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**IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST
AFTER THE INVASION OF IRAQ: 2003-2012**

By

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IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST AFTER THE INVASION OF IRAQ: 2003-2012

Mohamad Mahdi Berjaoui

ABSTRACT

What explains Iranian foreign policy in the region under the presidency of Mahmud Ahmadi-Nejad? Was it shaped by realist geopolitical calculations or ideological ones, or, alternatively, a combination of them? To explain this research question the thesis investigates Iranian foreign policy in the Middle East after the 2003 US invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq. It does so by focusing on the geopolitical confrontation between Iran and the US and Saudi Arabia in Iraq and Lebanon. The two case studies are selected because they represent the most important and direct confrontation sites after 2003 between, on the one hand, Iran, and the other the US and Saudi Arabia. The comparative analysis undertaken in this thesis suggests that both realist and ideological variables interact to shape Iran's foreign policy choices under President Ahmadi-Nejad.

Keywords:

Iran, Foreign Policy, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Lebanon, US, Hezbollah

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1-Introduction:

Due to its size, its military capabilities and its strategic location in the Persian Gulf, Iran has always assumed the role of a regional power. However, since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iran has become more isolated than ever. There are several reasons why this has transpired. These include Iran's disputed nuclear research and uranium enrichment program and its strong anti-Israeli and anti-American stances. The 1979 Iranian revolution, which produced a Shi'a theocracy, was an earthquake that shook not only the geopolitics of the region, but had far-reaching consequences to the international relations of the region, especially US interests in the region (Hunter, 2010, p. 23). This effect can be felt to this day, and in the years that passed, the relationship between the US and Iran was marked by perpetual antagonism, bringing the two countries to the brink of military confrontation on a number of occasions.

The 1979 revolution was, undeniably, a colossal event that had far-reaching consequences for Iran's domestic conditions and external relationships. However, it is also important not to ignore factors that demonstrate continuity in Iran's pre-and post-revolutionary periods, namely the country's constant pursuit of regional influence. It has become something of a truism to say that issues are intricately interrelated in the Middle East. The relationship between Iran and Iraq, however, has been particularly important, and it has gained importance after the 2003 overthrow of the Baathist regime in Iraq. Iraq's attack on Iran on 22 September

1980 was the beginning of a war that lasted eight years. The United States assumed a neutral position at the outset of the conflict. As Iran went on the offensive, and the US feared that it would become a threat to Saudi Arabia and ultimately could change the balance of power in the region, the US started helping Iraq against Iran in the war. The US pursued a policy that aimed at bleeding both states and, later, balancing the two regional powers against each other. (Pirseyyedi, 2013).

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and developments thereafter underscored the intricate relationship between Iran and Iraq. Iran's influence in Iraq was made possible due to the religious ties with the Iraqi Shi'a and its support to Shi'a political groups and militias. Iran cultivated a geopolitical alliance with the Shi'a of Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. For the region's Sunni Arab regimes, but especially Saudi Arabia, this was tantamount to a geopolitical nightmare. (Hunter, 2010). Iraq's aggression against Iran had its cause in old territorial disputes between the two states. Iraq also sought to replace Iran as the dominant state in the Persian Gulf. Although Iraq had hoped to take advantage of the revolutionary chaos in Iran, it made only limited progress into Iran and within months was driven away with Iran regaining virtually all territory lost by June 1982. The next six years, Iran went on the offensive without a decisive victory for one side, which led to the fronts stagnating (Pirseyyedi, 2013).

Despite the United Nations Security Council call for a cease-fire, the unrest continued till 20 August in 1988. The war finally ended with a United Nations-brokered ceasefire in the form of UNSCR 598, which was accepted by both sides. The conflict is often compared to World War I given its duration and military tactics. (Ehteshami & Zweiri, 2011). After the Iran-Iraq War, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. This invasion only ended when the Iraqi army was defeated by the US and its allies. This defeat coincided with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the

Soviet Union, in addition to the Ta'ef Agreement that ended the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990). The agreement was made possible by a subtle geopolitical deal in the region, whereby the US and Saudi Arabia outsourced Lebanon to Syria in exchange of the latter's participation in the war to liberate Kuwait and join the prospective peace process. Iran subsequently built an important alliance with Hezbollah, which is a central component of the Iranian military and security establishment. (Kagan, Kagan, & Pletka, 2008).

The 2003 US invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq turned a relation of balancing between Tehran and the US into one of open confrontation (Baer, 2008). The U.S invasion of Iraq and Israel's failed war against Hezbollah in the summer of 2006 created unprecedented geopolitical opportunities for Iran. Tehran sought to expand and strengthen its Shi'a trans-national social base, but also its alliance networks, which consist of Syria and non-state actors in the region, such as Hezbollah (Pirseyyedi, 2013:74). The assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005 led to the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. Hezbollah's success in the 2006 war against Israel, and US pressures on Arab countries not to support Hamas, brought the latter into the arms of Iran, thus strengthening its influence in Lebanon and Gaza (Hunter, 2010). Iran opposed the American invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq. Iran designated Saddam's regime as a brutal one that deserved to be overthrown and punished. However it did not want to see a pro-American Iraqi client regime installed in Baghdad that would act in favor of US interests at the expense of Tehran's own interests in Iraq (Barzegar, 2008). Motivated by this fear, Iran started filling the Iraqi vacuum and was able to build very strong influence in post-Saddam Iraq.

Another important geo-strategic alliance is between Iran and Syria. Syria sided with Iran during the Iran-Iraq war. This alliance faced three major phases. The first was under Syrian

dominance in the 1980s, followed by a transition phase during the 1990s, and finally the third phase, which is the phase of Iranian dominance in the 2000s. (Goodzari, 2009). Yet the most striking geopolitical change after the Iranian revolution was in Iran's position against Israel. Tehran built strong relations with the revolutionary Palestinian organizations and parties. These relations reached their peak in the last decade, especially with Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Iran's strategic ties and alliances in the Middle East have made some - most famously Jordan's King Abdullah - warn against a so-called "Shi'a Crescent" that stretches from Tehran and ends in Gaza Strip, passing through Baghdad, Damascus and Beirut. This crescent is a challenge to the pro-West alliance gathering the US and the so-called moderate Arabs led by Saudi Arabia. (Ansari, 2006:46).

1.2-Research Questions:

What explains Iranian foreign policy in the region under the presidency of Mahmud Ahmadi-Nejad? Was it shaped by realist geopolitical calculations or ideological ones, or, alternatively, a combination of them? To explain this research question the thesis investigates Iranian foreign policy in the Middle East after the 2003 US invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq. It does so by focusing on the geopolitical confrontation between Iran and the US and Saudi Arabia in Iraq and Lebanon. The two case studies are selected because they represent the most important and direct confrontation sites after 2003 between, on the one hand, Iran, and the other the US and Saudi Arabia. The comparative analysis undertaken in this thesis suggests that both realist and ideological variables interact to shape Iran's foreign policy choices under President Ahmadi-Nejad.

1.3-Religion's Influence in the Political Sphere:

To better understand the nature of Iranian foreign policy, a comprehensive understanding of the events of the revolution and the Shiite orientation of Islam is necessary. This is important to determine whether or not Iran's foreign policy under Ahmadinejad is characterized by ideology or realism.

After the Prophet Muhammad's death, the issue of leadership of the Muslims arose. The Shi'a believed that leadership belongs in Muhammad's family. Consequently, they began to call their leader Imam and considered that the Imam, through his blood relationship to Muhammad, could interpret the hidden meaning of his message. This leadership was exercised by a group of theologians and lawyers known as mullahs. The most learned among them bears the title *mojtahed* and the absolute elite among them bears the title Ayatollah (Wibeck, 2003). Since the very beginning of Shiite Islam, the religious elite have opposed the caliphs and secular rulers' right to rule Muslim community. Only the Prophet's successors, the Imams, are considered of having the credentials to understand Islamic law and implement it. The state is considered to exist only in order to defend and enforce the laws stated by God through the Prophet Mohammed and is written in the Koran and the Sunna, the Prophet's way of life and standards. (Gielsing, 1999). Shiite accepted government power as a social necessity and accepted obedience to the state as a way to ensure the survival and defense of the Sharia. (Omid, 1994).

At the end of the 1800s, the religious establishment had emerged as a central power that governments could ally with, manipulate, go into battle against but never ignore. The discovery of oil in southwestern Iran led to the formation of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, which

insured the free flow of oil to the British Empire. The potential profits also caused Russia to take an interest in the land and in 1917 Russia controlled northern Iran and the southern part was controlled by England. While resistance to the colonists grew, so did the success of religious schools. This gave the religious establishment a base to urge the Shah to follow the clergy's edict and not vice versa. The religious institutions' ability to harness this power, however, was closely related with the inability of state power to impose their will. (Menashri, 2001). The oil has always been one of the key political issues of Iran. Although Russia and the UK left Iran after World War II, most of the oil reserves were put in foreign hands, and particularly in the hands of the UK.

In 1953, the United States contributed with 4.5 billion to the Shah who then formed the SAVAK, the secret police, and crushed all political opposition. American companies were subsequently given about 40 percent of Iran's oil assets. The shah was determined to force the country into modernization, and so he deposed the parliament and became the absolute ruler. When the Shah erased all opposition, guerrilla movements and the religious establishments became the only possibility for resistance (Jahanbakhsh, 2001). Throughout the 1960s religion assumed a larger role in the political discourse. Shah added no greater power to thwart the religious opposition, but relied on the expansion of the bureaucracy and the army. In 1977, Iran had the world's fifth largest army and the most modern one in the Persian Gulf. (Omid, 1994). The shah's massive modernization project, a parasitic state apparatus and rearmament of the army, came with the oil boom and led to massive inflation in the country. Between 1974 and 1976 a million people became unemployed and inflation rose to 30 percent. The people's support turned to the clergy and the religious establishment received donations to overthrow the regime. Shah, who was backed by the Carter administration in the United States, felt confident in their

modernization plans and slowly began to let go of the secret police. In 1977, political groupings were allowed again and the clergy and secular intellectuals ganged up in the struggle against the regime and the Shah (Ali, 2005). A massive wave of protests and demonstrations took place in the country and Shah put in military forces for the first time to disperse demonstrations, leading to killings and imprisonment. The 8th of September 1978, became known as the Black Friday, as the bloodiest clash between protesters and the military, erasing all possibilities of peaceful negotiations between the Shah and the people.

On 11 February 1979, the head of the military declared that 2,500 years of monarchy were over. (Omid, 1994). Khomeini and the religious establishment did not promise the Iranian people money, but rather independence and an end to oppression. The Iranian people had initiated a revolution in the quest for freedom and rights and assumed that an Islamic alliance would help them reach these goals. (Menashri, 2001). Khomeini had been the central figure of the revolution and had along with his supporters won the people's "hearts and minds" (Menashri, 2001). The clergy did not have the organization needed to take over control of the country but quickly formed the Islamic Republican Party (IRP), as a step in establishing a theocracy. To win support, the IRP said to be against capitalism, imperialism and economic oppression. (Omid, 1994). To quell their opponents, IRP created a subversive party that became known as Hezbollah-Party of God (Menashri, 2001).

Using the IRP, Khomeini made sure that Islamic law would be the basis for all legislation (Omid, 1994). Khomeini saw the Islamic state as an undeniable theocracy where he, as God's representative, would rule the people (Menashri, 2001). Furthermore he claimed all Muslims to be equal, regardless of class, caste or ethnicity, and they were to be united together to serve God although the new Iranian constitution made clear differences of the equality of genders (Omid,

1994). Khomeini managed to slowly change people's focus from the opposition's demands for democratization to focus on the country's imperialist enemies, and especially the United States. Anti-Americanism became the basis of the new Iranian regime. On 4 November 1979, Iranian youth and students attacked and took over the United States embassy in Tehran (Menashri, 2001).

