Research paper

The "Counter-Terrorism" Strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the West Asia

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Abstract

Peace and security are blessings that God has given to mankind for the sake of the growth and development of human societies. What is certain is that peace is a human ideal, and all human beings need peace and comfort in their daily lives to work, strive, and to realize their material and spiritual abilities. Terrorism, as an old phenomenon with a new form and nature, is one of the most important and challenging problems in our world. Meanwhile, it is so brutal, outrageous, scary, and reprehensible that it can be called "cancer of our modern world". Terrorism by itself does not determine the system of action and reaction. Dealing with terrorism must follow a logical order— an order that is defined against all anti-peace phenomena and lies in natural, divine, and human values. The international system lacks a clear and comprehensive strategy against security threats and peace violations. Therefore, the counter-terrorism mechanisms and measures stipulated in the existing international documents have sometimes taken a direction that is not necessarily compatible with other measures that have been established regarding other categories of world peace. Rather, their contradictions and incompatibilities are clearly visible in practice. With innovative action, especially in the last decade, the Islamic Republic of Iran has adopted a strategy to eradicate terrorism. In this regard, while dealing with the roots and intellectual and religious foundations of terrorism, Iran has simultaneously, tactically, and operationally tried to fight with the manifestations of terrorism and prevent the expansion of terrorist attacks. In this field, it has had extensive cooperation with international and regional organizations and their executive bodies, such as Interpol.

Keywords: Strategy, Islamic Republic, Terror, Terrorism and West Asia.

Introduction

Over the past 40 years, the Islamic Republic has tried to strengthen its security and power in the region by taking advantage of these two factors. Expanding its role in the region provides Iran with this opportunity to maximize power in order to both find the possibility of challenging the US threat and increase its bargaining power over issues related to its regional rivals. In order to expand its influence, Tehran uses various policies, such as supporting Syria along with non-governmental or semi-governmental actors such as Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Houthis, and Hashd al-Shaabi. On the other hand, balancing against competitors and enemies is another variable that is one of the key components of Iran's foreign policy. This balancing, in essence, is both domestic and international. In fact, since the actors of the international system pursue self-help and your friend today may be your enemy tomorrow, Tehran prefers to employ its domestic capacities to balance against its competitors.

Security is a complex and controversial concept that is deeply influenced by values. The security issue arises when a person, group or government threatens the independence or survival of another. Meanwhile, ISIS or, "the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria," is one of the groups that formed in the Levant and became a serious challenge to West Asia security. Today, the Islamic Republic of Iran, as the key power center of the region, has become the most influential actor throughout the West Asia. In this regard, Iran cannot be excluded from the ongoing regional dynamics. In light of the recent movements that Takfiri groups have formed in the Levant with the aim of establishing an Islamic caliphate, it can be said that one of the gravest security-political crises in the West Asia has evolved. Also, Iran's foreign policy goals and strategies are more defensive and pragmatic, and above all, Tehran tries to eliminate the security challenges caused by new political and security developments in the region. In the past years, crises, wars, and tensions in the region have been costly and a source of instability for Iran. According to recent developments, employing alliance-making in Iran's regional foreign policy is not just an attempt to increase power in region, but a defensive reaction to deal with the existing security threats.

Concepts

A) The Concept of Strategy

The word "راهبرد" has been used for a long time to express the

knowledge and art used by a commander-in-chief. The English equivalent of the word "راهبرد", which is also widely used in Persian, is "strategy". This word is derived from the Greek word "stratigos" and was first used in the 18th century for describing a "military general's art" or "the art of organizing military units". However, a strategy is a long-term operational plan designed to achieve a specific goal. The United States Department of Defense officially defines strategy as follows:

"Strategy is a theory or set of thoughtful ideas about employing the national power capabilities to be used in a coordinated and consistent manner for achieving national and multi-national goals."

In 1963, the Association for Advanced Military Studies affiliated with the Pentagon proposed a similar definition of strategy:

"Strategy is the science and art of development and application of the nation's political, economic, cultural, and military might during peace and war in order to provide the maximum support for national policies, increase the probability of victory, and reduce the probability of failure."

Carl von Clausewitz, known as the father of modern strategic studies, defines military strategy as the use of existing capabilities in order to achieve the ultimate victory in war. The view of these authors is suitable for explaining the role of strategy in conventional conflicts, but today various actors have entered the battlefield. Actors such as terrorist groups, mafia, rebels, militias, and the like have made the scene of conflicts much different and more complicated than before. Because of these recent complexities, US military doctrine has introduced a different view on the definition of strategy. In this doctrine, the strategy is "the art and science of development, application, and coordination between different aspects of national power (diplomatic, economic, cultural, military, and information) for achieving the goals that lead to the maintenance of national security". It is different and more comprehensive than the previous definitions because, in addition to the military element, it also pays attention to other dimensions of power necessary to achieve the goals. Therefore, in this article, strategy is a coherent, comprehensive, sustainable, and scientific planning designed by Iran to counter with terrorism.

B) Terrorism

There are a variety of definitions for terrorism. Terrorism is a term on which there is no agreement among governments or academics,

but it is used almost negatively in various ways to describe the brutal actions of self-made, self-proclaimed supranational groups with political motivations against innocent lives.

Terrorism, in the sense of the terrorist struggle of revolutionary intellectuals apart from the masses, is a petite-bourgeoisie movement that appeared at a stage of the revolutionary struggles in Europe. In this line, terrorism is in favor of the active heroic theory of the inactive masses who are waiting for these honorable public figures. (Aghabakhshi, 1379, p. 583)

Terrorism refers to systematic and organized acts of terror. It is not only carried out by using tools that can harm people's lives and security, but also through the violent destruction of public services or infrastructure belonging to a group of people. (Ian McLean, 1381, p. 808)

Terrorism is derived from the Latin root "Terror" and refers to the behavior and actions of an individual or a group who want to achieve their political goals through creating fear and terror among the public.

Terrorism is a collection of activities by state and non-state actors who employ violent methods and means in their efforts to achieve their political goals.

Terrorism can also be the method of governments that repress and intimidate opponents by arresting, torturing, killing, and other kinds of illegitimate harassment through the secret political police. It can be the method of both the right and left extremes of the political spectrum who engage in assassinations, kidnappings, and vandalism to overthrow or scare the government. Terrorism is also defined as a way of governing through terror.

Additionally, the encyclopedia of political science offers the following different definitions of terrorism:

- A system of governance through terror and the belief in the necessity of murdering and creating fear among the public. An intellectual system that allows any kind of action to achieve a political goal.
- The systematic use of terror as a means of coercion or legitimizing actions of terrorizing nature in the minds of the public.

In general, it can be said that terrorism means the regular and organized use of terror. Although terror is an illegitimate and unacceptable way to achieve political goals, it is used anyway. If an individual, group, or government uses terrorist tactics in a systematic, orderly, and organized manner to achieve their political

goals, this type of behavior and phenomenon will be called terrorism.

Terrorism is one of the ambiguous terms in the IR literature, and due to the complexity in its definition, one can face a "crisis of meaning" in its concept and practical instances. "Terrorism" is one of the words that people, along with governmental and non-governmental organizations, use repeatedly, but each of them has their own understanding of it, which is different from others in many aspects. In the political encyclopedia, the violent and illegal actions of governments to suppress their opponents and scare the public are called terror, as well as the brutal behavior of militant groups that aim to achieve their goals through violence. Therefore, terrorism is usually interpreted as an act that causes fear. Although the ontological and even epistemological conflicts between the states, along with the existence of different perceptions of national interests and security, makes it hard to define terrorism, scientists, lawyers, writers, governmental and non-governmental organizations, conventions, and individuals have introduced their unique definitions of it in different ways. One of them is referred to as "terrorism" is a violent and frightening act (due to its sudden and surprising nature), which at the same time is conscious and organized, with generally political and (ideological) goals and objectives. Furthermore, in some cases, even economic and socio-cultural motives can instigate people to embrace terrorist sentiments. Terrorism is carried out both individually and socially by any possible means against an innocent population. It is worth noting that often the victims of terror are not the main target. terrorism Also has purposeful principles and rules with the organization of a specific and theoretical framework. Therefore, it can be differentiated from terror, which mostly includes sporadic, violent, surprising, and purposeful acts.

