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## The Security and Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: An Offensive Realism Perspective

Bledar Prifti  
*University of South Florida*

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The Security and Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: An Offensive Realism  
Perspective

By

Bledar Prifti

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Art  
Department of Government and International Affairs  
College of Arts and Sciences  
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Abdelwahab Hechiche, Ph.D.  
Harry E. Vanden, Ph.D.  
M. Scott Solomon, Ph.D.

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hegemony, nuclear program

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## Dedication

To my dear parents and my beloved wife, Suela. To my adorable niece, Elisa, and  
nephew, Ergi.

I love you all very much!

## Acknowledgments

Special thanks go to my humble and wonderful professor, Dr. Abdelwahab Hechiche—Hiba, whose words, ideas, advices, and recommendations have inspired and helped me throughout the process of completing this work. It was a privilege and an honor for me to have had Hiba both professor and chair of the thesis committee. Special thanks go also to my professor and member of the thesis committee, Dr. Harry E. Vanden. I will always remember his courses and the productive discussions we had together. Dr. Hechiche and Dr. Vanden have played a major and indispensable role in shaping my academic formation. In addition, I would like to express my deep gratitude to Dr. M. Scott Solomon for his support and willingness to be a member of my thesis committee. Finally, my sincere and profound gratitude goes to Dr. Mohsen M. Milani. It would have been a privilege and an honor for me to have had Dr. Milani in my thesis committee.

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The Security and Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: An Offensive Realism  
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ABSTRACT

This study argues that security and foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is mainly driven by the main principles of the *Offensive Realism* theory of international relations. While the Iranian political system is considered a theocratic system, based on the Islamic Shi'a ideology, its survival is defined as the *ultimate ideology*—an ideology that is paramount to any other ideology. Iran's security and foreign policy is determined and shaped by its need to survive in an anarchic international system. Iran's cooperation with “two Satans”, Israel and the United States, during the Iran-Iraq war demonstrates that the ultimate ideology of survival dominates over any other ideological predisposition. In addition, the lack of a *supranational government* and the fear about the intentions of other states make Iran aware of the need to rely on self-help. Iran has also realized that the best way to limit threats to its survival would be maximizing its relative military power and becoming a regional hegemony. Furthermore, a formidable military power would provide Iran with a new status in regional and global politics, deterrence power over any possible attack from other great powers, and bargaining power over regional and global matters. In order to enhance its military (conventional and nuclear)

arsenal, Iran has established “strategic relations” with its historic enemy, Russia. In its quest to advance its military capabilities and avoid threats to its sovereignty, Iran sided with Christian states, against its Muslim brothers, during the Russia-Chechnya and Armenia-Azerbaijan conflicts. Moreover, the Islamic state is aware of the fact that its paramount goals can be achieved by relying on precise rational strategies. In order to validate these claims, this study analyzes Iran’s policy during the *Iran-Iraq war* and Iran’s policy toward *Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict*, the *Russian-Chechen conflict*, and the *U.S. invasion of Iran*.



## Chapter One

### Introduction

After the sudden and prominent success of the Islamic Revolution in deposing the Shah's regime, and the coming into power of *Grand Ayatollah Sayyed Ruhollah Khomeini* in 1979, Iran's political behavior has had its own trajectory and traits that have bewildered not only the foreign governments but also the political scientists who endeavor to provide scientific explanations to such political behavior. This rapid and radical change of the political system and its institutions has had an enormous impact on how the security and foreign policy of the new *Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI)* was to be conducted by the new Iranian power elite in the years to come. After decades of close relationships and alliance with the United States and the West, Iran became the symbol of anti-Americanism and one of the most serious challengers of the American interests in the Middle East. Iran's new political system demanded for a new era of political relations and for a new position of Iran in both the regional and global arena. While for many states the problem is to separate state from religion, for most governments and international relations experts the problem is to separate speeches from actions, or words from deeds. Iran was one of the countries whose propaganda, or political rhetoric, rarely matched its actions.

Following the characteristics of the new Islamic state, many would think and believe that Iran's security and foreign policy would be based on religious rules and predispositions. *Shi'a Islam* became the leading anti-Shah ideology during the revolution

and received much of its potency by promulgating a fierce opposition against the policies of the United States and other Western powers. It culminated in Khomeini's speech of November 1979 when the *Supreme Leader* flamboyantly demonized and named the United States as the *Great Satan* (Beeman 1983, 191-192). Later, he would call Israel the *Small Satan*. However, this assumption was soon to be shaken by the *Iran-Contra Affair*, which became public in November of 1986. The affair consisted of systematic and intensive dealings between Iran, on the one side, and the United States and Israel, on the other side. The *Iran-Contra* scandal happened in a time when Iran was fighting for its survival against a very aggressive Iraq. In addition, the Russian-Chechen conflict revealed more of the nature of Iran's security and foreign policy. Iran's pro-Russian position was exercised in a time when Iran so desperately needed military and military-led technological support to confront its adversaries, to survive, and to increase its influence in the region. Iran's security and foreign policy toward the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and the U.S. invasion of Iraq are two other cases that reveal the real nature of Iran's security and foreign policy.

These events have brought to the minds of many scholars questions about the real principles that guide the Iranian security and foreign policy. Is the Iranian security and foreign policy guided by religious predispositions or by its need to survive in an anarchic international system? Thus, among others, the central question that this study endeavors to answer is: *Is the Iranian security and foreign policy guided by ideology or by the reality of current international system of politics?*

This study endeavors to provide answers to the following questions related to "the words and deeds" of Iran's security and foreign policy: What drives Iran's security and

foreign policy? Why does Iran behave the way it does? What are the paradoxes of Iran's security and foreign policy? Is Iran's security and foreign policy driven by ideology and religious predispositions or by rationalism? Does Iran really intend to "wipe out" the state of Israel? Will Iran build a nuclear weapon if the opportunity is given? What does all this mean for the international system of politics? What are some of the main challenges that the international system faces today when it comes to Iran's security and foreign policy?

Regardless of the responses to the above questions, there cannot be a single answer that can provide a comprehensive explanation of the Iranian security and foreign policy. There is no theory that explains everything.

Nevertheless, there are always theories that provide a better explanation or definition of the political reality. Following this assumption, this study endeavors to explain that Iran's security and foreign policy is shaped by the nature of the international system of politics, as defined under the principles of the *Offensive Realism Theory* of international relations (Mearsheimer 2001). The theory holds that the states are the main actors of the international system. In addition, the international system lacks a central government and is in a permanent state of anarchy. States also possess certain military powers, which make them capable of hurting or even destroying one another. Moreover, states are suspicious of the intentions of the other states. Finally, the top-priority goal of the states is their survival. The survival can be assured only when there is no other power in the system capable of threatening the existence of a state, meaning that the state has reached the status of *hegemony*.

In order to ensure their survival in this anarchic system, states rely on self-help and calculate their interests and powers in conjunction with the interests and powers of

the other states. *Fear* and *assurance* both lead to permanent change of status. States fear each other and seek to ensure their existence by eliminating any real or perceived threat. As such, states can hardly accept their *status quo*, unless they become hegemony. Survival in an anarchic international system of politics is the only *status quo* ideology—the *ultimate ideology* that cannot be changed for any other ideology. One, being a person or a state, can trade one's ideology for another. Nevertheless, one cannot trade its (his/her) existence for an ideology. If it happens, what would be the point or what would be left of it (his/her)? Nothing existential!

However, this study does not claim that there exist a dichotomical relationship between the Islamic ideology and offensive realism. Nor does it claim that one perspective or another can explain everything related to Iran's security and foreign policy. While Shi'ism may have significant impact on the Iran's internal policies, in the international arena, Iran is forced to comply with Machiavelli's *raison d'état*. The main argument of this study is to provide an adequate and efficient analysis that would indicate that survival is the *ultimate ideology* of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran seeks to ensure its survival in this anarchic system by increasing its powers *vis-a-vis* the powers of the other states. This main goal of the Islamic Republic is incorporated in and explained by the *Offensive Realism Theory* of the international relation.

The methodology that will be used to test the theory of offensive realism consists of multiple case studies, which encompass the most important events during the life of the Islamic Republic. Case study methodology is considered by many prominent political scientists as an “empirical inquiry that (1) investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when (2) the boundaries between phenomenon and context are

not clearly evident; and in which (3) multiple sources of evidence are used” (Johnson, Joslyn, and Reynolds 2001, 143). Johnson *et al* also claim that case study design clearly identifies political theories that would provide an accurate explanation of the events incorporated in that case study.

As such, this study argues that the principles of the *offensive realism theory* provide an explanation to the events presented through the case studies. A multiple case study approach will be used in order to provide stronger explanatory power of the theory. The use of multiple case studies will provide the opportunity to replicate findings and to repeatedly test the theory for several times. This approach will lead to a higher reliability of data and procedures implemented to test the theory. Case studies that will be used to test the theory include: (1) *the Iran-Contra Affair*, (2) *the Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict*, (3) *the Russian-Chechen conflict*, and (4) *the U.S. Invasion of Iraq*.

Emphasizing the importance of applying a pure and rigorous theoretical approach will help the scientific community and government entities not only to have a profound understanding of Iran’s security and foreign policy but also to make educated conjectures about Iran’s behavior and intentions in the future. Thus, the significance of the study rests not only on the emphasis that it puts on the theoretical and methodological framework but also on the importance that the result may have in defining and predicting the behavior of the Iranian government in the future.

In order to test the theory and provide reasonable and scholarly support for its claims, this study will analyze the main elements that have contributed to building Iran’s current security and foreign policy. Without analyzing and considering all these elements, it would be impossible to reach a final conclusion about what this study aims to explain.

First, this study will analyze (but will not argue about) Iran's historical elements such as the *Iranian exceptionalism* demonstrated throughout the history of Iran, conquests and exploitations from foreign powers, and major events that have shaped the nature of Iran's politics. The Iranian exceptionalism will consider the Iranians perception of themselves from the era of *Cyrus the Great* to the modern times of *Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi* and *Grand Ayatollah Khomeini*. In addition, foreign conquests from foreign powers will include a period of conquests starting with the conquest from *Alexander the Great*, the existential threats from *Mongols*, systematic conquests and exploitations from the Russians and British, and the unexpected attack from *Saddam Hussein* in 1980. This study also will continue with an analysis of the main events that have played a crucial role in shaping Iran's current policies. These events will include the 1953 coup d'état against *Mohammad Mossadeq* and the Iran-Iraq war.

Second, this study will make a thorough analysis of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Due to its crucial impact on defining the nature of Iran's politics and its current power structure, this event is analyzed separately from other historical events. The chapter under *the Islamic Revolution* will cover major actors and factors such as the *Constitutional Movement* of 1906, *the White Revolution* of the Shah in 1960, *the June uprising* in 1963, and other main social and political entities. The study will continue with a separate chapter on the life, ideas, and the work of the Grand Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Islamic Revolution. Khomeini formulated the *velayat-e faqih* doctrine and gave Iran the foundations of the Islamic state. Understanding the *velayat-e faqih* is crucial to defining Iran's current power politics and its informal power structure. In addition, this study will provide an analysis of the Islamic Constitution and the informal and formal

power structure of Iran. Its goal is to divulge the harbor where the real power rests, or who decides what, when, where, and how. Finally, after going through all these elements, the study will then conclude with the theoretical approach and case studies to test the theory.

## Chapter Two

### A History of Iran

As mentioned previously, we cannot have a coherent observation of the security and foreign policy of the modern Iran without analyzing first certain historical factors and events that have continuously shaped the process of the political and social development of Iran throughout history. First, the geostrategic position of Iran (Figure 1.) has played a significant role in shaping Iran's history (*Iran* stands for *Aryan*, used by *Indo-European* peoples who migrated southeast before 1000 B.C.) and its interaction with other states in the region. Iran borders the *Persian Gulf* (with its oil richness) to the south, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the *Caspian Sea* to the north, Afghanistan and Pakistan to the east, and Turkey and Iraq to the west. This geographic position makes Iran a very important route for international trade and geopolitical strategy. Iran's prominent role as a trade geostrategic state dates back during the era of the *Sassanid Dynasty* and the *Silk Road*, which connected China with the West. It continues today through the oil pipes by connecting Iran with China, Europe, Pakistan, and many other states around the world. It is this geographical location that has shaped the Iran's history and relations with other states and has given Iran a strategic geopolitical status in the international system of politics.

In addition, the history of Iran can be divided into three main historical blocs. It is important to emphasize that each of the blocs should not be considered separated from the others but as a result of the interconnection between each other. First, the history of



Iran emphasizes what many scholars consider the Iranian *Exceptionalism*, which is not that different from the well-known phrase of the *American Exceptionalism*. The second main bloc of the Iranian history incorporates events that deal with systematic conquests and exploitation of Iran throughout its history from other foreign powers. The third main bloc of the Iranian history analyzes the birth and the influence of *Shi'a* religion on Iran's cultural, social, and political life. This historical bloc will be discussed in details separately due to its significant role in shaping the Iran's image in the world politics.



Figure 1. *The Map of Iran*. Source: University of Texas—Produced by the CIA

### *The Iranian Exceptionalism*

The Iranian *exceptionalism* is a term used in this study to describe perceptiveness, feelings, and beliefs of the Iranian people and their leaders that their nation (Persia or Iran) holds a unique place in history and among other nations. Sadegh Zibakalam (n.d., 85), a professor at the Tehran University, claims that “the Iranian ‘exceptionalism’ rests on two main pillars: (1) the negation of the present world order and (2) the belief in the inherent superiority of the Iranian civilization”. The notion of the Iranian *exceptionalism* dates back during the reign of *Cyrus the Great* (600 B.C.—530 B.C.), the founder of the Persian Empire and the first king of the *Achaemenian Dynasty*. Under his three decades of leadership, the Persian Empire (“Persia” is the Greek name for Iran) became one of the largest empires that the world has ever seen throughout its history. *Cyrus the Great* became the epitome of a legendary military leader by conquering in a short time three other empires—*Median Empire*, *Lydian Empire*, and the *Babylonian Empire*. In addition, he laid the foundations of a successful model of a centralized administration and the principle of accountability before his people.

But the legacy of *Cyrus the Great* would not be accurate and complete without addressing the contribution that he made on religious issues. After seizing the kingdom, *Cyrus the Great* established *Zoroastrianism* as a monotheistic religion whose principles emphasized the concept of the social justice and the notions of the final judgment and immortality. He also emphasized and exercised the Zoroastrian principle of the *just ruler*. In addition, *Cyrus the Great* considered himself an instrument of God on earth, and his right to rule came directly from the will of the *Supreme God*. From *Zoroastrianism*, *Cyrus the Great* took the notion of the *Supreme God*, which he thought had entrusted him

with the task and the legitimacy of uniting people of the earth in one single kingdom of peace and justice. This belief is tantamount to the belief expressed in the *Manifest Destiny* of the new-born American state. The *Manifest Destiny* was used by many U.S. politicians to justify their belief that God had provided the United States with the task of expanding their values throughout the Western hemisphere. Cyrus also implemented different religious policies and allowed a diversity of religious practices and beliefs. The most notable contribution is his *Edict of Restoration* which brought to an end the *Babylonian Captivity* of the Jewish people.

*Darius the Great* (549 B.C.—486 B.C.) is another Persian leader who based his leadership on the legacy of *Cyrus the Great* and elevated the Persian identity to higher stages. Like *Cyrus*, *Darius the Great* believed in *Ahura Mazda* and *Zoroastrianism*. In addition, he organized a highly professional army and an administrative system which served in the future as a model for the *Roman Empire*. Moreover, *Darius* created a legal system based on justice, principles, and the moral code of *Zoroastrianism*. The main contribution that *Darius* brought to the Persian civilization was the building of *Persepolis*, which was considered as the main site to celebrate the grandeur of the *Persian Empire* and the symbol of the Persian uniqueness in the world.

*Darius the Great* was succeeded by *Xerxes the Great* (485–465 BC), the last king of the *Achaemenian Dynasty*. *Xerxes the Great* followed the leadership of *Cyrus* and *Darius the Great* by emphasizing military capabilities and strategies as the main ways for Persian expansion and security in the world.

In 332 B.C., Persia was conquered by another historical leader—*Alexander the Great*. Soon after the conquest, *Alexander* ordered the *Persepolis* burned, an action that

he regretted in the future. The reason for him to order the destruction of *Persepolis* was “to take from Persians their sense of self” and their identity (Mackey 1996, 31). The next dynasty to govern Persia after the Greek conquest was the *Sassanid Dynasty*, which reigned between 224 C.E. and 651 C.E. During the *Sassanid Dynasty*, trade flourished and the Iranian economy prospered more than ever before. The *Silk Road* between China and the West and the geostrategic location of Persia made Persians prosperous and feel that “they could go anywhere and do everything”.

In addition, the occupation of Iran by the Arab forces in 651 C.E. and the spread of Islam throughout Iran revealed again the nature of *Iranian exceptionalism*. This occupation also divided the history of Iran in two major timeframes: the *Islamic* and *Pre-Islamic* history. Islam itself was divided in two major sects: *Sunni* and *Shi’a Islam*. The Iranians embraced Islam but never relinquished their own identity.

In 1501, during the *Safavid Empire*, *Ismail Shah* declared the *Twelver Shi’ism* as the official religion of Iran. This came after prolonged conflicts and wars among different Muslim groups about the interpretation of *Koran* and the succession of the Prophet. For Sunnis, the successor of the Prophet does not need to be a descendant of the Prophet and “would need no exceptional spiritual qualities but would merely have to be an exemplary Muslim who could ably and virtuously direct the religious and political affairs of the community” (Nasr 2007, 35). On the other hand, Shi’as argued that the successor should be a descendant of the Prophet and should possess special spiritual qualities. While Sunnis chose *Abu Bakr* (a close friend and the father-in-law of the Prophet), Shi’as chose *Ali* to be the successor of the Prophet. Ali was a cousin, “virtual adoptive son”, the son-in-law, and a protector of the Prophet. He became the fourth *Caliph* of the Muslim

community and was later killed in confrontation with his Sunnis counterpart, who established the *Umayyad dynasty*. This event permanently changed the path of Shi'ism. Shi'a religion became consolidated and broadly-accepted by the people after the battle of *Karbala* in 680 C.E when soldiers of the second Umayyad caliph, *Yazid I*, massacred Ali's son *Hussein* along with seventy-two of his supporters and family members (2007, 40).

However, the conversion of Iranians to *Shi'ism* cannot be considered accidental but as a choice through which the Iranians decided to retain Islam, and at the same time, to shape it in such a way that would allow Iranians preserve their identity and values. Iran accepted *Shi'a Islam* because it was a mirror of the Persian culture and of the Iranian experience. The Iranians saw Shi'a martyrdom of Ali and Hussein as *shadows* of themselves. In addition, *Shi'a Islam* and the lives of Ali and Hussein showed Iranians that they, themselves, were humiliated and defeated throughout the history in their quest for their rights and the deepest convictions (Mackey 1996, 85). The Iranians found in Ali the figure of the “just ruler” that they had seen previously in *Cyrus*, *Darius*, and *Xerxes the Great*. Moreover, the Iranians found in Shi'ism their *Zoroastrianist* hope for the return of the savior who would restore justice on earth (the return of the *Hidden Imam*—the *Mahdi*).

However, the real and the vivid symbol of the Iranian identity and *exceptionalism* were brought back to life through the Ferdowsi's work *Shahnameb* (around 1000 C.E.). Many scholars consider *Shahnameb* a masterpiece that best expose the grandeur of *Persepolis* as a symbol of the Iranian identity. For Sandra Mackey, *Shahnameb* “evokes a whole range of images—heroism, justice, national glory, and tragic defeat—that Iranians

as a people holds essential to their culture and to their identity” (Mackey 1996, 63).

*Shahnameh* awakened what Mackey calls “the soul of the Iranians”, and its result was a long hymn to honor, valor, wisdom, and patriotism (1996, 63). It was a perfect blending and exposure of the identity and values the Pre-Islamic Iran with the Islamic Iran. It revived the memories of the Iranians and brought into light the Iranian *exceptionalism*.

Going back to the Sadegh Zibakalam’s pillars of Iranian exceptionalism, besides the “belief in the inherent superiority of Iranian civilization”, we may realize the traits of this Iranian *exceptionalism* in the negation of the present world order by the Iranian politicians and governments and the desire to bring back the glory of the Persian Empire. One example for this case includes the celebration of the 2,500 years of the Persian Empire by *Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi* (1919-1980; and the *Shah of Iran* 1941-1979) next to the ruins of *Persepolis*. This celebration of the Persian Empire and the place chosen for it tell us that the Persian glory still lives in the mind of the Iranians. *Cyrus the Great*, his leadership, and the Zoroastrian (Shi’a) moral code and social justice are still viewed as the elements of a just world order. Another example that emphasizes the Iranian *exceptionalism* is the behavior of the new Islamic State toward the Western-dominated world system. During these thirty years of the Islamic Republic, Iran’s security and foreign policy has been predominantly anti-Western and has endeavored to portray Iran as a unique nation even within the Muslim world. The portretization of the Islamic Iran as the country whose goal is to unite the Muslim world against the “evil” *West* is not that far from the belief held by *Cyrus the Great* who considered it a task given from the *Supreme God* to unite people of the earth in one kingdom of justice and peace.