The Iraqi invasion of Iran on 22 September 1980 gave impetus to Khomeini's rhetoric about its external enemies and the need for an Islamic community. The Khomeini regime seemed secure in the decade that followed (Gieling, 1999). Khomeini's adamant quest to win the war at any cost came to be broadly legitimized by religious rhetoric and at the price of untold suffering for the population. The war could have ended in 1982 when the Iraqis began to retreat and United Nations pressed for a truce, but the Iranian government, with Khomeini at the head, opposed this and went on the offensive between the years of 1983-84 but to no results at all. In July, 1988, Iran finally ceased fire and invited UN observers, a development which, according to Khomeini was synonymous with "drinking poison" (Omid, 1994).

1.4-Methodology:

The qualitative approach is used in this thesis to understand the dynamics of Iranian foreign policy in the Middle East from 2003, the date of the US invasion of Iraq, until the end of Ahmadi-Nejad's presidency in 2013. The case studies were selected to follow the contours of the confrontation between the US and Iran in two important theatres: Iraq and Lebanon.

There is an extensive literature on Iran's geopolitical interests, and it was used abundantly in this thesis. However, an attempt was made in this thesis to study the decision-making process among the Iranian elite. This entailed interviews with individuals involved in the

making of Iran's foreign policy, some of whom wished to remain anonymous. Personal interviews are favorable in terms of collecting a better view of Iran's geopolitical calculations. However interviews for such a sensitive topic are always a daunting challenge. Indeed, this thesis realized the limitations of the topic at hand and consequently used different channels to secure a number of important interviews in Tehran with individuals who have an insight into the Iran's geopolitical worldview.

1.5-Map of the Thesis:

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The next chapter examines the available literature on Iranian foreign policy. It situates Iran's foreign policy choices under Ahmadi-Nejad between realism and ideology. The third and fourth chapters look at Iran's foreign policy battles in Iraq and Lebanon, respectively. The final chapter spells out the implications of this study to Iran's post-Arab uprisings geopolitical challenges.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1-Introduction:

This chapter surveys the literature examining Iran's foreign policy, with an aim of situating Iran's foreign policy choices under Ahmadi-Nejad between realism and ideology. Explaining Iranian foreign policy under Ahmadinejad is the subject of a critical debate between different theories of international affairs. This is not surprising, however, since "social science is unlike physical sciences, it allows for a variety of internally consistent systematic explanations that lead to the same conclusion" (Kuhun, 1970).

2.2-Explaining Foreign Policy:

In explaining political actions, the ideologies of the parties and politicians are usually paramount. Every decision made reflects a person's history and ideological understanding of the world, whether this is consciously stated or not. This is why foreign policy theories are important for both practitioners and academics. Theories help us understand the world we live in and make sense of the mass production of news that we are bombarded with every day. (Makdessi, 2011).

Realism is the most frequently used theory in the field of international relations. It is the general term for anything that is based on power politics. In international relations, realism refers to the quest by rational, unitary states to balance against power or threat in the pursuit of protecting their geopolitical interests. Following the British philosopher Thomas Hobbes, traditional realism is based on a pessimistic view of human nature. On this view, states, like

human beings, are untrustworthy. A more recent variant of neo-realism emphasizes the international system's anarchic structure. The international system is depicted as one lacking a central law enforcing power; much like the "state of nature" without government. In practical policy, realism recommends a foreign policy that promotes the national interest either by maximizing military power capabilities or through appropriate strategic alliances (Crawford, 2013). Realism is also described as being a two faced theory: it is a general orientation in power and a body of explanatory theories and models that emphasize anarchy and the balance of power. "Realists emphasize the constraints on politics imposed by human selfishness and the absence of international government, which require the primacy in all political life of power and security. From a realistic point of view, then, international conflicts are created by selfish, self-interested, states operating in pursuit of their own interests (Makdessi, 2011).

In international relations, there are three variants of realism: classical, structural realism, and neo-realism. (Makdessi, 2011). Classical realism states that human characteristics such as pride, lust and the quest for glory have forever-doomed humanity to eternal wars. This suggests that conflict and war are part of human nature. Structural realism translates this view of human nature to the international system. Selfishness is considered to be basic to human nature. However whereas within states individual selfishness is restrained by a central authority, this is not the case at the international level. In the latter case, there is no central government, and anarchy not only allows but also encourages this aspect of human nature to be expressed. The situation of anarchy ensures us that there will always be an eternal struggle for power between states (Donnelly, 2009). In other words, states are just like human beings and have an inborn need to be dominant, a structural deficit that ultimately leads to war. (Walt, 1987).

Alternatively, neorealism is based on “an earlier generation of more complicated and eclectic realists” (Donnelly, 2009). Neo-realists justify state behavior in terms of their need for survival on their own. The offense-defense theory in realism states that offense is the most likely reason for war to occur, and thus defense is a better alternative for the states (Makdessi, 2011). Defensive realism underscores a state’s quest to defend its geopolitical interests through balancing or alliance behavior. Offensive realism, on the other hand, argues that states will seek to maximize their interests when an opportunity arises. (Walt, 1998)

There are of course, several forms of realism, although the above-mentioned ones are the most frequent ones in the field of international relations. No theory of international relations offers correct predictions and explanations, however. Realism cannot explain the whole field and every action of international relations but that is no reason to minimize its importance. “Realism must be an important, even essential, part of a pluralistic discipline of international studies. No less; But no more” (Donnelly, 2009). Realism must thus be part of any explanation of foreign policy. However, this theory alone cannot provide a complete framework for understanding international politics (Donnelly, 2009). Donnelly describes theory as an artificial construction. “Much as a good caricature selects, exaggerates and willfully distorts in order to capture the defining features of its subject, a good theory intentionally oversimplifies in order to highlight forces that are typically central to behavior” (Donnelly, 2009).

2.3-Realism versus Ideology:

Iran’s foreign policy under Ahmadinejad can be explained in different ways, according to different theories. “From a strictly realist perspective, Iran’s behavior may seem maddeningly inconsistent. Decisions made by the leadership to prolong the war with Iraq and export the

revolution to Lebanon were made, by all internal accounts, in order to support moral-religious imperatives of the revolution. Realist explanations for the same events seem convoluted at best, given the relative weakness of Iran and its ability to independently sustain expansionist policies at that time. Ideological explanations for Iranian foreign policy run into similar problems, with Iran supporting ideological rivals while turning a blind eye to the actions of corrupt allies...” (Grubb, 2010).

The reason why Iran is so keen on its relations with Iraq and Lebanon can be explained by both realism and ideology. As stated, the Shi‘a community is spread through this area and it can thus lie in the interest of Iran to seek out its Shi‘a Islamic allies. The logic of realism can also explain this: by playing a dominant role in Lebanon and Iraq, Iran guarantees itself significant geopolitical assets in the region as it tries to defend itself from possible regional (Israel) or international (US) threats. In addition, “if one state reaps larger than its partners, it will gradually become stronger and its partners will eventually become more vulnerable” (Walt, 1998). Tehran thus uses ideology as a tool for a foreign policy determined largely by realist considerations.

According to Grubb, ideological theories regarding Iran’s foreign policy were much more popular before the Iran-Iraq war. Tehran’s foreign policy changed significantly with the 2005 election of Ahmadinejad as president of Iran. Since then, Iran has carried out an expansionist policy, and many theorists have advocated that Iran’s new foreign policy is linked to internal regime politics. One of these theorists is Said Arjomand, who claims that the drive behind Iran’s nuclear ambitions and “increased regional mischief” is a result of a *domestic* “split of the revolutionary political elite into hardliners and pragmatists”, one in which the hardliners have been more successful in gaining power. (Arjomand, 2009)

On the other hand, realist explanations highlight the importance of *external* geopolitical calculations. For example, the fact that Iran developed closer ties with a number of regional states has aimed at protecting its geopolitical interests. Moreover, Iran has increased and advanced its security interests by pursuing a nuclear power capability and by creating a number of proxy non-state actors, most notably in Lebanon, Yemen, and in Iraq, but also Islamic Jihad. These arguments thus suggest that Iran's ideological posturing is only a mask for political motivations. It is consciously used by Iran to leave the United States and other opponents off balance. "Despite the attempts of Iran's clergy to claim the primacy of Islam over politics, it is clear that politics trumps religion in Iran's foreign policy" (Grubb, 2010).

It is in this context that Iraq has been subject to a harsh geopolitical struggle since the 2003 US invasion. "When Iran was sure that the American war against Iraq was about to take place, it concluded that moderate support for the American effort was the lesser of two evils" (Parsi, 2008). From a realist point of view, this was a balancing act. Iran then engaged in what was known as the "Geneva Channel", namely negotiations between Washington and Tehran in spring 2002 while the US was preparing its next war in the region after toppling the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Iran's engagement in the "Geneva Channel" was to balance US threats. "A successful US operation would leave Iran encircled and the next vulnerable target" (Parsi, 2008). However, "Iran's ability to assume a dominant role in post-Saddam Iraq altered the geostrategic balance of power in the region, tipping it in Tehran's favor" (Salloukh, 2013). This was possible to Tehran by using its political skills and the paramilitary experience of the al-Quds forces to deny Washington a stable Iraq (Salloukh, 2013).

Many Iraqi officials believe that nothing happens in Iraq without the knowledge of Qassem Suleimani, the head of Iran's elite al-Quds Force. "He is the most powerful man in Iraq

without question” as Mowaffak al-Rubaie, Iraq’s former national security minister, told the Saudi newspaper *al-Sharq al-Awsat* in July 2010. (Chulov, 2011). Moreover, realists explain Tehran’s support of anti-US states – such as Syria – and non-state actors – such as Hezbollah and Hamas – from a balance of power perspective and as part of the grand geopolitical battle ongoing in the region since the fall of Saddam’s regime. On the other hand, domestic level explanations of these actions underscore the ideology of the regime and its impact on the state’s foreign policy. In this respect, Iran’s support of Hezbollah can be placed within an ideological framework. For example, Augustus Richard Norton argues that “for Iran, the creation of Hezbollah was a realization of the revolutionary state’s zealous campaign to spread the message of self-styled ‘Islamic revolution’” (Norton, 2007).

The realist explanation of Iran’s support to Hezbollah puts it within the scope of a geopolitical contest with the US and the quest to build military capabilities that could support its security position. Despite the argument that Iran’s support to Hezbollah is a realist action to balance against US threats, the historical religious “ties between Iran and Lebanon goes back to the Safavid Dynasty” (Esposito, 2005). These ties were the prerequisite for long-term relations that are considered to be the major threat against US interests in the Middle East. This ideological umbrella has found its own institutions. For example, there is the Revolutionary Guard, which is related directly to the Supreme Leader and responsible for supporting non-state actors like Hezbollah and Hamas. This support is Iran’s duty according to Khomeini’s legacies, where Iran should support all the oppressed of the world. Khomeini, who had put the ideological framework of the Islamic State first, made it very hard for any foreign policy maker to go beyond this frame. Kenneth Pollack argues that “Iran’s support for terrorism in the 1980s served both ideological and practical foreign policy objectives” (Pollack, 2004). Pollack conclude that in the

days of Khomeini he was the foreign policy decision - maker, and “had sufficient influence to, at times, trump genuine national interest in favor of ideological pursuits” (Grubb, 2010). However, this essay attempts to map out the foreign policy under Ahmadinejad, whose foreign policy is different than that of Khomeini but it is none the less important for researchers to be aware of the Islamic states ideological background in Iran’s foreign policy in order to understand the influence it might have on the policy carried out by Ahmadinejad.

In a discussion of when other states will challenge the United States primacy, Walt points out that states that have openly resisted the United States have had foreign policies that clashed sharply with that of the United States. Iran and Iraq are two examples of such states. “Although there were important differences among these regimes, each was committed to foreign-policy objectives opposed by the United States, and several of them were also seeking to obtain weapons of mass destruction, a goal that U.S leaders have emphatically opposed”. (Walt, 2006) This supports the realistic theory of Iran’s foreign policy aiming to extend and secure the region, just as the United States aimed to do. Obtaining weapons also supports the realistic idea of defense rather than aiming to use weapons in order to convert sinners to Islam (Walt, 2006).