Therefore, it can be said that terrorism is caused by a type of conduct that, unlike terror, which is an individual and striking act and is usually carried out in a short period of time, is an organized and consistent sort of action implemented by a certain group that covers more diverse goals. Therefore, terrorism can be placed in the position of a kind of political or even military strategy. In this sense, terrorism is a movement that tries to advance its views and narratives through fear-mongering and violence. Another factor that differentiates terrorism from terror is the type and purpose of the chosen targets. In this line, terror is a kind of surprise and sudden action to eliminate the opponent and enemy, whereas terrorism is

defined by its political and social essence beyond a simple surprise assassination plot. In fact, in terrorism, killing or intimidation is not necessarily aimed at the victim population. Instead, terrorism is based on this principle; to attack or offend a small group of people in order to achieve its goals and make the larger population face fear and pursue passivity. Another distinguishing factor of terrorism is its mobility. This factor should be considered in any counter-terrorist operation. This means that unlike governments that have specific territorial boundaries and only have the power to move within those boundaries, the lack of sense of belonging to a territory has provided the terrorists with the ability to move swiftly from one country to another to pursue their goals. Therefore, it is very difficult to attack such an actor who lacks a sense of territorial belonging. (Nemati Marujani, 2015, p. 32)

C) Counter-Terrorism

Countering terrorism is defined as defensive measures that are carried out to reduce individual and social vulnerabilities from terrorist acts by employing local and civil military forces. (Dod, ۲۰۰۹:۳۹) However, while responding to the effects (terrorist actions), counter-terrorism also pays attention to the causes and roots of terrorism. From this perspective, counter-terrorism refers to the techniques, tactics, and strategies that governments, armed forces, and police use in order to prevent, contain, and respond to terrorist threats. (Nacos, 2008, pp. 169-218)

But in elaborating on counter-terrorism, the concept of anti-terrorism should also be addressed, and the boundaries between these two should be properly delineated. Therefore, we will first discuss the concept of anti-terrorism and then provide the conclusion and definition.

Anti-terrorism includes a full range of offensive measures to prevent, deter, and respond to terrorism. It is considered the last step in the fight against terrorism. Anti-terrorism is a reactive action and gives a legal aspect to the extensive measures of preparation, planning, and response that are included in action plans against terrorism (Sarmestani, 2019, p. 4); In other words, anti-terrorism deals with the effects and not the main causes of terrorist acts.

"Anti-terrorism" sometimes comes in contrast to "counter-terrorism". As stated by James Derderian, there is a fundamental difference between "anti-terrorist" and "counter-terrorist" policies. These differences are mainly focused on their ultimate goals. Although both policies seek to curb terrorism, the first seeks to

achieve the goal using power resources, while the second seeks to achieve the same by providing an alternative to it. Based on this, "counter-terrorism" necessarily leads to the production of alternative phenomena for "terrorism". (Derderian, 132, pp. 110-93).

Considering all these issues, the basis of the author's definition and analysis of fighting against terrorism is a combination of the two concepts of "anti-terrorism" and "counter-terrorism". Therefore, it includes both concepts and is on the side of the main research question and hypothesis.

History of terrorism in the West Asia

One of the currents that has played a significant role in the regional politics of the West Asia in recent years, especially after the developments and the extent of its influence in the region is expanding every day, is Takfiri terrorist Salafism. At the very beginning, we must mention that Takfiri Salafists are groups of Muslims who have been called "Takfiri" by their opponents because of their ideological differences. The main origins of these groups can be traced back to Saudi Arabia and Egypt. But they had also gradually spread to other Muslim countries as well. After the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate and its collapse in 1924, along with the occurrence of some cultural, political, and economic developments in Egypt, the idea of forming an Islamic government as an alternative to the institution of the Caliphate was gradually raised among Muslim scholars who had found their identity in danger. These groups, which were mainly branches of the Muslim Brotherhood and were inspired by its doctrines, influenced the social and political atmosphere of Egypt in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

In the second half of the 20th century, the Salafist and Takfiri sentiments expanded their sphere of influence beyond Saudi Arabia and Egypt and penetrated other West Asiaern countries. One of the common excuses for accepting the Salafist discourse was to confront Israel regime. These groups were revived in the 1980s to stand against Soviet communism and form a united front against the Soviet Union along with other countries of the Persian Gulf and in coordination with the Western powers. Even al-Qaeda was able to gain power in Afghanistan in cooperation with the Taliban. But after the events of September 11, international pressures on Salafi Takfiri groups intensified. This led to the entry of the United States into the scene through its invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. The most recent developments surrounding terrorist Takfiri groups go

back to the so-called "Arab Uprising" events, the clear examples of which have been manifested in the rise of "the Islamic State of Iraq" or "the Islamic State" known as ISIS in the Levant. They derive their ideological thoughts directly from Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab Tamimi Najdi. Salafism acquired a political form and structure after Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhab. Meanwhile, he and his companionship with Muhammad bin Saud, the founder of the Al-Saud dynasty in Saudi Arabia, accelerated this process. However, the relationship between the religious scholars and the Saudi rulers has gradually changed, and the Wahhabi sheikhs have lost some of their powers, including their authority to issue arrest warrants or judicial orders. Nevertheless, they still enjoy a good status and position in the Saudi political hierarchy. In addition to the Hejaz, Egypt was also not spared from ideological shifts. The Egyptian Salafists experienced a new trend in Sunni religious teachings thanks to the teachings of Hasan al-Bana and the Muslim Brotherhood. Therefore, new chapters were opened for these groups to develop the limited boundaries of Islamic Ijtihad.

But with the sudden death of Hasan al-Banna, the Muslim Brotherhood was influenced by the thoughts of two other personalities, Abul-Ali Maududi and Sayyed Qutb. In this regard, while establishing the method of adherence to religious texts based on their specific jurisprudential views, they introduced the view of takfir. Among the most important contemporary terrorist Takfiri groups are Hassan Basri Brigade, Zubair Bin Awam Brigade, Abu-Ayman Group, Yaran Ahl-al-Sunnah, the Organization of the Rule of Jihad in Bilad al-Rafdin, the Organization of Al-Finiyah Al-Askariyyah, Jamaah Al-Muslimin or Jamaat al-Takfir and Al-Hijra, Jamaah Al-Jihad, the Fatah al-Islam group, and others throughout the West Asia.

Theoretical Framework

A) Regional Security Theory

Copenhagen School of International Relations: The Copenhagen School is a term that Bill McSweeney applied to the works and views of Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, De Wilde, and others. Considering that the focus of this school is based on security, it can be considered one of the first approaches to establishing an independent place for security studies in international relations. In other words, this school has separated security studies, which is a feature of the post-Cold War academia, from post-Cold War

academic field of strategic studies. Instead, the Copenhagen School placed security studies in the field of international relations. these efforts by Buzan and his colleagues their attention to removing security issues from the narrow military circle (Ebrahimi, 2006, p. ۴۴۳). One of the other epistemological features of the Copenhagen School in the analysis of international security is its emphasis on the existence of different narratives regarding intersubjective international phenomena from different historical perspectives. In other words, the historical beliefs of Iranians, Arabs, Turks, and Greeks, from Buzan's point of view, significantly contributes to their current hostilities and makes the existing conflicts as an effect of the past dynamics. (Nasri, 2004, p. 568).

Barry Buzan believes that security should be defined as freedom from threat. In other words, security, in his opinion is understood in the absence of a threat. Barry Buzan's definition of security is close to the narrow-minded, one-dimensional, and Morgenthau's definition of security in the Cold War era. But since the end of the Cold War, Buzan himself no longer defines security as the absence of traditional threats. He says, "Security should be viewed as multi-dimensional, which overshadows different aspects such as immigration, national and transnational criminal organizations, the environment, and economic well-being". According to Buzan, the government is no longer the only source of security. In this line, individuals, transnational groups, sub-national and non-governmental organizations, media, and terrorism should all be considered as other sources of security as well. (Ebrahimi, 2006, p. ۴۴۸). Based on Barry Buzan's opinion, security analysis is done at three international, regional, and domestic levels. At the international level, more attention is paid to the analysis of the dynamics of great power politics. At the regional level, the scope and boundaries of the analysis are limited in a way that only includes regional trends and powers. Finally, it is at the domestic level that the impacts of domestic conditions, politics, and dynamics on security will be examined. While paying attention to all three levels of analysis, the Copenhagen School believes that regionalism has strengthened compared to the Cold War era. In addition, the importance of security systems has also increased, and accordingly, this school pays more attention to the regional level because it believes that every region has its own special security characteristics and that security analysis should be done differently from others.