### *Foreign Conquests and Exploitation*

A second bloc of the Iranian history deals with the frequent and systematic conquests and exploitations of Iran from other foreign forces throughout the history. The first major conquest that Iran has endured was its conquest from the *Alexander the Great* in 332 B.C. The conquest of Persia came after centuries of glory and dominance. In order to destroy also the glory of Persia, *Alexander the Great* obliterated *Persepolis*, the symbol of the Persian identity. The second major conquest of Iran occurred in 651 C.E. when the Islamic Arab forces (the Bedouins) invaded the Sassanid dynasty, following their goal of spreading the Islamic religion. This occupation, as mentioned earlier, divided Iran's history in the *Pre-Islamic* and *Islamic history*. During the Islamic history, Iran went through a new series of conquests and existential threats from foreign powers.

In addition, the eleventh century brought a series of conquests for Iran. The *Seljuk Turks* were the first to invade Iran in the beginning of the century. Even though *Seljuk Turks* did not cause any destruction to Iran's economy, they seriously threatened Iran religiously and politically (Mackey 1996, 68). The worse was about to come. In 1206, a highly skilled and mobile army of *Mongols* invaded Iran and perpetrated an infamous spree of killings among the Iranian population. For the first time in its history, Iran was facing the extermination of its population and its very existence. To make the situation worse, in 1384, the *Tatars* invaded Iran and drove the Iranian population further to extermination. Moreover, in 1514, another threat came from the *Ottoman Empire*. The Ottoman leader *Selim I* defeated *Ismail Shah* of Iran at the battle of *Chaldiran* and managed to enter the Iranian capital. Despite the Iranian defeat, due to his army overextension and disapproval of the invasion, *Selim I* was forced to retreat.

Even though the Ottoman occupation of 1514 is considered the last serious threat to the Iranian heartland, other minor wars followed between Iran and other foreign powers, resulting in exploitation and annexation of the Iranian territories. The nineteenth century confronted Iran with two great powers: Russia and Great Britain. Throughout this period, Great Britain and Russia were the threats and the protectors of Iran, depending on the balance of power that the Iranian leaders implemented to avoid domination from one party. This period was characterized by wars and stupendous concessions given to both the Russians and the British from Iran, such as the *Most Favored Nation Clause* given to British in 1841. These concessions culminated in 1872 when the British *Baron Julius de Reuter* received a concession that granted him the exclusive right to the Iranian infrastructure, national banks, mineral extraction, and the exploitation of forests (Ansari 2006, 14; Milani 1994, 25). This was a move by the Prime Minister *Mirza Husain Khan* to avoid Iran from falling under the Russian dominance (Keddie 2003, 54). A series of wars preceded and followed these concessions.

The first war was what is known as *The Russian-Persian War*. This war continued from 1804 to 1813. One of the main causes for this war was the Iranian desire to regain Georgia from Russia. For this reason, Iran (*Fath Ali Shah*), under the *Qajars Dynasty*, signed the *Treaty of Finkenstein* in which France would help Iran regain Georgia from Russia in exchange for Iran's military help against the British. However, this treaty did not work because France soon signed a peace treaty with Russia, the *Peace of Tilsit* (Ansari 2006, 10). The first war with Russia ended in 1813 with Iran signing the *Treaty of Gulistan*, which gave to the Russians other important territories in *Caucasia* and the exclusive right to have warships on the *Caspian Sea* (Keddie 2003, 38).



*The Treaty of Gulistan* was later considered ambiguous by the Iranians and claimed that the Russians were occupying territories that were beyond the provisions of the treaty. In addition to the ambiguity of the treaty, some clergy members claimed that the Russians were persecuting other Muslims in their occupied territories. These claims urged *Fath Ali Shah*, in 1826, to declare the second war against Russia by proclaiming *jihad*. However, the military superiority of Russia decisively defeated the Iranian army. Iran was forced to sign the *Treaty of Turkomanchai*, which annexed more territories from Iran. Among other concessions, this treaty forbade Iran from navigating the *Caspian Sea*. In addition, Iran was obligated to sign economic treaties based on the Russian preferences. Moreover, the Russians had the right to send their consulate envoys everywhere they please in Iran. Finally, Iran was required to pay Russia a certain amount of money in retribution.

In 1856, Iran fought another war, but this time against the British army. This war is called the *Anglo-Persia War* and was a result of the British responding to the Iranian quest to occupy the Afghan city of *Herat*. The British troops managed to force Iran to abandon the quest of *Herat*. As a result, Iran and the Great Britain signed the *Peace of Paris* in 1857, which forced Iran to renounce its claim for Herat. Since then, the presence of the British influence in Iran would continue to increase through its cooperation with Iran in the oil field, which resulted in creation of the *Anglo-Persian Oil Company* in 1909.

However, the conquests would not end here. In August 25, 1941 occurred what is known today as the *Anglo-Soviet* invasion of Iran. The reason for this invasion dates back in the outbreak of the *WWII* when Iran and the Nazi Germany had intensive political and

economic relations. The Iranian sympathy for the Germans caused great concerns once the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union in June of 1941. Reza Shah and the elite of the Iranian politics had openly expressed their sympathy for the Nazi Germany and their superiority as the *Land of the Aryans*, which is assumed to be the meaning for *Iran*. (Gonzales 2007, 43). Both the British and the Soviets became concerned about any possible German domination or invasion of Iran, which would cut off the supply for Soviet troops. To avoid this scenario, the British and the Soviets sent a note to the Iranian government demanding the expulsion of the Germans from the Iranian territory (Keddie 2003, 105). Reza Shah responded negatively to this note, causing both the Great Britain and the Soviet Union to invade Iran.

By invading Iran, Great Britain and Russia ensured control over oil supplies, a vital necessity especially during the time of war against the *Nazi Germany*, and created a “land corridor” to the Soviet Union. This corridor would be used to supply Soviet troops with oil and other goods while being at war with the Germans (Abrahamian 2008, 97). By invading Iran, at the same time, the British and the Soviet forces secured the oil fields from any possible German invasion. Fearing Reza Shah, the British and the Soviets decided to depose Reza Shah and to bring into power the young prince *Mohammad Reza Shah*. In January 1942, Mohammad Reza Shah, the Great Britain, and the Soviet Union signed an alliance which obliged the British and Soviets to safeguard the Iranian economy from the negative impact of the war and mandated the withdrawal of the troops within six months after the end of the war (Keddie 2003, 105). After the war, the foreign troops withdrew from Iran, leaving the country in critical economic conditions. The

British influence on Iran would come to an end in 1953 after the *coup d'état* against the *Mohamed Mossadeq* and the American involvement in the region.

The 1953 coup d'état against *Mohammad Mossadeq* remains one of the most important events in the Iranian history. It has played a significant role in shaping the future of not only the domestic policies but also of Iran's relations with other states. As Mark Gasiorowski argues, "If Mosaddeq had not been overthrown, the revolution might not have occurred" (Gasiorowski 1987, 261). Mossadeq was a Western-educated politician and was known as a firm nationalist. His popularity made him the leader of the *National Front*, which was a coalition of the secular and religious nationalist parties. Early in his political career, Mossadeq had identified himself with two main issues: "a desire to transfer political power from the royal court to the parliament (known as the *Majles*), and a desire to increase Iran's control over its oil industry, which was controlled by the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company" (1987, 262).

In 1950, Mossadeq and many other members of the *National Front* were elected deputies of *the Majles*. Together with other representatives of the *National Front* in *Majles*, Mossadeq took initiatives to reduce the power of the Shah and attempted to organize a nationalist movement against Shah's policies that had given to the British a major portion of the oil industry. For this purpose, Mossadeq submitted a bill to the *Majles* aiming at the nationalization of the oil industry. In March 1951, *Majles* approved the nationalization of the oil industry and managed to appoint Mossadeq as the *Prime Minister of Iran*, against the Shah's will. In 1952, Mossadeq resigned his position after the Shah's negative response to his demand for the control of the armed forces. However,

due to the public pressure, the Shah was forced to reinstate Mossadeq as the Prime Minister of Iran.

The nationalization of the oil industry and his connections to the *Tudeh* party brought Mossadeq in conflict with the British and the United States governments, and also with the Shah at home. Both governments planned to overthrow Mossadeq. The British were angered by the nationalization of the oil industry and the Americans saw an opportunity for the American oil companies to benefit from the Iranian oil production. In addition, Americans feared the expansion of the Russian communist influence in Iran due to the Mossadeq's close relation with the communist party—*Tudeh Party*. For this purpose, the United States launched the operation codenamed *BEDAMN*. This operation started in 1948 and aimed at containing the Soviet and the Tudeh influence in Iran and weakening the National Front by undermining its mass base of support (1987, 268-69). Iran and the United States had previously signed the *Mutual Defense Agreement* in 1950 through which U.S. recognized Iran as a strategic country for implementing the *Truman Doctrine*. This goal of this doctrine was to contain communism and to limit or destroy the Soviet influence in the region (Milani 1994, 38).

The British intelligence services and the U.S. *Central Intelligence Service* (CIA) made a detailed plan for deposing Mossadeq. The plan consisted of three main strategies. First, there was the using of legal channels to force Mossadeq accept the *International Court of Justice* as the arbiter of the oil disputes. Mossadeq rejected all the proposals. The second strategy included the undermining of Mossadeq's base of support by imposing stringent economic sanctions and black-mailing his government through military maneuvering in the region. The third strategy left to be used against Mossadeq

was to remove him from the office through covert political actions conducted by anti-Mossadeq and pro-Western forces in Iran (Gasiorowski 1987, 263). The CIA resumed the leading role in this operation after the staff of the British embassy left Iran in November, 1952. Meanwhile, and as a result of Mossadeq's growing popularity and power, the Shah was forced to go in exile in 1953.

The coup organized by the CIA aimed at promoting anti-Mossadeq propaganda from the opposition and encouraging high military officers to organize against Mossadeq. The operation for this purpose was named the *Operation AJAX* and was directed by the CIA officer *Kermit Roosevelt* in collaboration with the British M16 (Bergman 2008, 4; Gasiorowski 1987, 271). Besides the Shah, there were three main groups within Iran that brought down Mossadeq. The first group included a group of military officers led by *Fazlollah Zahedi*. Zahedi was a retired general and member of the Senate who also headed the *Retired Officers' Association*. The second group included members of the *National Front* who wanted Mossadeq deposed. In this group were the *Rashidian brothers*, who were the key players of the anti-Mossadeq movements before the coup. The third group included prominent figures of the *National Front* who worked to undermine Mossadeq's political base of support. This group included *Hussein Makki*, and *Ayatollah Kashani* (Gasiorowski 1987, 269).

The coup succeeded in overthrowing Mossadeq in August 19, 1953. Soon after the coup, Mossadeq was arrested and Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi returned home and instituted the *martial law* throughout the country. This was followed by a long series of arrests of the supporters of the *National Front* and of the *Tudeh Party*. The Press censorship was instituted and the pro-Mossadeq demonstrations were crushed by Shah's

military and militia forces. In addition, the Shah, with the help of the CIA, established the most fearful and notorious secret police forces of the modern Iran named *SAVAK*.

Together with Mossadeq ended the process that would bring a more representative form of government for the people and the Iranian independence from foreign dominance (Gasiorowski 1987, 278). In the eyes of the Iranian people, Mossadeq was a martyr who reminded the Iranians the Persian empathy for the *just ruler* and the veneration for Imam Ali and Hussein who sacrificed themselves for justice and freedom. Ali Ansari states it in his own words: “Mossadeq is seen as an opportunity lost and an icon to be lamented” (Ansari 2006, 38). However, the foreign intervention would not end here. In 1980, a brutal attack was launched against Iran from its neighbor Iraq. A bloody war started.

*The Iran-Iraq War* (1980-1988) can be considered one of the longest and the bloodiest wars in the history of the modern Iran. For some scholars, the war was the latest manifestation of the Arab-Persian struggle for the domination of the Gulf region. For some others, the war was just the extension of the historic struggle for power between the Sunni (Iraq) and Shi’a Islam (Iran). And for many others, the Iran-Iraq War was a struggle for power and the domination of the regional politics, following the decline of the Iranian hegemony and the Saddam’s quest to become the new “policeman of the region”. The war started less than six years after Iran and Iraq had signed what is called *The 1975 Algiers Agreement*. It was an agreement to settle the borders dispute and to stop interference in internal affairs of each country. One main dispute involved the issue of the oil-rich and multi-ethnic province of *Khuzestan*, which borders Iraq. Due to the Arab (or non-Persian) majority of the province, Iraq claimed the historical right to control it. The disputes also involved Iraq’s claim about several small islands in the Persian Gulf that

were occupied by the Iranian military. Moreover, the *Shatt al-Arab* waterway was another territorial dispute between Iraq and Iran. Due to Iraq's very limited access to the Persian Gulf, the control of the *Shatt al-Arab* waterway would become an economic and strategic gain for Iraq. Parties signed the *Algiers Agreement* under the promise to permanently stop the disputes and to restore good relationship and mutual cooperation. It is important to mention that this treaty did not incorporate an *escape clause* that would enable one party to deflect for certain reasons.

However, the situation in the region changed rapidly and radically after the triumph of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the growing hostility between the new Islamic government and the United States, especially after the Islamic conquest of the U.S. embassy in Tehran. For Iraq, the revolution could expand its impact in other regions of the Persian Gulf and a potential Islamic Shi'a movement would be a serious threat to the Iraqi regime. In addition to his desire to become hegemony, the Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, considered Iran an easy target due to the vulnerability created internally by the revolution. This perception was strengthened by the assumption that by losing the American support, Iran had lost the political and military support from the West. Saddam decided to take advantage of the new opportunities. On September 22, 1980, Iraq launched a massive attack on Iran. In response to the invasion, the Islamic government of Iran mobilized the regular army, the *Pasdaran*, and *Basij* volunteers, including young boys and girls.

Meanwhile, the Islamic government in Iran was going through radical processes of change and consolidation. The war also consolidated the popular support for *the Supreme Leader* and his government. By the 1982, after Bani Sadr was forced out of the office and *Mujahedin-e Khalq-e Iran* organization was almost entirely destroyed, the war

began to take a different course. Once in defense, now Iran became an offensive force. The 1982 counteroffensive forced Saddam to retreat from the occupied territories. After this, the Iranians intensified their war goals by demanding the removal of Saddam from power and a huge amount in reparations (Axworthy 2008, 268). The Iranians also rejected a peace plan proposed by the *Arab League* which demanded an immediate cease-fire, total withdrawal of the Iraqi army, and a \$70 billion in reparation for Iran through the Islamic Reconstruction Bank (Milani 1994, 209).

Despite the international indifference toward this conflict, certain foreign powers secretly engaged in conflict by providing weaponry assistance to countries at war. Throughout the war, the United States provided military assistance to both sides, depending on the course of the war. Once the Americans realized that Iran was gaining strength, they immediately launched an anti-Iran strategy. This strategy consisted of supporting Iraq both directly and indirectly, financially and militarily. In 1982, the U.S. State Department removed Saddam from the department's list of "sponsors of terrorism", and in 1984, diplomatic relations with Baghdad were established. Also, in 1984, the Reagan administration launched the *Operation Staunch*, which aimed at stopping the flow of arms to Iran. Iraq soon became the largest importer of weapons in the region. The Soviets became the main providers of arms to Iraq. The West Germany also assisted Iraq in building chemical and biological weapons, which were used later by Saddam against the Kurds and the Iranians. France provided Iraq with aircraft and long-range bombers. The Iran-Iraq war became a concern when Iraq began the *tanker war*. The *tanker war* consisted of attacks on oil-transporting ships in the Persian Gulf. This type of war endangered the U.S. interests in the Gulf. The U.S. navy soon became involved in this



type of war by supporting the Iraqis and attacking the Iranian navy. This culminated with the *USS Vincennes* downing an Iranian commercial aircraft, killing all its 290 people on board.

Interim, in November 1986, a Lebanese newspaper revealed that the United States, through Israel, was providing weapons to Iran. This became known as the *Iran-Contra Affair* (analyzed below as a case study). Due to its desperate need for weapons to stop Iraq, Iran was willing to buy weapons from everyone, including *The Great Satan*. Many believed that Israel was supporting Iran with weapons since the beginning of the war. The rationale behind this action was Israel's strategy to prolong the conflict, causing severe mutual destruction of both parties in the conflict, and provide military assistance to the anti-Khomeini groups in order to overthrow the theocratic regime in Iran. The U.S. officials also claimed that this affair was used to provide military support for groups within Iran that were willing to overthrow the regime. Major reasons for the U.S. involvement in this matter were the release of the American hostages held by Shi'a rebels in Lebanon and the need for monetary support for the *Contras* in Latin America. Facing the international isolation, unable to gather international support to condemn the Saddam's atrocities and the Vincennes incident, and succumbing to the argument of the Majles Speaker, *Akbar Ali Hashemi Rafsanjani*, that "the United States would never allow Iran to succeed in the war", the Supreme leader decided to allow President Khamenei announce the acceptance of the *UN Resolution 598*, which called for a cease-fire (Axworthy 2008, 269). Both countries accepted the resolution.

Thus, again, Iran survived and raised above all these existential threats the same way and with the same strength as it did previously from the Greek, Arab, British, and

Soviet threats. In the words of Sandra Mackey, “what matters is the Iranian perception that they, as people, must always live with the terrible threat of outsiders who have so often plundered and debilitated the Iranian nation” (1996, 71).

## Chapter Three

### The Islamic Revolution of 1979

#### *Major Factors Leading to the Revolution*

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 remains a crucial moment in the history of the modern Iran. Unlike what many would claim, the revolution was not a surprise to the Iranian people and to those who were familiar with Iran's social and political history. The revolution was a result of an overwhelming pressure and anger accumulated in decades in almost all the fields of the Iranian society—social, economic, and political. Ervand Abrahamian summarizes the sources of the pressure and anger against the Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi as follows:

*“In an age of republicanism, he flaunted monarchism, shahism, and Pahlavism. In an age of nationalism and anti-imperialism, he came to power as a direct result of the CIA-M16 overthrow of Mossadeq—the idol of Iranian nationalism. In an age of neutralism, he mocked non-alignment and Third Worldism. Instead he appointed himself America’s policeman in the Persian Gulf, and openly sided with the USA on such sensitive issues as Palestine and Vietnam. And in an age of democracy, he waxed eloquent on the virtues of order, discipline, guidance, kingship, and his personal communication with God.”* (Abrahamian 2008, 156)

Besides the 1953 coup d'état against Mossadeq (analyzed previously), there are several events and factors that explain why the revolution and its triumph was not a

surprise. The first main event was the *Constitutional Movement* of 1906. This movement was a result of the discontent of the people toward the interference and domination from foreign countries like Russia and Great Britain and the need to establish a democratic form of government. These two main sources of the discontent became the main objectives of the *Constitutional Movement*, which incorporated merchants, secular reformers, and Shi'a *ulama* (Milani 1994, 28). On August 5, 1906, Mozaffar ad-Din Shah signed the royal proclamation ordering the creation of the *Majles* and vested its deputies with the duty of drafting the *Constitution*. Soon, the Constitution was drafted and came into effect immediately after the Shah signed it on December 30, 1906. One of the most controversial articles of the new constitution was the Article 2, which limited the power of the people (given through *Majles*) by creating a committee of five *ulama* who had the power to veto any *Majles* legislation that was considered being against the Islamic law. However, the *Constitutional Movement* was defeated due to the conflict between the secular reformers and *ulama* and the foreign intervention in Iran's internal affairs. Despite the defeat, the *Constitutional Movement* succeeded in legitimizing elections, reducing the power of the Shah and its perceptiveness, and granting to the people rights and powers they had not had before (1994, 31).

Another main event that produced more anger and pressure toward the Shah's regime was what is known as the *White Revolution*, or *The Revolution of the Shah and the People*. The *White Revolution* incorporated (1) land reform, (2) sale of the state-owned factories to the public, (3) women's suffrage, (4) nationalization of forests, (5) creation of a national literacy corps, and (6) the workers' profit-sharing plan (Keddie 2003, 145; Milani 1994, 46). These reforms ignited anger among two main social groups,

the landlords and the *ulama*. The land reform severely limited the political power of the landed upper class and provided the government with absolute authority. Due to this reform, many peasants became landless and migrated to large cities, where they became a main source for the army of the *Islamic Revolution* (Milani 1994, 47). The land reform also promoted opposition from *ulama* because of the fact that the reform dealt also with *vaqf* holdings (land for charitable purposes), resulting in drastically reducing the revenue of the *ulama*.

In opposition to Shah's White Revolution, *ulama* organized what is known as the *June Uprising* of the 1963. Among other *ulama* were Grand Ayatollahs Rohullah Khomeini, Shariatmadari, Golpayegani, Ayatollah Najafi Mar'ashi, and Hojatoislam Hussein Ali Montazeri. The land reform, women's suffrage and the *de facto* recognition of the state of Israel served as causes for *ulama* to unite against the Shah. This was the opportune moment for Khomeini to emerge as a religious and political leader. Khomeini became the most aggressive and popular opponent of the Shah. In early 1963, Khomeini began to preach against the Shah in Faiziyeh, a *madrassa* of Qom. In March of the same year, the *madrassa* was attacked by militia and the SAVAK forces, killing a number of students and arresting Khomeini (Keddie, 2003, p. 147). Immediately after his release, Khomeini continued his attack on the Shah and his pro-American policy. He was arrested again on the anniversary of the martyrdom of *Imam Hussein*, after delivering a speech comparing the Shah to *Yazid I*, the caliph who had martyred *Imam Hussein* at the *Battle of Karbala* (Gonzales 2007, 55). This governmental action promoted abrupt and fierce demonstrations in the major cities of Iran, demanding for Khomeini's release and

declaring *Holy War* against the Shah. Soon, the *June Uprising* was suppressed and Khomeini was sent to exile.

