The Islamic Republic of Iran:
Ideology of the State and Its Foreign Policy Implications

A Thesis Presented to the Department of Social Sciences

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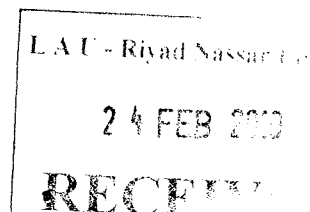of the requirements for the degree of

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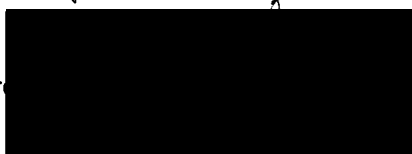
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Abstract

The Iranian revolution has redrawn not only the nature of the state in Iran but also

the political map in the M.E. The repercussions of the 1979 revolution within and outside

the Islamic Republic are attributed to the ideology of the Islamic state as established by

Khomeini. Consequently, to understand Iranian foreign policy, it is important to

understand the impact of the ideological considerations for the Iranian regime. The thesis

therefore presents Iranian foreign policy from an ideological, pragmatic and systematic

perspective. These three political orientations, the thesis argues, have been constantly

balanced and reorganized according to the changes in the regional and international

stages. Accordingly, the thesis interprets the dynamic evolution of Iranian foreign policy

from a historic and contemporary perspectives; touching on its Shiism and *welayat-el-*

faqih ideological foundations. It also analyzes Iranian pragmatism toward neighboring

countries and the U.S. following the demise of the Soviet power and U.S. encroachment

on Iran's eastern and western borders through Iraq and Afghanistan. Moreover, the thesis

examines the various political factions of the Iranian regime which shape Iran's policy

making. The thesis concludes that Iranian foreign policy whether in regard to its nuclear

program, its animosity towards Israel and the U.S. and its support of diverse transnational

groups in the Middle East takes into account the ideological tenet particularly that of the

faqih, which may not necessarily imply greater regional or international pragmatism.

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Introduction

Background

Iran's Islamic Revolution, although a national religious uprising, resulted not only

in the radical socio-political transformation of the Iranian society but also the geopolitical

remapping of the Middle East. The 1979 revolution toppled a U.S. backed Shah's regime

and replaced it with a unique system of Islamic governance based on Khomeini's

interpretations of the Shii doctrine that installed the supreme religious rule of *welayat-el-*

faqih. It also aimed to expand its horizon beyond its national borders by virtue of its

Islamic liberation ideology which triggered significant changes in the Middle East for the

last 30 years and will continue to impact the political events in the region for the years to

come.

Perhaps the most important repercussion of the 1979 revolution at the

international arena was shifting Iran's political stance with its geo-strategic importance in

the M.E. from a servile ally to the U.S. to its most resistant adversary. Furthermore, it

triggered a Shia revival which has been repressed for over 1400 years of Islam's history.

The U.S. feared the 'Shiite crescent ', which extends from Iran through Iraq to Syria and

Lebanon, because it simply threatened the long established pro-Western status quo in the

Middle East. The fear grew following the U.S. 2003 invasion of Iraq and the subsequent

capturing of Iraqi Shiites of political power along with the spread of Shiite anti-U.S

military groups, such as the Mahdi army. Likewise, the Israeli 2006 July war in Lebanon

consolidated pro-Iranian Shiite *Hezbollah*'s military and political power vis-à-vis Israel.

The January 2009 Israeli war on Gaza with pro-Iranian Islamic *Hamas* demonstrated

Iran's expanded power in the region. As for Syria, its Alawite- regime's alliance with the

Islamic Republic since 1979 has proved pivotal in thwarting the hegemonic aspirations of

both Israel and the U.S. in the M.E.

From an offensive realist perspective, Iran's foreign policy is dictated by the fact

that states as rational actors seek to maximize their share of world power at the expense

of their rivals on the regional or global levels. Mearsheimer explains that 'the principal

motive behind great power behavior is survival' in the anarchic international system

(Mearsheimer, 2001). He considered survival to comprise autonomy of the domestic

political order and territorial integrity as the primary goals of great powers. However, in

the beginning of his book, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Mearsheimer concedes

that one of the major drawbacks of his theory is that it disregards the role of individuals

or ideologies in international affairs (Mearsheimer, 2001). This paper adopts

Mearsheimer's theory in explaining the foreign policy of Iran which has sought to secure

the regime's and the state's survival since 1979 by increasing its power both within and

outside its borders. However, the primary aim of this paper is to highlight the pivotal role

of Khomeini, as an individual, and Shiism, as an ideology, in designing Iran's foreign

policy and setting up its position in the international system. However, did Iran's

ideology, strategy and foreign policy confer on the Islamic Republic the title of a regional

'great power'? This question shall be thoroughly addressed through out the following

chapters.

The Rise of Iranian Power

On February 1, 2009 hundreds of thousands of Iranians gathered in Azadi

(liberty) square, Tehran's biggest plaza, crying out anti-U.S. and anti-Israeli slogans to

commemorate the revolution's 30th anniversary and proclaiming victory in almost all the

aims of the revolution. It is worth noting that the speeches of the Iranian officials in

enumerating the revolution's achievements concentrated on Iran's position at the regional

and international level. The striking announcement was President Ahmadinejad's proud

declaration that Iran has now become 'a real and true superpower'[1]. Ahmadinejad

reiterated one of the common speeches of the Iranian leadership, demanding that the U.S.

administration ought to consider Iran as a global power and to hold talks on the basis of

'mutual respect'[2]. Knowing that the relations between both countries were terminated

following the revolution, the U.S. vice president Joe Biden, however, said: "We will be

willing to talk to Iran and to offer a very clear choice. Continue down the current course,

and then there will be continued pressure and isolation."[3] Iran instantly replied through its

parliament's speaker, Ali Larijani, who has joined the February 2009 Munich Security

Conference. Larijani remarked: "Do the Americans want to pursue the same old policies

against Iran by merely using a different tone? Their terms are slightly different. However,

it is a tactical not a strategy change."[4]

It seems that neither the U.S. with its new administration that has promised

change nor Iran with its deeply rooted ideology are willing to compromise their strategic

policies towards each other and towards the Middle East. Washington has been trying to

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[1] http.//cuminet.blogs.ku.dk/2009/2/10
[2] http.//cuminet.blogs.ku.dk/2009/2/10
[3] Baldor,Lolita,2009, 'Biden To Iran: U.S. will talk, but is ready to act', The Associated Press available at www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article
[4] 'Larijani calls for Strategic Change in U.S. Behavior'available at www.aljazeera.info

impose further sanctions against Iran for leading the anti-U.S. coalition axis in the region

and for allegedly developing nuclear weapons. Although, Iran has always denied the

latter accusation, insisting that its nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes only. What

further exacerbated U.S. fear of Iran's growing power is the latest announcement of

Tehran's successful launch of its first home-made satellite this February, adding that the

construction of an additional four satellites are on their way. This important scientific

achievement has also prompted Israeli Defense Minister, Ehud Barak, to urge the

international community to tighten its sanctions on Iran. Other than the continuous

imposition of additional sanctions on Iran, both key players in the Middle East, the U.S.

and Israel, have persistently refused to rule out the possibility of military strikes against

Iran over its rejection to stop its nuclear programme. Aware of the U.S.-Israeli dormant

intentions towards Iran since the triumph of the revolution, Iranian commander of the

Islamic Revolution Corps Brigadier warned the 'enemies' against the invasion of the

country which would lead to their death, referring to both U.S. and Israel[5].

Amidst all the threats and counter-threats among the two antagonistic camps in

the Middle East, the pro-U.S. versus the anti-U.S. alliances, one can interpret Iran's

present and future foreign policies on the basis of both its past experiences with foreign

powers and its intrinsic ideology which has been firmly founded by the Islamic

revolution. For this reason, the purpose of this paper is to put forward a case-study of

Iran's foreign policy making. On what basis does Iran act at the regional and international

levels? What triggers Iran's involvement in Middle Eastern states? Will Iran yield to

Western pressure? Is the Iranian nuclear programme a negotiable subject? Is the direct

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[5] www.irandaily.com

military clash with either Israel or the U.S. inevitable? All of these questions would be addressed in this research through a model that interprets Iran's foreign policy making.

Foundations of Iranian Foreign Policy Making

To understand Iranian foreign policy it is first important to draw the framework within which foreign policy is designed. Thus, this research proposes a model that constitutes the building block for Iranian foreign policy making. The model could be represented by a triangular chain that is composed of three major components: the Supreme Leader, the Islamic government and Iran's foreign policy. All of the three components are vitally connected to each other. The *faqih* who is the supreme leader of the state supervises and guides Iran's Islamic government. The government designs its foreign policy on the basis of Islamic principles which are firmly established in the constitution of 1979. Iran's foreign policy should therefore secure both of Iran's national interests and the supreme interests of Islam, both of which overlap. If any of the three components drifts away from the chain, the other two would pull it back to maintain the robustness of the triangle. Hence, whenever one of these components detaches from the other two, the chain breaks leading to the collapse of the regime and the disintegration of the Islamic state. It is in this sense that one should interpret Iran's policy in the region and should anticipate its political maneuvers. It is also for this reason why the Iranian political system is formed of a network of elected and unelected institutions which influence each other in the government's power structure. In short, it is a complex system of religio-juridicial checks and balances that is entirely based on a balance of power between the different factions of the ruling clerics.

How the three components are inherently linked to each other is thoroughly described in this research which falls into four chapters. The first chapter, entitled *Shiism and the State*, consists of four sections. The first two sections commence by giving a brief overview on the religious roots of Shiism that brought about such a defiant political ideology and empowered the Shii ulama. The third section introduces the conflicting stance of Shii ulama towards existing governing regimes and the legitimacy of establishing an Islamic government. The purpose behind this section is to show that Khomeini has chosen the most radical position in his quest that no other Shiite cleric dared to endorse. The third section also presents a historical background on the relationship between the Iranian ulama and the state during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to point out the powerful effect of Shii seminaries in checking governors and monarchs long before the establishment of the Islamic Republic. The last section thoroughly explains Khomeini's vision of the Islamic state with its fixed precepts. It also highlights Khomeini's philosophical and Islamic thought that lead in 1971 to the formulation of the concept of *welayat-el-faqih* by examining ancient Greek and Muslim philosophers who shaped Khomeini's thinking: Plato, Ibn Arabi and Al Farabi.

The relationship between Khomeini's *welayat-el-faqih*'s ideological vision and the foundation of the Islamic state is explored in the second chapter. It first covers the political events from the early 1960s up to 1978 explaining the steps Khomeini undertook to prepare the masses for the revolution. Then, it presents the period from 1978 to 1982 when the Islamic system was fully established. This chapter helps us understand Khomeini's acumen and decisiveness whereby he did not compromise the position of the Supreme Leader (*faqih*) thereby installing him as the vanguard of his Islamic state. This

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chapter will reveal the structural foundation of the Iranian state with its clerical and civic components. This dichotomy, this chapter will argue, was crucial for establishing the state's policies that stood on the principle of 'exporting the revolution' and, by thus, seeking the expansion of Iran's regional power.

The third chapter highlights the evolution of Iran's foreign policy following the break down of the Soviet Union and the subsequent U.S. incursions in the Middle East. It analyzes Iran's policy making in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Levant in accordance with the dictates of offensive realism that prioritizes the state's survival in international affairs. It also explains how Iran utilizes the Shiite ideological factor to guard its national interests through regional alliances and to emerge as a regional power amidst the power vacuum created by the growing weakness of the surrounding Arab states. This chapter also clarifies how such an ideology, in addition to Iran's status in the region, shapes its relations with Iraq, Syria, Hezbollah, Palestine and of course U.S. and Israel. Based on all of the established principles in the previous chapters, the final chapter determines Iran's unchanging adversaries and constant allies in its struggle for both survival and political expansion in the region. This chapter therefore anticipates Iran's political agenda in order to cope with regional problems, to deal with its nuclear programme dilemma, to handle the growing Sunni-Shiite tension and to contain the U.S.-Israeli axis in the Middle East.

Chapter 1

Shiism and the State

"The distinctive feature of the Iranian Revolution was the all-encompassing role played by the imageries

and symbolism of Shii Islam in initiating and sustaining the revolution"

(Moaddel 1992:353)

Religious Roots of Shiism

Shii Islam has been the state religion in Iran since the early 16th century. Since

then, the Shii Iranian ulama have played a pivotal role in the various political movements

during the last two centuries, including the tobacco protest movement of 1890-1891, the

Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911, the oil nationalization crisis of 1951-1953, the

uprising ignited by the arrest of Khomeini in 1963 which eventually culminated in the

Islamic Revolution of 1979. Ann Lambton, a historian who has written on the structure of

the state and political thought of post-revolutionary Iran, attributed this oppositional role

of the Iranian ulama to Shii thought and the related doctrine of the 12th Imam (Bakhash

1991:1479). Thus it is important to highlight the religious roots of Shiism and its political

implications which have shaped the course of the Iranian Revolution and have brought

about the current Iranian political system. So what is Shiism? And what distinguishes

Shiism from Sunnism?

Because Shiites and Sunnis view and understand Islamic history and theology

differently, they interpret the essence of Islam quite differently as well. Both the

disagreement and the divergence can be tracked back to the early days of Islam following

the Prophet Muhammad's death in 632 C.E. As the Sunnis chose Abu Bakr, the Prophet's

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friend as his successor, the Shiites believed that the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, Ali

Ibn Abi Talib, possessed the righteous qualities for leadership bestowed upon him by

both God and the Prophet. When Ali was chosen as the fourth caliph, his caliphate was

plagued by mutinies and wars that further deepened the division in Islam between the

followers of Ali (Shiites) and those who accepted the existing order (Sunnis). The rift

was also exacerbated by the rise of the Umayyad dynasty following the assassination of

Ali. By accepting Muawiya's reign, the Sunnis embraced "their traditional stance of

accepting a regime's legitimacy so long as it provided order, protected Islam and left

religious matters to the ulama"(Nasr 2006: 360). However, the transition from the

caliphate to a monarchy and the division of religious and political authorities under the

Umayyads led the Shiites not only to reject the legitimacy of the first three caliphs but

also all the monarchies that followed.

The official division in Islam materialized at the siege of Karbala in 680 C.E.

when the army of Muawiya's son, Yazid, brutally massacred Ali's son and the Prophet's

grandson, Hussein, along with his companions and family members. Hussein's refusal to

accept the legitimacy of the Umayyad Caliphate carried him to stand up against Yazid.

