives regarding the Lebanese Hezbollah were replaced with strategic calculations over time. Despite the fact that

there is no geographical connection with Lebanon, Iran's most successful foreign involvement has been with the Lebanese Hezbollah. Iran's engagement with Lebanese Hezbollah functioned as a laboratory and provided crucial experiments, which were later used in post-2003 occupied Iraq.

In both case studies, the focus will be on Iran's motivations and desired strategic outcomes for these foreign engagements and the level and characteristics of IRGC's involvements in them. Given this focus, this chapter is outlined as follows;

- The Military in Post-Revolutionary Iran, the IRGC's establishment, structure, and responsibilities,
- Case-1: Lebanese Hezbollah,
- Case-2: Shiite groups in post-2003 occupied Iraq.

The Military in Revolutionary Iran

Successful institutionalization of the Islamic Revolution has extended the life of the revolution up to the present. In this success, the up-to-bottom network in Khomeini's faction played a significant role. According to Ostovar, this network had three key components; "1) Ayatollah Khomeini as the leader and moral authority of the revolution; 2) the clerical leaders of the Islamic Republic Party; 3) the IRGC and other pro-Khomeini militias."¹

One of the most significant and influential institutions that the revolution produced is the IRGC. The nucleus of the IRGC contains unorganized revolutionary committees (*komitehs*) which were formed by many of the Islamic militants around mosques to handle local security

¹ Afshon P. Ostovar, "Guardians of the Islamic Revolution Ideology, Politics, and the Development of Military Power in Iran (1979-2009)." (University of Michigan, 2009), 76, <http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/64683>.

and enforce their interpretation of Islamic law.²

Despite the Imperial Army's declaration of neutrality, Khomeini could not risk revolutionary success. Early days in the revolution, the immediate need to establish an alternative unified military power was due to several reasons;

- Control of the streets and to ensure internal security during the revolutionary turmoil,
- Distrust of leftist guerillas,
- Fear of a U.S.-backed military coup conducted by the remaining members of the Shah's army, counterweight to regular Imperial Armed Forces,
- Potential competition between the multiple guards who were loyal to Khomeini and clerics would leave the revolutionary regime vulnerable to coup attempts,
- To consolidate and improve the clerics' power in the newly established regime and to advance the Khomeinist ideology in state and society.^{3, 4, 5, 6}

To attain these goals, in May 1979, the IRGC was established by a decree from Khomeini as a primary instrument for promoting the goals of the Khomeini revolutionary regime.⁷ In Article 150 of the 1979 Constitution, the primary function of the IRGC is stated as 'guarding the Revolution and its achievements.'⁸

Alfoneh states that, according to the statute of the IRGC, which was ratified on April 25,

² Kenneth Katzman, *The Warriors of Islam : Iran's Revolutionary Guard* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 8.

³ Ali Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled: How the Revolutionary Guards Is Transforming Iran from Theocracy into Military Dictatorship* (AEI Press, 2013), 10.

⁴ Shahrām Chubin, "Is Iran a Military Threat?," *Survival* 56, no. 2 (2014): 66.

⁵ Daniel Byman et al., *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 1st ed. (RAND Corporation, 2001), 32, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/mr1320osd>.

⁶ Ostovar, "Guardians of the Islamic Revolution Ideology, Politics, and the Development of Military Power in Iran (1979-2009).," 76.

⁷ Wilfried Buchta, "Iran's Security Sector: An Overview," in *Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces, Working Paper*, vol. 146 (Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces, Working Paper, Geneva, 2004), 8, http://www.dcaf.ch/content/download/33691/522599/version/1/file/ev_geneva_04071113_buchta.pdf.

⁸ "The Constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran."

1979, and passed by the parliament with slight changes to the original on September 6, 1982, the goals of the IRGC were defined as follows;

- Guarding the Islamic revolution in Iran,
- Expanding the Revolution abroad according to the pure Islamic ideology and executing the will of the Islamic Republic,
- Defending the country in the face of or during the presence of foreign occupiers within the country,
- Cooperating with the government in police and security affairs, pursuit and arrest of counterrevolutionary elements at a time of weakness of without established police forces in order to counter armed counter-revolutionary currents,
- Collecting intelligence,
- Assisting liberation and justice-seeking movements of the oppressed,
- Relief and rescue missions in the case of natural disasters.⁹

The IRGC took an important role in consolidating the power of the newly-established regime, particularly in the revolution's initial days. As stated by Buchta, the IRGC was the revolutionary clergy's strongest weapon in suppressing the opposition and uprisings of separatist minorities such as Kurds, Beluchis, and Turkmen between 1979 and 1982.¹⁰

In addition to its internal tasks, the IRGC was also responsible for exporting the revolution. According to Katzman, this task was different from the others. While internal activities were mostly reactive, this task was proactive. Katzman states that "[t]he Guard developed this function to implement Khomeini's vision of a revived Islamic *Ummah* (unified

⁹ Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled*, 17.

¹⁰ Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?*, 67.

Islamic nation), headquartered in Tehran and led by Khomeini.”¹¹ Thus, while the regular military is responsible for defending Iran’s borders, the IRGC was primarily an ideological-military network, which could consolidate the new regime’s power inside and ideological ambitions outside. As stated by Eisenstadt, however, in practice, the distinctions between different responsibilities are not so clear-cut. Notably, the Iran–Iraq war caused them to blur; the regular military (Artesh), the IRGC and other paramilitary organizations fought side-by-side against Iraqi forces.¹²

In addition to the IRGC, two more paramilitary organizations were established just after the revolution; Basij (“Mobilization of the Oppressed” in Farsi) and the Law Enforcement Forces (LEF). Today, according to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, the armed forces consist of three main components;

- The regular military (Artesh);
- The Law Enforcement Forces (LEF).
- The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Forces (IRGC)—with its paramilitary Basij militia.

The Artesh, and the IRGC, which also controls the Basij are headed by a joint headquarters.

The establishment of the regular military dates back to the 1920s. Both Pahlavi leaders tried to create a European-style modern army. Especially after the 1953 coup d’état, with the arrival of vast numbers of US-military advisors, relations between the US and Iranian Army intensified. According to Buchta, before the 1979 revolution, more than 20,000 American

¹¹ Katzman, *The Warriors of Islam*, 95.

¹² Michael Eisenstadt, “The Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran: An Assessment,” *The Middle East Review of International Affairs* 5, no. 1 (November 15, 2000), <http://www.rubincenter.org/2001/03/eisenstadt-2001-03-02/>.

military advisors were in charge of the Shah's army, and the navy and the air force were equipped with advanced US-weaponry.¹³

Following the revolution, although the Imperial Army declared its 'neutrality' in a public statement,¹⁴ its close relationship with the US and the army's association with the deposed Shah were regarded as a counterrevolutionary threat to the new regime by Khomeini and the clergy around him. After Khomeini took power, Buchta states that the structure of the army was unchanged; however, most of its generals and almost 17,000 officers were dismissed by 1986. Instead, lower-ranking soldiers and those with a background of religious and revolutionary militancy were appointed to influential posts. Trust was extremely important in the early period of the revolution. Satisfactory indoctrination of the army took fifteen years, until the clerical leadership gradually overcame their mistrust of the army.¹⁵ This indoctrination process was carried out by an organization named the Ideological-Political Directorate of the Armed Forces (IPD). The IPD integrated Khomeinist ideological propaganda into every level of military training.¹⁶

Up to now, the regular army had not posed any threat to the regime. Its focus has been on national security issues, weapons acquisition, training and military exercises.¹⁷ Today, the regular Army comprises roughly 350,000 men and possesses ground, air, and naval forces.¹⁸ The constitutional mission of Artesh, as for every conventional regular army, is to defend Iran's

¹³ Buchta, "Iran's Security Sector," 6.

¹⁴ Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled*, 6.

¹⁵ Buchta, "Iran's Security Sector," 7.

¹⁶ Alireza Jafarzadeh, *The Iran Threat: President Ahmadinejad and the Coming Nuclear Crisis*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 53.

¹⁷ Byman et al., *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 54.

¹⁸ "Chapter Seven: Middle East and North Africa," *The Military Balance* 115, no. 1 (January 1, 2015): 326, doi:10.1080/04597222.2015.996362.

borders against external aggression.¹⁹

The Law Enforcement Forces (LEF) is a kind of revolutionary police. It was established in 1990 by integrating three separate domestic security forces; the police, the gendarmerie (rural police) and the revolutionary committees.²⁰ In the new organization, the regular Shah-trained police force was dismissed and those former committee members who were undoubtedly loyal to the regime were assigned to influential positions in the LEF. As stated by Buchta, official figure is not available regarding the number of LEF personnel, but it is estimated that roughly 100,000 to 120,000 men play a crucial role in the maintenance of internal security.²¹

The Basij, the second most powerful paramilitary organization in Iran, was founded by a decree of Khomeini in November 1979, in which he ordered the establishment of an "Army of Twenty Million."²² As a popular militia and reserve component for the Guards, the Basij was known for human wave attacks during the Iran–Iraq war. Basically, the Basij has had two responsibilities;

1. Upholding security in major urban areas as the regime's urban shock troops against the domestic enemies of the revolution.
2. Providing a large pool of reservists during the Iran–Iraq war.²³

Today, the Basij is under the command of the IRGC and comprises approximately 90,000 active armed men²⁴ and around a 1 million reserve force —most of whom have received some

¹⁹ Frederic Wehrey et al., *Dangerous But Not Omnipotent: Exploring the Reach and Limitations of Iranian Power in the Middle East* (Santa Monica, CA; Arlington, VA; Pittsburgh, PA: Rand Corporation, 2009), 46.

²⁰ Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini: Iran Under His Successors* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 59.

²¹ Buchta, "Iran's Security Sector," 11.

²² Steven R. Ward, *Immortal: A Military History of Iran and Its Armed Forces* / Steven R. Ward. (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 227.

²³ Byman et al., *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 38.

²⁴ Buchta, "Iran's Security Sector," 12.

military training or served at war fronts in the 1980s.²⁵

After the Iran–Iraq war, the demobilization of Basij members created a significant problem for the regime. Byman states that two policies were adopted to solve this problem; to use the Basij for nonmilitary national reconstruction work, and to use the Basij as the principle force responsible for upholding Islamic norms in society. Thus, with each passing year, the Basij became less of a military factor and lost its status as a third military pillar, which cannot be compared with the IRGC’s level of professionalism.²⁶

Compared with Artesh, at its inception, the IRGC was an unprofessional and relatively weak military force, numbering about 10,000. Its initial activities were restoring public order and supporting the new regime’s monopoly on power.²⁷ Over time, its power and size expanded significantly and has become one of the strongest security pillars of the Islamic Republic without losing its ideological zeal. Uprisings of separatist minorities and particularly Saddam’s invasion of Iran in 1980 forced the regime to transform the IRGC from an unprofessional irregular mass infantry force into proper military units. According to Byman, the war also forced the regime into expand the IRGC dramatically from 10,000 troops in 1980 to around 450,000 in 1987.²⁸

The professionalization of the IRGC continued during and after the Iran–Iraq war. In 1982, an Operational Area Command and a joint Command Council were established, which created organizational contact between the commanders of the IRGC and their counterparts in the regular armed forces (Artesh).²⁹ In 1985, the IRGC set up its naval and air force units in addition to its ground troops.³⁰ It was put in charge of the surface-to-surface missile (SSM) force

²⁵ Byman et al., *Iran’s Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 38.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Jafarzadeh, *The Iran Threat*, 53.

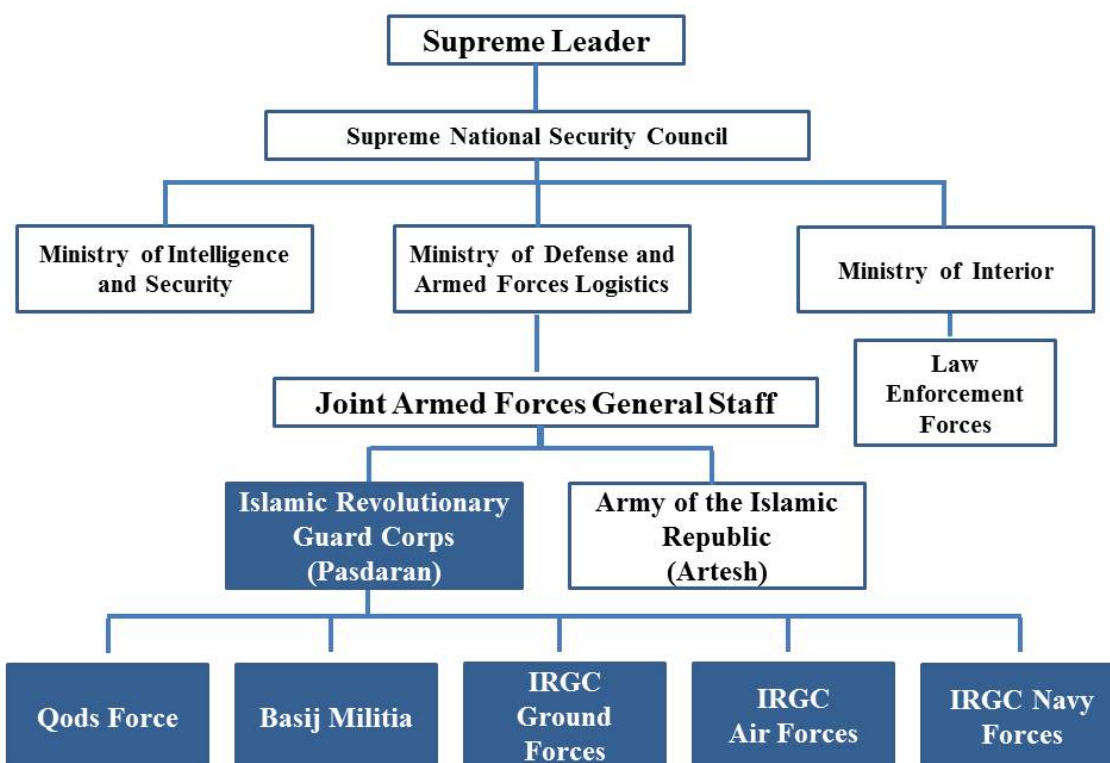
²⁸ Byman et al., *Iran’s Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 34.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?*, 68.

and non-conventional activities.³¹ The IRGC also enjoyed representation and an influential voice in the Supreme Defense Council, the highest military decision-making body.³² Byman states that, as these reforms were enacted, not only were the professionalization and integration of the various elements of the IRGC improved, but joint capabilities between the IRGC and the Artesh also developed through regular military exercises and sharing command and control systems.³³ There are still differences between the two forces, however.

Figure 8: Organization Chart of the IRGC



Source: Compiled by the author based on the information in Buchta's *Who Rules Iran*.³⁴

³¹ Buchta, "Iran's Security Sector," 8.

³² Byman et al., *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 34.

³³ *Ibid.*, 37.

³⁴ Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?*

Today the IRGC has about 120,000 men on active duty.³⁵ This number is significantly less than what the regular army has. The Artesh, however, is equipped with largely outdated equipment. It can be observed that the IRGC is the more powerful institution among Iran's military forces, and the strategic priority has always been given to the IRGC, which is a capable organization well versed in a variety of different tasks.³⁶ Though the Artesh and the IRGC have overlapping tasks in practice, the latter is less conventional in terms of its activities.

In Article 150 of the 1979 constitution, and unlike the regular armed forces, the primary function of the IRGC is stated as 'guarding the Revolution and its achievements.'³⁷ This broad responsibility in turn broadened the focus of the IRGC into all aspects of Iranian life and extraterritorial engagements. Thus, this function, which includes both internal and external threats and interests that consolidate the ideological agenda of the regime, makes it a political-military organization. If we take into account the practices and the aforementioned statute of the IRGC, the scope of the tasks and responsibilities of the IRGC can be outlined under two categories, internal and external, as follows;

Internal Responsibilities

Guarding the Islamic revolution in Iran,

The implementation of the regime's ideology,

Cooperating with police and security forces against all kinds of counterrevolutionary elements (There are IRGC installations in all of Iran's major cities organized into Quick

³⁵ "Chapter Seven: Middle East and North Africa," 326.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ "The Constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran."

Reaction Groups that serve as a reserve against unrest.³⁸),

Gathering intelligence regarding the security of the revolution,

The ideological indoctrination and training of IRGC personnel,^{39, 40}

Security

Safeguarding internal security particularly in rural regions (in conjunction with the Law Enforcement Forces); border security, stopping smuggling, and illegal drug trafficking (in conjunction with the Law Enforcement Forces), assisting in the execution of judicial decisions and providing public safety,^{41, 42, 43}

Humanitarian assistance in the event of natural disasters and unexpected catastrophes such as floods and earthquakes,^{44, 45}

Extraterritorial Responsibilities

Supporting foreign liberation movements and struggle for the rights of oppressed people,
Exporting the revolution, (in time this task has been replaced by expanding the sphere of influence through Shiite groups)

Defending the country against any kind of foreign intervention and attacks inside the

³⁸ Wehrey et al., *Dangerous But Not Omnipotent*, 45.

³⁹ Buchta, "Iran's Security Sector," 9.

⁴⁰ Ostovar, "Guardians of the Islamic Revolution Ideology, Politics, and the Development of Military Power in Iran (1979-2009).," 47.

⁴¹ Buchta, "Iran's Security Sector," 6.

⁴² Wehrey et al., *Dangerous But Not Omnipotent*, 45.

⁴³ Ostovar, "Guardians of the Islamic Revolution Ideology, Politics, and the Development of Military Power in Iran (1979-2009).," 47.

⁴⁴ Frederic M. Wehrey, United States. Dept. of Defense. Office of the Secretary of Defense, and National Defense Research Institute, *The Rise of the Pasdaran : Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps / Frederic Wehrey ... [et Al.]*, Rand Corporation Monograph Series (Santa Monica, CA: RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2009), 21.

⁴⁵ Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled*, 17.

country.⁴⁶

As mentioned in the previous chapter, regime survival is valued above everything for Iran, and the IRGC is chief executor of this goal. The scope of the duties and the missions of the IRGC have been designed according to the regime's ideological agenda. In this line, to implement the regime's agenda, the IRGC has improved unconventional and asymmetric strategies included in the IRGC's extraterritorial activities. According to the IRGC's commander Yahya Rahim Safavi who served as the chief commander of the IRGC between 1997 and 2007, "[t]he IRGC has no geographical border. The Islamic revolution is the border of the IRGC."⁴⁷ The IRGC's extraterritorial activities have not been limited by goals of supporting foreign liberation movements and exporting the revolution. Over time, these tasks transformed into sustaining and expanding its sphere of influence, and conducting counter activities against Iran's perceived enemies through unconventional and asymmetric methods. The IRGC's extraterritorial activities date back to 1982 when its first contingent arrived in Lebanon.⁴⁸ Owing to Iran's eight-year war with Iraq, extraterritorial activities decreased. However, with the end of the war, the IRGC again took a more active role outside Iran's borders.

The IRGC Quds Force (IRGC-QF) was established under the command of IRGC in 1990.⁴⁹ In a 1990 interview, Mohsen Rezai, one of the IRGC's senior leaders and chief commander of the IRGC before Yahya Rahim Safavi between 1981 and 1997, explained the reasoning behind the Quds Force's establishment and its areas of responsibility:

[T]he Qods Force, stands for assisting Muslims, Islamic states or Islamic governments, should they ask for help in training or advice. That is now a global

⁴⁶ Bayram Sinkaya, *The Revolutionary Guards in Iranian Politics: Elites and Shifting Relations* (Routledge, 2015), 45.

⁴⁷ Byman et al., *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 54.

⁴⁸ Kenneth Katzman, "The Pasdaran: Institutionalization of Revolutionary Armed Force," *Iranian Studies* 26, no. 3/4 (July 1, 1993): 397.

⁴⁹ Sinkaya, *The Revolutionary Guards in Iranian Politics*, 51.

custom. If an Islamic state, government or people need to be put through some training, well, the corps will go there and give them training; it will take measures to provide training support for world Muslims or Islamic states. There was a need for a force to perform this task, and the Eminent Leader commanded the corps to set it up. This force is now being set up and is mainly for helping Islamic governments and Islamic nations when there is a need to train them and transfer experience to them.⁵⁰

In the meantime, the IRGC-QF has become an intelligence and unconventional warfare component of about 5,000 men that centralized the IRGC's extraterritorial operations under a single command.⁵¹ Besides the Palestinian struggle, the IRGC-QF expanded its activities into new areas beyond the Muslim world; "Iraq, Lebanon, Central Asia, Europe, and the Americas."⁵² With these activities, the IRGC and its Quds Force have been a tool of foreign policy.

According to an Iraqi intelligence study which discusses the foundation of the Quds Force after the end of the Iranian-Iraqi war and Khomeini's death, the IRGC-QF has four main command centers to direct its intelligence and operational activities in neighboring countries in order to achieve its goals in these countries:

1. Ramadan Headquarters (1st Corps) is responsible for Iraq,
2. Nabi Al-Akram Command Center (2nd Corps) is dedicated to Pakistan,
3. Al-Hamzah Command Center (3rd Corps) is focused on Turkey and the Kurdish issue,
4. Al-Ansar Command Center (4th Corps) is intended for Afghanistan and Central Asia.⁵³

⁵⁰ Ostovar, "Guardians of the Islamic Revolution Ideology, Politics, and the Development of Military Power in Iran (1979-2009).," 137.

⁵¹ Anthony H. Cordesman, *Iran's Military Forces and Warfighting Capabilities : The Threat in the Northern Gulf/ Anthony H. Cordesman and Martin Kleiber*. (Westport, Conn: Praeger Security International, 2007), 79.

⁵² Joseph Felter, "Iranian Strategy in Iraq Politics and 'Other Means,'" *Combating Terrorism Center*, 16, accessed October 21, 2015, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Iranian-Strategy-in-Iraq.pdf>.

⁵³ "Harmony Document ISGZ-2005-001122-19954: Al-Quds Forces Associated with the Guards of the Islamic Revolution," October 2000, 2, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Iraqi-Intelligence-Study-of-the-Iranian-Revolutionary-Guard-Corps-Original.pdf>. ("Harmony Document ISGZ-2005-001122-19954: Al-

Besides these main command centers, the document indicates that there are also six corps for each country or area in which they operate,⁵⁴

Table 3: The Countries and Areas in Which the IRGC Operates

Corp	Responsible for
Fifth Corps	Turkish territory
Sixth Corps	Emirates and the Gulf countries
Seventh Corps	Lebanon (affiliated with the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Islamic Jihad, and Al-Amal Islamic Organization)
Ninth Corp	Europe, America, and east Asian countries
Bosnian Corps	Bosnia

Source: CTC, West Point ⁵⁵

Since 2007, according to the U.S. Department of the Treasury, because of its extraterritorial activities, the IRGC-QF has been named as a terrorism-supporting entity under Executive Order 13224 which targets terrorists and their supporters.⁵⁶

According to ‘Executive Order 13224’⁵⁷, the IRGC-QF provides lethal support to the Taliban, Lebanese Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC); considered the primary instrument for providing weapons (small arms and associated ammunition, rocket propelled grenades, mortar rounds, 107mm rockets, plastic explosives, and probably man-portable defense systems) and

Quds Forces Associated with the Guards of the Islamic Revolution (Original in Arabic),” accessed October 22, 2015, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Iraqi-Intelligence-Study-of-the-Iranian-Revolutionary-Guard-Corps-Original.pdf>.

⁵⁴ “Harmony Document ISGZ-2005-001122-19954: Al-Quds Forces Associated with the Guards of the Islamic Revolution.”

⁵⁵ Bureau of Public Affairs Department of State. The Office of Website Management, “Executive Order 13224,” Other Release, *U.S. Department of State*, (September 23, 2001), <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/122570.htm>.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

financial support to anti-U.S. and anti-Coalition activity in Afghanistan. This support contravenes Chapter VII UN Security Council obligations.⁵⁸ Additionally, Executive Order 13224 states that the IRGC-QF has provided guidance, funding, weapons, intelligence, and logistical support to Hezbollah's military, paramilitary, and terrorist activities. Additionally, select groups of Iraqi Shiite militants that targeted and killed Coalition and Iraqi forces and innocent Iraqi civilians have received support in the form of weapons, training, funding, and guidance from the IRGC-QF.

Including the commander of the IRGC-QF, Qasem Soleimani, Iranian military individuals have been listed on 'the Annex of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1737'⁵⁹ and 'UNSCR 1747,'⁶⁰ and on the Specially Designated National (SDN) list maintained by the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) pursuant to 'Executive Order 13382'⁶¹ and '13438'⁶² on the basis of their relationship to the IRGC and the IRGC-QF. Iranian military individuals who are listed in UNSCRs and Executive Orders are shown below:

⁵⁸ UN Security Council resolution 1267 established sanctions against the Taliban and UN Security Council resolutions 1333 and 1735 imposed arms embargoes against the Taliban.

⁵⁹ *Resolution 1737, Resolution*, vol. 1737, 2006, https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/unsc_res1737-2006.pdf.

