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To the Children of the Middle East
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The Middle East is infamous for its disorder status and current conflicts have a lot to do with Iran with one way or another. In 1979, Iranian revolution took place against Western backed Shah and theocratic leadership of Iran understood that they would not survive if they did not formulate offensive policy in long term. This belief was buttressed by international isolation and Iraqi war which pushed Iran for exporting its revolutionary system to other countries.

US invasion of Iraq and The Arab Spring gave Iran unparalleled opportunity to capitalize on consequent disorder in Middle East. In Iraq, Iran has already established strong influence which was unimaginable during Saddam Hussein’s ruling. In the course and aftermath of The Arab Spring, Iran prevented the falling of Bashar Al Assad and sent thousands of troops to secure its interests in the region but she did not stop there.

Yemen was another point of Iranian interests where Iran provides logistical support to Houthi rebels which helped rebels take control of most of Yemen. Furthermore, Iran tried to involved into Bahrain during popular uprising and she supported Hezbollah which recently gained an important position in the governance of Lebanon.

When all these countries are interlinked with lines, the Crescent appears which is now called Shiite Crescent. The term was first coined by King Abdullah II of Jordan and he furthered his claim by saying that the Shiite Crescent formation would have devastating impact on region\(^1\). The claim is strenuously and continuously denied by Iranian leadership and claims that Islam is one. The evaluation has right side in itself but Islam is interpreted differently by not only states but also prominent scholars, therefore, it seems that sectarian politics of Iran pays off. However, it is facile to just take sectarianism into consideration and conduct research based on it.

In the West, there is often misleading flow of information related to understanding of Middle Eastern region. The main reason is mainly due to Eurocentric approach to social sciences. All above mentioned have pushed me for choosing the topic “Shia Crescent” and my purpose is to contribute to objective explanation of one of the most important issues in the Middle East.

To analyze sectarian color of Iranian foreign policy, it is necessary to delve deep into history and geography to understand Iranian mindset. Then I will move to analyze Iranian political system because it is not only about theocracy but also democracy. It may sound weird but Iranian political system has bits of democracy, certain political groups lobbying for their ideas and Shia political thought which has been revolutionized and reformed into concept of Wilayet Al-Faqih or the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurists. Furthermore, Iranian bid for dominance of Islamic world, Saddam’s attack on Iran, Iran’s effort to export its revolution to other countries, Iran’s involvement

in Lebanon and Hezbollah are explained. Later on, USA invasion of Iraq and Iran’s increasing influence in Iraq are given in detail. For me, it is too tempting to pass up the Iranian foreign policy in the immediate aftermath of the Arab Uprisings, its involvement in Syrian civil war, support for Houthis in Yemen. Additionally, Saudi Arabian reaction to Iranian growing influence, Mohammad Bin Salman’s dangerous adventurism and emerging regional order which puts Sunni states closer to Israel are intriguing points to touch upon. Without going into comprehensive details, Russian and Turkish involvement in Syria, the Gulf Cooperation Council’s reaction to Iranian growing influence and American factor are also explained.

In this study, the research question is why Iran formulates offensive foreign policy. This is because I hold a view that Iran’s particular behavior is not cause but symptoms of greater regional and international power struggle. It is worth noting that the time framework of this study is limited to the beginning of 2019.

Theory
The study of Middle East can be undertaken through theories but not all theories are able to give the whole picture. I decided to choose two theories which can give impressive outlook about the Shiite Crescent. These theories are realism and constructivism. The reason why I choose these is that realism can explain the particular behavior of Iran in anarchical and multipolar world, whilst constructivism can explain how the social and historical construction of Iran and the whole region took place.

Realism
Starting with the explanation of realism. Realism is not single thought of school because it is further divided into different types of realist approaches. However, it is required to describe the common points of realist philosophical school:

1. Conflict is caused by human’s lust for power².
2. International system is anarchic which means that states are on their own and have to ensure their survival³.
3. States are rational actors because they can cooperate with any other state or actor if it fits to state interests⁴.
4. International Law is designated in a way that does not threaten state’s capacity to pursue its interests⁵.

According to Kenneth Waltz, International Relations are determined by three level of analysis of the system⁶. The first one is about human being in which Kenneth Waltz agrees with Classical

³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid.
Realists such as E.H. Carr, Morgenthau. Secondly, Waltz maintains that conflicts are there because of internal composition of states. For instance, the Western powers colonized Africa and incurred unmeasurable sufferings on innocent people because their own internal system requires it. That is to say, internal dynamics of any state compel it to try to exploit other states to ensure its security and survival. Lastly, he argues that International System is anarchic and states are compelled to compete with each other since they do not know each other’s intentions.

Many scholars including students of realist school of thought admits that it is not feasible to analyze the whole international system based upon realism since it can lead to miscalculations. That confession brings us to second part of our theory: Constructivism.

**Constructivism**
Constructivism is late phenomena in International Relations and bears similarities with both neorealism and neoliberalism. However, constructive school of thought does not agree with realists on the issue of anarchy and conflict. Alexander Wendt explains that anarchy and power politics are part of international politics but they are not responsible for tensions. In his book “Social Theory of International Politics”, Wendt explains that state’s behavior is caused rather by ideational structure than material structure (THEYS, 2018). For example, there are two Koreas and both are the same nation. Despite being the same nation, USA sees the North Korea as a threat, while it sees South Korea as an important ally. Taking another example, UK’s nuclear capability does not pose threat to USA, while even intent of Iran is vehemently opposed by it. This is explained by identities of each state and social norms shaped throughout decades (THEYS, 2018).

Constructivist theory is important to use because it can explain Iran’s social norms and identity molded from the nineteen century onward.

**Research Design and Methodology**
The design of research is basically exploratory and descriptive which seeks to both answer research question and narrate the situation in Middle East from the context of Iranian behavior. The methodology of research is largely based on qualitative methods but it possible to include some quantitative data such as economic, military statistics etc.

It is worth noting that there are some advantages limitations to my research study. Notwithstanding the requirement of the research design, I cannot directly visit region to observe the situation and obtain data. In addition, due to restrictions of media in the region, it is difficult to obtain unbiased and fact based information.

The advantage is that I come from Azerbaijan which is bordered with Iran and I can speak Turkish providing me with vast resources in regard to the topic.

**Origins of Conflicts in the Middle East**
**Sykes Picot Agreement**
Sykes-Picot agreement was reached between France and Great Britain in 1916. The aim was to partition the Ottoman Empire after the Great War. The map had to be modified after Turkish War
of Independence succeeded in expelling foreign troops from Anatolia. However, the agreement created artificial borders without taking the ethnic and religious diversity of region (Marshal, 2016, pp. 147-151). It is often cited as the primary source of instability in the Middle East. In 2014, ISIL leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi said that the ultimate goal was the reverse of Sykes-Picot in his speech.

Sykes Picot Map

Sunni-Shia Split in Islam

As in case of Christianity, Islamic faith is also divided into sects. There are many groups within Islam but the biggest two splits are Sunni and Shia sects. A sectarian division is as old as Islam itself and mainly caused after the death of Prophet Muhammed. The issue of succession split Islamic community. The Sunnis supported consensus method to choose the new caliph while the Shias proposed Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law as successor. After three caliphs, Ali became caliph of Islamic community but he was also assassinated. This time Shias supported leadership of Ali’s sons Hassan and Hussein but it simply did not happen. In 680, Hussein and his small group of supporters were massacred. The tragedy became central tenet of Shia sect and the group continued to insist on Ali’s succession of Prophet Muhammed. Hussein is currently lionized and his death is mourned by Shias during Muharram period, lasting 40 days. Contrary to Shia group, Sunnis proposed consensus to elect the new caliph and Abu Bakr became the first caliph. In Sunni

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tradition, it is believed that four caliphs including Ali are rightly guided caliphs. The Sunnis also commemorate Hussein and recognize his death as a part of fight of good against evil.

Historically, Sunni-Shia split was not as violent as Catholic-Protestant split. However, the fault line in Islam are exacerbated by regional states’ competition. In sixteenth century, Safavid Empire in modern Iran region was leading Shia state, while the Ottomans were leader of Sunni Islamic world. Both empires clashed throughout sixteenth century to assert their influence over Caucasus, Mesopotamia. In addition, the Ottomans tried curb the influence of Safavids in order to eliminate risk of losing leadership of Islamic world.

In the aftermath of the Ottoman disintegration, Islamic world became under control of the Western nations. However, the end of colonization, increasing globalization and emerging multipolar world order resurfaced the old Sunni-Shiite split. Until Iranian Revolution, Saudis enjoyed the leadership of Islamic community due to control of the two holiest mosques. Iran’s revolutionary leader Khomeini challenged this position and after that competition for regional influence intensified sectarian split as in case of Safavid-Ottoman competition. Iran started using pragmatic policy to export revolution but Saudi Arabia’s effort to paint Iran as Shia state only intensified fault lines.

In the following map, the distribution of Shiite and Sunni population is depicted. According to statistics, 10-15 percent of Muslims are Shia\(^9\). Iran, Azerbaijan and Bahrain are mainly dominated by Shiite Muslims. Shias are majority in Iraq, while they are large minority in Yemen and Lebanon. Shias are minority in Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Syria. It is worth noting that the Middle Eastern region is only depicted and there are Shiite minorities in other countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan but it is not the main focus of the writing.