With respect to Iran’s policy towards Iraq, opinions differ regarding the importance of ideology. Due to Iran’s ties with the Shi’a factions in the country, but especially the Sadrists, and in its quest to build a supposed “Shia Crescent”, this may sound logical. However, Barzegar argues that although ideology is a very important factor, ideology is in this case is used for pragmatic and strategic reasons. After all, Iran’s ties with the Sadrists are short and temporary, as they are only activated in times of insecurity. “The issue of building closer relations with the Iraqi Shia factions, due to their shared cultural-religious identity at the levels of both ordinary people and executive elites, is compelling. However, the genuine prospect of establishing a Shia

ideological coalition is yet to be institutionalized in either Iranian or Arab societies, including Iraqi society, and therefore has little weight in regulating Iran's foreign policy" (Barzegar, 2008). It seems that the role of ideology has gone from being the main objective of Iran's foreign policy back up to the presidency of Ahmadinejad when it instead became the means of the foreign policy and is now serving the interests of Iran. "The nature and the substance of current challenges and opportunities in Iraq force Iran to be pragmatic" (Barzegar, 2008).

Moshe Ma'oz also argues that ideology is being used as a strategy rather than serving as the driving force behind Iran's foreign policy. Ma'oz opposes the possibility of building a "Shia crescent" as most Shi'a factions actually do not get along very well and the Shiite communities tend to care more about changing their lot in their countries rather than tying themselves to Iran. "Iranian foreign policy aims to advance Iranian national interests as much as to promote any sectarian Shiite agenda... It is as likely that the Shiite Arabs of Iraq will rival Iran for the leadership of Shiite communities in the Persian Gulf as it is that the Iraqi Shiite Arabs will join with Iran as part of a pan-Shiite alliance." (Ma'oz, 2007) The famous Shia crescent is thus only a mask worn to hide Iran's interest.

2.4-The Myth of the Religious Devil

"America's Iran mythology continues long established patterns of thinking, not just about foreign policy but also, more broadly, about the Muslim world. For as long as the Middle East has been a focus of Western attention, "ill-informed and stereotype-ridden ideas have distorted Western discourse about it" (Leverett & Leverett, 2013). Moreover, Robert Baer suggests that the best way to understand the imperial drive of Iran is to look at Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan rather than Tehran (Baer, 2008). Against the view that suggests that Iran has been playing the

role of an Islamic missionary, Baer contends that Ahmadinejad was not fighting a crusade and had no intention of reforming western society. Rather, from Iran's point of view, they have been fighting a war against occupation for the last thirty-five years. The common American belief that Iran is a terrorist state, just as Hezbollah is a terrorist group, is long outdated and should be replaced by the fact that Iran is today a classic military power (Baer, 2008). In the late 1980s, Iran transformed itself from trying to export the Shia Islamic belief to instead impose order and expand (Baer, 2008).

The former intimate relation between the United States and the Shah of Iran has led many Iranians to believe that the United States was manipulating Iran to serve its own purposes. After the Shah fell, "US efforts to reach a modus vivendi with the revolutionary regime were hamstrung by Iranian suspicions that the United States was inherently hostile and untrustworthy" (Walt, 2006). Moreover, the actions of the United States allies also reflect upon them and damage the Americans reputation among the local population. For example, "when a close ally like Israel denies the national aspirations of the Palestinians and uses massive force against them, it reinforces Arab and Muslim hostility to the United States itself, even if the United States occasionally tries to distance itself from specific Israeli actions" (Walt, 2006).

2.5-Iran and Iraq

The victories of Hezbollah in Lebanon, against Israel, in 2000 and 2006, became Iran's paradigm for expansion and came to have a long term effect on the region's geopolitics. The effects can be seen in the Iraqi city of Basra, which is the country's only maritime access and main oil export route, making it the heart of the Iraqi economy. However, Iran has, without the use of violence, pulled the city and the south of Iraq into its sphere of influence. Now Iran runs

all societal institutions in the area and the real regional currency is the Iranian Rial. How Iran managed to annex the south of Iraq is a question to be answered by lessons learned in Lebanon, where Iran succeeded in convincing various religious and political parties, including the organization of Hezbollah, that it was in their best interest to follow Tehran's orders (Baer, 2008). "Iran demonstrates extraordinary patience and long-term vision when moving its pieces on the chessboard. It is able to tolerate chaos for long periods of time, waiting for local players to fail and then come to Iran for help" (Baer, 2008).

This description fits well with the case of Basra, which was at a chaotic state when Iran took over. Instead of marching their forces into Iraq, Iran has made a soft takeover by controlling the fighting when possible, taking control of the mosques, supplying Iraq with refined oil products, running social institutions, and simply making the Iraqis believe that they cannot manage their own affairs without Iran (Baer, 2008). The somewhat mutual relationship between Iran and Iraq is in part due to the manner in which the US has tried to impede relations between the two countries and forming forces against them. Walt argues that the United States has a tendency to view its potential enemies as a unified monolith. "Lumping North Korea, Iraq, Iran, Libya, Syria and other states together as a set of "rogue states," or announcing global "crusade" against any political groups that employ "terrorist" methods, ignores the critical differences among these various parties, blinds us [the United States] to the possibility of improving relation with some of them, and encourages them to cooperate with each other more actively." Also, when former American president George W. Bush, in his 2002 State of the Union speech, called Iran, Iraq and North Korea the "axis of evil" it did not promote the named states to change their anti-American stands (Walt, 2006).

Kayhan Barzegar argues that “the aims of Iran’s foreign policy are defensive, mainly pragmatic, and based on state-oriented and strategic issues” (Barzegar, 2008). After Iraq was invaded by the United States, the security situation changed and Iran needed Iraq to be a friendly and stable neighbor. Even though Iran has somewhat invaded Iraq as well, it has not been met with the same resistance as the one that faced the US. There are Shiite factions in both Iran and Iraq who support Iran’s role in Iraq. Since the US invasion, the Shiite factions have divided among themselves. The Sadrists, who are considered an important Shiite community in Iraq, have strongly opposed the idea of federalism and wanted all troops to leave for security reasons. Al Dawa, a military party in Iraq, however does follow a policy of federalism. The Islamic Supreme Council for Iraq (ISCI) would also welcome federalism but with a reduction of the governments power. Both Al Dawa and ISCI want the troops to stay for protection and as means for combating Sunni extremism. But despite the damaged Shiite factions, they all seek a role for Iran to play as the Shiites are a minority in a Sunni region and do not enjoy many sympathies. Also, if there ever was to be another Shiite government in the Middle East, they would obviously need the support of Iran. Basically, Iran is the most powerful Shiite faction, and even though not everyone may agree with them, they all want to be on good terms with them.

Another important factor stems from the fact that the Sunnis have long held a majority in Middle Eastern governments and founded Arab nationalism, which has been costly for Iran on its way to power. Due to this, Iran’s governments adopted a stance of antagonism toward many Arab states. This was terminated in 1981 with the Iran-Iraq war and Tehran’s consequent alliance with Syria. However, the Sunnis did not forget this stance and enmity still exists today. From Iran’s perspective this is a dangerous fraction in Iraq, as the new government that will eventually rise in Iraq has to give room to the Shiite and the Kurdish factions.

Iraq poses a series of security challenges to Iran. The U.S forces in Iraq and their presence at the Iranian borders is an issue of political security. Although Iran was happy to see the fall of the Taliban and the regime of Saddam, the new threat of having an American military force forever planted in their region, and so close to Iran, was perhaps even a greater danger than the previous threat. The United States aimed to transform Iraq into a democracy, which opposed Iran's interests because it would give the United States even more influence in the region. Since the events of 9/11, the Bush administration adopted a regional policy of isolating Iran geopolitically. Due to this, the U.S built allies against Iran, which has been forced to confront the U.S in their own region. Another reason for Iran's foreign policy towards Iraq is economic, cultural and political opportunities (Barzegar, 2008). From Iran's perspective, "tackling these challenges requires establishing close relations and cooperation on a state level. Meanwhile, Iran defines the new Iraq as its top-priority national-security interest and thus cannot live with an Iraq under its traditional order. The current conflict between Iran and the United States is, therefore, based on defining the new political-security arrangements in post invasion Iraq. Three rounds of direct talks have so far been effective in bringing closer the two sides demands and security concerns. These talks should continue in the future" (Barzegar, 2008). Moreover, the United States and Iran have made some significant moves towards peace talks during the Obama administration but the situation regarding American troops in Iraq is still protruding (Leverett & Leverett, 2013).

Iran's purpose of controlling Iraq is not only to balance out the United States influence in the region. "Iran is calculating that the United States will get tired of Iraq, pull out, and let fall the first domino in a Persian re-conquest of the Gulf. In December 2007, when Iranian president Ahmadinejad crowed that the National Intelligence Estimate – the document that confirmed Iran

had stopped building a nuclear bomb – was a “declaration of surrender,” he had the Gulf in mind. The United States couldn’t beat Iran in the Gulf and it couldn’t stay there forever – and when it left, Iran would fill the void. This is precisely what the Revolutionary Guards have in mind” (Baer, 2008). The Gulf is an extremely valuable source of oil, holding 55 percent of the world’s reserves. If Iran will control this water, it will inevitably become even more politically dominant (Baer, 2008). So far it seems to be going in a favorable direction for Iran, as the United States are still presiding in Iraq while making new records in world power dept and the two important allies keep leaning on to Iran. “Iraq and Lebanon are hardly turning into paragons of pro-American “stability”; it seems more likely that both will grow aligned with Iran’s axis of influence” (Leverett & Leverett, 2013).

2.6-Hezbollah: Iran’s Link to Lebanon

Lebanon has long been a tool for Iran in its foreign policy battles with the United States. One example was in 1989, before Ahmadinejad assumed office when Americans were held hostages in Lebanon. American president George H.W. Bush turned to Iran for help, trying to attract their willingness to help by promising that their good deeds would not be forgotten. Iran spent millions of dollars in pressuring Shi’a militias in Lebanon to release the American hostages. However, the commander of the Revolutionary Guards reported that the Iranian Diplomats were attacked by Lebanese Forces, in Lebanon. Although it is believed that it would not have been possible for this to happen without Iran’s higher hierarchy’s assent. Eventually Iran did though succeed in freeing the Americans but President Bush made it a point not to keep his promise and kicked Iran out of the 1991 Madrid conference and stationed American troops in and around Iran’s neighboring countries (Leverett & Leverett, 2013).

To understand the new revival of Islam in Lebanon, one must understand that the 1970s and 1980s were dominated by civil wars. Prior to this time in the history of Lebanon, this tiny country was regarded as one of the most stable and pro-Western countries in the Middle East. Shi'a groups in the area have traditionally had less power than the other two major groups; the Maronite Christians and the Sunni Muslims. The country that had long been administered by France, conducted a census in 1932, which concluded that the Maronite Christians were the largest population group, the Sunnis came second and the Shi'as were under this bill considered the smallest group. Key posts in the government came to be reserved for these sects. For example, the president of Lebanon was supposed to be a Maronite, the prime minister would be a Sunni Muslim and the Parliament's spokesman Shi'a Muslim. Shiite organizations such as Hezbollah and al- Jihad al-Islami, however, came to play a significant role in the Civil War. Also, one of the most important events in Lebanon's recent history is the emergence of an assertive albeit fragmented Shi'a community. A key person for these changes was Musa Sadr, who was born in Iran and was a Shi'a scholar imam. In 1974 he started a Shi'a movement in Lebanon that later came to be known as Amal. With strikes and demonstrations, he wanted to reform the system so that it took into account the demographic situation, as the Shi'a s had grown larger than they were at the population census 1932.

After the revolution in Iran, organizations like Islamic Amal, Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad began to demand an Islamic republic in Lebanon. Another important factor that the Islamist groups grew stronger was due to pro-Iranian religious leaders around Lebanon that offered Hezbollah guidance. They also made mosques serve as centers for the organization's recruitment. In the late 1980s, Hezbollah had grown strongly and became something of an

umbrella organization of various groups. One was the shadowy Islamic Jihad that allied with the organization.

After the Civil War, both the more moderate Amal and Hezbollah established political forces in Lebanon. Hezbollah took part in politics and society in northern Lebanon as a moderate party while continuing the militant struggle against Israel to the south. During the Iran-Iraq war and the eighteen yearlong conflicts in Lebanon, Iran learned to fight like a modern guerilla movement. "Lebanon was a tactical proving ground for Iran, a place where it learned to combine asymmetrical warfare with both advanced and primitive weapons." Ever since then, Lebanon has continued to be the place of Iranian warfare development (Baer, 2008).