⁶⁰ *Resolution 1747, Resolution*, vol. 1747, 2007, https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/unsc_res1747-2007.pdf.

⁶¹ Bureau of Public Affairs Department Of State. The Office of Website Management, "Executive Order 13382," April 16, 2007, <http://www.state.gov/t/isn/c22080.htm>.

⁶² Bureau of Public Affairs Department Of State. The Office of Website Management, "Executive Order 13438," accessed October 23, 2015, <http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/executive-orders/2007.html>.

Table 4: UNSCRs and Executive Orders that Include Iranian Military Individuals

UNSCRs and Executive Orders	Designated Iranian Military Individuals
UNSCR 1737 Executive Order 13382	General Hosein Salimi, Commander of the Air Force/IRGC
UNSCR 1737	Maj Gen Yahya Rahim Safavi, IRGC
UNSCR 1747	Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Zahedi, Commander of IRGC Ground Forces
	Rear Admiral Morteza Safari, Commander of IRGC Navy
	General Zolqadr, IRGC officer, Deputy Interior Minister for Security Affairs
UNSCR 1747 Executive Order 13382	Brigadier General Morteza Rezaie, Deputy Commander of IRGC
	Vice Admiral Ali Akbar Ahmadian, Chief of IRGC Joint Staff
	Brigadier General Mohammad Hejazi, Commander of Bassij resistance force
	Brigadier General Qasem Soleimani, Commander of Quds force
Executive Order 13438	Abdul Reza Shahlai, Deputy commander in the IRGC–Quds Force
	Ahmed Foruzandeh, Brigadier General in the IRGC-QF

Source: Compiled by the Author from the Aforementioned Sources

According to claims, the IRGC and its Quds Force branch have been involved in different forms of extraterritorial activities: Hostage taking, assassinations, subversion, bombings, aircraft hijackings, as well as providing financial support, military assistance, social services, ideological supports to its proxies. Owing to some of these activities, Iran has been designated as a State Sponsor of Terrorism.

Iran's extraterritorial activities are not limited to Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon. The IRGC has also taken very active roles in Yemen and Syria. As an indication of Iran's military

extraterritorial engagement, solely in Syria, Alfoneh states that 254 people, most of whom were affiliated with the IRGC-QF, have been killed between January 2013 and August 2015 according to open source data collected from Persian-language accounts of funerals in Iran.⁶³ In addition to Lebanese Hezbollah and Iraqi Shiite groups, the IRGC's name is affiliated with Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC).

Needless to say, Iranian ruling elites pursue political ends with the IRGC's extraterritorial activities. Although the secretive nature of these activities is an obstacle for research the IRGC's relations with Hezbollah and activities in Iraq are relatively well documented. Thus both cases are very valuable for observing Iran's motivations, as well as the extent and character of IRGC's involvement in these engagements. In this context, the remaining part of this chapter covers two case studies; the IRGC's relations with Lebanese Hezbollah and Shiite groups in post-2003 occupied Iraq.

The IRGC's Relations with Lebanese Hezbollah

Lebanon achieved its political independence from France in 1943. The modern state of Lebanon comprises many different religions and ethnic groups. Two main clusters, Muslims and Christians, include 18 officially recognized sects. Among them, Maronite Christians, Sunni Muslims, and Shiite Muslims constitute the three major sects. According to the 1932 census, which was the only official census conducted in Lebanon under the French Mandate, Christian Maronites (28.8%) had the largest population, followed by the Sunni Muslims (22.4%) then the

⁶³ Ali Alfoneh, "Shiite Combat Casualties Show the Depth of Iran's Involvement in Syria," August 3, 2015, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/shiite-combat-casualties-show-the-depth-of-irans-involvement-in-syria>.

Shiite Muslims (19.6%). The census with dubious reliability comprised the statistical basis for the distribution of political power among the major religious sects with their numerical sizes in proportion to their respective sizes.⁶⁴

Accordingly, the Christian Maronites were accorded the presidency, the Sunni Muslims were granted the premiership, and the Shiite Muslims were awarded the speakership of the parliament. Although the Shiites perceived their speakership as politically far weaker than either the presidency or the premiership, this political resolution based on the distribution of population worked well until significant demographic shifts took place in the 1970s, as a result of higher birth rates in the Muslim community and the influx of Muslim immigrants from Syria and Palestine.⁶⁵ Since then, unease has grown about the status given based on the 1932 census, particularly among Shiites, who were historically a rural and poor population located primarily in the South and the Bekaa Valley.

In addition to its effects on the demographic shift, the Palestinian implantation during the 1970's created a new environment that led to the civil war and foreign intervention (Israel operations and Syria's military support for the Christians, so as to prevent the war spilling across its border).

According to Wege, this new environment had a dual impact on the Lebanese political system:

First, the dominant Maronites construed Palestinian refugees as a demographic, religious, and political threat and acted accordingly.

⁶⁴ Muhammad A. Faour, "Religion, Demography, and Politics in Lebanon," *Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 6 (November 1, 2007): 909, doi:10.1080/00263200701568279.

⁶⁵ Augustus Richard Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 12.

Second, Palestinians competed with the Shiites for scarce resources in the underdeveloped south, and (after the 1974 Melkart Protocol) Palestinian military operations brought Israeli military strikes to Shi'a population centers.⁶⁶

A conjuncture of domestic conflicts and foreign interventions prepared the politicization and mobilization of Lebanese Shiites.

Particularly, a 1969 meeting in Najaf, one of the most important Shiite religious centers, constituted the origin of the mobilization of the Shiites. Among participants in the meeting, Musa al-Sadr, an Iranian-born cleric who moved to Lebanon in 1960, would be the most influential actor in the establishment of Hezbollah⁶⁷ by gaining great popularity through his outreach efforts and social activism.⁶⁸

Musa al-Sadr prepared the conditions that preceded Hezbollah. In 1969, al-Sadr established the Shiite Higher Council as a lobbying force for the Shiite community in Lebanon. Five years later, in 1974, he initiated the Movement of the Deprived (*Al-Harakat al-Mahrumin*) to amplify Shiite activism for economic and social development in Shiite villages.⁶⁹ After the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975, Sadr organized the first major Shiite militia called Amal (*Afwaj al-Muqawama al-Lubnaniyya*, Lebanese Resistance Battalions).⁷⁰ Sadr's Amal was the seedbed for Hezbollah.⁷¹ In the meantime, several critical developments precipitated the emergence of Hezbollah;

- The disappearance of Musa al-Sadr in Libya in August 1978, which became a

⁶⁶ Carl Anthony Wege, "Hizbollah Organization," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 17, no. 2 (January 1, 1994): 152, doi:10.1080/10576109408435950.

⁶⁷ A.k.a. Hizbullah, Hizb'allah, Hizballah; the meaning of Hizbollah in the Quran denoted 'the body of Muslim believers. As 'ad AbuKhalil, "Ideology and Practice of Hizballah in Lebanon: Islamization of Leninist Organizational Principles," *Middle Eastern Studies* 27, no. 3 (July 1, 1991): 393.

⁶⁸ Abbas William Samii, "A Stable Structure on Shifting Sands: Assessing the Hizbullah-Iran-Syria Relationship," *Middle East Journal* 62, no. 1 (January 1, 2008): 33.

⁶⁹ Mordechai Nisan, *Politics and War in Lebanon: Unraveling the Enigma* (New Brunswick, NJ; London: Transaction Publishers, 2015).

⁷⁰ Samii, "A Stable Structure on Shifting Sands," 33.

⁷¹ Wege, "Hizbollah Organization," 152.

major focus and rallying point for the community,

- Israel's invasions of Lebanon in 1978 and 1982,
- The establishment of a Shiite Islamic state in Iran in 1979.^{72, 73}

After the disappearance of Sadr, the shift in approaches of the new leadership represented by Nabih Berri led to splits among Lebanese Shiites. The more religious members, some of whom would go on to leadership positions in Hezbollah, opposed the adoption of more secular policies and tolerance toward Israel's advance.⁷⁴ Husayn al-Musawi, one of the Amal's leaders, called for Shiites to resist the invasion in the name of Islam.⁷⁵

On July 6, 1982, the Israeli army invaded Lebanon as part of its wider 'Peace of the Galilee' operation; Qassem -who is the second in command of Hezbollah with the title of deputy secretary-general- states that the reason of the so-called 'terrorist' attacks emanating from Lebanon was not the main purpose behind the operation.⁷⁶ According to Norton, the true objectives were "to destroy the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as a significant political force and to install a friendly government in Beirut."⁷⁷ Among other developments, the invasion became a seminal event and not only triggered further radicalization of Lebanese Shi'ites, but also paved the way for Iran's direct involvement.

Hezbollah emerged basically in three geographic regions: the Bekaa which was the movement's primary politico-military foundation; the southern suburbs of Beirut, its secondary

⁷² Marius Deeb, "Shia Movements in Lebanon: Their Formation, Ideology, Social Basis, and Links with Iran and Syria," *Third World Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (April 1, 1988): 685.

⁷³ Wege, "Hizbollah Organization," 153.

⁷⁴ Samii, "A Stable Structure on Shifting Sands," 36.

⁷⁵ Marc R. DeVore, "Exploring the Iran-Hezbollah Relationship: A Case Study of How State Sponsorship Affects Terrorist Group Decision-Making," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 6, no. 4-5 (2012): 91, <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/218>.

⁷⁶ Naim Qassem, *Hizbullah : The Story from within / Naim Qassem*. (London: Saqi, 2005), 167.

⁷⁷ Norton, *Hezbollah*, 71.

area of strength; and certain areas of South Lebanon, its tertiary foundation.⁷⁸ Among them, the Bekaa became the center of Iran's and Syria's support.

The third crucial event was the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The revolution had a stimulating effect on Lebanese Shiites. Iran saw the Lebanese Shiites as a natural proxy. The convergence of mutual interest and ideological affinity has been the root of Iran's most prominent, and most well-known relationship with the Lebanese group, Hezbollah. As stated by Norton, although '1982' was referred as the establishment year of Hezbollah, it existed as a cabal rather than a coherent organization until the mid-1980s.⁷⁹ Iran's wide range of ideological and material support was a vital instrument in the movement's improvement and emergence as a well-established organization.

Iran's ideological Influence on Hezbollah

The most noted example of Iran's efforts to export the revolution beyond its own borders was its active involvement in Hezbollah's establishment and development. Although the revolution took place a long distance away from Lebanon, since its inception, the Revolutionary Regime has had its greatest impact on Lebanese Shiites, by virtue of mutual religious and cultural affinities, profound historical connections and shared political interests.

Notably, the Hezbollah leadership's adherence to the thought of Twelver Shiism, adoption of the concept of *Velayat-e Faqih* and embrace of Ayatollah Khomeini as the supreme political and religious authority contributed to the success of the enduring strong Iran-Hezbollah relationship.

Personal relationships between some Iranian clerics and Hezbollah's command leadership

⁷⁸ Wege, "Hezbollah Organization," 155.

⁷⁹ Norton, *Hezbollah*, 34.

in Shiite spiritual centers such as Najaf, Qom and as well as Lebanon were another facilitator in the rapid growth and expansion of Hezbollah.⁸⁰

In the late 1960s and the 1970s, some Iranian revolutionaries were trained in Lebanon; Lebanese clerics also studied in Najaf and Qom with Iranian counterparts who would later be involved with the revolution.⁸¹

Qassem -deputy secretary-general of Hezbollah- asserts clearly the reasons that lay behind the success of Iran-Hezbollah relations as follows:

- Both Iran and Hezbollah believe in the jurisdiction of the Jurist-Theologian, and that Imam Khomeini was himself that leader -the embodiment of this jurisdiction in our times. Iran and the Party thus met within one framework of international leadership legitimacy.
- Iran's choice of an Islamic republican system of government coincided with the Islamic principles held by Hezbollah.
- Political concord also existed on the issue of Iran's absolute rejection of superpower hegemony, the safeguarding of independence, and support for all the liberation movements, especially those aimed at resisting Israeli occupation. Such was the view held by Hezbollah, with a priority awarded to the confrontation of Israeli occupation and whatever that entails regarding opposing powers or projects of domination.⁸²

In addition to the reasons stated by Qassem, the 'Open Letter' of 1985 addressed by the Hezbollah to the downtrodden in Lebanon and the world explicitly and officially shows the

⁸⁰ Magnus Ranstrop, "Hizbollah's Command Leadership," in *Terrorism Studies: A Reader / Edited by John Horgan and Kurt Braddock*. (London ; New York: Routledge, 2012), 156.

⁸¹ Samii, "A Stable Structure on Shifting Sands," 34.

⁸² Qassem, *Hizbullah*, 388-389.

ideological closeness and the leadership role assigned to Iran:

We, the sons of Hezbollah's nation, whose vanguard God has given victory in Iran and which has established the nucleus of the world's central Islamic state, abide by the orders of a single wise and just command currently embodied in the supreme Ayatollah Ruhollah al-Musavi al-Khomeini.⁸³

To adopt Khomeini as the leader of the Shiite world and his concept of *velayat-e faqih* gave Iran tremendous influence within Hezbollah. This allowed Iran to expand its influence in Lebanon's domestic and foreign affairs.

Apart from ideological familiarity and close personal relationships, Iran's direct involvement through a variety of channels and institutions, such as the IRGC, Iran's representatives in Syria and Lebanon to Iran's Foreign Ministry, Iranian Intelligence services and the Martyr's Foundation, institutionalized the relations and consolidated the establishment and the development of Hezbollah.⁸⁴ Among these, particularly the IRGC's efforts occupied a very important place.

Following Israel's 1982 invasion, Iran immediately advised Syria to allow the deployment of a small Iranian contingent to Lebanon. The imminent threat posed by Israel and Syria's alliance with Iran in the Iran–Iraq war easily made this demand possible and Tehran seized the opportunity through a military agreement signed between Iran and Syria in June 1982.⁸⁵

After the parliamentary vote, Iran initially deployed a contingent of 500 or so IRGC members (there is no specific number regarding the first unit, the number ranges from 300 to

⁸³ Samii, "A Stable Structure on Shifting Sands," 36.

⁸⁴ Magnus Ranstorp, "Hizbollah's Command Leadership: Its Structure, Decision-making and Relationship with Iranian Clergy and Institution," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 6, no. 3 (September 1, 1994): 316, doi:10.1080/09546559408427263.

⁸⁵ Deeb, "Shia Movements in Lebanon," 697.

500). In a short time, this number gradually reached 1,500, distributed throughout some smaller villages in the Bekaa Valley.^{86, 87, 88} Additionally, Syria allowed a supply line of support to run from Iran through Syria to Lebanese Shiites.⁸⁹

The IRGC intensified its efforts to create Hezbollah through working with Iranian intelligence and Iranian diplomats as well as Syrian officials.⁹⁰ Deeb states that “[i]n fact until the arrival of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards, . . . Hezbollah had previously existed simply as an idea in the writings of Muhammad Husain Fadlallah.”⁹¹ The IRGC’s influence became evident in a short time.

The IRGC served as a conduit for all kind of Iranian support and the IRGC’s activities in Lebanon included numerous forms of assistance. In particular, fostering a revolutionary spirit among the Lebanese Shiites and then the militarization of Shiite activism were the net effects of Iran’s presence in Lebanon. As stated by Byman, “[w]hen the IRGC initially arrived in Lebanon, its base in the Baalbeck area of the Bekaa Valley became a microcosm of revolutionary Iran.”⁹²

Kramer describes this transformation very well in quoting the experience of co-founder and Hezbollah’s secretary-general Abbas al-Musavi who took the first training course offered by the Revolutionary Guards in 1982.⁹³

⁸⁶ Magnus Ranstorp, *Hizb’allah in Lebanon : The Politics of the Western Hostage Crisis / Magnus Ranstorp ; Foreword by Terry Waite*. (New York: StMartin’s Press, 1997), 34–36.

⁸⁷ Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections : States That Sponsor Terrorism* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 82.

⁸⁸ Eric Sander Lob, “An Institutional History of the Iranian Construction Jihad: From Inception to Institutionalization (1979--2011).” (PhD Thesis, Princeton University, 2013), 134.

⁸⁹ Martin Kramer, “Hizbullah: The Calculus of Jihad,” *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 47, no. 8 (May 1, 1994): 26, doi:10.2307/3824797.

⁹⁰ Byman, *Deadly Connections*, 83.

⁹¹ Deeb, “Shia Movements in Lebanon,” 692.

⁹² Byman, *Deadly Connections*, 92.

⁹³ Abbas al-Musavi was an influential Lebanese Shia cleric, co-founder and Hezbollah’s secretary-general from 1991 until his assassination by Israel in 1992. Ranstorp states that Sheikh Abbas al-Musawi occupied not only the most senior positions as spiritual leaders of the Hizbollah in the Bekaa but also acted as liaison with the Iranian Pasdaran Revolutionary Guards Corps and Iran while maintaining overall control over Hizbollah’s irregular and semi-regular military units. (Ranstorp, “Hizbollah’s Command Leadership,” 305.)

I recall one of the sights I can never forget. We were awakened at night by the weeping of the brethren Guards during the night prayer. Is this not the greatest school from which one can graduate? I also recall when one of the brethren Guards gave a weapons lesson. Suddenly, after he had given all the explanations, he put the weapon aside and swore an oath saying: "All I have explained to you will not help you; only God can help you." He began to talk about belief and reliance on God.... When I joined the Guards and sat with the brethren in the first course they gave in the Bekaa Valley, I felt I derived immense benefit. I felt I had truly penetrated genuine Islam. If this is how I felt, as someone at an advanced level of schooling, then how must the other youths have felt who filled the ranks of the Guards?⁹⁴

Also, Kramer's subsequent quote shows the IRGC's successful indoctrination within a short span of time;

The school of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard made the Muslim youths love martyrdom..... We were not surprised at all when, shortly after the arrival of the Guards, a Muslim youth in Lebanon smiled at death while carrying with him 1,200 kilograms of explosives.⁹⁵

Over time, Hezbollah gained power and spread to Beirut and southern Lebanon from the Bekaa Valley. Apart from Iran's undeniable role in the rapid growth and popularity of Hezbollah in these three regions, Hezbollah leaders' success in meeting the social and economic needs of the Shiite community in the absence of any efficient Lebanese authority and the establishment of efficient Hezbollah propaganda machinery played important roles.⁹⁶

In the 1980s, Hezbollah had around 5,000 armed members actively engaged in fighting against Israeli and Western targets. Byman states that the number of fighters gradually shrank as the years passed, but the fighters got more skilled and professionalized. In May 2000, by the time of the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, the numbers of full time and part time fighters were

⁹⁴ Kramer, "Hizbullah," 31. (Quoted from an interview in *Al-Ahd* (16 October 1987).)

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 32. (Quoted from an interview in *Al-Ahd* (16 October 1987).)

⁹⁶ Ranstorp, *Hizb'allah in Lebanon*, 39.

respectively 500, and 1000.⁹⁷ Similarly the number of IRGC members in Lebanon shrank over time and decreased to roughly 150 fighters in the 1990s.⁹⁸

Since the beginning of its presence in Lebanon, the IRGC had not openly engaged in military operations. Ranstrop quotes from Qassem regarding the functionality of the IRGC as follows: “the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard does not fight in southern Lebanon. However, it is known that some of its members are present in the al-Biq’a area: they play an educational and training role and do not participate in other matters.”⁹⁹ Ranstrop argues that “[t]he main nature of Iran’s mission was geared towards aiding the formation of an organizational basis and infrastructure for a new revolutionary Shi’a group through extensive military training and religious guidance.”¹⁰⁰

Due to several reasons, Iran-Hezbollah relations lost their initial intensity. Hezbollah over time became the strongest group in Lebanon and has participated in parliamentary politics since 1992.¹⁰¹ As Hezbollah got stronger, the Hezbollah’s material and ideological dependency on Iran became weaker. For Iran, the cost of relations with Hezbollah and the eight-year war with Iraq had been the most influential factors in revising its policies. Over time, strategic reasons have come to the fore; the growing international pressure against Iran’s involvement in Lebanon and the war’s putting the regime's survival and the revolution's success at risk led Iran to shift its policy.^{102, 103} Additionally, another factor, as stated by Lob, the thought of satisfactory consolidation of power in the mid-1980s led the revolutionary regime to adopt a less radicalized

⁹⁷ Byman, *Deadly Connections*, 84.

⁹⁸ Byman et al., *Iran’s Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 81.

⁹⁹ Ranstrop, *Hizb’allah in Lebanon*, 34–36.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Byman et al., *Iran’s Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 81.

¹⁰² Samii, “A Stable Structure on Shifting Sands,” 51.

¹⁰³ Ostovar, “Guardians of the Islamic Revolution Ideology, Politics, and the Development of Military Power in Iran (1979-2009).,” 97.

foreign policy.¹⁰⁴ However, it did not mean Iran's support for Hezbollah totally ended.

Hezbollah's goals were outlined in the 1985 Open Letter as followings:

- (a) To expel the Americans, the French and their allies definitely from Lebanon, putting an end to any colonialist entity on our land;
- (b) To submit the Phalanges to a just power and bring them all to justice for the crimes they have perpetrated against Muslims and Christians;
- (c) To permit all the sons of our people to determine their future and to choose in liberty the form of government they desire. We call upon all of them to pick the option of Islamic government which, alone, is capable of guaranteeing justice and liberty for all. Only an Islamic regime can stop any further tentative attempts of imperialistic infiltration into our country¹⁰⁵

To attain these goals, Hezbollah pursued militant means against Israel and the West, and tried to consolidate and expand its power in Lebanese domestic politics. In 1989, the Taif Accord which "provided the basis for the ending of the civil war and the return to political normalcy in Lebanon"¹⁰⁶ and the death of Khomeini directly affected subsequent improvements. The accord brought the more equitable distribution of political power (on a 50-50 basis) and then paved the way for Hezbollah's involvement in Lebanese domestic politics. Also, the accord called for the withdrawal of foreign troops in Lebanon.¹⁰⁷ Parallel to improvements in Lebanon, after the death of Khomeini in 1989 and with the Rafsanjani presidency, revolutionary fervor was replaced by pragmatic policies. The immense cost of the Iraq war (economic and human), logistic needs and external political pressures regarding sponsoring Hezbollah caused this change of approach.

¹⁰⁴ Lob, "An Institutional History of the Iranian Construction Jihad," 123.

¹⁰⁵ "An Open Letter: The Hizballah Program," *Council on Foreign Relations*, January 1, 1988, <http://www.cfr.org/terrorist-organizations-and-networks/open-letter-hizballah-program/p30967>.

¹⁰⁶ Hassan Krayem, "The Lebanese Civil War and the Taif Agreement," *American University of Beirut*, accessed December 22, 2015, <http://ddc.aub.edu.lb/projects/pspa/conflict-resolution.html>.

¹⁰⁷ John C. Rolland, ed., *Lebanon: Current Issues and Background* (Hauppauge, NY: Nova Publishers, 2003), 23.

Thus, Iran's initial active involvement gave way to a partly constrained sponsorship.

In May 2000, Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon because of the increasing cost of military occupation. Hezbollah immediately presented Israel's withdrawal as a victory and this amplified the group's popularity amongst the Lebanese population. After a period of relative peace between 2000 and 2006, tension increased again because of Hezbollah's kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers and killing eight others in July 2006. In response, Israel attacked Hezbollah. After the deaths of 164 Israelis (forty-five civilians), and over 1,100 Lebanese (mostly civilians) in 34 days, the fighting ended with a ceasefire. This ceasefire was also claimed as a victory by Hezbollah by declaring Israel's incapability to destroy it.^{108, 109}

Overall, chiefly because of the following factors, Hezbollah began to be a more autonomous body;

- The immense cost of the Iraq war and external pressures regarding Hezbollah sponsorship,
- The death of Khomeini who was also Hezbollah's ideological leader,
- Iran's adopting foreign policy approaches that aimed to integrate itself into the international system,
- The Taif Accord that provided the basis for ending the civil war and the return to political normalcy in Lebanon,
- Hezbollah's increasing power in Lebanon's domestic politics and new alliances with domestic actors,
- Israel's (2000) and Syria's (2005) withdrawal from Lebanon.
- Decreasing dependency on Iran because of the growth of Hezbollah's own

¹⁰⁸ "Hezbollah."

¹⁰⁹ "Hezbollah | Mapping Militant Organizations," accessed December 7, 2015, <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/81#cite46>.

independent funds, particularly from wealthy Shi'ite merchants in Lebanon and from the sizable West African, South American, and U.S. Lebanese Shiite diaspora.¹¹⁰ (According to intelligence estimates, Hezbollah's overall budget amounts to around US\$500 million annually.¹¹¹)

Besides its militant activities, due to its involvement in politics and social services, there are debates about Hezbollah's classification as to whether it is a terrorist organization or not. For instance, while the US, Canada, Israel classify Hezbollah as a terrorist organization, other countries like Russia do not. In the third category, countries like Australia and the United Kingdom distinguish between Hezbollah's guerilla and political wings, and classify its guerilla wing as a terrorist organization.¹¹²

Since its inception, the organization has engaged in forms of violence through guerrilla warfare. According to the Global Terrorism Database, the number of Hezbollah or Hezbollah suspected fatalities is roughly 1200 between 1983 and 2014 in 398 incidents (including suspected incidents). The group is most actively in Lebanon and Israel. But it also executed violent activities in Argentina, Bahrein, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Egypt, France, Greece, Iran, Israel, Kuwait, Lebanon, Niger, Saudi, Arabia, Spain, Syria, Thailand, Tunisia, and Turkey.¹¹³

Hezbollah's Major Attacks

Instead of a day-by-day chronology of the violence employed by Hezbollah that would be

¹¹⁰ Graham E. Fuller, "The Hizballah-Iran Connection: Model for Sunni Resistance," *The Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (2006): 143.