**Shia Upheaval?**

As shown above, Sunni-Shia split originates from the succession of Prophet Muhammmad. Olivier Roy explains the division in terms of political rather than religious. Shias failed to participate in political processes after Ali’s son Hussein was killed in Karbala. Mainly, Shias were frequently suppressed by Sunni factions. Safavid Empire largely protected Shias in Iran and Iran became the main home for Shias. The breakdown of Safavid Empire separated Shias from political processes again. This does not necessarily mean that Shias did not hold any positions but they were chosen on individual basis.

After 1960, Shia revival became apparent. I conclude from several readings, there were several reasons for that. Firstly, Turkey, once center of caliphate, were anchored to the Western alliance. Despite not having control over Shias during the Ottoman Empire, Turkey’s position was generally perceived as treacherous. Turkey’s recognition of Israel and good relations further tarnished its image in Islamic world. Secondly, Pan- Arabism did not create single Arab nation and Israeli victories over Arab nations pushed the people of the Middle East to seek for alternative ideologies. Lastly, the long-run ignorance of Shias and their oppression added fuel to fire. Modernization

effort and Sunni supremacy came to end when Iranian people revolted. Iranian revolution was the first sign of Shia empowerment.

The second sign of Shia rise was Lebanon Civil War in which Shias gained important position in politics of Lebanon. In addition to that, Hezbollah was established and became the most powerful militia organization in the region over the next decades\(^\text{10}\).

Lastly, US invasion of Iraq paved way for establishment of Iraq government with Shia majority. However, Shia revival was vehemently opposed and aggressively reacted by Sunni powers. Sunni powers established closer alliance with Israel recently to contain Shia expansion.

What is more, Gulf countries gradually opened their political landscape to Shia citizens and their socio-economic status substantially improved in exchange for loyalty. The Arab Uprisings brought sectarian division to surface and intensified it. It can be said that decades of cohabitation of Sunni-Shia population has come to end because states play faith card to delegitimize the opponent.

Sectarian map of the Middle East\(^\text{11}\)

Chapter 2
Understanding Iran’s Mindset
While the topic is related Iran’s foreign policy, it is important to understand the elements formulate Iranian foreign policy. Therefore, a careful analysis of Iran’s modern history, its geographical

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dimension and political system is required. Firstly, Iran’s tumultuous history from the nineteenth century is analyzed because the decline of Iran’s imperial power made it vulnerable to foreign influence at best or incursion at worst. Secondly, Iran’s rough terrain encircled by mountains impacted Iranian mindset. Iran’s walls protected it from all-out invasion, while rough terrain caused significant problems for formation of cohesive society with strong economic development. The second issue, thus, takes us to the third one: political system. Iran’s political system is more democratic compared to Soviet dictatorship, while it is not close to Western style democracy, in other words, democracy with strict red lines put forward by Iranian clergy.

**Briefing on the History of Modern Iran: Iran Pays Exorbitant Price for Weakness**

It would not be a mistake to call the nineteenth century as “century of setbacks” leading to difficult times. Iran was weak in military, economic and political terms and found itself in precarious situation. In the aftermath of defeat of the Napoleonic France, the Great Powers decided to build new system at the Congress of Vienna and this system was based upon the balance of power perception. So, each power sought to attain greater influence to secure its place in the new system. One of the rivalries emerged between Russia and the British Empire because the British concerned about Russian invasion of India, the “jewel of its crown”, while Russia wanted to prevent the British from posing danger through penetration into Central Asia. In this game, Iran found itself as a playground among two powers and had no means to confront even one let alone both.

The initial blow to Iranian state came from Russia in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The war erupted between Iran and Russia in 1804 and continued up until 1813. The war ended with humiliating treaty of Gulistan in which Iran ceded territories of modern Azerbaijan, part of Georgia and Armenia to Russians. The Second Persian-Russian war broke out in 1826 and Iran was defeated. Iran was forced to sign treaty of Turkmenchay in which Iran lost additional proportion of its territories in the Caucasus and admitted to pay reparations to Russia.

Three decades later, Iran was compelled to go to war against the British. Iran was defeated and forced to relinquish its claims on Herat, modern portion of Afghanistan. Later on, Iranian state came under influence of Russia and Britain competing over the sphere of influence. In initial phase, Iran was divided into three proportions where north belonged to Russia, south to the British and remainder was given neutral status. In addition, Iranian state’s weak bureaucratic, financial, economic and political system prevented it from effective authority over the whole Iran and led Iran to borrow heavily from foreign powers at the expense of independence.

In 1905, the Constitutional Revolution inspired by Russian revolutionaries swept the whole country and opened avenues for liberal minded people to change country’s decaying polity. The reforms were halted by Iran’s internal difficulties. First of all, Iran’s geography makes it difficult to effectively control even today. Secondly, Iran’s weakness meant that foreign powers was able

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to acquire what Iran could have offered in case of alliance. Thirdly, Russia and Britain agreed to partition Iran according to their own interests. Notwithstanding its successful reforms at initial level, the Constitutional Revolution became reminiscent of malformed baby due to mother's failure to take care of it during pregnancy. The Great War put an abrupt end to the Revolution and Iranians lost their trust in promises of revolutionaries. Although Iran declared its neutrality, it was invaded by Russians, the British and the Ottomans. It can be claimed that Iran became failed state in the aftermath of the WWI and this caused resentment among military, nationalists and ordinary population.

As mentioned above, Iran was in dire straits when the dust was finally settled in the world. Russians and Turks were distracted by internal problems and foreign invasions, respectively. The British was the sole influential force in Iranian politics and she capitalized on it. Reza Khan, backed by the British, entered Tehran on 21 February 1921 and started self-assigned mission to save the country from internal convulsions and alien influence. It is quite debated issue to find person to compare with Iranian Reza Khan in terms of his political agenda to transform country. Reza Khan initially consolidated his grip on power and included modernization, nationalism, cultura and political engineering in his political agenda. His ideas are thought to be inspired by another authoritarian leader, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. However, it would be grave mistake to put both into identical character because Mustafa Kemal founded Turkish statehood based on the Ottoman Empire’s heartland. Anatolian peninsula, and he somewhat preserved character of central ruling inherited from the Empire. On the quite contrary to Ataturk, Reza Khan inherited weak and hardly integrated Iran dived into sphere of influence. While consolidating his power, Reza Khan began flirting with idea of republicanism. The republican state model was quickly suppressed after Iran’s monarchical dynasty was transferred from Qajars to Pahlavis. Reza Shah ruled country until 1941. Reza Shah’s reforms ensured indisputable authority of central government, changed society and created funcional economy.

In the years taking to the World War II, Iran’s shah was deperate to get foreing support for development to keep regime safe. Iran was wary of intent of the British and did not want to get too close to Soviet Union since it could offer little. USA was not interested, whereas Germany flooded Iran with experts, economic capital and other means. This costed Reza Shah his power in 1941. During the WWII, Iran was invaded by the British and Soviets and practically became under control of two powers again. However, it did not take long the British left country and Soviets were compelled by USA to follow the suit after the WWII ended.

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13 Ibid., p.35.
14 Ibid., pp.63-66.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., pp.141-142.
18 Ibid., p.61.
In the aftermath of the WWII, Iran experienced internal power struggle between Parliament and the Shah. The Shah had difficulties to exert full control over country because anti-imperialist revolutions made headlines for world affairs and Iranian political elites were impacted by these developments. Mohammad Musaddiq was successful to pass the bill to nationalize oil sector in 1951 and Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, the son of deposed Reza Shah, had no choice but appoint him as prime minister of Iran. Meanwhile, the Shah sought to undermine Majles’s powers and consolidate his grip on power. As time elapsed, prime minister’s popularity declined due to embargo imposed by the British. The economic isolation of Iran strained her economy and clergy opted for not supporting prime minister because of fear of backlash from society. In addition, USA was wary of Iran’s slip toward communist camp. As a consequence, the CIA backed coup was organized and it took no time to depose prime minister and ensure the Shah’s complete control over Iran. After the coup, Mohammad Musaddiq’s associates were tried and executed but he was too popular, therefore put under house arrest and died in 1967.

It can be said that the coup is the start of the third and last phase of Pahlavi State (Kamrava, 2013, pp. 145-146). Mohammad Reza Pahlavi embarked on modernization efforts interrupted by the WWII and internal power struggle. His way of modernization was infamous for cruelty and cronyism. Iran’s close relations with the West helped Iran gain certain benefits but detested by largely conservative society and clergy. In addition, high oil prices enriched Iranian government and Iran heavily invested in military and economy but marred by widespread corruption and profligate authorities. Iran’s secret service SAVAK was infamous for ruthlessness and omnipotence because it was widespread in all parts of Iran and responsible for extrajudicial killings. Richard Kapuściński explained the Shah’s domestic policies in his famous book the Shah of Shahs. However, the Shah’s place was safe at least for a while due to ‘‘Oil Crisis’’ in 1973. After OPEC countries imposed oil embargo upon the Western countries involved in Israel-Arab war in favor of Israel, oil prices skyrocketed. As a result, Mohammad Reza Shah had enough financial means to sustain economic development. To further consolidation of his grip on power, the Shah heavily invested in military, therefore, the economic benefits of oil prices could not reach to underclass people. Notwithstanding corruption and mismanagement, Iranian people did not dare
to challenge the Monarch. After Arab states increased production, oil prices started to go down and Iran’s financial situation only worsened. In the late years of 70s, Iran’s statehood was crippled by rampant corruption and economic slowdown due to decrease in oil prices and export simultaneously. In the first month of 1979, Iran was already heading into full-blown revolution.

Iranian revolution not only ushered into new era in the Middle East but also sent shockwaves across the globe. Before going into Iranian revolution, I would like to note on definition and types of revolution.