The day of Hussein's death, *Ashura*, engendered Shiism in its current form as a moral

and religious resistance to tyranny (Nasr 2006:43). After Karbala, the Shiites continued to

challenge the different empires that dominated the Islamic world. As a result, monarchs

viewed the Shiites and their Imams more as a political threat than a religious dissidence

and continuously had to suppress Shiite revolts. The Shiites argue that the true leaders of

the Muslim community are the Prophet's descendents from Ali for they possess the

necessary knowledge, piety and spiritual qualities to lead the Islamic nation. They also

believe that their Twelfth Imam, al-Mahdi, withdrew into a state of occultation so that he

shall return at the end of time to establish the state of divine justice. This view became

the cornerstone to Shii thought. Hence, the Shiites not only disagree with the Sunnis over

who should have succeeded the Prophet but also over the responsibility that his successor

should assume (Nasr 2006: 38).

In short, among the twelve Imams recognized by the Shiites as their infallible

leaders, three of them hold special significance, especially that they set the model for a

virtuous Islamic rule. First, Imam Ali's rule symbolizes an impartial leadership that

governs all social, economical and political aspects of a unified Islamic community.

Moussa notes that Imam Ali was the first to introduce the term 'state' into Islamic history

(Moussa 1996:204). Ali's letters to his governor in Egypt contain detailed instructions on

how the governor is required to deal with his subjects. Nasr describes these letters as a

'foundational document in Shii political theory' (Nasr 2006:73) while Moussa calls them

'a constitution of the state' (Moussa 1996:207).Second, Imam Hussein's rebellion against

tyranny sets another example for the Shii quest for a just Islamic society through self-

sacrifice and martyrdom. Third, the Twelfth Imam's rule represents the ultimate form of

perfect governance. In this context, Beeman explains that the "basic premise of

governance in the Islamic Republic rests on the principle of restoration of the leadership

of the Imams in human affairs and that the current government is seen as ruling in place

of the Mahdi until he returns." (Beeman 1986:75).

The Power of Shii Ulama

Shiites revere their ulama not only for their piety and knowledge but also for their role as successors to the Twelfth Imam. Shia ulama therefore exercise enormous authority in their society as they attend to the spiritual, social and political needs of their communities. As a shii cleric attends many years of tutorials and lectures and excels in his intellectual development, he becomes a *mujtahid* which qualifies him to practice independent reasoning to give new rulings, respond to contemporary challenges and expand the boundaries of Shii law. Furthermore, the community too plays an important role in determining the rank and the role of the clerics and in appointing them sources of imitation *(marja')*. From this group, one grand, leading ayatollah would excel as the absolute source of emulation which engenders a strong emotional appeal to the masses for the ayatollah's association with the sacred Imams. Khomeini acquired this privileged status and was referred to when he assumed power as deputy to the Twelfth Imam.

The most senior clerics are therefore entitled to take in religious taxes and funds through their representatives from believers worldwide to be distributed as they see fit across the Shii world among the poor, seminaries and institutions (Nasr 2006:70,71). This allows the most senior clerics to establish a wide patronage network that reaches out to and influences Shiites worldwide. The financial independence of Shii ulama from the state is an important factor in rendering them independent in political affairs as well unlike their Sunni counterparts who thrive on state's support (Martin 2000: 3).

The Conflicting Stance of Shii Ulama

Shiite scholars have agreed on a unanimous premise that defines Shii political

thought. It demands allegiance only to a pious, just and tolerant governor (Moussa

1996:160). However, with the occultation of the Twelfth Imam, Shiite ulama have

disagreed over the extent and the nature of the role they are supposed to play in their

communities. The *Usuli* school entrusts the ulama to protect the community's interests

including its political rights. This school of activists considers that revolution against

tyranny even in the absence of the Imam is an Islamic duty whenever the conditions for

its success are met. They explain that submission invalidates Islam's divine decree and

reinforces injustice. This group argues for the necessity of establishing an Islamic

government by a qualified faqih, even if the system is imperfect. However, if rebellion is

impracticable, they emphasize that it is permissible to interact with illegitimate

governments to preserve the unity, rights and freedom of the nation (Moussa 1996). The

Akhbari school, however, denied legitimacy to any Islamic government which is

established in the absence of the Imam. Those quietists believe that only the Imam can

fully implement Islamic law and establish a genuine Islamic state (Moussa 1996: 167).

Thus, for *Usulis*, the ulama are far more powerful in both religious and political affairs

than the *Akhbaris*. These two conflicting schools led a third group of fuqaha to argue for

a certain level of political involvement that would curtail oppression until the return of

the Imam. The two schools competed from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries

until finally the *Usuli* school prevailed, especially with the triumph of the Iranian

revolution.

The first confrontation between the shahs and the Ayatollahs in Iran came in the

19th century. As the shahs of the Qajar monarchy (1795-1925) subjugated the country

both economically and politically to the European powers, ayatollahs intervened to

defend national rights and interests. In 1892, as the shah granted tobacco monopoly to a

British company, a single fatwa issued from Iraq by Ayatollah Shirazi banning tobacco

use forced the shah to yield to popular opposition and cancel the concession. The Shia

ulama have therefore become Iran's first line of defense against foreign intrusions.

Similarly, at the beginning of the 20th century, Iranian ulama were actively involved in

the constitutional movement of 1905-6 along with social activists and liberal intellectuals

in order to limit the shah's power and to vest more authority in the people. At that time

Ayatollah Na'ini led the ulama in accepting a constitution that stipulated secular laws

provided that they do not contravene Islamic laws. The ulama also supported both the

nationalization of Iran's oil industry in 1951 and the popular opposition that it generated.

The nationalization resulted in a confrontation between the Iranians and the West, which

ended in 1953 with a CIA-backed coup that overthrew the elected nationalist premier,

Mosaddeq, and forcefully brought back the shah to power.

Khomeini attributed the failure of the Islamic movements of the 20th century to

their leaders who lacked a post-revolutionary plan for governance. He explained that after

the success of the tobacco and constitutional revolutions, the clerics stepped back thereby

installing power in the hands of both dictators and imperialists (Moussa 1996: 61).

Lambton notes that the Islamic movements before 1979 were at most reformist rather

than revolutionary in the sense that the clerics aimed to curtail oppression and to protect

Iran against foreign encroachment but not to overthrow regimes (Bakhash 1991:1480).

However, with Khomeini, a radical reformulation of the traditional understanding of the

Shii political doctrine has materialized; a reformulation that has adopted political

activism to dismantle the existing system and to replace it with a completely new form of

governance in which supreme power rests in the religious leadership.

Khomeini's vision of the Islamic State

The Impact of Greek and Islamic Philosophy

To understand Khomeini, his aspirations and his vision of the Islamic state, it is

first essential to comprehend the role of *irfan* in shaping his thoughts and character. *Irfan*

is a mystical philosophy based on the premise that all creation originates from the One,

the universal truth. *Irfan* thus embraces the possibility of unity with the divine one

through self-purification and self-discipline. It is important to note that the revival of

irfan was associated with the social and political changes of the late Qajar period (Martin

2000:33), thereby linking religion and philosophy to politics in Iran.

Khomeini who acquired a specialty in *irfan* became entitled to act as a *mujtahid* at

34 years of age. Khomeini had spent many years studying the works of Greek and

Muslim philosophers which greatly shaped his political thought and the political system

that he has established in Iran. The huge impact of Greek thought on the early Muslim

philosophers could be first observed in al-Farabi's *The Virtuous City (Al madina al-*

Fadila) where he addressed the question of who should lead the Islamic community. Like

Plato, al-Farabi displayed the conditions for the perfect ruler which include wisdom and

moral virtues, namely justice, courage and self-discipline. Ibn Arabi in *The Besels of*

Wisdom focused on the figure of the perfect man who is free from sin and endowed with

knowledge of the divine, both of which bestow upon him the rank of vice-regent of God

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on earth (Martin 2000 :35). According to this school of thought a virtuous state is

therefore a necessity to fulfill a virtuous life for the community. The most righteous state

is that which is ruled by a leader who possesses both wisdom and moral virtues. For the

Greeks, such a leader ought to be a philosopher, for Muslims such a leader was the

Prophet, whose example all others should follow (Martin 2000:34). In Islam however, all

leaders should govern by Islamic law, the *shari'a*.

In *The Light of Guidance (1931)*, Khomeini adopts Ibn Arabi's concept of the

perfect man and Mulla Sadra's work, *The Four Journeys*. According to Mulla Sadra, a

seventeenth century mystic philosopher, having experienced withdrawal, transcendence,

devotion and contemplation, the pilgrim in his four journeys to union with God acquires

the position of an *imam* (leader) whereby he returns to an active life with a heightened

understanding to lead the community (Martin 2000: 38). Khomeini explains that believers

reach different stages on these journeys. So the one who possesses the most exceptional

spiritual qualities in addition to the knowledge of holy law would be qualified to be the

leader of the community (Martin 2000:40). Khomeini clarifies in *Islamic Government*

that his authority emanates from his knowledge as a jurist (Martin 2000:44). Martin adds

that Khomeini's concept of the wise and virtuous leader, *al waliy el-faqih*, derives from

both Plato's republic and the Shii figure of the sacred Imams (Martin2000:34). In other

words, *al-waliy el-faqih* is a more religious and Islamic version of Plato's philosopher

king. To conclude, *Irfan* played a pivotal role in establishing Khomeini's state through its

impact on the creation of the Supreme Leader and the construction of the state's`

vanguard based on Islamic ideologies, both of which mobilize the people through a

number of factors: social, political and economical (Martin 2000).

Khomeini's Islamic Government

The climax of Khomeini's political thought culminated in 1970-1971 with the

controversial theory of *welayat el-faqih* or the 'government of the jurist' in his political

dissertation *Islamic Government* .Its main purpose was to provide a legitimate Islamic

base for the assumption of power by the ulama. It also persuaded the clergy to be actively

involved in political matters. Khomeini validated his theory by Shii traditions and

nineteenth century inferences of those traditions. Thus, the government of the jurist is not

entirely new in the Shii religious realm. The question of who should guide the

community on the behalf of the Twelfth Imam had been debated for centuries since his

absence. Broadly, there were two views. The first restricts the jurists' authority in general

affairs to shari'a matters while the second encompasses government as well (Martin

2000:117). Martin points out that Naraqi (d. 1831-1832) was the first mujtahid to present

a brief explanation of the government of the jurist. He emphasized that only a qualified

and a just faqih could be the legitimate governor in the absence of the Twelfth Imam and

could therefore act in his place (Martin 2000:115). This concept was also referred to in

the early 1960s by Ayatollah Tabatabai (Martin 2000:115).

Similarly, Khomeini argued in The Treatises (1953), that God, the Prophet and

the Imams desired that the community has leadership in its most important needs:

political and social affairs. In another work, he regarded governmental duties as an

intrinsic part of the duties of the faqih. He considered the Prophet's duties to include

dissemination of the divine message, judgment and leadership but at the time of

occultation, the last two duties are entrusted to the faqih (Martin 2000:119). To

Khomeini, the power of the jurist is defined and bound by the shari'a. His authority is

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based on his knowledge of Islamic law and his obligation to enforce its laws and to ensure a just society. All of the above views combined were fully expressed in Islamic Government. Consequently, Khomeini stressed the necessity of government in Islam to implement its ordinances, protect the weak and eradicate foreign influence. Khomeini added that if the jurist who is capable of carrying out the task is unavailable, the responsibility devolves on the jurists as a group in a council of jurists. He also viewed monarchy as an un-Islamic institution which has survived since the Umayyads seized Imam Ali's rightful rule. It is thus the duty of every Muslim to overthrow corrupt governments, the rule of imperialists and their agents (Martin 2000:119, 124).

One important issue that Khomeini also raised since his early writings is the necessity of a strong effective army for such an Islamic state. In The Revealing of Secrets (1943), where he first addressed the issue of an Islamic government, he noted that: 'There should be an army, but organized on an Islamic basis. It should protect the country when threatened and should propagate the Islamic message in time of peace' (Martin 2000: 110). Khomeini explained that the army should be financed by Islamic taxation so that it becomes the means of prosperity and greatness of the Islamic state (Martin 2000:110). He also addressed the issue of economic prosperity which could be achieved as well by a just Islamic taxation, both compulsory and voluntary. On the expenditure of the state's budget, Khomeini gave precedence to satisfying the needs of the poor. The remainder of the budget is to be disbursed on the army and the management of infrastructure (Martin 2000: 110). In short, Khomeini viewed Islam not only as a religion but also as a powerful ideology that governs all aspects of life commencing with the ruler

and encompassing the army, education, economy and the state's propaganda. For this

reason, he sought a culturally, politically and economically independent Islamic state.

Khomeini's Universal Islamic Ideology

Khomeini attributed the ills of Iran and the Islamic world to the superpowers,

especially the United States, the source of world corruption. He explained that the power

of Islam lies in its ability to unite Muslims and to protect them from injustice. Thus,

religious, political and cultural unity of all Muslims which has been dismantled by the

West could be regained by accepting Islam as the sole source of moral and political

authority. Khomeini set a simple model for the restoration of Islamic authenticity. The

process commences with the mobilization of the oppressed Muslims to expel

superpowers from their lands which would be followed by overthrowing their agents, all

Muslim and Arab regimes who serve the interests of these powers. Separate Muslim

states should be then replaced by a single Islamic government (Brumberg and Zonis

1987:18, 19).

This universal call for an uprising by the oppressed masses against their tyrants to

establish a united and a just Islamic government derives from the Shiite doctrine

discussed above. Yet, Khomeini's perception of Islam as a totalistic ideology made him

define his revolution not as a Shiite but as an Islamic one. He envisaged the Islamic

Republic of Iran as the core of a global Islamic movement away from the complexities of

the Sunni-Shiite divide. In his appeal to the Sunni-dominated Islamic world, he adopted a

pan-Islamic discourse, stressing Islamic unity, avoiding controversial sectarian issues and

focusing on unifying Islamic concerns, namely the struggle against the U.S. and Israel.

Khomeini considered imperialism represented by the U.S. and Zionism

represented by Israel to be the main enemies of Iran, the Islamic and the non-Islamic

worlds. He believed that the interests of these hegemonic powers are based on

subjugating the underprivileged nations politically, economically and culturally,

plundering their resources and confiscating their territorial independence. He therefore

labeled both the U.S. and Israel as the primary foe of Islam, the Quran and the Prophet.
[6]Consequently, he considered resisting and confronting these powers an Islamic duty

which Iran would be able to pursue. He compelled the Iranian nation to oppose and

thwart the interests of both the U.S. and Israel. Khomeini continuously reiterated the need

to defeat the former and wipe out the latter for justice to prevail.