¹¹¹ Martin Rudner, "Hizbullah: An Organizational and Operational Profile," *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 23, no. 2 (February 26, 2010): 232, doi:10.1080/08850600903565654.

¹¹² "Hezbollah."

¹¹³ Ibid.

long, some major attacks of Hezbollah are listed below;¹¹⁴

Table 5: Hezbollah's Major Attacks

DATE	COUNTRY/ CITY	FATALITIES	TARGET	ATTACK TYPE
4/18/1983	Lebanon Beirut	63	U.S. Embassy	Bombing/ Explosion
10/23/1983	Lebanon Beirut	241	Marine Base Command Center	Bombing/ Explosion
10/23/1983	Lebanon Beirut	58	French Peacekeeping Force's base	Bombing/ Explosion
9/20/1984	Lebanon Beirut	23	U.S. Embassy	Bombing/ Explosion
3/10/1985	Lebanon Metulla	12	Israel Military convoy	Bombing/ Explosion
4/12/1985	Spain Aporto	18	El Descanso restaurant/Spain	Bombing/ Explosion
6/14/1985	Greece Athens	1	TWA Boeing 727 Flight 847	Hijacking
7/11/1985	Kuwait Kuwait	11	Al Sharq Seaside Café	Bombing/ Explosion
6/23/1986	Egypt Cairo	10	Property	Bombing/ Explosion
9/6/1986	Turkey Istanbul	21	Neve Shalom Temple	Facility/Infrastruc ture Attack
12/26/1986	Saudi Arabia Riyadh	62	Airport and Aircraft (Jetliner)	Hijacking
7/12/1988	Greece Aegina	10	City of Porras Ferry	Bombing/ Explosion

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

DATE	COUNTRY/ CITY	FATALITIES	TARGET	ATTACK TYPE
9/19/1989	Niger	171	Airports and Aircraft France DC - 10 aircraft	Bombing/ Explosion
3/17/1992	Argentina Buenos Aires	29	Israeli Embassy	Bombing/ Explosion
7/18/1994	Argentina Buenos Aires	85	Jewish- Argentine Mutual Association (AMIA)	Bombing/ Explosion
8/25/1998	Israel Kiryat Shemona	12	Israeli Citizens	Bombing/ Explosion
5/7/2008	Lebanon Tripoli	40	Lebanon Government Soldiers and Civilians	Bombing/ Explosion
5/9/2008	Lebanon Beirut	11	Supporters of the Lebanese government	Armed Assault

Source: National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)

Most of the initial attacks aimed to get foreigners to retreat from Lebanon. For instance, in two separate attacks in 1983 and 1984 respectively; 86 people in an American Embassy bombing, 299 people in attacks on French Peacekeeping and the Marine Base Command Center were killed. Some attacks aimed to support Iran during the Iran–Iraq war. For example, to force Kuwait to abandon its support for Iraq, Hezbollah executed ten attacks in Kuwait and caused 16 casualties. Other group attacks aimed to free members arrested by other countries such as the hijacking of TWA flight 847 in 1985. Furthermore, Hezbollah attacked rival movements to

minimize their influence on the Lebanese Shiite community. As mentioned above, because of these activities Hezbollah was officially listed as a terrorist organization (at least its military wing) by eleven countries, including the EU.

Types of the IRGC's Support

Among many forms of Iranian support, the IRGC's role in the creation of Hezbollah can be defined as the most influential one. Besides military training and augmenting warfighting capabilities vital to the survival and the success of Hezbollah paramilitary activities, IRGC members also engaged in recruitment and indoctrination in which they preached the virtues of revolutionary ideology and stressed the value of martyrdom.¹¹⁵

A very short time after the IRGC's arrival in Lebanon, the Baalbeck area of the Bekaa Valley became a small revolutionary Iran. Byman states that “[w]omen wore veils, pictures of Ayatollah Khomeini were ubiquitous, and the debates in Iran were mirrored in Lebanon.”¹¹⁶ Hezbollah accepted the doctrine of the *velayet-e faqih*, the leadership of Khomeini and adopted other Iranian views; such as “the division of the world into oppressors and the oppressed, enmity to Israel and to the United States, and the rejection of national boundaries in favor of religious identity.”¹¹⁷ Given this emphasis, Hezbollah followed the Iranian ideological line.

Iran's influence is also seen in Hezbollah's organizational structure. The key decision-making body of Hezbollah, *Majlis al-Shura*, included one or two high-ranking IRGC representatives or officials from the Iranian embassies in Beirut or Damascus.^{118, 119} These Iranian officials provided a direct link on matters that required strategic guidance or Iranian

¹¹⁵ Byman, *Deadly Connections*, 88.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹¹⁸ Samii, “A Stable Structure on Shifting Sands,” 37.

¹¹⁹ Ranstorp, “Hizbollah's Command Leadership,” 310.

assistance or arbitration.¹²⁰

Majidiyar quotes from an interview with veteran Iranian diplomat Hossein Sheikh al-Islam that “the IRGC’s Intelligence Directorate (which later became the Quds Force) and the Iranian Embassy in Damascus played an instrumental role in the creation and organization of Hezbollah.”¹²¹

Based on intelligence estimates, Iran financed Hezbollah with roughly \$100 million annually.^{122, 123, 124, 125} This money, particularly in its initial period, enabled Hezbollah to sustain and expand its power. Hezbollah could “attract both veteran Shiite fighters formerly employed by Amal and Palestinian groups, and eager young recruits, by offering salaries of \$150-200 per month.”¹²⁶ In addition to monthly income, several special privileges were offered to these fighters such as cost-free education and medical treatment for them and their families.¹²⁷

This financial contribution not only financed the organization’s military activities (recruitment, weapons procurement, logistics, etc.) and the needs of militias, but also allowed Hezbollah to run “an array of social welfare and financial services for the Shi’a community, including religious schools, clinics and hospitals, as well as cash subsidies to Shi’ite families below the poverty line, which naturally boosted the popularity and growth of the pro-Iranian movement in the Beqaa.”¹²⁸

Overall, the IRGC’s support for Hezbollah may be divided into the following main

¹²⁰ Rudner, “Hizbullah,” 227.

¹²¹ Ahmad K. Majidiyar, “Is Deepening Shi’ite-Sunni Tension Plunging Lebanon into a New Civil War?,” AEI Outlook Series, March 2014, 25, <http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/95459651/deepening-shiite-sunni-tension-plunging-lebanon-new-civil-war>.

¹²² Wege, “Hizbollah Organization,” 158.

¹²³ DeVore, “Exploring the Iran-Hezbollah Relationship,” 93.

¹²⁴ Byman, *Deadly Connections*, 88.

¹²⁵ Rudner, “Hizbullah,” 232.

¹²⁶ DeVore, “Exploring the Iran-Hezbollah Relationship,” 95.

¹²⁷ Ranstorp, *Hizb’allah in Lebanon*, 34–36.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

categories;

- The IRGC's indoctrination fueled Shiite consciousness and spread revolutionary values among the Lebanese Shiite community. The IRGC created a microcosm of revolutionary Iran in its Beqaa Valley base. This transformed the Lebanese Shiite community into a pro-Iranian Revolutionary stand. The ideological mobilization enabled Hezbollah to find human resource and material support from the Lebanese Shiite community and to sustain its longevity and flourishing.
- Military training provided by the IRGC allowed Hezbollah to attain its goals through violent activities and subsequently made it one of the most influential actors in Lebanon.
- Providing safe havens allowed Hezbollah to improve organizational structure, to establish training centers, to have a long range strategy and to plan paramilitary and political activities.
- Material aid (financial, weaponry and logistical) provided by Iran empowered both Hezbollah's military and political wings.
- By joining in decision-making, the IRGC not only contributed to Hezbollah's organizational/structural establishment, but also to its strategy-making through know-how and intelligence.

Consequently, taken as a whole, Iranian support was essential to Hezbollah's long-standing life and success.

Iran's Motivations for Supporting Hezbollah

Iran's motivations for supporting Hezbollah were distilled from an interconnecting set of

ideological and strategic calculations. The first decade of Iran-Hezbollah relations was mostly shaped by Iran's revolutionary ambitions. Iran tried to export the revolution to all Muslim communities, however, the initial enthusiasm of the Revolution did not take root in Sunni and Shiite minority communities. Hezbollah was the first group that allowed Iran to export its ideology and influence, which is why, in the words of Byman, "none is more important to Tehran than the Lebanese Hezbollah"¹²⁹ among proxies. Iran exercised almost complete control over the organization by shaping its ideology, structure and joining its decision-making. However, over time, as Hezbollah gained power and its dependency on Iran decreased and as Iran adopted more rational policies in place of ideological ones, Hezbollah became for Iran a strategic tool for Iranian foreign policy goals rather than an idealistic phenomenon.

Although Iran's motivations for supporting Hezbollah have varied in strength over time, supporting Hezbollah served as a strategic tool in two main goals;

- A Tool of Deterrence and a Bargaining Chip

Since its inception, revolutionary Iran has primarily been concerned with regime survival and this deeply influenced its strategies. Alfoneh reveals the thinking of Mohammad Montazeri, who was one of the founders of the IRGC, regarding the strategy behind the use of Hezbollah in regime survival:

In order to achieve ideological, political, security and economic self-reliance we have no other choice than to mobilize all forces loyal to the Islamic Revolution, and through this mobilization, plant such a terror in the hearts of the enemies that they abandon the thought of an offensive and annihilation of our revolution.... If our revolution does not have an offensive and internationalist dimension, the enemies of Islam will again enslave us culturally, politically, and the like, and they will not abstain from plunder and looting.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Byman, *Deadly Connections*, 79.

¹³⁰ Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled*, 212.

Fulton asserts that “by demonstrating a capability to strike U.S. and Israeli interests anywhere in the world, or creating a perception of this capability, Iran’s leaders hoped to stave off a military strike, or at least make it extremely costly for their foes.”¹³¹

In this context, Hezbollah has been seen as a deterrence and retaliatory force against Iran’s adversaries. Especially for the US and Israel which are disproportionately powerful in terms of conventional military capabilities, Hezbollah stands as “a useful pressure point or eventually becomes a bargaining chip.”¹³² During the Iran–Iraq war, Hezbollah targeted countries that were directly providing military, financial, or logistical support to Iraq. Chubin states that “Iran’s direct interventions to expand Hezbollah’s targeting helped the Iranian government achieve such important foreign policy objectives as obtaining American weapons, persuading France to expel the regime’s opponents and strengthening Syria’s hold on Lebanon.”¹³³

- Project power

In addition to being a deterrent and retaliatory force that targeted the adversaries of Iran, Hezbollah also allowed Iran to project power to sustain and expand its sphere of influence by becoming a greater voice in regional affairs. Signaling Hezbollah as a forward base for Iran to punish the enemies of Islam and protect Muslim’s rights, allowed Iran to project its power to the Muslim world where it appointed itself as leader despite being religiously Shiite and ethnically Persian. Furthermore, the execution of active anti-US and Israel policies through Hezbollah aimed to gain prestige not only in the Arab world, but also among anti-US states and groups (South America).

¹³¹ Will Fulton, “Iran’s Global Force Projection Network: IRGC Quds Force and Lebanese Hezbollah” (American Enterprise Institute, 2013), 2, http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/-irans-global-force-projection-network-irgc-quds-force-and-lebanese-hezbollah_135304149797.pdf.

¹³² Chubin, “Is Iran a Military Threat?,” 73.

¹³³ DeVore, “Exploring the Iran-Hezbollah Relationship,” 99.

Norton defines Hezbollah as a stalking horse for Iranian interests, which offered a degree of deniability when confronted with international pressure over Hezbollah activities.¹³⁴ Iran has not had any direct involvement in conflict with Israel and enjoyed hostility without direct engagement.¹³⁵ Thus, Iran was able to achieve its interests without provoking military retaliation and without paying the consequences that more direct involvement might entail.¹³⁶

Furthermore, Iran's influence in Lebanese domestic politics and pressures on both the US and Israel also consolidated the revolutionary regime's power in its domestic politics.

The IRGC's activities in Lebanon were Iran's first and most successful extraterritorial engagement. It may be seen as a laboratory for its future foreign engagements in post-2003 occupied Iraq and the 2011 Syrian civil war. In this success, shared religious and ideological doctrines, preexisting networks between leaders and clerics, mutual interest and needs, and the power vacuum in Lebanon. Besides these factors, the IRGC's status in Iran's power structure was a defining point in the success. Although the level of involvement was questioned by different factions in Iranian Politics, the IRGC's autonomy from the civilian leadership and its own independent economic infrastructure deepened this relation and made it durable.

The IRGC's Relations with Shiite Groups in Post-2003 Occupied Iraq

Since the 1979 revolution, Iraq has been one of Iran's main foreign policy concerns. Just after the revolution, to take advantage of Iran's demoralized regular army, thinking it would be ineffective, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein invaded Iran in September 1980. According to Foran and Goodwin, the following motivations were behind this decision;

¹³⁴ Norton, *Hezbollah*, 44.

¹³⁵ Ray Takeyh, "Iran, Israel and the Politics of Terrorism," *Survival* 48, no. 4 (December 1, 2006): 86, doi:10.1080/00396330601062691.

¹³⁶ Byman, *Deadly Connections*, 115.

- The fear of export of the revolution to Iraq's large Shi'a population;
- Seeking to become the political leader in the Arab world;
- The thought of supporting of Iran's own Arab minority in the oil-rich Khuzistan province.¹³⁷

Although after several months, Iraqi forces were repelled and Iraq switched to a defensive position, Iranians could not immediately achieve a decisive victory. The war lasted eight years. When the war ended after Iran's acceptance of UN decision number 598, there were not significant territorial changes, but very high costs. As stated by Foran and Goodwin, "[i]ran had suffered at least 160,000 dead (other estimates claim 300,000 or more) and some \$450 billion in damage to cities, villages, ports, and oil facilities."¹³⁸ The Iran–Iraq war strengthened the regime at home. However, it limited its influence outside of Iran's borders. Instead of pursuing its ideological agenda, the cost of war pushed Iran to adopt more pragmatic policies.

Until the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iran adopted a more cautious foreign policy for the sake of improving good relations with the West and with regional actors. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990 offered several unexpected benefits for Iran. Iran condemned the invasion and voted for the UN decision that obligate to withdraw its forces immediately without conditions. Increasing pressures, costs and isolation convinced Saddam to retreat. Iraq promised to recognize the Iranian border and to redeploy the troops in the Iranian and Kuwaiti fronts.¹³⁹

The 9/11 attacks changed the course of relations in the Middle East. The Bush administration's first significant reaction to the attacks was to emphasize the need to combat states that harbored and supported terrorists. Particularly three states, Iran, Iraq and North Korea,

¹³⁷ John Foran and Jeff Goodwin, "Revolutionary Outcomes in Iran and Nicaragua: Coalition Fragmentation, War, and the Limits of Social Transformation," *Theory and Society* 22, no. 2 (1993): 219.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Gokhan Cetinsaya, "Rafsanjani'den Hatemi'ye Iran Dis Politikasina Bakislar," in *Turkiye'nin Komsulari* (Ankara: Imge Kitabevi, 2002), 302–304.

were targeted and called the ‘axis of evil.’ After the ‘axis of evil’ speech, the toppling of the Saddam's regime in Iraq and the defeat of the Taliban in Afghanistan by the US created a very complex situation for Iran. On one hand, the fear of being the next target as a member of the ‘axis of evil’, on the other, the removal of sworn enemies surrounding it on the east and west. For both issues, while Iran sought means to counter US presence in the region, it also tried to take advantage of the ensuing power vacuum by supporting proxies, deterrent activities and keeping the nuclear issue on the table. The IRGC’s roles in both strategies are unquestionable. In this context, the following section will address the IRGC’s activities to implement its goals in post-Saddam Iraq.

Iraq’s Importance to Iran

Iran’s relations with Iraq have been very complicated and problematic. There is no exact figure that shows the proportion of Shiites in Iraq’s total population. According to the few available surveys regarding religious identity in Iraq, more than half of the country’s population is Arab originated Shiite. This figure ranges from 47% to 65% according to different sources. However, 60 percent is the widely accepted proportion in the literature.^{140, 141} Thus, Iran naturally saw Iraq in its potential sphere of influence and tried to promote its religious influence and propagate *velayat-e faqih*. Despite the large Shiite population, the Iraqi Sunni-dominated government was an obstacle to Iran’s determination to spread its revolution next door.

Both states have historically competed for regional hegemony rather than an ideological struggle, but this competition culminated in the eight-year war. As indicated by Ehteshami,

¹⁴⁰ Michael Lipka, “The Sunni-Shia Divide: Where They Live, What They Believe and How They View Each Other,” *Pew Research Center*, accessed January 5, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/06/18/the-sunni-shia-divide-where-they-live-what-they-believe-and-how-they-view-each-other/>.

¹⁴¹ “Iraq,” *The World Factbook*, June 20, 2016, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>.

“personality clashes, geopolitical rivalries, regime types, and deep suspicion at the leadership level combined to escalate a manageable border dispute into a more general conflict, which resulted in all-encompassing interstate war. ... The war was ultimately about territory, influence, and survival—it was not about religion or some historically rooted difference.”¹⁴²

Apart from Iraq, Iran was geographically surrounded by potential and already existing rivals and threats; Turkey was a NATO member and a long-time US ally; Azerbaijan, despite its Shiite dominance, had close relations with the US; the south Arab states, namely the Saudis, were already in conflict with Iran. Additionally, with the invasions of Afghanistan in 2002 and Iraq in 2003, countries on both Iran’s eastern and western borders were vulnerable to the US. In this environment, Iran felt under pressure. Since the 1979 revolution, Iraq has been one of the Islamic Republic's main foreign policy challenges. Iraq not only challenged Iran’s hegemonic ambitions by isolating it from the Arab world, but also posed a direct security threat to its territory, economy, and population.¹⁴³ The US invasion of Iraq and the ensuing destruction of the Saddam regime fundamentally altered the regional balance of power. The invasion encapsulated both opportunities and threats for Iran.

Depending on the level of Iran’s capabilities to shape post-Saddam Iraq, an allied Iraqi government would provide a number of benefits in favor of Iran;

- An ally Iraqi government would guarantee its western border and then allow Tehran to concentrate on its south where a possible U.S. invasion would probably be launched.
- In addition to Syria and Lebanon, an ally Iraqi government would allow Iran to augment its penetration of the Arab world. Iran also would find the opportunity to

¹⁴² Anoushiravan Ehteshami, “Iran-Iraq Relations after Saddam,” *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (September 1, 2003): 117, doi:10.1162/016366003322387145.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 116.

extend its influence in Lebanon without any obstacle.

- It would tilt the balance of power in the Persian Gulf in favor of Iran; a friendly Iraq could join Iran, Syria and Lebanon in an alliance against Israel and other Sunni rivals.
- Lastly, an ally Iraqi government would place Iran in a stronger bargaining position and weaken the U.S. strategy of containing Iran. Thus Iran's position would be strengthened in a wide variety of ways, including negotiations on Iran's nuclear program.¹⁴⁴

On the other hand, after removing the Baath regime and ensuing occupation of Iraq by the US, Iran would become sole arbiter in the post-Saddam Iraq. A permanent US existence or a client regime in Baghdad would pose a great threat in Iran's calculations;

- The presence of the US in its two neighbors caused Iran to think of itself as the next target. Bush administration's preemptive doctrine was an influential factor in this thought.
 - As the new neighbor, the US might easily influence Iran's domestic affairs and intensify its efforts to change its regime. Iran always considered the economic and military sanctions that the United States had imposed on it and its supports for the opponents of the regime as a part of this goal.
 - The US, as sole authority in Iraq, might install a client regime in Baghdad instead of directly governing Iraq, which is more probable in terms of taking international reactions into account. This would also be detrimental to Iran's national security.
- In this scenario, Iran might experience both invasion and regime change options.

¹⁴⁴ Kamran Taremi, "Iranian Foreign Policy Towards Occupied Iraq, 2003–05," *Middle East Policy* 12, no. 4 (December 1, 2005): 36, doi:10.1111/j.1475-4967.2005.00222.x.

Either a permanent US presence or a client regime in Baghdad would not only prevent Iran from acquiring the aforementioned benefits, but would also force Iran to be on the alert against the world's most powerful military.

Since the beginning of the crisis, Iran tried to shape improvements and adopted a strategy that included numerous steps. At the outset, in order to satisfy the international community and keep all its options open, Tehran declared its policy to be 'active neutrality' and stated its willingness to play an active role in resolving the crisis. The Iranian foreign minister summarized Tehran's position to the Iranian Parliament as 'neutral but not indifferent.'¹⁴⁵

Iran's preliminary preference was to keep Saddam in power. A weak Saddam would be better than a pro-American government in Baghdad according to Iranian leaders. To avert the invasion, Iran opted for diplomacy. Before the US attack, Iran made every effort to prevent the US invasion of Iraq. Iranian leadership tried to convince Iraqi authorities to comply with UN resolutions so as to deprive Washington of reasons and began a diplomatic campaign to rally Russia, China and EU members as well as regional countries against the war.¹⁴⁶ However, these efforts were fruitless.

Following the occupation of Iraq, the victory of the coalition forces and the removal of Saddam did not take long. Iranians perceived the invasion of Iraq as a prelude to an offensive against themselves. Tehran carried out all its capabilities to defuse the threats resulting from the U.S. presence next to Iran's boundaries. Iran aimed to prevent a possible US attack on Iran, shorten the US presence in Iraq, and prevent the United States from establishing a client state or

¹⁴⁵ Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Iran's Assessment of the Iraq Crisis," in *The Iraq Crisis and World Order*, ed. Ramesh Thakur and Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu (Tokyo; New York; Paris: United Nations University Press, 2007), 142.

¹⁴⁶ Taremi, "Iranian Foreign Policy Towards Occupied Iraq, 2003–05," 34.

a body composed of Americans to rule Iraq.^{147, 148, 149}

To these ends, Iran first entertained the idea of a friendly Shiite dominated regime in Iraq without the US presence. Thus, Iran tried to directly shape Iraq's domestic politics through using its influence on Shiites. Maintaining Iraq's territorial integrity, the restoration of peace and stability in Iraq was an essential precondition for the holding of elections. In this context, while Iran tried to ensure that the Shiite-inhabited areas of southern and central Iraq remained calm, it also urged the more radical leaders of the Iraqi Shiite community to exercise restraint in their dealings with the coalition.¹⁵⁰ According to Iranian leaders' calculation, as stated by Takeyh, a degree of stability may remove the reasons behind the existence of coalition forces in Iraq.¹⁵¹ On the contrary, as stated by Barzegar, "instability in Iraq will not only increase security costs for Iran; it will also expose the region to more interference by foreign forces. This will have damaging consequences for regional power relations and any security arrangements."¹⁵² Thus, Iran adopted a policy of building close relations with all Shiite factions for shaping Iraq's domestic politics in favor of its interests. Additionally, in parallel with shaping Iraq's internal politics, Iran had also militarily harbored, organized, trained and armed Shiite groups through the IRGC and its Quds Force as previously practiced in Lebanon, to repel a possible attack in case of any post-invasion eventuality. Iran signaled an asymmetrical striking capability in order to deter a possible U.S. and Israel attack and to prevent the institutionalization of a U.S. presence in Iraq.

In the case of Iraq, Iran's primary means of attaining its goals was to support the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI, formerly the Supreme Council of Islamic Revolution in Iraq

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 36.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 30.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 36.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 37.

¹⁵¹ Ray Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 254.

¹⁵² Kayhan Barzegar, "Understanding the Roots of Iranian Foreign Policy in the New Iraq," *Middle East Policy* 12, no. 2 (June 1, 2005): 56, doi:10.1111/j.1061-1924.2005.00200.x.

(SCIRI) and its military wing Badr organization; Dawah party and conditionally Muqtada al-Sadr movement and its Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) militant group. Iran's relations with most of these Shiite groups had been intensified particularly since the beginning of the Iran–Iraq war. Iran supported and sheltered these groups and supported their leaders' efforts to form political movements and militias.¹⁵³ After the 2003 occupation, relations between Iran and these groups regained its strategic importance.