However, the vivid memories of the *Constitutional Movement*, the 1953 coup d'état against Mossadeq, and the *June Uprising* would not have a definitive impact on overthrowing the Shah without the existence of what Samuel P. Huntington (1968) considers the *gap theory*, similar to what Ted Robert Gurr considers *relative deprivation* (1970). Huntington argues that modernization is a multifaceted process involving a fundamental shift in values, attitudes, and expectations (Huntington 1968, 32).

Huntington defines the impact of modernization as follow:

*“At the intellectual level, modernization involves the tremendous expansion of man’s knowledge about his environment and the diffusion of his knowledge throughout society through increased literacy, mass communication, and education. Demographically, modernization means changes in the pattern of life...Socially, modernization tends to supplement the family and other primary groups having diffuse roles with consciously organized secondary association having much more specific functions...Economically, there is a diversification of activity as a few simple occupations give way to many complex ones...”* (1968, 32-33)

According to Huntington, social mobilization and the economic development are the main aspects of modernization related to politics. Social mobilization increases the aspiration and expectations. The economic development increases the capacity of a society to satisfy those aspirations and expectations. However, a gap develops between the aspirations and expectations and the capacity to fulfill those aspirations and

expectations. This situation generates social frustration, dissatisfaction, and political instability (1968, 54). Iran was under the same conditions.

Under the leadership of the Shah and his reforms for modernization, Iran witnessed a rapid economic development. During his last two decades of reign, the Shah was interested in modernizing Iran's economy and society and giving Iran a Western character and a modernized military (Keddie 2003, 133). This was made possible also by the high oil revenue entering in government's budget. In addition, this modernization process promoted by the Shah resulted in a high rate of social mobilization of the Iranian people. Dr. Mohsen M. Milani uses the *gap theory* to explain how the rapid socioeconomic development and the lack of an institutional building process created the gap that would set the stage for the Revolution to start. For Milani, the socioeconomic development increases social mobilization and the demand for political participation by various groups. And as he indicates, "To deny participation to those who desire to become involved in politics is to create the fertile ground from which a revolution grows." (1994, 15).

Nevertheless, this alone cannot be sufficient to start the revolution without the presence of what Milani calls the perception by the people of the "support linkage" between Iran and the United States and the indecisiveness of the Shah to act (1994, 16). The American support, the rapid economic expansion, and the repression were three main factors that helped the Shah retain power. There existed a perception from the Iranian people that the American support for Shah's regime had weakened. The human rights policy promoted by the Carter administration and Shah's liberalization reform of 1977 severely aggravated Shah's political situation. Being denounced by the *United Nations*

and the *Amnesty International* for severe violation of the human rights, the American human rights policy was perceived by the Iranian people as a pressure toward Shah to reform the political system. This situation was exacerbated by the inconsistent American policy toward Iran, which was a result of the radical split within the Carter administration. In the eyes of the Iranian people, the U.S. weakening support for the Shah was tantamount to losing the source of power to survive. To make the matter worse, Shah's liberalization reform allowed political and social groups to organize their anti-Shah movement. In addition, the Shah was known for his indecisiveness and the ability to use violence "at the right time" and direct it toward "the right group" (1994, 128). To all these can be added the fact that the Shah was suffering from an incurable disease, which might have influenced his decision-making ability. Marxist, nationalist, and other social groups took advantage of this situation by implementing their own agendas and strategies.



### *Main Political and Social Groups*

This situation led many social and political groups to organize and challenge the regime. One main political group included the Marxist organizations such as the *Tudeh Party* and the *Fada'iyun-e Khalq*. The *Tudeh Party* became an influential political actor after the triumph of Bolshevism in Russia in 1917. However, its force and reputation started to fade after the alleged conspiracies that this party planned against Mossadeq during the 1953 coup d'état. The *Fada'iyun-e Khalq* also did not have any better history than the *Tudeh Party*. They both ended up losing their leaders and supporters in confronting the Shah. Another important political group included the *National Front*. *National Front* was a very popular secular nationalist organization. However, after the 1953 coup d'état and the imprisonment of its historic leader Mahmud Mossadeq, the organization was severely damaged by conflicts between its members and the systematic persecution and executions of its members conducted by the *SAVAK* forces. Shah considered the *National Front* as the primary threat to his regime.

In addition to the political organizations, the anti-Shah movement included several social groups. One main social group was what was called the *Cultural Revivalism* group, comprising prominent intellectuals whose work aimed at portraying Shah's regime as unjust and illegitimate. This group of scholars included Seyyed Fakhreddin Shadman Valavi, Samad Behrangi, Mehdi Bazargan, Al-e Ahmad, and Ali Shari'ati. Shadman was a *Huntington* of his time because he emphasized the threat that the Western civilization posed to the existence of the Iranian culture and identity. Behrangi was considered a "secular leftist" who mocked the like-Western behavior of the

Iranian bourgeoisie and condemned the American influence in the Iranian education system (Hanson 1983, 1).

Al-e Ahmad was also an anti-Western, but his views were focused more on the West as an imperialist power, an indication of his past membership in the Tudeh Party. In addition, Bazargan focused himself on the internal conditions of Iran as the main causes of despotism and proposed the creation of an Islamic government run by experts who were also devoted Shi'as (Milani 1994, 80). Like Bazargan, Shari'ati was concerned about the intrusion of the Western values and ideas in the Iranian culture and the threat that it represented to Shi'a religion in Iran. He argued that *ulama* had failed to spread the ideas and teachings of the true Shi'ism, which he called *Alavi Shi'ism*. As a staunch opponent of the regime, Shari'ati was banned from lecturing and put under SAVAK surveillance. He died in London in 1977, without having the opportunity to witness the revolution he had lectured about.

Moreover, the *Mojahedin-e Khalq-e Iran* was another major component of the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The organization was founded in 1965 and is considered by some scholars as “the first Iranian organization to develop systematically a modern revolutionary interpretation of Islam” (as cited in Boroujerdi 1996, 116). The organization emphasized and supported ideas expressed from Bazargan and Ali Shari'ati with regard to the Western threat to Iran and Islam. The majority of its members and supporters came from the traditional and bazaar classes. The major source of support and recruitments was also concentrated in universities. The ideology of *Mojahedin-e Khalq-e Iran* was based on two major characteristics of the Iranian thoughts at that time: nationalism and populism. As such, they considered themselves “inheritors” of the

legacies of the constitutional movement of the early 1900s, of the movement of Mirza Kuchek-Khan, and of the nationalist movement of the 1950 led by Mahmud Mossadeq (1996, 117). The Mojahedins proclaimed Islam to be the sole ideology capable of mobilizing all the parts of the Iranian society in confronting the Western dominance. Inspired by the victory of *Fidel Castro* in Cuba, the Mojahedins believed in the need for armed struggle against the current regime as the most efficient strategy. They emphasized the concepts of resistance, martyrdom, revolution, and a classless society (Boroujerdi 1996, 117). However, in 1975 and on, many members of the Mujahedin organization were converted to Marxism. From the middle of 1975 to 1979, the organization was divided in two major and antagonistic groups—Islamic and Marxist. As a result, the Mojahedins not only lost their power in confronting Shah's regime, but they also lost the public support.

Finally, Shi'a ulama are considered lawyers who interpret and expand on religious law. They subscribe their role to the spiritual, social, and the political needs of their community. Shi'a ulama are educated at seminaries of Najaf in Iraq and Qom in Iran. In seminaries, students are prepared to reach a high level of proficiency in law, jurisprudence, theology, philosophy, logic, rhetoric, and literature. At the top of the Shi'a hierarchy are the most senior clergy, who are called *sources of emulation (marja' al-taqlid)*. Every Shi'a follows one *marja'*. The rank of a Shi'a cleric is determined by the profile of his mentor, the role of the mentor in student's formation, the quality of his publications, and the amount of the religious taxes and donations that the believer gives to the mentor for charitable purposes (Nasr, 2007, pp. 70-71). Besides Grand Ayatollah

Muhammad Husain Boroujerdi, many argue, there has never been any universally accepted supreme ayatollah or source of emulation.

Among the most influential *ulama* that worked for the Islamic Revolution were Grand Ayatollahs Rohullah Khomeini, Shariatmadari, Ayatollahs Mahmud Taleqani, Najafi Mar'ashi, and Hojatoislam Hussein Ali Montazeri. The revolution brought to an end the *Safavid Contract*, which stated that “Shi’a ulama would not recognize the Safavid monarchy as truly legitimate but would bless it as the most desirable form of government during the period of waiting.” (2007, 74). The *Safavid Contract* was replaced by the Khomeini’s doctrine of *velayat-e faqih*, which rendered Shi’ism and Islam incompatible with monarchy and advocated the direct ruling by ulama.

Despite the controversies among high-ranking clergy, ulama managed to succeed over other coalition forces of the revolution. There are several reasons why ulama succeeded. First, Shi’ism became the leading ideology of the revolution and justified the struggle against the Shah. Ulama were the source of this ideology that appealed legitimacy. Second, unlike other groups, ulama had significant financial resources coming from donations and charities. Third, due to their nature and activity, ulama were able to organize masses through Mosques. Because of the very organized nature of Shi’ism, ulama managed to create a nation-wide organization of the masses. Fourth, ulama had a very charismatic and skillful leader like Ayatollah Khomeini. Fifth, Khomeini’s supporters were trustful and adamant. Sixth, ulama were supported by lower classes people who had nothing to lose. Lastly, Khomeini was skillful and able enough to build parallel institutions to those of the old institutions—building “a state within the state”. While Khomeini kept the old institutions, he also built parallel institutions like the

Islamic Republican Party (parliament), the Revolutionary Guard (national army), the Komites (local police), the Revolutionary Courts (judiciary), etc.

## Chapter Four

### Ayatollah Rohulla Khomeini and the Velayat-e Faqif Doctrine

#### *Khomeini's Life*

Ayatollah Rohulla Khomeini was born in September 24<sup>th</sup>, 1902 in a family of *seyyed* (descendants of the Prophet). The title Ayatollah (the Sign of God) was given to Khomeini based on his education credentials as prescribed under the Shi'a Islamic tradition. Many believe that the life of Ayatollah Khomeini has gone through three different phases. The first phase, from 1908 to 1962, was characterized by training, teaching, and writing in the field of Islamic studies. At the age of six he began to study the *Koran* and elementary Persian. Later, he completed his studies in Islamic law, ethics, and spiritual philosophy under the supervision of Ayatollah Abdul Karim Haeri-ye Yazdi in Qom. During this scholarly phase of his life, Khomeini did not participate in political activities. However, his studies, teachings, and writings indicate that he firmly believed that leadership of political activities should be in the hands of the most prominent members of the Shi'a ulama.

The second phase of Khomeini's life, from 1962 to 1979, was characterized by highly political activism, which was influenced by his strict, religious interpretation of Shi'a Islam. He started his struggle against the Shah's regime in 1962, which led to the outbreak of a religious and political rebellion on June 5, 1963. This date can be regarded as a turning point in the history of the Islamic movement in Iran and as a pivotal moment that crystallized the religious and political profile of Khomeini. As analyzed previously,

Khomeini became the most aggressive and popular opponent of the Shah. In early 1963, Khomeini began to preach against the Shah in *Faiziyeh*, a *madrassa* of Qom. In March of the same year, the *madrassa* was attacked by militia and the SAVAK forces, killing a number of students and arresting Khomeini (Keddie 2003, 147). Immediately after his release, Khomeini continued his attack on the Shah and his pro-American policy. He was arrested again on the anniversary of the martyrdom of *Imam Hussein*, after delivering a speech comparing the Shah to *Yazid*, the caliph who had martyred *Imam Hussein* at the *Battle of Karbala* (Gonzales 2007, 55). This governmental action promoted abrupt and fierce demonstrations in the major cities of Iran, demanding for Khomeini's release and declaring *Holy War* against the Shah. The Shah brutally crushed the uprising and exiled Khomeini in 1964. Khomeini first resided in Iraq and then he moved to France where he stood until the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution. However, regardless of the failure of the uprising, it was during this time that Khomeini received the title of *Marja-e Talqid*, giving him a very distinguished position among clergy and superior credentials in Iran's political life.

The third phase of Khomeini's life begins with his return from exile on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1979, just two weeks after Muhammad Reza Shah had been forced out of Iran. On February 11<sup>th</sup>, revolutionary forces loyal to Khomeini seized power in Iran, and Khomeini emerged as the founder and the *Supreme Leader* of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Khomeini succeeded in building a new theocratic state of Iran as he envisioned in his doctrine of *velayat-e faqih*.

### *Velayat-e Faqih Doctrine*

The *velayat-e faqih doctrine* is the essence of Khomeini's vision about the Islamic government and the framework that would set the stage for Khomeini to attain the leadership of the Islamic Republic. This doctrine has its roots in Shi'a Islam notion of the *guardianship of jurisprudence*—vehemently espoused by Khomeini and opposed by some—which gives the *faqih* (the jurist) the power to decide on state and religious matters (Enayat 1983, 170). Khomeini envisioned a modern government that would resemble the theocratic Muslim community of the early years of Islam in which *ulama* possessed the legitimate power over the people, given to them directly by the *Prophet Mohammad* through the *Imams*. Khomeini also based his doctrine on the *Kur'anic* principle that *Imams* have the divine power to explain the Islamic laws and rules and provide them to the people in a simplistic and understandable manner. Khomeini's doctrine assumed its legitimacy on his explanation of *Kur'anic* saying: "O you believers, obey God, obey the prophet and obey those in charge among you." (Shevlin 2000, 365).

In his book *Islamic Government: Governance of the Jurist*, translated by Hamid Algar, Khomeini emphasizes the need for an Islamic government and laid down its main principles. Khomeini believes that it is the duty of all true Muslims not only to pray but also to act to defend Islam from the internal corruption and the external threats. This is to follow the path of the Prophet Muhammad who led Muslims both religiously and politically. Khomeini presents five main reasons for creating an Islamic government:

1. To support the rights of the weak from the oppressing ruling class;
2. To avoid corruption and the rule by minority;
3. To preserve the Islamic order and make individuals pursue the Islamic path;



4. To prevent the approval of anti-Islamic laws by sham parliaments; and
5. To destroy the influence and the domination of the foreign powers in Islamic lands. (Khomeini n.d., 27-28)

Khomeini argued that it is self-evident that the Muslim community needed “righteous and proper organs of government”. The Islamic government that he envisioned comprises three main branches: legislative, executive, and administrative. Even though Khomeini did not mention the judicial branch, he pays special attention to the adjudication process for civil and penal matters and considers the *faqih* both a judge and an executor. Khomeini argues that the legislative power and the competence to formulate laws belong exclusively to God. He believes that law alone rules over society and that the government should be a government of the law. The law should be considered as “a tool or an instrument for the establishment of justice in society, a mean for man’s intellectual and moral reform and his purification” (n.d., 47).

However, the controversy begins with Khomeini’s claim about the ruler and his religious credentials. Seeing that the government would be a government of law, Khomeini claims that the ruler should be a *faqih*—an expert in Islamic jurisprudence. He also argues that being a *faqih* should be a requirement for all those who hold governmental positions. The *faqih* must surpass other *fuqaha* (plural for *faqih*) in knowledge. Khomeini summarizes the credentials of the *faqih* in three main points: (1) to be an expert in Islamic jurisprudence, (2) to have the sense of leadership, and (3) to be a just ruler (n.d., p. 49). Moreover, as mentioned above, Khomeini believes that the ruling by a *faqih* and the obedience to those entrusted with authority is justified in Ku’ran’s verses: “...And obey the holders of authority from among you” (as cited in Khomeini

n.d., 30).

Khomeini also argues that *fuqaha* are the “heirs of the prophets” and fight in “God’s way to implement laws of Islam and establish its social system” (n.d., 94). By following this explanation, Khomeini claims that there is no difference between the *faqih*, *the Most Noble Messenger* (Prophet Muhammad), and *the Commander of the Faithful* (Imam Ali) because the ruler has the duty to implement the laws of God. However, the *faqih* does not have absolute authority over other *fuqaha* and cannot appoint or dismiss them. Despite the opposition from the majority of prestigious *Shi’a ulama*, Khomeini established his doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* and assumed the role of the *faqih* soon after the triumph of the Islamic Revolution and the adaptation of the Islamic Constitution after the referendum of December 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1979.

## Chapter Five

### The Islamic Constitution and Iran's Power Structure

#### *The Islamic Constitution*

Having proclaimed and established Shi'ism as the ideology of the revolution and succeeded in overthrowing the Shah, Khomeini moved on to realize his dream of creating the *Islamic State of Iran* based on his doctrine of *velayat-e faqih*. After debates with other coalition members (especially with the provisional Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan) about the name of the new state, in the referendum of March 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> of 1980, Iranians voted overwhelmingly to build an *Islamic Republic* (Taylor & Francis Group and Dean 2004, 368). The *Islamic Republic* was the only form of government to appear on the ballot, and votes were not cast in secret. An overwhelming majority of over 98 percent voted in favor of an *Islamic Republic*. Khomeini proclaimed the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran on May 1, 1979, when he “declared the first day of the *Government of Allah* on the earth” (Milani 1994, 154).

The name given to the new *Islamic Republic* comprises two meaningful concepts—(1) *Islamic* and (2) *Republic*. However, some argue that both these concepts are incongruous to each other, at least from the religious perspective. Abdelwahab Hechiche cites Professor Tibi when he states that:

*“the term 'Islamic Republic' betrays the character of contemporary Islam: It is a defensive culture. A 'Republic' is a European form of government and is identical neither to the Sunni Islamic Caliphate nor to Shi'i Islamic Imamate.*

*This concept cannot be found in the dogmatic Islamic sources.”* (as cited in Hechiche 2002, 192)

In addition, Askari defines some major problems the notion of the Islamic State. He argues that there are three main issues when dealing with the notion of the *Islamic State*:

1. *In a theocratic state, sovereignty lies with God.*
2. *Sharia is a criterion for an Islamic State.*
3. *The problematic issue concerning the very concept of state.*

Askari argues that “sovereignty is a concept which has its proper place in particular discourse—political science (as cited in Hechiche 2002, 184). He also claims that sovereignty cannot be used in the political sense for three main reasons:

1. *It limits God and reduces His transcendence.*
2. *It is a violation of the scriptural usage for reasons both earthly and heavenly—nothing is outside God's dominance and power.*
3. *God cannot be identified with one particular social and historical institution. This can reduce Him to a deity.* (2002, 184)

Despite this issue, the most important task after the victory of the revolution was the drafting of the new constitution that would solidify the structure of the Islamic State. Through the new constitution, Khomeini aimed at institutionalizing his doctrine of *velayat-e faqih*. For this purpose, in August of the same year, Iran held election to elect 73 member of the *Majles-e Khebragan* (Assembly of Experts), whose primary task was drafting the constitution. Khomeini’s supporters achieved a landslide victory. The drafting of the constitution created two main opposing groups. On one hand, there were

Bazargan and his supporters who supported a constitution modeled after the *Charles de Gaulle's Fifth Republic* and envisioned “a republic that would be Islamic in name but more democratic in content” (Abrahamian 2008, 162). The draft proposed by Bazargan was similar to the 1906 Constitution and provided *ulama* with a little power in state matters. On the other hand, there were Khomeini and his disciples who envisioned a constitution based on the *velayat-e faqih* doctrine, with *ulama* dominating and having ultimate decision-making power over the state matters.

The conflict between these two main opposing groups was also an indication of the existence of a dual government. One government was led by Bazargan and comprised the old political institutions, and the other government was led by Khomeini and comprised a set of parallel institutions created by him, which include the *Revolutionary Council* and the *Central Komiteh* to oversee the performance of the provisional government, the *Islamic Republican Party* (parliament), the *Revolutionary Guard* (national army), the *Komites* (local police), and the *Revolutionary Courts* (judiciary). The result of this situation was a constitutional draft “hybrid—albeit weighted heavily in favor of one—between Khomeini’s *velayat-e faqih* and Bazargan’s French Republic; between divine rights and the rights of man; between theocracy and democracy; between *vox dei* and *vox populi*; and between clerical authority and popular sovereignty” (2008, 163-164). The Assembly of Experts for Constitution finished the draft on November 15, and the Islamic Constitution was adopted through a national referendum on December 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1979.