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[6] Refer to Khomeini's quotes assembled in 'Al Kalimat Al Kissar' from p.p.201-209

Chapter 2

From the Iranian Revolution to the Islamic Republic

'An important ingredient was required to transform Iran's economic and political problems into a revolutionary crisis, to produce coordination among the masses...and to account for the collapse of the Shah's repressive machine in a non-military confrontation. That ingredient was ideology' (Moaddel 1992:359)

To understand the psyche of both the current Iranian leadership and the Iranian nation that determines present and future policy-making, it is important to highlight the historical events that took place in the 20th century paving the way for the 1979 revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic. The historical overview is important because it explains how Iran views Western powers based on its past experiences and the imprints these events have left in creating Iranian fears of subjugation by these powers. This chapter also presents the fixed precepts on which the Islamic Republic was founded and the complicated network of its political system. Both of which set the guidelines for Iranian foreign policy.

Predisposing Factors: A Historical Overview

At the beginning of the 20th century, state weakness, economic problems and popular discontent resulted in the constitutional movement of 1905-1906 led by the ulama which forced the shah to concede and produced a Belgian- based constitution. The constitution recognized Twelver Shiism as the state religion and provided for a Council of Guardians consisting of five mujtahids to monitor legislation in accordance with the sharia (Martin 2000:7). As a result, the power of Iranian ulama was officially recognized and stipulated by Iran's earliest Constitution. By 1911, the central government was

weakened by financial crisis that it lost authority in many areas thereby driving both

Britain and Russia to occupy the country and to guard their strategic and economic

interests there. With the end of the First World War, both great powers withdrew leaving

behind them a British -appointed Iranian colonel who became in 1926 the first Pahlavi

shah to guard the interests of the great powers in Iran (Martin 2000:10). With a vision to

establish a strong secular state, Reza Khan terminated constitutional rule in the 1930s by

censorship of the press, dominance of the secret service and destruction of the various

political parties. 'The presiding ethos of the new system was a militant form of secular

nationalism, with a vision of Iran regaining the glories of its pre-Islamic past' (Martin

2000:13).

As a result, Reza Shah was determined to undermine the political influence of the

ulama and to divide religion from the state. The legal system was gradually taken away

from the clerics and brought under the control of the Ministry of Justice. Laws were also

stipulated to extend state control over religious endowments and to enforce the wearing

of Western outfits. The influence of religion was further weakened in the outlawing of

religious ceremonies, namely the Ashura parades, and the veiling of women (Martin

2000:14). Martin points out that during that period clerical opposition to the Shah's

Westernizing reforms was insignificant because of the absence of a united front due to

the fear generated by the Pahlavi army and its secret police(Martin 2000:15). With the

beginning of the Second World War, Britain and Russia once again invaded Iran forcing

Reza Shah to abdicate in favor of his son. The military incursion was meant to protect the

great powers' interests from Reza Shah's economic relations with Germany. Muhammad

Reza Shah carried out his father's plans of Westernization, centralization and secular

nationalism. Amidst the growing silence of the clerics, only one ayatollah dared to attack

both the shah and the ulama. It was Khomeini in his work, *The Revealing of Secrets*,

published in 1943/44. Martin explains that Khomeini carefully designed his coming battle

with the state. She clarifies that in response to the quietism of the religious establishment

in Qum under Ayatollah Burujurdi in the 1950s, Khomeini attempted to broaden his

supportive base among the combative ulama through the variety of classes that he

taught(Martin 2000:55). His revolutionary thought attracted the most radical and

progressive students who perceived him as the one to stand up against the shah. The

younger ulama were assigned to spread out in villages and to educate its local on Islam

and its culture. As for Khomeini's close students, they were assigned important roles as

his mediator with the bazaar, to gain their loyalty, create and distribute funds (Martin

2000: 59).

After WWII, the political influence in Iran began to shift away from Britain to

the US. The young shah was thus perceived by the U.S. administration as the pro-

Western element in the region to contain Soviet power thereby reshaping Iranian politics

in accordance with Western strategic interests because of Iran's geo-political importance.

The beginning of U.S. intervention in Iran started with the infamous 1953 CIA-backed

coup, previously discussed, which dubbed the second Pahlavi shah as America's

accomplice by all political groups whether liberals, communists or Islamists. The rift

between the shah and his subjects widened as the U.S. provided military aid and training

in intelligence gathering to the shah's expanding army, leading in 1957 to the

establishment of the notorious secret service, SAVAK. As a result, the opposition was

crushed, the press was censored, and the assembly was abolished until finally, in 1961,

the shah started to rule by decree.

Between 1953 and 1961, new ideas in the religious seminaries were disseminated

through publications addressing matters of sociological and ideological importance.

Through these journals, Islamic concepts on guardianship and leadership rotated through

out the country thereby establishing a 'politico-cultural organization' that was to form the

basis of the revolution. Palestine composed a focal issue in Islamic politics at that time,

and Khomeini was the first to issue a fatwa demanding aid for Palestine (Martin

2000:59). The death of Burujurdi in 1961 terminated the tranquil relationship between the

clergy in Qum and the shah, which eventually culminated in the uprising of June 1963.

Khomeini's uprising: 1963-1979

The plight was initiated in January 1963 with the submission of the shah's White

Revolution, a plan of six principles, to a referendum. Amidst the ulama's silence,

Khomeini attacked the whole programme, forbidding his followers to participate in the

referendum. In addition to his economic concerns, Khomeini attacked the abandonment

of the poor, emphasizing that the shah's rule serves not only the Pahlavi dynasty but also

the interests of foreign powers, namely US and Israel, an issue he was to address

continually. Khomeini mobilized the urban middle class and the urban poor in a popular

uprising which resulted in massive demonstrations in Iranian cities in June 1963, during

the Ashura commemoration of Hussein's martyrdom when religious feelings of resistance

to injustice run high. Hundreds were killed by the army and Khomeini was arrested for

his provocative speeches which focused on four issues: the expansion of state control, the

spread of secularism at the expense of Islam, the increase in state repression and the

power of U.S. influence on government policy (Martin 2000:22). Khomeini's arrest

sparked additional demonstrations throughout Iran, created public appeal around him and

drew attention to his agenda. After his release following the intervention of ayatollah

Shari'atmadari, Khomeini maintained his criticism of the regime and demanded a

government according to Islamic principles. He attacked the shah again over legislation

passed by the parliament in October 1964 granting all U.S. military personnel and their

dependents immunity from prosecution for crimes committed in Iran. Consequently,

Khomeini was deported to Turkey from where he moved to the Shii holy city of Najaf in

Iraq, where he remained until 1978. During Khomeini's exile, the clerics engaged in the

struggle established a Combative Clerics Organization which developed connection with

the provinces and by 1978 came to include some 30,000 ulama and students through

mosques and universities. Khomeini's students in Najaf maintained contact with the

movement in Iran creating the Combative Clerics Outside the Country Group in 1972

which set out a full program for the movement. Khomeini's lectures were distributed both

-in tape and in print to Islamic societies world wide including Iran. Other than opposition

to the regime, Khomeini's discourse tackled main topics on anti-imperialism, anti-

Zionism, foreign policy and Islamic unity (Martin 2000: 72). Martin explains that the

circle of Shiites from Lebanon to Iran cooperated to disseminate Khomeini's thought.

Khomeini's *Islamic Government* was assembled in Beirut by funds coming from Najaf.

Furthermore, although by 1975 it was difficult for Iraqi Shiites to meet with Khomeini

under the secular Baathist regime, Lebanese, Syrian and Afghani Shiites continued to

contact him to spread his views and commands (Martin 2000:72).

Khomeini was able to win the allegiance of diverse factions of the Iranian society

because of the Shah's policies: political repression by the SAVAK, press censorship,

corruption of the regime, absence of political representation, protection of American

interests and the implementation of arbitrary economic policies. The shah's agricultural

policies resulted in massive migration of the poor to the cities where the state failed to

provide welfare, employment or housing for their growing numbers. The underprivileged

and dislocated found spiritual and financial support in the religious foundations (Martin

2000:25). Furthermore, most social strata were affected by the rise of oil prices in 1973

and the ensuing cycle of recession and inflation. As a result, the gap between the wealthy

elite and the poor widened thereby raising the issue of social justice by all the political

groups who participated in the downfall of the shah despite their conflicting political

visions and aspirations.

In the universities, diverse political factions of the Iranian society, including

Islamic liberals, Islamic Socialists, Marxists and secular liberals, began to assemble

against the regime. It should be noted that mostly the middle class constituted the base of

the above groups unlike the clerics and bazaar associations loyal to Khomeini who

attracted the poorer social factions. Yet, ironically, 'the Shii rhetoric of the Karbala

paradigm' was the galvanizing force for all social groups (Martin 2000:148). The

symbols of Shii Islam have driven the Iranian revolution not only through its religious

compartment represented by Khomeini but also through leftist intellectuals, most

important of all is Ali Shariati. Shariati who died just before the revolution in 1977 was

well-informed of Shii theology and history, but his vision of the world was shaped by

Marxist ideals that he encountered during his sociology studies in Paris. Shariati believed

in class war, revolution and the Marxist utopia. He found these elements in Shii Islam

which made him view Shiism as a creed of revolution (Nasr 2006:129). To Shariati, the

sacred Shii Imams were revolutionary heroes in their grand quest for justice and Karbala

was the epitome to be followed to reach an Iranian revolution. 'Every day is Ashoura,

every place is Karbala' became both Khomeini's and Shariati's slogans (Nasr 2006:128).

Shariati reminded the Iranians that their faith called for social justice and persuaded them

to embrace martyrdom for this divine cause, just as their Imams have done.

Consequently, 'Islamic Marxism', as the shah named it, drove the revolutionary youth

(Nasr 2006:129).

Real mass mobilization, led by the clergy in coordination with the religious

educated young, began in January 1978 following an offensive anti-Khomeini article

which resulted in the spread of protests. The suppression of each was followed by

mourning processions every forty days thus maintaining the unrest. On September 8, the

death of a large number of demonstrators in Jaleh Square, Tehran, triggered a huge

demonstration on Ashura in December. The role of the bazaar in revitalizing

demonstrations was pivotal, the bazaars of Tehran and Qum closed frequently for a whole

year between January 1978 and January 1979. All in all, two-thirds of the 2500

demonstrations that took place during the revolution were organized by the bazaar-

mosque alliance (Martin 2000). By the end of November 1978, the shrine cities of Qum

and Mashhad were controlled by the Islamists with an Islamic Republic declared in the

latter (Arjomand 1988:134). In December 1978, millions of demonstrators approved a

revolutionary program that called for the recognition of Khomeini as imam (leader),

abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of an Islamic government (Arjomand

1988: 134). By mid-January 1979, other major cities fell into the hands of the

revolutionaries. Even in Tehran the state and its military were paralyzed as the mosques

took over the responsibility of distributing food and fuel and the revolutionaries took over

security. At that time, Khomeini founded a Council of Islamic Revolution with the

mission of setting up a transitional government. In an effort to appease the middle class,

the shah appointed Bakhtiar, a member of the National Front, as prime minister when it

was too late. Khomeini returned to Iran on February 1, 1979 soon after the shah's

departure two weeks earlier, forcing Bakhtiar himself to leave.

The Struggle over the Nature of the Islamic Republic: February 1979-December 1982

On February 4, 1979, Khomeini appointed Bazargan provisional prime minister

who formed a secular cabinet with no clerics. However, a 'parallel' government of

revolutionary committees, courts and guards also developed alongside the powerful

clerically dominated revolutionary council. On 11 February, 1979, the council was

installed as the supreme-decision making and legislative authority in the country by a

public endorsement issued by Khomeini. Arjomand explains this dispersion of power as a

'common by-product in the aftermath of all revolutions which usually result in multiple-

sovereignty' (Arjomand 1988:135). During this period of 'multiple-sovereignty' in the

spring of 1979, peripheral ethnic regions, namely among the Turkmans, Kurds and Arabs

experienced separatist insurrections alongside armed activities of the Marxist groups

against the representatives of the new regime. Massive executions were also carried out

against members of the Pahlavi regime, SAVAK agents and army officers by

independent revolutionary courts.

Confronted by ethnic insurgencies and an armed opposition, Khomeini criticized

Bazargan for being weak. Determined to strengthen his central government and to unite

his lines, Khomeini purged the armed revolutionary groups, reorganizing them into the

carefully selected, 6000-man corps of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution which

would become the armed wing of the Islamic Republican Party and which was to be later

placed under the clerical supervision of the two-rising prominent clerics: Rafsanjani and

Khamenei (Arjomand 1988: 136). As for the government, direct clerical takeover of the

state began by Bazargan's invitation of four clerics to join the cabinet in July 1979. These

were: Mahadavi-Kani as minister of the interior and Rafsanjani, Khamenei and Bahonar

as deputy ministers of interior, defense and education. This move was pivotal for the

instigation of the Islamization program which was to end Bazargan's power and that of

any other moderate figure in the new regime, as we shall discuss later on. Meanwhile, the

Islamic Republican Party was reorganized on the basis of Khomeini's concept of

welayat-el-faqih as the one and only party of the Islamic state of the near future. Perhaps

the most sincere interpretation of the events that led to the rise of power of the clergy in

Iran was explicitly declared by Bazargan himself shortly before his fall. "What happened

was that the clergy supplanted us and succeeded in taking over the country…In that

respect, all the parties went to sleep after the revolution. And that included the parties of

the left, which have never been able to attract the masses in Iran and have always

remained on the fringes of reality" (Arjomand 1988: 137). In the above statement,

Bazargan touched upon a significant factor that was in favor of the clergy which is the

powerful grip of the Islamic Shiite ideology over the Iranian masses vis-à-vis imported

ideologies from both East and West that failed to inspire, mobilize and win over a great majority of the Iranians.