Revolution is fundamental and radical change of political system of a country. According to Mehran Kamrava, revolution is divided into four types: Pre-planned, spontaneous, negotiated and top-down. Pre-planned is in which certain groups use planned violence to compel changes, while spontaneous is when people go to streets to express their dissatisfaction and frustration with not only government but also political system. Negotiated revolutions occur when state becomes weaker but society has no sufficient power to challenge state. Top-down revolutions happen when dictators enforce changes on society and do not tolerate questioning his policies.

Iran’s revolution is mainly categorized into spontaneous one because state became weak and people went to streets to demand complete overhaul of political system which they were fed up. The revolution had many leaders but none was as popular as the Imam Khomeini. He quickly ascended to power, changed the political system based on his lust, clamped on opposition. In particular, Khomeini strengthened his position through using foreign crisis such as ‘’Hostage Crisis‘’, Iraq’s invasion of Iran. For the first time in the history of Iran, Khomeini drafted constitution which allowed defrocking ayatollahs. Then Khomeini used it against his opponents within clergy, famously, Mohammad Kazem Shariatmadari. Lastly, Khomeini called Iranian revolution as Islamic revolution and used reformulated Shia political thought where he divided the world between oppressors and oppressed ones. Later on, he explained the Shah’s admission into USA for medical treatment, Iraq’s attack as an attack on Islamic revolution which brought its fruits. Rouhollah Khomeini died on 3 June 1989 and he left his marks on Iranian political system and continued to determine Iran’s regional policy while keeping its people in torment.

Iran’s Geography

I am pretty sure that many ordinary people wonder why USA does not start outright invasion of Iran as in case of Afghanistan and Iraq. Instead of invasion, USA always opts for covert and overt measures to curb Iranian economic system, try to foment ethnic tensions and bring about regime change in Tehran. Iran’s privilege can be explained by Joseph Brodsky in which he says geography

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29 Ibid., p.161.
blended with time equals destiny. Thus to understand Iran and its foreign policy, we need to have a glimpse of its geography.

Iran is 17th biggest country with approximately 70 million people in the world30. However, it contains many ethno-religious diverse populations because of its mountainous topography (Friedman, 2008). Beginning with western part of Iran, Zagros Mountains run from northern part until Strait of Hormuz. From eastern part, starting with Caspian coastal areas, Elbrus Mountains run through Turkmen border and become lesser along Afghan and Pakistani borders. In the southern-east parts of Iran, Central Mahran Range puts obstacle against any power coming from Gulf of Oman. It can be said that only Khuzestan province is flatland and it contains rich hydrocarbon reserves but the province is mainly populated by restive Arabs. In the region, the most important port city is Bandar Abbas but it is vulnerable due to narrow Strait of Hormuz. If we look at the geographical map of Iran, we can see that Iranian southern coasts are not good for harbor and the other part can be easily blocked through invasion of the Strait of Hormuz. These facts can explain why Iran cannot become naval power. The last part is central Iran where it is uninhabitable wasteland due to the DASHT-E KAVIR (Salt-Desert) and DASHT-E LUT.

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31 Ibid.
The geography of Iran is largely responsible for its foreign policy. Taking history as a guide, it is clear that Persian empires were aware of geographical challenges by mountains and a need to overstretch to gain power in the region. Persian empires did so through invading Mesopotamia and going deep into Central Asia. Persian Empires clashed with Greek city states, Byzantium Empire, the Ottomans to gain control over modern Iraq, Syria and secure line the Mediterranean. Many things changed but geography remained constant factor and foreign incursions into Iran pushed Iran to resort to strategy prepared by history. Here, it is crucial to note that Iran’s problem is not about invasion by outside forces but manipulation by them and taking diverse ethno-religious groups into account, it is deadly for survival of Iranian state. History showed that Iran needs to secure its borders from foreign powers to ensure internal cohesion. This is completely contrary to the Western perceptions because internal cohesion is deemed priority to secure state survival in face of foreign threat in many of major political discourses.

Let’s begin analysis of geographical impact on Iranian foreign policy. Firstly, if we look at the eastern borders, it is clear that Iran is safe and trying to intervene into Turkmenistan will be confronted by brutal desert, while mountains warn Iran that Pakistan and Afghanistan are not your cup of tea. That is why, Iran looks into the western borders because it has been historically proved to be efficient for increasing Iranian imperial powers across the region. In the northern and north-west part two powers are confronting Iran: one is Turkish power, the other is Russian-Turkish interests in the South Caucasus.

In short, the geography of Iran assigns imperatives to Iran’s foreign policy:

1. Control the Zagros and Elbruz mountains to buffer any incursion.
2. Increase influence in the neighborhood, particularly, in Iraq and Syria to confront USA, Russian and Turkish threats.
3. Having uninterrupted access to Indian Ocean.
4. Maintain strong security apparatus to ensure internal stability.
5. Foment ethnic and religious violence in neighboring countries to distract USA.

At the end, I would like to note that Iran is almost impossible to conquer by force and Colin Powel’s “we do deserts not mountains” quote on Bosnia is exactly the same for Iranian case.

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32 Ibid., p.2.
33 Ibid., pp.5-8.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
Iran’s Political System: Neither Islamic nor Democratic

Iran’s political system has been a source of confusion and bewilderment for decades. However, one thing is clear cut that the Supreme Leader holds the highest position in Iran. To understand how the Supreme Leader is influential, it is necessary to look at the structure of Iranian political system. Iranian political system is divided into two parts, one being unelected and the other elected.

According to Islamic Government: The Guardianship of Islamic Jurists ideology, Khomeini suggested that only religious clergy would be able to rule country based on the God’s orders. However, in the book “The Politics of Chaos in the Middle East, Olivier Roy claims that the Sharia Law is independent and Khomeini’s version of Islamic governance is mainly driven by political principles not religious and these principles supersede religious principles.

In terms of political factions, Iranian internal power struggle is not noticed at first sight. But following the death of the Khomeini, two factions emerged: Conservatives and Moderates. They are divided into smaller factions in itself. There are currently four factions in Iranian politics: Reformists led by Mousavi, Moderates led by Khatami, Conservatives led by Khamenei, and Hardliners led by Mesbah-Yazdi. Iranian reformists and moderates have a lot in common in terms of economic policy, relations with the West and an end to isolation of Iran. However, Iranian political system prevents these factions from implementing meaningful changes in the country. It is worth noting that factions do not necessarily mean power in politics of Iran and Iranian politics can be compared with kleptocracy. This kleptocratic nature of Iranian politics laid foundation of four power rings in Iran. The first ring is considered a small group of Shia clerics, while the second ring is mainly comprised high government officials. The third power base is security apparatus. The last ring is made up influential individuals, intellectuals who are in opposition to regime but prefer rather internal and peaceful change than radical option.

The Supreme Leader: The powers of the Supreme Leader were defined by the Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Ali Khamenei is current supreme leader and appoints the head of judiciary, six members of the Guardian Council, the commanders of Revolutionary Guard and military. In addition, the Supreme Leader supervises constitution, sets foreign and domestic policy guidelines and is the commander in chief of the armed forces.

Assembly of Experts: Responsible for appointing, dismissing and monitoring the Supreme Leader. Members of the Assembly are chosen among clergy and the Guardian Council are responsible for qualifying candidates in which determines their loyalty to Islamic Revolutionary principles. After all, candidates are voted by popular vote. Despite its power to monitor and dismiss the Supreme Leader, its independence from the Supreme Leader is questioned. This is particularly

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because the half of the Guardian Council is appointed by Khamenei, the other half is nominated by Judiciary, whose head is appointed by the Supreme Leader, for approval by the Parliament. Thus it can be concluded that Assembly of Experts can appoint but lack practical power to dismiss the Supreme Leader.

**The Presidency:** The president is considered to be second to the Supreme Leader and the president is mainly focusing on economic policy, negotiating international agreements, ratification of budget, appointing ministers for approval by the Parliament. On the contrary to norms in the world, Iranian president is not commander in chief because the Supreme Leader plays that role. In addition, Iranian president is directly responsible to the Supreme Leader and president-elect has to be ratified by the Supreme Leader.

**Council of Guardians:** It has 12 members and is responsible for constitutional reviews where the Council makes sure that laws passed, candidates suggested for presidency and parliament are not un-Islamic. Six members are directly appointed by the Supreme Leader and the other half are nominated by Judiciary for approval by Majles (Parliament).

**Expediency Council:** The body was established to resolve differences between Males and the Council of Guardians. Expediency Council is mainly comprised intellectuals, clerics and scholars.

**Head of Judiciary:** Appointed by the Supreme Leader, the head of judiciary plays important role in judicial system because of power to propose minister of justice, appointment of six non-clerical members of the Guardian Council and many high-profile judicial bureaucrats related to judicial affairs.

**Supreme Court:** It is the highest court in Iran. It members are appointed by the head of judiciary appointed by the Supreme Leader. Due to being under heavy political influence, Iran’s judicial independency are still questioned.

**Special Clerical Court:** The court was established to try clerics who would go against Islamic Republic. It is seen as a tool to silence critics among clergy.

**The Armed Forces:** Iranian armed forces are divided into two branches: The Revolutionary Guard and the Republican Army. The Revolutionary Guard is under direct control of the Supreme Leader to prevent any coup attempt. What is more, The Revolutionary Guard is main source of power for hardliners and conservatives in Iranian politics.

