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# An Analysis of French and Iranian Political Cartoons on Trump's Withdrawal from the JCPOA

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## Abstract

The present study was conducted to investigate how Trump's unilateral withdrawal from Iran's nuclear deal on May 8, 2018 has been framed in political cartoons published in French and Iranian media. In this paper, a thematic analysis of published cartoons available on Google images from May 8, 2018 to June 8, 2018 was conducted in both French and Farsi. Five categories of news frames identified by Semetko and Valkenburg (2002) were applied on selected cartoons to observe how these frames are used on political cartoons in French and Iranian news outlets. Findings of the study showed that withdrawal of Trump from Iran's nuclear deal has been framed mostly as a threat for France and has been considered in a bilateral perspective between USA and France. For the Iranian press the withdrawal is mostly considered as a result of Trump's mental instability and P5+1 inaction.

**Keywords***: Political Cartoons, JCPOA, France, Iran, Donald Trump, Framing*

## Introduction

While scholarly attention has been paid mostly to investigate textual or verbal discourse, visual news discourse is still a relatively under-studied realm of political discourse. As the quip goes, "A picture is worth a thousand words," newspaper editorialist cartoons use this medium to communicate complicated political and social messages. Edwards & Winkler (1987) define political cartoon as a "graphic presentation typically designed in a one-panel, non-continuing format to make an independent statement or observation on political events or social policy" (p. 360). As a form of visual discourse, political cartoons typically combine humor, satire, hyperbole, and artistic skills to highlight and accentuate political and social events. Purpose of a cartoon is informing, sensitizing, educating, persuading, or passing a message via a drawing, often accompanied by text in order to impress the public. Meaning production in political cartoons is commonly achieved through, "humorous pictorial representation and political butt or critical stance expressed in the cartoon" (Marín-Arrese, 2015, p. 1). Thus, it serves to reinforce or reshape readers' minds regarding their beliefs or points of view on specific sociopolitical issues, as well as their social and cultural attitudes (Schilperoord & Maes, 2009).

Joan L. Conners suggests that political cartoons "do need not to follow principles of objectivity we expect in news stories; rather, they are expressing opinions in parallel with newspaper editorials and opinion columns" (2005, p. 480). They have different functions and are used in different contexts to obtain a certain goal. According to Kelley-Romano and Westgate, political

cartoons "can function in a multiplicity of ways as commentary, critique, memorial, and criticism" (2007, p. 755). Thus, the cartoonists use various tools to serve these purposes- including employing symbolic elements, colors, or body positions, and applying exaggeration of one or more characteristics of personages present in the cartoon. Medhurst and DeSousa argue that political cartoons convey meaning and message by ''the use of line and form, exaggeration of physionomical features, placement within the frame, relative size of objects, relation of text to visual imagery, and rhythmic montage'' (1983, p. 236). Conners maintains that, "political cartoons provide humorous commentary, often using exaggeration of events or individual characteristics, on contemporary issues and events" (2010, p. 300).

Then, political cartoons aimed at impressing their audience serve as a stimulus for public opinion.  As Josh Greenberg put it, "Political cartoons are both informative and persuasive. Cartoons render normative judgments about social issues by employing a variety of journalistic conventions such as figures of speech, metaphors, and irony" (2002, p. 185). In fact, they are representative of striking periods and events and contribute to social and political debates.

The present paper is concerned with the ways in which political cartoonists of French media have framed Trump's withdrawal from Iran's nuclear deal (known as Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action). Thus, all cartoons affiliated with French media and available in Google images from May 8, 2018 (the date announced by Trump as US withdrawal) to June 8, 2018 were analyzed to study themes and patterns of framing. The researchers were concerned with French political cartoons, as France was an active member in the P5+1 vs. Iran negotiations in relation to Iran's nuclear deal in 2015 and new French president, Emmanuel Macron, tried to play an active role more than other members of the P5+1, to conserve the US in the deal, indeed by taking to account French interests in reestablishing economic

relations with Iran.

By conducting a case study on political cartoons about Trump's withdrawal from Iran's nuclear deal in French media, this paper attempts to answer the following questions:

RQ1-What types of news frames (according to Semetko and Valkenburg, 2002) have been chosen in these political cartoons?

RQ 2-How French critical position vis à vis Trump's decision to withdraw from Iran's nuclear deal has been reflected in French cartoons?

## I. Theoretical Framework

A frame is a central organizing idea for making sense of events suggesting what is at issue, "framing is often considered as a necessary tool for reducing complexity of an issue, given constraints of their respective media related to news holes and airtime" (Scheufele, D. A., & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 12). Entman defines framing as selecting "some aspects of a perceived reality" to enhance their salience "so as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (Entman, 1993, p. 53). Todd Gitlin explains framing as "principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation" created to profile "what matters" (1980, p. 6). Frames set parameters "in which citizens discuss public events" (Tuchman, 1978, p. IV) through "persistent selection, emphasis, and exclusion" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7). Dorman and Farhang state that frames "are simply constructions of social reality" selecting specific information such as who is quoted in the article, what details are emphasized, and so on (1987, p. 8). They believe that facts are not often of prime significance, "but rather kind of interpretation that facts receive" (1987, p. 44), and the context given to a series of events. "In journalism, context and emphasis are everything, for they transform literal truths into reassuring and legitimate acts in one instance or threatening and illegitimate behavior in another" (p. 44). Framing occurs when the press chooses "what to present and what not to present in media

coverage" (Dimitrova, 2006, p. 79). In addition, selection, and exclusion of information in "news framing can occur [...] through emphasis and elaboration" (p. 79).