To understand Hezbollah's development, it is essential to take into consideration its role as a welfare organization. Judith Palmer Harik writes in her comprehensive analysis of Hezbollah that the dynamics of Hezbollah's growth as a recognized and respected player in the Lebanese political system, much depends on its work in the social arena (Harik, 2004). It is through Hezbollah's extensive social commitment that the organization enjoys great support and underpins its legitimacy as a Lebanese party. It is common for Muslim groups to take on social issues. They can contribute directly to the prosperity of the health service and infrastructure improvement, while offering involvement in community development and in social networks (Bayat, 2002). As both a social service organization and a player who can generate political pressure, Hezbollah can be considered a civil society actor, as these two features are typical of those performed in the civil society arena.

Throughout the years, Hezbollah has been able to offer more social services than other organizations in Lebanon and other fundamentalist groups in the region. They have predominately operated in the Shi'a areas, which often have been highly neglected by the Lebanese government

regarding infrastructure and social institutions (Harik, 2004). Asef Bayat believes that a contributing factor to Hezbollah having been so successfully able to run their welfare project lies in the organization also being based in a strongly religious movement, which in turn generates social engagement and breeding ground for volunteering (Bayat, 2000). From this, it can be assumed that Hezbollah is a player that promotes citizen participation and Iran's major funding to Hezbollah over the years means that Iran may have some degree of influence on the organization. Hezbollah's dependence on Iran certainly has decreased significantly as the organization has grown in popularity, and a large part of its funding now comes from Lebanese Shiite Muslims around the world (Gambill, 2006).

Still, it should be pointed out that Iran's economic and military assistance is considerable and that Hezbollah consults Iranian leaders of various issues, but Iran is no longer considered to have direct control over the organization and its policies. (Deeb, 2006). Bayat also stresses that Hezbollah does not follow the UN guidelines on participation in welfare work but rather acts paternalistic towards the population (2000). Hezbollah has political and religious goals, and social projects are selected and shaped by them (Harik, 2004).

Hezbollah is also a political party but its function is multifaceted and its political role is different from other Lebanese parties. Since its formation Hezbollah has had a revolutionary approach but has increasingly made it onto the reformist path and has become a political party in the Lebanese system (Hajjar, 2002). Hezbollah has accepted that an Islamic revolution like the one in Iran could not easily be imported into Lebanon, which thus led to alternative and more reform-oriented ways of its political strategy. Hezbollah's evolution from being a radical and military resistance movement into a party involved in the political process is inevitably a

democratic progress in itself. Hamzeh also suggests that Hezbollah's mere presence in parliament reduces fundamentalism (Hamzeh, 1993).

A large part of Hezbollah's activity is its military mobilization. Violence has been used and is still being used today as a tool for political change. The party is therefore branded a terrorist organization in the Netherlands, UK and United States (Hajjar, 2002, p. 13). The early ideological signs for Hezbollah's mobilization were found in its predecessor in the Iranian revolution and Hezbollah was also identifying with the broad Islamic revolutionary movement (Haugbolle, 2006: 8). Iran became an important part in the establishment of Hezbollah's military activity, together with Syria, which was one of its main sources of income. Iran helped with training, military equipment and manpower to support Hezbollah's armed struggle against Israel, which was also part of Iran's own geopolitical agenda in the region (Norton, 1999). As Hezbollah's influence and military success has grown, the organization has thus been the subject of a regional political power game where both Syria and Iran, to varying degrees dictated the terms for continued support for Hezbollah by controlling the organization by their own power-political interests in the region. (Harik, 2004).

After the Lebanese civil war, Hezbollah continued to develop its military resistance movement. The party was successful in forcing Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories in southern Lebanon in 2000, an event seen as a victory for the organization. Then in the summer of 2006, a war erupted between Israel and Hezbollah. The conflict resulted in hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah in a direction that was regarded as an Israeli defeat (Haugbolle, 2006). The organization won popular support both in Lebanon and the Middle East not only from Muslim groups but also received some recognition from others as an expression of national liberation and independence from a past that was greatly influenced by colonial interventions (Palmer-Harik,

2004). Hezbollah can be seen as a direct representative of the Shiite in Lebanon (ICG, 2003). Hezbollah's operations are closely linked to the religious sphere which has also contributed to their involvement and provided a clear part of their agenda - both in terms of welfare work, political commitment and military actions.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter surveyed Iran's regional strategy in its quest to defend and advance its geopolitical interests. It examined the debate pertaining to Iran's foreign policy and then argued that Iran's foreign policy under Ahmadi-Nejad presidency is best explained as a mix of realism and ideology. The chapter then discussed Iran's immediate geopolitical theatres and how these have affected its foreign policy choices. The chapter then looked at the formation of Hezbollah as a proxy for its geopolitical interests. The next chapter looks at Iran's role in Iraq after the US invasion.

CHAPTER THREE

IRAQ: A THREAT OR AN OPPORTUNITY?

3.1-Introduction:

The 2003 US invasion of Iraq triggered major shifts and changes that have affected the geopolitical structure of the Middle East. Iran saw in the US toppling of Saddam Hussein both an opportunity and a threat. “By shifting post-invasion Iraq to a friendly state, Iran desires to discard the traditional designation of Iraq as Iran’s counterbalance in the Persian Gulf and to turn the new relations into a balance of interests” (Barzegar, 2008). The troubled history between Iran and Iraq has left its work on Iran’s foreign policy towards Iraq. The predominant Iranian view of Iraq is based on suspicion and mistrust. The fall of Baghdad was viewed as an opportunity to review Iran’s foreign policy towards Iraq. Though Iran viewed the toppling of Saddam Hussein as an opportunity, Tehran was also conscious of seeing a “pro-American Iraqi client regime with like-minded elites that would probably act in favor of U.S purposes and in defiance of the Islamic Republic” (Barzegar, 2008). Thus Iran was ready to develop new arrangements in the region, but with the US refuse to accept Tehran’s offer to negotiate a new regional modus operandi after the fall of Saddam (Parsi, 2007). “Iran pursued a mix of classical balancing and asymmetric balancing strategy to defend its geopolitical interests” (Salloukh, 2013). The Iranians pursued a strategy labeled “the diplomacy of weaving carpets” which consists of thousands of knitting, tens of colors without anyone knowing its final shape. This diplomacy was linked by the strategy of walking between raindrops that is, making it very hard to catch any Iranian directly involved in supporting any of the Iraqi militias.

CIA Director General David Petraeus suggests that the personnel of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGS) are in Iraq under the cover of diplomats to ensure that there is no connection with Iran (Chulov, 2011). “Three officials said that about 150 Iranian intelligence officers, plus members of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Command, are believed to be active inside Iraq at any given time. There is no evidence that the Iranians have directly attacked US troops in Iraq, intelligence officials said” (Linzer, 2007).

Tehran supported two approaches in post-Saddam Iraq: on one hand it pushed its allies to participate in the elections in order to guarantee control on the new political system; on the other hand it supported all militias that resisted and fought the American troops. Iran pushed its allies - mainly the Islamic supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), the “Dawa” (Islamic Call Party), and al-Mahdi Army (Jaish al-Mahdi – JAM) - to participate in the first elections held in 2005 by financing and guiding them and trying to gather them in one electoral list to avoid the dispersion of the Shi’a votes and to reflect the Shi’a demographical majority which is more than 50% of the population. This Iranian support coincided with the US policy to make Iraq a model of democracy in the Middle East. Iran exploited this policy in two ways, first by allowing its allies in Iraq to achieve the highest degree of American support to strengthen their power in the new Iraq and second, it recruited this compatibility to soften the American rigidity towards the Iranian nuclear program.

This chapter evaluates Iran’s foreign policy in Iraq and the tools it used to apply this policy and whether Iran was able to attract Iraq to its sphere of influence in the region and how was did Iran use Iraq in its geopolitical struggle with US and with Saudi Arabia. It starts by assessing Iran’s relations with different Iraqi parties. Then, it moves to address Iran’s support to

Iraqi militias that resisted the American troops. The chapter also examines the debate pertaining to a presumed Shi'a crescent, and evaluates whether Iran is interested in such a scenario or not.

3.2.-Iran's Relations with Iraqi Parties:

Kayhan Barzegar argues that “the aims of Iran’s foreign policy are defensive, mainly pragmatic, and based on state-oriented and strategic issues” (Barzegar, 2008). In the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq, the security situation changed and Iran wanted Iraq to be a friendly and stable neighbor. Barzegar argues that “Iran has attempted to build balanced relations with all Shia factions in order to preserve its national and security interests.” He states that relations with the “Sadrist faction are tactical and short term. Such contact exists foremost with an eye to undermining the unilateral US policy of excluding Iran from the domain of Iraq politics” (Barzegar, 2008). Relations with al-Dawa and ISCI are strong and based on faith and trust, taking into consideration that the “ISCI is the only sizeable Shi'a party that fought on the Iranian side during the Iran-Iraq war” (Visser, 2008). Unlike its good relations with the mentioned religious factions in Iraq, “Tehran’s main concerns from secular Shi'a factions, but mainly the groups related to Iyyad Allawi and Ahmad Chalabi, stems from their relations with the US. Iran fears that the US empowerment of those secular factions is to balance its role in the new Iraq. While Iran’s main policy focused on balanced relations with all Shi'a factions, and mainly ISCI and Al-Dawa” (Barzegar, 2008).

Concerning Iran’s relations with Sunni factions, it is important not to overlook the fact that “Saddam’s regime was considered a Sunni regime, and Sunnis were present at the top levels of governments during the Ba’athist regime and had a tendency to foment Arab nationalism, which was costly to Tehran. The Iraq governments led by Sunnis adopted hostile policies

towards Iran which was culminated in the 1981 Iran-Iraq war” (Barzegar, 2008). This left a deep impact on Iran’s relations with Sunnis factions in Iraq, where Tehran is concerned about the return of such hostility or even rivalry in Iran-Iraq relations.

3.3.-Iran’s Assistance to Iraqi Resistance:

Hezbollah’s victories in Lebanon, against Israel, in 2000 and 2006, were used by Iran to expand its regional influence and had a long term effect on the region’s geopolitics. Thus, with the help of Hezbollah, Iran started training and financing Shi’a insurgent groups in Iraq and this support was well documented by U.S intelligence and military officials, where General Michael Hayden, principal Deputy Director of National Intelligence, told the Senate Armed Service Committee in November 2006 that “the Iranian hand is stoking violence in Iraq and supporting even competing Shi’a factions, General Michael Maples the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) shared the same assessment in congressional testimony. They both said that Iran has provided direct support to Shi’a militias in Iraq, including trigger devices for roadsides bombs” (Yaalon, 2007, p. 20) Since the fall of Saddam’s regime and the end of Arab Sunni control of Iraq, Iran wasted a little time in building its influence in the country. Tehran maintains close relationships with Iraqi Shi’a political parties and their major leaders, especially the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, the “Da’wa Party”, Moqtada al-Sadr and his “Jeish el-Mahdi”, in addition to its relationship with ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. A Chatham House report concluded included that there is “this often overlooked fact that it is Iran, not the US, and certainly not the UK, that is the most influential ‘external’ power in Iraq today, with an unparalleled ability to affect stability and security across most of the country” (Catham House, 2006, p. 20). These efforts are in line with what can be defined as, “Iran’s strategy towards’ post-

Saddam Iraq”. This strategy seeks to achieve the following objectives: prevent the emergence of an Iraq that could threaten Iran; strengthen economic and religious interests in Iraq, prevent the emergence of an independent and separate Kurdish State in the north, prevent any decisive victory for the United States which could improve the image of the U.S in the Middle East, and could encourage Washington to repeat the experience of regime change in Iran; and finally, prevent the establishment of full-scale civil war in Iraq. Such a war might threaten the Shiite influence inside Iraq, and destabilize Iran, and antagonize neighboring Sunni Arab states.