The Constitution was amended in 1989 to cope with the new reality facing the Iranian politics—“the transition from the consolidation phase to the reconstruction phase

of the Islamic Revolution and the emergence of state as the central player on the Iranian political scene” (Milani 1994, 225). The election of Khomeini's successor and the demand for a stronger and effective executive branch of the government urged the *Assembly for Reconsideration of Constitution* (*ad hoc* Assembly formed by Khomeini to review the Constitution), under Khomeini's previous directives, to remove *marjaeyat clause* and to centralize the executive. The removal of the *marjaeyat clause* made it possible for Khomeini's successor to assume the position of the *Supreme Leader* based on a new (lower) set of religious requirements (1994, 221-222). The centralization of the executive branch consisted on the constitutional removal of the office of the prime minister and transferring of all its powers to the office of the President (analyzed below). However, this change did not have any significant impact on Iran's power structure.

### *Iran's Power Structure*

The political system of the Islamic Iran has a fairly complicated power structure.

Kazem Alamdari (2005, 1299) claims:

*“the political structure of the IRI is not constructed like a canopy, in which removing the central pole causes its collapse; rather, it is built on many independent, rival, parallel columns of power that hold the system together. In the case of a sudden collapse of the IRI, a civil war and partition of the Iranian territory is highly probable”.*

The political system is comprised of the *formal* power structure and the *informal* power structure. The formal power structure is clearly defined under the Islamic Constitution and is encountered in the structure of state institutions and offices. The formal power structure encompasses the *Supreme Leader*, the *Assembly of Experts for Leadership*, the *President*, the *Council of Ministers*, the *Expediency Council*, the *Majles*, the *Council of Guardians*, the judiciary, state radio and television, and the armed forces.

The informal power structure consists of religious-political organizations, revolutionary foundations, and paramilitary organizations supporting factions of Iran's clerical leadership (Buchta 2000, xi). According to Wilfried Buchta (2000, xii), the informal structure consists of “four concentric rings” The first ring, the inner, comprises the most powerful clerics in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the government. The second ring comprises “the most senior nonclerical governmental functionaries and administrators”. The third ring consists of the power base of the regime, the members of the revolutionary organizations, the *pasdaran* and *Basij* militia, revolutionary committees, religious security forces, and media. The fourth ring

encompasses former influential individuals and groups that serve as interlocutor between the civil society and the regime and seek to promote peaceful reforms from within the system.

The *Supreme Leader*, the *President*, the *Assembly of Experts for Leadership*, the *Majles*, the *Council of Guardians*, and the *Expediency Council* are the most important institutions of the Islamic Republic of Iran. An analysis of these major institutions will help us determine how the power is distributed and where the real power rests. However, this does not mean that other state (i.e. armed forces and media) and non-state institutions (i.e. Teachers of Qom Theological Colleges) are not important. This is to reveal which institution(s) bears the dominant power to influence the political decision-making process, both domestically and internationally.

The *Supreme Leader* is the most influential institution and exerts his power over almost every political and social institution. No major decision can be made and no policy can be implemented without the approval of the Supreme Leader (Sadjadpour 2008). The *Chapter VIII* of the Islamic constitution deals with qualification and powers of the *Supreme Leader*. Qualifications of the *Supreme Leader* are elaborated in Khomeini's doctrine of velayat-e faqih, as analyzed previously. The *Article 110* provides the Supreme Leader with the authority and the rights to exert power as follow:

1. *Delineation of the general policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran after consultation with the Nation's Exigency Council.*
2. *Supervision over the proper execution of the general policies of the system.*
3. *Issuing decrees for national referenda.*
4. *Assuming supreme command of the Armed Forces*



5. *Declaration of war and peace and the mobilization of the Armed Forces*
6. *Appointment, dismissal, and resignation of:*
  - a. *the religious men on the Guardian Council,*
  - b. *the supreme judicial authority of the country,*
  - c. *the head of the radio and television network of the Islamic Republic of Iran,*
  - d. *the chief of the joint staff,*
  - e. *the chief commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, and*
  - f. *the supreme commanders of the Armed Forces.*
7. *Resolving differences between the three wings of the Armed Forces and regulation of their relations.*
8. *Resolving the problems which cannot be solved by conventional methods, through the Nation's Exigency Council.*
9. *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 a President, by the Leadership.*
10. *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 the Article 89.*
11. *Pardoning or reducing the sentences of convicts, within the framework of Islamic criteria, on a recommendation from the Head of judicial power.*

In addition, the Leader exerts his power through the *Office of the Supreme Leader*. The main task of this office is to organize and manage the Leader's agenda and to keep him informed with all the internal and external political development. This office consists of four permanent members, all of whom are high-ranking clerics and the most trustful collaborators of the Leader. Moreover, the Leader exercises direct power over the other institutions through the *nemayandeha-ye rahbar* (representatives of the supreme leader). The representatives are closely connected to the *Office of the Supreme Leader* and are appointed in person by the Leader. Almost all of them are clerics, and the majority of them holds the rank of *hojjatoeslam* (proof of Islam). The representatives make it possible for the Leader to exercise his power in five major areas of the Iranian politics, as cited by Wilfried Buchta (2000, 48):

1. *Ministries in the executive branch;*
2. *The armed forces and security services;*
3. *Provincial representatives (Friday imams);*
4. *Revolutionary and religious organizations; and*
5. *Iranian cultural centers in foreign countries*

*The Assembly of Experts for Leadership* is the only institution that has the power to elect the Faqih and dismiss him when the later is deemed incapable of fulfilling its constitutional duties. Its powers are defined under the *Article 107* and are exercised in accordance with the *Article 111*. It has the power to appoint and supervise *Faqih's* performance, to make sure that the performance complies with the Islamic ideology, and that *Faqih* is capable to perform his duties. Under the *Article 108*, the *Faqih* and religious members have the power to appoint the members of the *Assembly*. Their power is given

under the *Charter VIII*, the *Articles 107-111* of the Iranian Islamic constitution. The Assembly consists of eighty-six clerics elected by the popular vote to eight-year terms. Any candidate for election to the assembly should pass the criteria established by the *Assembly of Experts* and must take the approval of the *Council of Guardians*. If the assembly dismisses the Faqih, than a leadership council composed of the President, the head of the judiciary, and a *faqih* from the *Council of Guardians* assume the duties of the Leader (2000, 60).

In addition to Iran's formal power structure, the *President* is considered the second highest leader of the Islamic Republic. Together with the legislative and the executive branches of the government, the *President* constitutes the democratic element of the Islamic Constitution. The *Article 56* provides the men with the divine right to govern themselves. The *Article 57* articulates the separation of powers in three branches of the government—executive, legislative, and judicial—all of which functioning under the supervision of “the absolute religious Leader and the Leadership of the Umma”.

In addition, the powers and responsibilities of the office of the President are enumerated under the *Chapter IX*, Section 1 and 2, the *Articles 113-142*. The *Article 113* states that after the office of Leadership (the Leader), the President is the highest official of the state. The President has the responsibility for implementing the constitution and acting as the head of the executive, except in matters directly concerned with the office of the Leader. The President is elected for a four-year term by the direct vote of the people and is allowed to serve no more than two terms in office. The President can be removed by two-thirds of majority vote of no-confidence in the Parliament. The *Majles* declare the President incompetent and inform the Supreme Leader to dismiss the President in

accordance with the *Article 110* of the Constitution. His main rights and powers include (2000, 23):

1. *To select the first of the four vice presidents;*
2. *To appoint and dismiss ministers, who should be confirmed by the Majles (Parliament);*
3. *To control the sazeman-e barname va bujet (Planning and Budget Organization);*
4. *To act as the chairman of the shura-ye amniyat-e melli (National Security Council); and*
5. *To manage the personnel composition of the shura-ye 'ali-yeenqelab-e farshangi-ye eslami (Supreme Council of the Islamic Cultural Revolution).*

Despite the prestige, the office of the President does not have influence over the foreign policy agenda. Even though it is elected by the people, the President should be confirmed by the Supreme Leader in order to serve in office. In addition, the President and the entire executive branch of the government are subordinated to the *velayat-e faqih* institution. Lastly, and the most important, the President does not have any control over the armed and security forces. Only the *Faqih* has authority over all other institutions and in all the political issues (2000, 23).

Moreover, the Parliament (Majles) represents the legislative body of the Iranian government, as defined under the *Article 58*. The parliament bears significant principal similarities with the parliament coming out of the constitutional movement of 1906. Members of the parliament are elected every four years through public elections. The main rights and powers of the *Majles* include: “drafting legislation (the *Articles 71-75*), ratifying international treaties (the *Article 77*), approving state-of-emergency declarations (the *Article 79*) and loans (the *Article 80*), examining and approving the annual state

budget (the *Article 52*), and, if necessary, removing from the office the state the president and his appointed ministers” (2000, 58). Unlike the Western parliaments, the *Majles* is heavily influenced by the clergy rule and domination. The *Council of Guardians* have considerable influence over the *Majles* composition and legislation.

Furthermore, the power structure of Iran encompasses the *Council of Guardians*. The Council consists of twelve members and its power is defined under the *Article 91* of the Constitution. The Council has the right and the power to determine whether or not candidates for in the *Executive* and *Legislative* branches of the government are suitable and competent for their positions. It also determines the compatibility of the legislation passed by the *Majles* with Shi’a Islam. Six members of the council are religious men selected by *the Faqih* and other six members are jurists specialized in different areas of law, who are elected by the *Majles* from among the Muslim jurists nominated by the head of the judiciary.

Finally, the *Expediency Council* is another important element of Iran’s power structure. It was created (by Ayatollah Khomeini and being led currently by Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani) to solve cases when there is an impasse within the *Council of Guardians* or between the *Majles* and the *Council of Guardians*. Its decision is final and irreversible. The Council receives importance in case of impasse between the *Council of Guardians* and the *Majles*, as was the case in 1988-89. The Council also advises the *Faqih* in accordance with the *Articles 110 and 112* of the Constitution. Many believe that the current Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, exercises his authority without consulting with the Council.

## Chapter Six

### The Theoretical Approach

#### *Offensive Realism*

In order for us to maximize our understanding about Iran's security and foreign policy, we need to rely on a theoretical approach that provides an accurate explanation of the political phenomena. It is also important to make an analysis of the other theoretical approaches in order to be able to realize the main differences between theories of international relations as pertaining to this study. While a theory may provide a better explanation of the topic compare to the other theories, knowledge about the other theories may help us discern hidden aspects and perspectives of the issue or phenomena.

As previously stated, the argument of this study is that Iran's security and foreign policy is mainly based on the principles of the *Offensive Realism* theory of international relations, founded and advocated by John Mearsheimer (2001). However, it needs to be emphasized that this study does not claim or pretend that *Offensive Realism* explains everything regarding Iran's security and foreign policy. Indeed, the founder of this theory considers it "a powerful flashlight in a dark room: even though it cannot illuminate every nook and cranny, most of the time it is an excellent tool for navigating through the darkness" (2001, 11).

Mearsheimer provides us with five "bedrock assumptions", or principles, of the offensive realism (2001, 30-31). The first principle of the *Offensive Realism* is that the international system has an anarchic status. However, it does not mean that the system is

chaotic or engulfed by conflicts and wars. The concept of anarchy refers to the notion of ordering principle of the international system, which considers the states to be sovereign and obeying to no higher authority. Thus, the state of anarchy means that the international system lacks a central authority or a supranational government. As Kenneth Waltz affirms, conflicts and wars happen in an anarchic international system “because there is nothing to prevent them” (2001, 232).

The second assumption is that great powers possess some offensive military capabilities that can be used to cause damages or even destroy each other. Based on his study of the three former European great powers during the last two centuries, Mearsheimer claims that wealth and the economic status is (but not always) a good indicator of *latent power*. He defines “great powers” as states that have sufficient military potential to engage in conventional war against the most powerful state in the world. Mearsheimer claims that his theory focuses on great powers because “the fortunes of all states—great powers and smaller powers alike—are determined primarily by the decisions and actions of those with the greatest capability” (2001, 5). According to him, a great power does not need to have capabilities to defeat the most powerful state, but it should be powerful enough to turn the conflict into a war of attrition that weakens the leading power, even though the later wins the war (2001, 5). The potential of the threat depends on the capabilities owned by each state. The most dangerous powers are those that possess greater military strength.

The third “bedrock assumption” of the Mearsheimer’s *Offensive Realism* is that states are suspicious of other states’ intentions. States fear each other and believe that there cannot be any guaranty that states that possess military capabilities would not attack

other states. There may be many possible causes for confrontation and aggression that can be used by one state to attack the other. Intentions of the states can change rapidly, and so do alliances. The *security dilemma* embracing both the United States and Soviets during the *Cold War* is a perfect example and of absence of trust among States and of the maximization of power relative to the power of the others. Another example is Iraq's aggression toward Iran in 1980. Iraq attacked Iran less than six years after they had signed in a "brotherly" manner what is called *The 1975 Algiers Agreement*. It was an agreement to settle the borders dispute and to stop interference in internal affairs of each other. Soon, the aspiration for brotherhood was converted into an ambition for power and territory. The history of Iran showed us a plethora of cases in which Iran has been continuously under the threats and aggressions from other states.

The fourth principle holds that the survival is the primary goal of every state. There is no higher priority for a state than its survival. All the other goals succumb to the instinct of survival. Mearsheimer argues that states can also pursue non-security goals "as long as the requisite behavior does not conflict with the balance-of-power logic" (2001, p. 46). If we had to consider the *survival* as an ideology, then we would define it as the only *status quo* ideology—the *ultimate ideology* that cannot be changed for or be subjugated to any other ideology. The invasions from *Mongols* and *Tartars* in thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, among others, remind Iranians of the fact that extermination and the very existential threats may still be present in today's world.

The last "bedrock assumption" of *Offensive Realism* is that states are rational actors and behave based on their need to survive and on constraints provided to them by the international system. Mearsheimer argues that states get involved in *game theory*



through which “they consider the preferences of other states and how their own behavior is likely to affect the behavior of those other states, and how the behavior of those other states is likely to affect their own strategy for survival” (2001, 31).

However, as Mearsheimer cautions us, none of these five “bedrock assumptions” alone mandates that states behave competitively or aggressively. Taken together, these assumptions create powerful incentives and motivations for the states to think and act aggressively toward each others. In an anarchic international system, states realize that in order for them to survive, they have to account on self-help. The best way for states to ensure their survival is to become the most powerful state—*global hegemony*.

Mearsheimer (2001, 35) summarizes this view as follow:

*“Given the difficulty of determining how much power is enough for today and tomorrow, great powers recognize that the best way to ensure their security is to achieve hegemony now, thus eliminating any possibility of a challenge by another great power. Only a misguided state would pass up an opportunity to become hegemony in the system because it thought it already had sufficient power to survive.”*

Thus, being under such conditions, states will never accept the *status quo* status of power until they dominate the entire international system. Mearsheimer cites Immanuel Kant when he says that “It is the desire of every state, or of its ruler, to arrive at a condition of perpetual peace by conquering the whole world, if that were possible” (2001, 34). Mearsheimer believes that a *global hegemony* is not possible and “the world is condemned to perpetual great-power competition (2001, 2). He also distinguishes between the notion of *global hegemony* and the *regional hegemony*. The United States is just a regional hegemony due to the absence of other powers in the Western hemisphere. In order to be a global hegemony, the United States should be the only power in Asia and

Europe, which is not the case.

In his theory, John Mearsheimer also argues that there are four main strategies through which a state can gain power relative to the powers gained from the other states. First, states gain power by going to war with the other rival states. Second, states gain power by threatening rival states to use military forces against them--"blackmail". Third, the *bait and bleed* strategy causes to rivals to engage in a "protracted war", so that "they bleed each other white, while the baiter remains on sideline with its military strength intact" (Mearsheimer, 2001, 147-155). This is the case when one state causes other states to go in war with each other and the "baiter" would be free in the future to expand its power. The last strategy that states implement to gain power is the *bloodletting* strategy, which aims at causing rival states to fight against each other in a long and costing conflict.

On the other hand, states also aim at preventing other states from gaining power at their expenses. In order to achieve this goal, states implement two major strategies. The first strategy is *balancing*. Through this strategy, a great power "assumes direct responsibility" to prevent another state from disturbing the current balance of power. The initial goal is to deter the aggressor. If this part of the strategy fails, then the balancing state will use its power to prevent the other state from disturbing the balance of power (2001, 156). The second strategy to prevent other states from gaining power is by using the *buck-passing* strategy. The state implementing this strategy attempts to get another state bear the burden of preventing, confronting, or even fighting against other state that aims at upsetting the balance of power. This strategy requires high diplomatic sophistication in order to "pass the buck" to the other state (2001, 157-159).

### *Different Theoretical Perspectives*

Offensive realism is an alternative theory to the *structural realism theory* of Kenneth N. Waltz (1979), also known as *defensive realism*. Both have their roots from *the classical realism theory*. The classical realism theory begins with the Thucydides' famous work *The Peloponnesian War*. Thucydides argues that power politics is a law of human nature. He maintains that the "lust for power" and the ego to dominate the others are embedded in the human nature. Thucydides captured the *Melian dialogue* and defined it as a perfect example to validate his claims. In addition, Nicolo Machiavelli (1532) is another classical realist who argued that in the real world principles are subordinated to policies of the state. Machiavelli emphasized his notion of *raison d'état* or *reason of state* and argued that "the ultimate skill of the state leader is to accept, and adapt to, the changing power political configuration in world politics" (Baylis, Smith, and Owens 2008, 96).

In addition to the works and ideas of Thucydides and Machiavelli, Hans Morgenthau provided the fundamental principles of the classical realism. In his work *Politics Among Nations* (Morgenthau and Thomson 1985, 4), Morgenthau defines six main principles of *political realism*. First, politics is governed by "objective laws that have their roots in human nature" (1985, 3). In order for a society to prosper and survive, it is imperative for the society to understand the laws by which it is governed. Second, Morgenthau also argues the main strategy to survive in international arena is to pursue its interests defined in terms of power (1985, 3). He claims that statesmen think and act in terms of interest defined as power (Mearsheimer 2001, 19). Third, the concept of interest defined as power is universal but is not fixed and "affected by the circumstances of time

and place” (Morgenthau and Thompson 1985, 8). Fourth, the political realism is aware of the moral significance of political action. The classical realism theory maintains that “universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of the states”. Those moral principles are defined based on circumstances of time and place (1985, 9). Fifth, political realism does not identify the moral principles of the state with the moral principles of the universe. Similar to Machiavelli, he supported the notion of *raison d'état* and argued that beyond the frontier of a state there are no ethics or moral principles to which a state should obey. The only moral principle is the survival of the state. The self-help in an anarchic international system is the only moral duty. Sixth, according to Morgenthau “the political realist maintains the autonomy of the political sphere, as the economist, the lawyer, and the moralist maintain theirs” (1985, 9). For a political realist there are no other standards of thought other than the political standards. The former are subordinated to the latter. Together with E. H. Carr (*The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939*), Morgenthau became a staunch proponent of realism during the *Inter-War Debate* (1919-1939) with the proponents of *Liberalism*.

Unlike Morgenthau and other classical realists, Kenneth Waltz argues that it is the anarchy that defines the international system and not the “lust for power”. Waltz claims that great powers are essentially aggressive not because of their “lust for power” but because of their need to survive in the international system of politics. Waltz believes that states seek to maximize their security and not their power *per se*. In addition, according to Waltz, the structure of the international system forces the states to emphasize the balance of power. Morgenthau, on the other hand, considers the balance of power as a “universal concept” and defines it as “a situation of equilibrium as well as any situation

in which power struggles take place” (Keohane 1986, 13). Moreover, Waltz attributes the security competition and the inter-state conflicts to the absence of a central global government. He defines the structure of the international system in terms of three main elements: (1) organizing principles, differential of units, and distribution of capabilities. The organizing principles are defined through the anarchic status of the international system and the hierarchical structure of the domestic order. Sovereign states are the units of the international system. Waltz considers the distribution of capabilities across the units of the system as the most important factor in defining and understanding the outcomes of the international politics (Baylis et al. 2008, 98).

Moreover, Waltz differs with Mearsheimer when it comes to the question of the how much power states want to ensure their survival (Mearsheimer 2001, 21). Waltz argues that the international structure does not provide states with incentives to maximize their power. He argues that when great power behave aggressively and aim at maximizing their powers, they will encourage their potential victims to come together and balance against the aggressive state(s) (2001, 20). This scenario motivates states to be security maximizers, instead of being power maximizers, and follow strategies that would maintain the existing balance of powers. However, it needs to be clarified that offensive realism, like defensive realism, emphasizes the needs of the state to ensure their survival. While defensive realism finds the balance of power as the best strategy to ensure the survival of the state, offensive realism argues that the survival of a state can be ultimately ensured by reaching the hegemonic status.

Other mainstream theories of international relations include *liberalism*, *neoliberalism*, *social constructivism*, and *Marxist theories*. Liberals argue that “power

politics itself is the product of ideas, and ideas can change significantly (Baylis et al. 2008, 110). They agree with the realists about the anarchic status of the international system. However, liberals claim that anarchy is a result of imperialism, failure of the balance of power, and problems with undemocratic regimes. The latter goes back to the Kantian argument to achieve perpetual peace by transforming individual consciousness, promoting *Republican Constitutionalism*, and abolishing war through a federal contract between states (2008, 112). Indeed, liberalism has gone through several waves. The first wave happened after the WWI, culminating with *the League of Nations* and interrupted by the WWII. The second wave occurred after the WWII and was interrupted by *the Cold War*. The third wave started after the fall of *the Soviet Empire* and was interrupted by the September 11<sup>th</sup> attack on the American soil. The *Democratic Peace Theory* and Fukuyama's work *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) have attempted to provide some grounds for liberalism. However, liberals have found it hard, so far, to succeed in their quest to "domesticate international politics".