Buzan and Wæver's main thesis is regional security complex

theory, which assumes that the end of the Cold War was the beginning of widespread insecurities that have been rooted in the shortcomings of the realist school of thought. One of the limitations in defining security dimensions for the realist school is that it still considers the states as the only source of security. Meanwhile, the globalist school has also neglected the recent unconventional developments at the regional level by considering the international system as the only credible level of analysis for security. Therefore, to provide a proper understanding of the nature of security, it is necessary to pay attention to the regional security architectures and the characteristics of the countries that are in those regions and share similar security concerns about. To achieve an accurate analysis of regional security, Buzan mixed the model of friendship and enmity between states with the power based relations and proposed the regional security complex theory. In this theory, governments are considered the most important unit of analysis. Meanwhile, the military, and political sectors are emphasized as the main domains of security relations. Regional systems and the framework to deal with them would be examined in terms of security, while the relative independence of regional security relations would also be analyzed properly (Buzan, 1378, p. 118). According to this school, the regional security complex is a security system that the countries located in it have similar security concerns. Secondly, these countries have relatively common memories or a common destiny in terms of history, geography, and culture. The governments within a regional security complex, according to their concerns and their unique understandings and perceptions of threats, adhere to specific rules and mechanisms for preserving their security.

In 1998, Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde, in the book "Security: A New Framework for Analysis," examined five military, political, economic, environmental, and social components to enhance their ability to explain security developments. According to these points, five criteria can be proposed for the existence of a security complex:
• Security interdependence
• Pattern of friendship or enmity
• Geographical proximity
• The presence of at least two effective actors
• Relative independence (Dadandish and Kozegar Kaleji, 2009, p. 79).

Although numerous endeavors have been dedicated to the theoretical exploration of security systems, yet it is undeniable that

the most comprehensive body of work in this domain has been assembled by Barry Buzan. He defined security analysis based on the security environment. According to Buzan, each region has its own special security formula, and due to the unique characteristics of every region, the method of resolving conflicts in a region cannot be generalized to others. Therefore, the West Asia, like the western hemisphere, Europe, etc., has its own unique security formula. He sees the similarities within a region very strongly and believes that factors such as the interference of ethnic, national, religious, and international currents have quickly and easily made the West Asia a hotbed of security conflicts. (Nasri, 1389) In his opinion, identifying the historical, economic, or cultural roots of the regions and then examining their security dynamics of them will provide a clear picture of the security politics and strategies of the regional actors. He believes that since the national and international levels of analysis cannot be suitable for the analysis of issues related to regions, therefore, the existence of an intermediate level of analysis will be necessary for this purpose. (Buzan, 1387, p. 212) Based on this theoretical foundation, Buzan defines the regional security complex as follows: a set of state actors whose perceptions and security concerns are so closely related to each other that their security problems can't be analyzed or resolved separate from other state actors in that complex. Interactions between states within the regional security complexes are described as deep-rooted, while durable security interdependence in a coherent geographical grouping is another reality of interstate relations in a regional security complex.

Buzan considers the presence of several elements vital for the stability of a regional security complex. The first element is security interdependence between a group of countries. He states that in the framework of a security complex, there is a network of strong security relations among the states, which has interconnected their security and separated them from the others in that complex. It is noteworthy that with Iran's persistence on advancing in its nuclear program and the effective functioning of the Shia government in Iraq, Syria gains more influence in the region. Furthermore, Hezbollah and Hamas will also be more equipped and, in addition to their previous defensive measures, will initiate offensive measures either way. Therefore, the number of Israeli military strikes will be reduced. On the other hand, whenever the international pressure on Iran increases due to its nuclear program, Syria reduces its activism in the region and tends to compromise with other Arab countries.

On the other hand, Hezbollah would be more conservative in arranging its regional behavior. The interference of regional and extra-regional powers in Syria and Iraq, along with the continuation of regional developments in Bahrain and Yemen, means the interference of those actors in the entire regional security complex. The disintegration of Iraq, the expansion of ISIS influence throughout the region, and the collapse of Assad's government would also signal the intensification of an already-existing insecurity for Iran and Hezbollah.

B) Theory of Defensive Realism

One of the most important steps taken in understanding international dynamics is the type of effort that has been made since the beginning of this century to understand the necessity of theories. During this time, almost a relative consensus has been reached in the field of international relations that, without coherent and comprehensive theories, it is not possible to understand international developments in a systematic way. (Seifzadeh, 1369, p. 17) Therefore, many believe that the theory of international relations is a systematic study of observable phenomena that tries to explain and describe various behaviors through the analysis of major variables and the coordinates of various types of relations between state units. IR theories examine and analyze international politics from different and sometimes unconventional perspectives. Therefore, each of them describes and explains only a certain part of reality. With this introduction, to explain Iran's foreign policy strategy towards the Syrian crisis, perhaps the theoretical framework of defensive realism (Walt's balance of threat theory) can be a suitable option. In 1987, Walt introduced his definition of balance of threat theory as a major modification of Waltz's classical approach. In the framework of defensive realism, the overall distribution of power is less important than the level and direction of threats. However, Stephen Walt's "balance of threat" theory claims that states do not react to threats, but rather react to their perception of threat.

The level of threat posed by a state depends not only on its overall power but also on its geographical proximity, military capabilities, and aggressive intentions. (Yazdan Pham, 2006, pp. ۷۳۱–730) According to the balance of threat theory, states create a balance not against power but against those states that appear particularly threatful to them. This theory tries to modify the balance of power theory by taking other factors into account. But

the balance of threat theory can hardly be tested because it is difficult to estimate and measure these factors. According to Waltz, a threat consists of overall power, geographic proximity, offensive capabilities, and aggressive intentions. The overall power is the sum of a state's resources. A state with more resources can naturally pose a more serious threat than a state with less. Geographical proximity is also important because, other than being equal, states that are geographically closer to each other are often considered more threatening than distant ones. Offensive capabilities consist of those abilities that one state owns to threaten the sovereignty or territorial integrity of another at an acceptable cost. Finally, states with a history of aggression are more likely to be a real threat than other states. Aggressive intentions define the willingness of a particular state to force another country to react-a situation that can be exemplified by Nazi Germany. In his theory, Walt emphasizes the importance of aggressive intentions over material sources of power.

According to Walt, compared to variables such as power or threat, the variable of ideology is less decisive in motivating the formation of balancing alliances. Walt has interpreted many ideological alliances as a form of balancing behavior. His findings show that the importance of ideological differences decreases when the level of threat increases. However, when ideological factors and security considerations reinforce each other, the strength of the alliance increases. In short, Walt argues that governments tend to balance rather than bandwagon. In his opinion, ideology plays an important but limited role in alliance-making. Also, Walt says: "Foreign and political aids as well as economic influence, by themselves, play a small role in the formation of alliance options but may help the interests of aligned countries." (Niakoui, Ismaili & Sotoudeh, 1392, p. 124)

۳. Causes of Terrorism

Several views have been proposed about the causes of terrorism. Some researchers believe that two types of factors motivate terrorists: the pressuring factor, which includes negative and unfavorable situations such as ethnic, religious, and social dissatisfaction, neo-colonialism, systematic discrimination, etc., and the pulling factor, which includes favorable situations such as profit-seeking by the individual in question.