**Chapter 3**

**Iran-Saudi Arabia Relations before the Arab Uprisings**

Realist thought of school claims that states are only relied on themselves and increase in state power creates security dilemma. This means that if one state increases its power, it guarantees its survival but arise suspicions in the eyes of other states. This definition is true for Saudi-Iranian relations since both are currently rivals over the dominance of the Middle East. However, it can be said that modern Iran and Saudi Arabia relations are divided into four phases. The first phase
is between 1925 and 1979 which can be described as amicable and working period, while Iranian revolutionary period witnesses tense relationship between two states. After the death of revolutionary leader, Khomeini, relations improved, ushering into third phase of relations. However, the Arab Uprisings have dramatically changed Saudi-Iranian relations and both states rushed to capitalize on the regional crisis, bringing two countries into the Cold War period for dominance over the region.

Iran and Saudi Arabia Relations between 1925 and 1979

Iran and Saudi Arabia were monarchic countries during this period and formed close relations. In first years, both countries struggled for state building and tried to build close relation with Western nations. Iran had skeptic stance toward the British until the WWII, and short interregnum in Iran monarchy did not change much about relationship between two states. After the coup removed the Prime Minister of Iran in 1953, the Shah of Iran forged close relations with Saudi Arabia. The primary reasons for close relations were secular Pan-Arab movement under leadership of Nasser, withdrawal of the British Empire from the region and fear of Soviet expansion in the region. Particularly, Saudi Arabia was interested in close relationship since Nasser could have dubbed Saudis as traitors if Saudis had inclined toward the Western Alliance in very open manner. In addition, Iranian and Saudi Arabia leadership looked for the Western Alliance and tried to cooperate over oil industry. In brief, both countries found themselves in alliance of circumstances to stabilize the region. However, after Nasser left the political scene, Saudis grew suspicious of Iranian Shah’s intentions because he was obsessed with military and it posed threat to Saudi interests. Despite growing skepticism or security dilemma, Saudi Arabia and Iran worked together to provide stability and security in the Middle Eastern region.

From Iranian Revolution to the Death of Khomeini (1979-1989)

Iranian Revolution completely changed Saudi Arabia’s stance toward Iran. Before Iranian Revolution, Saudi Arabia enjoyed the status of being undisputable leader of Islamic World. Due to its oil wealth, Saudis financially helped Muslim populated countries. However, its relations with USA was always shadow over its leadership. In the “first oil crisis”, Saudis tried to prove that they were able to defy USA and act upon its frustration over Palestinian cause, but to no avail. It could be said that initial reactions from Saudi side to Iranian Revolution were restrained and cautious. Saudis emphasized Islamic solidarity and avoided mentioning the Shia sect of Iranian Muslims. However, Khomeini’s rhetoric and calling Saudi Arabia as an American ally and its Islamic governance as “false Islam” pushed Saudis to harden its stance against Iranian threat. The existence of Iran-Saudi rivalry was reality during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah but it was interest based and not colored with ideology.

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43 Ibid., pp.20-21.
44 Ibid., p.22.
What is more, Saudi Arabia’s eastern region is main source of oil and mostly populated by Shia Muslims (Look at map section). In 1979, Shias rioted against regime in Qatif region of Saudi Arabia due to social and economic grievances\(^\text{45}\). Saudis put down the riot and took their demands into consideration to ameliorate the conditions of Shias. However, another issue arose when Sunni group seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca on 20 November 1979.\(^\text{46}\) Alarm bells were ringing for Saudis because Iranian Revolution and Khomeini’s anti-monarchical rhetoric emboldened dissidents of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia took steps to prevent Iranian encroachment on the region. The first step was to resolve socio-economic problems of population, particularly Shias. Secondly, Saudi Arabia encouraged the Gulf States to establish the Gulf Cooperation Council in 1981. Lastly, the GCC led by Saudis gave Iraq financial and material support when the war turned in favor of Iran. In 1988, Iraq-Iran war ended without having decisive victor, causing millions casualties. The war and Saudis determination to thwart Iranian expansion caused significant problems for Iran and Khomeini because people of Iran understood the cost of it and they paid it while Khomeini consolidated his grip on power. One year after Khomeini died and Iran’s people and members of Iranian political elite started to build Iran from the ruins. It was also considered the beginning of thaw in bilateral relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

**Iran-Saudi Arabia Relations between the Death of Khomeini and the Arab Uprisings**

After Khomeini died, Iranian political elite was made up two political factions, moderates and conservatives. Akbar Hashem Rafsanjani emerged as one of powerful politicians after Khomeini died. Additionally, Rafsanjani had moderate views when it came to exporting revolution, relations with the Western nations and economic matters\(^\text{47}\). In 1989, he was elected president and got his chance to realize his ideas. Rafsanjani started to put an end to the isolation of Iran. Firstly, he tried to normalize Iran’s relations with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Countries. His intentions were proved through abandoning ideological rhetoric and the idea of revolutionary exportation. Initially, Saudis were unwilling and distrustful to establish relations with Iran because of relations with Iraq, diminishing threat of Soviets and American influence on Saudi foreign policy. However, the Iran-Iraq war devastated Iraq as well and Iraq was on the brink of bankruptcy. Iraq could not get financial bailout package from the Gulf Countries. According to Mehran Kamrava, he allegedly threatened Kuwait to cancel Iraq’s debt and give 8 to 10 billion dollar to keep country’s economy afloat\(^\text{48}\). To meet his demands, Saddam invaded Kuwait on 2 August 1990. This changed Saudis stance toward both Iran and Iraq because Saudi Arabia was opposed to the invasion. Rafsanjani used the opportunity to strengthen relations and make Iran as an important part of security complex of the Middle East. In addition, Iran was wary of USA presence in the region but did stay neutral during the Gulf War intended to dislodge Iraqi troops in Kuwait. After the Gulf War, Iran continued to seek improvement in relations but conservative led by Khamenei were not happy about policy shifts. As noted previously, the Supreme Leader sets foreign policy directions,

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\(^{45}\) Ibid., pp.29-32.

\(^{46}\) Ibid., p.32.


limiting changes by elected president. In 1992, Abu Musa island crisis initiated by Khamenei dealt a blow to bilateral relations\(^4^9\). USA dual containment policy exacerbated the situation in the region. In 1997, a dark horse candidate, Mohammad Khatami was elected president. He was eager to improve bilateral relations and continue Rafsanjani’s policies. Despite his efforts, the relations stayed tense during Khatami’s tenure. After USA decided to invade Iraq, Iran’s conservatives gained momentum and 2005 presidential election resulted in election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. In 2003, Iraq, contrary to international law, was occupied by USA. Neither Iran nor Saudi Arabia desired invasion. Each side has different reasoning for the same conclusion. Iran was feared about US expansion in its neighborhood, while Saudi Arabia was wary of having Shia dominated government in Iraq, substantially increasing Iran’s clout in Iraq. Soon, Saudis’ fear came into reality. The last throne was about Iran’s nuclear ambitions. Initially, Saudi Arabia admitted that Iran had a right to use nuclear enrichment for peaceful purposes but Saudis changed their mind quickly when they realized that Iran’s sphere of influence was increasing in Iraq, Lebanon and Syria. Tensions peaked after the Arab Uprisings changed the political landscape of Iran because Iran saw it enormous opportunity for increasing its influence while Saudis viewed it national security issue.

Iran-Iraq Relations before the Arab Uprisings

Iran-Iraq Relations before 2003

Iranian Revolution reverberated across the Middle East and Saudis were not alone in uneasy feelings about Iran’s new regime. Khomeini’s call for removal of monarchical regimes raised eyebrows in Bagdad as well. Mehran Kamrava suggests that four reasons are mainly responsible for the encouragement of Iraq to invade Iran\(^5^0\). Firstly, Saddam wanted to divert people’s attention from domestic problems to outside enemy. Secondly, Iran’s internal power vacuum made it easy prey to be haunted by Iraq. Then Iranian Revolutionary calls against monarchical rules provoked ire of Saddam Hussein. Last but not least, Saddam Hussein saw Iranian quest for leadership as a threat against the Arab World. When he came into power, Arab people were desperately seeking leader to placate their frustration with Nasserism, being distant memory, and Anwar Sadat’s abandoning the Palestine cause.

Thus, on 20 September 1980, Iraqi army attacked Iran and started the longest inter-state war in the history of the modern Middle East. Early successes of Iraqi army turned into calamity because Iranian leader Khomeini could mobilize Iranian people to fight against Iraqi army. In some cases, it was reported that there were trench wars and street fights between Iraqi troops and Iranians. Khomeini accused the President of being incompetent and succeeded in his removal. Then Khomeini became commander in-chief of Iranian army. In 1982, the tide turned in favor of Iran


and Iran started its own offensive against Iraq. However, both sides were unsuccessful and they tried different war tactics like “tanker war”, “war of cities”. Iraq’s leader miscalculation became apparent when both sides were locked into never ending war. Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons and weapon of mass destruction to deter Iran from incursion into Iraq. In addition, it was easy for Iran to defend but attacking was in vain. Iran’s disruption and confrontation with USA and foreign involvement in war brought it to end. In 1988, both sides agreed to UN Security Council resolution calling for ceasefire. In 1990, Iran established diplomatic relations with Iraq and remained neutral during the Gulf War. However, mistrust was always disturbing factor for betterment of relations.

In the aftermath of 9/11 attack, Bush dubbed Iran and Iraq as axis of evil. When it became clear that USA was determined to put an end to Saddam Hussein’s regime, Iran became panicked. The primary reason, as mentioned above, was to be encircled by USA. After 2002, Iran intensified dialogue with Iraqi officials to persuade them to cooperate and avoid conflict with USA, but to no avail. On 20 March 2003, USA with UK defied international community and invaded Iraq. Initially, Iran was scared to be next but the rise of Islamic Dawa party supported by Iran during suppression by Saddam relieved Iranian fears. As time elapsed, it became clear that Iran’s effort to support Shiite dissents started paying off.