Consequently, in March 1979, the referendum on the creation of an Islamic republic was supported by a public vote of 98%. By June, the first two drafts of the constitution were issued abolishing the monarchy and replacing it with a strong presidency. It failed to stipulate the implementation of Islamic law or to grant specific role to the jurists, except on the already established Council of Guardians. Khomeini accepted the second draft and wanted to submit it to a referendum. Yet, the opposition which included laymen like Bazargan and Bani Sadr and even radical Islamists requested further debate. The Revolutionary Council was thus driven to turn to the people to choose a panel of Assembly of Experts that would mediate differences among the various groups and write a final draft to put to the nation. By accepting this proposal, the moderates made the mistake that would finally empower the hardliners. The Islamic Republic Party, which represented the views of Khomeini, won over 2/3 of the seats of the assembly. As a result, Khomeini's clerical supporters used the assembly to demand supreme authority under the *faqih* in accordance with Khomeini's *Islamic Government*. Martin notes that the demand for the government of the jurist was legitimized by the mere fact that the mass of ordinary people did not object to it although the middle class laity did (Martin 2000: 159). Bazargan publicly warned of the 'dictatorship of the clergy' (Wright 1989: 74). Yet, the opposition which included moderate clergy, leftists, religious minorities and ethnic groups was too dismantled to effectively block the proposal for clerical rule.

What further weakened the opposition's stance was the take over of American hostages by Islamic students at the American embassy in November 1979 in response to

U.S. acceptance to harbor the deposed shah. This move accelerated the fall of Bazargan

who relentlessly sought rapprochement with the West. Wright explains that 'even among

Iranians opposed to or disillusioned by the revolution, the ability to stand up to the United

States had strong nationalistic appeal' (Wright 1989: 76). Furthermore, the plight of

American hostages marked the beginning of Khomeini's battle with the 'Great Satan', the

U.S. On the other hand, Khomeini regarded those opposing the new constitution as siding

with Satan and the imperialists against the nation and Islam (Arjomand 1988:139). Thus,

Bazargan and most political groups, who had many reservations on the powers to be

conferred on the jurist, declared themselves 'constrained to support the new constitution

in order not to jeopardize the on-going anti-imperialist struggle and the political line of

the imam'(Arjomand 1988:139). Arjomand adds that what bolstered Khomeini's position

was the presence of enough votes among the underprivileged Iranians in favor of the new

constitution which secured its ratification and passage with a significant margin

(Arjomand 1988: 139). The timing for the referendum was perfect to ensure a 99%

approval. It took place in December 1979 on the day following Ashura, when Shiite

fervor is high, and after the seizure of the embassy, when nationalist feelings were at a

peak. Consequently, the constitution of the Islamic Republic rendered Iran the first

Twelver Shiite theocracy in history and gave the *faqih* the decisive word on government

actions in its executive, legislative and judicial branches.

Following the end of the debate over the constitution, presidential elections were

held in January 1980. Khomeini prohibited clerics from participating and encouraged

instead Bani Sadr, a religious intellectual who has written on Islamic government and

economics. Martin explains that during this period Khomeini still had unity and the aim

to revive the economy as his objective (Martin 2000:166). Moreover, all the Islamic reformists, nationalists and liberals supported Bani Sadr who won the presidential elections as an independent. In February 1980, Khomeini assigned Bani Sadr the position of chairman of the Revolutionary Council and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. However, the first parliament which was elected in March was dominated by the clerics and the IRP. This resulted in a political plight between the president and his moderate supporters on the one hand and the parliament and its fanatic supporters on the other hand. The plight was further exacerbated as the IRP carried out the 'Islamization' program to reshape both the Iranian state and society through the army, the educational and the judiciary system. Consequently, Khomeini ordered the creation of the Commission for Cultural Revolution to carry out the Islamization of universities and schools. The process culminated in the summer of 1980 by the repeated purges in the higher and lower ranks of the state, the Ministry of Education and the army (Arjomand 1988: 144). The empty posts were distributed among Islamic activists, clerics and servile religious laymen. The political crisis worsened following the Iraqi invasion of Iran's western border in September 1980 which pushed the clerically dominated Supreme Defense Council to limit the president's power in favor of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution whose power was progressively enhanced. As a result, by the end of December 1980, the IRP pushed for the vast expansion of the Guardians' numbers.

Islamization of the state was resisted by the liberals and the left who rallied behind Bani Sadr leading to clashes between the president's supporters and the IRP's military forces. Khomeini then interfered ordering Bani Sadr to resign. After the deposition of Bani Sadr in 1981, Khomeini took overall control of the armed forces in

accordance with his constitutional rights as the jurist. In response, the Mujahidin blew up

the headquarters of the IRP assassinating both the new president and the prime minister.

Faced with a deadly war with Iraq, insurgency in Kurdistan and military leftist activities

through out the country, the regime counterattacked resulting in the execution of

thousands of Mujahidin. By 1983, the suppression of the opposition was almost complete

and the establishment of the Islamic state with its tripartite base, the bazaar, the mosque

and the Revolutionary Guards was finally accomplished.

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic

The constitution of Islamic Iran endorses the ideological vision of Khomeini. This

is manifested in both the introduction and in Article 2.6 which describe the constitution

as being based on Islamic precepts which provide for the prevalence of social justice,

economic, cultural and political independence and national integrity. Moreover, the

Islamic character of the republic is represented and preserved by the leadership of a

pious, just, courageous, capable and knowledgeable jurist. Article 110 reveals that the

power of the individual jurist or the council of jurists far exceeds a simple supervisory -

role over the three branches of the government. The leader (*waliy el faqih*) appoints both

the jurists to the Guardian Council and the highest judiciary authority in the country. He

signs the certificate of appointment of the president and dismisses him if the Supreme

Court declares the president politically incompetent. The leader also holds supreme

command over the armed forces and declares war and peace based on the

recommendation of the Supreme Defense Council (Schirazi 1997:14).

On the other hand, the constitution reserves many other key government positions

for Islamic jurists. Six out of the twelve members of the Guardian Council must be

fuqaha' and only these six have the right of veto over parliamentary resolutions. This

council is responsible for the interpretation of the constitution, supervision of presidential

and parliamentary elections and referendums. In other words, the Guardian Council

constitutes the second most important government institution in the Islamic Republic.

Moreover, memberships of the Assembly of Experts and the five positions as judge in the

Supreme Court are also reserved for Islamic jurists (Schirazi 1997:14). The Assembly of

Experts which is elected by the people was formed after the demise of Khomeini to

appoint the Supreme Leader. This assembly is also in charge to dismiss the leader or any

member of the leadership council if he/they no longer enjoy the necessary qualifications

for leadership (Schirazi 1997). The Iranians are also entitled to elect the president,

members of the parliament and members of local councils from amongst the people by a

direct ballot. However, the institutions elected by the people to represent them

(presidency, parliament and the Assembly of Experts) either lost their representative

character as a result of the restrictions on the eligibility of political candidates or are

constantly checked by other state organs not chosen by the people, mainly the Guardian

Council. Yet, the Council of Guardians can be bypassed by a resolution of the

Expediency Council whose members are chosen by the Supreme Leader. The latter

council also rules on legal and theological disputes between the parliament and the

Guardian Council (Schirazi 1997).

Based on the above, one can conclude that Islamic Iran has an unusual political

system which is definitely unprecedented in history. It is a network of elected and

unelected institutions in a complex system of religio-juridicial checks and balances. As a

result, the entire system is established in a way to maintain a balance of power between

the different ruling factions where no one enjoys an unlimited power in the decision-

making process. This balance is maintained by the Supreme Leader in alignment with his

duty to guard the Islamic Republic, its regime and its interests. Thus, the short and long

term goals of Islamic Iran are set by qualified jurists based on their knowledge of the holy

texts and their continual exercise of judgment (*ijtihad*) based on their awareness of the

demands of the times.

The constitution also endorses a vision of a wider Muslim community. It

discusses the duty of the Islamic Republic in preparing the ground for the continuation of

the revolution through the expansion of international relations with other Islamic and

popular movements to pave the way for a unified world community (Martin 2000:164).

The constitution therefore reflects the values and goals of Khomeini and his Islamic

movement. But how did these goals evolve and mature to cope with 'the demands of the

times' as expressed in the constitution?

Exporting the Revolution

As the new Iranian regime consolidated its power during the early 1980s, it aimed

to export its universal Islamic message to the Arab world. But the Arabs failed to respond

to Khomeini's call for two main reasons that still constitute the major hurdle to Iran's

rapprochement with its Sunni Arab neighbors. The first and most important deterrent is

the Shiite essence of Iran's ideology which renders the Sunni-dominated Arab world

indifferent to the Iranian quest. The 1400 year old religio-political Sunni-Shiite divide

still plays against Iranian goals and interests. Second, the debilitating Iran-Iraq war

engendered persisting antagonism on both sides. As a result, Iran turned to exporting its

revolution to the Shiite communities of the Arab world. The appeal of Khomeini's

revolution instigated popular uprisings among the Shiites in Lebanon, Iraq, Kuwait,

Bahrain and even Saudi Arabia. The Iranian regime made use of the clerical relations that

linked leading Shiite ayatollahs through out the Arab world to one another and to their

loyal students. At the center of those networks were clerics who studied with Khomeini

in Najaf during the 1960s and 1970s at the time of his exile there. The most important of

them were ayatollahs Muhsin al-Hakim, Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr and Mohammad

Hussein Fadlallah whose political activism during the 1980s gave birth to the Dawah

party and the Sadrists' movement in Iraq and Hezbollah in Lebanon. All of which were

to play a key role in toppling the balance of power in both Iraq and Lebanon at the

beginning of the 21st century in favor of Iran.

Although the Iranian revolution failed to replicate its success elsewhere for

reasons beyond the scope of this research, it succeeded in triggering an unprecedented

Shii revival in the Arab world that significantly changed the political map of the Middle

East. "The ideology and its perceived accomplishments had the ability to move people

from a stage of quiet passivity into a sudden and explosive activism." (Brumberg and

Zonis 1987: 71) Yet the ideology of the Islamic Republic is associated with a strong

sense of pragmatism as the following two chapters will reveal. This pragmatism is

attributed to the flexible Shiite doctrine itself, which can be interpreted and reformulated

by the leading *mujtahids* to cope with the changes and challenges of time. All of which is

intended to preserve the Islamic Republic for the return of the Twelfth Imam (Brumberg

and Zonis 1987: 78). Khomeini explained: "This country belongs to the Imam of Age and we are its guards and must protect it from foreigners" (Martin 2000:169). The next chapter will clarify how Islamic Iran led by the *faqih* has successfully employed pragmatism in favor of its ideology to overcome the challenges brought about by U.S. policies in the Middle East plunging Iran in a hostile and a turbulent environment.

Chapter 3

Iran's Foreign Policy and Contemporary Challenges

"The enemy's expenditure of effort consists in the wastage of his forces-our

destruction of them…is to wear down the enemy"

Carl von Clausewitz / 'On War'

The Evolution of Iran's Foreign Policy

Islamic Iran emerged amidst a deepening Cold War between its most despicable

foe, the United States, and its next-door Communist neighbor, the Soviet Union. Born out

of Khomeini's vision of an Islamic state, Iran had to find a new place for itself in the

bipolar system. Inspired neither by East or West, the Islamic Republic evolved as an

'anti-imperialist Muslim version of the French Republic' (Ehteshami 2009:127). The

Iranian revolutionaries also sought to export their revolution wherever possible to

promote its ideology. Such attempts were tamed by the existing regional order and most

of the revolutionary zeal was curtailed by the debilitating 8-year Iran-Iraq war. The costly

war forced the Iranian regime to realize the limits of its power (Takeyh 2007:2). With

the collapse of the bipolar international system and the death of its uncompromising

founder ten years later, Islamic Iran had to overlook its 'neither East nor West' approach

in order to cope with the new world order formed by the demise of the Soviet Union and

the supremacy of the United States. It also had to secure its own strategic and political

presence in the new international system. In this sense, Iran's foreign policy evolved into

a series of pragmatic measures alongside its ideological constituency. Indeed, Iran's

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persisting foreign policy foundation has been its anti-Americanism established by

Khomeini (Ehteshami 2009:129). Accordingly, Islamic Iran's main concern has always

been how to direct its confrontation with the U.S.

In short, Iranian leaders combine their ideological principles with pragmatic

calculations to achieve their strategic objectives. Although the regime has learned to

prioritize the geopolitical factor in its foreign policy conduct, ideology remains a

determining factor among others in Iran's political calculations. Today, ideology 'serves

the aim of preserving Iran's national and security interests' (Barzegar 2009:134). The

main reason for this political evolution is Iran's immediate geo-political environment

which poses multiple sources of insecurity to the Islamic Republic. On its western border,

Iraq is torn by sectarian strife and the risk of territorial disintegration. On its eastern

border, Afghanistan and Pakistan plunge in chaos and Sunni fanaticism. Along its

northern borders, the states of Central Asia and the Caucasus are burdened with weak

social, political and economic systems. To its south, Iran faces hostile pro-American

regimes that are liable to socio-political changes in the future (Barzegar 2009:134). As a

result, Iran spends a major share of its political and economic capital to deal with these

threats and to maintain a powerful army. Yet, the intertwined nature of the region's

emerging security dilemmas has brought both challenges and opportunities for Iran as it

will be discussed in the coming sections.

The Islamic Republic's international relations can be therefore divided into four

periods that complement each other: from a period of confrontation under Khomeini

(1980-1988) to a period of accommodation under President Rafsanjani(1989-1997),

détente under President Khatami(1997-2005), and rejection under President Ahmadenijad

(2005-) (Ehteshami 2009:129). As Iran's military capability was recovering during the 1990s, Iranian policy makers began to moderate Iran's revolutionary outlook and to shift security policy toward deterrence and détente. Both of which would provide a more favorable strategic context for the development of Iran's military power (Ward 2005). In the 1990s, as the U.S. military presence strengthened, Israeli missile program progressed and India and Pakistan carried out their nuclear tests, Iran took advantage of Khatami's election as President in 1997 to improve relations with its surrounding and Europe. However, the events following 9/11 and Iran's inclusion in the 'Axis of Evil' by the Bush administration in January 2002 reinforced the return of Iran's hardliners to the political scene. Between late 2001 and 2003, Iranian leaders began to design defensive strategies that emphasized 'the spiritual dimension of Iran's security principles' including faith, popular mobilization and the use of proxies outside Iran's borders (Ward 2005:564).

Iranian officials whether hard-liners or moderates, radicals or pragmatists, are unified on how they can strengthen Iran's sphere of influence and best utilize its status for their country's ascendance as a regional power (Takeyh 2007:3). Iran's revolutionary veterans still possess ultimate authority, yet they are increasingly responsive to the approaches of their successors. Unlike their predecessors during the 1980s, Iran's new leaders have abandoned the old revolutionary discourse of overthrowing pro-Western regimes in Iraq, Jordan, Egypt and the Gulf. As the revolution evolved learning from past experiences, Iranian leaders now focus on the outcome of these states' foreign relations rather than their internal composition (Takeyh 2007:3). In short, Iran's strategy in the Middle East has been to maximize both its political and military gains at the expense of

the U.S. This policy is evident in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Gaza where Iran's

allies are achieving not only military but also political supremacy.