It is important to note that political and cultural ties between the Iraq Shiites and Iran do not mean that Iraq will establish an Islamic state similar to that in Tehran. Historically, Iraq is considered to be one of the most secular Arab states. Moreover, senior Iraqi Shi‘a leaders, including al-Sistani, did not support the model of the Iranian “Wilayat al-Faqih” or rule of the Jurist-consult with direct religious control over the government. But with Saddam Hussein’s overthrow, the United States indirectly made Iraq the first Arab state to be ruled by Shi‘as in modern history. This empowerment of the Shiites in Iraq has had a significant influence on the Middle East.

Because of the role played by Iran in the post-American occupation, it seeks to prevent the creation of a new security dilemma in its relations with the United States. For this purpose, Iran has applied the tools of both realism and ideology in order to regulate its policies toward Iraq. It has supported its allies mainly the Shi‘a factions, and has balanced against the threat posed by the presence of US forces in Iraq after the invasion. Many analysts believe that Iran sought to destabilize Iraq through its unlimited support to Shi‘a forces to bring more chaos to Iraq, to facilitate its control over things in Iraq, in order to protect and secure its interests using an Iraqi political cover. Iran has turned Iraq to a site to compete with the United States benefiting

from the internal Iraqi political troubles, including struggles on the form of the government, in addition to economic and security problem to serve its interests in a weak Iraq that was still suffering from the consequences of the US war.

Despite Iran's use of the Shi'a card to find a foothold in the arrangements of post-Saddam Iraq in order to protect its national security, it nevertheless realized the need to reach a dialogue with the US. Yet Tehran is always suspect of US designs in the region. Iranian President Mohammad Khatami expressed this attitude in an open session of the Islamic Council Shura when he said that "the United States today has become our neighbor in the west as well in the east and we have to live with the fact that the US in the region despite the bitterness of it , calling reformist MPs to immediately open a dialogue with the United States this was also also highlighted by Javad Zarif, Iran's ambassador to the United Nations that Iran does not choose its neighbors and should make every effort to live in peace and tranquility with its neighbors" (kishk, 2003, 87).

Iran agrees with the United States on the need to preserve the unity of Iraq. It also supports the spread of democracy in Iraq because this would give more power to the Shi'a majority. Iran also wants to avoid the transformation into an Islamic radical state. Nevertheless, mistrust between Washington and Tehran inhibits close cooperation between them. Iran's strategy in Iraq involved sinking the United States in the Iraqi quagmire, while maintaining its ties to keep its position in Iraq through its agents to reach the final stage. This strategy necessitated a complex set of contradictory policies: "on one hand, a clogged behavior, and on the other hand it sent offers to the United States to assist in controlling the stability of the country" (Baer, *The Devil We Know*, 2008). But Iraqi Sunnis and others, including the United

States, felt suspicious about the intentions of Iran, and they repeatedly warned Tehran about the consequences of tampering with Iraq's security.

Iraq was not Iran's only worry. Washington's policies towards the Islamic Republic itself were also a source of grave concern to Tehran. Tehran assumed that it was likely to be the next target on the list developed by the United States to be hit after Iraq. And accordingly, Iran continued to follow the same policies which it followed in the past. Tehran was fully prepared for a possible outbreak of fighting with the United States. For this, Tehran considered Iraq as a first line of defense. It thus sought to prevent the United States from finding the time or the opportunity to secure full control over Iraq and to achieve this, Iran had reviewed its strength in Iraq through its proxy Shi'a groups.

The Iranian leadership was convinced that even if the US was not interested in removing the regime in Tehran, it was interested in keeping it under threats in order to cause it to change its behavior and stop what is suspected to be a nuclear weapons program. In addition, pushing Iran to stop its support for Hezbollah in Lebanon and other anti-Israel Islamist groups and movements such as Hamas and the Islamic Jihad is on the top of US demands. Iranian officials believe that the occupation of Iraq is just a part of the scene prepared for the region. Therefore, the Iranian regime did not want the United States to succeed in its project to rebuild Iraq. It feared that that Washington's success in regime change in Iraq would encourage it to repeat it in Iran. "For this reason, especially before the elections in January 2005 Iran pursued a policy of controlled chaos in Iraq as a mean to preserve its interests." (Crisis Group, 2005, pp. 14-15).

This is also why Iran was determined to see the Americans withdraw from Iraq as soon as possible. The formation of a Shi'a-led, strong, national and legitimate government in Baghdad will increase the chances of accelerating the American withdrawal. Shi'a hegemony in Iraq could

pose a strong Iranian card to pressure in dealing with the United States. And, as many Iranian officials warned, if the United States threatened Iran, they had 140,000 potential hostages in Iraq (Crisis Group, 2005).

Although the US invasion of Iraq neutralized one of Iran's main threats – Saddam – it nevertheless replaced it with an even bigger and stronger enemy – the US. Intensive American presence on the borders of Iran in Iraq and Afghanistan and US military forces deployment in the Gulf States was a source of security threat to Tehran. However, this perception was not absent from Iran, where it views the positives of such intensified US military presence in the region, as it may give Iran an important advantage in the event of a military confrontation with the United States, where the US forces in the region become in the Iranian missile range. Hashemi Rafsanjani's words, when he was asked about what Iran able to do when is besieged by all those American troops around all its borders, best express the thinking of the Iranian leadership: "We do not know who is blockading who?" (Crisis Group, 2005). His answer revealed the extent to which Iran is betting on its allies in Iraq, and how it looks at US troops in Iraq as hostages and would transform them to a precious hunting in case the US launched any military attack against it. This situation provided Iran with a great deal of protection and peace of mind, prompting the United States not to think about attacking Iran in the presence of more than one hundred and forty thousand of American soldiers in its grip in Iraq.

As aforementioned in the previous chapter, another technique adopted by Iran is to bring Iraqi cities under Iranian influence without the use of violence. One example is the case of the Iraqi city of Basra, which is the country's only maritime access and main oil export route, making it the heart of the Iraqi economy. Iran has, without the use of violence, pulled the city and the south of Iraq into its sphere of influence. Now Iran runs all societal institutions in the

area and the currency is the Iranian Rial. How Iran managed to annex the south of Iraq is a question to be answered by lessons learned in Lebanon, where Iran succeeded in convincing various religious and political parties, including the organization of Hezbollah, that it was in their best interest to follow Tehran's orders. "Iran demonstrates extraordinary patience and long-term vision when moving its pieces on the chessboard. It is able to tolerate chaos for long periods of time, waiting for local players to fail and then come to Iran for help" (Baer, *The Devil We Know*, 2008). This description fits well with the case of Basra, which was at a chaotic state when Iran took over. Instead of marching its forces into Iraq, Iran made a soft takeover by taming down the fighting when possible, taking control of the mosques, supplying Iraq with refined oil products, running social institutions in society, simply making the Iraqis believe that they cannot do without Iran's help (Baer, *The Devil We Know*, 2008).

Iran's purpose of controlling Iraq is not only to balance against the US influence in the region. In 2008 Bauer noted that "Iran is calculating that the United States will get tired of Iraq, pull out, and let fall the first domino in a Persian re-conquest of the Gulf. In December 2007, when Iranian president Ahmadinejad crowed that the National Intelligence Estimate – the document that confirmed Iran had stopped building a nuclear bomb – was a "declaration of surrender," he had the Gulf in mind. "The United States couldn't beat Iran in the Gulf and it couldn't stay there forever – and when it left, Iran would fill the void. This is precisely what the Revolutionary Guards have in mind" (Baer, *The Devil We Know*, 2008). The Gulf is an extremely valuable source of oil, holding 55 percent of the world's reserves. If Iran will control this water, it will inevitably become even more politically dominant (Baer, *The Devil We Know*, 2008). So far the contest seems to be going in a favorable direction for Iran, as the United States was still presiding in Iraq while making new records in world power and the two important allies

keep leaning on to Iran. The Iraqi resistance represented the major challenge that faced American Policy in the Middle East and mainly in Iraq, where the United States claimed that Iraq would be a democratic model for the region, but that did not happen, on the contrary there was a situation of chaos and turmoil in the light of the failure of achieving stability in Iraq by the occupation forces, where the United States did not imagine that the resistance against it will escalate to this point, especially after the violent clashes with (JAM) and lead by Moqtada al-Sadr. In light of the American quagmire in Iraq, Iran could have gained a lot, especially in the wake of the escalation of the resistance it and the entry of the Shi'a militias into the battle. This prompted the United States to demand from Iran to intervene and convince Moqtada al-Sadr to stop the resistance, which was considered a striking development in the relations between Iran and the US.

Reports issued by the coalition forces show that Iran used money, weapons, training and other forms of support to assign all of its Shi'a and non-Shi'a allies in Iraq, to disrupt the work of the US and the coalition forces, and to ensure that Iraq remains too weak, unable of challenging its interests and security. And according to the States Departments' notes, obtained by WikiLeaks, Iran provides 100-200 million dollars annually to its proxies in Iraq, where it seek to prevent and obstruct any US attack on Iran, and to create a buffer zone against any invasion of its western borders (Guardian, 2010).

According to many analysts, Iran exploited the Iraqi crises in order to defend itself against criticism regarding its nuclear project, to offset international sanctions on its economy, and to weaken the U.S forces and keep them busy in Iraq. Iran faced the plans and practices of the US with a lot of flexibility, given the linkage between the Iraqi issue in the American policy with other issues that concerns Iran, most notably the Iranian nuclear program, and the issue of Hezbollah in Lebanon, in addition to the Iranian-Syrian strategic partnership, and the Iranian

rejection of the peace process in the Middle East, not to mention the ‘war on terror’. To spoil US plans in Iraq, Tehran played on two cards: it encouraged the ongoing Iraqi resistance against the US forces in Iraq and, at the same time, it made sure to maintain strong relationships with those leaders dealing with the US presence in Iraq, especially the leaders of Shi‘a organizations. Conservatives forces in Iran also feared the repercussions of the fledgling democratic experience in Iraq, and its effects on the domestic scene in Iran. They were especially fearful that federalism in Iraq, which gives autonomy to the Kurds in the north, and provides them with political, economic, and social right, could spill over into Iran. After all, Iranian society is ethnically diverse and includes many minorities, sects, including a large Kurdish minority. Conservatives officials in Tehran were apprehensive from possible demands from minorities for greater cultural and political rights, similar to those given to the Iraqi Kurds. This was especially the case given that that the US administration has always tried to destabilize Iran by playing on its internal contradictions. Washington has tried to trigger internal unrest to undermine the theocratic regime in Tehran from the inside, given the difficulty of achieving this through external military operations (Barzegar, 2008).

The US plan in Iraq aimed not only at establishing a genuine democracy, but also to convert it to a starting point for spreading regime change in other regional states. The US objective, from Tehran’s perspective, was to control the sources of global energy in the region, and to guarantee Israel’s security by redrawing the regional balance of power. However this American project stalled in Iraq because of multiple sources of resistance. Genuinely concerned about its own security, Tehran used its Shiite allies in Iraq to sabotage post-invasion Iraq. Iran also strengthened its influence in Iraq using its allies operating in Iraq, especially the religious

authorities who contributed to the consecration of the Iranian influence in the name of the Iraqi resistance against the American occupation.

The main strategic consequence of the U.S invasion of Iraq is that Iran became a new major regional power, the opposite of what the US and its allies, mainly Israel, wanted. A study by the British Royal Institute of International Affairs in August 2006 concluded that the United States, with the help of the coalition, had removed two of Iran's most deadly rival in the region – the Taliban government in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq – but had failed to replace any of them with stable regimes. The study added that the Iranian influence in Iraq today is greater than that of the United States itself, and that Iran has a significant presence in Afghanistan and the only way for Washington to change this unexpected outcome is to defeat Iran militarily. Moreover, and if the United States attacked Iran, for example, the main aim of this attack is reducing Iran's newly acquired role and power in the region (Baer, 2008). Iran used its control over Iraq to advance its own geopolitical interests. This marked the Islamic Republic's republic transformation from a state trying to export the Islamic revolution to a state recognizing its geopolitical role and trying to expand. This achievement turned Iraq overnight from an enemy state to a friendly Shi'a state, playing a central role in the so-called "Shi'a Crescent" alluded to first by Jordan's King Abdullah.

3.4.-A Shi'a Crescent or Axis of Resistance?