After the Invasion of Iraq

USA invasion of Iraq surfaced ethno-religious fault lines and the country descended into chaos. Initially, USA invaded Iraq, disbanded Iraqi army and formed interim administration to oversee Iraq. However, USA failed to create democratic, prosperous country based on rule of law and free market principle. USA’s intentions were to implement the strategy similar to rebuilding of South Korea, Japan and Germany but it would soon prove to be problematic.

To understand why USA failed in Iraq, we need to have comparative historical explanation. After the WWII, Germany was defeated but it was still nation state and USA did not deal with ethno-religious matters. It was similar case in Japan, while Korea was divided into two states. South Korean nationalism and ideological perception were considerably stable and buttressed by Japanese invasion of Korea. All these nuances are different when it comes to Iraq. Firstly, there is need to look at the definition of identity of the Middle Eastern nations.

Raymond Hinnebusch notes in “The International Politics of Middle East” book that the identity is rooted in shared history, religious belief, language strengthened by the conflicts with others and social communication (2003, pp.54-73). After the WWI, Sykes-Picot agreement drew artificial borders without taking ethno-religious diversity of the region. Historically, Iraq was home to Babylon, Assyria and Sumer and these divisions continued to be case during the Ottoman reign. The Ottomans divided the region into Mosul, Basra and Bagdad based on ethno-religious diversity. Iraq’s artificial borders were sustained during the Cold War era. However, ethno-religious diversity was not channeled into political system of Iraq and Iraqi regime was largely

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52 Ibid.

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made up by Sunnis. During Saddam regime, Saddam Hussein suppressed and oppressed dissents including Shias and Kurdish population. The restive population of Iraq was linked to state through violence and Iraqi state spent a considerable amount of resources on cracking down dissent voices. In the Middle Eastern region, states were divided over two parts during the Cold War. Henry Kissinger puts in ``The World Order`` book that states were supported financially and militarily by two then-superpowers. However, these resources were cut after the breakdown of Soviet Union. Thus states had to face socio-economic problems and understand that short-term security and stability would only be sustained by solving population’s problems. Iraq was no exception. After USA invasion, Iraq fragmented through ethnic and sectarian lines. Iran’s approach toward invasion was ambivalent. Firstly, Iranian leadership bore grudge against Saddam regime but USA’s categorization of Iran as a part of axis of evil pushed Iran toward active neutrality. Iran wanted to see ouster of Saddam Hussein but was sceptic about seeing USA in its immediate borders.

After USA toppled Saddam, Iran started to pursue active policy in Iraq. There are several reasons for that. Firstly, Iran felt uneasy about USA presence and wanted to limit USA influence in Iraq. Secondly, if Iraq had become successful and secular democracy or elected nationalist Shiite government, it would have become ally of USA and example to be emulated by Iranian society. What is more, Iraq is home to Shias holy shrines in Karbala and Najaf. Najaf has particularly been the center of Shiite theological studies, being rival to Qom of Iran. Iraqi Shiite clerics refused to admit Khomeini’s teachings and politicization of Shia branch of Islam. In addition, Iraqi clergy can be considered moderate and flexible compared to Iranian version. Fourthly, Iraqi Kurdistan is throne in both Iran and Turkey. Although Iran did not suffer from insurgency like Turkey, having more autonomous or even independent Kurdistan raises eyebrows in Tehran. Fifthly, Sunni extremist groups’ threat to Iran would become dangerous to Iran if it is supported by disenchanted Sunni population in Syria. Fifth reason became reality when ISIS swept across the region, terrifying Iran.

Iran’s strategy to infiltrate into Iraq contains several dimensions and it can be called ``Whole-of-Government`` approach. The first dimension is to employ political factions to increase its influence. Political factions are mainly divided into several categories, ranging from fervent pro-Iranian to alliance of circumstances.

The first political ally is Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq or previously known as Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution of Iraq. It was founded in Tehran in 1982 during Iran-Iraqi war and fought alongside Iranians against Iraq. It is considered pro-Iranian faction in Iraqi politics.

The second ally is Badr Organization also known as Badr Brigade. It was part of Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq but following US invasion of Iraq, it became significantly independent from ISCI. It is powerful within security and intelligence apparatus of Iraqi state which increases Iranian power within Iraq.


54 Ibid., pp.138-140.
The next ally is Islamic Dawa party founded in Bagdad in 1957. It quickly rose to power after the fall of Saddam. The former prime minister Nouri al-Maliki was member of Dawa party and he exiled to Iran for 24 years.

Another allies are proven to be uncertain and problematic. The prime example can be the Sadrist movement. Muqtada Al-Sadr formed his Sadrist movement the Mahdi Army to oppose USA invasion. Back then Iran supported through military and financial means but Muqtada Al-Sadr represents underclass Shias and prefers Iraqi nationalism over ethno-sect divisions.

Another dimension includes military strategy. The invasion of Iraq brought Shia government but Iran wanted to make sure that it would be capable of exerting its influence over newly formed government. Therefore, Iran supported many militia and insurgent groups to prevent the establishment of strong central government. It mainly collaborated with local militias, disenchanted population, anti-invasion forces. In addition, Iranian agents and security forces tried to infiltrate into Iraqi Security Forces in order to be aware of situation in Iraq.

Last dimension is about socio-economic activities of Iran’s in Iraq. When USA invaded Iraq, Iraq’s already weak economy was further strained. Basic foods, electricity became scarce. Iran stepped into economic and financial sectors of Iraq to gain positive public opinion of Iraqis. For example, Iran provides foods, medical equipment, humanitarian aids and electricity to Iraq. In addition, Iran build up many schools, hospitals and religious places to build its cultural influence. Of course, political dimensions of socio-economic projects surface when Iran uses these means to influence Iraqi politics.

Above Iranian activities with motives are described without going into deep details. However, Iran has certain strategic goals to be achieved by doing this. Despite the fall of Saddam, Iraq-Iran war’s scars are still lingering in minds of both countries. Thus Iran wants to see weak central government, while being stable. It means that Iran should navigate between using its proxies to create instability to prevent prosperous Iraq, whilst not allowing it to plague Iraq. Besides becoming powerful, Iran does not want to destabilize Iraq to extent in which USA feels necessary to be present. When it comes to military strategy of Iran, Iran wants to use proxies to exert influence in Iraq while not being caught red hand. Furthermore, militia groups can be used against USA and Israel if two decides to attack on Iran.

**Hezbollah and Lebanon**

Lebanon is another key issue in the Middle East and part of Iranian Shiite Crescent. To understand today’s Lebanon and why Iran is influential there, there is need to delve into history after the WW1. According to Sykes-Picot agreement, Lebanon was granted to French mandate. The state for Maronite Christians was established and named after Lebanon mountains. However, the French
created new problem for the Middle East for decades to come because Lebanese state was diverse country in terms of ethnicity and religion.

Initially, Lebanese demography favored Maronite Christians but increasing Muslim populations turned the tide of it. According to 1943 National Pact based on 1932 census, Lebanon was ruled based on confessions which meant president to be Maronite Christian, prime minister Sunni Muslim and speaker of parliament Shia Muslim. Due to its ethno-religious diversity, Lebanon suffered continuous political crisis like in 1958. Tensions snowballed into full-blown civil war in 1975, lasting for 15 years. Lebanese Civil War costed thousands of lives and prompted foreign intervention. Iranian Revolution was vociferous event during that time. Lebanese Shias who were living in harsh conditions took fight during civil war. In addition, Lebanese Shias were particularly impressed by Khomeini’s rhetoric and revolutionary ideas. Meanwhile, Iran was seeking to export its revolution and Lebanon offered a golden opportunity.

Inspired by Khomeini’s ideas, Lebanese Shiites formed organization to oppose foreign intervention and carve place in Lebanon politics. In 1985, Hezbollah was formally founded and Iranian Revolutionary Guard technicians and generals provided financial, technical and advisory support to Hezbollah to unconventionally resist against Israeli intervention and its domestic supporters such as South Lebanon Army. The strategy proved to be successful in Taif agreement and Hezbollah vowed to continue its fight until the end of “Zionist” regime. In 2000, Israeli forces were compelled to withdraw from Lebanon. Besides military victories, Hezbollah scored political gains in Lebanese political system. However, Rafik Hariri’s assassination59 casted shadow on Hezbollah because it was largely received rather proxy of Syrian-Iranian axis than inclusive Lebanese organization. Protests against Syrian involvement erupted following the assassination under the name of “Cedar Revolution”60.

What is more, Lebanese politics was divided into 8 and 14 March alliances caused by pro and anti-Syrian perceptions. Iran-Syrian alliance’s continuous financial and technical support further strengthened Hezbollah and made it even more powerful than Lebanon armed forces. In 2006, Hezbollah triggered Israeli air strikes and ground invasion of Lebanon. Hezbollah was capable of mobilizing people to resist against Israeli incursions, thus gaining greater popularity than before. 2006 Israeli intervention into Lebanon and Hezbollah resistance increased anti-Israeli anger and pro-Hezbollah sympathy across the region. Resolving many political crisis, Hezbollah has already become an important part of political landscape in Lebanon. Its staunch anti-Israeli stance earned it popularity. However, Iran and Syria used Hezbollah as deterrent against Israeli attack.