The Shiite Groups Supported by Iran

The Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI, formerly the supreme Council of Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI))

The SCIRI has been the closest Iraqi Shiite faction to Iran, which had a military wing known as the Badr Corps trained and equipped by the Revolutionary Guards.¹⁵⁴ The long-established relations between Iran and the ISCI date back to the early 1980s. The SCIRI was organized by Iran as an umbrella organization including various Iraqi Shiite groups to undermine the Saddam regime. Many SCIRI leaders were in exile in Iran during Saddam's regime. The SCIRI was formed under the Sayyid Hadi al-Mudarassi leadership in 1982. Subsequently, during the Iran–Iraq war, SCIRI was based in Tehran under the leadership of Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim. It promoted the idea of installing an Iranian-style government in Iraq and agreed with Khomeini's concept of *velayet-e faqih*.¹⁵⁵

The group fought with Iran against the Saddam regime, and then supported the Shiite

¹⁵³ Marina Ottaway, "Nation-Building in Iraq: Iran 1, the United States 0," *Insight Turkey* 17, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 14.

¹⁵⁴ Ray Takeyh, "Iran's New Iraq," *Middle East Journal* 62, no. 1 (2008): 24, doi:<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.princeton.edu/10.3751.62.1.11>.

¹⁵⁵ Jocelyne Cesari, *The Awakening of Muslim Democracy: Religion, Modernity, and the State* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 151–152.

uprising that started with the 1991 Gulf War. When Saddam Hussein succeeded in crushing the uprising, the Badr Brigades retreated into Iran.¹⁵⁶

After the overthrow of the Saddam regime, the group quickly tried to empower its position in Iraq. Taremi states that when the United States invaded Iraq, the Badr Corps had about 16,000 men who had also served throughout the Iran–Iraq War and were a battle-tested force.¹⁵⁷

Then the SCIRI made several significant changes; it intensified its efforts to become a political actor rather than an armed opposition. It participated in the 2005 elections and won 30 of the 128 seats designated to the United Iraqi Alliance. On the other hand, it also continued to resist Sunni parties through the Badr Corps. In 2007, the SCIRI changed its name to ISCI; dropped “revolution” from their name to disassociate itself from militancy. Furthermore, the Badr organization officially separated from the ISCI to become an autonomous political party led by Hadi al-Amiri.¹⁵⁸ Under his leadership, the Badr Corps started to become stronger; while the ISCI was getting weaker. In 2009, the ISCI's leader Abdulaziz al-Hakim died and was succeeded by his son, Ammar al-Hakim. However, he did not command the same degree of authority and respect.¹⁵⁹ Over time, ISCI lost its central role in Shiite politics.

Da'wa Party:

Da'wa is Iraq's longest surviving Shiite political party. The actual date of its emergence is unclear. Its emergence is placed as occurring in 1958 by most academic scholars, although

¹⁵⁶ Ottaway, “Nation-Building in Iraq,” 15.

¹⁵⁷ Taremi, “Iranian Foreign Policy Towards Occupied Iraq, 2003–05,” 34.

¹⁵⁸ Cesari, *The Awakening of Muslim Democracy*, 151–152.

¹⁵⁹ Ottaway, “Nation-Building in Iraq,” 15.

according to al-Jihad (the Iraqi Islamic movement's weekly newspaper), the party was organized in October 1957.¹⁶⁰ By late 1979, Da'wa had formed a military wing (later called Shahid as-Sadr).¹⁶¹

The ideological outlook of the party owes much to the intellectual work of Muhammad Baqir as-Sadr.¹⁶² Da'wa, along with other Shiite groups, came together to form the SCIRI (ISCI) in Tehran in 1982, after the increasing tensions between Iran and Iraq. During the war, Iran backed Da'wa against Saddam's regime. However, within two years, Da'wa acknowledged its dissimilar ideological stance by rejecting the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini and questioning the concept of *velayet-e faqih* and then began to distance itself from the SCIRI.¹⁶³ Since then this improvement has led to splits not only within the Iraqi Shiite opposition and but also within Da'wa itself.¹⁶⁴

The SCIRI (ISCI) chairman Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim was a supporter of Khomeini's *velayet-e faqih* concept, thus consequently established very close relations with the Iranian regime. While many *Da'wa* members followed al-Hakim's lead, others refused him and sought to maintain their independence from Iranian political and ideological control.

Most Da'wa members remained in exile in Iran until the American invasion in 2003. The US invasion of Iraq presented Da'wa with an opportunity to join in power-sharing in Iraq that it had pursued for over 40 years.¹⁶⁵ Following the invasion, Da'wa joined the political process. Although its potential was limited due to the lack of an armed militia, through the support of powerful groups such as ISCI and Sadrists, Nouri al-Maliki was selected as prime minister in

¹⁶⁰ Rodger Shanahan, "Shi'a Political Development in Iraq: The Case of the Islamic Da'wa Party," *Third World Quarterly* 25, no. 5 (2004): 944.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 946.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ A. William Samii, "Shia Political Alternatives in Postwar Iraq," *Middle East Policy* 10, no. 2 (June 1, 2003): 94, doi:10.1111/1475-4967.00108.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Shanahan, "Shi'a Political Development in Iraq," 949.

2005 as a compromise choice.¹⁶⁶ Since then, all Iraqi prime ministers have been members of the Da'wa Party, although Nouri al-Maliki eventually formed a new organization called the State of Law without changing his ties to Iran or his sectarian inclinations.¹⁶⁷ Da'wa and the ISCI have retained close ties to Iran, although they have different approaches. As stated by Takeyh “although both parties have no inclination to act as Iran's surrogates, they are likely to provide Tehran with a sympathetic audience, and even an alliance that, like all such arrangements, will not be free of tension and difficulty.”¹⁶⁸

Muqtada al-Sadr and Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM)

As stated by Bruno, Muqtada al-Sadr, who has since emerged as one of the most prominent Shiite leaders in the country, had been virtually unknown before the collapse of the Saddam regime.¹⁶⁹ He comes from a line of extremely influential Iraqi Shiite clerics. His father is Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr, the founder of the Sadrist Movement in the 1980s.¹⁷⁰

Sadr was opposed to the invasion and the presence of coalition forces in Iraq. In response to the invasion, Muqtada al-Sadr formed the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) militant group, also known as the Mahdi Army, in 2003 to use violence for expelling coalition forces. Like other Shiite militant groups, the Sadr movement and the Mahdi Army flourished in a power vacuum that

¹⁶⁶ Robin B. Wright, *The Iran Primer: Power, Politics, and U.S. Policy* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2010), 152.

¹⁶⁷ Ottaway, “Nation-Building in Iraq,” 14.

¹⁶⁸ Takeyh, “Iran’s New Iraq,” 24.

¹⁶⁹ Greg Bruno, “Muqtada Al-Sadr,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, May 16, 2008, <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/muqtada-al-sadr/p7637>.

¹⁷⁰ “Mahdi Army,” *Mapping Militant Organizations - Stanford University*, April 6, 2016, <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/57>.

existed due to political destabilization after the invasion.¹⁷¹ Sadr tried to take the advantage of this power vacuum.

The Mahdi Army was relatively unknown until its clashes with the US forces. “One of the earliest occurred in Najaf and Karbala in April 2004, and again in Najaf in August 2004, where a standoff around the Imam Ali Mosque left hundreds of Iraqis and nearly a dozen U.S. soldiers dead.”¹⁷²

Soon after the clashes in 2004, thinking that violence alone could not accomplish his goals, Sadr increased his efforts in Iraq’s political arena. He followed the pattern of Hezbollah; he used the Mahdi Army to increase visibility and engage in social works. This led the Sadrist movement to win 32 of 275 parliamentary seats in December 2005 national elections.¹⁷³ Since then, the Sadrist movement has become one of the most influential actors in Iraqi politics.

Sadr and his Mahdi Army are followers of Twelver Shiism. In addition to its strong Shiite identity, the movement is vehemently Arab nationalist and populist. Sadr believes that “Iraq’s Shiite Arabs are the rightful leaders of the Iraqi Shiite community and thus assert that Iraq’s government should put Iraqi interests first.”¹⁷⁴ Thus, Sadr kept his distance from the Iranian regime and opposed its interventions. For Iran, although Sadr and the Mahdi Army were unreliable proxies, Iran had also found them useful for achieving its conditional purposes. Thus, Iran likely provided organizational know-how and material aid. For example, Iran provided Sadr a safe haven and allowed him to run Mahdi Army operations from their territory between 2007 and 2011. Furthermore, the IRGC had assisted him in reorganizing the Mahdi Army during his

¹⁷¹ Leslie Bayless, “Who Is Muqtada Al-Sadr?,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35, no. 2 (February 1, 2012): 136, doi:10.1080/1057610X.2012.639063.

¹⁷² Greg Bruno, “Muqtada Al-Sadr,” *The Washington Post*, May 19, 2008, sec. World, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/19/AR2008051900974.html>.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ “Mahdi Army.”

exile in Iran.¹⁷⁵

In addition to the above-mentioned prominent Shiite groups, Iran also organized and used the Special Groups, such as *Kataib Hizb Allah*¹⁷⁶, *Asaib Ahl al-Haq*¹⁷⁷ and the *Promised Day Brigades*¹⁷⁸, for attaining its goals in post-2003 occupied Iraq.

Apart from political influence-building in Iraq, Iran used paramilitary activities to shape the environment against other actors within Iraq: the Coalition Forces, Sunni and other ethnic groups. The IRGC and IRGC-QF played a very active roles in this process.¹⁷⁹ On September 10, 2007 Ambassador Ryan Crocker, United States Ambassador to Iraq, stated that “Iran plays a harmful role in Iraq. While claiming to support Iraq in its transition, Iran has actively undermined it by providing lethal capabilities to the enemies of the Iraqi state.”¹⁸⁰ The same day, General David Petraeus, commander of the Multi-National Force in Iraq, stated in testimony that

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Kataib Hizb Allah (KH) was formed in early 2007 as a vehicle through which the IRGC Qods Force could deploy its most experienced operators and its most sensitive equipment. Michael Knights, “The Evolution of Iran’s Special Groups in Iraq,” *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, November 1, 2010, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-evolution-of-iran%E2%80%99s-special-groups-in-iraq>.

Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis is the most notable individual associated with Kata’ib Hizbollah is an Iraqi by the name of Jamal Ja’far Muhammad, but well-known in Iraq as Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis (a.k.a. The Engineer). He has been described as the “right-hand man” of Qassem Suleimani, the head of Iran’s Quds Force. “Kata’ib Hezbollah,” *Mapping Militant Organizations - Stanford University*, May 28, 2016, <https://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/361?highlight=Kataib+Hizb+Allah#cite1>.

¹⁷⁷ Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) emerged between 2006 and 2008 as part of an effort by the IRGC Qods Force to create a popular organization similar to Lebanese Hizb Allah that would be easier to shape than Moqtada al-Sadr’s uncontrollable Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) movement. [13] AAH was built around one of al-Sadr’s key rivals, a protégé of al-Sadr’s father called Qais al-Khazali who had consistently opposed al-Sadr’s cease-fire agreements with the U.S. and Iraqi militaries. Knights, “The Evolution of Iran’s Special Groups in Iraq | Combating Terrorism Center at West Point.”

¹⁷⁸ The Promised Day Brigade (PDB) was founded around November 2008. The organization is one of several Iraqi “Special Groups,” a U.S. military term assigned to Iranian-backed Shiite militias operating primarily in and around Sadr City and Baghdad. The PDB is one of the most prominent of these small, foreign militias, along with Asaib al-Haq (AAH) and Kataib Hezbollah (KH). “Promised Day Brigades,” *Mapping Militant Organizations - Stanford University*, August 27, 2012, <https://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/249>. In theory, PDB is a Shi’a nationalist militia that provides Moqtada al-Sadr’s militant followers a way to justify staying within his organization while reserving the theoretical right to fight U.S. forces. In practice, many purported members of PDB appear to collaborate with KH and AAH organizers to participate in small numbers of attacks on U.S. forces. Knights, “The Evolution of Iran’s Special Groups in Iraq.”

¹⁷⁹ Knights, “The Evolution of Iran’s Special Groups in Iraq.”

¹⁸⁰ United States of America, *Congressional Record - Proceedings and Debates of the 110th Congress - First Session*, vol. 153 (Government Printing Office, n.d.).

“[i]t is increasingly apparent to both coalition and Iraqi leaders that Iran, through the use of the Iranian Republic Guard Corps Qods Force, seeks to turn the Shi‘ite militia extremists into a Hezbollah-like force to serve its interests and fight a proxy war against the Iraqi state and coalition forces in Iraq.”¹⁸¹

The unclassified documents based on the Harmony Program, launched by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (CTC) in 2005, clearly show the level of the IRGC and the IRGC-QF involvement in Iraqi affairs. These documents contain captured Iraqi intelligence reports, working papers, captured Iranian documents in Iraq, and U.S. intelligence reports paraphrasing a former Shiite groups and organizations members’ descriptions of their activities.¹⁸² To show the level and nature of the IRGC/IRGC-QF involvement in Iraq, all documents regarding the IRGC’s activities were evaluated in depth. The title and summary of the documents are shown below:

Table 6: Harmony Documents that Show the IRGC's Activities in Iraq

Document ID & Title	Summary
ISGQ-2003-00037289 Iraqi Intelligence Documents 4	<p>This document includes numerous Iraqi intelligence reports dated as 11 Jul 2001 and 25 Jul 2001. Document describes the following Iranian activities;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Iranian regime’s supplies for its agents and Badr Corps including significant quantities of explosives, 107 mm and 122 mm rockets mines, guided missiles, launchers, timing devices and pistols with silencers to carry out sabotage activities in Iraq. - Sabotage activities in Baghdad on orders from the Iranian Regime.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² For further information please see <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/programs-resources/harmony-program>

Document ID & Title	Summary
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Badr Corp recruits from the Iraqi volunteers in Iran. Also, the criminal, Muhammad Baqir Al-Hakim, increased the salaries of their agents. - Muhammad Baqir Al-Hakim's coordination with the Iranian regime to print 10,000 pamphlets (small booklets and a flyer) urging citizens to revolt against the state.
<p>Redacted Intelligence Report 001-028 Debriefing of Detainee Under Coalition Forces Control</p>	<p>There are 28 U.S. intelligence reports that paraphrase former Special Group members' description of their trips to Iran, Syria and Lebanon and the details of training given by the members of the IRGC, IRGC-QF, and Lebanese Hezbollah (LH). Detainee reporting includes following issues in general: Daily details of traveling to Iran; pre-travel coordination, meeting with other trainees in Iraq, legal/illegal ways and methods of crossing border, transportation details, maps and the descriptions of course areas, the organizational breakdown of the Iraq-based IRGC/LH paramilitary instructed trainer specialties, comparison of Lebanese and Iranian instructors (For instance; The SG trainees like and respect the Lebanese Hezbollah trainers because the Lebanese trainers speak Arabic and treat the SG trainees with respect. The Iranian trainers and the SG trainees did not get along during the SG training.) Regarding courses, detainees mention following issues; There were numerous courses conducted at the military facilities in Iran; Paramilitary instructor training Mortar Specialty Training Course IED Specialty Training Course Weapons Specialty Training Course Fighter Course Tactics Course The Engineer course</p>

Document ID & Title	Summary
	<p>Support course</p> <p>Overall leader course</p> <p>Special Forces Training</p> <p>Air defense training</p> <p>Sniper training (Russian Draganov, German made 12.7, and M-16 rifle with a laser sight attached to it)</p> <p>In addition to course types, detainees identified following topics in these courses;</p> <p>Introduction to Tactics,</p> <p>How to guard an area, building and set up a perimeter,</p> <p>How to fill and stack sandbags to create a large sturdy structure that one can hide behind for cover,</p> <p>How to apply camouflage to hide,</p> <p>Types of terrain,</p> <p>The group practiced walking in different formations,</p> <p>Ambushes, respond to an ambush,</p> <p>The types of fighting that are used in urban environments,</p> <p>Small arms maintenance,</p> <p>Personal security,</p> <p>Operational security,</p> <p>Counter-Interrogation training,</p> <p>Physical surveillance,</p> <p>Detection of physical surveillance,</p> <p>Counter-surveillance,</p> <p>Use of maps,</p> <p>Live firing range day for small arms,</p> <p>Watching videos and pictures of successful Lebanese Hezbollah</p>

Document ID & Title	Summary
	<p>operations.</p> <p>Furthermore, relations among Badr Organization, Da'wa Party, ISCI, Muqtada al-Sadr and Iran, the nature of relations, Iran's material supports to these groups, and Lebanese Hezbollah activities in Iraq explicitly were stated in 28 documents.</p>
<p>RLSP-2005-000618 A Letter From the Office of the Iranian Supreme Leader</p>	<p>The letter from the Office of Iran's Supreme Leader to the Leader of the IRGC dated JAN 05, 2005 suggests that in case of an unexpected result in 2005 Iraqi elections that does not bring Iran's allies to power in Baghdad, Quds Force should prepare for coup d'état operations and carry out the necessary planning.</p>
<p>ODP1-2005-00009023 Iraqi Intelligence Document Studying Iran</p>	<p>This document includes Iraqi intelligence correspondence dated between 1993 and 1996. The correspondence contains following topics:</p> <p>Iranian influence in Iraq,</p> <p>Important Headquarters and Iranian Intelligence Stations, especially which follow Iraqi affairs,</p> <p>Information gathered from Iranian regime's radio regarding Iraq,</p> <p>Mas'ud Al-Barzani's visit to Iran,</p> <p>Iran's intelligence activities in Northern Area of Iraq,</p> <p>Information source: Mujahidin-e Khalq Organization (MKO), an anti-Iranian terrorist organization.</p>
<p>ISGP-2003-00023756 Working Paper by the Iraqi Anti-Espionage Corps</p>	<p>This working draft was prepared by the Anti-Espionage General Office at the Intelligence Service about 'the disloyal Badr Corps.' The content of document is as follows;</p> <p>Its beginning and formation,</p> <p>Organization of the Badr Corps (Headquarters, Composition of the Divisions, Locations, Formations of the Badr Corps),</p> <p>System for the Administrative Division of the Corps,</p> <p>Military operations carried out by the Badr Corps 9 against Iraq,</p>

Document ID & Title	Summary
	<p>Iranian Administration of the disloyal Corps, Conflicts inside the Corps, Figures of the Corps, Its relations with Sadr and Da'wa party.</p>
<p>ISGP-2003-00027262 Iraqi Intelligence Reports (March 2003)</p>	<p>This document contains series of Iraqi intelligence reports regarding the activities and locations of coalition forces in March/April 2003. Additionally, it includes discussion of Iraqi militia groups fighting against regime forces.</p>
<p>ISGZ 2005-001122-19954 Iraqi Intelligence Study of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps</p>	<p>This document is a very detailed study on Quds Force. The content of the document is as follows;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Leadership, Goals and Duties, Staff Command and al-Quds Forces Command Centers, Forces and Corps Designated to Countries, Quds Elements in the Embassies, The Islamic Associations and Covert Companies, Coordination with the Ministry of Intelligence, Training Camps, Courses' Curriculum, Organizational Structure, Report on Badr 9th Corps, Relationship and Correlation between Al-Malali Organization and Badr 9th. <p>Among headquarters, Ramadan Headquarter (1st Corps) is responsible for Iraq. Additionally, Al-Hamzah Command Center (3rd Corps) is intended for Turkey and in charge of coordinating with anti-Turkish Kurdish groups, subduing the Iranian Kurds, as well as carrying-out terrorist operations</p>

Document ID & Title	Summary
	<p>against the Iranian Kurdish groups in Iraq.</p> <p>Brigade Malik Ashtar was under the command of the Ramadan command center during the Iranian-Iraqi war. Following the completion of operations inside the Iraqi territories, the Brigade was attached to Al-Quds Force.</p> <p>The document also gives detailed information about Badr Corps, which is under the IRGC and mentions relations between leaders of Quds Force and Mullah Baqir Al-Hakim, and Abu-Mahdi Muhandis.</p>
<p>ODP1-2005-008247 Iraqi Intelligence Document Describing Iranian Intelligence (1993)</p>	<p>This Iraqi intelligence document contains reports and correspondences that describe Iranian intelligence services, the IRGC and the IRGC-QF in detail. The document includes following topics; Duties of Headquarters and Corps, the leadership, extraterritorial activities of IRGC-QF such as in Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan, and North Africa.</p>
<p>ISGQ-2003-00052520 Iraqi Intelligence Reports (2000 & 2001)</p>	<p>This document comprises numerous Iraqi intelligence service correspondences prepared in 2000-2001 aimed to urge Iraqi organizations and authorities regarding operations of Iranian intelligence services and groups supported by IRGC.</p>
<p>ISGQ-2003-00032998</p>	<p>This document includes numerous Iraqi intelligence reports from the late 1990s, including the descriptions of fighting against Iraqi opposition groups such as the Badr Corps. The reports detail Iraq's suspicions of Iranian support for Iraqi groups and describe various activities along the Iraq/Iran border.</p>
<p>ISGQ-2005-00038283 Iraqi Intelligence Study about the Badr Corps</p>	<p>This document is a very detailed study of Iraqi intelligence that was prepared in 2002. The study is largely based on confessions made by two members of the Corps' cadre arrested by the General Security Office. The document covers the following topics;</p> <p>Corps' formations connected to the Corps' Assistant Commander,</p>

Document ID & Title	Summary
	<p>Corps' axes, Corps' formations connected to the Chief of Staff of the Corps, Locations of some Corps' formations, Corps' fighting force, leading elements, armament, equipment, administrative affairs, financial resources, recruiting methods, Training and preparation, Privileges granted to the Corps' elements, Facilities granted to the Corps' elements, Law for the Purchase of the Service, Corps' relationship with the sons of the fugitive tribes to Iran, Organizational activity on the inside and its method, Execution of the operations and Methods of infiltration, Transportation methods of weapons and missiles to Iraq Important meetings after September 11, 2001, Corps' plans upon the occurrence of the crisis, Corps' instructions for the Northern region.</p>
ISGQ-2004-02311818 Statement by Badr Corps	This 2007 document was prepared for Badr Corps members around the time of the coalition invasion of Iraq. The document enunciates strategies to act against Sunni groups and also to cooperate with the coalition forces in the belief that Badr members could seize power through the political process.
CMPC-2003-000562 Iraqi Intelligence Documents 1	This document includes a series of Iraqi Intelligence correspondence and reports prepared in 2003 including information about following topics; The conference held by the Intelligence Service to discuss the plan that was designed by the Ministry of Defense to deploy units of the Iranian National Liberation Army in case of any aggression against Iraq, The IRGC's and Basij forces' maneuvers during December 2002, The activities of the Iranian National Liberation Army, A meeting that was held with Mas'ud Rajawi, the Commander in Chief of the Iranian Liberation Army, to determine what

Document ID & Title	Summary
	<p>steps to take in case of an American attack on Iraq, The important activities of Iranian troops, Iranian traitor activities in the southern and middle sectors, Iranian Weapons Sources and a report about new arms deals made by Iran information about Iranian agents' activities obtained from the field of operations.</p>
<p>MNCI-2005-001140 Iraqi Intelligence Report about the Quds Force Activities in Iraq</p>	<p>This document is an Iraqi intelligence report about Quds Force activities in Iraq. The Document covers the following issues;</p> <p>The activities of Arkan Isnad al-Kawthar, which practices economic, construction, commerce, supply and passenger transportation openly. It was established by Al-Quds force to create a suitable infrastructure for its intelligence officers in Iraq, on a large scale, in order to provide support to those groups who are loyal to Iran. The Guard General Mansur Haq is in the leadership of the Al-Kawthar organization, and he works under the direct supervision of Qasim Sulaymani, who is the General Commander of the Al-Quds Force.</p> <p>According to the document, assignments and responsibilities of Arkan Isnad al-Kawthar are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To secure and support the Badr Corps, and the different groups belonging to Al-Quds force, such as the movement of Hezbollah, Sha'aban, Sayid al-Shuhada' Movement, and Tharallah. - To distribute the food supply and products among the citizens to gain the support of the society. - To establish companies as a cover in order to transport the elements of the Al-Quds force into Iraq. - Coordination and supervision of the activities of all the economic and social organizations belonging to the Iranian regime in Iraq.
<p>NMEC-2007-624223 Insurgent Group</p>	<p>This document describes a large militant organization in southern Iraq. The document outlines the number of fighters and</p>

Document ID & Title	Summary
Outline and Administrative Documents	political operatives available in numerous southern cities. The exact organization is not identified.
MNCI-2005-001143 Report on Tharallah (God's Rebel's)	This document is a report prepared on Iraqi Tharallah group, which is active mostly near Iraq's southern city of Basrah. The document describes the linkages between the Tharallah group and the Quds Force, the leadership, its illegal activities.

Source: CTC-West Point.

As understood from the unclassified Harmony documents project, launched by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (CTC), the IRGC was very actively involved in Iraqi domestic affairs before and during the 2003 occupation of Iraq. As seen in the documents, the range of support to Iraqi Shiite groups by the IRGC is very broad.