The aforementioned crescent stretches from Iran to Israel's borders (Salloukh, 2013, p. 35). "Three presumptions center on Iran's role and intentions. A Shi'a crescent is seen by the Arab Sunni elites as an attempt by Iran firstly to engage the masses in the region; secondly, to build an ideological belt of sympathetic Shi'a governments and political factions in Iraq, Syria,

Lebanon, and the Persian Gulf region and, thirdly, to expand its regional role and power” (Barzegar, 2008, p. 87). The fear from the birth of such a geopolitical sphere stems from the fact that some elites, mainly Arab Sunni elites, are afraid that the revival of Shiite in Iraq and their rise to power might be reflected as demands of the Arab Shi‘a population to acquire more socio-political rights. This fear accompanied with US encouragement and support pushed Riyadh to lead a new coalition of “moderate” Arab states labeled the “axis of the moderate” states consisting of Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority (PA), Tunisia, Morocco, Yemen, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and supported implicitly by Israel. This axis was a Saudi tool used to reverse Tehran’s influence and balance against the Shi‘a Crescent, which Iran prefers to call “the axis of resistance,” including Iran, Iraq, Syria, Hezbollah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and backed by Russia on the international stage (Salloukh, 2013, p. 35). The ongoing confrontation between Iran and its allies on one side, and Saudi and its allies on the other side, is just the second part of the “1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war which was intended by Saddam to bottle up fundamentalist Shiites and to keep it from having a major impact in Iraq and the Gulf” (Cole, 2006). With the loss of what was considered to be a buffer zone between Iran and the Arab States, the “moderate” Arab states are concerned about the growing Iranian role in their region especially the growing relation with the Shi‘a communities in their states.

The two axes used at least three main sites in their geopolitical struggle. These sites are Lebanon, Iraq, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Due to its geopolitical position and oil resources the Iraqi site is one of the most important battlefields between the two camps. And the future of this confrontation will mark and determine the future of the Persian Gulf, “if the Iraqi State is able to reconstruct itself, the entire region will be stable. If the Iraqis fail to construct a

viable state, then the country will remain a playing field for regional and international forces to extend its influence and fight their own proxy wars” (Gause, 2010).

3.5. Conclusion

This chapter examined the Iranian role in Iraq after the 2003 US invasion and occupation. The case of Iraq demonstrates the tools employed by Tehran in order to counter the US-Saudi alliance, and to expand its influence, trying to create a shift in the geopolitical order in the Middle East amounting to a new order in Tehran’s and its allies’ favor. “One certainty about the Iraq War is that the United States will see Iran’s imperial ambitions played out more clearly there than in Tehran” (Baer, 2008, p. 29). Taking advantage of its experience in Lebanon, Iran managed the chaos in Iraq and filled out the vacuum and took control of Iraq. Iran’s patience in building up alliances and applying its policies has made it a force that could not be underestimated when dealing with the geopolitics of the Middle East. A British officer who had served in Baghdad observed that “the Iranians were there before we arrived; I have no doubts they will be there when we leave” (Burke, 2006). He concluded that “in strategic terms, the United States lost the Iraq War and the Islamic Republic won it” (Leverett & Leverett, 2013, p. 70). By 2011 Iran’s influence was very clear. When the Obama Administration favored keeping some 20,000 troops in Iraq permanently, Iran opposed this request. Consequently, the Iraqi government opposed any American presence in Iraq and demanded a full US withdrawal from Iraq. The next chapter turns to Iran’s use of Lebanon to advance its geopolitical interests.

CHAPTER FOUR:

HEZBOLLAH'S IRANIAN CONNECTION

4.1-Introduction:

This chapter examines the Iranian role in Lebanon and how Tehran's support to Hezbollah helps it in its geopolitical struggle with the US and Saudi Arabia. It begins by a historical overview of the conditions of Hezbollah's creation and the crucial role played by the Revolutionary Guards. It then raises the question of whether Iran's commitment towards Hezbollah stems from an ideological or realist perspective. Then the 9/11 terrorist attacks and their consequences on the geopolitics of the Middle East, mainly the invasion of Iraq, are studied. The UNSCR 1559 and the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, and the subsequent withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon created new challenges for Iranian policy in Lebanon. This chapter focuses mainly on the geopolitical struggle between Iran and its allies against the US and the moderate Arab States. In doing so, the chapter demonstrates how Lebanon is used as a confrontation site between the two camps in the grand geopolitical contest.

4.2-Historical Background:

In the aftermath of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982, and the subsequent defeat of the PLO, a cabal was created. This cabal remained loosely organized and largely clandestine until 1985, with the proclamation of Hezbollah's open letter addressed to the Downtrodden in Lebanon and the World: "We, the sons of Hezbollah's nation, whose vanguard God has given victory in Iran and which has established the nucleus of the world's central

Islamic state, abide by the orders of a single wise and just command currently embodied in the supreme Ayatollah Ruhollah al-Musavi al-Khomeini, the rightly guided imam who combines all the qualities of the total imam who has detonated the Muslim's revolution, and who is bringing about the glorious Islamic renaissance." (Norton, 1987, p. 168)

This document, considered to be Hezbollah's manifesto, explains to a large extent the relation between Iran and Hezbollah, and Tehran's role in Hezbollah's institutional order which it "bears a strong made-in-Tehran coloration" (Norton, 2007, p. 35). Iran did not serve only as its inspiration; it also supported the party technically and financially. In fact, "the initial deployment of 800 IRG (Islamic Revolutionary Guards) personnel to Lebanon took place in 1982 under the supervision of Mohsen Rafiqdust" (Ranstorp, 1997, p. 32). In addition to providing training, the IRG worked to establish its position in Lebanon, but without direct confrontation to avoid the Lebanese quagmire. Throughout the years, Iranian material support increased, where "it is estimated that Iran's support to Hezbollah reaches \$100 million or more per year; whereas Iran's total investment in Hezbollah has exceeded \$2 billion" (Samii, 2008). This substantial aid allowed Hezbollah to build a network of social organizations including schools, hospitals, NGOs, and construction firms. It was crucial in the reconstruction project that followed the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war where "Hezbollah was seen doling out hundreds of hundred-dollar pills procured from a suitcase to Lebanese seeking compensation for Israeli bomb damage to their homes" (Kagan, Kagan, & Pletka, 2008).

Many observers believe that Hezbollah is an integral part of Iran's foreign policy. Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, one of the founders of Hezbollah, and former Iranian ambassador to Syria and Lebanon explained, that "Hezbollah is part of the Iranian ruler ship; Hezbollah is a central component of the Iranian military and security establishment; the ties between Iran and

Hezbollah are far greater than those between a revolutionary regime with a revolutionary party outside its borders” (Kagan, Kagan, & Pletka, 2008). The US accuses Iran of using Hezbollah to undertake terrorist attacks and to seize the world’s attention whenever Tehran needs a distraction from its nuclear program. The US classifies Hezbollah as the most dangerous terrorist group. In fact, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage once stated that “Hezbollah may be the ‘A-Team of terrorists’ and maybe al-Qaeda is actually the ‘B-Team’” (Bradley, 2003). It is also reported that “before September 11th, Hezbollah was responsible for more Americans deaths than any other terrorist group” (Committee on International Relations, 2006)

4.3-The Founding of Hezbollah: Ideology vs. Realism

Article 152 of the constitution of Iran states that “The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based upon the rejection of all forms of domination, both the exertion of it and submission to it, the preservation of the independence of the country in all respects and its territorial integrity, the defense of the rights of all Muslims, non-alignment with respect to the hegemonic superpowers, and the maintenance of mutually peaceful relations with all non-belligerent States.” This article summarizes the principles of the foreign policy of Iran, “such as foreign interference versus ‘preservation of the independence of the country’, anti-Americanism versus ‘nonalignment with respect to the hegemonic superpowers’, the export of the revolution/ideological considerations versus ‘the defense of the rights of all Muslims’” (Hargitai, 2013). Even before coming to power Khomeini considered that “Israel is an integral part of the West’s imperial strategy toward the Middle East. In a 1972 ‘message in support of Palestine’ , he warned that everyone must know that the goal of the great powers in creating Israel does not end

with the occupation of Palestine. “They are planning to make all Arab countries share the Palestine’s fate, God Forbid” (Leverett & Leverett, 2013, p. 53).

From the early days of the revolution, Iran showed its commitment to defending the Muslims of the world. Thus, Iran’s leaders were worried about Israel’s intentions. “They were particularly disturbed by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, which they saw first of all as an assault on southern Lebanon’s largely Shi’a population” (Leverett & Leverett, 2013, p. 54). Their threat perception deepened when they saw a pro-western government being installed in Beirut, which concluded a peace agreement with Israel in May 1983. Such pro-western government was a real threat to Iran’s strategic interests in the Middle East. Iran considered “the Mediterranean coast was a likely security zone against future provocation” (Zisser, 2011). Iran was concerned with aiding the Lebanese, and thus sent cadres of the IRGC to the Bekaa’a valley in east Lebanon and started training the Shi’a youth. This was a direct consequence of its anti-Israel policy.

Ideologists explain this anti-Israel policy as part of Iran’s efforts to attract the Arabs by adopting the Palestinian cause, which will allow it to win the support of the Arab mass, putting Iran in a better position to export the revolution and support the vulnerable around the world. This was one of the most fundamental principles of the revolution. Realists, on the other hand, have a different explanation of the Iranian support of its Shi’a allies in Lebanon, where they link this support to Hezbollah as part of its quest to balance power and collect geopolitical cards against the U.S; and to influence the Arab-Israeli struggle. American commentators consider that the peak of the Iranian engagement in the Lebanese civil war was the “truck-bombing of the US embassy in April 1983, the US Marine and French barracks in October 1983, and the new US embassy in October 1984” (Baer, 2008, p. 54). The ideological interpretation of these attacks

could be put in the context of fighting imperialism and driving out the western troops from Muslims countries. Realists explain those attacks as attempts to balance through asymmetric fighting skills U.S and Israeli power in the region, where Iranians wouldn't welcome to insert "a significant number of American troops and intelligence officers into a highly contested Middle Eastern arena, without a U.N. or other valid international authorization, to impose an anti-Iranian government on Lebanon" (Leverett & Leverett, 2013, p. 70). Iran has never declared its responsibility for these attacks. Reports however, at that time attributed the bombings to the Islamic Jihad Organization, a stealth group considered a front for Hezbollah and the Jerusalem Forces brigades, used to claim attacks that neither Hezbollah nor Iran wanted to claim. The Iranian engagement in Lebanon's affairs increased in later years, and the financial as well the military aid to Hezbollah increased steadily. This support finally reached its goal, with the 25 May 2000 Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon. "Ayatollah Khamenei made it clear what the victory in Lebanon meant for Iran. Lebanon, he said, pointedly using the Arabic pronunciation *Lubnan*, is Iran's greatest foreign policy success. We will repeat it across *Dar al-Islam* (the Islamic world) until all of Islam is liberated" (Baer, 2008, p. 56).

4.4-The September 11 Attacks and their Consequences:

The 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington D.C had a huge impact on the entire world and on the Middle East specifically. Lebanon, at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and one of the sights of the geopolitical confrontation between the Iran-led "axis of resistance" on one side and the Saudi-led "axis of moderate Arab states" backed and supported by the US, was greatly influenced by the consequent "war on terror".

Hezbollah, who has always been at the heart of the Iranian-American confrontation, and has always raised the slogan “death to America,” issued a statement condemning the terrorist attacks that led to a huge number of casualties between civilians. Hezbollah at that time was conducting operations in order to liberate the Sheb’a farm, but pressure exerted on it made the party suspend its operations for a while. Those pressures were actually exerted mainly by Syria and Iran, who were worried from the global “war on terror”. Ryan Crocker, the US ambassador in Iraq from 2007 and 2009, and a senior State Department official at the time of the 11 September attacks, said that after the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, “the Iranian officials were frantic to let the Americans know that they wanted peace. Many of them watched the regimes toppled in Afghanistan and Iraq and were convinced that they were next” (Filkins, 2013). The Iranians feared that Israel wanted to lure Hezbollah and Iran to a new confrontation in the wake of Bush’s war on terror. Kamal Kharrazi, Iran’s foreign minister from 1997 to 2005, in a press conference that took place on 11 April 2002, after his meeting with Hezbollah’s general secretary Sayid Hassan Nasrallah, called for “care and self-restraint in order to prevent the Zionist regime from causing intrigue in the region” (Samii, 2008).