Neoliberalism is another mainstream theory of international relation. David Baldwin identifies four varieties of liberalism: (1) *commercial liberalism*, (2) *republican liberalism*, (3) *sociological liberalism*, and (4) *liberal institutionalism* (1993).

Neoliberalism, consistently, is used and defined under the principles of liberal institutionalism. There are several core assumptions of neoliberalism. First, states are the key actors in the international system but not the only significant ones. Second, states are guided by rationality and the quest to maximize their interests in issue-areas. Third, states seek the maximization of their absolute gains through cooperation. Fourth, the greatest obstacle to successful cooperation is cheating and noncompliance with the established

rules and contracts. Lastly, states will shift loyalty and resources to institutions if they are viewed as mutually beneficial and if these serve the international interests of the states and provide them with opportunities to secure those interests (Baylis et al. 2008, 132). These main principles are also elaborated in details in Keohane's work *After hegemony: Cooperation and discord in the world political economy* (2005).

As one may realize, there are several disagreements between neorealists and neoliberals. While neorealists emphasize the importance of survival in an anarchic system, neoliberals minimize the importance of survival and claim that neorealists minimize the importance of international interdependence, globalization, and international regimes. While realists argue that cooperation depends on the will of the states, neoliberals argue that cooperation can be achieved in those issue-areas that states have mutual interests. While neorealists like Mearsheimer emphasize the relative gains, power, and security, neoliberals focus their attention on absolute gains, the economic welfare, and the international political economy. And while neorealists argue that capabilities are essential for security and independence, neoliberals argue that institutions and preferences are more important (Baylis et al. 2008, 133).

However, some may argue that neorealists and neoliberals disregard some other factors. First, they both focus on states as the main actors of the international system and downplay the role of the domestic forces. In addition, they ignore the issues of political culture, domestic politics, ideology, and identity. Moreover, both neorealists and neoliberals ignore the fact that political activities may be shifting away from the state, especially in the new era of globalization or of the economic interdependence. Furthermore, they both struggle to properly define power and the real interests of the

states (2008, 135-136).

*Social constructivism* is another alternative theory to neorealism theory. It is based on the thoughts of Max Weber and Emile Durkheim and is later developed by Michel Foucault, Alexander Wendt, Michael Barnett, James Fearon, and others. It is considered a social theory and has gained grounds since the 80s. Constructivism emphasizes the human consciousness and its role in international relations. The assumption that the world is socially constructed means that global change and transformation can be investigated (2008, 166-169). It deals with the social construction of the reality and argues that actors, both domestic and international, are created by the cultural environment. The social construction of reality defines and shapes people's behavior toward the system. In a response to neorealist and neoliberal consensus about the anarchic status of the international system, Alexander Wendt, a constructivist, stated that "anarchy is what states make of it" (1992).

Constructivists also argue that knowledge plays a crucial role on how individuals construct and interpret the world. In addition, constructivists consider rational choice theory (used by neorealists) as the *logic of consequences* and mock other theories for not emphasizing the *logic of appropriateness* and explaining global transformations. Regarding power, constructivists claim that the forces of power can be both material and ideational. Moreover, the effects of power "go beyond the ability to change behavior" (Baylis et al. 2008, 165). Constructivists emphasize "the diffusion and the internationalization and institutionalization of norms". This can be done through *diffusion* and *institutional isomorphism*. *Diffusion* deals with the concern of how a particular model, norm, practice, strategy, or belief spread within a population. *Institutional*



*isomorphism* is a process which maintains that “those organizations that share the same environment will, over the time, resemble each other” (2008, 169). It is this process of internationalization and institutionalization of norms that promote conformity, socialization, and create a sense of “international community, all of which may cause a significant change in global politics and world order.

Moreover, Marxist theories have continuously provided interesting ideas that have attracted a considerable number of scholars. Unlike neorealists who emphasize the role of the state in international system, Marxists see the state as the source of the problem and as an apparatus that serves the interests of one class, the capitalist class, at the expenses of the other class, the working class. Marxist theories share similarities with each other. They tend to analyze the social world as a totality. They claim that history, economics, politics, international relations, sociology, philosophy, etc. should be studied in totality. The academic division in different fields would not provide an accurate explanation of the reality because “none can be understood without the knowledge of the others” (2008, 145). Another “key element” of the Marxist thought is the materialist conception of history. For Marxists, historical changes are related to and affected by economic changes. *Means of production and relations of production* form the *economic base* of a society. The mode of production influences the political, social, and intellectual life of a given society, known also as *superstructure*. A change in *means of production and relations of production* will cause changes in *superstructure*.

One major Marxist theory is the *World System Theory*. The system theory was a result of a series of critiques on imperialism. The first major work to define a systemic approach was Lenin’s *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Lenin argued that in

capitalist states, free competition gave way to monopoly capitalism. Within the world economy, the monopoly capitalism “created a two-tier structure” consisting of capitalist states in the core exploiting the less developed states in the periphery. Bourgeoisie of the states in the core would appease their own proletariat by exploiting states in the periphery.

The work of Lenin was followed by the *Dependency School of Latin America* led by Andre Günter Frank and Henrique Fernando Cardoso. Frank (1984) distinguished core and periphery by referring to them as *metropole* for developed capitalist states and *satellite* for underdeveloped states. He argued that metropole-satellite relations are also found at the international level. Frank argued that the most underdeveloped states are those that have had previous relations with metropolises. However, he acknowledges that there also exist opportunities for satellites to develop, especially in times of war.

Another major work related to the Marxist thought is the world-system theory of *Immanuel Wallerstein*. Wallerstein proposed a system whose structure comprised the *core*, *semi-periphery*, and *periphery*. He argues that capitalism is the driving force of the expansion, which he defines as “as system of production for sales in a market for profit and appropriation of this profit on the basis of individual and collective ownership” (as cited in Baylis et al. 147). However, Wallerstein’s *world-system theory* received continuous and significant critiques by *Andre Günter Frank*. Frank argued that the world system was far older than Wallerstein had presented it and has functioned based on the same process of capital accumulation (Frank and Gills 1996, 4).

Lastly, Marxist theories also include *Gramscianis*, given after the name of the Italian Marxist *Antonio Gramsci*. Gramsci was the first to make a detailed analysis on the

concept of *hegemony*. Gramsci argues that it is the hegemony of the ruling class that allows the moral, political, and cultural values of the dominant group to be broadly disperse throughout society and to be accepted by subordinate groups and classes as their own (Baylis et al. 2008, 150). This process takes place through the institutions of the civil society and hegemony is achieved when those values are considered to be “common sense”. According to Gramsci, a given order is defined by the historic bloc, which is a “mutual reinforced” and “reciprocal relationship” between the socioeconomic relations (base) and political and cultural practices (superstructure) (2008, 150). The ideas of Gramsci were applied later by his supporters to define the international system. Other Marxist theories include *critical theory* and *New Marxism*, both of which do not play a significant role in the field of international relations.

As we may realize, each of these theories presented here has a unique view of the world affairs. Despite similarities, they all see the world from different angles and have different principal approaches. However, just a few of these theories provide comprehensible explanations of the reality of the world’s politics. *Offensive realism* theory of international relations is one of these theories. It provides an objective and rational approach to the issues of the international relations and clearly defines the nature of these relations. This study endeavors to prove that the security and foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is guided by the main principles of the theory of offensive realism. The following case studies will be used to validate this assumption.

## Chapter Seven

### Iran's Policy During the Iran-Iraq War

The *Iran-Iraq War* was the first event to reveal the true nature of the security and foreign policy of the Islamic Iran. Despite the reduction of the military expenditures and the decrease of power after the revolution, the new Islamic regime inherited from the Shah's regime a modernized army capable of challenging any other state in the region. During the 1978, Iran had spent over 15 percent of its total *Gross Domestic Product* (GDP) on building its military capabilities (Geller and Singer 1998, 147). In 1978, Iran ground forces comprised three major field armies. Combat forces included three armored divisions, three infantry divisions, and four independent brigades. In addition, Iran inherited formidable air forces that included 460 combat aircraft (many of which were Tomcat fighters), spread in 14 air bases, and close to 100,000 men in personnel (1998, 147). Moreover, the navy forces included three destroyer, eight frigates, three diesel submarines, and twenty-four missile patrol boats. In 1979, the Iranian armed forces numbered 415,000 men in active duty (1998, 147). In 1980, months before the outbreak of the war, Iran had oil revenue exceeding \$26 billion (Karsh 2002, 14).

On the other hand, Iraq possessed a lesser military capabilities, compare to Iran. Iraq increased its military capabilities during the period between 1972 and 1980. In 1972, Iraq spent approximately fourteen percent of its *Gross Domestic Product* (GDP) in advancing and strengthening its military power (Geller and Singer 1998, 147). In 1980, the military expenditure increased drastically to twenty-one percent of the GDP of the country. In addition, at the same time, Iraq numbered 212,000 men in the armed forces,

of which 28,000 were part of the air forces and 4,000 men in navy forces (1998, 148). This was an indication that Iran was far superior in naval power, despite the fact that Iraq had a force of ten patrol boats equipped with surface-to-surface missiles. In 1977, the army comprised four armored divisions, two mechanized divisions, four infantry divisions, one independent armored brigade, and the Republican Guard mechanized brigade (1998, 148). To provide its army with sufficient expertise, Iraqi government collaborated with 2,000 Soviet advisors (1998, 148).

The war started less than six years after Iran and Iraq had signed what is called *The 1975 Algiers Agreement*. It was an agreement between both states to settle the borders dispute and to stop interference in internal affairs of each country. One main dispute involved the issue of the oil-rich and multi-ethnic province of *Khuzestan*, which borders Iraq. Due to the Arab (or non-Persian) majority of the province, Iraq claimed the historical right to control it. The disputes also involved the Iraq's claim about several small islands in the Persian Gulf that were occupied by the Iranian military. Moreover, the *Shatt al-Arab* waterway was another territorial dispute between Iraq and Iran. Due to Iraq's very limited access to the *Persian Gulf*, the control of the *Shatt al-Arab* waterway would become an economic and strategic gain for Iraq. Parties signed the *Algiers Agreement* under the promise to permanently stop the disputes and to restore good relationship and mutual cooperation. The promise for brotherhood between two countries soon turned into a war of destruction for many years to come.

As mentioned previously, for some scholars, the war was the latest manifestation of the Arab-Persian struggle for the domination of the Gulf region. For some others, the war was just the extension of the historic struggle for power between Sunni (Iraq) and the

Shi'a Islam (Iran). And for many others, the Iran-Iraq war was a struggle for power and dominance of the regional politics, following the decline of the Iranian power and Saddam's quest to become the new "policeman of the region". Before him, the Shah of Iran had argued that "the responsibility for maintaining Gulf security lay solely with the local states and that no external states were to be allowed to interfere in the affairs of the region" (Karsh 2002, 7). The Shah strongly believed that the military capability endowed Iran with the "historical and the geopolitical obligation" to be the "guardian of the Gulf". The Shah's doctrine can be compared to the *Monroe Doctrine* of the United States in the Western hemisphere and to the *Brezhnev Doctrine* of the Soviets in the Eastern Europe. The ambition of Saddam made no difference from that of the Shah.

However, the situation in the region changed rapidly and radically after the triumph of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 and the growing hostility between the Islamic government and the United States, especially after the Islamic conquest of the U.S. embassy in Tehran. For Iraq, the revolution could expand its impact in other regions of the Persian Gulf, and a potential Islamic Shi'a movement would be a serious threat to the Iraqi regime. In addition, as mentioned previously, the Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, perceived Iran as an easy target due to the vulnerability created internally by the revolution, the reduction of Iran's military power due to the U.S. cancellation of military aid after the conquest of the U.S. embassy, the demoralization of the army forces, systematic coups, and persecution and execution of many well-known political figures. This perception was strengthened by the assumption that by losing the American support, Iran had lost the political and military support from the West. Saddam also perceived a shift in military balance would favor Iraq. He thought that through war he would increase

the power and the influence of Iraq in the region. To all this can be added the Saddam's desire to make Iraq the hegemony of the region

Following this perception, on September 22, 1980, Iraq launched a full-scale invasion of Khuzistan. As many would have predicted, the international community did not condemn the Iraq invasion of Iran, instead, the United Nations Security Council called for immediate cease-fire and the withdrawal of the military troops to the pre-war borders. Sir Anthony Parsons, a British Ambassador to the United Nations at that time, stated that the continuation of the hostage crisis had left Iran alone in the international stage of diplomacy (Ansari 2006, 98). In response to the invasion, the Islamic government of Iran mobilized the regular army, the *Pasdaran*, and *Basij* volunteers, including young boys and girls. The regime emphasized the notions of *Ashoura*, *Karbala*, *Hussein*, and the Shi'a martyrdom. The Iraqi invasion of Iran unified Iran, consolidated the power of the Islamic Revolution, and undermined the moderate actors of the revolutionary coalition (Milani, 1994, 207).

However, Israel and the United States were two other major actors that played a significant role on the conduct and the outcomes of the Iran-Iraq war. Throughout the war, the United States and Israel provided military assistance to both sides, depending on the course of the war. Previous to the fall of Shah in 1979, the Iranian-Israeli relations were friendly and very productive. In the early 1950, Iran *de facto* recognized the state of Israel. Relations between these two states were influenced by the fear that both countries had from other Arab countries in the region. Both countries had realized that it was through the cooperation with each other that they would be able to keep the regional

balance of power and confront Arabs. According to a 1979 CIA report on Mossad (Israeli Secret Service)

*“The main purpose of the Israeli relationship with Iran was the development of a pro-Israel and anti-Arab policy on the part of Iranian officials. Mossad has engaged in joined operation with SAVAK over the years since the late 1950s. Mossad aided SAVAK activities and supported the Kurds in Iraq. The Israeli also regularly transmitted to the Iranians intelligence reports on Egypt's activities in the Arab countries, trend and developments in Iraq, and communist activities affecting Iran.”* (as cited in Tarock 1998, 104)

Their relations increased significantly in the mid-1970s when both countries reached an agreement through which Israel would provide military assistance to Iran in exchange for oil. This was in continuance of the Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi’s saying that “neither Iran nor Israel wants to be alone in a sea of Arabs.” (as cited in 1998, 103)

However, the victory of Islamic Revolution in 1979 severely damaged relations between two countries. The new Islamic regime closed the Israeli embassy in Tehran and, ironically, gave it to the Israeli's sworn enemy—*Palestinian Liberation Organization* (PLO). Another great event would shake the regional politics in the Middle East—Iraq would launch the invasion of Iran in September 1980. Having destroyed the relations with Israel, Iran was now being in a situation that Shah had warned about—“alone in a sea of Arabs”. For Israel, this was the best opportunity to re-instate relations with Iran in order to further its interests and to stop Iraq from gaining power. A powerful Sunni Iraq would become a far greater danger for the state of Israel compare to the danger coming from a powerful Iran. In case of a victor Iraq, Israel would be “alone in a



sea of Arabs”. However, in the case of a victor Iran, neither Israel nor Sunni Arabs would allow a powerful Iran to dominate the Middle East. For Iranians, they had to fight for their survival. In order to do so, Iran had to substantially increase its military capabilities.

In his theory of *offensive realism*, John Mearsheimer argues that there are four main strategies through which a state can gain power relative to the others. First, states gain power by going to war with the other rival states. In our case, Iraq was the aggressor and Iran would need a powerful military arsenal to confront Iraq and win the war. The acquisition of military capabilities to survive the attack became the paramount goal of the Islamic Iran. Second, states gain power by threatening rival states to use military forces against them--”*blackmail*”. Iran did not have this privilege because it was already the victim of an aggression. Third, the *bait and bleed* strategy causes to rivals to engage in a “protracted war”, so that “they bleed each other white, while the baiter remains on sideline with its military strength intact” (Mearsheimer 2001, 147-155). This is the case when one state causes other state to go in war with each other and the “baiter” would be free in the future to expand its power. In our case, Iran could not be an instigator of an aggression of which it would be a potential victim. The last strategy that states implement to gain power is the *bloodletting* strategy, which aims at causing rival states to fight against each other in a long and costing conflict. This last strategy provides significant explanation to the strategy followed by Iran, Israel, and the United States during the Iraq-Iran war. Iran and Israel were bounded by the same interests. Iran needed weapons to survive the aggression from Iraq, which means following the *war strategy*. On the other hand, by providing weapons to Iran, Israel would make sure that Iran and Iraq would wage a prolonged war against each other and cause each other to “bleed white”. A long

and costing conflict would weaken both Iran and Iraq and would keep Israel in a more secure position. Thus, by promoting this strategy, Israel “kills two birds with one stone”—It destroys both Iran's and Iraq's military capabilities and reduces their influence in the region. This would also allow Israel to maintain the *status quo* of the balance of power. Despite the interests of Israel in a long and costing Iraq-Iran war, Iran had to acquire military capabilities in order to survive. The hostage crisis and the Iranian anti-Western rhetoric discouraged Western powers from providing military assistance to Iran. Military capabilities provided by Washington during the Shah's reign were either destroyed or needed spare parts.

While the United States and Israel were using *bait and bleed* and *bloodletting* strategies to increase their influence and power in *the Middle East*, Iran was facing a situation in which its survival was at stake. It was this need for survival that would lead Iran to cooperating with the *Small Satan* and the *Great Satan*. Indeed, Israel expressed its concerns soon after Iraq invaded Iran. In a press conference, the Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan called on the United States to forget the past events (especially the hostage crisis that was continuing at that time) and to provide assistance to Iran (Parsi 2007, 105). Ariel Sharon, then the Israeli Defense Minister, also emphasized the importance of assisting Iran in this war. He warned U.S. of any possible Soviet intervention in Iran.

All these concerns prepared the stage for what is known as the *Operation Seashell* (Bergman 2008, 40-48). This secret operation was implemented by Israel and aimed at providing Iran with weapons to fight against Iraq. For Israel, there were four main reasons to support Iran: (1) Israel hoped that by helping Iran and Khomeini in this situation would ease relationship between two states; (2) Israel hoped that by providing

arms to Iran, it would cause the war to intensify and increase the possibility for mutual destruction (This strategy reminds us of the *bloodletting* strategy); (3) by supporting Iran, Israel aimed at diminishing the threat coming from a possible victorious Saddam; and (4) the Israeli weapons industry sought to make money through this opportunity (Bergman 2008, 43).

Due to its desperate need for weapons to stop Iraqi invasion, Iran was willing to buy weapons from everyone, including *the Great and Small Satans* (Milani 1994, 212). The first deal under *the operation seashell* was made by Israel through an Iranian arms dealer and a French intermediary. It included the purchase of 250 tires for *Phantom* jet fighters, communication equipment, 106mm recoilless guns, ammunitions, and mortars (Bergman 2008, 44). The operation continued later through a Portuguese arms dealer named George Piniol. For Iranians, the deals were conducted under the close surveillance and patronage of Dr. Sadeq Tabatabai, who was a distant relative to Khomeini and a very credible person to the Supreme Leader. Tabatabai identified himself as a representative of the Defense Council of the Revolution, which held considerable power within the power structure and was the primary actor of Iran's security and intelligence system. Piniol began his first deal with the purchase by Iranian of 150 M-40 antitank guns and 24,000 shells for each gun. Iranians had provided Piniol with a detailed list about the items to be bought. The list included spare parts for tanks and aircraft engines, shells for 106mm recoilless rifles and for 130mm, 203mm, and 175mm guns, and TOW vehicle-mounted launchers and missiles (2008, 45).

The Israeli technology and arms company Elul realized that everything Iran needed was available in the warehouse of the *Israel Aircraft Industries* (IAI) and the

*Israel Military Industries*. Some of the items needed by the Iranians were in the *Israel Defense Forces Stockpiles*. The arsenal planned to be given to the Iranians included a total of 360 tons of spare parts and ammunitions. In order to avoid any possible scandal, Piniol managed to get officials of the Argentinean airline *Transporte Aereo Rioplatense* to conduct the transportation of the military arsenal to Iran. This deal included eighteen flights, with each flight carrying twenty tons of spare parts and ammunitions. The total cost to be paid by Iran was \$75 million (2008, 45). In mid-1981, an Argentinean plane carrying military supplies from Israel to Iran crashed in the Soviet Union borders with Turkey (Tarock 1998, 106). However, this incident did not stop the operation. It needs to be mentioned that besides Piniol's deals, there existed many other channels through which Israel sold arms to Iran. According to another arm dealer working at that time for the Iranian government, approximately 80 percent of the weapons sold to Iran soon after the beginning of the war came from Israel (Parsi 2007, 106). It was due to this weaponry support from Israel that Iran managed to turn the tide of the war to its advantages.