Iran's Foreign Policy in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Levant

Iranian Strategy in Iraq

Since 1979, Iraq has remained one of Iran's major foreign policy concerns. Iraq

had destabilized Iran's western border soon after the victory of the revolution by

bombarding its strategic economic targets followed by the Iraqi invasion of Iranian

territory in September 1980. With Khomeini in charge, Iran was driven by its

revolutionary fervor to reconstruct the existing order in the Middle East. The Islamic

Republic, however, lost the war for two main reasons: its inferiority in both the

battleground and the diplomatic arena as well as the unlimited support that the U.S. and

its allies provided for Iraq. Faced with similar challenges in 2003, Iran learned to be more

prudent and pragmatic, keeping all its options open. It therefore chose to take the stand of

'active neutrality' in the 2003 U.S. war on Iraq (Ehteshami 2003:124).

Because 'interest dictates policy and history informs it' (Ehteshami 2003:115),

Iran's foreign policy is directed in response to the U.S. policy in the region. It is fortified

however with ideological concepts and revolutionary zeal. In other words, Iran's more

immediate concerns lie with the U.S. intentions toward the Islamic Republic itself.

"Driving Tehran's policy is its obsession with the U.S. and its anxieties about how

Washington's actions will impinge on Iran's national interests" (Fitzgerald 2003:1).

Thus, Iran aims to deny the U.S. both the time and the opportunity to attack its regime

and territory, therefore keeping the U.S. lingering in chaos in Iraq and Afghanistan,

confused and strained.

In a 2008 article, the McClatchy Washington Bureau reports that one of the most powerful figures in Iraq is neither a top U.S. military officer nor an Iraqi politician, but an Iranian general, Suleimani, who heads the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force (IRGC-QF) (Allam, Landay, Strobel 2008: 1). According to Iraqi and American officials, Suleimani provides financial and military support to diverse Iraqi factions. Furthermore, he has secured the elections of pro-Iranian politicians and has promoted Shiite personnel in the Iraqi security forces (Allam, Landay, and Strobel 2008: 2). A senior Iraqi official explains, "The Quds Forces have played it all, political, military, intelligence, economic. They are Iranian foreign policy in Iraq" (Allam, Landay, Strobel 2008: 1). The IRGC-QF has been actively involved in organizing, training, funding and equipping Iraqis, both Sunni and Shia, to fight against coalition forces (Kagan and Pletka 2008:17).

Therefore, an analysis of Iran's policy in Iraq would define its longstanding goals there: driving the U.S. out of Iraq as a prelude to a wider withdrawal from the M.E. and establishing a Shiite- dominated Iraqi state that would not threaten Iran's security. In fact, Iran initiated its preparations to wear down the U.S. forces in Iraq even before the 2003 U.S.-led invasion. Based on classified intelligence documents, Supreme Leader Khamenei assembled a council of war in Tehran in 2002 that acknowledged the need to "adopt an active policy in order to prevent long-term and short-term dangers to Iran" (Kagan and Pletka 2008:18). Consequently, the Iranian intelligence services reassembled the various Iraqi refugee resistance groups under Brigadier Sulleimani, head of the Quds Force (Kagan and Pletka 2008:18).

Since 2003 Iran has supported both political allies like the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and militant allies like Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army. However, over the past six years, Iran has prioritized its political allies and their attempts to rise to power through the Iraqi political process. Following the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, Iran avoided any direct confrontation with the U.S. forces. Instead, Iran's policy in Iraq implemented a 'conciliation strategy' approved by the Supreme Leader himself which focused on the democratic elections as the best means by which it would install its allies, SCIRI and the Dawa party, in leading positions within the Iraqi government (Felter and Fishman 2008:26).Thus, one of the first major Iranian victories against the U.S. in Iraq was the outcome of political insight rather than military might. In January 2005, Iraqis voted for the first time since the U.S. invasion two years earlier. As the U.S. backed up the pro-Western interim Prime Minister Allawi to keep him in office, Iran counteracted U.S. efforts by heavily supporting a bloc of conservative pro-Iran Shiites who democratically replaced Allawi and his bloc. A year later, the Iraqi Shiite politicians compromised on Prime Minister al-Maliki who was an acceptable choice to Iran (Allam, Landay, Strobel 2008: 3).

In the meanwhile, Iran also prepared the grounds for destabilizing the U.S. forces in Iraq. By August 2005, an extensive network of Iraqi insurgents was fully developed with the sole aim of attacking the U.S. and Coalition Forces thereby creating a new war zone in the battle against the U.S. (Kagan and Pletka 2008:18). As al-Sadr guided violent uprisings around Najaf and Karbala in Spring 2004, Iran has reportedly established camps for training the rebels along the Iran-Iraq border and financed al-Sadr movement with millions of dollars (Felter and Fisherman 2008:30). However, as the Iranians sensed

that the Sadrist uprising might hinder the 2005 elections of the General Assembly, they

persuaded al-Sadr to end the violence in August 2004. The events in Najaf revealed the

effectiveness of Iran's 'dual-track strategy' in Iraq, the crisis intimidated the U.S. and its

resolution politically empowered the ISCI as they won major seats of the General

Assembly and a Dawah party member, al-Jaafari, became prime minister. Nonetheless,

the Najaf crisis also demonstrated the precedence of Iran's political strategy in Iraq over

the military option (Felter and Fisherman 2008:35). Thus, most often when violence

jeopardizes the political process that ensures bringing Iran's allies to power, Iran steps in

to negotiate a solution to the given crisis (Felter and Fisherman 2008:26).

Yet, Iran's support to Iraqi insurgents is not confined to the Shiites. U.S. and

British intelligence reports confirm that Iran is also providing sanctuary, basic training

and arms to extremist Sunni militants including al-Qaeda (Kagan and Pletka 2008:22).

These reports comply with other intelligence records that note that General Sulleimani

ordained in the spring of 2004 that "any move that would wear out U.S. forces in Iraq

should be done. Every possible means should be used to keep these forces engaged in

Iraq" (Kagan and Pletka 2008:21). Thus, Iran's bait and bleed policy toward the U.S. in

Iraq overlooks the 'Sunni-Shii' divide and even the 'ally-adversary' divide for the

purpose of securing Iran's national interests away from ideological preferences.

Consequently in 2005, the U.S. and Iranian strategic positions in Iraq were

overturning in favor of the latter. The U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003 to consolidate its

influence in the region while Iran was on the defensive, aiming to ward off any U.S.

attack on the Islamic Republic. By 2005, however, the U.S. strategy in Iraq dwindled for

the lesser goal of maintaining its security there while Iran's strategy broadened to ensure

that the U.S. would be driven out of Iraq (Felter and Fisherman 2008:37). The U.S. has

striven, without much success to paralyze the Quds Force's activities in Iraq. The most

known events took place when U.S. forces detained alleged QF members in Baghdad and

Irbil in 2006 and 2007. Iran retaliated by increasing its associates' attacks on U.S. forces,

detaining 15 British sailors and four Iranian-Americans in the Persian Gulf and Iran

respectively. The crisis intensified as the U.S. sent off additional aircraft carrier battle

group and missile defense batteries to the Persian Gulf. Yet, Iran did not flinch in talks

about its nuclear program nor in its forces' activities in Iraq (Allam, Landay, Strobel

2008: 4). On the contrary, the Quds Forces responded to the increase of U.S. troops in

Iraq in both February and August 2007 by escalating its support for Special Groups'

military activities in central and southern Iraq (Kagan and Pletka 2008:27). Thus, it was

only after a series of talks that both Iran and the U.S. mutually freed their detainees in

November 2007.

Iran has also proved equally skillful at making peace to reach its goals. In March

2008, the QF commander in Iraq played a pivotal role as a mediator between the Iraqi

forces and al-Sadr's Mahdi Army to end the fighting over Basra which could have incited

if unrestrained a full-blown rebellion not only in Iraq's oil-producing south but also in

Baghdad. As the representatives of the Dawa Party and the ISCI headed to Iran to meet

with both al-Sadr and Iranian officials, the pro-American Iraqi President Talbani also met

with QF commanders at Iran-Iraq border to end the fighting. Unsurprisingly, the conflict

ended soon thereby highlighting Iran's 'politics-first' strategy in Iraq. Thus, as Iran

intervened in 2004 to pave the way for the elections, it also intervened in 2008 to

facilitate Iraq's provincial elections and Iraq's SFA/SOFA negotiations with the U.S. The

SFA/Sofa agreements grant Iran the best means to remove most of the U.S. troops from Iraq thereby restraining their ability to attack Iran in the future (Felter and Fisherman 2008:51). Therefore, as the ISCI and the Dawa cooperate with the U.S. as a source of stability in Iraq, Al-Sadr constitutes a source of instability for the U.S. forces. Al-Sadr's movement remains a powerful political faction in Iraq today because of the ceasefire arranged by Iran in March 2008. If Iran had not intervened, his movement would have been crushed by both the Iraqi and U.S. forces. Moreover, al-Sadr's residence nowadays in Iran suggests that Tehran can influence and shape his political moves in the future against any Iraqi intention to yield in to U.S. demands (Felter and Fisherman 2008:53).

Furthermore, the Iranian influence in Iraq now stretches from Kurdistan in the north to Basra in the south. In August 2007, the coalition forces reported that the Iranian-backed violence on its forces constituted roughly half the attacks compared to previous years in which the majority then came from Sunni-Arab insurgency and al-Qaeda (Kagan and Pletka 2008:17). In short, the intensity of violence promoted by Iran's militia proxies in Iraq against U.S. forces will be dictated by the amount of U.S. troops present in Iraq and their freedom of action (Felter and Fisherman 2008:53).

On the other hand, it is important to note that the stated objective of the Iranian-trained Iraqi insurgents is the expulsion of the U.S. forces from Iraq and not the ignition of sectarian strife. The following quote of an alleged Special Groups member from a U.S. intelligence report best portrays Iranian interests: '*Iran does not care about the fight between Shia and al-Qaeda. Iran just wants to force Coalition Forces out of Iraq because Iran is afraid these forces will use Iraq as a base for an attack in the future. Iran is training people to fight Coalition Forces not al-Qaeda*' (Felter and Fisherman 2008:56).

This explanation is also consistent with Iran's long term policy to avoid any Sunni-Shiite

struggle in the region for any sectarian divide will primarily inflict damage on Iran itself

in its Sunni-dominated surrounding. The Iranian foreign policy bypasses the sectarian

divide as an emphasis on the holistic Islamic discourse as set by Khomeini himself and as

an interpretation of the Iranian pragmatism. Consequently, unlike the sectarian rhetoric

which is often used by the Americans and their Arab allies, Iran and its allies plan,

coordinate and function away from the sectarian struggle which is detrimental to all

groups within that national-Islamic alliance.

Iranian Strategy in Afghanistan

Iran's policy in Afghanistan over the last thirty years has been governed by its

geo-strategic interests which engendered continual Iranian support to diverse political

factions: the mujahideen Shia fighters, during the Soviet invasion, anti-Taliban groups

during Taliban's rule and the post-Taliban Afghan government, despite Iranian

resentment of U.S. presence in Afghanistan. Iran's 'active neutrality' during the 2003

U.S. invasion of Iraq was therefore similar to its stance during the 2001 U.S. invasion of

Afghanistan. There is no doubt that Iran's relations with Afghanistan has significantly

improved since the overthrow of the Taliban which Iran viewed as a threat, especially

after the former overran in September 1995 the western province, Herat, that borders

Iran. In September 1998, Iran nearly came into war with Taliban over the murder of

Iranian diplomats in northern Afghanistan. Thus, upon the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan,

the Iranian leadership chose to use the U.S. to rid them of the Taliban and to exploit the

latter to bleed the U.S., thereby wearing out both. As a result, Iran fully cooperated in

2001 with the Northern alliance supplying its troops with fuel, funds and ammunition and

offering search and rescue assistance. Tehran also allowed the transit of U.S. aid to the Afghans through its territory (Katzman 2009:47).

Iranian influence runs deep in Afghanistan for Iran has close cultural and religious ties with the Persian-speaking Afghans in western Afghanistan and the Shiite minority in central and northern Afghanistan. Consequently, Iran actively carries out since 2001 a project of cultural and economic expansion to consolidate its influence there. Iranian economic assistance to Afghanistan therefore underlies an economic strategy to affect power relations (Kagan and Pletka 2008:37). In the 1980s and 1990s, Iran opposed both the Soviet-backed Afghan governments and the Taliban regime but accepted millions of Afghan refugees during these two decades and actively supported insurgent groups. It also abstained from developing any economic ties with those 'hostile' regimes. However, the drastic changes that took place in Afghanistan in 2001 were accompanied by a profound change in Iran's policy toward post-Taliban Afghanistan. Iran actively assisted the U.S. in bringing down its foe, the Taliban, and participated in the establishment of a new Afghan government.

Following President Khatami's first high-level visit in forty years in 2002, trade agreements were initiated a year later, including the replacement of Karachi with Iranian port of Chahabar as Afghanistan's principal trade route. Iranian-Afghan trade grew from less than $10 million in 2001 to $500 million in 2006 (Kagan and Pletka 2008:37). In addition to Iran's general support in reconstruction, it has also supplied 'targeted assistance' to three border Afghan provinces (Kagan and Pletka 2008:38). The most important of these contributions have been in electricity and transportation infrastructure which drew Afghanistan's west closer to Iran than Kabul. Although all of Iran's

economic efforts are in accordance with Afghanistan's National Development Strategy,

the report by the American Enterprise Institute perceives a coming Iranian threat. It notes

that 'Iran is absorbing western Afghanistan into its economic orbit faster than Pakistan,

Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and China are integrating the Afghan provinces on

their borders-faster even than Afghanistan is integrating its own regions and cities into an

economic unit' (Kagan and Pletka 2008:39). Furthermore, Iran's support for

Afghanistan's religious and educational programs includes the teaching of Farsi in areas

even beyond the western border provinces. Such Iranian emphasis on the spread of 'pan-

Persianism' and 'pan-Shiism' is seen to have important outcomes within Afghanistan

itself and on the Iran-Afghanistan relations (Kagan and Pletka 2008:37).Moreover, the

extensive financial and economic support has rendered the Shiite Afghans wealthier than

most of their counterparts (Beehner 2009:2). This financial empowerment replicates the

ascendance of the financial and political power of the Shiites in Lebanon and Iraq.