The present study was conducted to investigate how Trump's unilateral withdrawal from Iran's nuclear deal (JCPOA) on May 8, 2018 has been framed in political cartoons published in French media. In this paper, five categories of news frames identified by Semetko and Valkenburg (2002), about nature of news in the U.S and Europe were applied including conflict, human interest, responsibility, economic consequences, and morality frames.

In their analysis of news frames, Semetko and Valkenburg (2002) argued that a deductive approach toward news involves predefining certain frames as content analytic variables to verify the extent to which these frames occur in the news (p. 94). Thus, the researcher is provided with types of frames and the frames that are not defined a priori may not be over- looked (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2002, p. 95). This approach has its own advantages, "it can be replicated easily, coping with large samples, and easily detecting differences in framing between media (e.g., television vs. press) and within media (e.g., highbrow news programs or newspapers vs. tabloid-style media)" (p. 95).

Accordingly, Semetko and Valkenburg investigated the following five news frames as identified in earlier studies:

In *Conflict frame,* attention of the audience is captured via portrayal of conflict between individuals, groups, or institutions as a means of capturing audience interest (Neuman, Just & Crigler, 1992, pp. 61–62). Semetko and Valkenburg argue that political elites often tend to reduce complex political debates to excessively simplistic conflicts. As a result, the news media have been criticized for inducing public cynicism and mistrust of political leaders (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997).

*Human interest frame* attempts to humanize and add an emotional aspect to the issue, event or problem (Neuman et al., 1992) to produce a product capturing and retaining audience interest (Bennett, 1995).

*Economic consequences frame* reports an event, problem, or issue in terms of its economic consequences on an individual, group, institution, region, or country (Neuman et al. 1992). Extensive effect of an event has an important news value, and economic consequences are often considerable (Graber, 1993).

*Morality frame* puts the event, problem, or issue in context of moral/religious prescriptions. This is often referred to indirectly—through quotation or inference—with someone else raising the question (Neuman et al., 1992). Such a story may include moral messages or offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave.

*Responsibility frame* presents an issue or problem so as to attribute the responsibility for its cause or solution either to government or to an individual or a group (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2002).

Thus, in the present paper, this deductive framework is used on the current case study to detect differences in framing between media in order to answer to the research questions.

Political cartoons of the present research, a case study of Trump's withdrawal from Iran's nuclear deal as depicted in French news media were collected through the following process: The first selection of cartoons was made by searching a combination of keywords "caricature Iran-États-Unis accord nucléaire" (French equivalent of "cartoons related to Iran-US nuclear deal") in Google images accessed from May 8, 2018 (the date announced by Trump as US withdrawal) to June 8, 2018. This period was chosen to provide an up-to-date corpus of cartoons illustrating perspective of French news outlets on the issue as the media began to cover Iran's nuclear deal, Trump's withdrawal extensively and relevant data started to appear in media during this particular period.

To conduct a thematic analysis, this study focused on cartoons concerned with Iran's nuclear issue: thus, all cartoons affiliated with French media were selected and those belonging to unaffiliated sources or non-French cartoons (e.g. Russian news

website "Sputnik" in French, which had numerous cartoons in relation to this subject) were removed from selection process. Also, those cartoons appeared on Google images search but did not fall in the research time duration were removed. Totally, 8 French cartoons were obtained, which were categorized thematically.

## Background of Contemporary Relation of Iran and France

**Technical and Nuclear Relations**: With the formation of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran in 1974, Iran signed a contract with France in 1975 in which France was supposed to build five nuclear power plants, to provide Iran with enriched uranium to fuel them, and to establish a nuclear research center. This collaboration lasted until 1978. Iran, besides, has provided a $ 1 billion loan to invest in building Eurodif nuclear facility. Iran and France established SOFIDIS (a 60% stake in France and a 40% stake in Iran), which owned a 25% stake in Eurodiff, along with Belgium, Spain, and Sweden. Since Iran owned 10% of its shares, it should have owned 10% of the enriched uranium produced by this center. The contract for the construction of two nuclear power plants in Darkhovin near Ahvaz in South-West, with a payment of two billion dollars to the companies Framatome, Espy-Batinoul, and Alstom Atlantique, was signed between Tehran and Paris after two years and the contract determined that 350 Iranian experts should be sent to France for training. With the victory of the Islamic Revolution, Iran suspended its contract with Eurodif demanding repayment of an Iranian $ 1 billion loan to the company while cutting off its payments to the company for uranium enrichment. Eurodif sued Iran, and the court ruled in favor of confiscating Iranian assets from the company. On the other hand, the French company Faramatome suspended its activities in Iran on October 4 under the pretext of non-compliance with its financial obligations by Iran, and Iran subsequently canceled the contract for the construction of nuclear reactors. On the other hand, François Mitterrand stated in one of his speeches in 1995 that despite Iran's

shareholding, France would not deliver any enriched uranium to Iran and refuse to return $ 1 billion. (Marini et al., 2014)

**Iran-Iraq War and France's Non-Neutrality**: After the establishment of the Republic Islamic of Iran, bilateral relations between Tehran and Paris began to deteriorate. The reception of several Iranian figures who have come into opposition with the new Iranian regime in France, such as the last prime minister of Shah Shapour Bakhtiar and the first president of the Islamic Republic Abolhassan Bani Sadr, also soured relations. (Piron, 2019)