Based on Mearsheimer's theory of *offensive realism*, the United States would behave as an *offshore balancer* of power and would suppress any tentative made by any state to reach the status of a regional hegemony. Fearing that Iraq (in case of victory against Iran) would elevate itself to a regional hegemon, the Americans saw Iran as the main actor at the opportune time to stop Iraq from reaching that status. In addition to this strategy, the Americans sought to prevent the Soviets from increasing their influence in Iran and in the region. However, once the American officials realized that Iran was gaining strength, they immediately launched an anti-Iran strategy. This strategy consisted of supporting Iraq both directly and indirectly, financially and militarily. In 1982, the

U.S. State Department removed Saddam from the department's list of "sponsors of terrorism", and in 1984, diplomatic relations with Baghdad were established. Also, in 1984, the Reagan administration launched the *Operation Staunch*, which aimed at stopping the flow of arms to Iran. The first effect of this new operation was the downing of an Iranian F-4 plane from an Arab F-15 in May 1984. This opened the way for U.S. to provide military assistance to Arabs, which included 400 Stinger missiles, 200 missile launchers, and the deployment of a CENTCOM KC-10 tanker aircraft (Marschall 2003, 183). Iraq also became the largest importer of weapons in the region. The Soviets became the main providers of arms for Iraq. The West Germany also assisted Iraq in building chemical and biological weapons, which were used later by Saddam against Kurds and Iranians. France provided Iraq with aircraft and long-range bombers. The Iran-Iraq war became a concern when Iraq began the *tanker war*, which consisted of attacks on oil-transporting ships in the Persian Gulf. This type of war endangered the U.S. interests in the Gulf. The U.S. navy soon became involved in this type of war by supporting Iraq and attacking the Iranian navy.

Meanwhile, another affair would shake the international community, especially the politics of Iran, Israel, and the United States. This affair came to be known as the *Iran-Contra* affair and consisted of illegal arms support from U.S. and Israel to Iran in exchange for hostages and money for *Contras* in Nicaragua. The *Iran-Contra* affair, which became public in November of 1986, became the first major (public) event to question the ideological approach of Iran's authorities on security and foreign policy in the region. Being under the persistent threat from Iraq, Iranian leadership was willing to trade their Shi'a ideological for the ultimate ideology of survival in the international

system of politics. Both the “Great” and the “Small Satan” could supply Iran with military capabilities that Iran so desperately needed to confront Iraq. This opened the stage for the *Iran-Contra* affair, which engaged Iran, Israel, and U.S., altogether.

The idea to circumvent the *Operation Staunch* was first planned at a meeting in Hamburg in late 1984 between several Israelis (arms dealers and political advisers) with close ties to high-ranking Israelis officials and the Iranian arms dealer Manuchehr Ghobanifar, a close collaborator of the powerful head of the *Majles*, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafshanjani. Iran was in a desperate need for spare parts and other weaponry assistance. The operational capabilities of the Iranian Air Forces were drastically lowered after the 1982 offensive and due to the absence of spare parts. This problem became a priority concern when Saddam launched *the War of the Cities* attack on Iran through aerial bombardments (Ansari 2006, 109). They realized that Israel would be the best intermediary to convince the Americans to provide spare parts weapons for the Iranian army. Rafsanjani, a high-profile Shi’a clergy and a close collaborator to Khomeini, gave clear indications that Iran was in a desperate need to restock its military arsenal even though a collaboration of the United States.

The Americans joined the plot in the summer of 1985. In July, President Reagan authorized contacts with the Iranian authorities, and in August he gave the “green light” for the operation to begin. Through the secret negotiations, the United States aimed at releasing the U.S. citizens taken hostages by the Lebanese Shi’ite terrorist organization *Hezbollah*, preventing the Soviet expansion in Iran, stabilizing the oil prices, and collecting money for *Contras* in Nicaragua (Marschall 2003, 183). Based on the report of the Congressional Committee investigating the *Iran-Contra* affair, U.S. provided Iran,

through two weapons shipments, to Iran, with 504 TOW missiles (Hamilton and Inouye 1987, 169). The report of the Congressional Committees investigating the *Iran-Contra* affair, among other things, argued:

*“Tehran had its own agenda. Rhetoric notwithstanding—the United States was considered 'The Great Satan' and Israel a blasphemy—Tehran wanted modern tanks and high-technology antitank and anti-aircraft missiles to encounter Iraq's Soviet-made fighter planes and modern tanks. It needed spare parts to maintain the arsenal of weapons that the Shah had purchased from the United States.”* (1987, 163)

According to one source, with assistance from Israel, the United States secretly provided Iran through six shipments with more than 2,000 TOW anti-tank missiles, 235 Hawk anti-aircraft missiles, and considerable spare parts, all of which with a cost of about \$64 million (Marschall 2003, 183). At the same time, the Americans provided Iraq with military intelligence and AWACS planes. According to another source, weaponry shipments occurred as follow: on August 20<sup>th</sup> 1985 were shipped 96 TOW missiles, on September 14<sup>th</sup> were shipped 408 TOWs, on November were shipped Hawks missiles, and on February 19<sup>th</sup> 1986 were shipped 500 TOWS (Wroe 1991, ii-iii). On May 23<sup>rd</sup>, an American delegation headed by the former national security advisor, Robert McFarlane, went to Tehran for direct talks about the hostage issues, taking with them Hawk spare parts. The shipments continued in August and October.

On the beginning of November, a Beirut magazine published details of McFarlane's trip to Tehran. This information was leaked to the newspaper by Mehdi Hashemi, an associate of Ayatollah Ali Montazeri. Montazeri was at that time the designated successor to Khomeini's office and a fierce opponent of Rafsanjani. This

event cost Montazeri his political career. The irony of the fact is that Hashemi who revealed the secret dealings with U.S and Israel was executed by the Islamic regime and Rafsanjani who orchestrated the dealings remained free and untouchable from the regime. In addition, leaders of the two countries, of U.S. and Iran, both refuted the fact of having information about the secret dealings. Surprisingly, after such controversies, they both promoted aggressive policies and rhetoric against each other.

Thus, based on the above information, the Iran-Iraq war serves as a good indicator to define the main factors that shaped the security and foreign policies of states involved in this affair. Both Iran and Iraq possessed significant military capabilities. The history has shown Iran to be suspicious of the intentions of other neighboring countries like Iraq. Agreements like the *1975 Algiers Agreement* did little to stop Iraq from invading Iran. It was the shift in the balance of power favoring Iraq that created the premises for Iraq to attack Iran. On the other hand, Iran's ultimate ideology of survival dominated any other ideological predisposition. The need for survival led Iranian leaders to enter in secret negotiations with countries they considered the *Great* and the *Small Satans*. These negotiations helped Iran increase its military capabilities in order to survive the Iraqi invasion. Israel and the United States, on the other hand, entered the negotiations for different reasons. Israel needed to prevent any disturbance of the balance of power in the region that would jeopardize Israel's security and survival. Its goal to diminish the Iranian and Iraqi power and influence in the region through the *bloodletting* strategy became a priority for the Israelis. Moreover, the Iran-Iraq war reveals the role of the United States as the “offshore balancer”. Its goal was to not allow any state to reach the status of the regional hegemony that would upset the balance of power.



## Chapter Eight

### Iran's Policy Toward the Russian-Chechen Conflict

Why studying the *Russian-Chechen conflict* as pertinent case in analyzing Iran's security and foreign policy? The answer is simple: Because Chechnya is a republic predominantly of Muslim population and Russia has been historically a threat to the Iranian sovereignty. According to 2002 census, Chechnya had a population of 1.1 million, 93.5% of whom were Muslims. The *Article 3(16)* of the Islamic Constitution of Iran enumerates that the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has the duty of directing all its resources to, among others, the goal of “framing the foreign policy of the country on the basis of Islamic criteria, fraternal commitment to all Muslims, and unsparing support to the freedom fighters of the world”. On the other hand, as analyzed previously, Iran still has fresh memories of the *Russian-Persian* wars which resulted in the signing of the *Treaty of Gulistan* (1813) and the *Treaty of Turkomanchai* (1826). Both these treaties annexed Iranian territories in favor of Russia. The *Anglo-Soviet* invasion of 1941 reminds Iranians that history may repeat itself. Thus, Iran has all the reasons to fear its neighboring Russia.

During the era of the Soviet Empire, Chechnya, together with *Ingushetia*, formed an autonomous republic under the jurisdiction of the federal government. The collapse of the Soviet Union was followed by a Chechen independence movement led by the former Soviet air force general Dzhokar Dudayev. On October 27<sup>th</sup> 1991, the Chechen *Central Election Commission* held presidential and parliamentary elections, which were won by

Dudayev by a plebiscite vote (Graney 2004, 122). On November 1<sup>st</sup> of the same year, Dudayev issued decree declaring the Chechen Republic a “sovereign state”. The parliament ratified the decree the next day. For Dudayev, his supporters, and the Russian authorities in Moscow this meant a *de facto* declaration of independence and an act of secession from the Russian Federation (2004, 122). Boris Yeltsin, then the head of the federation, reacted fiercely by imposing martial law in the Chechen Republic and sending 600 federal troops of the Interior Ministry to Chechnya. Faced with a strong Chechen opposition, the federal troops failed to complete their mission. This opened the stage for a long-term conflict between Chechen separatists and the Russian federal troops.

The conflict escalated from 1994 to 1996 in what is called the *First Chechen War*. For the Russians, the war against the Chechens became a proactive strategic movement that would prevent other republics from demanding secession. For the Chechen forces, it became a war of independence and of survival. The results of this war were tragic. The number of casualties (including Chechen and Russian troops and civilians) up to February of 1995 varied from 5,000 to 35,000, depending on the source (Seely 2001, 258). The “storming of Grozny” by the federal troops caused the displacement and killing of thousands of civilians. During the 21 months of the first Chechen war, nearly 40%, (400,000 to 600,000 people) of the Chechen pre-war population was displaced from their homes and fled to neighboring republics (Global Security.org n.d.; Holland 2004, 335).

The *Second Chechen War*, which began in 1999 and continued until the restoration of the federal government, increased the scale of atrocities conducted against the civilian population on both sides. In their quest to crush Chechen separatists, the Russian forces perpetrated extra-legal and summary executions, forced disappearance,

tortures, rapes, attacks and assassination of civilians, and other horrendous crimes (Holland 2004, 336).

Seeing that the profile of Chechnya's population is predominantly of Muslim population and that it was fighting for their own freedom against a non-Muslim (Christian) country, many would believe that Iran would side with Chechnya to condemn the Russian aggression. The Constitution of Iran clearly demands the government to frame its foreign policy based on “*Islamic criteria*, fraternal commitment to all Muslims, and unsparing support to the freedom fighters of the world”. Iran had previously followed this constitutional obligation in the Middle East by supporting the Palestinian cause and by promoting aggressive policies against the Israeli and the U.S. involvement in the region. Iran, like no other Muslim state, has relentlessly condemned Israel’s and the U.S. policies in the Middle East, considering them anti-Islam policies. The U.S. involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan are two other cases in which the Iranian fierce rhetoric has received a prime-time focus. Not only was Iran vehemently supporting its Muslim brothers in Middle East, but it was also supporting every Muslim cause around the globe. Not only was it providing support for its Shi’a brothers of *Hezbollah*, but it was also providing assistance to its Sunni counterpart, *Al Qaeda*. Thus, rarely we can find news from the Muslim world where Iran has had no blueprint on it.

However, as strange as it may sound, the Iranian policy toward the Russian-Chechen conflict was completely different from the other cases mentioned previously. While many other Muslim countries condemned the Russian aggression on Chechnya, it became obvious that Iran had no intention of jeopardizing its “fruitful relations” with Russia. It was not a common political relationship. It was “a strategic relationship”

(Freedman 2000, 70). It was the time again for Iran to set aside its ideological predispositions. In March 1996, months before the end of *the First Chechen War*, the Iranian Foreign Minister, Ali Akbar Velayati, in a visit to Moscow, stated that Iranian-Russian relations were “at their highest level in contemporary history” (as cited in 2000, 71). In 1999, then the Iranian Foreign Minister, Kamal Kharrazi, expressed this political position to his Russian counterpart, Igor Ivanov, by adding that Tehran was ready “to undertake effective collaboration in the struggle against terrorists to destabilize the situation in Russia” (as cited in Samii 2001, 49). Russian diplomats responded by stating that the Iranian policy toward the Chechen conflict promised for productive bilateral relations between two countries.

In 1999, Iran became the head of the *Organization of the Islamic Conference* (OIC). This new position obligated Iran to serve and protect the welfare of all Muslims around the world. Despite this fact, Iran’s policy toward Russia did not show any significant change. The Iranian rhetoric against the Russian invasion of Chechnya was sporadic and without resonance. In the midst of the *Second Chechen War*, in early January 2000, President Sayyed Mohammed Khatami congratulated Vladimir Putin on assuming the office of the Russian President and emphasized the hopes for further intensification of contacts with Moscow (Malek 2008, 2). Vladimir Putin was then the Prime Minister and one of the leading Russian strategists of the Russian-Chechen conflict. In 2003, Hamid Reza Assefi, the Iranian representative of the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs, declared that the conflict was an “internal affair” of Russia:

*“We tolerate all measures of Russia that are peaceful and aimed at respecting and guaranteeing the rights of Russia's multinational population, including the*

*Muslims. Iran welcomes the respect the Russian Federation pays to the many representatives of the Islamic faith and, by all means, considers the problem with the Chechen Republic to be an internal Russian affair.”* (as cited in Malek 2008, 2)

The Chechen's field commander Chechen field commander Shamil Basayev adamantly responded to the Iranian statements that the war was Russia's "internal affair". In an open letter to the Iranian leadership, Basayev asked a series of questions which questioned the Islamic ideology of the Iranian government. Among others, he questioned:

*“Since when have the infidels become closer to you than the Muslims?”, “Who released you from Jihad?”, “Why is the murder of Muslims an internal affair for the infidels?”, “If Ichkeria [Chechnya] is Russia’s internal affair, why is Iran not the U.S.A.’s internal affair?”, “Is it not better to be terrorists in the eyes of the infidels than hypocrites in the eyes of God?”, and “Iran is the closest neighbor of the Caucasus and Chechnya. Is it not your direct duty before God . . . in accordance with Sharia, to take part in Jihad and support the Muslims waging war for Islam?”* (as cited in Samii 2001, 50)

For Chechens, Iran had become an agent of Russia from whom they could not hope for support. Despite the main theme of the Iranian foreign policy toward Russia-Chechen conflict, in 2005, rumors were spread to indicate that *Iranian Revolutionary Guard* had used its training camps to train Chechen fighters and launch them back in battlefields of Chechnya. However, these rumors did not have any significant impact on Iran-Russia cooperation.

In addition, other Muslim countries and organizations responded to the Chechen

conflict by focusing their attacks mostly on Russia. Allahshukur Pashazade, head of the *Spiritual Board of Muslims* of the Caucasus, declared that regardless of its statements “from the very beginning up to now the Russian empire has been against the Muslim religion and Muslims”(2001, 51). Furthermore, the Egyptian Foreign Minister Amir Musa commented that “in the future meeting of the OIC foreign ministers, top priority should be given to the Chechnya crisis, and it is essential that the Islamic states adopt united stances on this issue” (2001, 51). In addition, Usamah al-Baz, political advisor to the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, “emphasized that the method of deploring and condemning aggression was not the ideal treatment of the tragedy of the Chechen people” (2000, 51). The government of Afghanistan acted aggressively by recognizing the independence of Chechnya and stated that “It is not justifiable for the Islamic countries to turn their back on the Chechen nation in the name of their international expediencies” (2001, 52). In order to defend their position toward the conflict, the Iranian officials declared that the Chechen rebel forces “were backed by ‘external forces’ which were enemies of Iran and Russia alike”, referring to the involvement of the U.S. and Turkey (Malek 2008, 4). Besides admitting the fact that Iran was not supporting Chechen movement, this excuse did little to justify in the eyes of the other Muslim states Iran’s policy toward the Chechen conflict.

The Iranian policy toward the Russian-Chechen conflict brings forth the questions: “Why didn't Iran support its Muslim brothers in Chechnya?” and “Why did Iran side with Russia?” This brings up the main argument of this study, which states that the Iranian security and foreign policy is guided by its *ultimate ideology* of survival and the main principles of the offensive realism. Iran's cooperation with Russia and its neutral

position during the Chechen struggle for freedom is a product of an Iranian rational choice. Iran calculated and feared that a support for the Chechens would cause Russia to stop providing military assistance and military-related technology that Iran so desperately needed. In addition, in supporting the Chechen separatist movement, Iran would inadvertently encourage the Azeri separatist movement in Northwestern Iran, or fearing that Russia would support the separatist movements in Iran in a retaliatory strategy. Thus, the main strategy leading the security and foreign policy of the Islamic Iran toward Russian-Chechen conflict was to enhance its military capabilities and to prevent any separatist movements within its territory. The paramount goal leading to this strategy was the survival of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its sovereignty.

Since its birth, the major threat to the Islamic Republic of Iran has been the subversive regional strategy of the United States. The United States came out of *the Cold War* victorious and more powerful. More important, there was no other great power capable of challenging its domination of the international system. Russia was suffering from radical changes in its political and economic system. China was struggling with its economy, and Europe had its own problems at home. The other powers were looking at U.S. to launch its new post-Cold War strategy from which they might profit. The Islamic Republic of Iran had seen U.S as the major threat to its existence. In January of 1995, U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher openly called for an overthrow of the Islamic regime by stating: “We must isolate Iraq and Iran until there is a change in their governments, a change in their leadership” (as cited in Gerges 1999, 132). Some considered this reaction as being part of Christopher's past experience with Iran when the hostage crisis vanished his hopes to be Secretary of State under the Carter administration.

In addition, there had been prevailing assumptions among the Iranian leadership that the primary goal of the United States was to change the Islamic regime.

However, many may consider the security relationship with Russia to be an anomaly because Iran historically has seen Russians with a deep suspicion. Russians, alone and in collaboration with the British forces, had conquered and annexed territories that previously belonged to the Persian Empire. They had sought to divide Iran into spheres of influence. In order to ensure its regime survival, Iran's leadership put the emphasis on military capabilities and decided to increase its capabilities by cooperating with the Russian Federation, after having relied for decades on U.S. military assistance and weapons. At the same time, Iran would rely on U.S. to avoid any possible aggressive tentative by the Russians to extent their influence in Iran. This was the same strategy that Iran followed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Russia and the Great Britain struggled with each other for the domination of Iran. At that time, Iran played the role of the balancer. While the Americans might have not liked the current Iranian regime, they would (inadvertently) have played the role of the Iranian defender by not allowing any Russian expansion in its former “protectorate”. Thus, Iran was protected by both the United States and Russia. Iran was also, at the same time, playing the role of the balancer. The situation would have changed only if the two great powers (U.S. and Russia) would have reached a consensus regarding Iran. That would have been very dangerous for Iran. Russia, on its part, would have supported Iran, motivated by the goal to minimize the U.S. influence in the Middle East. As the offensive realism also maintains, the Iranian leaders recognized that the more military capabilities they gained, the more secure they would be from the foreign dominance and invasion. Besides the traditional military arsenal, the Iranians



realized that possessing nuclear capability would dramatically increase their power and influence and would ensure their survival.

Tentative to expand its military power had started in 1989 when Iran launched an ambitious effort to rebuild its military potential and transform itself into a regional military power. Iran's military arsenal at that time included 100-200 combat aircraft; 1,000-2,000 armored vehicles; several submarines; and as many as a dozen missile boats (Eisenstadt, 2001). Parallel with this military strategy, Iran had accelerated its tentative to enhance its missile technology, which culminated on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2009 with the launching of the first satellite into space (Fathi and Broad, 2009). Having a sophisticated missile technology would give Iran significant advantage in fighting against other aggressive states, which cannot be reached by the conventional weapons in Iran's disposition. It also would provide Iran with the capability to deliver warheads to distanced locations.

The first main agreement between Iran and Russia dated back in 1989 when Rafsanjani negotiated with the Soviets in Moscow. Russia inherited this agreement and implemented part of the agreement due to the Russian demand for direct payment and the Iranian lack of economic power to buy them all. From this agreement, Iran received 422 T-72 tanks, 413 BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles, and self-propelled artillery; SA-5 and SA-6 surface-to-air missiles (SAMs); 12 Su-24 and 24 MiG-29 fighters; and three Kilo-class submarines, along with advanced torpedoes and mines (Eisenstadt 2001; Samii 2001, 55). Meanwhile, U.S. feared that the Iranian arsenal could destabilize the balance of power in the region and forced the Russians to stop their transfer of technology and military capabilities to Iran. Under the American pressure, the Russian President Boris

Yeltsin pledged to stop the arms trade with Iran in September 1994. In June of 1995, Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and the U.S. Vice President Al Gore signed an agreement in which Russia promised to “fulfill existing contracts by the end of 1999 and would not sign any new ones” (Eisenstadt 2001).

Despite the *Gore-Chernomyrdin Agreement*, the Russian and Iranian officials allegedly met in early 1997 to discuss new arms deals. These supposedly involved the possible sale of eight Su-25 attack aircraft; 25 Mi-17 transport helicopters; hundreds of T-72 tanks; 500-1,000 SA-16/18 Igla shoulder-launched SAMs; several battalions of SA-10 and SA-12 SAMs; air-surveillance radars; and several other items (Eisenstadt 2001). In violation of the agreement, Russia transferred to Iran other five Mi-17s starting in January 2000, while in November 2000, an Israeli newspaper reported “the imminent departure of a shipment” of 700 SA-16/18 Igla missiles for Iran (2001). In the middle of the *Second Chechen War*, in November of 2000, Russia officially nullified the *Gore-Chernomyrdin* agreement and together with Iran signed another agreement that would start a new phase in the military and technology cooperation.