On the other hand, Iran has significant domestic interests in having a stable

Afghanistan to its east. Around 4% of Iran's total exports in 2006 were bound to

Afghanistan thereby making up more than $500 million in revenue (Beehner 2009:2).

Yet, the most important domestic concern for Iran is checking Afghanistan's notorious

drug trade which renders Iran its major transporter. This problem has left Iran with more

than 1.7 million addicts as estimated by the U.N. office of Drugs and Crimes (Beehner

2009:2).

For all of the above reasons, Iran facilitated U.S. efforts in Afghanistan in 2001. It

joined forces with Western countries through the Six-Plus-Two framework and the Bonn

conference to set up a post-Taliban government. Later on, Iran strengthened its relations

with the Karzai government and deported at the time hundreds of al-Qaeda and Taliban

leaders who had escaped to Iran (Beehner 2009:2). One of the U.S. officials in regional

policy who acted as a director for Iran and Persian Gulf affairs at the National Security

Council in the Bush administration, Hillary Leverett, reported to the Congress in

November 2007 that Iran's coordination with the U.S. on Iraq, al-Qaeda and namely

Afghanistan after 9/11 was promising (Beehner 2009:2). However, by May 2003, that is

following Bush's 'axis of evil' announcement, speech- channels communication with

Iran shut down. Leverett adds that the years of failed talks between the old foes have

elevated the level of distrust to almost an irreversible stage (Beehner 2009:2).

Claims of Iranian aid to insurgents, first in Iraq then in Afghanistan further

deteriorated U.S.-Iran relations. The first significant report of intercepted Iranian

weapons heading for the Taliban came in 2007 (Kagan and Pletka 2008:41). Couple of

months later, Secretary of State Nicholas Burns insisted that, "There's irrefutable

evidence that Iranians are now transferring arms to Taliban fighters in Afghanistan. It's

certainly coming from the government of Iran. It's coming from the Iranian

Revolutionary Guard Corps Command which is a basic unit of the Iranian government"   .

(Kagan and Pletka 2008:44). If these claims are valid then it must be that the Iranians

reason that a limited amount of Iranian weapons to the Taliban will neither bring the

latter back to power nor will it cripple the NATO and Karzai. Thus, sending limited

weaponry to the Taliban sets a more limited Iranian aim of intimidating the U.S. and

NATO forces thereby restraining their power in Afghanistan. Consequently, U.S. fears

increase as the Taliban introduce more advanced weaponry and simulate the suicidal

attacks common in Iraq, both of which are inflicting enormous damage on U.S. forces.

Iran is also accused of harboring opponents of the Afghan government and Al-Qaeda

members (Beehner 2009:2). Iranian officials, however, deny all of these charges. Iran's

strategy of a 'managed chaos' is supposed to maintain a certain level of instability that

keeps the U.S. forces tied down, knowing that the largest military airfield in western

Afghanistan currently under U.S. control is located less than 100km away from the

Iranian border (Mir 2008). Thus, at the opening of a new Iranian air base in the middle of

Iran's eastern frontier in October 2007, the base's commander said that 'with the

inauguration of this base, from now on, all the military movements of the regional and

world powers based in Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf would be under the observation

of the air force' (Kagan and Pletka 2008:47). In his book, *Hidden Iran: Paradox and*

Power in the Islamic Republic, Ray Takeyh explains that "for Tehran the issue in

Afghanistan has not been ideological conformity but stability" (Beehner 2009:20).

"Iran's policy toward Afghanistan is essentially multi-faceted, carefully

orchestrated and highly nuanced" (Fitzgerald 2003:1). On one hand, Iran offers

cooperation in Afghanistan. On the other hand, Iran's Revolutionary Guards and the

Ministry of Intelligence and Security provide arms and funding to Iran's allies in

Afghanistan as well as al-Qaeda. Both policies, no matter how contradictory they might

seem, converge to protect Iranian interests in Afghanistan. As Fitzgerald puts it: "The

final goal of Tehran's policy is to parry U.S. efforts, cooperating where necessary, but

also willing to act to deter American goals" (Fitzgerald 2003: 2).

Iran's aid to Afghanistan has exceeded $1 billion since 2001, mainly to construct

roads and schools and to supply electricity to regions near the Iranian border. (Katzman

2009:46). This makes Iran among the top financial donors and the second major trade

partner of Afghanistan, after Pakistan (Mir 2008). According to the UN's refugee commission, around one million Afghan refugees still live in Iran. In April 2007, the forceful expulsion of 50,000 Afghan refugees created a political and a humanitarian crisis to the Afghan government keeping it aware of the significant impact of the Iranian policy on its own affairs (Mir 2008:2). This allows Iran to use both its political and economic might to influence the course of events in Afghanistan.

In short, Iran has achieved multiple gains in Afghanistan. On one hand, it has provided social, cultural and economic assistance to the Afghans and has developed a deep bilateral relation between both governments. On the other hand, it has effectively used the Afghan refugees and the Taliban to pressure both Kabul and the U.S. Taken together, these activities have resulted in: the creation of a buffer zone which is increasingly linked to Iran in three western Afghani provinces, the restraint of U.S. power in Afghanistan and the consolidation of Iran's grip on Afghanistan's government (Kagan and Pletka 2008:37)

Iranian Strategy in the Levant

Iranian foreign policy in the Levant is the replicate of Iran's broader foreign policy strategy that underpins its ideological or political allies with military, financial and diplomatic support to serve their own interests as well as Iran's. In the case of Syria, Iran invested in its Alawite regime, in Lebanon, the Shiite Hezbollah and in the Palestinian areas, anti-Israeli groups, namely Hamas and the Islamic Jihad.

Syria and Iran

Syria under Hafez al-Asad considered its alliance with post-revolutionary Iran to be the counterbalance to the new power structure that emerged after Egypt's withdrawal in 1979 from the Arab-Israeli struggle following the Camp David accord. Similarly, Islamic Iran dealt with Syria as a pivotal strategic ally for Syria was the first state in the region to side with the Islamic Republic in the anti-U.S./Israel alliance. What drew an Arab nationalist secular republic to a Persian Islamic theocracy were the shared geo-political threats that were primarily Israel, the U.S. and Iraq in the early 1980s and nowadays Israel, the U.S. and the pro-American Arab states. During the Iran-Iraq war, shared security threats from Iraq allowed Iran to bring considerable amounts of Eastern bloc arms through Syria which shutdown the trans-Syria pipeline to drain Iraq's capacity to finance the war. In return, Iran provided Syria with cheap Iranian oil to limit the economic pressures that the Gulf Arab donors could impose to shift the Syrian foreign policy (Hinnebusch 2009:150). With the end of the cold war and the death of Khomeini, Iran and Syria were both obliged to ease hostilities with the West as the U.S. intervened in the region through the 1990-91 Gulf crisis in the absence of a counterbalancing Soviet power. In the 1990s, the Syrian-Iranian alliance helped Syria to strengthen its position in

the Arab-Israeli peace process negotiations and helped Iran to withstand U.S. efforts to

isolate it (Hinnebusch 2009).With the end of the 1990s, the Syrian-Iranian alliance was

empowered by Israel's expulsion from southern Lebanon in 2000. In 2003, Syria joined

Iran in exploiting U.S. presence on their borders to weaken U.S. influence in Iraq and to

prevent the establishment of a U.S. client state there. As the U.S. increased its political

pressure and economic sanctions on Syria over the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri

and on Iran over its nuclear program, both states elevated the level of coordination in

both security and economic realms (Hinnebusch 2009:151).

Despite the strategic interests of both states, the Iranian forces were not active in

Syria under Hafez al-Asad. Iranian activity in the Levant in the 1980s was confined to the

Shiite strongholds in the Lebanese south and the Bekaa valley to organize and set up an

Islamic resistance against Israel. Today, however, the military relation between both

states is undergoing deep and broad cooperation to fortify their strategic positions. In

2005, the two states initiated cooperation on defense matters, including the construction

of joint Iranian-Syrian intelligence stations in both northern Syria and the Golan Heights

in addition to a Syrian commitment to 'allow Iran to safely store weapons, sensitive

equipments or even hazardous materials on Syrian soil should Iran need such help in

times of crisis' (Kagan and Pletka 2008:3). In 2007, the Iranian defense minister placed

Iran's defense capabilities at Syria's disposal and emphasized the two states' weapons

manufacturing cooperation. Notable examples of these profound military relations

include reported weapon transfer between the two states, cooperation on production of

chemical weapons, joint training on newly supplied Russian air defense systems and

Iran's financing of Syrian weapon acquisition. There are also several reports that the

Iranian Revolutionary Guard has achieved considerable presence in Syria in recent years (Kagan and Pletka 2008:4).

In addition to the military cooperation, Iranian investment in the Syrian economy in 2006 has constituted two-thirds of the total Arab investment and half that of all non-Arab. It is estimated that the amount of Iranian projects in Syria escalated from $100 million in 2005 to $750 million in 2006 in key sectors such as energy, telecommunications, agriculture, transportation, oil refineries and a renovated oil-pipeline from northern Iraq to Syria's west (Kagan and Pletka 2008:4).

To sum up, the durability of the Syrian-Iranian alliance is dependent on the presence of common enemies and the benefits each derive from it. The strategic benefits that Syria gained from such an alliance, not to mention the economic and military benefits as well, make it very difficult for Syria to reposition itself away from Iran. As for the Islamic Republic, its alliance with Syria has become a major element of the regional power balance and the main hurdle to an unrestrained U.S. hegemony over the Middle East.

Hezbollah, Hamas and Iran

One of the founders of Hezbollah and a former Iranian interior minister, Mohtashemi, 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 and Pletka 2008:9). Knowing that Hezbollah's source of authority is 'welayat- el -faqih', the Iran-Hezbollah alliance is deeply intertwined with ideological drivers that also serve the national interests of both

parties. At the political level, the fundamental ideological bond between Iran and Hezbollah is their religious view of Israel as an illegitimate entity which is bound to extinction. As the Iranian revolution concurred with the Israeli invasion of the Lebanese south with its predominantly poor Shiite population, the revolutionaries established a pro-Iranian military ally to fight back the Israelis in Lebanon. With time, the amount and quality of financial and military aid to Hezbollah increased significantly until the latter has become a complex political-military-social system, a major player in Lebanese and regional politics and a trainer for regional militants as well, namely the Palestinians and Iraqis (Kagan and Pletka 2008:6). In fact, the successes of Hezbollah in its 2006 war against Israel and its May 2008 victory over the Saudi-backed Lebanese ruling factions demonstrated the value of Hezbollah as a pivotal strategic power for both Iran and Syria (Hinnebusch 2009:151).

It is estimated that Iran's support to Hezbollah reaches $100 million a year; whereas Iran's total investment in Hezbollah has exceeded $2 billion (Kagan and Pletka 2008:8). In addition, following the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, Iran supplied its Lebanese ally with over $150 million to be distributed in cash to the Lebanese Shiites as a compensation for Israeli damage.(Kagan and Pletka 2008:8). It also carried out a plan to reconstruct more than 1000 projects including bridges, mosques, schools...etc. As a result, Iran has become a major actor in Lebanon today. Following the Syrian withdrawal in 2005, Iran had come to replace Syria as the primary supporter of the anti-U.S./Israel camp in Lebanon. There have been many reports on Iran's strategy of reproducing the 'Hezbollah model' through its proxies in the region. The model implies the empowerment of a political group with a military wing that also provides social services

to its population. Iraq's Sadrists and Hamas have proven to follow this model with great

success (Kagan and Pletka 2008:64)

On the other hand, the Palestinian cause has been central to post-revolutionary

Iranian foreign policy since 1979. Iran's financial and military support for various

groups, including, until very recently, the PLO and Fatah, has toppled the balance of

power in the Palestinian territories, namely Gaza, in favor of the anti-U.S./Israel camp.

Since Hamas's electoral victory in January 2006, Iran has reportedly bolstered Hamas

leadership with hundreds of millions of dollars to sustain the social and economic

Palestinian infrastructure amidst the growing Israeli siege, thereby establishing itself as

an indispensable ally to the Palestinians(Kagan and Pletka 2008:11). In early 2007, the

head of the Israeli Shin Bet declared that Iran has become Hamas's basic supplier of

weapons and training. He added that training by both the IRGC and Hezbollah experts

take place in Gaza, the Bekaa valley in Lebanon and inside Iran itself (Kagan and Pletka

2008:10). Thus, in the last few years, Iran has become the fundamental sponsor of three

interconnected proxy groups in the Levant: the Syrian government, the Lebanese

Hezbollah and the Palestinian Hamas. All of which confine Israel's northern and southern

flanks thereby maximizing Iran's military reach beyond its geographical borders.

To conclude, the alliance between Syria, Hezbollah, Hamas, the Iraqi insurgency

and Iran could be dubbed a 'national-Islamist' alliance for nationalist interests are the

primary drivers for the policy of all those players yet Islamic beliefs compose a major

component of their political thought as well, namely for Hezbollah, Hamas and Iran. On

the other hand, this "growing economic interdependence along with the flow of military

aid to the Levant, Iraq and Afghanistan place Iran at the center of a dependency network

that makes survival away from the powerful patron almost impossible" (Kagan and Pletka 2008).

Based on the above, a close analysis of the Iranian strategy in these three hotspots in the M.E. confirms that the Iranian foreign policy is designed in compliance with the dictates of offensive realism. In other words, in the presence of an anarchic international system and the prevalence of mistrust among states, great powers act as rational actors with survival as the primary goal through an offensive military capability. These five assumptions were proposed by Mearsheimer to explain the struggle for power and the competition for hegemony among states (Mearsheimer 2001). These assumptions also explain how an encircled Iran in an international system dominated by the U.S. seeks to defend the survival of its Islamic state by maximizing its share of power in its surrounding in accordance with John Herz's principle: 'the best defense is a good offense' (Mearsheimer 2001:36). However, the theory of offensive realism also recognizes that great powers might pursue non-security goals as well such as economic prosperity, promotion of particular ideologies and national unification especially that such goals further enhance the state's power. Based on these premises, the next chapter will tackle Iran's policy towards the persisting challenges and its strategic considerations for the near future.

Chapter 4

Challenges and Strategic Considerations

"There are strategic attacks that have led directly to peace, but these are the minority.

Most of them only lead up to a point where their remaining strength is just enough to

maintain a defense and wait for peace. Beyond that point the scale turns and the reaction

follows with a force that is usually much stronger than that of the original attack."