All in all, since the beginning of the crisis, there was a three level strategy that were gradually and reactively adopted by Iran:

- Preventing the US invasion,
- Preventing a permanent US presence or a client regime in Baghdad
- Establishing a friendly Shi'ite dominated regime in Iraq

To these ends, Iran followed subsequent strategies;

- Diplomacy:

Besides Afghanistan, the second front with the US seemed very risky to Iran. According to calculations of Iranian ruling elites, a weaker Saddam would be better than being surrounded by the US, which openly threatened Iran with an attack and regime change. Iran tried to prevent the US invasion of Iraq and started a diplomatic campaign to rally Russia, China and EU members as well as other countries in the region against the US attack.

- Shaping Iraqi domestic politics:

Iran encouraged, organized and coordinated all Shiite groups to establish an ally Shiite-dominated regime. To this end, Iran tried to remove all obstacles to a stable Iraq. By this means, Tehran could accelerate the coalition forces' withdrawal by eliminating the reasons for their presence in Iraq and could achieve the preconditions for holding elections, which would subsequently enable the establishment of a friendly Shiite-dominated government.

- Controlled chaos for deterrence by using Shiite groups:

With this strategy, Iran aimed to signal its asymmetrical striking capability to deter Coalition Forces, particularly the US, and to prevent the institutionalization of a U.S. presence in Iraq and a possible attack on Iran. Additionally, Iran also used this strategy against Sunni groups to suppress them.

At the beginning of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Iran's Iraq policy was driven by a fear of U.S. intentions. Since the inception of the crisis, Iran systematically worked with Iraqi Shiite leaders and groups. Based on findings from resources and Harmony documents, it seems that the IRGC (including IRGC-QF) served as a node of Iran's various forms of support for Iraqi Shiite groups, ranging from military training, harboring, providing military supply (explosives, ammunition, weapons) and intelligence, to organizing and coordinating the activities (including sabotage and attacks) of Shiite groups. With the 2005 elections, Iran reached the goal of establishing a friendly Shiite-dominated regime in Iraq.

Since the deployment of the IRGC contingent to Lebanon in the early 1980s, particularly the 2005 Iraqi elections, 2006 Hezbollah-Israel war, 2011 Syrian crisis, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)'s activities in Iraq have produced situations enhancing Iran and Shiite roles in the power structure of the region.

It is also worth noting that post-ISIS period Iran publicly confirmed the presence of the Quds force and the Quds Force Commander General Qassem Soleimani in Iraq, in contrast to the previous period. In June 2014, ISIS made considerable advances in Syria and Iraq, which are close allies of Iran. ISIS's advances in both states were accepted as significant threats to Iran's interests. Iran openly declared its concerns and emphasized the importance and safety of Shiite cities such as Karbala and Najaf, as well strategic cities such as Damascus, Baghdad and Irbil. Thus, Iran progressively increased its involvement in both states. To preserve its gains, Iran did not hesitate to show its activities against the common enemy, ISIS. Photos of Soleimani in Iraq engaging with various groups were actively shared in the social media. Soleimani, with 100 Quds Force members, planned to create a volunteer militia similar to the National Defense Force in Syria to fight against ISIS alongside the weak and demoralized Iraqi army.¹⁸³

The Tikrit operation is a good illustration of IRGC-QF and Gen. Soleimani's level of involvement in Iraqi affairs. In March 2015, a combination of 30,000 Iraqi militiamen and security forces launched a campaign to retake Tikrit from ISIS. Gen Soleimani has been pictured on the outskirts of the city in photos shared widely on social media. According to media reports, Gen Soleimani and members of the Guards and the Quds Force were actively involved in the operation.^{184, 185}

Lastly, although it is not the focus of this study, a brief mention of Iran's activities in Syria would contribute to further understanding of the IRGC's extraterritorial activities. With the beginning of the 2011 crisis in Syria, Iran faced losing its vital ally in the region. The toppling of

¹⁸³ Dina Esfandiary and Ariane Tabatabai, "Iran's ISIS Policy," *International Affairs* 91, no. 1 (January 1, 2015): 8, doi:10.1111/1468-2346.12183.

¹⁸⁴ "Iraq Moves against Islamic State in Tikrit," *BBC News*, accessed January 26, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-31689433>.

¹⁸⁵ "Iranian Military Mastermind Leading Battle to Recapture Tikrit From ISIS," *Newsweek*, March 5, 2015, <http://europe.newsweek.com/iranian-military-mastermind-leading-battle-recapture-tikrit-isis-311516>.

the Assad regime and the institution of a new Sunni regime not only would cause the loss of a long-time ally, but would also block access to their most important proxy group, the Lebanese Hezbollah, among a scarcity of regional allies. Thus, as in Iraq, Tehran aimed to preserve Syria's territorial integrity and keep Bashar al-Assad in power. To this end, Iran politically, financially and militarily supported the Assad regime. Besides training, advising, intelligence gathering and analysis, the IRGC and the IRGC-QF members are believed to be fighting for Assad. As an indication of the IRGC's current extraterritorial engagement, according to Terrill, between 2012-2015, at least four high-ranking IRGC generals -Iranian Brigadier General Hasan Shateri who was from the Quds Force and whose funeral was attended by Major General Qasem Soleymani; Brigadier General Mohammad Jamali-Paqal'eh, who is believed to have been commanding Quds Force units in Syria at the time, IRGC Brigadier General 'Abdollah Eskandari (probably also of the Quds Force), and IRGC general Mohammad 'Ali Allahdadi were killed in Syria.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, as stated by Alfoneh, 254 people, most of whom were affiliated with the IRGC-QF have been killed between January 2013 and August 2015, according to open source data collected from Persian-language accounts of funerals in Iran.¹⁸⁷

Additionally, as a last example showing clearly the involvement of IRGC members in the Syrian war, BBC news released captured tapes that had been filmed as part of a project conceived to help recruitment and other internal uses for the IRGC. From conversations in the footage, it is understood that they are somewhere to the south of the northern Syrian city of Aleppo. The Iranians seem to be in command of the group. The commander says that they are fighting as part of the National Defense Force. He also states that 'Syrian fighters are friendly with their Iranian counterparts and at ease fighting alongside them because they were trained in

¹⁸⁶ W. Andrew Terrill, "Iran's Strategy for Saving Assad," *The Middle East Journal* 69, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 230–231.

¹⁸⁷ Alfoneh, "Shiite Combat Casualties Show the Depth of Iran's Involvement in Syria."

Iran and are familiar with Iranians and their attitudes.’ According to the BBC research, the commander on camera is Ismail Haidari who is a senior commander of the IRGC.¹⁸⁸

In this chapter, the level and characteristics of the IRGC’s involvement in extraterritorial activities were addressed through two cases. Findings from the two cases and the dynamics between Iranian foreign policy goals and the IRGC’s extraterritorial activities will be evaluated in the following chapters.

¹⁸⁸ “Footage Claims to Show Iranians in Syria,” *BBC News*, accessed January 26, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24103801>.

CHAPTER V

ASSESSING THE IRGC'S EXTRATERRITORIAL ACTIVITIES

Introduction

In chapter two, the characteristics of Iran's foreign policy and foreign policy goals were presented. In chapter three, the regime's use of the IRGC (including the IRGC-QF) in attaining its foreign policy goals was analyzed through two cases; the IRGC's relations with Lebanese Hezbollah and Shiite groups in post-2003 Iraq.

In chapter two, Iran's broad foreign policy goals are defined as follows;

- Regime survival which is an indispensable (*sine qua non*) goal of Iran foreign policy above all else,
- State security and survival (the defense of Iranian territory against external threats),
- Projecting power and becoming the dominant power in the region.

In chapter three, Lebanese Hezbollah and Iraqi Shiite groups in post-2003 Iraq cases showed how the IRGC has taken active roles in achieving these foreign policy goals.

Since the deployment of the IRGC contingent to Lebanon in the early 1980s, the influence of IRGC's activities have been seen in Lebanon, the Iran-Iraq war, the 2005 Iraqi elections, 2006 Hezbollah-Israel war and 2011 Syrian crisis, which produced situations enhancing Iranian and the Shiite influence in the region.

In addition to these strategic gains, the IRGC has served as an asymmetrical striking capability to deter its enemies. Iran has intentionally avoided any conventional confrontation with its enemies. This strategy has made the IRGC an important tool in implementing national

and ideological interests, as well as against perceived threats.

Iran's use of the IRGC in extraterritorial activities leads to several questions: What is the basis of these activities in international law? Are these activities categorized as state sponsorship of terrorism? If so, what is the regime's real motivation behind the decision to use the IRGC's in extraterritorial activities, in spite of the risk of being labeled as a terrorism sponsor?

Since the revolution, Iran has always prioritized internal security concerns above external ones. Iran's first priority has consistently remained the survival of the regime. Thus, other set of questions arises at this point: How have the IRGC's extraterritorial activities served this end? How does the regime legitimize the IRGC's activities? How does the IRGC contribute to the regime's legitimacy? To answer these questions, this chapter will focus on how the IRGC's extraterritorial activities contribute to the survival of the regime. This chapter is structured as follows:

- International Law and the IRGC's Extraterritorial Activities
- State Sponsorship of Terrorism and the IRGC's Extraterritorial Activities
- Why do States Support Terrorism?
- What is the difference between 'regime survival' and 'state survival'?
- Domestic and External Conditions that Made the Regime Survival the Obsession of the Ruling Elites
- Analysis and Conclusion

International Law and the IRGC's Extraterritorial Activities

"Armed forces" are defined in Article 43(1) of Additional Protocol I of the Geneva Conventions as comprising:

The armed forces of a Party to a conflict consist of all organized armed forces, groups and units which are under a command responsible to that Party for the conduct of its subordinates, even if that Party is represented by a government or an authority not recognized by an adverse Party. Such armed forces shall be subject to an internal disciplinary system which, 'inter alia', shall enforce compliance with the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict.¹

The IRGC fits all above-mentioned descriptions and it is officially recognized as a branch of Iran's Armed Forces under Article 150 of the Iranian Constitution. According to Article 150, the scope of its duties and responsibilities are to be determined by law. The Chief Commander of the Guardians is appointed by the Supreme Leader. The IRGC has a hierarchical command structure that includes about 120,000 uniformed men on active duty, naval and air force units in addition to its ground troops, and it has its own statute.

Initially, the scope of the duties and the missions of the IRGC have been designed according to the regime's ideological agenda. However, in the meantime because of domestic and external pressures, Iran has adopted more pragmatic policies that are driven by strategic calculations instead of ideological ones. Afterward, the IRGC's extraterritorial activities have not been limited by goals of supporting foreign liberation movements and exporting the revolution, over time these tasks have been transformed to sustaining and expanding its sphere of influence, and conducting counter activities against Iran's perceived enemies.

While the IRGC has the characteristics of regular conventional armed forces, the Regime has unconventionally and asymmetrically used it in Lebanon and post-2003 occupied Iraq. The UN Charter defines the conditions of legitimate use of armed forces. The following statements define the frame of legitimate uses of armed forces;

¹ "Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977," International Committee of the Red Cross, accessed February 19, 2016, <https://www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=AF64638EB5530E58C12563CD0051DB93>.

Article 2(3) provides that

[a]ll members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security, and justice, are not endangered.²

Article 2(4) contains an encompassing prohibition against the use of military force:

All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat of force against the territorial integrity or the political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.³

There are two exceptions to the prohibition on the use of armed force:

- According to Article 39, under an authorization by the Security Council under Chapter VII of the Charter, in response to “any threat to the peace, breach of the peace or act of aggression... in accordance with Articles 41 and 42, to maintain or restore international peace and security.” Article 41 proposes “the Security Council may decide what measures not involving the use of armed force are to be employed” As a last option, in case of inadequacy of measures provided for in Article 41, according to Article 42, the Security Council may decide to use of military force.⁴
- In a case of self-defense under Article 51:
- Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of

² “Charter of the United Nations Chapter I,” *United Nations*, accessed February 19, 2016, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-i/>.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ “Charter of the United Nations Chapter VII,” *United Nations*, accessed February 19, 2016, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-vii/index.html>.

self-defense shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security.⁵

In addition to the above-mentioned conditions, ‘intervention by invitation’ and ‘humanitarian intervention’ are other possible legal justifications for the use of force, which are based largely on customary international law. In circumstance of ‘intervention by invitation’, “the government of a State is entitled to request assistance from other States in the suppression of rebel groups.”⁶ The last condition is “a developing customary international law right of unilateral humanitarian intervention – that is an intervention, for humanitarian purposes, which has not been authorized by the Security Council.”⁷

Given the conditions of the use of military force, in both the Lebanese Hezbollah and post-2003 occupied Iraq cases, the IRGC’s extraterritorial activities are out of the above-mentioned legal frame of use of force. Furthermore, following major resolutions condemn the state participation in acts of international terrorism;

- General Assembly Resolution 2625 (XXV) of 24 October 1970:

Every State has the duty to refrain from organizing or encouraging the organization of irregular forces or armed bands, including mercenaries, for incursion into the territory of another State;⁸

Every State has the duty to refrain from organizing, instigating, assisting or participating in acts of civil strife or terrorist acts in another State or acquiescing in

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Michael Byers, “Terrorism, The Use of Force and International Law After 11 September,” *International & Comparative Law Quarterly* 51, no. 02 (April 2002): 158, doi:10.1093/iclq/51.2.401.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “General Assembly Resolution 2625 (XXV) Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Co-Operation among States in Accordance with the Charter of the United Nations,” *UN Documents*, October 24, 1970, <http://www.un-documents.net/a25r2625.htm>.

organized activities within its territory directed towards the commission of such acts, when the acts referred to in the present paragraph involve a threat or use of force;⁹

- General Assembly Resolution 42/22 of 18 November 1987:

States shall fulfil their obligations under international law to refrain from organizing, instigating, or assisting or participating in paramilitary, terrorist or subversive acts, including acts of mercenaries, in other States, or acquiescing in organized activities within their territory directed towards the commission of such acts.¹⁰

Despite their non-binding nature, these resolutions, under customary international law, created shared values to refrain any states from supporting terrorist activities.

The IRGC's support for Hezbollah has been crucial for Hezbollah's long-standing life and its success. Iran provided the organization with a wide range of support; the IRGC's indoctrination-fueled Shiite consciousness and the spread of revolutionary values among Lebanese Shiite community. The ideological mobilization enabled Hezbollah to find human resources and material support from the Lebanese Shiite community and to sustain its longevity and flourish. Military training given by the IRGC allowed Hezbollah to attain its goals through violent activities and subsequently made it one of the most influential actors in Lebanon. By providing safe havens, Iran allowed Hezbollah to improve its organizational structure, to establish training centers, to have a long-range strategy and to plan all paramilitary and political activities. Iran's material aid (financial, weaponry and logistics aid) empowered both Hezbollah's military and political wings. By participating in decision-making, the IRGC not only contributed to Hezbollah's organizational/structural establishment but also to its strategy-making through its know-how and intelligence providing.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ "General Assembly Resolution 42/22: Declaration on the Enhancement of the Effectiveness of the Principle of Refraining from the Threat or Use of Force in International Relations," *United Nations Documents*, November 18, 1987, <http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/>.

According to the Global Terrorism Database, the number of Hezbollah or Hezbollah suspected fatalities is roughly 1200 between 1983 and 2014. Because of such activities, the organization is designated as a terrorist organization by the states mentioned in the previous chapter.

In post-2003 occupied Iraq, Iran adopted a multi-layered strategy; Iran adopted a policy of building close relations with all Shiite factions for shaping Iraq's domestic politics in favor of its interests. Additionally, in parallel with shaping Iraq's internal politics, Iran had also used the IRGC and its Quds Force as previously practiced in Lebanon to repel a possible attack in case of any post-invasion eventuality. Iran signaled an asymmetrical striking capability to deter a possible U.S. and Israel attack and to prevent the institutionalization of a U.S. presence in Iraq. Additionally Iran also aimed to suppress all Iraqi rivals, particularly Sunnis that potentially posed threats to its interests.

Based on the Harmony documents mentioned in previous chapter, it is clear that the IRGC and IRGC-QF served as a node of Iran's support for Iraqi Shiite groups, which ranges from the broad spectrum of military training, harboring, providing military supply (explosives, ammunition, weapons) and intelligence, to organizing and coordinating the activities (including sabotage and attacks) of Shiite groups. With the 2005 elections, Iran has reached the goal of establishing a friendly Shiite dominated regime in Iraq.

High-ranking US officials, Ryan Crocker, United States Ambassador to Iraq, and General David Petraeus, commander of the Multi-National Force in Iraq, explicitly condemned Iran's activities in Iraq. Both stated that Iran provided lethal capabilities to the Shiite groups and sought to create a Hezbollah-like force to serve its interests.

Taken together, both cases, the activities of the IRGC and the IRGC-QF, do not fit

regular use of army and these activities are widely accepted as the state sponsorship of terrorism. This raises questions about the ‘state sponsorship of terrorism’ and Iran’s classification as such. Thus, in the section that follows, the state sponsorship of terrorism will be briefly examined.

State Sponsorship of Terrorism and the IRGC’s Extraterritorial Activities

State-sponsored terrorism is a sub-topic of terrorism. Davis and Jenkins divide the actors of a ‘terrorist system’ into the following categories; “top leaders, lieutenants, foot soldiers, recruiters, external suppliers and facilitators, and heads of supportive states.”¹¹ In this actor categorization, state-sponsored terrorism can be found in the categories of ‘external suppliers and facilitators, and heads of supportive states.’ As can be understood from the name of phenomena, there are two components of the topic; terrorism and state behavior. In the following section concentration will be on both components.

Rapoport posited four distinct waves of modern terrorism. The first wave is ‘anarchist’ (1880s-1920s), the second is ‘anti-colonial’ (1920s-1960s), the third wave is ‘new left wing’ that ended in the 1990s, and the fourth and most recently is ‘religious wave’ which began in 1979 with the Iranian Revolution.¹² In modern terrorism history, the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand on June 28, 1914 was the watershed which was also end of the Rapoport’s first wave. Rather than the assassination, the suspicion of rival state involvement in the sponsorship of the killing catalyzed the major powers into taking violent action and caused World War I. Taking into account the results of this suspicion, although it was a turning point in history, this early example of state-sponsored terrorism does not characterize today’s state-sponsored terrorism.

¹¹ Paul K. Davis and Brian M. Jenkins, *Deterrence & Influence in Counterterrorism a Component in the War on Al Qaeda* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, ©2002, 2002), 15.

¹² David C. Rapoport, “The Four Waves of Rebel Terror and September 11,” *Anthropoetics: The Journal of Generative Anthropology*, Spring / Summer 2002, <http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap0801/terror.htm>.

The height of state-sponsored terrorism was represented by the decades of the 1970s and 1980s. As a result of technological advances and subsequently dramatic explosion of international media influence, terrorism gained a firmly international character during the 1970s and 1980s.¹³ Cronin explains the progression of the relations between national causes and terrorist organizations during and after these periods;

Individual, scattered national causes began to develop into international organizations with links and activities increasingly across borders and among differing causes. This development was greatly facilitated by the covert sponsorship of states such as Iran, Libya, and North Korea, and of course the Soviet Union, which found the underwriting of terrorist organizations an attractive tool for accomplishing clandestine goals while avoiding potential retaliation for the terrorist attacks.¹⁴

This interaction between states and terrorist organizations has created the phenomena of state sponsorship of terrorism.

The term ‘terrorism’ has no precise or a widely accepted definition in academic and policy environments. Simon states that there are more than 200 definitions of terrorism.¹⁵ What is called terrorism thus seems to depend on one’s point of view. As stated by Cronin, “Terrorism is intended to be a matter of perception and is thus seen differently by different observers.”¹⁶ In literature, according to Richard Jackson, there are several approaches to determine terrorism; first approach is defining terror as a an ideology, the second is an actor-based approach that defines terrorism as a particular form of political violence committed by non-state actors who attack civilians, the third and most common approach defines terrorism as a violent strategy or

¹³ Audrey Kurth Cronin, “Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism,” *International Security* 27, no. 3 (2002): 35–36.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁵ Michael G. Findley, “Terrorism, Democracy, and Credible Commitments,” *International Studies Quarterly* (2011) 55, 357–378.

¹⁶ Cronin, “Behind the Curve,” 32.

tactic that actors employ in pursuit of particular political goals.¹⁷ At this point I find fruitless to argue which definition explains the phenomena of ‘terrorism.’

Richard Jackson’s perspective on definitional ambiguity is explanatory;

Most definitions of terrorism by leading scholars for example, describe it as a form of illegitimate violence directed towards innocent civilians that is intended to intimidate or terrify an audience for political purposes. The question of what makes an act of violence legitimate or not, who is considered a civilian, how innocence can be measured, what the real intentions of often clandestine actors might be and what counts as a political aim, are all highly contested and subject to competing claims.¹⁸

As we can understand from this perspective, it is not easy to create a widely-accepted definition of terrorism, but we know it when we see it thanks to its well-known characteristics. Thus, instead of being busy with questions of definition, I find focusing on common characteristics of terrorism more useful in understanding it. Hoffman defines terrorism as having five distinguishing characteristics:

- Ineluctably political in aims and motives
- Violent – or, equally important, threatens violence
- Designed to have far-reaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim or target
- Conducted by an organization and
- Perpetrated by a subnational group or non-state entity.¹⁹

There is a strong link between definition of terrorism and its goals. As goals of terrorism have varied overtime, we have faced the new versions of the definition. Andrew H. Kydd and

¹⁷ Richard Jackson, “An Argument for Terrorism,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* Vol.2, No.2 (2010), <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/index>

¹⁸ Richard Jackson, “An Argument for Terrorism,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2, no. 2 (2010), <http://terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/27/html>.

¹⁹ Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, Rev. and expanded ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 43.

Barbara F. Walter state that despite the changing nature of terrorism, five goals have remained valid; “regime change, policy change, territorial change, social control, and status quo maintenance.”²⁰ In Walter and Kydd’s words;

Regime Change is the overthrow of a government and its replacement with one led by the terrorists or at least one more to their liking. Policy Change Policy change is a broader category of lesser demands, such as al-Qaida’s demand that the United States drop its support for Israel and corrupt Arab regimes such as Saudi Arabia. Territorial Change is taking territory away from a state either to establish a new state or to join another state. Social control constrains the behavior of individuals, rather than the state. Finally, status quo maintenance is the support of an existing regime or a territorial arrangement against political groups that seek to change it.²¹

In order to analyze the range of goals and their relative frequency, Kydd and Walter examine forty-two terrorist organizations, which are designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) by the U.S. State Department. Of the forty-two groups, “thirty-one seek regime change, nineteen seek territorial change, four seek policy change, one seeks to maintain the status quo.”²² These goals of terrorism, to some extent, may overlap with states’ political objectives against a target state and that may allow them to move together against a common target. This is the point where ‘state sponsorship of terrorism’ emerges.

As in ‘terrorism’, definitional ambiguity also exists for the term of ‘state-sponsored terrorism.’ Before asserting the definition, it is important to clarify at the outset what the expression of state sponsorship does not include. Firstly, the term "state sponsorship" does not cover domestic state terrorism that can be practiced against a regime’s own population for different reasons. Second, the term does not include instances of state terrorism that occur during war. Each of these conditions has different political and legal meaning.

²⁰ Barbara F. Walter and Andrew H. Kydd, “The Strategies of Terrorism,” *International Security* 31, no. 1 (2006): 52.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

²² *Ibid.*

According to the U.S. State Department, state sponsors of terrorism are described as “countries determined by the Secretary of State to have repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism.”²³ This definition refers to three laws which explicitly designate only one form of sponsorship; “the recurring use of any part of the territory of the country as a sanctuary for terrorists and terrorist organizations.”²⁴ However, the spectrum of state sponsorship of terrorism is not as limited as it is in this definition.

State sponsorship is generally defined as any country’s deliberate support of terrorist groups for achieving a desired political or strategic objective against another country. This deliberate support can be implemented by providing funds, weapons, logistics, training, intelligence and bases. One prominent feature of this definition is ‘a desired political or strategic objective’ of sponsor state. In this approach, overlapping of ‘desired political or strategic objectives’ and ‘the goals of terrorist groups’ establish the origin of this phenomenon in the most of the cases; however, in the some forms of sponsorship, this overlapping may not exist.

Among many definitional approaches, Daniel Byman’s definition has a particular explanatory power. Byman, who has authored some of the most recent works on state-sponsored terrorism, defines state sponsorship of terrorism as “a government’s intentional assistance to a terrorist group to help it use violence, bolster its political activities or sustain the organization.”²⁵ In his definition, he defines state sponsorship by eliminating sponsor states’ political objectives for extending its spectrum.

Although, in recent history, many authors have examined state-sponsored terrorism in specific cases, such as Iran, Soviet Union, and Pakistan’s support for terrorism, there has not

²³ Bureau of Public Affairs Department Of State. The Office of Website Management, “State Sponsors of Terrorism,” January 20, 2009, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/list/c14151.htm>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Byman, *Deadly Connections*, 63.

been improved broad generalization and a specific definition.