Many observers believe that after the US declared the war on terror, there was a split within Hezbollah between pro-Syrian and pro-Iranian wings. “The pro-Syrian elements” recommended “restraint for the time being in regard to Hezbollah’s campaign to liberate the Sheb’a Farms” (Blanford, 2001). Though Tehran feared it might be next in Bush’s war list especially when US president George W. Bush mentioned Iran along with Iraq and North Korea as states that constitute the axis of evil, Tehran sent message to the U.S through Hezbollah’s continued operations in South Lebanon against Israeli targets. This was the game of brinkmanship at its best.

The US invasion of Afghanistan inadvertently relieved Iran from a major adversary on its borders. On one side, the toppling of Taliban was an opportunity for Iran. However, it created a new threat to Tehran with the US troops on its borders. This threat was postponed with the US preoccupation in the preparation of its new war. The threat to Iran and many other states in the Middle East escalated with the US invasion of Iraq. Though all the countries in the Middle East had a troubled history with Saddam's Iraq, each state feared it may be next on Washington's hit list. For example, Saudi Arabia feared that a stable Iraq would encourage the US to continue with its post-9/11 democratization agenda. Syria, Iran and Hezbollah feared that the invasion of Iraq would be just the first step in reshaping the geopolitical map of the Middle East.

Just days before the U.S invasion of Iraq, Nasrallah told tens of thousands of demonstrators celebrating 'Ashura' that "the US should not expect [that] the people of this region will welcome you with roses and jasmine. The people of this region will receive you, rather, with rifles, blood, and martyrdom operations. We are not afraid of the American invaders, and we will keep saying 'death to America'" (Norton, 2007). Using those words, Nasrallah was warning the Americans not to consider attacking Hezbollah, Syria or Iran because any such prospective attack will be resisted. This message was very important from Hezbollah's point of view, especially that the quick and successful toppling of Saddam's regime "led to speculation, in and around the Bush administration, about further, imminent military action to snatch the 'low-hanging fruit' elsewhere in the region to exploit America's apparent strategic momentum" (Norton, 2007). The months that followed the toppling of Saddam's regime carried many changes to the politics and the international relations of the Middle East. Just one day after the military operation ended (March 19 – May 1, 2003), Colin Powell then United States Secretary of State (2001-2005), visited Damascus. The visit "drove home the tough choices

faced by Assad in the wake of Saddam's fall" (Simon & Stevenson, 2004). Powell urged Assad's assistance in the Bush administration's plans for reestablishing the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. In addition, Powell carried two main demands. First, he asked Syria to end its support to terrorism, i.e. close the offices of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hamas, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command. The second demand was to end Syria's military and intelligence presence in Lebanon and stop its support to Hezbollah, in addition to other demands. When none of the demands were met, Bush signed the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act in December 2003; this was just the first step before UNSCR 1559 was promulgated, with all its consequences.

4.5-UNSCR 1559 and its Aftermath:

The United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution on September 2004 calling upon all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon; the resolution also called for the disarmament of all Lebanese – i.e. Hezbollah – and non-Lebanese militias – mainly the pro-Syria Palestinian groups. In addition, the resolution supported free and fair presidential elections in Lebanon. The resolution was the spark for continuing the pressures on Damascus to withdraw from Lebanon, and to stop its support to Hezbollah to install and maintain the new post 9/11 political order. Damascus, backed by Iran, countered this resolution by extending the presidential term of President Emile Lahoud just two days after the adoption of the resolution. Tehran and Hezbollah supported the extension and saw in it a favorable development: “the Iranian President Mohammad Khatami telephoned his congratulations to Lahoud, and a delegation of top Hezbollah officials visited Lahoud to convey Nasrallah's congratulations” (Samii, 2008). Political opposition to the Syrian role and presence in Lebanon started to coalesce as a response

to the extension. Initially the opposition was led by the Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, with support from the Christian communities. The opposition escalated, and even though Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri did not participate in any of the opposition's meetings, "it was widely understood that he was the opposition's de facto leader" (Norton, 2007).

The pressures on Damascus to withdraw from Lebanon peaked after Hariri's assassination on 14 February 2005. "A statement from an opposition movement made up of Druze and Sunni Muslims and Christians attributed responsibility to Syria, given that it is the *de facto* authority in Lebanon" (Samii, 2008). Syria almost remained silent, and Hariri's assassination was barely mentioned when Syrian state-controlled television blamed Israel. On the same day, Hezbollah issued a statement condemning "this suspicious act targeting Lebanon's stability", and "stressed the need for awareness by all parties of the dangers of this stage" (Hezbollah, 2005). Iran, through its former ambassador to Syria; Hojatoleslam Ali Akbar Mohtashami-Pur, "pinned the blame on al-Qaida acting on behalf of the US, with the objective of starting a civil war that could be blamed on Syria" (Samii, 2008).

Iran had to demonstrate its solidarity with Damascus as the latter came under increased international pressure. Two days after the assassination, Syrian Prime minister Muhammad Naji al-Utri visited Iran and received all kinds of support and "cooperation was guaranteed" (Samii, 2008). After three weeks of anti-Syrian demonstrations, Hezbollah responded with a huge demonstration on 8 March 2005. "Sayid Hassan Nasrallah said to the crowd that Lebanon is not the Ukraine or Georgia. Lebanon is Lebanon, a unique experience in the world." (Noe, 2007, p. 325). He stressed this point and then directed his speech to President Bush: "to the United States, to President Bush, Ms. Condoleezza Rice, and to the American field commander in Lebanon, Mr. [David] Satterfield, I would like to say: your plans for Lebanon are suspect; your plans for

Lebanon are wrong. Lebanon is immune to partitioning, immune to sedition, and immune to defeat.” (Noe, 2007, p. 326). Days after the March 8 Rally, a message of support was sent from Tehran’s Friday Prayer sermon, where the “preacher claimed that the US and Israel killed Hariri in order to force Syrian withdrawal and weaken Hezbollah. He hailed the March 8 rally and told the US and Israel that ‘this is the awake Lebanon that you see before’” (Noe, 2007). One week after the March 8 rally, a huge demonstration was organized by the opposition on 14 March 2005 calling for a complete Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. “Thus emerged what came to be known as the “independence intifada”, referred to as a “Cedar Revolution” by the White House to equate it with the Orange Revolution in Ukraine and the Rose Revolution in Georgia” (Samii, 2008).

Continued international and domestic pressure pushed Bashar al-Assad to announce a complete withdrawal by the end of April, 2005. The “Syrian withdrawal after 29 years of occupation was a historic blow to the sphere of influence that Hafez al-Assad had painstakingly built in the 1970s and 1980s, but it also unleashed tensions and conflicts in Lebanon that had been dormant under the Syrian boot” (Salem, 2008). Iranian Foreign Minister Kharrazi visited Damascus during April to show Iran’s support and solidarity. Iran’s fear was that the “political vacuum” could be filled against its interests, and in favor of the US. The struggle to fill the political vacuum “divided the country into two overlapping domestic, regional, and international camps competing for the control of post-Syria Lebanon: on one side was the US, France and the moderate Arab States, and their Lebanese allies gathered in the 14 March coalition led by the Sunni-dominated Future Movement; on the opposing side stood Iran, Syria, and their Lebanese allies led by Hezbollah” (Salloukh, 2013, p. 36).

During its presence in Lebanon, Syria benefited from controlling Lebanon's foreign policy and from supporting Hezbollah. Lebanon served as Syria's springboard against Israel. Although the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon undermined the Syrian-Iran-Hezbollah alliance, nevertheless it would made Hezbollah and Iran enjoy a freer hand in Lebanon. "If freed from Syria's restraining hand, Iran could provide Hezbollah with new and dangerous weapons systems via direct shipments to Lebanon (Damascus has been particular about ensuring that any such shipments be made through Syria)" (Herzog, 2005).

Hezbollah sought with the support of its domestic allies to delay the elections scheduled for May 2005 in order to prepare for a new electoral law. The US was afraid that any delay would lead into splits in the March 14 coalition, thus under International pressures, the elections were held on time and were won by the anti-Syrian coalition. At the same time, elections were held in Iran and resulted in the elections of Mahmud-Ahmadi Nejad as the Islamic republic's president. "One month after the Nejad's election, even before his inauguration, Sayed Hasan Nasrallah arrived in Tehran to coordinate activities with the new Iranian leadership" (Samii, 2008). Hezbollah enjoyed huge Iranian support following the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. Amir al-Moussawi (personal communication, Feb.18, 2013) an Iranian political analyst, who has close ties with the Iranian Foreign Ministry suggests that the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon moved the political decision in Lebanon from 'Anjar' (a Lebanese town in west Lebanon, the base of Syrian intelligence headquarters) to 'Haret Hreik' (Hezbollah's headquarters in Beirut's suburb).

4.6- The 2006 July War:

On the morning of 12 July 2006 Hezbollah launched an operation on the Israeli borders and captured two Israeli soldiers, and killed three others. Five more IDF soldiers were killed in a failed rescue attempt. Hezbollah's demanded an exchange of the captured soldiers with thousands of Lebanese and Palestinian prisoners, but Israel refused and launched a military operation against Lebanon. Israel's exaggerated response convinced Seymour Hersh that Israel started preparing for this war after its withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000 (2006, p. 34). The US had several reasons to support the Israeli war on Lebanon; the "White House was more focused on stripping Hezbollah of its missiles, because, if there was to be a military option against Iran's nuclear facilities, it had to get rid of the weapons that Hezbollah could use in a potential retaliation at Israel. Bush wanted both. Bush was going after Iran, as part of the Axis of Evil, and its nuclear sites, and he was interested in going after Hezbollah as part of his interest in democratization, with Lebanon as one of the crown jewels of Middle East democracy" (Hersh, 2006).

Two days after the start of the war, Hezbollah targeted the INS Hanit, an Israeli naval vessel that was hit by an Iranian-produced C-802 Noor guided missile, leaving four sailors dead (Norton, 2007). Some reports claimed that the missile was operated by Iranian combatants. The US State Department's Coordinator for Counterterrorism claimed that Iran was engaged directly in the confrontation. The Iranian officials' movements and actions lead to such suspicions. Ali Larijani, Iran's Supreme National Security Council Secretary, was in Syria on the day the confrontation started. Iranian foreign minister Manuchehr Mottaki arrived few day later to Damascus where he and the Syrian vice president "condemned the Israeli attack and supported

the resistance and expressed the solidarity of Iran and Syria with the government and people of Lebanon” (Samii, 2008).

Some analysts believe that Iran ordered Hezbollah to start the conflict to distract the attention of the international community away from its nuclear program, which was going to be discussed at the G8 summit the following week. One month before the *wa'd al-sadiq* (faithful promise) operation, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Mohamed Elbaradei, released a report noting “gaps” in the agency’s knowledge about the role of military in Iran’s nuclear program. (Kagan, Kagan, & Pletka, 2008). Moreover, the violence in Iraq seemed to recede during the thirty-three-day war, and “when the fighting ended, Suleimani sent a message to the American command. ‘I hope you have been enjoying the peace and quiet in Baghdad, I’ve been busy in Beirut’” (Filkins, 2013). Although the Iranians denied any military involvement in the war, Tehran seemed contented. “Khamenei said events in Lebanon prove that “the presence of the Zionists in the region is a satanic and cancerous presence and an infected tumor for the entire world of Islam.” (Samii, 2008). After one month of war, the UNSCR 1701 concluded the confrontation. Hamid Reza Asefi, the Iranian Foreign ministry spokesman, noted that “although the resolution is unbalanced, we are happy for the ceasefire in Lebanon.” (Samii, 2008). Following the war, Iran financed Hezbollah with more than \$150 million to be distributed to families who lost their homes. (Kagan, Kagan, & Pletka, 2008). Iran’s support was crucial in maintaining Hezbollah’s popularity following the war, as 15,000 families lost their homes and are given money to rent a new home until their homes are rebuilt.