For Adam Tarock "A particular bone of contention between the two countries was France's supply of arms to Baghdad that continued throughout the eight-year old war between Iran and Iraq" (1999:46) In fact, with Iraq attacking Iran in the wake of Saddam's hegemonic ambitions in the Middle East, the Arab and European countries, which were worried about the new revolutionary and ideological regime in Iran, generally sided with Iraq and continued to supply Iraqi military items despite UN sanctions. Iraq spent $ 40 billion on purchasing weapons from 22 countries. Among European countries, France and Germany provided the most aid to Baghdad. In 1980, with the start of the war, France stayed beside Iraq, which was France's arms industry's main customer and the country's second-largest oil exporter, and did not pay attention to the UN arms sanctions. It thus broke the Soviet monopoly on arms sales to Iraq by adhering to contracts signed in 1977 and 1979 for the sale of 60 Mirage F1s and 53 others, which were added in 1985. French arms sales to Iraq continued in the same way: In 1981-82, worth 28 billion francs, 150 Alphajet aircraft assembled in Iraq, Crotal, Roland, Exhaust, AXA tanks, and the leasing of supersonic aircraft. With the provision of pilots to the Iraqi army, the French army has been one of the most important military collaborators against Iran and alongside Iraq. (Boudier, 1987: 410) Abuzai, one of Saddam's generals, revealed that Iraqi pilots had spent a month in France training to fly the planes. (Woods, 2011: 209) France thus became the first supplier of Iraqi weapons to the West. (Krause, 1991)

French aids to Iraq did not go unanswered, and the Ba'athist regime paid $ 1 billion to the French Socialist Party in 1988. (Barnett & Martin, 2004) One of the consequences of France's support for Iraq was the problem faced by French troops and diplomats in Lebanon in the 1980s, who were targeted and harmed by Iranian supporters in Lebanon. (Ashton & Gibson, 2013: 224-225)

Thus, the Iran-Iraq war became a period of divergence between Iran and France. In France, however, the delivery of 450,000 bombs between 1983 and 1985 to Iraq, with the knowledge of the French Ministry of Defense and the French presidency, led to the Luchaire scandal. On the other hand, during these years, the French National Gunpowder and Explosives Company (SNPE) delivered 250 tons of gunpowder to Iran. Matra Company sold radar systems to Iran. Thomson-CSF delivered 200 night-vision cameras to the Iranian Air Force (Ashton, Gibson, 2013: 223)

Economic obstacles in this period were mostly related to Iran's request to close the economic development department of the French embassy and Air France offices, as well as the repayment of the $ 1 billion loan that Mohammad Reza Shah had lent to France to build the Eurodif nuclear enrichment plant.

**The End of the War: The Closeness Period**: With the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in June 1989 and the election of Ayatollah Khamenei as the leader and Hashemi Rafsanjani as president, the ambassadors of two countries that had withdrawn following a decade of tensions, gradually returned to the embassies and a new chapter of relations opened between Tehran and Paris. At this time, the talks between the representatives of the two countries, which had begun on the Eurodif case and the French debt to Iran, were tied to other issues as the two countries became more acquainted with each other's view points on international issues. In December 1991, Paris-Tehran nuclear talks were concluded and Iran's right as a shareholder in Eurodif was recognized. Between 1995 and 1999, Total signed and operated four contracts for the investment and operation of Iran's oil fields worth $ 4 billion.

(Marini et al., 2014) With the meeting of President Mohammad Khatami in Paris, the level of Iran-France relations strengthened and the volume of trade reached an unprecedented level. (Izadi, 2009)

Following the Iranian nuclear issue, France, Britain and Germany formed the European Troika in 2004 to negotiate with Iran on nuclear enrichment. After several rounds, the talks ultimately failed. Besides, with the coming to power of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in June 2006 and following the problems in the nuclear issue due to his anti-Israel positions, the relations between the two countries worsened. (Izadi, 2012:49-50) This gap widened as a result of the election of Sarkozy as President of France and the presence of Bernard Kouchner as French Minister of Foreign Affairs who were close to the US position. The second term of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency was accompanied by the intensification of the nationalist discourse on nuclear energy, and Iran's approaches to the issue of nuclear enrichment took Iran's case to the Security Council.

**The Era of Sanctions**: In the late 2000s and early 2010s, three levels of sanctions were imposed on Iran to force Tehran to abandon its nuclear program suspected of pursuing military purposes: United Nations Security Council, European Union, US extraterritorial sanctions

As a result of these sanctions, Iran's economic activities with many countries around the world, including France, were affected. (Farrar-Wellman, 2010) The overseas activities of Sepah and Melli banks (with branches in France) were stopped and restrictions on the export of LC to Iran were formed. Following the 2010 sanctions, sanctions were imposed on oil and gas equipment (loans and investments), investment insurance, Iran Shipping Company, and Iranians banks such Saderat (with branches in France), Post Bank, Mellat, Refah,  Sina. Additionally, a ban on helping to manage Iran's public debt was imposed. France shared in the pressure, and the EIH, the joint bank of Iran and Germany, was closed at France's request.