In addition to the changing nature of terrorism over time, the absence of generalization mostly originates from the varieties of the methods of state support, the sponsor state's level of involvement, and the sponsor state's objectives for providing support. Unsurprisingly, most authors tend to address the issue in the context of the sponsor state's level of involvement. In terms of the legal consequences of complicity, this perspective makes sense.

Richard Erickson, in his book *Legitimate Use of Military Force against State-Sponsored International Terrorism*, identifies four levels of state involvement "from greatest to least: sponsorship, support, toleration, and inaction through inability to act."²⁶ Erickson's categorization of the level of involvement ranges from sponsorship where a state directly controls international terrorism as a means of gaining strategic advantage, to inaction where "the state does not wish to ignore international terrorists within its borders but lacks the ability to respond effectively."²⁷ In 'support' the state does not control the terrorists, but the activities of the terrorists which serve the interests of the state are encouraged, and the state provides expertise and material aid to the terrorists. In 'toleration,' the state neither actively supports terrorists, nor impedes its activities.²⁸

While Jenkins and Hoffman have researched the subject in depth, they have not broadly focused on defining levels of involvement. Hofmann, in *Inside Terrorism*, states that sponsor state supplies the "resources of an established nation state's entire diplomatic, military, and intelligence apparatus"²⁹ to terrorist organizations. Jenkins, in *Defense against Terrorism*,

²⁶ Richard J. Erickson, "Legitimate Use of Military Force Against State-Sponsored International Terrorism" (Washington, DC: DTIC Document, 1989), 26, <http://oai.dtic.mil/oai/oai?verb=getRecord&metadataPrefix=html&identifier=ADA421977>.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 256.

mentions that states contribute to organizations “money, sophisticated munitions, intelligence, and technical expertise.”³⁰ As seen, for these two authors, there is no specific categorization of the level of involvement.

Byman performs a comprehensive analysis of the topic in his book *‘Deadly Connections: States That Sponsor Terrorism.’* Byman identifies six specific types of state sponsorship:

- Strong Supporters,

Strong supporters decisively support the terrorist group and are capable of providing broad range of state resources to this group.

- Weak Supporters,

Weak supporters have desire to support the terrorist organization, but not the capacity to offer necessary resources.

- Lukewarm Supporters,

In this category, states seem rhetorically support the terrorist group, but do little actual tangible support.

- Antagonistic Supporters,

Antagonistic supporters appear to be supporting the terrorist group in search of controlling it or weakening its cause.

- Passive Supporters,

Passive supporters do not directly provide aid to the terrorist group but intentionally turn a blind eye to its activities.

- Unwilling Hosts.

In this category, states are incapable of stopping terrorists, thus unwillingly allow their territory and resources to them. In Byman words, “such hosts are not ‘supporters’ of terrorism

³⁰ Brian M. Jenkins, “Defense against Terrorism,” *Political Science Quarterly* 101, no. 5 (1986): 589.

but rather its victims.³¹

Byman attempts to take this argument further in an analysis paper entitled “*The Changing Nature of State Sponsorship of Terrorism*.”³² In it, he describes ‘a spectrum of sponsorship’ that ranges from ‘direct control to support through incapacity.’³³ He introduces two new sub categories; active and passive support. In *Passive Support of Terrorism*, according to Byman, “active state sponsorship involves a deliberate regime decision to assist a terrorist group, often in the form of arms, money, training or sanctuary.”³⁴

Byman identifies three types of active state sponsorship of terrorism:

- a) Control: Some states directly control the terrorist groups they support: the group is in essence a cat’s paw of the state.
- b) Coordination: Absolute control is rare, but states often try to coordinate the activities of terrorist groups to best serve the state’s interests. These groups, however, have their own agendas and operate with some degree of independence from their sponsors.
- c) Contact: States are regularly in contact with terrorist groups, at times engaging in minor tactical coordination or simply trying to keep channels open for possible future coordination.³⁵

In passive sponsorship, “a regime can be said to be guilty of passive support if it knowingly allows a terrorist group to raise money, enjoy a sanctuary, recruit or otherwise

³¹ Byman, *Deadly Connections*, 15.

³² Daniel Byman, *The Changing Nature of State Sponsorship of Terrorism* (Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, 2008).
http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/papers/2008/05_terrorism_byman/05_terrorism_byman.pdf (accessed November 01, 2013)

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Daniel Byman, “Passive Sponsors of Terrorism,” *Survival* 47, no. 4 (December 1, 2005): 118, doi:10.1080/00396330500433399.

³⁵ Byman, *The Changing Nature of State Sponsorship of Terrorism*.

flourish without interference, but does not directly aid the group itself.”³⁶ Byman’s passive sponsorship is characterized as:

The regime in question itself does not provide assistance but knowingly allows other actors in the country to aid a terrorist group; the regime has the capacity to stop this assistance or has chosen not to develop this capacity; and often passive support is given by political parties, wealthy merchants or other actors in society that have no formal affiliation with the government.³⁷

Passive state sponsored terrorism, argues Byman, also manifests itself in three different forms:

- a) Knowing toleration: Some governments may make a policy decision not to interfere with a terrorist group that is raising money, recruiting, or otherwise exploiting its territory. In essence, the regime wants the group to flourish and believes that by not acting it can help it do so.
- b) Unconcern or ignorance: Some states may not seek to further a terrorist group’s activities, but they may not bother to stop it, either because they do not believe its activities are extensive or because they do not believe the group’s activities affect the state’s interest.
- c) Incapacity: Some states do not fully control their territory or the government is too weak vis-à-vis key domestic actors that do support terrorism to stop the activities.³⁸

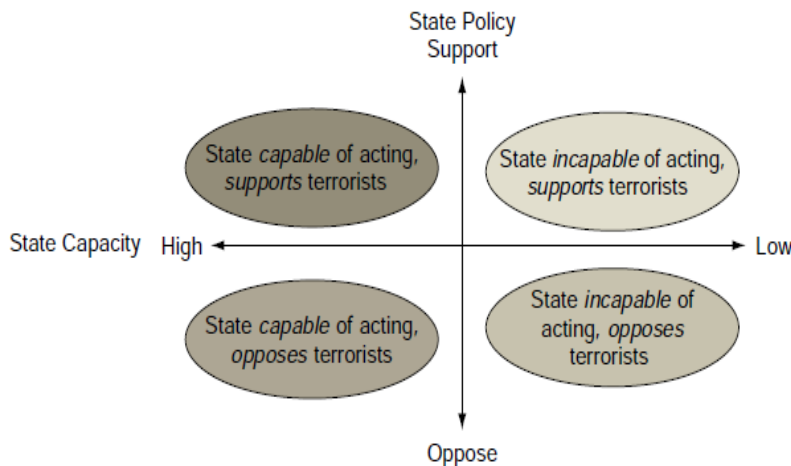
According to Byman, a state’s level of involvement depends on two parameters; State policy (it ranges from support to oppose), and State capacity (it ranges from high to low.)

³⁶ Byman, “Passive Sponsors of Terrorism,” 118.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Byman, *The Changing Nature of State Sponsorship of Terrorism*.

Figure 9: A Notional Spectrum of State Support



Source: Deadly Connections; States that Sponsor Terrorism, (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11³⁹

In the scope of [Figure 9](#) rather than suggesting state support as an “all-or-nothing” classification, it is more accurate to describe it as a spectrum. In terms of two parameters, figure one depicts the spectrum of involvement between the state and the terrorist organization. The lowest level of involvement is ‘incapacity’ in which the state possesses no capability to assist or impede the terrorist organization that is operating within its borders, and the highest level of the involvement is ‘direct Control’ in which the state exercises complete control over the organization, to include ideology and operations.

Why do States Support Terrorism?

As mentioned earlier, there are several levels of state involvement. The lowest level of involvement is ‘incapacity’ which generally originates from the sponsor state’s failing or failed state character. James A. Piazza, in *Incubators of Terror: Do Failed and Failing States Promote*

³⁹ Byman, *Deadly Connections*, 11.

Transnational Terrorism?, defines failed and failing states as “the states that due to severe challenges cannot monopolize the use of force vis-a-vis other non-state actors in society and are therefore incapable of fully projecting power within their national boundaries.”⁴⁰ Due to the lack of the ability to project power throughout their national territory and having incompetent and corrupt law enforcement capacities, failed and failing states provide opportunities and suitable conditions for terrorist groups to organize, train, generate revenue, and set up logistics and communications beyond those afforded by the network of safe houses in non-failed states.⁴¹

Bruce Hoffman, in *Inside Terrorism*, also addresses some states’ relatively weak position and their relations with terrorist organizations. According to him they are economically, politically weak and their conventional military forces are obsolete and outclassed by their adversaries. “Using terrorist proxies rather than government agents allows a degree of deniability *to them*, which in turn reduces the chances of retaliation from more powerful states that possess stronger economies and militaries. [italic added]”⁴² Bruce Hoffman’s perspective evokes the asymmetry debate. “The term ‘asymmetric strategies’ is often used to label approaches that underdogs might employ to avoid direct military confrontation; and to focus instead on exploiting key political and military vulnerabilities such as the perceived Western sensitivity to casualties and collateral damage.”⁴³ The growing technological gap in conventional military capabilities between weak and a strong state pushes the weak state to attempt to circumvent the strong state’s conventional superiority in order to avoid a force on-force military confrontation. Therefore, the high possibility of defeat in case of a war with a stronger state, and in order to

⁴⁰ James A. Piazza, “Incubators of Terror: Do Failed and Failing States Promote Transnational Terrorism?,” *International Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (September 1, 2008): 470, doi:10.1111/j.1468-2478.2008.00511.x.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 471.

⁴² Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 27.

⁴³ Wyn Q. Bowen, “Deterrence and Asymmetry: Non-State Actors and Mass Casualty Terrorism,” *Contemporary Security Policy* 25, no. 1 (April 1, 2004): 56, doi:10.1080/1352326042000290506.

deny its role as an aggressor, avoid retaliation, a weaker state can sponsor terrorism covertly

Richardson also looks at the issue through the same lenses;

State sponsorship of terrorism has had relatively low risk because it is so difficult to prove and may serve to achieve a state's foreign policy objectives. If it does not, it is easily deniable. Moreover, the primacy placed on human life by Western, democracies leaves them very vulnerable to attack through their individual citizens because there are so many of them in so many places. So state sponsorship is often low cost, easy to deny, and difficult to prove, and has potential for a high payoff. It should come as no surprise that relatively weak states resort to the support of terrorists to strike against their more powerful enemies.⁴⁴

Audrey Kurth Cronin ties this perspective to globalization. According to her; “the objectives of international terrorism have also changed as a result of globalization. Foreign intrusions and growing awareness of shrinking global space have created incentives to use the ideal asymmetrical weapon, terrorism, for more ambitious purposes.”⁴⁵

Byman makes a comprehensive categorization in terms of states’ motivations behind their support for terrorist groups. According to him, “understanding motivations is vital both for predicting when a state might support a terrorist group and for determining how to end this backing.”⁴⁶ He examines the motivations of nine states’ sponsorship in 38 instances. The motivations are divided into three categories; strategic, ideological, and domestic. All three categories of motivations and their sub categories are shown below;

⁴⁴ Louise Richardson, *What Terrorists Want : Understanding the Enemy, Containing the Threat / Louise Richardson.*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 2006), 51.

⁴⁵ Cronin, “Behind the Curve,” 51.

⁴⁶ Byman, *Deadly Connections*, 21.

Table 7: Categorization of States Motivations in Support for Terrorist Groups

Strategic	Ideological	Domestic
Destabilize or weaken neighbor	Enhance international prestige	Aid kin
Project power	The interplay between ideology and strategy	Military or operational aid
Changing a regime		
Shaping an opposition		

Source: Deadly Connections; States that Sponsor Terrorism, (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 21-50⁴⁷

In order to advance the security and power that are core concerns for any state, strategic motivations are the most common in contrast to domestic and ideological concerns. In this category, the use of terrorists “becomes war and politics by another means, enabling a state to destabilize, or even topple, its rivals, and to shape politics in a neighboring country or one farther way.”⁴⁸

In addition to strategy, Byman states that exporting an ideology is also a common reason for states that support terrorist groups. “Many states seek to export their ideology and political system and use terrorist groups as a proxy to this end.”⁴⁹ It is a way of creating sphere of influence. Prestige also serves to this end, enhancing their political status at home and their influence abroad.

Byman’s last category is Domestic Politics. This category is particularly common “when the regime seeks to demonstrate its support for causes that its own people see as representing their ‘kin,’ be they ethnic or religious.”⁵⁰ This support in turn strengthens a regime’s political

⁴⁷ Ibid., 21–50.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 36.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 41.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 33.

position at home through bolstering its own popularity domestically. Another sub category is ‘Military or operational aid.’ “More rarely, regimes use a terrorist group to gain military aid or other forms of assistance in the state’s own struggles in a civil war or against regime dissidents.”⁵¹

If we look at both cases, we can observe that Lebanese Hezbollah and Shiite groups in post-2003 occupied Iraq have Hoffman’s terrorism characteristics; ineluctably political in aims and motives; violent – or, equally important, threatening violence; designed to have far-reaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim or target; conducted by an organization; and perpetrated by a subnational group or non-state entity.⁵²

Additionally, Lebanese Hezbollah and Shiite Groups in post-2003 occupied Iraq had the following goals, using violence to attain these goals.

Table 8: The Goals of Lebanese Hezbollah and Shiite Groups in post-2003 Occupied Iraq

Lebanese Hezbollah	Shiite Groups in post-2003 occupied Iraq
To expel all foreigners that they saw as threat to themselves	To end presence of Coalition Force, namely the US Forces in neighbor Iraq
To change political system in which Shiites perceived their position as far weaker	To suppress other groups
The social control of Lebanese people	To gain power in political system
Regime Change (to establish an Iran-like regime)	To establish a new regime in which Shiites have decisive authority

Source: Created by the Author

These goals recall Kydd and Walter’s five goals of terrorism; regime change, policy

⁵¹ Ibid., 47.

⁵² Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 43.

change, territorial change, social control and status quo maintenance. Three of five goals, regime change, policy change and social control clearly can be seen in Lebanese Hezbollah and Iraqi Shiite groups' goals.

In Lebanon and Iraq, groups aimed to gradually overthrow the existing regime and replace it with one led by Shiites. To this end, groups followed two strategies; First, following militant activities for expelling foreign forces in order to create room for themselves to maneuver and suppressing opposition groups in order to shape domestic politics in favor of themselves; second, joining political activities to become the dominant, decisive power in a political system.

These activities and its ends undoubtedly served Iran's foreign policy goals. Iran deliberately supported Lebanese Hezbollah and Iraqi Shiite groups and provided a broad range of state resources in the form of ideological direction, organizational assistance, diplomatic backing, training, operational direction, money, arms, logistics and sanctuary.⁵³

The convergence of mutual interest, ideological closeness and these groups' ideological, financial, military, and operational needs has been the basis of Iran's relations with these groups. If we look at Iran's motivations through Byman's categorization, Iran unquestionably supported Lebanese and Shiite groups for all three reasons; strategic, ideological, and domestic.

Initially, Iran used the IRGC in extraterritorial activities to spread its ideology and revolution. However, the realities of international politics, the costly Iran-Iraq war, the inapplicability of expansionist policies and the need for foreign capital and technical expertise to carry out economic reconstruction forced Iranian leaders to temper ideological foreign policy. Pragmatist and reformist measures were proposed against revolutionary policies in order to enhance domestic and regional stability and to integrate Iran into the international system. But Iran has always kept ideological rhetoric and reasons on the table, in case of a potential future

⁵³ Byman, *The Changing Nature of State Sponsorship of Terrorism*.

need. Since then, instead of explicit support, Iran has covertly and more professionally supported its proxies.

The regime proclaimed itself as the protector of Muslims and all oppressed people. By supporting Lebanese and Iraqi Shiite groups, the regime also considered domestic public opinion, consolidating its legitimacy at home by tying it to a popular cause.

In terms of strategic ambitions, we can observe all sub-categories of strategic ambition in the IRGC's extraterritorial activities; Destabilizing or weakening a neighbor, projecting power, changing a regime, and shaping an opposition. By organizing and providing a broad range of support to Lebanese Hezbollah and Shiite groups in Iraq, Iran targeted all actors who were potential threats to their success.

By creating room to maneuver for their political wings, Iran tried to shape opposition, including rival Shiite groups, Sunnis and foreign forces who posed a potential threat to its goals.

At the same time, Iran tried to change regimes and bring friendly ones into power in Lebanon and Iraq, which would expand its sphere of influence and create the opportunity of being a regional power.

Iran also aimed to project its power by supporting these groups. 'Power projection' is briefly defined as the ability of a state to apply its power components beyond its borders. In the past, power projection denoted the use of naval power. Under Eisenhower, the US navy practiced "gunboat diplomacy." Hagan describes gunboat diplomacy as, "the finite application of force to effect discrete political ends in distant places."⁵⁴ As stated by Hagan, the US used the aircraft carrier and the Marine Corps for this purpose.⁵⁵ Over time, the means of power projection expanded beyond hard power applications because of new characteristics of the international

⁵⁴ Kenneth J. Hagan, *This People's Navy: The Making of American Sea Power* (Free Press, 1991), 350.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

system. In other words, after WWII, the post-colonial and post-cold war environment forced states to act within international norms. In proportion to their capabilities, major states began to use new means such as substantial networks of economic and military aid, arms sales agreements, and explicit and de facto alliances in order to sustain or develop their worldwide interests.⁵⁶

The lack of hard and soft power capabilities made proxies the sole means for Iran to influence discrete political ends beyond its borders. With this capability, Iran tried to signal itself as being in the same category as the major powers. In addition to political ends, Iran's capability to shape Lebanese and Iraqi domestic politics in favor of Shiites, and to be influential on policies of the US and Israel consolidate its popularity at home, self-professed status as the defender and leader of Muslim world, and its sympathy and prestige in the anti-US bloc.

Iran also used these groups to extort its sworn enemies; the US, Israel and Iraq. Since the revolution, Iran had very problematic relations with the US, Israel and the Saddam regime in Iraq, which had a considerable effect on Iran's immediate threat perceptions and did not allow Iranians to live in peace. By destabilizing and weakening them, Iran tried to guarantee state survival.

Iran's relations with Iraq have been complicated and problematic. Both states have historically competed for regional hegemony. With the Iran-Iraq war, mutual hostility peaked. Iran started to use Shiite groups against Saddam Regime after organizing and supporting which would constitute the roots of the activities in Post-2003 occupied Iraq. To some extent, the removal of the Saddam regime significantly lessened the perceived threat from Iraq. However, US Middle East policies have increased long-standing concerns about potential US military

⁵⁶ Willard Scott Thompson, *Power Projection: A Net Assessment of the U.s. and Soviet Capabilities* (Transaction Publishers, 1978), 7.

intervention against Iran.

Khomeini's ideological, antagonistic approach to the US ("the Great Satan") and Israel ("the Little Satan"); subsequently, the hostage crisis and Iran's support for Hezbollah created incurable bias for all parties. In time, this bad condition further deteriorated because of developments like the U.S. President George W. Bush's "Axis of Evil" speech. Additionally, the alliance between the US and Israel and increasing US presence in the region doubled Iran's survival concerns. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the new unipolar world order provided room to maneuver to the United States. The 1990–91 Gulf War and the 2003 Invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan caused enlarged-presence and paved the way for the United States to settle in the region. Thus, not only do Iranians geopolitically find themselves stranded among Sunni states, but also feel surrounded by the United States' asymmetrically powerful conventional military forces.

Thanks to the IRGC's direction and support for Hezbollah, Iran could influence Lebanese domestic politics and Israel's policies, even though Iran is hundreds of kilometers away from Israel. In Iraq, Iran used the IRGC supported Shiite groups to weaken Saddam's regime before the 2003 occupation. Post-occupation, the IRGC organized and supported Shiite groups for multiple purposes; to shape Iraq's domestic politics through empowering Shiites and weakening the opposition, to prevent further US settlement in Iraq. Most importantly, in both cases, IRGC directed and supported these groups as a deterrent tool against possible future attacks.

Comparatively, Iran seems weaker than the US or the US-Israel alliance in terms of conventional military force. In such an antagonistic relation, Iran knew that there is a high possibility of defeat in case of a war and that there is no way to survive by depending on conventional military force. Instead of conventional confrontation, by signaling a capability to

strike its enemies, Iranian leaders aimed to deter a potential military strike. Thus, using proxies provided following benefits to Iran; it is cheaper than developing conventional military capabilities, it is easy to deny, difficult to prove, and thus it has low risk in terms of provoking military retaliation.

Obviously, since the mid-1980s strategic motivations are the most influential ones for Iran's decision-making, in contrast to domestic and ideological motivations.

In chapter two, Iranian foreign policy goals were briefly defined as follows;

1. Regime survival (above all else)
2. State security and survival (the defense of Iranian territory against external threats),
3. Projecting power and becoming the dominant power in the region,

'Regime survival' is emphasized as the indispensable (*sine qua non*) goal of Iran foreign policy, above all else. Since its inception, revolutionary Iran has primarily been concerned with regime survival and this deeply influenced its strategies. Besides all other goals, which also serve regime survival, the IRGC and the Quds Force were primarily used to attain this goal, which has been overlooked among other goals.

What is the Difference between 'Regime Survival' and 'State Survival'?

The realist school, which was dominant throughout the Cold War, portrays international relationship as a struggle for power among self-interested states. In time realism evolved, and neorealism -structural realism- became the most popular international relations theory because of its persuasive power in explaining state behaviors. That's why IR instructors devote a large percentage of time to covering neorealism.

According to Waltz, the father of neorealism, the international arena is an anarchic and

self-help system. In other words, there is no an authority to protect states from one another. In Waltz's words, "[s]elf-help is the principle of action in such an order, and the most important way in which states must help themselves is by providing for their own security."⁵⁷ According to this perspective, in this anarchic and self-help system states can never trust other states, today's friend may be tomorrow's enemy, thus each states has to survive on its own. States are the primary actors and constitutive units of the international system. In this international environment, all states as units primarily seek to survive by pursuing power and balance against its powerful rivals.

However, in Iran's case, I argue that 'regime survival' is the primary goal rather than 'state survival.' 'Regime survival' occupies the first place in the Iranian leader's agenda, and directly effects its domestic and foreign affairs decision-making and, of course, defines the IRGC's extraterritorial activities. Briefly, herein the regime represents Iran's current political system and the ruling elites who hold the power. The meaning of the regime and its components will be explained broadly in the following part.

As stated by Hunter, who cites R S. Northedge: 'foreign policy is a dialogue between the inside and the outside,' " the pattern of states external behavior is determined by a constant interaction between its domestic needs and realities - internal determinants - and the characteristics of the external environment within which they operate."⁵⁸ Thus, in the next part of this chapter, I will try to analyze the domestic and external conditions that created the Iranian leader's obsession of regime survival.

⁵⁷ Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, volume 18, Issue 4, (Spring, 1988): 624.

⁵⁸ Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era*, 17.

Domestic and External Conditions that Made the Regime Survival Priority of the Ruling Elites

At this point, it would contribute to our understanding of the dynamics of defining policy preferences and decision-making to start by searching for answers to the questions of ‘what does regime mean?’ and ‘who constitute the regime in Iran?’

In the scholarly literature, a variety of definitions for a political regime exist. Among them is Skaaning’s definition, which is based on detangling the existing conceptual origins of ten broadly accepted definitions. Skaaning defines four principles in the definition of political regime: character of rulers, access to power, vertical power limitations, and horizontal power limitations. He states that “political regime designates the institutionalized set of fundamental formal and informal rules identifying the political power holders (character of the possessor(s) of ultimate decisional sovereignty) and it also regulates the appointments to the main political posts (extension and character of political rights) as well as the vertical limitations (extension and character of civil liberties) and horizontal limitations on the exercise of political power (extension and character of division of powers – control and autonomy).”⁵⁹

As stated by Walt, “a revolutionary state rests on new principles of legitimacy, displays new symbols of authority and identity (names, flags, anthems, etc.), adopts new rules for elite recruitment, and creates new political institutions and governmental procedures.”⁶⁰ The 1979 Iran revolution was not merely a ruler change. The revolution changed rulers, access to power, vertical and horizontal power limitations in Iran.

Initially, the revolution was made by many segments of Iranian society. All anti-Shah

⁵⁹ Svend-Erik Skaaning, “Political Regimes and Their Changes: A Conceptual Framework,” Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law Freeman Spogli Institute Stanford, accessed April 19, 2016, http://cddrl.fsi.stanford.edu/publications/political_regimes_and_their_changes_a_conceptual_framework.

⁶⁰ Walt, “Revolution and War,” 1992, 334.

groups -Marxists, liberal National Front, secularists, Islamic activists- participated in it. Shortly thereafter, the Shah was removed from power. Rather than returning to their mosques and madrasas, Khomeini and his followers began to take steps to increase their power and to control the government. In time, all participants who took part in the revolutionary government and were not supporters of Khomeini were eliminated. The power sharing moved from a very broad range of ideologically different anti-Shah segments to a very narrow group of clerical elites.