Carl von Clausewitz/ 'On War'

Tenets of Iranian Foreign Policy Making

National Pride and Historic Legacy

Understanding Iran's present and future foreign policy requires a deep analysis of

the 'cultural and psychological contexts of Iranian foreign policy behavior. For Iran, the

past is always present' (Ramazani 2009:12). In his article, *Understanding Iranian*

Foreign Policy, Ramazani depicts Iran's foreign policy as a 'tradition of prudent

statecraft that has been created by centuries of experience in international affairs'

(Ramazani 2009:13). Thus, Ramazani enumerates the 'lessons to be learned' by powers

dealing with Iran. First, Iran's statecraft is highly associated with the expectation of

respect. For this reason, pressures and threats of any form whether diplomatic, economic

or military would turn out to be counterproductive (Ramazani 2009:13). This fact is well

established in the speeches of Iranian leaders who continually reiterate their rejection of

threats and their expectations of respect. Second, Iranian negotiating style combines a

variety of tactics in handling their opponents: testing, analyzing, delaying, misleading and

counter threatening when threatened (Ramazani 2009: 14). Third, the relentless sense of

resistance of the Iranian people created by their cultural reservoir would render explicit or implied ultimatum futile (Ramazani 2009: 14).

Domestic Institutions

As for the domestic factors in Iran's policy-making, one can identify two determining elements: a complex system of checks and balances and political economy (Ehteshami 2004). The Constitution of the Islamic Republic created a political system that guarantees that unrestrained power would not rest in the hands of one person. The system that has evolved since 1979 has confined power to five major bodies. The most important of these in foreign policy matters goes to the Supreme Leader. Yet, four other bodies also play an influential role in the policy debates: the Presidency, the National Security Council, the Council of Guardians and the Expediency Council, which was formed in 1989 to sort out inter-agency disagreements (Ehteshami 2004:182). In June 2006, Khamenei established the Strategic Council for Foreign Relations as a new foreign policy-making council to counterbalance the Supreme National Security Council, Iran's main foreign policy decision-making body which is chaired by the President (Nashat 2009:140). The new council is headed by some of the most experienced foreign policy officials in Iran. Consequently, the Supreme Leader is required to rule by consensus, guiding the various competing factions. As a result, these sources of power in the Iranian political system assess policy options for the state and design policy decisions for the government. This process of decision-making by consensus enables the Iranian regime to moderate its policies when needed and to calculate its actions in the international arena (Boyars, Conell, and Nader 2007:3).

Political Economy

On the other hand, political economy has been playing an important role in

shaping Iran's policy-making since the early 1990s. The crucial role of oil in the Iranian

economy pushed Iran to moderate its foreign policy in what is known as 'economization

of foreign policy' (Ehteshami 2004:184). As a result, Iran encouraged foreign direct

investment, the creation of foreign-trade zones and strengthening economic relations with

Europe and the Gulf States. For this reason, the 'oil weapon' that entails reducing its oil

exports or sabotaging shipping in the Strait of Hormuz, would most likely be the last

resort used by Iran in its defensive strategy. It shall be employed only when the regime's

survival is directly threatened (Connell, Nader, Boyars 2007:5). Today, the most evident

tasks of the Iranian leaders have been to handle pressing security threats and to promote

economic and political development (Barzegar 2008:95). Iran's strategic 20- Year Plan

(2005-2025) states that: "Iran is a developed country ranking first in the region

economically, scientifically and technologically" (Barzegar 2008:95). To achieve this

plan, Iran is empowered by its geo-strategic position, size, economic potentials,

population and energy resources which all require the presence of a stable environment

and the creation of new economic opportunities. Iran thus plans to integrate its economic

potential with the economy of the region and the rest of the world. Iraq, Afghanistan,

Syria and the Persian Gulf are all promising opportunities for Iran to fill the regional

markets' demand and to secure its immediate neighborhood (Barzegar 2008:96).

Regional Geopolitical Considerations

The regional factors compose the fourth and most important determining element in Iran's policy-making. The instability in Iraq and Afghanistan, the containment of the Israeli power in both Lebanon and Gaza, the rise of the Shiites in the Middle East and the ascendance of al-Qaeda and their fellow extremist Sunni militants have reshuffled the distribution of power in the region, plunging it in a complex plight. Amidst these dramatic changes stands the Islamic Republic as a regional beneficiary (Takeyh 2007). Its regime has not only survived the U.S. pressures and encirclement following the 2001 and 2003 U.S. wars in the region but it has also used the new geo-political realities in its favor to boost Iran's regional power.

Since Iran has been empowered by these regional gains, nuclear power as a deterrent and a defiant ideology, the United States should therefore abandon any of the following three options in its future policy towards the Islamic Republic: military action, conditional talks and attempts to contain the regime (Tayekh 2007). Such considerations will only exacerbate regional tensions as previous dealings with Iran have shown. In fact, Iran now lies at the center of the Middle East's major dilemmas which makes it hard for the U.S. not to involve Tehran in the resolution of these issues. Moreover, Iran's regional power is being reinforced by its nuclear programme which proceeds unhindered despite all the sanctions and the threats from the U.S., Europe and IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency).

A Sunni-dominated Iraq was used by both the U.S. and the Gulf states to counterbalance Iran's power. However, with the new realities created by the U.S. itself, it is unlikely that any Shiite dominated Iraqi government will be willing to defy or confront

the Islamic Republic for the sake of Washington nor is any other Arab country likely to

challenge Iran today amidst the growing weakness of the surrounding Arab states(Tayekh

2007:2). Thus, in order to develop a more practical U.S. policy towards Iran, the former

must first acknowledge two important facts: the determination of the Iranian regime to

stand up against the United States and the ascendance of the Iranian power in the region.

These two facts allow Tehran to behave as "an opportunistic power seeking to assert

predominance in its immediate neighborhood without recourse to war" (Tayekh 2007:3).

Iran and the U.S. are therefore confined with either coexistence or confrontation.

Knowing the limits of its power, Iran will not initiate a direct military confrontation with

the U.S. but it will definitely prepare itself for it as its history, ideology and the existing

realities dictate its present and future tactical moves. Part of its defensive policy,

President Ahmadinejad declared that the Islamic Republic has never initiated war against

any nation and does not plan to do so in the future (Safaghi-Ameri 2009:138). Aware of

these two outlets for the ongoing struggle, confrontation or coexistence, the Iranian

government has always favored comprehensive discussions over talks on a single issue.

Through out previous attempts of negotiations with the U.S. and the IAEA, Iran

continuously stressed its readiness for "long-term cooperation in security, economic,

political and energy areas in order to achieve sustainable security in the region" (Tayekh

2007:3). For the time being, Iran's strategy to counterbalance U.S. power in the Middle

East will continue to hinge on an indirect confrontation through regional proxies.

U.S.-Iranian Relations

On March 21, 2009 the Supreme Leader Khamenei, replied to President Obama's call for a new beginning in U.S.-Iran relations. In his holistic speech, Khamenei put forward both the definite constants and the plausible variables in Iran's policy. He clarified that there would have to be drastic changes in U.S. foreign policy before the two countries could begin new relations. Among these included calls to drop 'unconditional support' for Israel, economic sanctions and criticisms of Iran's nuclear ambitions. Khamenei clarified that Iran will carry on its nuclear project regardless of international regulations if the U.N. Security Council insists it stops Uranium enrichment. He also threatened to hit back if attacked by the U.S. over its nuclear program. On the other hand, Khamenei backed up talks between Iran and the U.S. on Iraq. He explained that the Iranian officials will demand that the U.S. leaves Iraq. He clarified that "if the talks mean opening a venue for the bullying, aggressive and cunning side to forcefully impose its view, this will be forbidden like all the other cases."[7]

Thus, it does not seem to be much room for compromise on either side for the political and strategic objectives of the two states widely diverge. What the U.S. is offering is simply talks, an offer that the Supreme Leader dismissed if not correlated with fundamental changes and strategic shifts in U.S. foreign policy. Yet, Khamenei's approval of the proposed discussions with the U.S. was followed by the hard-liner's criticism over what they view as a serious change in Iranian foreign policy after three decades of official enmity between the two states. Such talks, according to the hard-line daily *Kayhan*, insinuate that "Iran gave in to Washington after 27 years of resistance".[8] It

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[7] www.leader.com
[8] www.memritv.org

could therefore be said that in such talks Khamenei stands and will continue to stand

halfway between the ideologues and their pragmatists counterparts. In fact, what divides

the Iranian political groups in foreign affairs is whether coexisting with the U.S. or

confronting it would serve as the best means to secure Iran's national and security

interests. (Takeyh 2007:4).

The Radicals

The radicals, on the one hand, include important individuals in the Council of

Guardians, the Revolutionary Guards and the judiciary along with President

Ahmadinejad. . These radicals draw their strength from Iran's most powerful structures:

the Revolutionary Guards with its intelligence apparatus and the Basij paramilitary force

(Takeyh 2007:4). Indoctrinated by Khomeini's perception of the U.S. as 'The Great

Satan', the radicals believe that the U.S. was and continues to be the reason behind all of

Iran's adversities from the 1953 coup to their 1980s war with Iraq to this day (Takeyh

2007:4). Accordingly, the radicals consider the acquisition of nuclear weapons as pivotal

for the survival of the Islamic Republic. With their deep religious convictions, the

radicals consider Iran's nuclear program as the 'great divine task' and a "necessary

preparation for the next phase on the future battlefield" (Takeyh 2007:4).But they also

deal with the U.S. on the basis that its power is deteriorating. A commander of the

Revolutionary Guards stated in March 2006: "we have assessed the ultimate power of

global arrogance; on this basis there is nothing to worry about" (Takeyh 2007:4).

The Pragmatists

The second group of 'conservative' Iranian politicians emphasizes Iranian nationalism and pragmatism over Islamic identity and ideology. Among these pragmatist conservatives are Ali Larijani, the head of parliament, and Abbas Mohtaj, the commander of Iran's navy(Takeyh 2007:4). With the end of the cold war, this group withdrew during the 1990s into research centers to evaluate Iran's international status. They deduced from both the collapse of the bipolar system and their country's geographic position that Iran is a natural regional power whose progress has been hindered by the state's ideological zeal and its uncalculated enmity with the rest of the world. Consequently, they argue that Iran should behave more wisely to realize its potentials. This entails accepting certain international standards and negotiating passable agreements with its opponents (Takeyh 2007:4). In the last few years, the pragmatists have used their close ties with the Supreme Leader to take control of Iran's international relations. It is these realists who allowed Iran to be a key player in both the global energy market and the international political arena. Their growing power was manifested in December 2006 as they outdid the radicals in municipal elections (Takeyh 2007:4).

Although both political groups foresee the decline of U.S. influence in the region, the pragmatists consider that Iran's ascendance requires a more rational relationship with the U.S. Larijani clarified their pragmatic policy in late 2005, "We may be sure that the Americans are our enemies but working with the enemy is part of the work of politics" (Takeyh 2007:5). He further explained that "the strategy of curbing and reducing disruptions and normalizing relations is itself beneficial in the long term" (Takeyh 2007:5).Despite the disagreement of these two political groups over the attitude toward

the U.S., they both agree on Iran's strategic need for a nuclear capability. Yet, the pragmatists consider that by improving Iran-U.S. relations, they can reach an agreement with Washington over Iran's nuclear program without having to abandon it (Takeyh 2007:5).

The Supreme Leader and the Guardians

Yet, the conclusive decisions in Iranian foreign policy lie in the hands of the Supreme Leader. Khamenei, although an ideologue with deep religious convictions, has managed to balance the different political groups as the foreign and domestic conditions entail. As the head of the state, he must primarily secure Iran's national interests and prudently balance ideology with statecraft. Thus, since the immense repercussions of the 2001 and 2003 U.S. encroachments on Iran's frontiers, Khamenei was driven to take a more pragmatic stance. Furthermore, in order to deflect economic sanctions, Khamenei sided temporarily with the pragmatists as he agreed in October 2003 to sign the (Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty) NPT's Additional Protocol, including provisions for a fairly intrusive inspection regime, despite calls by the Iranian parliament to reject the NPT (Pollack and Takeyh 2005:27). Furthermore, in November 2004, Khamenei agreed to postpone the uranium-enrichment projects and to give up completion of the nuclear fuel cycle (Pollack and Takeyh 2005:27). However, in August 2005, Iran's uranium enrichment program was reactivated with the backing of the Supreme Leader. Such maneuvers in Iran's nuclear policy can be thus interpreted as one of its tactics to balance its nuclear aims with its economic priorities (Pollack and Takeyh 2005:26). It also reflects Iran's calculating policy which shows 'restraint when the risks are high' but is also "willing to endure considerable sacrifices to achieve its most important objectives"

(Pollack and Takeyh 2005:21). Thus the Supreme Leader confirms himself as the main decision-maker on foreign policy matters keeping all other Iranian officials in check.

As clarified in his March 2009 speech, Khamenei has shown signs of support for conditional talks with the U.S. over issues of mutual concern, namely on Iraq and Afghanistan, but without any compromise on issues that include Iran's nuclear activity, Iran's stance towards Israel and Iran's demand of lifting the economic sanctions. Thus, as the U.S. reconsiders its Iran policy, it should first concede that the "guardians of the theocratic regime do not fear the U.S., they do not relate to the international community from a position of strategic vulnerability. Tehran now seeks not assurances against U.S. military strikes but an acknowledgement of its status and influence" (Takeyh 2007:5). Moreover, according to the American Enterprise Institute "the U.S. is not now mobilized on any dimension appropriate for the necessary struggle. Our military is too small, our foreign aid programs ill-designed and our intelligence systems dysfunctional" (Kagan and Pletka 2008:66). Hence, in the meantime, a direct military clash between Iran and the U.S. is postponed. The two states still have the choice of talks to minimize the tensions but not to resolve their problems. This means that the U.S. should negotiate Iran on three separate tracks.

Prospect for a Three-Track Rapprochement Strategy towards Iran

As for the nuclear track, Iran could be granted its NPT rights to enrich uranium

for Iran validates its nuclear aspirations by the rights granted by the NPT itself. " Under

Article IV of the NPT, all states that are signatories to the treaty have an inalienable right

...to develop research, production, and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes"

(Kemp 2005:30). Moreover, unlike the U.S. administration, Iran does not tie its nuclear

policy to any other foreign issue (Takeyh 2007:6). Iranians consider that nuclear weapons

compose an important deterrent to any future U.S. strike against the Islamic Republic.