Following the 2012 sanctions, Iran's oil industry was completely sanctioned. Iranian tanker insurance was suspended. The sale of crude metals and alloys, petrochemicals, gold, and precious metals to Iran was banned. Tejarat Bank (with a branch in France) was closed at the request of Germany and the assets of the Central Bank of Iran in Europe were blocked. With the extraterritorial sanctions on Iran, which came into force on July 1, 2013, the Iranian automobile sector, along with companies supplying and exporting parts, parent companies, and credit institutions, were sanctioned by the United States, giving foreign companies a one-month deadline to leave Iran. The French company PSA, which signed a contract with General Motors in 2012, left Iran despite extensive cooperation and high sales. The result of this exit was that at the time of the embargo, Iranian car factories that assembled French cars turned to Chinese parts, and thus, despite the construction of French-branded cars in Iran, in this period, income did not go to the French mother factories. This become importance when one knows that 35 to 40% of cars made in Iran are French. It should also be noted that before 2013, the automobile sector accounted for more than 60% of French exports to Iran. (Marini et al., 2014)

**Iran's Nuclear Deal**: Trump's decision to pull the US out of nuclear deal with Iran and re-impose sanctions significantly hit a number of French businesses working in Iran. French companies which had triumphantly returned to Iranian market then found Trump's decision a difficult episode in their relation with the United States.

French president repeatedly expressed his regret about Trump's policy toward Iran's nuclear deal, as French companies had to stop their business with Iran, which in long run will bring about significant losses for French industry. These departures cost a lot on French economics. For instance, Airbus had to cancel its $ 25 billion contract (Lawder, 2018) as Renault did the same with its $780-million agreement (Nussbaum, 2018) or PSA which canceled $818-million investment (Rosemain, 2018). Total left the

giant South Pars gas field for which it had signed a project worth $4.8 billion (Selby-Green, 2018).

However, mismatch between economic power of the United States and Iran explains France desperate abandonment of Iranian market: with the US GDP, approximately thirty times higher than that of Iran (Nation Master), and the EU economy more or less comparable to that of the US, the multinationals are not really reluctant to choose between the access to Iran vis-à-vis US markets. The US dollar is also the world's dominant currency reserve and main medium for international trade. As a result, any prospects for even minor sanctions are unbearable for US allies (Rosenberg, 2018).

**Trump's Presidency**: Since his presidential campaign, Donald Trump was harshly critical toward Iran's nuclear deal expected to be lifted "all UN Security Council sanctions as well as multilateral and national sanctions related to Iran's nuclear program including steps on access in areas of trade, technology, finance, and energy" (the JCPOA preamble and Provisions, Article V).

During his campaign, Trump had promised renegotiation of the deal as one of his main issues in his foreign policy (Jacobson, 2017), stating, "This deal, if I win, will be a totally different deal" (Trump, 2015).

Since Donald Trump took office, he began his efforts to dismantle the deal, which he had repeatedly called as "terrible", or "one of the worst deals" in history; eventually on May 8, 2018, the United States officially withdrew from the deal and issued new round of sanctions against Iran.

New measures labeled by Trump as the "toughest ever" are believed to be the strongest sanctions regime imposed by Washington against a country. A few months after Trump's withdrawal, the US has not only reinstated all sanctions lifted by 2015 deal, but it has also blacklisted 300 Iranian individuals and entities, and sanctioned crucial oil, banking, and transportation sectors (U.S. Department of the Treasury).

While withdrawal caused admiration and cheer by the United States conservatives, various European countries that were among signatories of the deal including UK, France, and Germany, as well as China and Russia expressed concern and remorse at the decision.

During the period Trump suspended his decision to withdraw for a while, French president, Emmanuel Macron, tried hard to convince Trump to stay in the nuclear deal with Iran, not only because of the French interests which were expected to be obtained by French companies after the JCPOA, but also to avoid desperate issue for a multilateral approach used in this deal in an international context where Americans are unique superpower. Obviously, he did not succeed and Trump acted upon what he has promised to do since his presidential campaigns.

**Findings**

Trump's decision for withdrawal was blamed not just by politicians but also in the media. Papers and editorial notes were published and many cartoonists mark their opinions about the event all over the world. The following offers a thematic analysis of published Iranian and French political cartoons available in Google images from May 8, 2018 (the date announced by Trump for US withdrawal) to June 8, 2018, which were selected as explained in Introduction Section to make corpus of the analysis.

## II. Iranian Political Cartoons on Trump's Withdrawal

**Trump Lacks Mental Stability:** In several cartoons published by the Iranian newspapers, Trump is depicted as mentally instable man or an incontrolable infant. The cartoon in Figure 1 shows Trump as an infant in his diaper (implying a lack of self-control). Playing with the match and burning a paper with the title "US polishes the JCPOA's spirit" shows Trump's impulse to start fires deliberately, a metaphor for warmongering.

**Figure 1. [US Polishes the JCPOA's Spirit], Shargh News Agency, June, 2, 2018**

Another similar cartoon, figure 2, depicts Trump running uncontrollably toward a sign holder with the JCPOA and IAEA written on that, with TNT around his waist and ready to explode himself. An unknown figure is shouting, "bring his pills…he has gone crazy again".
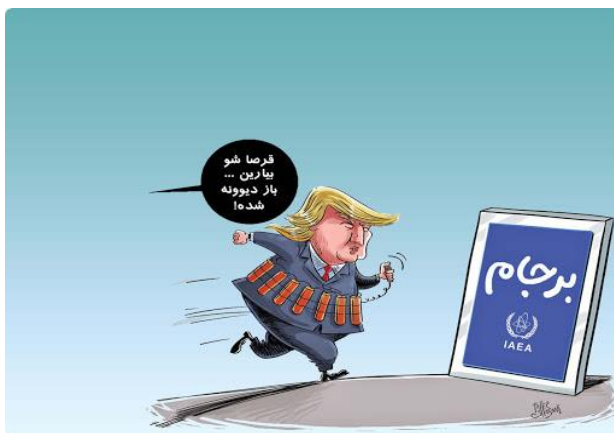


**Figure 2. [Trump's Terrorist Attack on the JCPOA], Fars News Agency, May 24, 2018**

Cartoons published by other Iranian newspapers portray similar themes that depict Trump as the one who is responsible for the

failure of the JCPOA with his childlike, irrational and impulsive behavior.