After the revolution, the concept of *velayat-e faqih* developed by Ayatollah Khomeini was the basis of Iran's political system. According to the concept of *velayat-e faqih*, the supreme leader is the temporal, spiritual and legal leader of the *ummah* (Muslim community) during the absence of the Twelfth Imam. *Velayat-e faqih* has provided the constitutional justification for the regime's political reconstruction.

The new regime has a dual and unique political system; in addition to deriving its legitimacy from the *velayat-e faqih* system, it also employs republican institutions. In the political structure of Iran, there is a parliament and a president, both selected by Iranian voters. However, it has also a supreme leader who is more powerful than the president and is not democratically elected. Moreover, the unelected institutions of Iran's government are more powerful than the elected ones.

The Supreme Leader is constitutionally the 'guardian jurist', 'leader of the Islamic revolution' and ranked above the state president. Ultimate power resides in the Supreme Leader who appoints and dismisses all key senior positions - the head of the judiciary, the supreme commander of the IRGC, the supreme commander of the regular military and the security services, the head of state radio and television, and the clerical jurists in the Council of the Guardian- ; he controls all important institutions of state such as the courts, the police, the

military, and can veto candidates for office and veto parliamentary legislation.⁶¹

The influence on decision-making by the ultimate power of the supreme leader and unelected institutions (such as guardian -partly unelected- and expediency councils) establishes an elaborate system of checks and balances, which seek to safeguard regime survival and to maintain the status quo. Thus, it can be said that the state system is designed according to this sensitivity, and the supreme leader is “the ultimate gatekeeper.”⁶²

Thaler supports this thought with the following: “multiple institutions that perform identical or similar functions—and therefore compete with each other for resources and status—has generated a diffuse and complicated system. In theory, this multifarious, redundant design prevents any one center of power from gaining undue influence over the entire system and ensures the overall survival and security of the regime and the central position of the Supreme Leader.”⁶³

The decisiveness of the supreme leader, guardian council (Six of twelve members appointed by the Supreme Leader) and expediency council on the decision-making process limits the democratic and republican process. With these characteristics, it is not easy to position Iran in a particular regime type. As stated by Chehabi, Iran “[l]ike totalitarian regimes, it proclaims the absolute supremacy over public life of an ideology, i.e. ‘Islam’; like authoritarian regimes it permits a limited degree of pluralism; and like democracies it holds elections in which the people sometimes have a genuine choice, to wit Mohammad Khatami’s upset victory in the presidential elections of May 1997....”⁶⁴

⁶¹ Ivan Sascha Sheehan, “What Is ‘Regime Change From Within?’ Unpacking the Concept in the Context of Iran,” *Digest of Middle East Studies* 23, no. 2 (September 1, 2014): 394, doi:10.1111/dome.12055.

⁶² Shahrām Akbarzadeh, “Where Is the Islamic Republic of Iran Heading?,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 59, no. 1 (March 1, 2005): 44, doi:10.1080/1035771042000332020.

⁶³ Thaler, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads*, 21.

⁶⁴ Chehabi, “The Political Regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Comparative Perspective,” 48.

Rakel, based on Linz and Chehabi's assessments, identifies the regime type as follows; "the political system of the IRI between 1979 and 1989, when Ayatollah Khomeini was the supreme leader, was classified as close to totalitarian and, since 1989, as authoritarian with some limited democratic features."⁶⁵

All in all, the regime is designed to prevent any individual, institution, and faction from dominating the system and insulate the regime against internal and external threats.

To understand how ideologically valuable the regime is, Khomeini's following statement is very explanatory;

A government which is a branch of the Prophet Mohammad's absolute guardianship is one of the primary Islamic precepts and takes priority over all subsidiary precepts, even over praying, fasting and pilgrimage ... if necessary, [a] governor can close or destroy mosques ... the government can unilaterally terminate its religious agreements with the people if an agreement violates the expedience of the country or Islam. And [it] can abandon every commandment- both worshipping and non-worshipping precepts- which is against the expedience of Islam.⁶⁶

Khomeini repeatedly stated "the regime preservation (*hefz-e nezam*) was of highest necessity among all that is required (*oujab-e vajebat*)"⁶⁷ even fundamental religious practices.

Domestic and External Conditions during Khomeini Period

The first decade of the regime was completely dominated by Khomeini. Khomeini made all his efforts to consolidate the new regime during his leadership. To this end, Khomeini tried to prevent all potential internal disputes between the Parliament and the Guardian Council, and

⁶⁵ Eva Patricia Rakel, *Power, Islam, and Political Elite in Iran : A Study on the Iranian Political Elite from Khomeini to Ahmadinejad*, vol. 18, International Comparative Social Studies (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2009), 27.

⁶⁶ Ghobadzadeh, "Religious Secularity: An Emerging Backlash to The Islamic State in Iran." (Khomeini, R. (2006a) Sahifeh Nour (Book of Light), V.20, Tehran: Moasseh Tanzim va Nashre Asare Imam: 170-71).

⁶⁷ Yasuyuki Matsunaga, "The Secularization of a Faqih-Headed Revolutionary Islamic State of Iran: Its Mechanisms, Processes, and Prospects," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 29, no. 3 (2009): 413.

created the Expediency Council for mediating between two intuitions.

Despite the fact that he eliminated and suppressed all existing and potential opposition, Khomeini faced ‘four unsuccessful coup attempts’⁶⁸ and revolts in some regions. However, the regime survived. In the successful consolidation of the new regime, three key components were influential; “1) Ayatollah Khomeini as the leader and moral authority of the revolution; 2) the clerical leaders of the Islamic Republic Party; 3) the IRGC and other pro-Khomeini militias.”⁶⁹ Among them, the IRGC made a significant contribution to this success by preventing initial domestic threats against the regime. Buchta states that the IRGC was the revolutionary clergy’s strongest weapon in suppressing the oppositions and uprisings of separatist minorities such as Kurds, Beluchis, and Turkmen between 1979 and 1982.⁷⁰ In addition to the suppression of all opposition, the following reasons were the key factors for the establishment of the IRGC;

- To control the streets and to ensure internal security and stability,
- To consolidate and improve clergies’ power in the newly established regime and
- To advance the Khomeini’s ideology in state and society.^{71, 72, 73, 74}

Before the death of Khomeini, domestic factors, particularly the Iran–Iraq war and the task of “exporting the revolution,” contributed to the new regime’s power inside, which was mostly succeeded by the IRGC.

Walt, in *Revolution and War*, puts forward that “[t]he greater the divisions within the revolutionary state (either within the elite or between the government and the population at

⁶⁸ Amanda C. Skuldt, “State Sponsored Terrorism? Leader Survival and the Foreign Policy of Fear,” 2013, 151–153, <https://utexas-ir.tdl.org/handle/2152/21811>.

⁶⁹ Ostovar, “Guardians of the Islamic Revolution Ideology, Politics, and the Development of Military Power in Iran (1979-2009).,” 76.

⁷⁰ Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?*, 67.

⁷¹ Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled*, 10.

⁷² Chubin, “Is Iran a Military Threat?,” 66.

⁷³ Byman et al., *Iran’s Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 32.

⁷⁴ Ostovar, “Guardians of the Islamic Revolution Ideology, Politics, and the Development of Military Power in Iran (1979-2009).,” 76.

large), the more bellicose its foreign policy will be.” According to him, this proposition takes two distinct forms:

- A conflict among factions within the revolutionary regime promotes conflicts with other states in order to secure greater power for themselves.
- In order to rally popular support, to justify internal repression, and to provide a scapegoat should domestic problems persist, revolutionary leaders pursue conflicts with other states.⁷⁵

In both forms, the aim is to consolidate the regime’s power at home.

Between September 1981 and May 1982, with three major military attacks, Iranian forces successfully repulsed the Iraqi forces to the original border in most places.⁷⁶ Although there had been opportunities for a negotiated settlement in mid-1982 as Iran’s forces approached the border, Iran did not choose to sue for peace. Instead, Iran declared that its forces were "going to liberate Jerusalem, passing through the holy city of Karbala" in Iraq just after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982.⁷⁷

In this decision, in addition to the regime’s expansionist ideology, it seems that the ruling elites practically calculated that both the Iran–Iraq war and active participation in Lebanon affairs could contribute to consolidating the revolution and Khomeini’s power by rallying popular support and justifying internal repression. Another benefit of war was to keep the regular army under control; as stated by Wehrey “as long as the regular army was stretched thin and fully deployed on the western border (with Iraq), it could not mount any sort of a coup d’état

⁷⁵ Walt, “Revolution and War,” 1992, 327.

⁷⁶ Gary Sick, “Trial by Error: Reflections on the Iran–Iraq War,” *Middle East Journal* 43, no. 2 (1989): 235.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 236.

against Khomeini and his cohorts.”⁷⁸

Additionally, the war created a valid reason for investments that were made for the IRGC, which actively took part in the war. During the war, the IRGC, which was constituted by unarguably loyal members to the regime, evolved into a complete military thanks to these investments. The IRGC’s involvement in the war and Lebanese affairs also created legitimacy in society. Then, material investments and gained legitimacy made the IRGC a balancing power against the regular army, whose loyalty was in question for Khomeini.

The IRGC’s initial ideological activities in the name of ‘export of the revolution’ in Lebanon also served to weaken and punish the regime’s perceived external enemies by Hezbollah as a military strategy. According to Skuldt, roughly 57% of Hezbollah attacks explicitly targeted countries that were directly providing military, financial, or logistical support to Iraq.⁷⁹

All in all, in the first decade of the revolution, while the new regime had been fighting for its survival, the IRGC had been the key institution for preserving the regime in the following ways;

- Iran’s inherently multiethnic population and ideologically different groups’ struggle for power in the post revolution vacuum created a significant threat to the new regime. This was coupled with the shadow of the regular army’s potential coup threat.
- In this environment, the IRGC suppressed all ideological opposition and ethnic uprisings. The IRGC became a balancing power and removed the potential threats against the regime that might come from the regular army.

⁷⁸ Frederic M. Wehrey et al., *The Rise of the Pasdaran: Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps* (Santa Monica, CA; Arlington, VA; Pittsburgh, PA: Rand Corporation, 2009), 24–25.

⁷⁹ Skuldt, “State Sponsored Terrorism?,” 158.

- The triumph of the IRGC over all existing domestic threats preserved and consolidated the power of the new regime in its initial years.
- Khomeini and the IRGC commanders viewed the Iran–Iraq war as not only matters of military strategy. As stated by Wehrey, it was more than a struggle for the territorial integrity; it was also “an opportunity to further consolidate and institutionalize the revolution, purging it of known and potential opponents.”⁸⁰ Similarly, the IRGC’s commanders also viewed the war as “a mechanism to consolidate their internal position and marginalize the regular forces politically”⁸¹
- In addition to the Iran–Iraq war, with the IRGC’s involvement in Lebanon affairs, creating and supporting Hezbollah, besides strategic calculations, the regime aimed to consolidate the revolution’s following ideological and moral basis:
 - Export of the revolution,
 - Islamic unity and responsibility of other Muslim and ‘oppressed’ nations,
 - Confrontational and assertive anti-western (namely anti-Americanism, or anti-Zionism)
 - Rejection of all forms of domination,

As a military strategy, the regime also aimed to get the states to abandon their support of Iraq and to create room to maneuver by driving Israel and the West out of Lebanon.

- These improvements showed to Khomeini and the ruling elite how vital it was to have absolutely loyal armed forces for safeguarding regime survival. During the first decade, the IRGC’s power and size significantly expanded and became the strongest security pillar of the new regime. To invest in the development of the

⁸⁰ Wehrey et al., *The Rise of the Pasdaran*, 24.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, xiii.

IRGC had been the strategic priority of Khomeini. The more the IRGC got stronger, the more Khomeini and the regime got stronger. The IRGC's activities in Lebanon and in the Iran–Iraq war legitimized all efforts of the IRGC's to get stronger than other security institutions. Thus, this prepared the conditions of becoming a major domestic political, economic, and security power center and the bedrock of the regime's ideology.

Domestic and External Conditions during Post-Khomeini Period

The realities of international politics, and need for foreign capital and technical expertise to carry out economic reconstruction convinced Khomeini to temper the ideological principles of the early days of the Islamic Republic. This started a slight transition to pragmatist policies. Subsequently, the end of the costly Iran–Iraq war, the death of Khomeini, and the collapse of the bipolar international system created new conditions for the regime. Despite the institutionalization of revolution, the regime couldn't feel itself secure.

After Khomeini's death, the Assembly of Experts made Ali Khamenei the Supreme Leader. He had played an important role in the Revolution and served as the president for two successive terms from 1981 to 1989.⁸² His death removed a towering and symbol figure of the revolution from the scene. Khamenei was not as charismatic and powerful as Khomeini. Since becoming the supreme leader, Khamenei has tended to follow Khomeini's principles instead of initiating his own approaches. While he has been trying to balance ideology and the realities of international politics, he has avoided both confrontation and accommodation with the West in general. Khamenei's lack of authority has affected domestic political improvements, and as well

⁸² Ganji, "Who Is Ali Khamenei," 247.

as foreign policymaking. He was not able to suppress different factional approaches. Since the mid-1980s, different approaches to policy-making and rivalries for power created factions. This degree of political diversity did not disturb Khomeini, so long as the factions remained loyal to him and to certain fundamental principles of revolutionary Iran.

Additionally, the absence of a charismatic and dominant leadership has opened room to maneuver for key individuals who actively had taken part in the revolution. These key individuals, constant power-holders in the political structure and society, have constituted the ruling elites. Each of them has his own sphere of influence; some control the different institutions of the state and others represent the factions. They are absolutely loyal to the regime, because, besides their ideological motivations, each of them knows that their power depends on the continuity of the regime.

In the post Khomeini period, despite the institutionalization of the revolution to some extent, regime survival remained as the top priority of the ruling elites. New domestic, regional and global conditions introduced new threat perceptions for the regime. In the following section, these threat perceptions and its results will be analyzed.

Factional rivalry has seen as part of a check-balance system as long as it does not threaten the revolutionary regime. As stated by Wehrey “[f]actional maneuvering is a key manifestation of the competition for power and influence, and foreign -and domestic- policy issues are used as tools and are extensions of this competition.”⁸³ In other words, the factions use foreign policy to bolster their domestic position. On the contrary, an opponent can discredit a faction for threatening the regime because of its policies.

In the May 1997 elections, Mohammad Khatami was elected as the President of the Islamic Republic. Khatami, as a protagonist of the Reformist faction, attempted to avoid past

⁸³ Thaler, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads*, 118.

ideological priorities, and he tried to improve basic principles of democratic political system; such as freedom of speech, rule of law, civil society and pluralism.⁸⁴

Besides domestic political reforms, Khatami inaugurated important changes in Iranian foreign policy. The post-Soviet and post-Iran–Iraq war environment was the main reason for this policy orientation. Afghanistan and Pakistan were in chaos and challenged by Wahhabist religious fanaticism. The newly independent states of Central Asia and the Caucasus were trying to overcome weak social, political and economic conditions. Iraq was suffering sectarian and ethnic tensions. There were very hostile relations with pro-American Sunni regimes.⁸⁵ Last and most importantly, there was the growing US presence in the region.

To minimize the uncertainties originating in this chaotic environment, Khatami adopted the strategy of improving Iran’s regional and international relations. Khatami tried to behave less ideologically and promote relations with European countries, stability of the region, and active participation in international organizations.

In the aftermath of Sept. 11, within hours after the attacks by al-Qaeda extremists, Khatami condemned the attacks, and he was ‘the first cleric in the Muslim world to call for ‘holy war’ (jihad) against terrorism.’⁸⁶ The Khatami government cooperated with the US against the Taliban regime, which had harbored the anti-American al-Qaeda terrorists in Afghanistan. Relations between the United States and Iran seemed to be warming up. However, following President Bush’s 2002 ‘Axis of Evil’ speech in which Iran was accused of supporting terrorism, pursuing nuclear weapons, and destabilizing Afghanistan, the relations with the US reversed.

Khatami’s moderate domestic and international stance received its first major setback and

⁸⁴ Soltani and Amiri, “Foreign Policy of Iran after Islamic Revolution,” 203.

⁸⁵ Imad Salamey and Zanoubia Othman, “Shia Revival and Welayat Al-Faqih in the Making of Iranian Foreign Policy,” *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 12, no. 2 (June 1, 2011): 203.

⁸⁶ Ramazani, “Reflections on Iran’s Foreign Policy,” 62.

opened a new era in Iran's international relations. After the speech, US-Iran relations entered a long stalemate. Thus, this improvement gave conservatives the opportunity to discredit Khamenei in the eyes of Iranian public.

The conservatives viewed Khatami government as a direct threat to their position in the power structure. As stated by Gheissari and Nasr, “[i]f the Revolution of 1979 presented a unique opportunity for the clerics to dominate Iranian politics, the Khatami movement presented their opponents with a chance to challenge that domination.”⁸⁷

Khatami's policies surfaced the ideological disagreements between conservatives and reformists. Divisions went deeper with time, and Khatami's re-election in 2001 created further ideological polarization between the two factions. The division, in the words of Kamrava and Hassan-Yari, caused a very tough power struggle that affected “all aspects of Iranian politics and society; ranging from fundamental differences in foreign and domestic policies to the dismissal of “reformist” ministers, clamping down on supposed public immorality, closing down numerous newspapers and jailing their editors, drastically increasing the number of public floggings, and unleashing violent vigilantes on activists and other well-known figures.”⁸⁸

The conservative resistance bloc against the reformist bloc, under the leadership of supreme leader Khamenei, included “the top echelon of the Revolutionary Guard, the leadership of various ‘foundations’, conservative clerics associated with the Guardian and Expediency Councils (that oversee the legislative and judicial processes), the judiciary and key seminaries in Qom.”⁸⁹

From 1997 on, the conservatives' strategy was to prevent the erosion of ideological

⁸⁷ Ali Gheissari and Vali Nasr, “The Conservative Consolidation in Iran,” *Survival* 47, no. 2 (June 1, 2005): 177, doi:10.1080/00396330500156701.

⁸⁸ Mehran Kamrava and Houchang Hassan-Yari, “Suspended Equilibrium in Iran's Political System,” *The Muslim World* 94, no. 4 (October 1, 2004): 501, doi:10.1111/j.1478-1913.2004.00071.x.

⁸⁹ Gheissari and Nasr, “The Conservative Consolidation in Iran,” 179.

precepts of the revolution and expand their dominance in the state structure. The best way that the conservatives could maximize their prospects for survival was to gain power at their rivals' expense.

These international and domestic improvements prepared the end of Khatami's presidency and the conditions of presidential victory of Ahmadinejad in 2005. Ahmadinejad heavily used foreign policy for domestic consumption. He introduced a new tone in foreign policy orientation and stressed its inefficiency based on cooperation and interaction with the West that had been followed by the two previous presidents of Iran. Instead, he adopted a foreign policy based on confrontation with the West and interaction with other states.

During his presidency, it can be said that Iran's foreign policy recalled the policies of the Revolution's early years. In Rubin's words, he seemed to be "a hardliner à la Khomeini and used a very hostile tone, especially against the US and Europe, and also Israel."⁹⁰ Ahmadinejad adopted a more confrontational, assertive and active foreign policy to present Iran as an independent regional power. However, this new strategy not only deepened hostile relations with the US and Israel but also provoked Sunni-Arab states who were concerned with Ahmadinejad's nuclear ambitions and increasing support for Shiite groups.

According to Saikal, by "claiming that the United States and its allies, especially Israel, were determined to destroy the Islamic regime" he tried to build Iran's military and nuclear power and maintained support for Iran's partners including Syria, Lebanese Hezbollah, and proxies in Iraq. On these controversial issues, he received the conservatives' and the IRGC's support.⁹¹

After the first period of Ahmedinejad, the unprecedented character of the 2009 election

⁹⁰ Barry Rubin, "Iran: The Rise of a Regional Power," 186, accessed August 17, 2015, <http://www.rubincenter.org/meria/2006/09/Rubin.pdf>.

⁹¹ Saikal, "The Roots of Iran's Election Crisis," 97.

and its immediate aftermath, when hundreds of thousands of protestors occupied the streets for protesting the manipulation of the election results, showed how factional disputes can destabilize a system, and, ironically, how the most powerful faction, the Conservatives, was the least institutionally organized of factions.⁹² The consensus on the revolutionary precepts among factions did not seem to the conservatives to be enough protection for regime survival. The factional disputes stand as a potential threat for the regime, unless the conservatives are not as powerful as to control and shape domestic politics.

This motivation doubled with developments after 9/11, which drastically changed the regional security environment. The US invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan in 2003 led to the enlarged presence of the United States and paved the way of its settling in the region. Iran's sworn enemies, the Saddam regime and the Taliban, were eliminated and no longer a threat. However, the stationing of US forces in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Qatar, Tajikistan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE, Turkey and Pakistan caused Iranians to feel themselves completely surrounded. Additionally, the US and Israel's explicit threats and talk of regime change caused unease among the conservatives. They feared a counterrevolution supported by the United States as happened in the overthrow of Mosaddegh in 1953. Thus the regime adopted a multifaceted strategy, which ranged from improving nuclear weapon and ballistic missiles to the use of Hezbollah and Iraqi Shiite groups. This would establish a negotiating position for containing the US and deter possible foreign intervention.

Since 1997, and particularly after 9/11, the IRGC has played a vital role in challenging both internal and external vulnerabilities. Parallel to this responsibility, significant investment was made to the IRGC, which ranged from the advanced weapon system to increasing life standards of members. As expected, this resulted in increasing power of the IRGC and

⁹² Kamrava, "The 2009 Elections and Iran's Changing Political Landscape," 400–403.

subsequent militarization of the political system to some extent.

As one of the most loyal supporters of the regime, the scope of the IRGC's influence on foreign-policy-making, strategic decision-making, in the economy and even in cultural life has been significantly expanded. For instance, although the Revolutionary Guards' involvement in politics was relatively small in numbers -in single digits- between 1980 and 2004, it has grown to unprecedented levels since 2004, when former IRGC members won at least 16 percent of the 290 seats.⁹³ According to Gheissari and Nasr, they constitute one-third of the conservative parliament that was elected in early 2004.⁹⁴ Besides the IRGC's expanding political role and influential institutional diffusion, during Ahmadinejad presidency, the IRGC accelerated and expanded its reach into the economy, the roots of which date back to the wake of the Iran–Iraq War.

Ahmadinejad “favored the IRGC by offering it numerous lucrative no-bid contracts, especially in the areas of oil and natural gas extraction, pipeline construction, and large-scale infrastructure development.”⁹⁵ According to Hen-Tov and Gonzalez “[b]ased on available data, it is reasonable to estimate that the Guards controlled less than five percent of GDP shortly after the end of the Iran—Iraq War in 1989. Now (2011), they directly or indirectly oversee at least 25 percent of GDP, and more likely about 35 percent and growing.”⁹⁶

All in all, even though the nature of threats held different characteristics in Khomeini and post-Khomeini periods, the IRGC has been the most influential instrument against these threats. During Khomeini's leadership, the IRGC suppressed all ideological oppositions and ethnic uprisings; the IRGC became a balancing power and removed all potential threats against the

⁹³ Mehrzad Boroujerdi and Kourosch Rahimkhani, “Revolutionary Guards Soar in Parliament,” *FRONTLINE - Tehran Bureau*, September 19, 2011, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2011/09/revolutionary-guards-soar-in-parliament.html>.

⁹⁴ Gheissari and Nasr, “The Conservative Consolidation in Iran,” 180.

⁹⁵ Wehrey et al., *The Rise of the Pasdaran*, 56.

⁹⁶ Elliot Hen-Tov and Nathan Gonzalez, “The Militarization of Post-Khomeini Iran: Praetorianism 2.0,” *The Washington Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (February 1, 2011): 52, doi:10.1080/0163660X.2011.534962.

regime that might come from the regular army. In the post-Khomeini period, increasing factional disputes after 1997, demonstrations in 2009, the post-9/11 security environment and explicit regime change threats increased the ruling elites' sensitivities. This led the conservatives' efforts to concentrate their power. Similarly, as in Khomeini leadership period, the regime saw the IRGC as the key instrument against both internal and external challenges. In this line, the ruling elites chose to empower the IRGC as a strategic move.

The leaders of the IRGC also know that the IRGC's own survival was entirely dependent on the survival of the regime. If the regime lives, the IRGC exists. To justify its existence and all investments made by the regime in the hearts and minds of society, it has needed valid reasons. Thus, its extraterritorial activities have aimed to appeal to Iranian society's nationalist and religious sentiments, in addition to its functions against domestic and external threats. In a nutshell, there has been a two-way interaction and a mutual interdependence between the IRGC and the regime; the regime has empowered the IRGC; the IRGC has consolidated the regime.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The 1979 Iranian Revolution is the most important turning point in Iran's recent history. The revolution put Iran in a controversial and exceptional position in the Islamic World, and the regional and global arena. There were many factors that constituted ground for the revolution. Particularly, the Shiite clerical power in society can be accepted as the most important one.