Thus, from a realist perspective, Iran's pursuit of nuclear deterrence for strategic

considerations is totally comprehended. Furthermore, the CNA 2007 report explains that

the proximity of Iran to hostile nuclear states such as Israel and Pakistan compels any

Iranian regime, not only that of the Islamic Republic, to become a nuclear power

(Connell, Nader, Boyars 2007:5). Having experienced a ferocious war with Iraq where

an isolated Iran was deprived the supply of both weaponry and its ammunition, Iran has

learned to rely totally on a self-generated and a self-sufficient deterrence. A reliable

missile technology and an efficient nuclear deterrence would therefore grant Iran "not

supremacy of power, but a balance of power" in its hostile environment (Mokhtari

2005:211). On the other hand, nationalism plays an important role in compelling most

Iranians to support their regime on the nuclear issue which has become "an object of

Iranian national pride, liberty and independence" (Mokhtari 2005:209). Hence, Iran's

nuclear quest could be primarily categorized as a nationalist rather than a pure Islamic

pursuit.

The second track which includes talks on Afghanistan and Iraq, Iran's most vital security concerns, seems to be the most flexible and feasible for both Iran and the U.S. There is no doubt that Afghanistan plunges in chaos and its government is hardly capable of holding on to power beyond Kabul for much of the country is actually controlled by local leaders and warlords amidst the growing power and violence by al-Qaeda. The U.S. is therefore finding it increasingly difficult to bring stability to the country and security to its forces. The U.S. has thus failed in translating its military success into a political one and in the absence of a responsible dialogue between Iran and the U.S. the situation will get worse, especially for the latter. Moreover, such a fruitful dialogue would ease many of Iran's Afghani generated troubles such as the refugees' crisis and drug trafficking. It seems that the Obama administration is willing to hold comprehensive talks with Iran and General Petraeus stated that cooperation with Iran should be part of a regional strategy for Afghanistan (Katzman 2009:46). NATO partners as well tend to include Iran in the talks for resolving the Afghani dilemma. Thus, despite the growing debate over Iran's nuclear program and the continuous accusations of arming insurgents, the U.S. administration is bound to include Iran in any future efforts to achieve stability in Afghanistan.

In his 2008 policy paper, Karim Sadjadpour, an Iran expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, noted that "Afghanistan presents even more fertile ground for U.S.-Iranian cooperation than the issue of stability in Iraq" (Beehner 2009:3). Similarly, Zalmay Khalilzad, the former U.S. ambassador to the U.N. and former envoy to Kabul, considers Afghanistan as Iran's 'bargaining chip' against U.S. aggression (Beehner 2009:3). Nonetheless, negotiations over Iraq and Afghanistan will have to

overcome historical enmity which "began with the 1953 CIA-led coup in Iran and was

cemented by the Iranian revolution of 1979", as Barnett Rubin puts it (Beehner 2009:3).

On the other hand, the break down of Iraq into autonomous regions plagued by sectarian

and ethnic strife threatens Iran's security and economic interests. It is for this reason that

Iran is and will be willing to cooperate with the U.S. to stabilize Iraq and to strengthen its

central government (Kemp 2005: 2).

As for the third track of negotiations of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Iran's

antagonism toward Israel is based on its Islamic ideology which denies the legitimacy of

the Zionist state. Iran under the Shah allied with the U.S. and Israel. However, as post-

revolutionary Iran redefined itself as an Islamic state that stands up to imperialism and

Zionism, Iran's revolutionaries redefined its friends and enemies as well. The ongoing

U.S. intervention in Iranian politics, its continual support of Israel and the latter's

occupation of the 'holy land' made both U.S. and Israel enemy states in the post-

revolutionary Iranian policy doctrine. This renders the Arab-Israeli conflict the most

difficult to resolve, if not to negotiate, especially that Hezbollah's victory against Israel in

2006 and Hamas's resistance to Israeli incursions in Gaza in 2009 further stiffen Iran's

determination to assert its regional influence and to challenge Israel. In short, Iran's

stance vis-à-vis Israel serves both its strategic interests as well as its ideological beliefs.

Iran's Latin and Eastern Policy

At the international arena, the western pressures and economic sanctions that

burden Iran over its nuclear program have pushed it to pursue an 'Eastern' policy by

strengthening relations with major countries like Russia, China and India and forging

close ties with different countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. This extensive

policy enables Iran to boost its economy and its political status to confront the difficulties

brought about by the West. Furthermore, Iran successfully employs the argument of state

sovereignty, world justice and technological sufficiency to gain support over its nuclear

program (Nashat 2009:140). The main audiences were the members of the Non-Aligned

Movement (NAM). Such a tactical foreign policy rhetoric proved successful in

September 2006 when 118 NAM members supported Iran's nuclear program in their final

statement at the Havana Summit. During a 2007 tour of Latin American states,

Ahmadinejad and Venezuelan President Chavez intensified mutual investments and the

exchange of technology between both states. They also set up a $2 billion fund to back up

countries which oppose U.S. foreign policy, thereby creating a 'backyard of loneliness'

for the U.S. (Nashat 2009:140). In July 2008, Iran announced its bid for a seat on the

2009-2010 UN Security Council at a meeting of the group of 57 Islamic nations, gaining

the support of the Asian group. Although this application failed, it reveals the difficulties

of both the U.S. and Europe in isolating Iran (Nashat 2009:140). Thus, Iran's radicalism

has been limited to certain 'ideological' issues that are restricted to the Middle East,

namely anti-Americanism/anti-Zionism. Yet, Iran has successfully utilized its anti-

imperialist and pan-Islamic rhetoric in its public diplomacy to reach out to different parts

of the world. In the Middle East, President Ahmadinejad's administration has reiterated

Khomeini's discourse as a tactical means to overcome Iran's isolation in the region by

increasing Iran's pan-Islamic influence and by placing pro-U.S. Arab governments on the

defensive (Nashat 2009:141). For this reason, Ehteshami depicts Iran's foreign policy as

a 'mix of religious nationalism, revolutionary-populism propaganda, policy opportunism

and anti-Americanism/anti-Zionism' (Ehteshami 2009: 128,129).

The Aftermath of the 2009 Presidential Elections

The credibility of Ahmadinejad's reelection by a 62% margin in the June 12, 2009 elections triggered civil unrest in several major Iranian cities of a size and intensity unprecedented since the 1979 revolution. Furthermore, the measures taken by the government under the command of the Supreme Leader to end the protests and silence the opposition have shaken the relationship between the regime and a considerable portion of its citizens. The current domestic crisis brings us back to the model proposed in this research as the cornerstone on which Islamic Iran rests. To reiterate, the triangular chain composed of the *faqih,* the Iranian Government and the Iranian foreign policy maintains the survival of the Islamic Republic according to the tenets set by its founder. Any inconsistency between the three components would strain the chain and therefore jeopardize the state. Thus, synchrony between these components is required to maintain the state's power.

The plight in Iran today revolves around the struggle for power between the competing wings of the regime, Khamenei on the one hand and other veterans of the Islamic Revolution headed by Rafsanjani on the other hand (Khalaji 2009). Ahmadinejad pointed out to the nature of the struggle in the televised pre-election debates as he clarified that he was competing against all three: Mousavi, Khatami and Rafsanjani. Although this twenty-year old struggle is domestic in nature, it entails a struggle over foreign affairs as well. This was made clear by all three presidential candidates running against Ahmadinejad. Having a more flexible and compromising stance towards the

West, they continually warned the public against Ahmadinejad's domestic and foreign

policies (Khalaji 2009). Ahmadinejad on the other hand campaigned specifically against

détente with the West (Singh 2009). Thus, as the two components of the model,

government and foreign policy, started to deviate, the Supreme Leader interfered to bring

back all three components into one single alignment.

Khamenei's public speech on the Presidential elections on June 19 set clear

markers on the regime's decisiveness to protect the revolution and its achievements,

thereby asserting his role as the vanguard of the Islamic state. Khamenei openly sided

with Ahmadinejad and his defying policies as he depicted the turnout of the elections as

"a political earthquake for enemies and a historical celebration for friends of Iran and the

revolution."[9] He also accused the West and the Zionists of aiming to spark a 'velvet

revolution' in Iran by shaking national trust and expressed his determination to stand up

against all mutinies. Khamenei empowered his speech with the ideological rhetoric as he

addressed the Twelfth Imam at the end saying, "we have done what needed and said what

needed and will do. We would stay the course powerfully. You are the true owner of the

revolution and country. Please pray for us."[10]

Both of Khamenei's speech and the deployment of the paramilitary Basij and the

Revolutionary Guards in the struggle indicate that the regime in Iran today is willing to

take all the necessary measures to preserve the current system and its foreign policy as

well. Regardless of the actual election results, if Ahmadinejad has genuinely won the

majority of votes, this implies that a considerable portion of the Iranians support the

regime in its domestic and foreign policies thereby emphasizing the powerful grip of

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[9] Check speech at www.cfr.org
[10] www.cfr.org

ideology over the Iranian nation. If on the other hand, the regime fabricated the results to

carry out its current policies for the next four years, this implies that ideology will remain

one of the basic tenets in Iran's foreign policy-making alongside pragmatism. Both cases

suggest the difficulty of any Iran-U.S. rapprochement in the near future. In a CRS report

for the Congress, Addis explains that some analysts argue that "Ahmadinejad's message

of piety and anti-corruption coupled with his hard line on national security issues are both

popular among the majority of Iranians. Others argue that the regime headed by

Khamenei engineered the election results to send a political message to the U.S. and

others that overtures to the Iranian public did not sway Iran from its ideology- a

commitment to a nuclear program and an approval of Ahmadinejad's inflammatory

rhetoric about Israel- and that discussions with the U.S. are not perceived by the Iranian

people as a prize to be won" (Addis 2009:6).

In all cases, the coming months will unravel which of the three plausible scenarios

Iran will undertake under the renewed leadership of Khamenei and Ahmadenijad. The

first most likely scenario is that Iran will maintain the current status quo in the region

which would enable it to absorb the domestic shock on the one hand and to continue with

its nuclear program, its support for Hezbollah, Hamas and the Iraqi insurgency and its

defiant regional policies on the other hand. Yet, others might argue that following the

June 2009 domestic disorder, Iran might be compelled to consolidate its grip within its

borders by taking a hard-line position to end all domestic disputes in order to preserve its

power outside its borders. This scenario was carried out by the regime in the early 1980s

when nascent Islamic Iran was faced by a war on its western border and insurgency from

within. The decision back then was to counterattack ruthlessly by all means. Still the third

scenario is that the Iranian government might accept a compromise to the current crisis in order to restore the balance between the official and civil constituents of the Iranian society thereby preserving the regime with minimum costs.

Concluding Remarks

The geopolitical changes that have taken place in the Middle East since September 2001 have provided Iran with the chance to prove itself as a major power in the region. Yet, the U.S. and its regional and international allies are determined to keep Iran from acquiring this status. This situation carries us to the original question on the extent to which Iranian foreign policy is driven by ideology as opposed to pragmatism in defining Iran's national interests. The following remarks may be useful in summing up the answer to the above question.

First, revolutionary regimes in their very beginning tend to cling to ideological approaches in their foreign policy conduct. However, as the regime matures, pragmatic considerations start to prove itself pivotal for the state's survival (Saghafi-Ameri 2009:137). This explains why Iran cooperated with the U.S. in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Simply, stability in these states was vital to Iran's national interests. Such a consideration has therefore superseded the ideological preference for not dealing with the U.S. In this case, pragmatism took precedence over ideology. Second, Iran's size, a population of 70 million, its natural resources, technological developments and nuclear capabilities drive the country towards regional predominance which is further empowered by its influence in the Levant, Iraq and Afghanistan. Third, the enmity that has overshadowed Iran-U.S. relations has guided many aspects of the Iranian foreign policy over the past thirty years and will continue to do so. In fact, the Iranian regime designates the U.S. as Iran's

primary enemy because of its hegemonic threats and its military superiority (Ward

2005:566). Israel is regarded as the next foe because of Iran's ideology along with

Israel's military superiority and nuclear power (Ward 2005:566).

The above three premises lead us to a fourth important remark. Today, Iranian

officials appear to view the U.S. presence in the region more as a weakness to exploit in

Iran's favor. Deterrence, however, still remains Iran's proclaimed primary security

strategy (Ward 2005). Yet, Iran's redlines are very clear. "Any military action against our

country, including limited and surgical operations, would be considered as an attack on

the existence of the Islamic Republic of Iran and therefore would be responded to with all

our might", clarifies Iranian Minister of Defense in 2004 (Ward 2005: 565). But what

defines Iran's military doctrine?

The basic principles of Iran's strategy were codified in the regulations of

the Iranian Armed Forces in 1992. The principles outlined in these regulations present

Iran's defensive goals in its national security policy. It comprises the five major aims of

protecting national independence, territorial integrity, regional interests, the theocracy

and other Muslim and 'oppressed' nations (Ward 2005:560). 'These principles stress

Islamic ideology as a basic precept for organizing and equipping the Armed Forces. They

also demand loyalty to the Supreme Leader, seek self-sufficiency, and hold defense-

deterring and ultimately punishing an aggressor against Iran or oppressed nations as the

Armed Forces primary orientation' (Ward 2005:561). The regulations correlate the

principle of unity of command to allegiance to the concept of 'welayat el faqih' (Ward

2005: 561). This results in the positioning of mostly hardliners who are loyal to the

Supreme Leader as military commanders. It is important to note that these principles

reflect Khomeini's tenets of the Islamic State. 'The residual strength in the early 1990s of the legacy of Ayatollah Khomeini insured that ideology would be a keystone for Iran's conception of war and military doctrine' (Ward 2005:560).

To sum up, the lessons Islamic Iran has learned in the past thirty years is that success in a turbulent environment entails balancing ideological and pragmatic policies. Thus, Iranian foreign policy in the near future is likely to be focused on pursuing national interests by flexible means but guided by ideological principles (Saghafi-Ameri 2009:138). There is a direct and a proportional relationship between the intensity and the probability of U.S. military threats towards Iran and the utilization of the geopolitical and ideological element in Iran's foreign policy. The Iranian engagement in Afghanistan and Iraq serves as a good example. The more the U.S. threatens Iran whether directly or indirectly, the more Iran intensifies its struggle against the U.S. via its proxies employing the Shiite ideological element. Meanwhile, subsidence of U.S. threats will diminish the intensity of the ideological element while focusing on the integrative and economic relations with regional states (Barzegar 2009:135). It is important however to mention that the ideological factor serves as the leverage for the geopolitical factor. Iran's strategy of building 'a coalition of Shiite friendly governments' primarily stems from a strategic rather than an ideological rationale (Barzegar 2008:88). 'Ideological forces do, of course, act as a stimulus in connecting people morally and in winning hearts and minds' (Barzegar 2008:93).

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