**US Shot Itself in the Foot:** Another major framing of Trump's unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA in Iranian newspapers, is representing Trump and by an extension the United States as the party that has deprived itself from the benefits of the JCPOA. The cartoon depicts Trump's podium on the verge of collapse and the US flag (as a symbol of American integrity and identity) being shattered. Similar cartons in Fars, Mashregh, Khorasannews and donya-e-eghtesad are published on the Americans as the major loser of Iran deal withdrawal.



**Figure 3. [Abandoning the JCPOA: A Historical Regret for the United States], Tasnim News Agency, May 8, 2018**

**Trump Disappointing Allies**: Many cartoons refer to Trump alienating US partners, Figure 5 shows "European allies" and other members of the p5+1 countries all one side of a teeter-totter and Trump who apparently sitting on the other side of the broad had decided to leave the game and his partners look disappointed probably referring the expectations of several parties that economic and political ties with Iran would be expanded after the JCPOA. The cartoon is also reflective the inaction and powerlessness other signatories of the Iran nuclear deal.

**Figure 4. [A Spoiled Politian Spoils the Game], Nishkhand, 13 May, 2018.**

## III. French Political Cartoons on Trump's Withdrawal

**Frustration of French President**: Among caricatures spotted, theme of the French's frustration, represented by French president has an important place. Frustrated and deprived of advantages acquired by France, French president finds himself in a weak position, facing a person like Trump who ignores him and does what suits himself. In drawings, Trump is presented as bold and blunt, indifferent to his entourage, without taking into account considerations of "his allies": closed eyes seen in the character representing Trump in several drawings clearly testify this impression. But as thoughtless as Trumps decision appears, he knows how to draw benefits from it.

In a cartoon spotted in French news site *present.fr*, cartoonist Chard portrays three characters: Macron, Trump and a woman that could be designated as personification of France insofar as she has worn the Phrygian cap, worn by French revolutionaries and today is a symbol of Marianne on official emblem of France. She also wears a tricolor skirt in colors of French flag. Behind her, Trump, standing tall, eyes closed is tearing the nuclear agreement in total composure; the woman challenges the character of Emanuel Macron by reproaching this result. "I thought he listens

to you" she says an affirmation showing that the woman, representing French nation and therefore , interests of France, relied on vigilance of Macron and his conviction to avoid this "disaster". With his legs and hands tight, showing his discomfort and frustration, Macron replies that Trump only listens to himself when he says "the same thing" that Trump says.



**Figure 5. Christian Daisug, ''Trump torpille l'accord sur le nucléaire iranien'' [Trump torpedoes Iran's nuclear deal], Present.fr, May 9, 2018.**

**Denunciation of American Unilateralism:** Cartoons identified in French corpus clearly denounce American unilateralism. The *Echo* cartoonist resorted to animalization metaphor by presenting Trump as a shark with blond hair, still with his eyes closed moves forward at full speed while biting with fine teeth, gripping its prey, which here is Iranian flag. A small fish trying to catch the shark represents France with a head likened to the face of Macron and carrying a French flag saying, "important thing is that he heard the voice of France." However, despite France having made efforts to prevent Trump from taking a decision endangering the French interests, the Trump-Shark does not hesitate to follow his own intuition of attacking Iran.
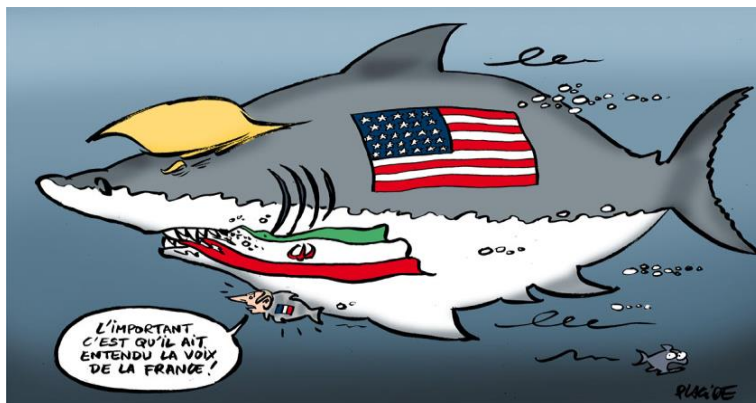
**Figure 6. Placide, ''Trump déchire l'accord sur le nucléaire iranien''**
**[Trump tears up Iran's nuclear deal], l-Echo.fr, May 9, 2018.**

This unilateralism is also visible in drawings where the cartoonists portray the nuclear agreement as "USA-Iran agreement", which is contrary to multilateral nature of the agreement between Iran and the P5 + 1. In this regard, *Charlie Hebdo*'s cartoonist did not hesitate to take title of "Iran rejected by Trump" on occasion of the American withdrawal from the JCPOA. This drawing depicts an Iran turned into a country trying to mimic America's policies to "please" Trump. From his verbal signs "slogan of *Make Iran great again*" to his appearance (Trump's haircut followed by the Pasdarans),[1] through his obsessions (excessive use of Tweeter), this drawing not only includes features related to Trump, but also American culture (Mc Do, Hollywood) or other famous American personalities (Spielberg, Harvey Weinstein). According to the cartoon, Iran may well assimilate to the American life style and conform to Trump's obsessions, this staging promoted by a "mullah" in middle of the drawing failed to prevent Trump from "rejecting" Iran. The latter then takes the United States as its main interlocutor and exit of Trump is considered as an American rejection vis-à-vis Iran; meanwhile France is absent in all these

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transformations.