Currently, scientific ideas and theories about the causes of terrorism can be analyzed in four categories:

1- Researchers who only consider the role of internal factors as important, such as biological, nervous, and hormonal factors, as well as the need for respect along with the instinct of fame;

2- Researchers who consider only the role of internal factors to be effective in provoking terrorist behavior;

3- Researchers who place less value on psychological factors and emphasize environmental factors;

4- Experts who consider a combination of internal, psychological, and environmental factors to be the cause of terrorism.

A) The Role of Internal Factors in the Occurrence of Terrorism

In elaborating on the roots of terrorism, different factors are proposed by researchers, which include hormonal, biological, neural, and chemical factors.

The Role of Hormonal Factors

In the research carried out to discover the impact of physiological and biological factors on terrorism, some researchers have mentioned male sexual hormones as one of the factors related to instigating terrorist behavior. Although the effect of these hormones is weaker than expected, there is no doubt that men can demonstrate more violent and aggressive behavior than women due to the sexual hormone testosterone. The high amount of this hormone in the blood leads to an increase in aggression. About 385 studies on 230 men also emphasize the significant but small relationship between testosterone and violence.

The Role of Neural Factors

The discovery of serotonin in the brain and other organs has led to the emergence of this hypothesis. There are similarities in the chemical compounds between serotonin, LSD, and adrenochrome, where the presence of one can neutralize the action of a similar substance. Serotonin plays an important role in the transmission of neural waves, so as the amount of serotonin in the body decreases, the stimulation of neural waves will increase which, ultimately can lead to aggressive behavior.

In those mental patients who have schizophrenia and Parkinson, the amount of dopamine is often higher than usual. Although most of the research in this field has been related to schizophrenia, later research showed that patients with neuroticism are constantly under intense tension and fear.

The Role of Chemical Agents

Chemical factors can also affect the functioning of the neural system. In this context, the chemical-biological factors of taraxin and adrenaline have been considered in the occurrence of schizophrenia. reacts with other chemical elements of the body to form a toxic compound that disrupts brain activity. When the patient is under pressure, these chemical interactions will increase and cause a disturbance in the individual's neural system.

Some claim that "norepinephrine" and "noradrenaline" cause the sympathetic nerve to respond physically in situations where people are available. Also, the chemical "acetylcholine" in the brains of terrorists, which is produced by parasympathetic nerves, causes people to respond with norepinephrine.

The Role of Biological Factors

At the time of the presentation of the "born criminal" theory by Cesare Lombroso in the 1870s, which considered the roots of criminality to be natural and innate, terrorism in Italy had a significant growth and prevalence, to the extent that Lombroso tried to identify the causes of this prevalence. In this regard, he considered the existence of a type of disease called "pellagra" along with several other diseases caused by vitamin deficiency in a person as the reason for demonstrating terrorist behavior (Raish, 2010, p. 490). He believed that pellagra vitamin deficiency in humans would instigate violence.

Several decades later, the biological approach re-entered the field of etiology with newer ideas. This time, a psychologist declared the cause of terrorism to be a malfunction of the vestibulocochlear nerve.

The Role of Internal Factors

The first important publication in the psychology of terrorism was from a psychiatrist named Friedrich Hecker, who emphasized the diversity of motives in his analysis of terrorism. Although considering the various motivations that cause terrorists to commit criminal acts, no obvious signs of mental disorders or anxiety have been observed in groups that mainly enter the field of terrorism with political, national, and separatist motives.

In any case, it seems that a range of factors can lead to violence, among which the following can be mentioned:

- Personality disorders
- The role of paranoids in the narcissism of psychopathic

  personalities
- Nonsocial and antisocial personalities
- Signs of abnormal behavior
- Thinking disorder
- Concrete thinking
- Delusions of guilt, delusions of existence, denial, and delusions of self-conceit
- Satisfying needs such as the need for truth, goodness, beauty, and unity

In this regard, the hierarchy of needs introduced by the famous American psychologist Abraham Maslow should also be taken into account. It is natural that until the needs of the base of the pyramid are not met, the needs of the top of the pyramid will not be met either, and all these factors can lead to violence and terror.

B) The Role of Social Factors in the Occurrence of Terrorism

The social environment is divided into two categories: "personal social environment" and "macrosocial environment". The personal social environment in which the criminals' acquaintances are present is categorized at the level of the individual, while the macrosocial environment consists of all the general conditions of the society and therefore brings the same results to all members of the society. The personal social environment itself can be divided into inevitable, accidental, selective, and forced environments; however, in the macrosocial environment, concepts such as the political environment, the imperialist environment, or the role of colonial systems, the reduction of the role of governments, a lack of democracy, and population growth can be found.

The Role of Personal Environment

The personal social environment, or, in other words, the "center of growth" of a human being, is divided into several categories based on Dugrove's theory..

Inevitable Environment

The inevitable environment is an environment in which a person is inevitably placed and has no role in its emergence. The family is the first environment where an individual is placed and gets to know the good and bad of actions and deeds.

Usually, terrorists grow up in families whose parents were also members of terrorist groups, and even according to some analysts,

the endeavors of rehabilitation for these people are almost futile because there is enmity and hatred in their blood.

According to the research results, out of 1100 convicted terrorists in Turkey, about one-third had no father or paternal guardian, and this shows how much influence families have in shaping the behavior of children.

The Role of Selective Environments

Selective environments are those in which the presence of a person takes place by his own will and choice. If this chosen environment is decent and healthy, it will lead to the excellence of the person, and if the environment is impure and corrupt, it will lead to the decline and delinquency of the person's personality.

If an individual joins a terrorist group, usually the leaders of such groups, in the process of terrorist cultivation, pursue some measures such as brainwashing through which brutal actions would look good in a way that doing them not only does not make the agents feel guilty but even makes them proud. Of course, there are many tricks in this field. The mechanism of justification, especially the moral justification, the technique of responsibility transfer, the technique of minimizing or downplaying, and the mechanism of responsibility distribution are among those methods that people in such groups are taught.

The Role of the Accidental Environment

It is also called the environment of the "first social contacts", which includes different places such as the environment in which an individual undergoes education or the environment in which an individual should perform their military service. The information obtained from more than 350 terrorists and leaders of 18 terrorist groups from 1966-76 shows that these people are generally 22-25 years old, male, mostly single, living in big cities, and believing in the political philosophy of anarchism, Marxism, Leninism, etc. Of course, such environments should not be considered dangerous, but they can affect people and, along with other conditions, lead a person to accept terrorist tendencies.

The Role of the Imposed Environment

Criminals are placed in the imposed environment after arrest, trial, and conviction. This environment is not solely limited to prison; instead, it is a collection formed by the criminal justice system (Raymond, 1376, p. 190). This environment may not only help to

correct the criminals, but it may also be effective in getting the criminals to get to know each other. It can be a cause for intensifying the motive of revenge and even the proliferation of new methods of terrorism. According to available data, 7.5% of the 1100 convicted terrorists in Turkish prisons have acknowledged being influenced by individuals they encountered during their time in prison, leading to the adoption of terrorist motives.

C) The Role of the Macrosocial Environment in the Occurrence of Terrorism

Macrosocial environment means the overall political, economic, cultural, and social situation governing a country.

The Role of the Political Environment

The political environment is one of the most important factors in the occurrence of terrorism in today's world. Perhaps the most important player in the political environment can be called, "the society structure". Conflicts and tensions between structures at the national or international level, civil wars, elections, autocracy and democracy, ethnic, religious, and sectarian conflicts, political inequalities, inequality in the distribution of power, inequality in the distribution of wealth, poverty, the existence of guerrilla groups, the rift between the state and the nation, and separatist demands are among the things that can play a role in intensifying terrorist tendencies in people.

Decline in the Role of Governments

Terrorism can be the result of the gradual decline in the role of governments in maintaining the authority and territorial sovereignty of a country. With the beginning of this decline, the vulnerability of governments has increased, while the level of loyalty of citizens to the government has decreased. Furthermore, national identities have been weakened, whereas receiving training and necessary orders, along with exchanging weapons from abroad, are also facilitated. The existence of such conditions has caused some people to consider the existence of weak and failed states as a definite reason for the occurrence of terrorism.

In today's world, the monopoly of acting in the field of international relations is out of the hands of governments. With the entry of new actors in the name of multinational companies and non-governmental groups to the scene of IR, the governments have inevitably transferred some of their authorities and powers to them,

both willingly and unwillingly.