The Arab Uprisings caused several problems for Hezbollah. The first problem is Syrian civil war weakened Hezbollah’s ally. Secondly, Syrian refugee crisis hit Lebanon hard. The refugee issue shed light on the reality that Hezbollah is militant organization and finding solutions to socio-

political crisis require different approaches. After Syria became embroiled by civil war and Sunni insurgency, Iran increased its support for Hezbollah. Iran’s recent supply and increasing presence in Syria further strengthened the position of Hezbollah in Lebanon. Even Israel has recently declared its uneasy feeling and determination to contain Iranian influence right next to its borders\(^61\). Basically, the role of Hezbollah can be summarized as pro-Iranian politico-military force in Lebanon and ways to indirectly threaten Israel and USA that any kind of attack would come at certain cost. However, Hezbollah public image has been tarnished since its involvement in Syrian Civil War. This is because Sunni Muslims are growing suspicious of Hezbollah’s true intentions and its sectarian colored orientation. Saudi Arabia is also concerned about how Iran gains comfortable place in Lebanon. Therefore, Saudis tried to intervene into Lebanese politics by forcing prime minister Saad Hariri to resign in November 2017. Despite announcement of resignation, Lebanese president Michel Aoun did not accept resignation and Hariri suspended his resignation upon his return to Beirut\(^62\). Thus, Saudi Arabia unsuccessfully tried to curb Iranian influence, while losing popularity among its allies in Lebanon. It is worth noting that Iran has upper-hand in Lebanese politics due to powerful Hezbollah and its presence in Syria but both actors’ popularity and power have been significantly weakened by their involvement into Syrian civil war.

**Iran-Syria Relations before Syrian Civil War**

Despite being theocracy, Iran found reliable partner in Damascus after Iranian Islamic Revolution. The relations between Iran and Syria can be divided into three periods. The first period is from Iranian Revolution to the death of Hafez Al-Assad. The second one is between 2000 until the Arab Uprisings and the last phase is Syrian civil war.

**Iran-Syria Relations between 1979 and 2000**

There were fundamental reasons for this axis. First of all, Iran was isolated from International Community. Secondly, Iraq attacked on Iran to prevent revolutionary ideas from spreading and claim the title of leadership of the Arab World. The next reason is that Saddam’s intentions provoked ire of Damascus. Both Syria and Iraq were coming from secular Ba’athist political faction but Iraq was Shia majority country with Sunni leadership and wanted to replace Nasser’s claim for the Arab Leadership. On the other hand, Syrian leadership was Alawites branch of Shiism and ruling over Sunni majority country. In other words, Saddam could have used sectarian card to delegitimize Hafez Al-Assad’s leadership. This fear was consolidated by Muslim Brotherhood insurgency and massacre of Sunnis in Hama known as Hama massacre.


In 1982, Syria-Iran alliance was formalized and Syria openly supported Iran by cutting off Iraqi oil pipelines crossing Syria and dispatching troops near to Iraqi borders. In exchange for alliance, Iran provided Syria with financial means and oil. In addition, Syria was heavily backed by Soviet Union, therefore Iran could have indirect access to Soviet weapons and technical assistance through Syria. Lebanese civil war further consolidated Syria-Iran axis because both supported Shia militant group Hezbollah and Syria intervened into Lebanon. Another important substance for relationship was opposition to Israel. The failure of Pan-Arabism and defeat by Israel caused frustration among Syrian population. It can be concluded that Syria tried to ally with Iran to show that it was not surrendered but betrayed by other Arab leaders. In the aftermath of Soviet breakdown, Syria felt isolated because of loss of Soviet aid. Iran was looking inward at that time because Iran-Iraq war devastated country and it needed swift reconstruction. Therefore, Syria downplayed its rhetoric and tried to improve its relations with regional countries such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

Iran-Syria Relations between 2000-2011

Following the death of Hafez Al-Assad, Bashar Al-Assad assumed power in Syria. Initially, he was seen reformer and modernizer for Syria. However, he continued to keep close relations with Iran, while trying not to be isolated. USA invasion of Iraq further strengthened bilateral and security ties between Damascus and Tehran. Both countries coordinated to intervene into Iraqi affairs to bother USA. In addition, Syria continued to aid Hezbollah and Lebanese Shites along with Iran. However, Syrian intervention into Lebanon and assassinations of prominent people including Rafik Hariri triggered "Cedar Revolution" and compelled Syria to withdraw from Lebanon. In the following years, Iran-Syria alliance continued to cooperate, while Iran tried not to allow Syria to gain greater influence in the region. The Arab Uprisings started new era in the bilateral relations and made Syria increasingly dependent upon Iranian assistance.

Chapter 4
The Arab Uprisings

The Middle East is infamous for never-ending crisis. One of them happened in 2011. Mohammad Bouazizi set himself on fire after being humiliated and harassed by local police officer. The self-imolation triggered waves of protests in Tunisia and spilled over other arab countries. However, it is worth noting that the self-imolation was threshold for Arabs.

The problem was deep for the region. Firstly, Arab people were ruled by the Ottoman Empire for centuries. After the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, Western nations assumed control over Arabs through colonization. The colonization and the regimes that were put into power could not even try to solve population’s problems. Secondly, there was widespread perception in Islamic world that it would be better to follow Western path to reach to development. Thus, the perception of secular Pan-Arabism was in full swing across the region in the aftermath of decolonization. The

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foundation of Israel added fuel to this fire. Following years proved Arabs to be wrong about Pan-
Arabism because they were neither united nor able to eliminate Israel. Thirdly, As Henry Kissinger
notes, the Arab despots were enjoying bipolarity since both Superpowers were willing to assist
their ally for preventing them from collapse. After the breakdown of Soviet Union, Arab dictators
were alone and had to accommodate changing world realities into countries. Fourthly, population of
the region grew substantially which meant that dictator’s cautious adaptations to new realities
could not match with high anticipations of the youth. Last but not least, rapid development of
Internet technologies, helping information flow faster than ever before. Through Internet, people
of the region were able to see prosperity, human rights, freedom expression in the world. All these
details contributed to the Arab Uprisings.

During the uprisings, Ben Ali of Tunisia, Qaddafi of Libya, Moubarek of Egypt were all toppled
in a matter of weeks. The uprisings reached out to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Morocco, Lebanon and
Jordan, Yemen, therefore countries commenced to take preventative measures. Saudi Arabia was
leading status-quo power, while Iran welcomed the changes until it reached to Syria. The West
was surprised but did not find it strange. There was hope that the Middle Eastern states would
eventually become democracy and called it “the Arab Spring”. Despite high expectations, hopes
were soon dashed. There were many reasons why the Arab Spring turned into the Arab Winter.
Firstly, the lack of vibrant civil society due to suppression by dictators. Secondly, state apparatus
are to be strong enough to bear sudden changes but dictators are usually equate state regimes to
their despotic regimes. Consequently, the regime needs to be rebuilt and that is case with the Arab
Uprisings. Lastly, there was no strong opposition groups who could assume power during sudden
changes. Some argue that people who topple dictators are opponents but it is simply reductionist
approach because angry protesters can be academicians or illiterate people.

Saudi-Iranian Cold War

The crisis and coups are characteristics of the Middle East but ordinary people’s ability to remove
dictators is rare case in the history of the region. As written above, Saudi Arabia and Iran modern
relations can be categorized into four phases. The Arab Uprisings is the event ushering these
relations into fourth phase.

As the Arab Uprisings swept across the region, Iran saw its popularity soar owing to its support
for movements. In Egypt, Muslim Brotherhood assumed power in democratic elections, while
Bahrainian Shias demanded end to Sunni autocracy. Yemen has also experienced civil uprisings
through Houthi. Another proxy battle ground for Saudi Arabia and Iran emerged in Syria, when
people revolted against Bashar Al-Assad’s despotic rule. Consequently, both sides took sides
based on their interests and helped their own allies in this battle.

118.

[Accessed 26 April 2019].
The Gulf Cooperation Council intervened into Bahrain and put down popular uprising. In addition, Saudi Arabia bankrolled Bahrain, Jordan and Yemen to prevent their collapse. In Syria, Saudi Arabia along with Qatar and Turkey started to give aid to Sunni rebellions to hasten Assad’s end. Also, Saudi Arabia lobbied for NATO intervention to topple Qaddafi, while backed Egypt junta financially. In another case, Saudi Arabia intervened into Yemen in 2015 and caused significant the most severe human rights crisis. Of course, Iran’s response has been as aggressive as Saudis to increase its regional standing.

Iran’s Role in Syrian Civil War: Pyrrhic Victory

The Arab Uprisings caused significant changes in the region despite not being democratic. In March 2011, Syrian boy Naief Abazid wrote “It your turn, Doctor” on the school wall. After that writing, he along with several boys were detained and tortured. These events caused uproar in Syrian city Daraa and Syrian uprising was set in motion. Demonstrations were mainly peaceful but Syrian government responded with violence. Syrian people took arms after Syrian security forces stormed demonstrations in Homs. Iran became alarmed about developments in Syria and decided to help its ally. Initially, Iran sent advisers and technical assistance to help Syria control crowd. However, as foreign powers started to aid rebels to topple Assad, Iran propped up its support for Syrian regime.