Since 1501, when Shiism became the state religion with compulsory conversion as a political move against the expansion of foreign influences, Shiism and clerics have been an active component of Iranian politics. In a series of events, the Tobacco Monopoly revolt (1890-1891), the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1906), the Oil Nationalization Movement of Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh (1951-1953), and the Iranian Islamic Revolution (1978-1979), reactions to the domination of Iran and exploitation of its wealth and resources by foreign powers, clergies played a prominent role. Their historically rooted influence and well-established network in society made them a victor of the 1979 Revolution under Khomeini's leadership.

The 1979 Iranian Revolution was not merely a change in rulers. It made Khomeini's ideology, which is a blend of his interpretation of Shiism and Persian nationalism, the dominant characteristic of the post-revolutionary era, and has influenced every aspect of life. The revolution has changed its political structure, the priorities of policy makers, the economic spheres of Iran, but even more fundamentally, culture and society. After the revolution, Iran declared itself a theocratic republic guided by religious principles and named itself the Islamic Republic of Iran. The revolution also completely transformed Iran's foreign policy and international standing.

Throughout Iranian revolutionary foreign policy history, the pattern of Iran's external

behavior were directly or indirectly determined by numerous factors: Iran's geographical and demographic realities, historical experience (lessons learned), post-revolutionary ideology which is a blend of nationalism and Khomeini's interpretation of Shiism, the post-revolutionary political structure and decision-making process, national interests, immediate domestic needs, ruling elites' priorities (ideological/individual), regional improvements and threat perceptions.

Based on observations and assessments from internal and external determinants of Iran's foreign policy making, Iran's foreign policy goals are defined as follows: Regime survival is the indispensable (*sine qua non*) goal of Iranian foreign policy and above all else; State security and survival (the defense of Iranian territory against external threats); Projecting power and becoming the dominant power in the region. The goal of 'regime survival' is an outcome of Khomeini's ideology as well as his heritage, and occupies first place in the Iranian leader's agenda and directly affects domestic and foreign affairs decision-making.

Iran employs a number of different tools in attaining these foreign policy goals. Among them, the IRGC is the most crucial and controversial one. The IRGC has actively taken the lead in achieving all three goals, the preservation of the regime is a unique task and its reason for existence. However, the IRGC's way of achieving these goals are very controversial.

Iran deliberately supported several armed non-state actors and provided them a broad range of state support in the form of ideological direction, organizational assistance, diplomatic backing, training, operational direction, money, arms, logistics, and sanctuary. The IRGC has served as an outpost to provide this support.

The regime's initial ideological motivations, parallel to changes in foreign policy approaches, have been replaced with rational and strategic calculations. The need for foreign capital and technical expertise to carry out economic reconstruction, which mostly originated

from the costly Iran–Iraq war and international isolation, made this transformation a necessity. However, the IRGC’s extraterritorial-capability has always been used it covertly and professionally. In terms of strategic purposes, the IRGC’s extraterritorial activities served as a tool of deterrence and retaliatory force against the adversaries of Iran, a bargaining chip and a way of projecting power to different audiences.

The controversial nature of these activities emerges at this point. Despite the fact that the IRGC has the characteristics of a regular conventional armed force, based on the international law and state sponsorship of terrorism literature, the IRGC’s extraterritorial activities are outside the legal frame of ‘use of military force’ and mostly fit the characteristics of ‘state sponsorship of terrorism.’

If we take into account Iran’s foreign policy goals which are very common for all states, the IRGC’s extraterritorial activities as a strategy to achieve these goals challenge international norms and provoke other regional actors who are mostly Sunni and have strong prejudices against Iran. This condition creates an obstacle to Iran’s integration into the international system, which is increasingly globalized and interconnected, and an environment, which is costly for Iran to live within and highly isolating. Paradoxically, these attitudes put Iran in a situation that contradicts the goals of ‘state security and survival’ and ‘becoming the regional power.’

Thus, the real reason behind the regime’s insistence for this strategy is preserving the current political system and the power of current ruling elites. Briefly, it is called ‘regime survival’ in this study. There are several issues that have created this phenomenon. In the following section, the reasons that have created the ruling elites’ motivations and sensitivity of regime survival will be addressed.

Structural and Ideological Basis of Regime Survival

As stated by Hunter, “the character of states’ political systems and their decision-making apparatus and processes greatly influence their external behavior.”¹ The 1979 Iranian revolution was not merely a ruler change. In Walt's words, it created the new principles of legitimacy, new symbols of authority and identity, new rules for elite recruitment, new political institutions, and governmental procedures.² Walt’s definition of ‘a sharp departure from those of the old regime’³ explains what happened in Iran with the 1979 Revolution. Following the revolution, Khomeini’s ideological doctrines formed all facets of life: political, educational, legal, social, and religious.

The main concern of the new political leadership was the survival of the newly established political regime. Survival was the *raison d’etre* of the new polity. Khomeini defined regime preservation as the highest priority even over fundamental religious practices. In the words of Stanley, Khomeini’s formulation regarding the survival of the regime is as follows; “the regime is the embodiment of Shia Islam’s authority on Earth and to abandon it would be to abandon the will of God. Thus, the survival of this government and its form is an existential imperative as well as an expression of self-interest and Iranian nationalism.”⁴

The political system of the Islamic Republic, which enjoys the concept of *velayat-e faqih* and republican characteristics, is the embodied form of Khomeini’s ideology. The preservation of the Islamic Republic is defined as the ultimate religious value of the regime’s ideology by Khomeini which can be died for. Tucker quotes Stephen Hanson’s “ideology unites activists around a set of shared beliefs and symbols and provides a ‘higher cause’ that legitimates their

¹ Hunter, *Iran’s Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era*, 20.

² Walt, “Revolution and War,” 1992, 334.

³ Walt, “Revolution and War,” 1992, 140.

⁴ Stanley, “The Strategic Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran,” 4.

struggle.”⁵ Regime preservation (*hefz-e nezam*) has been a ‘higher cause’ of revolutionary ideology. The IRGC, which can be characterized as the loyal armed forces of the regime, by definition ‘guardian of the revolution,’ has been the primary instrument for implementing this task.

Moreover, the political structure, institutions, rules for elite recruitment, and governmental procedures have been designed accordingly. The Supreme leader, and several institutions –particularly unelected components of the regime- have been loyal protectors of the regime. The ultimate power of the Supreme Leader and unelected institutions’ (such as partly unelected Guardian Council and Expediency Council) influence on decision-making establishes an elaborate system of checks and balances, which seek to ensure regime survival and to maintain the status quo. To prevent potential instability that was a threat to the regime, Khomeini established the Expediency Council in 1988 to mediate disputes between the Parliament and the Guardian Council. Even this decision was made in order to preserve the regime in case of political dispute that might harm the regime’s legitimacy. The IRGC, which is an institutional armed organization and an alternative to the regular army, is established solely to preserve the regime. Thus, the political structure is designed in a way to prevent any individual, institution, and faction from dominating the system and several institutions are created to insulate the regime against internal and external threats.

With these characteristics it is not easy to position Iran in a particular regime type. As stated by Chebabi, Iran “[l]ike totalitarian regimes, it proclaims the absolute supremacy over public life of an ideology, i.e. ‘Islam’; like authoritarian regimes it permits a limited degree of pluralism; and like democracies it holds elections in which the people sometimes have a genuine

⁵ Joshua Tucker, “Some Thoughts on Authoritarian Durability in the Middle East,” *The Monkey Cage*, February 21, 2011, http://themonkeycage.org/2011/02/some_thoughts_on_authoritarian/.

choice, to wit Mohammad Khatami's upset victory in the presidential elections of May 1997...."⁶ The regime has totalitarian, authoritarian, and democratic features. Furthermore, after the Ahmadinejad presidency, the IRGC's increasing influence on strategic decision-making and cultural life started the debate of Iran's being a 'praetorian state.'⁷ For the sake of simplification, as classified by Rakel, the regime type can be defined as close to totalitarian during Khomeini's leadership; since 1989 as authoritarian with some limited democratic features.⁸

Khomeini named the new regime as 'Islamic republic.' He avoided to use the very notion of democracy that is an undesirable Western concept and stated that 'Islam itself is democratic.' Although the new regime was born of a popular movement that inherently had democratic aspirations; in practice, since establishment, the ruling elite has violated them in many ways that range from the manipulation of electoral processes, inhibiting free speech, human rights violations, and suppression of all opposition to control of the media. The regime did not refrain from acting in undemocratic ways.⁹ The regime's priority has been survival, and its leaders' priority has been to stay in power, not democratic republican aspirations.

Skuldt, in her study, draws attentions to the connection between the regime survival strategies and Buena de Mesquita et al.'s selectorate theory.¹⁰ I also find this approach useful in explaining the dynamics between regime survival and the IRGC's extraterritorial activities. As stated by the authors of *The Logic of Political Survival*, all political leaders' -whether democratic or autocratic, in any type of regime- primary objective is to remain in power. In their words,

Our starting point is that every political leader faces the challenge of how to hold on to his or her job. The politics behind survival in office is, we believe, the essence of

⁶ Chehabi, "The Political Regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Comparative Perspective," 48.

⁷ Hen-Tov and Gonzalez, "The Militarization of Post-Khomeini Iran," 45.

⁸ Rakel, *Power, Islam, and Political Elite in Iran*, 2009, 18:27.

⁹ Alex Vatanka, "The Authoritarian Resurgence: Iran Abroad," *Middle East Institute*, April 30, 2015, <http://www.mei.edu/content/article/authoritarian-resurgence-iran-abroad>.

¹⁰ Skuldt, "State Sponsored Terrorism?"

politics. The desire to survive motivates the selection of policies and the allocation of benefits; it shapes the selection of political institutions and the objectives of foreign policy; it influences the very evolution of political life. We take as axiomatic that everyone in a position of authority wants to keep that authority and that it is the maneuvering to do so that is central to politics in any type of regime.¹¹

According to the authors, in order to survive, the leaders need to create and maintain a *winning coalition* in exchange for a share of public/private goods. The winning coalition, which is the faction that keeps a leader in power, emerges from a group called the selectorate that is authorized to choose the leader. The leadership position is always desirable and therefore competitive. Thus, all leaders are preoccupied with their survival against a challenger.

In order to remain in power, the leader must guarantee the winning coalition's support by allocating resources to the members of the coalition. In a democracy, the size of the winning coalition is larger relative to the size of the selectorate than in autocracies. The leaders try to generate more support by providing public goods to the coalition's members. This ends up in a probability that a member of the winning coalition may join a challenger's coalition with the belief of continuing to receive the same benefits. In an autocracy, the winning coalition is smaller and each member has more to gain or lose, because given valuable private goods are not accessible to the larger population instead of equably distributed public goods. In the words of the authors; "the survival of leaders in small winning coalition systems depends on their ability to provide private goods to their supporters."¹² Fewer members given larger and more valuable gains, in turn, generate stronger loyalty. The members of small winning coalitions have much to lose if the leader is replaced, and thus as long as the leader remains in power, it means that they guarantee the expected benefits.

¹¹ Bruce Bueno de Mesquita et al., *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 2003), 8–9.

¹² *Ibid.*, 102.

Given this context, in the case of Iran there are two levels of winning coalitions that originate from the nature of the dual political system; the first includes unelected components of the political structure –such as the members of the Expediency Council, Guardian Council, Head of Judiciary, Commanders of the Armed Forces- under the leadership of the supreme leader, mostly conservatives that have a long history in this coalition; the second gathers around the president who constitutes the elected component of the political structure.

The leaders and members of the IRGC have been part of the permanent winning coalition since the revolution. Their power and wealth have grown over time. As one of the beneficiaries of the regime, the IRGC has always been loyal to the supreme leader and the regime and always played a key role against both internal and external threats. Because, as mentioned earlier, it is clear that the IRGC's institutional survival is dependent on the regime's survival. Mutual dependency between the IRGC and the regime and the IRGC's benefits from the regime makes sense in terms of the logic of 'winning coalition'.

Domestic and External Threats against the Regime

During the first decade of the revolution, the regime was dominated by Khomeini as the leader and moral authority of the revolution. The consolidation of the new regime had been the primary goal during his leadership. Instead of a power struggle among Khomeinists, the regime faced threats from 'others' who did not have any connection to Khomeini. The initial domestic threats originated from ethnic fragmentation and military coup attempts. The IRGC was Khomeini's 'strongest weapon' in suppressing the opposition and uprisings of separatist minorities. Keddie characterizes the Khomeini period as follows: "The decade of Khomeini's rule was marked by the ever-growing power of his followers and elimination, often by violence

and despite resistance, of opposition groups, and by increasing enforcement of ideological and behavioral controls on the population.”¹³ Besides these domestic factors, in particularly the IRGC’s role in the Iran–Iraq war and the task of ‘exporting the revolution’ contribute to further consolidation and institutionalization of the revolution.

In the post-Khomeini period, increasing factionalism -particularly Khatami’s reformist domestic and foreign policies were perceived as a threat that might erode the ideological precepts of the revolution and conservatives power. Then, the conservatives adopted a strategy that expanded their dominance in the power structure.

Additionally, the US invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan in 2003 led to the enlarged presence of the United States and paved the way for its settling in the region. Although Iran’s sworn enemies, the Saddam regime and Taliban, no longer being a threat, Iran was surrounded by US military supremacy. Furthermore, the US and Israel’s explicit threats and talk of regime change caused unease among Iranian ruling elites. Thus, the regime adopted a multifaceted strategy, which ranged from improving nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles to the use of proxy groups. Since 1997, and particularly after September 11, 2001, the IRGC has taken the vital role of challenging both internal and external vulnerabilities. This has resulted in increasing the power of the IRGC and subsequently the militarization of the political system to some extent.

The IRGC has been an active part of regime survival strategies as a loyal supporter with its Basij force, which is the principle force responsible for upholding Islamic norms in society and social control at home; and with the Quds Force, which is an intelligence and unconventional warfare component of the IRGC abroad.

¹³ Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, 241.

Need for Legitimacy

In any type of regime, democratic or autocratic, the maintenance of power and stability of the political system necessitate the pursuit of legitimacy –“the terms by which people recognize, defend, and accept political authority”¹⁴ According to Weber, an authority becomes valid once the actors subject to it believe in its legitimacy. In his words:

Custom, personal advantage, purely affectual or ideal motives of solidarity do not form a sufficiently reliable basis for a given domination. In addition there is normally a further element, the belief in legitimacy.¹⁵

As stated by Campell, “Weber holds that beliefs in legitimacy maintain the stability of an order of domination he by no means wishes to confer any actual legitimacy upon that order.”¹⁶

According to him, Weber emphasizes here the empirical significance of validity. In the words of Weber:

Experience shows that in no instance does domination voluntarily limit itself to the appeal to material or affectual or ideal motives as the basis for its continuance. In addition every such system attempts to establish and to cultivate the belief in its legitimacy.¹⁷

Lipset defined legitimacy as the “capacity of the system to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate one for the society”¹⁸

Both Weber and Lipset emphasized the ability of a ruler to persuade the ruled of the

¹⁴ Mlada Bukovansky, *Legitimacy and Power Politics: The American and French Revolutions in International Political Culture*, Princeton Studies in International History and Politics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 2.

¹⁵ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 213.

¹⁶ David Campbell, “Truth Claims and Value-Freedom in the Treatment of Legitimacy: The Case of Weber,” *Journal of Law and Society* 13, no. 2 (1986): 209, doi:10.2307/1410281.

¹⁷ Weber, *Economy and Society*, 213.

¹⁸ Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man; the Social Bases of Politics*, First Edition, Doubleday Anchor Books (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1963), 64.

legitimate nature of a political system. In a broader sense, the system is legitimate insofar as people believe that it should be obeyed. Thus, legitimacy can be accepted as a powerful ordering tool and “a necessary component of authority and thus of power.”¹⁹

As Weber pointed out, the modes of legitimation may include tradition, charisma or rational-legal authority: Tradition, “the authority of the “eternal yesterday”, i.e. of the mores sanctified through the unimaginably ancient recognition and habitual orientation to conform”; Charisma “the authority of the extraordinary and personal gift of grace (charisma), the absolutely personal devotion and personal confidence in revelation, heroism, or other qualities of individual leadership”; Rational-legal authority “domination by virtue of “legality”, by virtue of the belief in the validity of legal statute and functional “competence” based on rationally created rules.”²⁰ For instance, contemporary nation-states in the Western world can be classified as Rational-legal authorities; some states may blend various type of legitimations.

As stated by White, “all regimes, from naked tyrannies to pluralistic democracies, seek to legitimate themselves.”²¹ Although the pursuit of legitimacy is a necessity for all kind of regimes, it proves significantly more difficult for the authoritarian states. For authoritarian regimes there are essentially two ways to keep domestic stability and maintain power: coercion and repression on one side, the quest for legitimacy on the other. In *Non-Democratic Regimes: Theory, Government and Politics*, for a new dictatorship, Brooker put forward the same prescription in different words. His two-pronged approach is as follows:

- The new regime claims to be legitimate and seeks to have its claims to legitimacy accepted by state and society.

¹⁹ Bukovansky, *Legitimacy and Power Politics*, 70.

²⁰ Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Routledge Sociology Classics (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2009), 78–79.

²¹ Stephen White, “Economic Performance and Communist Legitimacy,” *World Politics* 38, no. 3 (1986): 462, doi:10.2307/2010202.

- It also deploys a range of organizations, organs or administrative devices that strengthen its (at least partially coercive) control over state and society -so that even if the claims to legitimacy are unsuccessful, the regime may still be able to hold and effectively use the public offices/powers it has seized or misappropriated.²²

Although Brooker proposes these means for a new dictatorship, I believe that these are valid for most of the non-democratic regimes.

Brooker's first approach includes two ways of seeking legitimacy: electoral means of legitimation and ideological means of legitimation. In electoral means of legitimation, the regime uses "an electoral/democratic façade is in a sense their recognition that public offices should indeed be owned by the public and that to be legitimate a government must be based upon the people's choice, the popular will, or some other democratic basis."²³ Although ideological legitimation has not been as common as the electoral legitimation, it can be observed in several cases. In ideological legitimation, the ruler or the regime has the right to rule based on ideological values. According to Brooker it is "to some extent the modern equivalent of the now largely extinct religious claims to legitimacy."²⁴

North analyzes ideology's effect in seeking legitimacy. Regimes need to depend on some ideational element or ideology to legitimize their rule by establishing an abstract relation between the ruler and the ruled. He links legitimacy to policing cost. Legitimacy created by ideology is a cost-effective method of ruling. In the words of North:

²² Paul Brooker, *Non-Democratic Regimes: Theory, Government and Politics* (New York, NY: St Martin's Press, 2000), 101.

²³ *Ibid.*, 104.

²⁴ Paul Brooker, *Non-Democratic Regimes*, Second Edition (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 139.

The costs of maintenance of an existing order are inversely related to the perceived legitimacy of the existing system. To the extent that the participants believe the system fair, the costs of enforcing the rules and property rights are enormously reduced by the simple fact that the individuals will not disobey the rules or violate property rights even when a private cost/benefit calculus would make such action worthwhile.²⁵

Brooker's second approach for maintaining power and preserving stability is strengthening control, which can be defined as coercion and repression. As an important source of stability, and to strengthen their control over state and society, the regimes "deploy a (competent) security/intelligence organ or organization."²⁶ Although coercion and repression are often predominating methods during the consolidation of power, the rulers also seek to find different means for legitimating their rule.

Hurd defines three generic reasons why an actor might obey a rule: "(1) because the actor fears the punishment of rule enforcers, (2) because the actor sees the rule as in its own self-interest, and (3) because the actor feels the rule is legitimate and ought to be obeyed."²⁷ In this context, depending on the characteristics of the ruler and ruled, the methods of maintaining power and preserving stability range from the material benefits that authoritarian regimes offer to the 'winning coalition', electoral/ideological legitimation of coercion and sometimes become a mix of methods.

Another means in the legitimization is the external use of force for internal political purposes (domestic policy making through foreign policy means). Skuldt, in her study, explains this phenomenon through the logic of diversionary war theory.²⁸ According to this logic, rulers may pursue a belligerent foreign policy in order to distract the public from internal

²⁵ Douglass C. North, *Structure and Change in Economic History*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1981), 53.

²⁶ Brooker, *Non-Democratic Regimes*, 2009, 144.

²⁷ Ian Hurd, "Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics," *International Organization* 53, no. 02 (March 1999): 379, doi:10.1162/002081899550913.

²⁸ Skuldt, "State Sponsored Terrorism?"

socioeconomic and political problems, to unify the nation against an external threat, and thereby increase their own domestic political support. It is often assumed that this strategy is more likely to take place in democracies because of electoral accountability, less likely in authoritarian regimes because of the coercive basis of their authority and their insulation from society. However, because of the problem of legitimacy, greater need for the maintenance of internal unity and domestic political support makes autocratic regimes more prone to diversionary actions, which may be in different forms such as hostile diplomatic action, limited military action, and substantial military force. The construction of an external threat and pursuit of a diversionary action against that threat may serve well to increase the internal unity of the autocratic regime as well as its support in society and to legitimize it by appealing patriotic symbols of the nation.²⁹

The revolutionary regime, since its inception, has been in the pursuit of legitimacy to maintain its power and domestic stability. Indeed, the revolution against the Shah, which was started by the participation of a number of different groups, ended with Khomeini's hijacking. In the ethnically and politically fragmented Iranian society, Khomeini adopted a two-pronged approach to maintain domestic stability and hold his power: (1) Coercion and repression, which was executed by the IRGC (and its branches) against domestic threats. This issue was discussed in detail under the title of "Domestic and External Threats to Regime Survival." (2) Seeking legitimacy through electoral and ideological means.

The new regime was based on the convergence of two means of legitimacy; political and religious, in the words of Brooker, electoral and ideological. The regime's dual system included the *velayat-e faqih* system, which is the embodied form of Khomeini's ideology, and also

²⁹ Jack S. Levy and Lily I Vakili, "Diversionary Action by Authoritarian Regimes: Argentina in the Falklands/Malvinas Case," in *The Internationalization of Communal Strife* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 118–124.

republican institutions, which are an electoral/democratic façade that aimed for public recognition. The dominance of the Supreme Leader and the network of unelected components of the government over elected institutions have overshadowed the democratic characteristics of the regime and made it a façade. The limited political pluralism, which originates from vague candidate eligibility criteria and a multi-layered vetting process, can be given as an example of this phenomena.

Although the ideological incentives have been taken place with rational calculations of national interests, the core ideological principles -*velayat-e faqih*, the presumption of Islamic leadership, anti-Americanism, or anti-Zionism- have been the limits of decision-making. With the application of the expediency concept, the regime created the capability of softening the ideological strictness and legitimization of decisions that contradict ideological principles. Otherwise, the loss of these core ideological principles would make the existence of the Supreme Leader, the IRGC and unelected theoretical components of the political structure questionable.

The first decade of the revolution under Khomeini's leadership can be defined as charismatic legitimation in Weber's typology. With the death of Khomeini, the regime's ideological legitimization began to weaken. In contrast to Khomeini's powerful personality as the father of the new regime, Khamenei's lack of acceptance within the clerical community and his relatively low profile as a Supreme Leader resulted in questions to his ideological legitimacy. The increasing factionalism and, subsequently, Khatami's reformist domestic and foreign policy were perceived as threats to the regime by the conservatives gathered around the Supreme Leader. This perception was doubled with antagonistic relations with the US-Israel alliance and the increasing presence of the US in the Middle East. Additionally, arguments about the manipulation of the election results in 2009 and the regime's fierce post-election suppression of

demonstrators showed how ‘electoral legitimacy’ is still in question.

In such domestic and foreign political environment, the IRGC was the most important actor. It could use Hezbollah and Iraqi Shiite groups against Israel and the US; it also suppressed perceived threats to the clerics’ power. In other words, the IRGC became the protector of *velayet-e faqih* inside, a warrior against the US and Israel (executor of anti-US and anti-Zionist strategies) outside, which are the core principles of ideology.

In addition to the IRGC’s strategic purposes, their extraterritorial activities also consolidate the ideological legitimacy of the regime in various ways. Their activities against the great Satan -the US- and little Satan -Israel-, which are deemed the enemies of the Muslim world, aim to appeal to the religious and nationalist feelings of society.

The successes of Hezbollah and Iraqi Shiite groups were perceived as successes for the IRGC and the regime. This has increased the regime’s popularity at home. To fight for a ‘higher cause’ outside and being successful in this fight constitutes an effective strategy for the establishment of domestic cohesion inside and keep alive ideological motivation. This phenomenon of foreign policy produced social control can be expressed by the term ‘boomerang effect.’ In the logic of diversionary action, the boomerang effect can be explained as follows: The IRGC’s extraterritorial activities against perceived enemies and for national interests can be defined as a kind of permanent war. This permanent war outside is a way of distracting society from domestic problems and unifying them against an external threat, which ends by increasing political support for the regime inside. Lastly, the IRGC’s extraterritorial activities based on ideological motivation and national interests legitimize its existence and the regime’s empowerment of it

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