Paul Salem suggests that Israel, backed by the US failed, to destroy Hezbollah, and that this was a turning point, which demonstrated that the “US power had perhaps reached its limits.”

(2008, p. 18). Hezbollah's victory ended US efforts to build a New Middle East, one more congenial to its own geopolitical interests.

4.6.1-Lebanese Domestic Politics in the Aftermath of the July War 2006:

Months after the July war, Nasrallah called for a national unity government with a Hezbollah veto over all government measures. When the March-14 coalition refused to form a national unity government, widespread demonstrations and a massive sit-in Beirut's central district were organized by Hezbollah. The March 14 coalition accused Iran and Syria of trying to topple the legitimate authorities in Lebanon. Iran supported Hezbollah's position on the formation of the new government and achieving the veto-power. Amal Saad-Ghorayeb and Marina Ottaway suggest that Hezbollah officials denied vehemently that the party's movements were "simply a pawn in a game played by Iran" (Saad-Ghorayeb & Ottaway, 2007). Salloukh suggests that the political stalemate that preceded the July war overlapped "with a grander geopolitical regional contest between Tehran and Riyadh, climaxed in May 2008" (Salloukh, 2014, p. 37) when Hezbollah, supported by other parties in the March 8 coalition, took over West Beirut after a military operation that was triggered by the government's decision to replace General Wafic Shuqeir, head of Beirut Airport's security, as well to consider Hezbollah's military telecommunications network illegal. "The Qatari-negotiated 21 May2008 Doha Accord resolved the political stand-off between the 8 and 14 March coalitions." (Salloukh, 2014, p. 37) The agreement led to a considerable shift of power in favor of Hezbollah and its allies, supported by Iran. Many observers consider the Doha Agreement to be the final step in the Shi'a revival and rise to power. Tehran played a major role in achieving the agreement. Manouchehr Mottaki (Personal communication, Feb. 19, 2013), the Iranian minister of foreign affairs, said that in

return to their role in Doha, they sought to head the Non-Aligned Movement and they expected to receive Qatari support. But with the Saudi opposition, Egypt was chosen to head the movement. In return, they received a promise to gain the Qatari support in the following summit.

The following year, Parliamentary elections were held in Lebanon in June 2009. Though the elections resulted in a slim majority for the March 14 coalition, a national unity government was formed under Saad el-Hariri, one in which Hezbollah and its allies enjoyed veto power. Disputes and disagreements shaped Hariri's government on every detail. Syrian president Bashar el-Assad joined the Saudi King Abdullah on his royal plane and paid a visit to Lebanon, in a Saudi push to establish a Syrian-Hariri alliance. The visit reflected positively on the government for a while. This did not last however, as Hezbollah's fears grew as the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) started to point fingers to members in the party. Hezbollah demanded the Lebanese government to take actions against the STL. The March 14 coalition refused to do so, and during el-Hariri visit to the US and while meeting with President Obama, Hezbollah and its allies resigned from the government, thus bringing the government down. The March 14 coalition accused Iran of orchestrating what they called 'Hezbollah's political coup d'état'. Months later, Hezbollah and its allies in March 8 coalition, named Najib Mikati to form the new government. Saudi Arabia was against the new government, as it saw Iran gain a new position after Iraq in the grand geopolitical struggle in the Middle East.

4.7-Conclusion:

This chapter discussed the roots of the Iranian role in Lebanon since the formation of the Islamic Republic in Iran in 1979, and the role Tehran played in the formation of Hezbollah in the 80's of the last century. It examined mainly the role Tehran played in Lebanon post the invasion

of Iraq. This was done to demonstrate on the Iran-Hezbollah relation, and to study whether Iran is a proxy to Iran, and whether Iran's relation with Hezbollah stems from a realistic point of view, or it stems from Iran's commitment towards the Downtrodden and the Muslims of the World. Observing the Hezbollah-Iran relation, one can conclude that this relation developed from a proxy to an alliance as time has passed. Iran after having completed its control in Baghdad, and after seeing Hezbollah forming Lebanon's government, "felt that the US invasion of Iraq, far from being a prelude to the weakening or toppling of the Iranian state, had to the contrary greatly empowered it throughout the region" (Salem, 2008). This Iranian relief soon had wakened some implications that relates to the Arabs fear of a "Shi'a Crescent" that stretches from Iran to Lebanon, and passes through Iraq and Syria. Hezbollah's increased engagement and achievements in the Lebanese politics made it more concerned about its own community, and many observers think that Hezbollah will not risk those achievements unless the Iranian regime is at stake. The next chapter spells out the implications of this study to Iran's post-Arab uprisings geopolitical challenges.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.1-Summing Up the Argument:

Explaining Iran's foreign policy by one theory of international relations is inappropriate. The geopolitical struggles that Iran has been facing since the Islamic Revolution in 1979 make it necessary to adopt a mixture of realism and Ideology. After all, the geopolitical changes in the Middle East since the "war on terror" and the subsequent occupation of Iraq, was a threat and an opportunity at the same time. From an ideological point of view, toppling Saddam's regime was a strategic blessing, but US troops stationed on the borders of Iran was a curse, at least from a realist point of view. Iran sought to undermine the US presence in Iraq using asymmetric warfare to protect itself from the threats resulting from the American presence in Iraq, especially that "Iraq is only the first stage of a long-term US strategy for a pervasive presence in the region and a change in the Iranian political system" (Barzegar, 2005). In addition to undermining the US presence in Iraq, Iran was committed of building new relations with the post-Saddam Iraq, and to "redefine the traditional characterization of Iraq's function as a counterweight to Iran's power" (Barzegar, 2005). Saddam's fall allowed Iran to play a leading role in the Middle East and catalyzed the geopolitical struggle in the Middle East. Iran's success in playing a dominant role in Iraq, in addition to its relations with the Syrian regime and Hezbollah in Lebanon, tilted the balance of power in the region in Iran's favor. Iran's commitment towards the Muslims around the world was applied in its support to the Iraqi people and government in the post-Saddam Iraq. On the other side, Iran's knowledge of the balance of power in the region and its commitment to

survive in one of the most unstable regions of the world was the trigger to apply a pragmatic and a realistic foreign policy in Iraq.

Iran's initial support to Hezbollah in Lebanon was rooted in Iran's revolutionary ideology and its commitment to export the revolution. Hezbollah's victories and its ability to become an important player in the geopolitics of the region made Iran benefit from Hezbollah's growth and role to balance against the US and Saudi Arabia in their "cold war". Hezbollah's success in overcoming all the calls of disarmament, in addition to its ability to survive from July 2006 war against Israel made Iran's cards much stronger in its growing confrontation with the US and its allies mainly Saudi. The "cold war" between the two regional camps was in Iran's favor in the period between Saddam's toppling and the Arab Uprisings.

5.2-The Arab Uprisings and Geopolitical Confrontation in the Middle East:

The US invasion of Iraq was a threat and a chance for both Iran and the Saudi as well. Iran enjoyed regime change in Iraq, but was worried about the US presence on its borders and the threat this presence carries on Iran. It consequently launched a mix of policies to take over Iraq. On the other side, the Saudi regime believed that the US campaign will be in its favor, if it managed to make its allies control the new Iraq government, but was worried that a stable post-Saddam Iraq would encourage "Washington to pursue its post-9/11 regional reform agenda aggressively" (Salloukh, 2013). Thus, both countries started aggressive campaigns to expand their sphere of influence. Salloukh suggests that Riyadh was afraid that if it didn't balance Iran's growing regional role, "then it would one day be forced to confront Tehran in the Persian Gulf, the Kingdom's own strategic backyard" (Salloukh, 2013). Thus, a long lasting confrontation began between the two camps. Gregory Gause claims that until the beginning of the Arab Spring

“Iran had been on a winning streak in the Middle East cold war” (Gause, 2014). In the first days of the uprisings, with the toppling of Riyadh’s allies especially Mubarak’s regime in Egypt, events seemed to move in Tehran’s favor, and to improve its position in its ongoing geopolitical confrontation with Riyadh.

The Arab uprisings extended the Saudi-Iranian confrontation to a new level. Although this confrontation looks to be with sectarian, but in fact, as Gause claims that “Riyadh and Tehran are playing a balance of power game. They are using sectarianism in that game, yet their motivations are not centuries-long religious disputes but a simple contest regional influence” (Gause, 2014). Awakened by Saudi’s awareness of Iran’s success in building and leading the “axis of resistance” against Israel, Riyadh invested a lot in the Syrian uprising in a way to undermine Iran’s role in the Middle East. And as time passed, Riyadh felt immune from any internal disturbances. This was especially the case after Riyadh secured its own backyard by intervening militarily in Bahrain to squash the uprising; one that Riyadh accused Tehran of supporting. This situation made Riyadh move from the defensive to the offensive, trying to take the lead in the resumed geopolitical battles, and “the uprisings became part of the repertoire of these battles.” (Salloukh, 2013).

Iran welcomed the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, but concerning the uprisings in Syria, Tehran had a distinct position. Tehran focused on the foreign role in the disturbances occurring in Syria. Tehran accused the US, Israel, and Saudi Arabia in interfering in Syria’s internal affairs to weaken the Syrian state and its sources of power against Israel. Development in Syria made both Riyadh and Tehran intensify their “cold war” by increasing their support to their allies. On one side, Tehran increased its support to the Syrian regime and backed Hezbollah’s intervention in the Syrian crisis. On the other side, Riyadh supported the Free Syrian

Army (FSA) and other opposition groups fighting the Syrian regime. Syria became so important and crucial to Saudi Arabia, because it was the only remaining opportunity to reduce or roll back Iranian regional influence. Gause claims that Riyadh was cautious and slow to react at the beginning of the uprising in Syria. But by 2012 “Riyadh was ‘all in’ for the Syrian rebellion” (Gause, 2014).

The open Saudi support to the FSA and other Salafi opposition groups was a real threat to the Syrian regime. But as of middle 2014 the Syrian regime enjoyed unlimited Iranian financial and military support and seems secure and in a better position than it was a year ago. The ongoing crisis in Syria and Iraq are the major battles in the Middle East. Although the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) – later renamed the Islamic State (IS) – managed to control large parts of Iraq, this “ISIS-led assault in Iraq has little prospects of success outside of Sunni areas and gains by ISIS -now known as the Islamic State- are hardly victories for Saudi Arabia” (Gause, 2014). Riyadh balanced the Iranian role and succeeded to “transform Syria from a one-time regional player, into terrain for geopolitical battles” (Salloukh, 2013) in its quest to reorient Syria away from Tehran. But “Tehran seems to hold the upper hand in both Syria and Iraq” (Gause, 2014).

The ISIS takeover of large parts of Iraq made Washington worried about its interests in the Middle East. Washington asked Prime Minister Nuri el-Maliki to “broaden his government and change his autocratic style, bringing the credible Sunni Arab leaders into the government and giving them the resources to combat Salafi jihadism and the remnants of the Saddam Hussein government in their territories” (Gause, 2014). Although Obama’s administration looks to be passive towards the events in the Middle East, but a nuclear deal with Tehran seems to be on its top priorities. Washington’s orientation towards completing such deal, made Riyadh worry

that the “US might be willing to concede the Middle East as an Iranian sphere of influence in order to get the deal” (Gause, 2014). This worry made Obama visit Riyadh in March 2014 to calm down the Saudis and denying any intention to bargain such a deal with Iranian regional dominance.

If the confrontation between Riyadh and Tehran continues, geopolitical battles and the “cold war” will persist, on different sites and different proxies. “How the Syrian-Iraqi crisis ends will largely determine Middle Eastern perceptions of who “won” this round of the contest for regional influence” (Gause, 2014). Although none of the two rivalries seem to retreat soon, any improvement in Saudi-Iranian relations would consolidate the chances to lessen the bloody confrontations that are moving more towards being sectarian. The growing confrontations in Syria, Lebanon, Bahrain and Iraq, could make Washington push Riyadh to make some kind of deal with Tehran. However any such act will make the Saudis more suspicious towards Washington’s talks with Tehran. Consequently, many analysts believe that geopolitical confrontations in multiple sites will continue until a geopolitical “grand bargain” between Tehran and Washington is reached. Such a bargain is bound to recognize Iran’s regional sphere of influence and dominance.

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