There are basically several reasons why Iran supports Syrian regime against rebels at the cost of its image and resources. The first motive of Tehran is to avoid loss of key ally. Secondly, Iran uses Syria to exert influence in the Levant. Thirdly, Syria is Sunni majority country which means that any democratic Syrian regime would include Sunni government. Sunni government in Damascus could deal serious blow to Iran’s Shiite Crescent. Lastly, despite having normal relations, Iran is wary of autonomous or even independent Kurdish state in the Northern Syria because it will trigger secessionist movements inside Iran as well. It is worth noting that these reasons are mainly accepted by Iranian Revolutionary Guard Council because the former president Ahmadinejad saw Syrian uprising similar to Tunisian uprising. However, Iranian Revolutionary Guard and the Supreme Leader decided to directly intervene into Syria when Iranian aid proved to be insufficient. Besides sending advisories, Tehran supported foundation of National Defense Forces. Hezbollah, Shia militias from Pakistan and Afghanistan were also called to fight against rebels.

What is more, Iran tried to collaborate with Russia to gain allies in this conflict. The effort to collaborate with Russia was mainly due to drive Russia into alliance with Iran and decrease Iran’s share of burden. In particular, when ISIS gained sways of territories across Syria and Iraq, Iran grew more anxious. In September 2015, Russia rapidly escalated its involvement in Syria and used

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its air forces to defeat opposition. After Russian involvement, both countries started to coordinate their efforts more closely. However, their opinions, reasons and goals are significantly different.

Tehran’s goal can be divided into three categories:

1. The defeat of insurgencies and making sure that they will not reemerge. Extremists groups are included but not limited to Western backed Free Syrian Army, ISIS, Jabhat Al-Nusra.
2. The restoration of status quo is another goal of Iran to be attained. It is particularly interested in avoiding federalization of Syria similar to Lebanon.
3. Preserving state institutions is another dimension of goals of Iran because Tehran knows that any change in state apparatus would empower other groups, leading to the loss of ally.

Russia’s goals are sometimes coinciding, while most of time Russia tries to keep its collaboration conditional not strategic. This is because Russia has different reasons and objectives in regard to Syria. The first motive for Moscow to intervene is to preserve the only ally in the Middle East. Secondly, Moscow tries to keep USA bogged down in the Middle East, thus allowing it to exert more pressure on post-Soviet periphery. Fourthly, Russian leader Putin tries to show that Russia is still superpower in spite of its ailing economy. Lastly, Russia wants to have bargaining chip in negotiations with the West, particularly, on the issue of Ukraine.

When it comes to Russian-Syrian-Iranian triparty, the alliance can be described through mutual mistrust and uneasy feelings. Firstly, Iran and Assad want Syrian regime intact, whilst Russia can accept replacement of Assad. Next, Russia is ready about federalization of Syria, while two others are unwilling. Lastly, Russia knows very well that it should accommodate Turkey in this game because it is the only way to the Mediterranean Sea and it would be meaningless to have Syrian naval base without Turkish permission to access it. Additionally, Russia intends to balance Tehran with Ankara after it leaves Syria. Therefore, Russia agreed to Turkey’s participation in Astana and Sochi talks for stabilizing and creating de-escalation zones within Syria. Contrary to Turkish desires, Iran does not want to see Sunni government or removal of Bashar Al-Assad dynasty. Consequently, Russian involvement does keep Assad in power for now but his and his regimes future are not vital for Russia, putting Iran-Syria axis between rock and hard place.

Another issue for Iran in Syria is that Iran’s increasing foothold in Syria continues to anger the Gulf Cooperation Council and Israel. Even Sunni states and Israel have recently started to publicly talk about their relations which have been taboo for decades. Both Israel and the GCC have successfully lobbied for USA exit from Iran deal and putting sanctions back on Iran, causing severe financial and economic problems for Iran. Furthermore, Iran’s presence in Syria have

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70 Ibid., pp.20-24.
71 Ibid.
triggered direct Israeli military actions. It is worth noting that Russia is also unwilling to choose Iran at the cost of relations with the GCC and Israel.

As it is shown in the name of the paragraph, Iran’s involvement into Syria is complex and its victory is pyrrhic. There are basically four reasons to conclude this opinions:

1) Iran’s economic, financial and human resources have been drained over its involvement into Syria. According to USA State Department reports, Iran spend billions of dollars on its involvement into Syria.\(^73\)

2) Iran’s behavior antagonized the GCC, Turkey, Israel and USA, leaving it isolated from International Community. For instance, after intense lobbying by Saudis and Israelis, USA exited nuclear deal and sent Iranian economy to tailspin through sanctions.\(^74\)

3) It is unclear what will happen about the future of Syria because Bashar Al-Assad is definitely war criminal and lost his legitimacy in the eyes of Syrians. Therefore, Iran will need to spend enormous amount of resources to keep Assad in power.\(^75\)

4) Even if Iran becomes successful at keeping Assad in power, it will take generations to rebuild infrastructure, economy and financial system of system. What is more, it is easier to rebuild the country after the war than civil war. This is because civil war tears down social cohesion of society and rebuilding nations comprised tribes and sects will take a while.\(^76\)

So, Iran can have upper-hand in Syria but it has been costly war and will continue to be.

Iran’s Iraq Policy: Tehran in Bagdad

Historically, Iran had an important influence in Mesopotamia and Iranian goals, strategies and objectives are explained above. After the Arab Uprising, Iran faced several difficulties and opportunities in Iraq

Firstly, the Obama administration decided to withdraw from Iraq in 2011. The move was initially welcomed by Iran but the power vacuum would eventually prove difficult to fill. Iraqi prime minister Nouri Al-Maliki consolidated his grip on power and intensified his sectarian policies. Maliki’s policies made Sunnis feel marginalized and paved way for radicalization of Sunni population.

Secondly, Syrian was hit by popular riots and Bashar Al-Assad released many Sunni extremists from Syrian prisons in order to taint Free Syrian Army. Assad was successful because Sunni extremists increased cautiousness of the Western nations and they subsequently restrained their support for FSA.

Thirdly, USA toppled Saddam Hussein and started de-Ba’athification of Iraq. Consequently, a half army was disbanded and many party officials were demoted. In addition, USA detained many


\(^74\) Ibid.

\(^75\) Ibid.

\(^76\) Ibid.
soldiers and kept them at Camp Bucca detention facility. Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi established his networks with former Ba`athist soldiers.

All these contributed to the emergence Islamic State in Iraq and Levant. The terrorist group swept across the region and held the sway of territories in both Syria and Iraq, causing chaos and civil war in Iraq. Iran saw it great threat because ISIS was also against Iranian ideologies and sphere of influence.

From my analysis of post-invasion Iraq, I conclude that Iran has always opted for low-cost influence in Iraq. For instance, Iran showed its opposition to Iraqi war, but Iranian leadership saw removal of Saddam costly and tacitly agreed USA to assume the role. The same thing happened in Afghanistan as well. In addition, Iran were not interested in fighting insurgency, building institutions because it was not in its interests and costly at the same time. After USA withdrew from Iraq, Iran increased its influence in Iraq. When ISIS emerged from the chaos in Iraq, Iran and its militias proved to be unable to thwart ISIS expansion. Therefore, Iran tacitly approved USA led coalition involvement in fight against ISIS and even found itself in the alliance of circumstances during the operation ``We are coming``.

In 2014, Ayatollah Sistani declared fatwa against ISIS77. Iran took opportunity and founded umbrella group Popular Mobilization Forces or Hashed al-Shaabi. In addition, Iran sent its Quds Forces led by General Qasem Soleimani to help Iraq fight against ISIS. USA aerial support allowed Iran to eliminate ISIS at lower cost. Also, 2015 nuclear deal agreement allowed Iran to increase its economic investments in liberated areas. However, Iran is cautious not to create institutionalized security architecture. Kenneth M. Pollack argues that Iran is concentrated on personal relations because it is easy to threaten and bribe ordinary people based on changing interests.78 It can be observed that Iran has been successful at eliminating ISIS but many human rights organization reported PMF’s intense sectarian war crimes79. PMF’s unmanageable sectarian war crimes lowered Iranian approval rating80.

It is worth noting that Iranian failure to push back ISIS without USA tarnished Iranian public image. Kenneth M. Pollack notes that Iraqi people say that they are not in favor of Iran but Iran is close and it can wait to punish Iraqis when USA leaves81. That fear is utilized by Iranian leadership but 2018 elections shows that Iraqi nationalism is on the rise. Many Iraqi people casted their votes

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and Muqtada al-Sadr\textsuperscript{82}, strong opponent of Iranian influence in Iraq, won the majority. It means that Iraqis do not love Iran based on their historical experiences but they are too weak to resist to Iranian influence. Iranian president visited Iraq on 11 March 2019 to increase bilateral trade and strengthen cooperation\textsuperscript{83}. However, the Trump administration is showing decisiveness to curb Iranian influence in the region. Iraq can be seen in dilemma because it needs to accommodate Iran and USA simultaneously but USA has more means to replace and stabilize Iraq. It is difficult to predict future of the Iraq-Iran relations but if the history is best guide, neither Iran nor USA will abandon Iraq. The question is whether Iraqi people can take Iraq’s destiny into their own hands or surrender to historical determinism.

Iran’s Role in Yemeni Crisis

The former president of Yemen Ali Abdullah Saleh was frequently describing ruling Yemen like ``dancing on the heads of snakes''\textsuperscript{84}. The unfolding events confirm his opinion. Yemen was plagued by civil war, foreign invasion, tribal feuds throughout its history. In 16\textsuperscript{th} century, the Ottomans invaded Yemen only to be expelled in the beginning of 17\textsuperscript{th} century. The British were quick to grasp the importance of port Aden and took control of Aden to secure trade lines to its crown jewel, India in 1839. In 1849, the Ottomans came back to only North Yemen, but its rule collapsed in the aftermath of the WWI. The independence of North Yemen did not alleviate disorder and it became scene for proxy conflicts between Nasserist Egypt and Saudi Arabia. In 1967, The British withdrew from South Yemen and South Yemeni republic was formed by communists. In 1978, Ali Abdullah Saleh became president in North Yemen. However, clashes continue to beset both Yemeni republics. Despite the unification in 1990, internal tensions remained high. Yemeni president authoritarian and corrupt government could not solve the problems of population in the upcoming years.