However, acquiring military capabilities and power was not Iran's goal in itself. The real goal was to acquire military capabilities that would surpass the capabilities of other states in the region. This phenomenon deals with the main realist/neorealist concepts of *relative* and *absolute gains*. According to Joseph Grieco, states aim at increasing their power and influence (*absolute gains*) through cooperation with other states (as cited in Baylis, Smith, and Owens, 2008, p. 129). However, states are always concerned about the gains of other states in multilateral or bilateral cooperation (relative gains). In its cooperation with Russia, Iran aimed at increasing its regional power in

influence. Iran was not concerned about the relative gains of Russia because Russia was already significantly superior to Iran and U.S. was far superior to not allow Russia to threaten Iran's sovereignty or to disturb the balance of power. Indeed, Iran sought to use the absolute gains extracted from cooperation with Russia to increase its power and influence in the Middle East. This would create the premises for reaching the status of the regional hegemony, which in turn would provide more security for Iran. The Iran's nuclear ambition provided sufficient and credible support to this argument.

The Iran's nuclear ambitions date back in the *Shah* era, but they were reinvigorated in the midst of the Iran-Iraq war due to the perceived threat to its sovereignty coming from Iraq. Having the Germans abandoning the project following the Islamic Revolution, Iran relied on Soviets to pursue its nuclear ambitions. The Iran-Iraq war reminded the Iranians of the fact that the international system was anarchic and self-help and preparedness were the most effective ways to deal with possible foreign aggressions. In January 1995, Iran and Russia signed an agreement which dealt with the construction by the Russian specialists of a nuclear power plant at Bushehr. In July 2002, notwithstanding the U.S. opposition, Russia declared that it would help Iran build five additional nuclear reactors. Russian nuclear cooperation with Iran caused severe diplomatic disagreements between the United States and Russia. The Americans saw the Russian nuclear assistance to Iran as part of the Russian strategy to undermine the U.S. interests in the Middle East. Regardless of these disagreements, Iran's nuclear activity intensified in 1999. This intensification of the nuclear program happened in a time when the U.S. government was attempting to establish relations with Iran whose government was supposedly led by the reformers.

The nuclear program became an international issue in 2002 when it was revealed that Iran had secretly built fuel cycle facilities. The pursuit of the nuclear program had a little rationality to support the argument that its final product would be for economic purpose. The American leaders demanded Russia to not supply any nuclear fuel to the Bushehr reactor unless Iran agreed to send all used fuel back to Moscow. In addition to the American demands, Moscow should withhold the nuclear fuel until Iran signed an additional protocol with the *International Atomic Energy Agency* (IAEA) permitting that agency unannounced visits to all Iranian nuclear facilities (Freedman 2006, 19). This discovery caused the head of the IAEA, Muhammad Al Baradei, to visit Tehran in 2003. Al Baradei urged Iran to stop the nuclear activity and ratify the *Additional Protocol* (AP) with the *EU-3* (Great Britain, Germany, and France). Being under pressure from IAEA and fearing possible U.S. military action, Iran accepted and signed the agreement. Since then, Iran has systematically violated any agreement and broken any promise it has made to the international community. The Iranian-Russian nuclear cooperation still continues today, raising serious concerns about the outcome of this cooperation. This revelation and the future events that follow Iran's nuclear ambitions have given Iran a new status and profile in international arena.

However, the main questions that most political scientist and politicians face today are: (1) what is the goal of Iran in pursuing the nuclear program? and (2) what factors shape this goal? In following the principles of the offensive realism, the argument holds that Iran's nuclear program is an extension and growth of the military capabilities to insure the survival of the Islamic Republic. To insure its survival, Iran seeks to militarily dominate other states in the region. As a consequence, Iran aims at increasing its military

power until the status of the regional hegemony is achieved. Shahram Chubin argues that there are four main goals that drive Iran toward a nuclear capability (2006, 8-13). First, it is the goal to deter other countries from taking any possible military actions against Iran. The Iraqi invasion of Iran showed the importance of possessing sufficient military capabilities to deter attacks from hostile states. Possessing a nuclear arsenal would provide Iran with significant capability to retaliate against any military attack from outside. Facing retaliation, foreign forces would be reluctant to attack Iran due to their fear of a very costly conflict. Other forces are aware that this may lead to a mutual assured destruction (MAD). Second, a nuclear arsenal would increase the Iranian influence in the region. As previously mentioned, this is not a new idea for Iranians. It is an idea that dates back during the times of *Cyrus* and *Darius the Great*, idea that was revived during the Shah's era. Its history and the geographical location make the Iranian leaders believe that they are entitled to a privileged status in the Middle East, and probably in the world. Third, a nuclear arsenal would give Iran significant bargaining power in dealing with regional and global issues. Lastly, the nuclear program would be a nationalist card for regime legitimation. The new Islamic government considers the nuclear arsenal a powerful tool that would make Iran independent of other states and would ensure the survival of the regime. The fate of the nuclear program will also be the fate of the regime. Russia happened to be its strategic partner in achieving (or even coming closer to achieving) these paramount goals. As a rational actor, Iran would never jeopardize this productive and strategic relationship.

Lastly, the territorial integrity played a crucial role in shaping Iran's position toward the Russian-Chechen conflict. Iran feared that an independent Chechnya would

encourage minorities within Iran to strive for their independence. Potential separatist movements might come from Azeris in Northwest, Arabs in South, Kurds in West, Turkmen in Northeast, and Baluchis in Southeast of Iran. Iran had previously sided with a Christian country (Armenia) in its struggle against a Muslim country (Azerbaijan) in order to prevent any future separatist movement from growing in its Northern borders. This fear urged the Iranian Defense Ministry official Alireza Akbari to declare that Russian-Chechen conflict was a result of the threat that Chechen movement posed to the Russian territorial integrity. He also warned that “A victory for the separatist trends promoted by leaders of Chechen armed groups would trigger a domino effect in the region – the issue of territorial integrity of other countries in the region would arise” (as cited in Samii 2001, 55). Seeing that its neighbor Azerbaijan has the potential to instigate an Azeri’s separate movement in Northwest, Iran was determined to not provide any precedent that would act as a catalyst for such a movement. An anti-Russian foreign policy toward the Chechen conflict would also make Russia not only stop the military assistance, but it would also pursue an anti-Iranian policy by sponsoring the separatist movements, especially the Azeri's movement. Thus, Iran also saw the cooperation with Russia as the best ways to forestall and suppress any potential separatist movement that would threaten its territorial integrity.

## Chapter Nine

### Iran's Policy Toward Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict During the Post Soviet Era

The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict is another crucial event in understanding the security and foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. There are three main reasons for studying Iran's policy toward the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. First, both Armenia and Azerbaijan (Republic of Azerbaijan) are Iran's neighbors, which share land borders among each others. Iran and Azerbaijan border each other in the Caspian Sea and share about 611 kilometers of the land borders (Djalili 2002, 49-50). In addition, Iran borders the south of Armenia in a land borderline of 35 kilometers. The geostrategic location of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Iran raised certain geopolitical issues, including pipelines, division of the Caspian Sea, Nagorno Karabakh region, and the issue of Southern Azerbaijan. All the above issues set the stage for other great powers to be involved in regional politics. For example, the pipeline issue created two main groups with opposing interests. On the one hand, there was the bloc created by the Azerbaijani cooperation with the U.S., Turkey, European Union, and Georgia. On the other hand, there was the bloc comprising Russia, Iran, and Armenia, who found their interests challenged by the first bloc. When it came to the division of the Caspian Sea, alliances changed and became very complicated. Azerbaijan allied with Russia, Turkey, U.S., and Kazakhstan, while Iran was left on the other side with Turkmenistan. However, it needs to be emphasized that Russia saw the Turkish and the U.S. involvement in this matter with deep suspicion and concerns. The Nagorno-Karabakh issue, which was the main cause of the Armenian-

Azerbaijani conflict, created a new configuration of politics in the region and revealed the true nature of Iran's foreign policy toward both countries (analyzed below in this case study).

Second, both the Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan have been under the Iranian (Persian) domination for centuries. Armenia has been subject to conquests from the Persian Empire, starting with the conquests from Cyrus and Darius the Great and ending with conquests from the Safavid dynasty. Like Armenia, Azerbaijan has been part of the Persian Empire throughout the history, or of what was called the *Greater Iran*. However, during the Russo-Persian wars in the beginning of the 19th century, much of the Caucasus was occupied by the Russian troops and was formally ceded to Russia under the terms of the Treaties of *Gulistan* (1813) and *Turkmenchay* (1828) (mentioned earlier in the study). This event brought the creation of two "Azerbaijans"—the South and the North Azerbaijan. The *North Azerbaijan* became the *Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan* under the sovereignty of the Russian Empire. This part would declare its independence from the Russian domination in 1918, proclaiming the *Azerbaijani Democratic Republic* (ADR). However, in 1945, the new republic was invaded by the Soviet army and became part of the Soviet Empire. Azerbaijan restored its independence soon after the official demise of the Soviet Empire in late 1991. The Southern Azerbaijan was considered the Northwestern part of Iran populated by Azeris. Actually, there are more Azeris living in the Northwest Iran than are in the Republic of Azerbaijan (Freij 1996, 73). There is a lack of consensus regarding the actual number of Azeris population in the northwest of Iran. Some researches indicate that Azeris comprise from one-fifth to one-third of the Iranian population, while the total number varies from twenty to twenty-



seven million Azeris (Shaffer 2000, 473).

The third main reason to study Iran's policy toward Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict is the specific formation of the latter countries. At the time of the conflict, Armenia was predominantly a Christian country (approximately 95% of its population) and was characterized by uniqueness in religious practices and in spoken language. Despite their past engagements with each other, Armenians did not share much value and traditions with Iran. The majority of Armenians practiced an orthodox form of Christianity, and its church was named the *Armenian Apostolic Church*. It was the first nation to adopt Christianity as a state religion. On the other hand, Azerbaijan and Iran shared values from their mutual past and certain elements of a common culture. After Iran, Azerbaijan had the second largest Shi'i population in the world. The majority of the Azerbaijanis were of Turkic descent, and approximately 95% of its population was of the Muslim religion. Both countries were members of the Organization of Islamic Conference. Since 1918, Azerbaijan had been in a hostile and continuous conflict with its neighbor Armenia.

Just by looking at the demographics and the religious affiliations of both countries, we would assume that in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict the Islamic Iran would support its Muslim brothers in Azerbaijan. It was not a choice for Iran. It was a mandatory task given under the Islamic Constitution and a religious obligation to their fellow Muslims in need. Not only was Azerbaijan a Muslim country, but it was also fighting to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The conflict, as some may argue, had its roots in the awakening sense of identity that arose during the last years of the capitulation of the Ottoman Empire. The demise of

the Ottoman Empire set the stage for the promotion of the *Pan-Turkism* ideology, similar to the Gamal Abdel Nasser's *Pan-Arabism*. *Pan-Turkism* promoted a sense of national, linguistic, and historical commonality among the Turkic people (Croissant 1998, 8). The Armenians, on the other hand, began to create their own unique identity based on their history. Under the domination of the Ottoman Empire, they were considered by Turks as the "pro-Western fifth column" and became subject to persecution. This led the Ottomans to implement their strategy of "Armenian Question", which caused massive forced deportation of and massacres against the Armenian populace during 1895-1895 and 1915-1916 periods (1998, 5). The massacre itself, the lack of support from the Christian Europe, and other previous conquests produced the Armenian sense of uniqueness, vulnerability, and self-reliance (1998, 5). At the same time, the Armenians perceived the Azerbaijanis as Turks and grew a sense of animosity toward them.

The first confrontation between the Armenians and Azeris occurs in mid-1918 when Armenians began a large-scale aggression against Azerbaijan. The cause of the conflict was the Azerbaijani province of *Nagorno-Karabakh* that was populated by a popular majority of the Armenian descends. The Nagorno-Karabakh region was under the sovereignty of the Republic of Azerbaijan. At that time, both countries had proclaimed their independence after the dissolution of the *Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic* (incorporating Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia). However, both countries were soon occupied by the *11th Red Army* of Soviet Russia and the Soviet rule was established. The Soviet rule lasted until the official collapse of the Soviet Empire in late 1991.

The Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict was revived as a result of *perestroika* and

*glasnost* policies implemented in 1985 by the new general secretary of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev. These policies provided more political freedom for citizens and groups to express their concerns and objections about political matters. This new policy motivated the Nagorno-Karabakh regional parliament to vote in favor of unifying the autonomous region with Armenia on February 20, 1988. This decision was in response to the Armenian claims that Azerbaijan's government was maltreating the Armenian population, forcing the latter to abandon their homes. At that time, Armenians comprised approximately 74% of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh (Melander 2001, 50). This decision led to a series of violent anti-Armenian protests in Baku (2001, 58-59). However, the conflict never escalated to an armed conflict between two republics because any border change would be in violation of the Article 78 of the Soviet Constitution. The Soviet leader was determined to apply this constitutional provision in this matter.

The official collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991 and the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Karabakh (which was completed in March 1992) provided the Karabakh forces with arms and provoked an offensive in early 1992 (Migdalovitz 2003, 3). On February 26, 1992, the Armenians seized the control of Khojaly, the second largest Azeri town in Karabakh. On March 6, the Azeri public outrage over Khojaly led to the ouster of the Azeri President. On May 9<sup>th</sup>, while Azerbaijan was caught by surprise and under a political turmoil, the Armenians seized the opportunity to take Shusha, the last Azeri town in Karabakh. Shusha fell to the Armenian rule while the Armenian president, Levon Ter-Petrosian was conducting peace talks with the acting Azerbaijani leader, Yaqub Mamedov, in Tehran (De Waal 2003, 180). The news from Karabakh

became an embarrassment for the Iranians and all the other parties in meeting as well. The capture of Shusha by the Armenians provoked a political chaos in Baku in which the government changed twice in 24 hours (Migdalovitz 2003, 3; De Waal 2003, 181). Meanwhile, the Armenians had also secured the “Lachin corridor”, a corridor joining Armenia and Karabakh. The Armenian offensive continued against Nakhichevan city, in which 30,000 people were displaced (Migdalovitz 2003, 3). In June 1992, Azerbaijan began an offensive to regain Karabakh province. By 1993, the Armenians engaged in a fierce counteroffensive and managed to capture several villages in northern Karabakh.

The conflict escalated and the Armenian attacks spread on the southern areas of Karabakh, resulting in a massive displacement of the Azeri population. On April 6, the U.N. Secretary General implied that there were indications that Armenian army was participating in the conflict. This statement forced the Armenian Defense Minister to admit that the Armenian forces had fired on the Azeri positions. The U.S. State Department identified that there was an unnecessary use of force by the Armenians in several occasions based on the pretext of self-defense (Migdalovitz 2003, 3).

On July 29, the *Security Council Resolution 853* condemned the Armenian conquests, demanded an immediate cease-fire and unconditional withdrawal of occupying forces, and appealed for direct negotiations within the *Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe* (CSCE) framework. It also urged Armenia to pressure Karabakh to comply. On August 18, the Security Council demanded cessation of fighting and withdrawal of occupying forces from Fizuli, Kelbajar, and Aghdam. In addition, the resolution called on Armenia to use its “unique influence” to require a cease-fire and to ensure that forces involved were not provided with the means to extend their campaign

(2003, 4). On October 14, *Security Council Resolution 874* called for a permanent cease-fire, a withdrawal timetable, and removal of communication and transportation obstacles. The conflict continued until a cease-fire went into effect in May 1994.

Meanwhile, Iran had prepared its strategy to respond to this conflict. Before the demise of the Soviet Empire (1998-1990), Iran did not interfere in the conflict and considered it an internal affair of the Soviets. However, the collapse of the Soviet Empire brought a new era of politics in the region. The dissolution was followed by the creation of the new independent states of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Previously, Iran and Azerbaijan had stable and friendly relations. However, after the declaration of the independence by Azerbaijan, Iran became concerned about the links between its Northern Azeri population and the new republic. In January 1993, Iran's Ministry of Interior, General Foreign Citizen and Emigration Affairs Office, announced that “any Iranian citizen intending to marry a citizen from Azerbaijan must get a permit from the Ministry of Interior” (Freij 1996, 72-73).

Throughout the conflict, Iran promoted a foreign policy that endeavored to contain the impact of the conflict outside Iran's borders. Many believed that Iran's policy toward the conflict would be neutral due to domestic and international pressure from both sides (Gresh 2006, 4). However, the situation proved that neutrality was not the case. The conflict caused a massive displacement of the Azerbaijani population to its neighboring Iran. By the beginning of 1993, Iran mobilized military troops to its northern borders and provided humanitarian aid to feed the Azerbaijani refugees. In addition, Iran built refugee camps within Azerbaijan's borders. By building refugee camps within the Azerbaijani territory, the Iranian authorities aimed at preventing the rise of any possible sense of

affinity between the Azerbaijani refugees and the Azeris living in the northwest of Iran.

In addition, aware of the impact of the conflict, Iran attempted to negotiate a ceasefire in 1992. However, this attempt failed due to the intensification of fighting between the Azerbaijani and Armenian troops. Meanwhile, Iran was faced with a fierce anti-Iranian rhetoric and calls for Azerbaijani unification coming from the newly-elected president of Azerbaijan, Abulfaz Elchibey. Iran opposed Azerbaijan and its new anti-Iranian policies by aligning itself with Armenia. By the end of 1992, Iran and Armenia signed a bilateral treaty of friendship and economic cooperation (Gresh 2006, 5). Rumors were spread that Iran had allowed the transit of weapons from Russia headed to Armenia during the conflict. It was also reported that Iran trained the Armenian secret army forces, which were directly involved in the conflict (2006, 5). The Iranian-Armenian relations reached the pinnacle when Iran provided economic assistance to Armenia during the trade embargo imposed on Armenia by Turkey and Azerbaijan in 1994.

But what are the forces driving Iran's policy toward the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict? For Iran, the collapse of the Soviet Empire and the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict inflicted a sense of fear regarding the Iranian role in the region and the security threat that these events pose to the Iranian sovereignty. The demise of the Soviet Empire signaled a new configuration of powers in the region. After breaking relations with the United States and the fall of communism, Iran lost the privileged status that it had had for the containment of Communism in the Middle East. The demise of Communism led to the birth of another regional ideology—*pan-Turkism*. Many began to envision a federation of all Turkic people, extending from Turkey to Himalayas (Hunter 2003, 137). A Turkic hegemony in the region would severely jeopardize Iran's regional interests and

ambitions. It would cause a chain reaction that would later challenge even the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of the Islamic state of Iran. Iran feared that pan-Turkism might motivate the Azeri minority of Turkic descent in the northern Iran to demand secession from the Islamic state.

To make the matter worse, Iran feared that the newly independent *Republic of Azerbaijan* could claim the rights over the Azeri province in northern Iran, or what the latter called the *Southern Azerbaijan*. This fear of insecurity and national unrest became a real concern for Iran in 1992 when Abulfaz Elchibey, a nationalist and anti-Iranian, became the president of Azerbaijan. Elchibey publicly declared his government's aspiration for unification with the *Southern Azerbaijan* (Souleimanov and Ditrych 2007, 104; Gresh 2006, 4). He supported the idea of the *Greater Azerbaijan*, which holds that the Azerbaijani national unity was split into northern and southern halves by imperial Russia and Iran and should therefore reunite (Sadegh-Zadeh 2008, 38). Iran also feared that this situation could lead to separatist movement by the Azeri minority (which comprises about 24% of the Iranian population) to secede from Iran and join the Republic of Azerbaijan. This would not end here. The Iranian authorities also thought that a potential Azeri separatist movement might serve as an incentive for separatist movements from Arabs in South (3% of the Iranian population), Kurds in West (7%), Turkmen (2%) in Northeast, and Baluchis (2%) in Southeast of Iran (Sadegh-Zadeh 2008, 36).

Besides the impact of the Azeris separatist movements, Iran feared a possible involvement of the neighboring states and the U.S. in destabilizing and weakening Iran. Iran feared that Turkey might assume, under the support and blessing from the United States, the role that Iran had previously maintained in the Middle East during the Shah

era. The history had given Iran all the reasons to fear other states and look at their intentions with suspicion. Saddam attacked the Islamic Iran in 1980 motivated primarily by his desire to make Iraq a regional hegemony. The attack happened in a time when Iran was perceived as less powerful and after U.S. has stopped its weaponry assistance to Iran. Twelve years later, Iran feared that history might repeat itself.

In addition, Iran's policy toward the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict was shaped by Iran's need to have close relationship with Russia. From this perspective, the Iranian policy toward this conflict had the same goals as the Iranian policy toward the Russia-Chechnya conflict, as analyzed previously. Iran considered Russia a crucial force to contain and confront the Turkish and U.S. influence in the region. At the same time, Russia was Iran's primary source of weaponry assistance. Nothing was more important for Iran than building of military capabilities. Iran was aware of what other states, like Russia or Armenia, were gaining from the cooperation with it. However, the Iranian officials believed that by enhancing military capabilities through cooperation, they would maximize their relative gains. Iran also believed that the balance of power served Iran's long-term interests. Iran was not concerned about short-term gains. What mattered the most for Iran was becoming a potential regional hegemony in the future. A hegemonic status would provide Iran with more security and leverage on regional and global issues. To reach the hegemonic status, Iran needed a strong state, a solid army, and a modern and abundant military arsenal. Russia was considered a strategic partner to achieve this goal.