The Role of Democracy Deficiency

In democratic societies, due to the open political climate, the lawful circulation of elites, holding open and free elections, observing civil liberties, the functioning of different groups, associations, organizations, and parties in a peaceful atmosphere, and the responsibility of the government to be accountable to public demands, a threatful atmosphere does not exist.

However, in non-democratic societies, different causes, such as the authoritarian nature of the political system, the state's promotion of a culture of unquestionable obedience, a lack of civil liberties, the unaccountability of the government, the accumulation of power in the hands of a certain group, and a lack of suitable space for the formation of civil groups, force individuals and opposition groups to choose violence to pursue their interests. Under these circumstances, unsatisfied groups try to demand fundamental changes from the state through underground activities and the formation of guerilla groups while declaring their opposition to the government. Therefore, the lack of space and opportunity to express dissatisfaction, along with the lack of political freedoms in the society can lead to terrorism.

The Role of Population Growth and Gender

In the field of social environments, we can refer to categories such as population growth and gender type. According to FBI information, 90% of the people whose names are on the terrorist lists were males who were between the ages of 22 and 34. Also, the growth of the urban population, unemployment, reduction of job opportunities, etc., cause some people to turn towards terrorist tendencies. Violent acts are more common among young people than others. (Aghaei, 1378, p. 116). The ongoing population growth and the lack of credible action or failure to curb this process have terrible consequences in the political field, in a way that can lead to increasing instability and violence (Attarzadeh, 2017, p. 78).

D) The Role of the Cultural Environment in the Occurrence of Terrorism

A very wide collection of literature, ethics, beliefs, values, norms, customs, ideals, symbols, lifestyles, beliefs, attitudes, etc. are considered among the cultural elements of any society, and due to their impact on all areas of social life, the role of cultural factors

along with cultural experiences and even political and behavioral cultures is considered important in this field.

The Role of the Clash of Civilizations

Western analysts attribute the causes of terrorist incidents, believed to be perpetrated by Islamic fundamentalists, is to two key factors: First, because Islamic civilization does not have the ability to solve its challenges, it blames the West for its failures and tries to take revenge on the West through terrorism. Second, according to Esposito, Jihad, as one of the characteristics of Islam, can be a leverage by which the leaders of extremist groups try to pursue their goals. In this line, they play a role in carrying out terrorist attacks by inciting individuals and issuing religious fatwas.

Culture is a set of values, norms, and lifestyles that allow people to distinguish between good and bad or right and wrong behavior (Akhavan Zanjani, 1381, p. 118). The relationship between the political system and society is like a vase placed on a table. The sturdiness and stability of the vase depend on the sturdiness of the table, and the stability of the table also depends on the nuts and bolts that connect its components (Naghibzadeh, 2011, p. 311).

Civilization is also a product of culture, and on the other hand, culture is enriched in the context of civilization. Between cultures and civilizations, there are relationships and interconnectedness. However, Huntington's introduction of the theory of clash of civilizations was an outcome of a variety of causes, such as his pessimistic attitude towards other civilizations, his emphasis on the theory of the hypothetical enemy, the existence of various crises within the US political structure and its ruling factions, and the intellectual gaps in international relations that intensified after the collapse of the Soviet Union. (Sahranavard, 1379, p. 33) He predicted that future challenges would manifest themselves in the form of the confrontation of different cultural groups, something that he theorized would be the clash of civilizations. (Naghibzadeh, 1381, p. 50).

This theory is based on a growing confrontation among different civilizations. He believes that thefaultline between civilizations will be the future clash points, the causes of the future conflicts, and a substitute for existing ideological borders. (Sahranavard, 2019, p. 32). Therefore, to defeat the rising yellow dragon and contain the ongoing Islamic renaissance, the western world must find other solutions.

4. The Origin of Terrorism in the West Asia

The protest movements that have covered the West Asia and North Africa since 2011 can be analyzed from different perspectives. Some researchers have discussed the causes of these developments and their ontology, and others have pointed to their regional and geopolitical consequences.

In the meantime, the important point is that many researchers have evaluated the recent developments from the perspective of the fourth wave of democracy. In this regard, they tried to invalidate those theories that promote democratic exceptionalism in the West Asia.

On the other hand, some researchers spoke optimistically about the reconciliation of democracy and religious movements in the Islamic world, emphasizing post-Islamism or the formation of Islamic democratic movements. However, it didn't take long for such optimism to practically fade away. The Muslim democratic movements failed to endure the upcoming regionally harsh developments, while Takfiri and extremist ideology succeeded in expanding their sphere of influence so that, in less than four years after the beginning of the Arab Spring, dozens of Takfiri groups were formed. In this regard, large parts of Syria and Iraq are currently in the hands of groups such as Daesh, al-Nusra, or other aligned Takfiri groups. Even in some periods of time, the areas under the control of these movements have been larger than the areas under the control of the legitimate governments of Iraq and Syria. Apart from these, the deep influence of ISIS in the Sinai desert and the allegiance of many Takfiri groups in this region to this group, along with its control over large areas of Libya, are also important developments in the past years. Of course, the influence of Takfiri movements is very deep and wide and now covers a significant part of the world. Groups like Boko Haram and al-Qaeda continue to attract new forces. According to the above, the main questions raised by this research are as follows: What factors caused the spread of takfiri movements and religious extremism after the beginning of the Arab Spring? What effects has the spread of the above trends had? Of course, considering that the cradle of Takfiri movements is in Iraq and Syria, this research deals with the causes of the spread of Takfiri movements in the Levant.

It should be noted that various studies has been conducted in relation to Takfiri movements. Most of the research have dealt with the intellectual foundations of Takfiri thoughts. For example,

Gholamreza Khosravi (2005) has dealt with the intellectual foundations of Islamic fundamentalism and its major thinkers in research titled *Introduction to Islamic Fundamentalism.* Bakhshi Sheikh Ahmed, and others (1392) have also studied the intellectual foundations of ISIS ideology in a paper titled *Studying the Ideology of the Takfiri-Wahhabi Group of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.* These studies have a different field and basically do not deal with the causes of the spread of Takfiri movements.

Some studies have also examined the foreign policy of great powers, especially the United States, regarding Takfiri movements such as ISIS. In this regard, we can refer to Christopher Blanchard and Carla Humud's research entitled *the United States and the Islamic State* (Blancherd & Humud, 2015). These studies mainly analyze the approach of a specific actor and do not investigate the reasons for the spread of takfiri currents alone.

Apart from these, some research directly deals with the future of Takfiri groups in Iraq and Syria, paying attention to various political and social components. For example, Alireza Samiei Esfahani and Mohsen Shafii Seifabadi, in an article entitled t*he Future of Takfiri Groups and Solutions for the Stability of the Governments in Syria and Iraq* examines the process of the formation of Takfiri movements in the Levant. The same article, in the framework of future studies, has examined the possible and probable scenarios regarding the future of Takfiri groups (Samiei Esfahani & Seifabadi, 2014). Although this research has a good study on takfiri groups in the West Asia, it does not provide a comprehensive explanation of why these currents occur along with various factors affecting them. Ali Karimi and Reza Garshasbi have also studied the political nature of Takfiri movements in Syria. After elaborating on the domestic causes of the formation of Takfiri groups, this research has addressed the characteristics of these currents, including their non-popular, instrumental, and multinational nature (Karimi & Garshasbi, 2014). Although the above study has useful insights about takfiri movements in Syria, it mainly deals with their political nature along with the characteristics of these movements and has not directly examined the causes of their expansion. At the same time, the mentioned research only deals with the takfiri movements in Syria, while the strengthening of the takfiri movements should be investigated in the broader area of the Levant and the West Asia.