**Trump's Bellicose:** The French vision of Trump's bellicosity has been reflected in cartoons attributing warlike characteristics to the current US president. On cover of the *Courrier International*, Trump's face, sketched by a drawing, recognizable by blond hair, is masked in the middle by a bomb thrown; which seems to be by an airplane. Arrangement of the bomb gives a particular effect to drawing with an upper part of the bomb having two "wings" conform to places where the eyes should always be, and are closed to lower part of this bomb constituting nose of the character. A big nose staged by a bomb recalls famous story of Pinocchio and his nose which becomes long when he indulges in lies. This arrangement of the bomb on this face also gives an impression of a clown face, involving a virulent criticism towards Trump who is designated as a dynamiter [le dynamiteur] by the title.
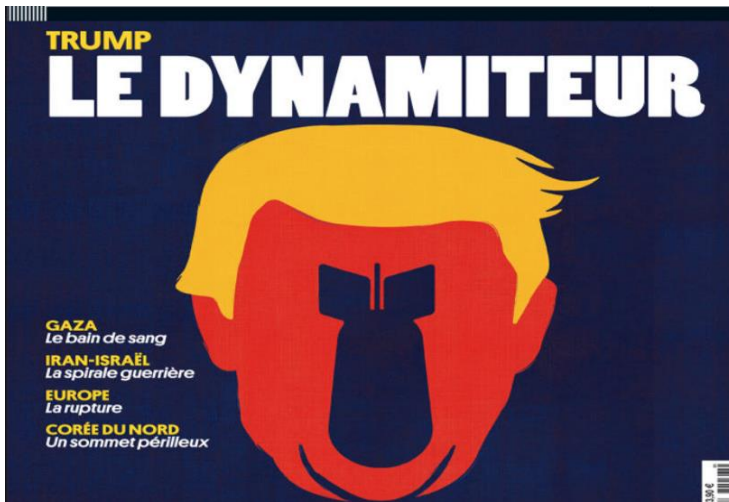


**Figure 7. ''Trump Le Dynamiteur'' [Trump the Dynamiter],** *Courrier international***, May 17, 2018.**

Another drawing spotted at *tvlibertes.fr* illustrates Trump and Macron standing side by side. Trump positions himself as a cowboy and shoots with his hand gesture to the front with an open

mouth shouting "Bâââm" thus targeting Iran's nuclear deal. Trump's body posture, yelling and frowning, as well as fear found in the character representing Macron who does not dare to look ahead, hiding his eyes with his hands, shows danger regarding withdrawal from the nuclear agreement for world peace in general. Moreover, expression on Trump's face also shows that he feels no pity while shooting and thus, occurrence of a war is predictable.



**Figure 8. Ignace, ''Far West au Proche-Orient'' [Far West in Middle East],** *Tvlibertes.com***, May 9, 2018.**

## Conclusion

In analyzed cartoons, Trump's decision to withdraw from the JCPOA was perceived differently by Iranian and French cartoonist. However, similarities can be found in the ways in which French and Iranian cartoonists depict the withdrawal. French cartoons considered it as an act against the French interest requiring a reaction from French politicians who appear powerless in relation to this matter. However, an analysis of Iranian cartoons shows that Iranian cartoonists consider Trump's decision as major blow to his own image and the United States. Also Iranian

cartoonists were critical of other P5+1 countries' inaction.

It can be argued that, the JCPOA, negotiated by the P5+1 countries was framed mostly in French media as a Franco-American interaction, in this regard reaction of French president vis-à-vis Trump's withdrawal is required. This shows how American unilateralism is a matter of concern for French media and US-France conflict of interest is a keyword in Franco-American relations, particularly in Trump's era. Thus, a multilateral agreement between the P5+1 dismantled by Trump's unilateral withdrawal has been framed in analyzed cartoons from a bilateral perspective. On one hand, this shows somehow anti-American policy in French vision and on the other hand importance of recognizing the France as a great power in international relations. For the Iranian cartoonist the blame of the Trump's withdrawal is also shared by the European Union.

Absence of human interest frame and morality frame in both Iranian and French cartons is of significate. Both French and Iranian cartoonist are focused on the political aspect of the withdrawal and repercussions on Iranian population is ignored. French cartoonists have framed this act in a perspective of bilateral relations between France and US and somehow ignored its effect on main stakeholders of this agreement, namely Iran. For the Iranian cartoonist the political aspect is the major area of concern.