## Chapter Ten

### Iran's Policy Toward the U.S. Invasion of Iraq

*"...wherever Iran goes, it faces the United States. This includes Iraq."*

Hassan Rowhani, Iranian Nuclear Negotiator

*"That is right, but there is another side to it. Wherever the U.S. goes, it faces Iran."*

Hussein Mousavian, Iranian Nuclear Negotiator (arrested in 2007 on espionage charges)

The Iranian security and foreign policy in the Middle East cannot be fully comprehended without taking into account the U.S. policy in the region. There are three main reasons why the U.S. and Iranian security and foreign policy are so intertwined and interdependent on each other.

1. U.S. is the only state to have an indisputable military capability and influence in the Middle East policy.
2. U.S. represents the most serious threat to the Islamic Republic of Iran.
3. After the fall of Saddam Hussein, Iran sees itself as the most influential actor and as a potential regional hegemony for in the future.

The coup d'état perpetrated by the U.S. and British secret services against the Iranian government of Mohammed Mosaddeq in 1953 consolidated the U.S. hegemony in the Middle East for decades to come. Through this coup d'état, the U.S. sought to achieve two main goals: (1) control over Iran's petroleum and (2) containment of the Soviet expansion (Communism) in the Middle East. Besides the interests in the oil-rich field of the region and the containment of Communism, its support to the state of Israel provided another important reason for the U.S. presence in the Middle East.

Despite the oil crises in 1973, the U.S. interests remained unchallenged until the coming of the Iranian Islamic Revolution. The coming into power of the Islamic forces caught U.S. by surprise and changed its regional policy for decades to come. In addition, the hostage crises and the labeling of the United States by Ayatollah Khomeini as the *Great Satan* stunned and humiliated the American government. Both countries entered in a fierce battle of demonizing each other, one naming the other “Great Satan” and member of the “axis of evil”. The Islamic Republic of Iran saw the U.S. as the most serious threat to its existence and interests in the Middle East. The United States, on the other hand, saw the Islamic Iran as a threat to its security and economic interests in the region.

However, the regional politics (and global politics as well) changed radically and profoundly after the U.S. invasion of Iraq (may call it also “U.S. involvement in Iraq”) in 2003 and the fall of the regime of Saddam Hussein. Rightfully, many analysts would raise several questions about the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Why did U.S. invade Iraq and not Iran? What may be the reasons behind this invasion, especially after it was revealed in 2002 that Iran was secretly engaged in a nuclear activity? Were the U.S. foreign relations experts ignorant about regional politics in the Middle East and relations between Iraq and Iran? While taking into account these questions, this case study will focus on the Iranian security and foreign policy toward the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

The Americans government tried to convince its people and the international community that the reason for invading Iraq was the possession of nuclear weapons by Saddam. However, a reasonable analysis would conclude that it would be almost impossible for a country to attack another country that possesses nuclear capabilities. If such an attack were to be conducted, then both countries would risk entering in a mutual

assured destruction (MAD) process. Thus, logically, it would be impossible for the Congress to vote for a war whose consequences would remind the international community of the nuclear bombardment of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They would probably fear an Iraqi nuclear attack against Israel in case of an American attack on Iraq. Indeed, the U.S. invasion of Iraq can be considered a preemptive attack which aimed at disarming Iraq and limiting its capabilities to create a nuclear arsenal. In addition, the U.S. officials may have feared that a nuclear Iraq might serve as a weaponry supporter for the *Al Qaida* terrorists. The Americans also feared that Iraq might turn into a safe haven for the Al Qaeda, from where the anti-American strategies would be launched. Some may argue that the U.S. invasion of Iraq aimed at disturbing the balance of power between Sunnis and Shi'as. By doing this, U.S. would attempt to curtail the anti-American activity of the Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East. It could be done by providing more power to Shi'as, which are a minority in the Muslim world. However, any of these scenarios does not indicate that the U.S.-Iran relations are friendly or peaceful. Both U.S and Iran were playing to promote and protect their interests in the region. U.S. was aware of the Iran-Iraq relations and Iran's ambitions in the region.

As expected, the U.S. invasion of Iraq was followed by the coming into power of Shi'a-dominated government in Iraq. Nothing has better served the Iranian regional interests and none (besides the Iraqi people, especially Shi'a population) has profit more from this invasion than the Islamic government of Iran. Iran saw this as an opportunity to expand its influence and power in the region. As Vali Nasr argues, "The Shi'a ascendancy in Iraq is supported by and is in turn bolstering another important development in the Middle East: *the emergence of Iran as a regional power*" (Nasr,

2007, p. 212). Years after the deposition of Saddam Hussein and the coming into power of the Shi'a forces, many analysts believe that Iraq is becoming a satellite of Iran and a battleground for the U.S.-Iran confrontation.

The Iranian secret nuclear program discovered in 2002, followed by the new opportunities coming from the destruction Iraq and its Sunni-led government, provides clear indication why U.S. feared the Iranian politics and its quest to become a regional hegemony. As an offshore balancer, U.S. would do everything to stop Iran from reaching the hegemonic status in the region. With Saddam out of the political scene, U.S. is now focused primarily on Iran. An Iranian hegemony would challenge and decrease the U.S. influence in the Middle East, would threaten the U.S. historical ally, Israel, and would profoundly alternate the balance of power in the region. Thus, the argument stands that Iran's security and foreign policy toward the U.S. invasion of Iraq was(is) influenced by its need to survive, the desire to become a regional hegemony, and the threat that U.S. imposes on its regime survival and its ambitions to become a regional hegemony.

The Iranian policy toward the U.S. invasion of Iraq provides a fundamental support and explanation for this argument. In order to succeed in its security and foreign policy agenda, and in addition to increasing its military capabilities, Iran implemented two other main strategies: (1) the prevention of coming into power of Sunni forces, and (2) lowering of the U.S. influence and power in the region. Iran was enhancing its military capabilities by conducting "asymmetric, low-intensity wars", modernizing its weapons systems, developing "indigenous" missile and antimissile systems, and developing a nuclear program (Milani 2009).

Furthermore, the American invasion of Iraq and the fall of Saddam Hussein

brought opportunities for the Islamic Iran to influence the political process within Iraq. Soon after the fall of Saddam Hussein, Iran promoted an agenda to join all Iraqi Shi'ite factions in a cohesive group to participate in the post Bathist election process. For this purpose, Iran managed to assemble all the factions in a Shiite Islamic bloc called *United Iraqi Alliance*. The bloc encompasses the *Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq* (ISCI), the *Da'wa* (Islamic Call) party, and the faction of the young cleric Moqtada Al Sadr. Iran's goal was to take advantage of Iraqi's Shiite majority population and turn it into a source of political power to control the state apparatus. The election results proved that the Iranian strategy had worked: the bloc won 128 of the 275 seats in the December 15, 2005, election for a full term parliament (Katzman, 2008, p. 1). The profile of the political figures coming out of this election showed that they all had direct or indirect ties with Iran. Nuri al-Maliki, who was selected as Prime Minister, was from the *Da'wa Party*, whose leaders were in exile mostly in Syria. Most leaders of ISCI had spent their years of exile in Iran. In 1982, Ayatollah Mohammad Baqr Al Hakim, leader of ISCI, who was killed in an August 2003 car bomb in Najaf, was anointed by then Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini to head a future "Islamic Republic of Iraq" (Duss and Juul, 2009, p. 10).

In addition to enhancing its military capabilities and taking the control of the Iraqi state, Iran put significant emphasis on its strategy of gaining power and weakening the American military power and influence in the region by using military and paramilitary groups. Iran also found it vital for its interests and security to not allow any permanent establishment of the U.S. military bases in Iraq. Permanent U.S. military bases in Iraq would be a permanent threat to Iran's national security and fortifications for the U.S.

military forces in the Middle East. This led Iran to consider several strategies to enhance its security status and to diminish the U.S. political and military power.

In his theory of offensive realism, John Mearsheimer argues that there are four main strategies through which a state can gain power relative to the others. First, countries gain power by going to war with the other rival state. In our case, Iran could not implement this strategy because it has no chance of winning a war against the U.S. mighty military forces. Second, states gain power by threatening rival states to use military forces against them--"*blackmail*". Iran didn't even think about this strategy because it did not have sufficient military capabilities to challenge the U.S. military power. Third, the *bait and bleed* strategy causes to rivals to engage in a "protracted war", so that "they bleed each other white, while the baiter remains on sideline with its military strength intact" (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 147-155). This is the case when one state causes other states to go in war with each other and the "baiter" would be free in the future to expand its power. As mentioned previously, the U.S. invasion of Iraq was not provoked or instigated by Iran. It was a result of the U.S. fear of Iraq running nuclear facilities and supporting terrorism. The last strategy that states implement to gain power is the *bloodletting* strategy, which aims at causing rival states to fight against each other in a long and costing conflict.

This last strategy best describes the Iranian strategy in Iraq. First, Iran did not have any implication in starting the invasion, but just benefited from it. Second, a long and costing conflict would weaken the American power in the region and would keep Iraq in ruins for decades to come. Thus, by promoting this strategy, Iran "killed two birds with one stone": (1) kept Iraq out of competition for regional hegemonic power, which

may also turn in a servant of Iran's ambitions, and (2) kept America “bleeding”, resulting in declining of its regional political and military influence.

Following the above strategy of “*bloodletting*”, Iran provided political and military support to ISCI’s militia, the “Badr Brigades”. The *Badr Brigades* had been recruited, trained, and armed by Iran’s Revolutionary Guard, the most politically powerful actor of Iran’s military during the Iran-Iraq war and in the current Iran (Katzman, 2008, p. 1). In addition, the Iranian leaders have sought to establish close relationship with Sadr’s faction, a large and dedicated following among lower-class Iraqi Shiites, and which built an estimated 60,000 person “Mahdi Army” (Jaysh al-Mahdi, or JAM) militia after Saddam’s fall (2008, p. 2). JAM became very aggressive toward the U.S. troops and the pro-U.S. Iraqi's politicians. In most occasions, they would try to eliminate pro-American politicians. Iran soon realized that JAM would be the best political and military group through which Iran could gain power, prevent U.S. from establishing its hegemony and military settlements, and help Iran in any possible Iran-U.S. confrontation. In 2005, Iran began supplying arms to the JAM through the Revolutionary Guard’s “Qods (Jerusalem) Force,” the unit that assists Iranian protégé forces abroad (2008, p. 2).

Moreover, Iran’s arming and training of Shiite militias in Iraq had been in continuation of the U.S.-Iran tensions over Iran’s nuclear program and regional ambitions, such as its aid to Lebanese Hezbollah and the Palestinian organization Hamas (2008, p. 3). For example, the U.S. officials had provided specific information on Qods Force and Hezbollah aid to the Iraqi Shiite militias, but without detailed number of the operatives. The Qods Force officers were not combatant forces. Their main task was to

identify Iraqi trainees and create traffic route for weapon shipment into Iraq. In addition, in his report to the members and committees of Congress, Kenneth Katzman, Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs for the *Congressional Research Service*, provided the following information about the Iran support for armed groups:

*On February 11, 2007, U.S. military briefers in Baghdad provided what they said was specific evidence that Iran had supplied armor-piercing “explosively formed projectiles” (EFPs) to Shiite (Sadr) militiamen. EFPs have been responsible for over 200 U.S. combat deaths since 2003. In August 2007, Gen. Raymond Odierno, then the second in command and who in mid-September 2008 will become overall commander in Iraq, said that Iran had supplied the Shiite militias with 122 millimeter mortars that are used to fire on the Green Zone in Baghdad. On August 28, 2008, the Washington Times reported that pro-Sadr militias were now also using “Improvised Rocket Assisted Munitions” — a “flying bomb” carrying 100 pounds of explosives, propelled by Iranian-supplied 107 mm rockets. On July 2, 2007, Brig. Gen. Kevin Bergner said that Lebanese Hezbollah was assisting the Qods Force in aiding Iraqi Shiite militias, adding that Iran gives about \$3 million per month to these Iraqi militias. He based the statement on the March 2007 capture of former Sadr aide Qais Khazali and Lebanese Hezbollah operative Ali Musa Daqduq. They were allegedly involved in the January 2007 killing of five U.S. forces in Karbala. (2008, p. 3)*

To the above information can be added the testimony of General David Petraeus on April 8-9, 2008, who stated that Iran continues to arm, train, and direct “Special



Groups” – radical and possibly breakaway elements of the JAM — and to organize the Groups into a “Hezbollah-like force to serve Iran’s interests and fight a proxy war against the Iraqi state and coalition forces...” (as cited in Katzman, 2008, p. 3). His testimony culminated in his briefing to the press on October 7, 2007 when Gen. Petraeus told journalists that Iran’s Ambassador to Iraq, Hassan Kazemi-Qomi, was himself a member of the Qods Force (Yates, 2007). Despite these revelations, nothing changed the Iranian policy toward the U.S. involvement in Iraq.

Thus, the use of the armed groups against the U.S. forces and any other threat to the Iranian security and interests shows that the Iranian regional hegemonic policy not only was based on field operatives but was orchestrated by its high-ranking officials with clear strategies in mind. The Islamic government of Iran considered the United States a serious threat to its regime and national security and interests. The Iranians were aware of the military power of the U.S and the impact that it would have if the Americans established permanent military bases in Iraq. Permanent U.S. military bases in Iraq would mean permanent threat to Iran’s national security and interests in the region. For these reasons, Iran implemented political and military strategies to diminish and obstruct the U.S. military influence and presence in the region. At the same time, in order to increase its influence in the region, Iran has also continued the modernization of the armed forces and the growth of its military arsenal. During an army parade on April 18, 2009, the Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad stated that "The power of the Iranian armed forces is at the service of the nations ... and will help to preserve the region's security and stability" (Dahl 2009).

## Chapter Eleven

### Conclusion and Policy Implications

The case studies analyzed above indicate that Iran's security and foreign policy during the post-Shah era is driven by its paramount need for survival and its quest for regional hegemony in the Middle East. There are no major policy differences between the today's Iran, the Iran we have seen throughout its history, and any state in the international community. Iran behaves like any other state in the international system. The Iran-Iraq war revealed that both countries possessed significant military capabilities that could harm each other. It was the shift in the balance of power favoring Iraq and its desire to become a regional hegemony that created the premises for Iraq to attack Iran.

In addition, the attack enforced the assumption that states can never be certain about the intentions of the other states, even after signing agreements like the *1975 Algiers Agreement*. Furthermore, Iran's ultimate ideology of survival dominated any other ideological predisposition. The need for survival led leaders of the Islamic Iran to entering in secret negotiations with countries they considered the *Great* and the *Small Satans*. These negotiations helped Iran increase its military capabilities in order to survive the Iraqi invasion.

In addition, during the Russian-Chechen conflict, Iran sided with the Christian Russia and considered the conflict an "internal affair". Iran calculated and feared that a support for its Muslim brothers in Chechnya would cause Russia to stop providing military assistance and military-related technology that Iran so desperately needed. In

addition, in supporting the Chechen separatist movement, Iran would inadvertently encourage the Azeri separatist movement in Northwestern Iran. Iran also feared that Russia, in retaliation, would support the separatist movements in Iran. Thus, the main strategy leading the security and foreign policy of the Islamic Iran toward the Russian-Chechen conflict was to enhance its military capabilities and to prevent any separatist movements across. The paramount goal leading to this strategy was the survival of the Islamic Republic of Iran, its sovereignty, and the ambition to become hegemony.

Moreover, during the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, the Islamic Iran sided with the Christian Armenians rather than with its Muslim brothers in Azerbaijan. This policy was due to Iran's fear that the newly independent *Republic of Azerbaijan* could claim the rights over the Azeri province in the northern Iran, or what they called the *Southern Azerbaijan*. In addition, Iran feared a possible involvement of the neighboring states and of the U.S. in destabilizing and weakening Iran. Iran feared that Turkey might assume, under the support and blessing from the United States, the role that Iran had previously maintained in the Middle East during the Shah era. Finally, Iran's policy toward the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict was shaped by Iran's need to have close relationship with its strategic partner, Russia.

Finally, during the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the Islamic government of Iran launched strategies which aimed at diminishing and obstructing the U.S. military influence and presence in the region. Iran considered the United States a serious threat to its regime and national security and interests. The Iranians were aware of the military power of the U.S. and the impact that it would have if the Americans established permanent military bases in Iraq. Permanent U.S. military bases in Iraq would mean permanent threat to Iran's

national security and interests in the region.

Referring to the above case studies, we may realize that Iran sees the intentions of other states with deep suspicions. For example, Iran sees the U.S. foreign policy more as a threat to its regime survival rather than a behavior change. The Iranian past history of occupations from foreigner states, especially the modern Iraq—Iran war of 1980s, make Iran more suspicious of states' intentions. Iran has come to realize that in an anarchic international system of politics, survival through self-help is all what matters. The *ultimate ideology* of survival is superior to any other ideology. Iran also believes that in order to survive, a state should have formidable military capabilities and endeavor to shift the balance of power based on its interests. The nuclear program would give Iran a regional hegemonic status, ensured survival, deterrence power, and bargaining power over regional and global matters. Thus, Iran is not different from other states within the international system. It bases its security and foreign policy on a rational choice analysis.

However, Iran should be aware of constraints that the international system puts on its behavior. Iran should also be aware of the fact that U.S and Russia behave the same way as Iran does. Thus, neither U.S. nor Russia would accept a nuclear Iran. A nuclear Iran would challenge the U.S. interests in the region and would seriously jeopardize the territorial security of its neighboring Russia. In order to prevail, Iran should implement certain policies that would allow it to reach its goals. Having put the international community and the U.S. policy in an uncertain position, the Iranian government should send a message to the global community indicating that it is willing to cooperate and talk about its nuclear activity. In addition, seeing that the *Nonproliferation Treaty* (NPT) does not prohibit Iran from pursuing nuclear capability

for economic purpose, it is imperative for Iran to lower its rhetoric against the state of Israel and focus on the legal aspect of its nuclear activity. Iran has to realize that there is no great power in the international system that would accept another nuclear power. Thus, it should aim at building its nuclear capability, while the others will try to stop this from happening. However, Iran should not push too hard for this goal because it may risk an attack from U.S. and other powers. Israel also would be in alert and willing to take unilateral actions against Iran in case of a perceived and imminent threat.

The best way for Iran to pursue its goal is to use the current balance of power to achieve its goal. This means that Iran may use its policy to have other powers confronting each other. For example, Iran may find a way or a strategy to put Russia, China, and U.S. in different positions and pursuing different interests, while not ignoring the influence of other states in the region. This will make them reach no consensus over Iran's nuclear program. A consensus among great powers regarding Iran's nuclear activity would be very unfortunate for Iran. In addition, Iran should pursue a regional policy of cooperation with other countries in the region. It should not publicly call for the overthrow of other regimes but should implement the strategy of "divide and conquer". Iran may also continue the use of the *bait and bleed* and *bloodletting* strategies of gaining power. Iran must also be careful that its strategies do not compromise or jeopardize its domestic base of support.

Regarding the American, Israeli, Russian approach toward Iran, it is imperative to understand and assume that Iran's goal is to become a regional hegemony and build a nuclear arsenal. In confronting Iran, U.S. should be cautious to not fall in the trap of the Iranian policy and portray itself as the "police of the world". To reach this goal, U.S.

should provide incentives for the engagement of the international community in Middle East issues. One particular strategy should focus on dealing with a productive engagement of great powers like Russia and China. The goal is to use the United Nation (through the Security Council) as the main actor dealing with Iran. U.S. should emphasize concerns about the Iranian nuclear activity and provide benefits for these powers in case they succeed in stopping Iran.

In addition, U.S. should use regional states to force Iran stop its nuclear activity. It should emphasize that a nuclear Iran is a threat to all states in the region. The best strategy would be the formation of an *anti-nuclear-Iran* regional coalition. Finally, U.S. should use the domestic factions in Iran to gain more intelligence and to decelerate the pace of the nuclear activity. One example is the decision of the *European Union* to take the *People's Mojahideen Organization* (PMOI) of Iran off the list of terrorist organization and unfreeze its assets. As staunch opponent of the Iranian theocratic regime, PMOI has promised to provide (and has provided) intelligence regarding the Iran's nuclear activity and help overthrow the regime. Regardless of the circumstances, both U.S. and Iran will not abandon their paramount goals. Iran will not stop pursuing its *ultimate ideology* of survival and the need (quest) to be a regional hegemony. U.S. just cannot accept a regional hegemony in the Middle East that would threatened its regional and global status. Meanwhile, Russia will support Iran to that extent that Iran itself does not become a threat to the security and interests of Russia. Russia will continue to provide nuclear support to Iran as a way to challenge the U.S. interests in the Middle East, but it will never allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon. Facing U.S. and Russia, Iran should play the role that it once played with Russia and Great Britain in the nineteenth

century. Meanwhile, Iran should be cautious to not promote policies that would cause U.S. and Russia to cooperate with each other.

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