A) Identity and Geopolitical Competitions in the West Asia Region

September 11 and the subsequent US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq have had significant impacts on the balance of power in the West Asia. The occupation of Iraq caused the formation of a process, after which the Shiites in Iraq took high political power. In fact, Iran has never been able to remain indifferent to the situation of Shiites in different countries, such as Iraq or Lebanon, even in pre-revolutionary times. Instead, it has used this element in its foreign policy throughout history to the extent that the connection between the national interests of Iran and Shiism could be recognized even by other countries (Farji Rad, 2004, pp. 80-81). The statements of the king of Jordan regarding the formation of the Shiite crescent in the region and the statements of former Egyptian president Mubarak regarding the loyalty of the Shiites of the region to the Islamic Republic can be evaluated from this point of view (Barzegar, 2007, p. 43). It should be noted that up until the downfall of Saddam Hussein's regime in Baghdad, there had always been a deep rivalry between Iran and Iraq. However, the fall of Saddam Hussein allowed the Iraqi Shia majority to rise to the highest levels of the political hierarchy of that country. One of the groups that has played a significant role in Iraqi politics since 2001 was Hizb al-Dawa, which is known for its deep intellectual sympathies with the 1979 Revolution of Iran. Nonetheless, these developments seemed practically unbearable for Iran's regional rivals, especially Saudi Arabia. For the past two decades, before the US invasion of Iraq, Baghdad was the biggest regional rival for Tehran. According to Barry Buzan's theory, the security structure of a region is such that the weakening of one actor makes another actor stronger.

Buzan also adds that in the West Asia, the friendship of actor A with actor B necessarily implies enmity with actor C. (Harati, Soleimani, and Ebadi, 1394, p. 177) A careful examination of Saudi foreign policy indicates that this country has used the Takfiri Sunni groups, the remnants of the Iraqi Baath Party, as well as those tribes aligned with it, in various ways to weaken the Iraqi Shiite government. Saudi Arabia's reluctance to recognize Iraq's new government has been to the point that after its formation, Riadh even refused to extend a congratulatory message to the Iraqi authorities. In this way, the hostile behavior of Saudi Arabia towards the Iraqi government has been clear even from the beginning and during the transitional government of Ibrahim Jafari

(Shuja', 1385, p. 47). The Saudi kingdom has tried to distort the process of institutionalization and stabilization of the new Iraqi political system, which was based on demographic realities, through various strategies such as supporting the Baathist and Takfiri groups and opposition movements such as Tariq al-Hashemi. These policies have played an effective role in the continuous insecurity in Iraq, as the Iraqi authorities have also pointed out that Saudi Arabia has been the perpetrator of many bloody explosions in Iraq with its financial aid along with the educational and intellectual promotion of Wahhabism. It seems that the main goals of Saudi Arabia were to counter Iran's political-religious influence in Iraq and make the Iraqi government ineffective. In fact, Saudi Arabia's support for Takfiri movements with the aim of confronting the Shiites and limiting Iran's influence in Iraq to create a breach in the so-called Shiite Crescent is very significant (Niakoui, 1392).

In the meantime, the Islamic Awakening caused the intensification of regional rivalries in a more complicated manner. The beginning of the Syrian uprising in 2011 created a suitable opportunity for Saudi Arabia and Turkey to think about expanding their sphere of influence to Syria and try to limit Iran's influence on Damascus. In fact, after the Arab Spring, the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia reached its highest level, in such a way that Yemen, Bahrain, Iraq, and Syria became the scene of a significant, unprecedented proxy war. In fact, Saudi Arabia has been trying to take advantage of the unrest in Syria to weaken Assad's government by providing financial, logistical, and intelligence support to the opposition groups and Salafists and expanding its sphere of influence throughout the region. In the meantime, the developments in Syria created an attractive opportunity for Turkey to seek to expand its influence in the West Asia by following the Neo-Ottomanist doctrine. In recent years, especially after the issues that prevented Turkey from joining the European Union, Ankara has tried to strengthen relations with its West Asia neighbors in addition to paying attention to Europe. In the framework of its foreign policy in the West Asia-Neo-Ottomanism-Ankara is trying to achieve goals such as closer ties with its neighbors and taking over the leadership of the region (Omidi and Rezaei, 2010, p. 255). This idea, which comes from the "strategic depth" doctrine of Ahmet Davutoğlu, the architect of Turkey's new foreign policy (Aras, 2009), puts this country against Iran. In this regard, Turkey supports some takfiri and fundamentalist movements such as Jaish al-Islam and Ahrar al-Sham. There is also some evidence about Ankara's support for ISIS

and al-Nusra, along with Turkey's procurement of oil from ISIS.

In a paper that elaborates on the goals of Turkey and Saudi Arabia in Syria, it is pointed out that countering Iran's influence is the common goal of these two actors (Niakoui & Behmanesh, 2011); meanwhile, Ankara and Riyadh pursue this goal by providing direct and indirect support for Takfiri movements.

The sectarian atmosphere in Syria, as well as the support of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey for the sectarian mentality in that country, has convinced tens of thousands of fundamentalists from various regions, from Tunisia and Libya to Central Asia, to go to Syria to fight against the Assad government. Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey also provide strong diplomatic and media support to the opposition groups in addition to financial and military support. In general, fighting Iran's influence is a common goal that has brought Turkey and Saudi Arabia very close to each other and made them support the Sunni opposition to weaken the Iranian-backed government in Damascus.

The Islamic Republic of Iran and Hezbollah, on the other hand, have been trying to maintain the survival of Assad's government in different ways, from deploying thousands of military personnel and volunteers to providing financial, advisory, and diplomatic support (Simbar & Ghasemian, 1393, pp. 170-170 & 174)

B) Great Powers and the Spread of Terrorism in the West Asia

Finally, it is important to examine the reaction of great powers, especially the United States, Russia, and the European Union, to the security developments in Iraq and Syria, as well as the expansion of takfiri groups. In this regard, after September 11, the United States placed a special emphasis on the West Asia. So, in addition to the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, titles such as the "Greater West Asia" doctrine and the democratization of the region were repeated many times in the statements of American neoconservatives. Affected by the emotional atmosphere of September 11, terrorism and Islamism were considered major threats to US national interests in such a way that even allies such as Saudi Arabia were pressured to implement democratic reforms. In fact, under the Bush administration, the democratization of the West Asia, unilateralism, the use of military power, and disregard for international institutions and regimes have completely been on the agenda of American foreign policy. The occupation of Afghanistan, along with the invasion of Iraq without the permission of the Security Council and the promotion of regime change in Iran, can be evaluated from this

point of view. In this regard, one can find elements of democratic peace theory in the worldview of the neoconservative elites of the Bush administration. (Niakoui, 2014, p. 91) However, after Obama's inauguration, major changes occurred in America's West Asia policy. Emphasizing multilateralism and respect for international institutions, as well as avoiding military intervention in the West Asia, have been some of the most important features of Obama's West Asia policy. (Niakoui, 2014, p. 91) Such an agenda has also been well reflected in the Syrian crisis. Until 2014, the United States mainly provided financial support to Assad's opponents and provided them with weaponry. Along with supporting opposition groups such as the Free Syrian Army, the US also tried to provide the groundwork for the collapse of Assad's government through the Security Council. However, Russia's resistance against the United States as well as its implementation of the soft balancing policy practically hindered the efforts of the United States (Niakoui, 2013).

Of course, as it was said, the United States also put aside unilateralism under the Obama administration. In this line, in the matter of withdrawing chemical weapons from Syria, the Americans accepted an equal role for Russia. This policy indicates that the United States, unlike the previous practices of the post-Cold War era, has considered an equal position for one of its competitors (Hedayati & Pinkeftsev, 2016, p. 80).

In the meantime, the importance of the West Asia in US foreign policy has undoubtedly declined. Walt argues that whenever the US has intervened in the West Asia, the situation has worsened, and considering that the strategic importance of the region along with the US demand for West Asia energy has decreased, the US desire to withdraw from the region has naturally soared. According to Walt, the strategic importance of the region is declining, and none of America's traditional allies in the region deserve full American support. In such a situation, America's actions only lead to the anger of its friends and enemies in the West Asia, so the time has come for the US to stop trying to solve problems that it has neither the ability nor the interest to solve (Waltz, 2016). In this background, Obama's foreign policy regarding the developments in Syria and Iraq and the strengthening of Takfiri movements can be better analyzed.