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# Iran's Geopolitical Strategy in the West Asia: Containment of 'Geography' and 'History'

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## Abstract

The depth and extension of Iran's controversial connections with its proxies have caught eyes and thoughts. While much ink has been spilled to Iran's regional policy, the majority of these analyses, either intuitively or deliberately, build their explanation on the so-called 'Persian-Shia offensive intentions'. Conversely, the present paper seeks the roots of Iran's regional policy in its specific geography and history. From this perspective, Iran's regional policy is inseparable from its geopolitical strategies. To shed light on these strategies, the paper begins with the rise of the Persian Achaemenes until the establishment of the Islamic Republic, focusing on major driving forces behind Iran's regional policy and strategies. The paper elaborates on a foundational concept of 'strategic loneliness', as Iran's permanent feature, by highlighting the country's curse of geography and its long-standing historical insecurity. In following, it shows the consequential impact of Iran's strategic loneliness for the country's non-state foreign policymaking strategic connections with military non-state actors—in the containment of its regional enemies. The paper ultimately argues that while this policy has kept Iran's national integrity and security while entrapped the country in a durable 'geopolitical predicament' and deepened regional crisis in the Middle East.

**Keywords**: *Geopolitics, Strategic Loneliness, Historical Insecurity, Non-State Foreign Policy, Geopolitical Predicament*

## Introduction

The Persian Dilemma has been still catching eyes and thoughts of the western analyses. Once used to be the U.S. close ally in West Asia, Iran has rejected the post-Cold War order in the Middle East through its support for the political and military non-state actors. The majority of analyses on the pivotal factors responsible for Iran's regional policy, either intuitively or deliberately, build their explanation less on Iran's national and regional interests rather than on essentially and immortally cultural-ideological-normative narratives manifested in Iranian leaders' so-called 'Persian-Shia offensive intentions'.

To avoid such long-standing blind spots, an alternative explanation of major driving forces for Iran's regional policy should unchain itself from mainstream analytical biases and, in return, focus on pivotal factors with undeniable roles in the formation, dynamics, and trajectory of this policy. From this perspective, the article sets forth a new understanding of Iran's geopolitical strategy of support for its proxies. The paper explicates the evolution of Iran's geopolitical strategy as the unfolding of constant interaction among its specific geography and history. "What factors, at what levels of analysis and through what mechanisms have shaped Iran's geopolitical strategy?" This is the central question that guides the analytical narrative in the present paper. Within this framework, the paper tracks down Iran's geopolitical strategy in the region with regards to its 'Non-State Foreign Policy'. In following, the paper traces the major roots of this strategy by highlighting the concept of the 'strategic loneliness' as the country's permanent feature. In the next step,

the paper traces this concept by focusing on the country's historical insecurity and its specific geography. Last but not least, it assesses the broad contours of Iran's regional policy as well as its possible future path(s) for the regional balance of power in the West Asia with a focus on Iran's 'geopolitical predicament'. In short, the article focuses on more durable and consequential factors in shaping its geopolitical strategy: Iran's Geography and History.

## I. Iran's Non-State Foreign Policy

A geopolitical strategy seeks to enhance the state's security and prosperity. It refers to concepts of strategy and geopolitics. On the one side, strategy is about how force is being contemplated. According to Freedman, strategy is the art of creating power to obtain the max political objective using available military means (Freedman, 1992). From this perspective, strategy is the product of dialogue between policy and military power (Gray and Sloan, 2014: 169), reconciling political ends with military means. On the other side, geopolitics examines the impact of geography on politics. It is concerned with how geographical factors affect the relations between states and the struggle for world domination (Foster, 2006: 1). Interconnecting power, world order, and geography, Geopolitics is the spatial study and practice of international relations in a way that international, regional, and local politics has a geopolitical dimension (Gray and Sloan, 2014: 164). Connecting physical geographical with a power struggle, geopolitics feeds a strategic imagination(s). Combining two concepts of geopolitics and strategy, the geopolitical strategy is the merger of strategic considerations with geopolitical factors. It is a strategy and foreign policy mainly guided by geographical factors while shaping political and military planning.

Within this context, the geopolitical strategy is derived by geopolitical narratives while targeting specific geographical locations. On the one side, geopolitical strategy refers to a specific strategy originated from a geopolitical narrative(s). These narratives inspire specific strategies for statesmen to increase national power and security. At the same time, the geopolitical

strategy targets a specific geographical location(s). From this perspective, George Kennan's famous Containment strategy "by the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points" (Kennan, 1947) was not a geopolitical strategy since it did not refer to specific geographical locations. Conversely, Nicholas Spykman's theory of 'Rimland' advocated a geopolitical strategy through targeting specific geographical locations: "Who controls the rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world (Spykman, 2017). Like any strategy, geopolitical strategy requires utilizing military means and presence in specific geographical locations, normally coterminous with the opening of military bases and building a network of state and non-state alliances. Concisely put, geopolitical strategy is a manifestation of a state's shaping, rather being shaped, power on the globe.

Iran's geopolitical strategy is manifested in extensive networks with its regional proxies. In the post-American invasion of Iraq at 2003, these networks expanded to an unprecedented level as such that King Abdullah of Jordan coined a controversial phrase of the Shia Crescent in late in 2004. "If pro-Iran parties or politicians dominate the new Iraqi government, a new 'crescent' of dominant Shia movements or governments stretching from Iran into Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon could emerge to alter the traditional balance of power between the two main Islamic sects and pose new challenges to the U.S. interests and allies," the King claimed (Wright and Baker. 2004). Sunni Arab leaders of the region have intertwined Iran's revolutionary ideology of political Shia Islam as a final driving force for the formation of the Shia Crescent. Accordingly, the Islamic Revolution of 1979 marks a genuine change of heart in the trajectory of Iran's regional policy. Nonetheless, this view ignores to trace the roots of Iran's support for its regional proxies before the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the late1950s, Pahlavi Iran initiated a heavy support for the Iraqi Kurds, led by Mullah Mustafa Barzani, to contain the Soviet-backed, pan-Arab regime of Baghdad.