In the early 2000s, Yemen became hotbed of terrorism. In particular, disillusioned and poor people joined Al-Qaeda and caused significant problem for the central government. What is more, Houthi insurgency snowballed into full fight between the government forces and rebels. USA and Saudi Arabia backed Yemeni central government. However, the Arab Uprisings hit Yemen hard and forced president Saleh give his position to his vice-president Mansour Hadi. Mansour Hadi tried to form transition government but he failed due to feuds among tribes. In addition, Houthis demanded greater role in power sharing. In 2015, Saleh reached agreement with Houthis, but he broke ties with the insurgent in 2017. It proved to be wrong decision and costed him his life on 4 December 2017. After the death of Saleh, political solution of Yemeni crisis came to abrupt halt.

\textsuperscript{82} Raya Jalabi, Michael Georgy, 2018. Cleric Moqtada al-Sadr’s bloc wins Iraq election. [Online]
Available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-election-results/cleric-moqtada-al-sadrs-bloc-wins-iraq-election-idUSKCN1IJ2X0
[Accessed 29 April 2019].

\textsuperscript{83} MARASHI, I. A., 2019. [Online]
Available at: https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/rouhani-goes-to-iraq-despite-internal-rivalries-and-external-pressure-25080
[Accessed 29 April 2019].

\textsuperscript{84} JACINTO, L., 2012. Can the new leader 'dance on the heads of snakes'? [Online]
[Accessed 29 April 2019].
Consequently, Yemen became open ground for competition between regional and international powers.

When it comes to Iranian involvement into Yemen, it is not clear what kind of relationship Iran has with Houthi rebels. International Crisis Group’s report suggests that Yemen is a hot topic in Tehran because Rouhani led coalition tries to distance Iran, while the Supreme Leader supports interference with Yemeni affairs. As it is noted above, Iran foreign policy is mainly formulated by the Supreme Leader, therefore, Iran continues to be involved with Yemeni civil war. Yemen is not strategically important for Iran because Houthi is not “Twelver Shia” similar to Lebanese and Iraqi Shias and Hezbollah supporters. Houthi rebels are called Zaydi and they are known as uncontrollable group owing to rebellious nature of group. Zaydi group shares similarity with Shia branch of Islam but it has been under influence of Sunni traditions, that is why, Zaydis share a lot of similarities with Sunnis. Olivier Roy describes Zaydi Shias as being Sunni-ised. In March 2015, Mohammad Bin Salman rapidly escalated Saudi involvement into Yemeni affairs upon request of interim president Mansour Hadi. Saudi Arabia’s involvement prompted Iranian reaction.

According to USA State Department sources, Iran provided weapons, missiles, rockets and training for Houthi rebels. Jeremy M. Sharp notes for his report for US Congress that Hezbollah is also involved on the side of Houthis (2019, p.8). In the same report, Sharp claims that Hezbollah uses Yemen as launchpad into Saudi Arabia (2019, pp.8-9).

According to International Crisis Group’s report, Iran sees Yemen as Saudi Arabia’s Achilles heel, therefore, it is involved. In addition, Iran intends to pre-occupy Saudi Arabia and USA in Yemen in order to flex its muscle in Iraq and Levant. In the same report, citing Iranian diplomats, it is claimed that Iran does not want too much involvement because Houthis are unpredictable. Iran fears that Houthi rebels reckless behavior would risk its interests and its ties can pave way for hot conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

In brief, it can be observed that Iranian involvement into Yemen civil war is neither strategic nor deep. However, it wants to make Yemen “Vietnam of Saudis”. UN reports clearly show that Saudi Arabia is deliberately targeting civilian population and more than 10 million Yemeni civilian are at the risk of starvation. Despite callings from International Community, Saudi Arabia continues to keeps Yemen under harsh blockade. Although USA stopped refueling Saudi warplanes in November 2018, Trump vetoed Congress decision to end USA involvement in

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Yemeni crisis in 17 April 2019\textsuperscript{91}. As in other cases, Saudi-Iranian competition will continue besetting Yemen.

\textbf{Conclusion}

In this writing, it is aimed at describing Iran’s foreign policy based on its sectarian elements. The main research question has been proven right because the unfolding events show that Iran capitalizes on the chaos and disorder in the Middle East and sectarian policy is just a tip of iceberg. It is worth explaining why the research question is proved to be sufficient by recaping.

In first parts, the explanation of theory shows that all states are self-egoists and fight for their survival. However, if one state improves its standing, it naturally creates discomfort for other state. This is called security dilemma and security dilemma partly explains why neighboring countries aggressively reacts to Iran’s activities across the region. Also, constructive theory helped to understand that Iran’s behavior has been shaped by decades of foreign intervention and domestic chaos. Therefore it needs to increase its power to be safe in long-run.

In the following part, tumultuous history of Iran is explained. It can be clearly observed from history that Iran experienced humiliating defeat and lost most of its territories to Russia and Great Britain. Worst of all, these two countries vied for sphere of influence, causing significant underdevelopment in Iran. In the beginning of twentieth century, Iranian people tried to change the course of history through 1905-11 constitutional revolution, but these efforts were thwarted by the British and Russians. In the aftermath of the WWI, Iran underwent huge changes by Reza Shah. However, Iran became playground for foreign competitor again when the WWI started. In the aftermath of the WWII, Iran briefly tasted chaos, disorder and democracy but Iranian popular prime minister was toppled by CIA backed coup. Following the coup, Mohammad Reza Shah embarked on his ambitious modernization plans and allied with Western nations until deposed by Iranian revolution. During the Shah’s reign, Iranian society forcefully modernized, but Iranian Shah did not cure corruption, hold officials responsible and promote transparency. All these caused backlash and opened new era in Iran and the Middle East.

Experiencing years of injustice, corruption, humiliation, Iranian people fully supported charismatic Imam Khomeini in his standing against imperialist centers. The Islamic governance model crafted by Khomeini made sure that Iran would not be able to change its direction. Iranian clergy divided political system into elected and unelected bodies. Unelected bodies hold most of authority, whilst people channelize their angers into elected bodies for all failures.

In the next parts, Iranian geography is explained. Iran’s geography shows that it is contained and protected, but it cannot survive without expansion and exploitation of neighbors. Afghanistan and Pakistan are not options because of cost, whereas Iraq, Syria and Lebanon seem too tempting to pass up. However, Iran’s attempts to carve comfortable place have not been without reactions.

As to reactions of neighboring countries, it is seen that Iran and Saudi Arabia are rivals and this rivalry is not new. Despite having good relationship, Iran and Saudi Arabia had working but tense relations due to security dilemma issue. When revolution deposed the Shah, Iran’s determination to dominate region surfaced and surmounted to challenging status quo in the region. Iran-Iraq war was the first reaction to Iranian desires but mountains showed that Saddam was barking the wrong tree.

In the following part, the post Cold War era and Iran’s behavior are explained. In this part, it can be seen that Iran was mostly focused on rebuilding efforts and it did not see opportunity to export revolution other that Lebanon. However, Iraq’s outright invasion by USA opened new avenues for Iran. In Iran’s policy toward Iraq, it is outlined how Iran has become one of the most powerful voice in Iraq.

Iran’s Iraq strategy is also interesting and can be described as strategic depth. This is because Iran tries to keep Iraqi central government weak, while preventing it from Lebanization. It is difficult balance to sustain. Iran knows that strong Iraq will eventually pose existential threat to Iran. In addition, there are many reasons such as limiting USA, preventing Kurdish independence for Iranian presence in Iraq. Lastly, it is interesting to see that Iran accepts foreign involvement when it sees stabilization efforts too costly.

Another dimension of this writing is Syrian-Iranian relations. From the beginning of Iran’s revolution, Syria has been only Arab nation allying with Iran. However, Syrian civil war dealt devastating blow to Iranian Shiite Crescent. Firstly, Syria is weak now and will not be as beneficial as before. Secondly, Iran has been compelled to agree to Russian and Turkish intervention. Both Russia and Turkey have significantly different objectives in regard to Syria and it will be difficult for Iran to accommodate these two powers in Syria, while protecting its own interests. Lastly, post-conflict Syria will be burden on the shoulders of Iran because it will need assistance to rebuild itself and reconcile its war torn societiel bonds.

Lebanese case is probably the most success story for Iran. When Iranian revolution was in full swing, Lebanon was plagued by civil war. Iran helped Lebanese Shias to organize themselves by founding Hezbollah. Over three decades, Hezbollah demonstrated uncomprimising attitude toward Israel and fought for independence of Lebanon. However, Hezbollah’s relations with Iran and support for ruthless dictator Bashar al-Assad casted shadow over Hezbollah’s warrior reputation.

Yemeni crisis is the last part of this writing. From the analysis of Yemen, it is clear that Iran is not keen on Yemen and it only tries to keep Saudis preoccupied with their own matters. However, Houthi insurgency and Saudi led coalition’s aerial campaign costed thousands of innocent lives.
When all these parts are taken into consideration, Iran’s behavior becomes pragmatic. The research question clearly states that Iran’s policies are symptoms not causes and the overall writing shows that real causes are geography, anarchical structure of International System and history.

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