In fact, he onsidered the failure to carry out extensive military and even diplomatic measures against the security developments in Syria and Iraq because of not having any vital interests, along with the possible unnecessary costs. The increasing strength of the

Takfiri groups, especially ISIS and al-Nusra, in Syria and the spillover of these dynamics to Iraq, which practically put half of Iraq and Syria under the control of the Takfiris, were never accompanied by a serious, coordinated, and proportionate response from the West, especially the United States. However, the United States has played a role in retaking some areas, such as Kobani, by supporting the local forces, such as the Kurds as well as the Iraqi army. The US also boasts about its actions to contain ISIS with limited and occasional airstrikes as well as the deployment of a few special forces. (Blancherd & Hummud, 2015:26) However, the growing strength of the Takfiri groups between 2013 and 2015 was never met with a serious response from the West so a number of analysts believe that Takfiri groups in Syria are used as leverage by the United States in order to achieve geopolitical and geostrategic goals such as weakening the resistance front, fighting Russian influence in the region, maintaining the security of Israel, and ensuring the continuity of the energy flow (Karimi and Garshasbi 1394, p. 117).

There are two different positions in the political climate in Washington regarding the way to deal with Takfiri groups. On the one hand, some pragmatists in the Pentagon believe that Assad should be supported against the Takfiris. In this regard, several pieces of evidence even indicate some assistance and intelligence cooperation provided by West to the Assad's government. On the other hand, most of the American political elites believe that the survival of Assad's government has caused the strengthening of sectarian sentiments as well as the Takfiri discourse in Syria, and only by removing Assad from power can the roots of Takfiri movements such as ISIS and al-Nusra be dried up. (Blancherd, Humud, & Nikitin, 2015, p. 1) In general, the United States has mostly acted passively against the rise of takfiri groups such as ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra and has not made a serious and proportionate effort to deal with these movements. Failure to block the financial networks of these groups, failure to create an international military alliance to fight ISIS, failure to carry out heavy and sustained attacks on Takfiri positions, and finally failure to put pressure on regional allies to avoid supporting Takfiri groups are some aspects of this passivity. The reasons for this passivity have been summarized in components such as the reduction of the strategic importance of the region for the US, the lack of vital interests in regional crises, the usefulness of these groups as a leverage in weakening the Iran-backed resistance front, and the internal

contradictions in Obama's foreign policy. In any case, the West's lack of appropriate response to the Takfiri uprising provided the basis for the expansion of the activities of such groups.

In the meantime, it is important to examine Russia's foreign policy towards takfiris and opposition groups in Syria. Until 2015, Russia continued to provide financial, diplomatic, and military support to Assad's government and hindered American efforts to overthrow his government through its veto power in the UN Security Council. However, since September 2015, with the expansion of the power of the opposition movements and the subsequent growing possibility of the fall of Assad's government, Russia has launched large-scale airstrikes against the opposition groups. (Kabalan, 2015) With these efforts, the balance of power in Syria changed in favor of Assad, so that Takfiri opponents such as Ahrar al-Sham and Jabhat al-Nusra retreated from many areas in January 2019. In general, there are a variety of incentives for Moscow to actively support the Syrian government:

- Containing Takfiri movements in Syria due to their Chechen and Central Asian Jihadists and the fear of the spread of these movements to Russia;
- Efforts to restore Russia's position as a world power through effective intervention in Syria;
- Maintaining the Tartus naval facility
- Expanding Russian strategic sphere of influence throughout the West Asia;
- Maintaining Syria as the only Russian remaining ally in the West Asia;
- Using Syria as a bargaining chip in the process of negotiations with the West on issues such as the Ukraine crisis and the expansion of NATO. (Hedayati & Pinkeftsev, 2014).

Russia's approach to Syria has provided the basis for a wide conflict between Moscow on the one hand and Riyadh and Ankara on the other. Meanwhile, the nuclear deal between Iran and the West practically provided the groundwork for reducing the conflicts between Iran and the United States and even brought the views of Iran and the United States closer to each other. Currently, the main difference regarding the Geneva negotiations is regarding the possibility of Assad's nomination for the upcoming elections and the composition of the opposition groups. Meanwhile, it seems that the United States has come closer to the positions of Iran and Russia to some extent. In any case, although the passivity of the international community provided the basis for the expansion of Takfiri

movements, events, such as the terrorist attacks in Paris and the escalation of the migrant crisis in Europe as well as the extensive Russian airstrikes against ISIS and other Takfiri opponents, have had significant impacts on the battlefield in Syria. It seems that the possibility of a global consensus against the takfiris in the region is not far from imagination anymore. It is important to pay attention to the fact that the prominent role played by Iran's Quds force along with Iraqi and Afghan Shiite forces alongside Lebanon's Hezbollah in the liberation of Aleppo, as well as Russia's military airstrikes, legitimize the Takfiri mentality in a way that can provide terrorists with enough justification for their unity. It may also create grounds for the legitimization of Takfiri sentiments among the Sunnis and fuel the sectarian aspects of the ongoing developments in the West Asia. Undoubtedly, regional developments are very fluid, and issues such as the US presidential election can also have an impact on them.

The Strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Dealing with Terrorism

Terrorism has existed throughout the history of mankind and has taken the lives of innocent people. The Islamic Republic of Iran is no exception to this rule. As mentioned in the introduction and as the main question of this research, this article tries to explain the strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in dealing with terrorism. In this regard, according to the theoretical framework of the research and global strategies that exist in dealing with terrorism, we will find that Iran has also followed these strategies and has employed various strategies, including prevention, suppression, etc.

The author's basis for this research is the classification of the strategies that Iran employs in countering terrorism into three different categories: preventive, repressive, and aggressive strategies. Notwithstanding the lack of official documents regarding Iran's counter-terrorism strategies, this essay considers the following three documents as the roadmap for counter-terrorism and part of the practical measures taken in this field.

First, the Convention of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation; second, *the Anti-Terrorism Bill of the Islamic Republic of Iran*; and third, the reports of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Counter-Terrorism Committee of the UN Security Council. In addition to these three documents, statements, positions, interviews, and reports of the decision-making authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran, such as the Supreme National Security

Council, have also been taken into account.

A) The Preventive Strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Countering Terrorism

The Convention of the Organization of the Islamic Conference is known as one of the strategic documents for countering terrorism for all Islamic countries, including Iran. Therefore, the membership of the Islamic Republic of Iran in this convention is one of the key steps in this field. On the preventive and precautionary measures of the signatory states, this convention implies:

"By announcing their commitment to preventing and fighting terrorist crimes and in compliance with their domestic laws, the signatory states should consider the following points regarding the implementation of preventive measures:

- preventing their lands from being a place for planning, and executing terrorist crimes in any form.
- preventing the infiltration of terrorist cells into their territories.
- avoiding providing terrorist agents with asylum or residence at both collective and individual levels.
- avoiding hosting, training, arming, or financing terrorist cells or providing facilities to them under any circumstances.
- cooperation and coordination with other signatories, especially neighboring countries where common or similar terrorist crimes have taken place in the past.
- developing and strengthening necessary procedures for cross-border transit monitoring and inspection, as well as strengthening customs controls, in order to prevent arms smuggling among the signatory countries.
- developing and strengthening the necessary facilities and procedures in order to prevent terrorist infiltration from aerial, maritime, and land border crossings.
- strengthening systems and procedures to ensure the health and protection of individuals, critical facilities, and public transportation.
- further intensifying the protection and security of diplomats along with consular and diplomatic missions based in the signatories in accordance with the conventions and regulations of international law.
- promoting security operations along with coordination with the security operations of other signatories in line with the signatories' security interests, with the aim of revealing the goals

of terrorist groups, neutralizing their plans, and exposing their danger.

- establishing a database by each of the signatory states to collect and analyze data regarding terrorist organizations, movements, groupings, and agents to curb terrorism and develop successful experiences in fighting it. The signatory state shall update this information and exchange it with the competent authorities of other signatory states in accordance with the legal restrictions and regulations of its own country." (Bouzorgmehri, 2015, pp. ۵۲–۵۳)

In addition to the above, for curbing terrorism, the convention encourages the exchange of information, research and investigation, training, and the exchange of experts between the signatory states.

The Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has repeatedly warned the Iraqi government about providing terrorist groups such as the MEK with safe haven or training, assisting, and inciting them to continue terrorist activities, and has demanded that these activities should stop. (5th report of the Islamic Republic of Iran to CTC, 1390, p. 19)

The police and intelligence agencies have formed a working group to discuss the requirements and potentials of establishing a database, along with other mechanisms for greater cooperation in the collection, compilation, and analysis of relevant information, analyzing terrorist groups, advancing the best measures to prevent or curb terrorist attacks, and finally choosing the best practical solutions (The Fifth Report of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the CTC, 2010, p. 19).

The Islamic Republic of Iran has taken important measures to combat arms smuggling. Arms smuggling, especially after the conclusion of the 8-year war with the former Iraqi regime, has been one of Iran's major crises in the post-revolutionary period. Currently, due to the critical conditions of Iran's neighboring countries and the presence of extra-regional military forces there, the smuggling of weapons, ammunition, and hunting rifles from some of these countries to Iran is still going on. Since most of these weapons are illegal and end up in the hands of murderers, thieves, drug traffickers, and security disruptors, it has been one of the priorities of the directorate of the Supreme National Security Council and the Central Commission for the Supervision of Arms and Ammunition. So far, important plans have been implemented with the cooperation of Iran's security, military, and law enforcement forces, which include the following:

The legislation, which was approved on February 15, 1971, provides more severe punishment for arms and ammunition smugglers as well as armed smugglers. It also regulates the purchase, sale, storage, import, and export of weapons, ammunition, explosives, and inflammatory materials (Second Report of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the CTC, 1390, p. 10).

According to paragraphs 7 and 8 of Article 4, the collection of illegal weapons, ammunition, equipment, the issuance of licenses to own and carry personal weapons to individuals, and the supervision of authorized storage and use of incendiary substances are within the scope of law enforcement forces.

Owners of illegal weapons and ammunition were given a national amnesty in 1997, which led to the collection of about 270,000 weapons of various types, including 90,000 firearms and 160,000 hunting rifles.

The implementation of the second phase of the plan to collect illegal weapons and ammunition, which was approved by the Supreme National Security Council in 2000 and revised in 2004, led to the collection of about 90,000 weapons, ammunition, and military equipment of various types. These weapons and ammunition were confiscated, and the relevant suspects were handed over to the judicial authorities.

The implementation of a special plan, approved by the Supreme National Security Council in 2005, aimed at combating arms trafficking. This plan successfully led to the identification and dismantling of numerous arms trafficking gangs. Additionally, approximately 45,000 weapons and various types of ammunition were confiscated as a result of these efforts.

A proposed amendment to the legislation on arms and ammunition smuggling has been introduced to the parliament for approval. This amendment suggests stricter punishments for those involved in the production and ownership of illegal explosives, inflammatory substances, chemical, confusing, numbing, and tear gas (the Second Report of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the CTC, 2010, pp. 10-11).

Regarding Iran's efforts to strengthen border protection, the following can be mentioned:

- strict monitoring of borders;
- exercising more control over border movements through establishing security checkpoints and deploying sophisticated security equipment along the eastern and western borders of the

country. (such as Nabi Akram's headquarters)
- the construction and development of security walls along the eastern borders, including concrete walls, digging border canals, establishing A2/AD, laying border barbed wire, and blocking the border as much as possible (5th report of the Islamic Republic of Iran to (CTC, 2013, p. 28).

Among other measures that the Islamic Republic has taken into account in order to design its preventive strategy for countering terrorism is the holding of the "Global Fight against Terrorism" international summit. This conference was held at the initiative of Iran and was a suitable opportunity to convey the message of the Islamic Republic and all other freedom-seeking countries that seek the real eradication of terrorism. According to the head of the Center for Communications, Information, and Public Relations of Iran's presidential administration, some of the main goals of this conference were to provide an opportunity to exchange opinions on various aspects of counter-terrorism and examine the causes of the growing trend of terrorist activities around the world. Examining the challenges and obstacles in the way of fighting terrorism and how to strengthen the appropriate solutions and mechanisms to deal with terrorism at bilateral, regional, and international levels have also been announced in this conference.

B) Iran's Strategy of Applying Legal Punishment to Counter Terrorism

One of the counter-terrorism strategies of the Islamic Republic of Iran is applying legal punishment in accordance with human rights necessities, which is in line with Iran's goals of respecting human rights. The Islamic Republic of Iran has taken various actions in this field and followed various national and international policies. At the same time, Tehran has paid special attention to human rights in dealing with terrorism, so that in the way of countering terrorism, basic human rights would not be jeopardized and these actions would not lead to the possible escalation of terrorist actions.

Some of these policies that are mentioned in this section are related to the legal measures and policies for countering terrorism, which are to be employed in a way for both the prevention and eradication of the main causes of terrorism. But there is also a need to counteract the practical manifestation of terrorism in the form of terrorist attacks. However, the Islamic Republic of Iran has paid attention to both aspects.

In other words, when the preventive measures at the first stage

did not work and terrorist acts were carried out, Iran would try to curb the spread of terrorist acts through the application of legal punishment and strict implementation.

C) Iran's Strategy of Suppression in Countering Terrorism

During the last three decades, the Islamic Republic of Iran has benefited from the employment of a suppressing strategy of terrorism to deal with individuals and terrorist groups such as the Kurdistan Democratic Party, the People's Fedayee Guerrillas, MEK, the PJAK, the Jundullah, and so on. In this line, regarding various documents, including the Convention of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which recommends military operation in Article 2, Part (b), Tehran has arranged its military and security policies to curb terrorism, which in this context have involved huge human and financial costs.

Of course, in military logic, it can be emphasized that those individuals who are proven to be terrorists and are recognized as terrorists by both national and international institutions should be suppressed in any situation where military operations are possible.

Although the Islamic Republic of Iran has given importance to the suppression strategy and has resorted to military measures in order to curb terrorism, it has not forgotten to deal with the causes and roots of terrorism at any stage. Therefore, even with Iran's seriousness about the employment of the suppression strategy, it has not blocked the way for the penitent individuals to leave their past and reform, and each of them, at whatever stage they are, can still leave the terrorist cells and start their new lives in peace and security.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of terrorism is one of the challenges facing our world. Terrorist groups seriously threaten global peace and security. Terrorism means the use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to achieve a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or threat. Despite the continued spread of terrorism and the occurrence of numerous terrorist attacks all over the world, the tip of the arrow of insecurity is currently in the West Asia. Today's West Asia is so involved in complex and expanding crises and conflicts that the achievement of any comprehensive and lasting peace and stability from the perspective of its security system has dimmed, at least in the short term. To effectively address the security challenges of the West Asia at hand, the first step is a calculated and comprehensive understanding of the nature of those challenges so that a step can be

taken in order to solve them. In order to solve the ongoing crisis, the Islamic Republic of Iran has paid attention to strategic mechanisms as well as security-building in the region. However, unlike Iran, the rivals on the opposite front have considered sanctions and the military option as fruitful, regardless of the importance of negotiations and diplomatic initiatives.

Suggestions

Since today terrorism is associated with concepts such as globalization, identity, media, psychological warfare, suicide operations, and mass victims, the way to deal with it is also different compared to previous waves of terrorism. This difference, more than anything else, comes back to distinguishing the new terrorism from the previous types, which can be seen as a psychological operation against the whole society with religious and ideological justification.

1- The will to deal with terrorism should be both psychologically unbreakable and at the level of the political administration of society. In other words, the political commitment to fight terrorism is the most fundamental motivation behind all anti-terrorist activities.

2- Based on this, taking clear political decisions, especially in the field of media, along with clear and transparent differentiation between extreme and rational views of religion, plays an important role in anti-terrorism management.

3- Politicians are primarily responsible for controlling and supporting anti-terrorist tools. They can also reduce the impact of psychological operations on public opinion by insisting on the decision to fight terrorism and sending clear signals to extremist groups.

4- At the same time, politicians should have the support of strong thinktanks that include current and former members of the anti-terrorism community, as well as those who can provide a combination of their views.

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