Simultaneously, Iran began backing the remote, isolated community of the Lebanese Shia as Seyyed Musa Sadr left Tehran to Tyre. Interestingly, the Islamic Republic of Iran followed the same strategy, fueled by revolutionary ideology of political Shia Islam. Indeed, Iran's geopolitical strategy is part of its 'non-state foreign policy'. This policy relates to how a state—Iran—builds and manages ties with a non-state actor(s) through mechanisms beyond the common foreign policy (Reisinezhad, 2018: 3). Crafted to contain regional threats, Iran's non-state foreign policy has been shaped around the armature of strategic connections with political-militant groups and movements in the region. Iran's support for the military and political non-state actors in the region emerged in the midst of the Cold War while reached its zenith in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The continuity of Iran's non-state foreign policy for more than sixty years reaffirms that the root of Iran's geopolitical strategy is not revolutionary ideology of political Shia Islam.

## II. Geopolitical Foundation and Iran's Strategic Loneliness

Pahlavi Iran's support for the non-state actors shows that the final driving force behind Iran's geopolitical strategy is its 'historically strategic loneliness'. First coined by Mohiaddin Mesbahi, a prominent Iranian strategist, strategic loneliness refers to the fact that "Iran by design and by default has been strategically 'lonely' and deprived of meaningful alliances and great power bandwagoning" (Mesbahi, 2011: 9-34). It refers to the fact that Iran is lonely in both planning and operationalizing strategies as well as resisting against its enemies' strategies. strategic loneliness reaffirms that the cornerstone of Iran's national security is not predicated on its relations with the great powers. In contrast to Israel and Turkey whose national security doctrine have been predicated on the strategic alliance with the US and NATO, respectively, Iran lacks any strategic ally. More significantly, Iran's strategic loneliness does not mean Iran's isolation. Indeed, its geographical centrality, revolutionary ideology and intricate tension with the U.S. have intensified Iran's loneliness, while

made the country "busily engaged at the core and crossroads of all major regional and occasionally global issues of significant systemic ramification" (Mesbahi, 2011). Concisely put, 'geopolitical isolation' is an absurd concept for a country like Iran who has been historically under geopolitically systemic pressure.

Undoubtedly, Iran's strategic loneliness intensified with the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the following Hostage Crisis. Later, it was the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88) that reaffirmed strategic loneliness as revolutionary Iran fought a notorious, totalitarian Baath regime supported by both Cold War superpowers and their allies. Since the 90s, Iran has been under crippling sanctions for its nuclear program and support for its regional proxies. Only months ago, Iran paid its price when it lost Major General Soleimani as no country sided with Tehran in its response to the U.S. It was the most recent manifestation of Iran's strategic loneliness wherein the country was deprived of an effective state allies.

Nevertheless, strategic loneliness was not the Islamic Republic of Iran's exclusive characteristic. In the nineteenth century, the Qajar kings of Iran unsuccessfully tried to side with the third power, including France and the U.S., to neutralize the powerful Russians and British influence in the country. Only after losing vast provinces in Caucasia, Central Asia, and South Asia, they found out that Iran lacked a natural ally. Despite his hatred towards his Qajar predecessors, Reza Shah Pahlavi followed the same logic as he began flirting with Nazi Germany. However, he soon paid the price when he was forced to resign from the crown in 1941 right after the Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran. The Shah had also felt, by instinct and experience, Iran's omnipresent strategic loneliness. In contrast to the mainstream view, he never felt the U.S. full support for Iran. He knew that the United States' attention to Iran is not genuine. In the late 40s, the Shah was told by the U.S. ambassador that "America would never go to war with the Soviets on account of Iran, to save Iran" (Parsi, 2007: 25). He was fully aware that in the case of the Soviet direct or indirect assault, particularly under Moscow or one of its regional allies' invasion, no country would guarantee Iran's national integration.

Neither Iran-United States mutual defense agreement of 1959, nor the Baghdad Pact of 1955 and its heir, the CENTO of 1959, removed his geopolitical concerns. In his 1974 trip to Moscow, the Shah clarified his real view towards regional pacts and told Brezhnev, "… I want to share one of my experiences with you. That is, international organizations and alliances are nonsense and ineffective. …" (Alam, 1995: 249-250). In the zenith of the Cold War, Iran was surrounded by the Soviet and its regional allies in Afghanistan and Iraq. Turkish and Pakistani states were unstable and the Arab Sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf were weak. Not surprisingly, the Shah saw his country lacking a natural ally and, thus, felt insecure. "We are in a terrible situation since Moscow's twin pincers coming down through Kabul and Baghdad surround us," the Shah had shared his insecure feeling with his close aide, Assadollah Alam (Alam, 1995: 259). Pahlavi Iran's strategic loneliness illustrated that the country lacked a reliable ally(s), particularly under military threats. In the Shah's geopolitical calculation, relation with the U.S. as well as defensive regional pacts did not fully compensate Iran's strategic loneliness. It was in this historical juncture that Pahlavi Iran built a non-state foreign policy with the Iraqi Kurds and, to a lesser degree, the Lebanese Shia to compensate Iran's strategic loneliness and lack of reliable ally.

Pahlavi Iran's non-state foreign policy was later followed by the Islamic Republic, though this time under the alleged title of 'the Export of the Revolution'. Revolutionary Iran soon saw itself surrounded by the two superpowers and their allies. The bloody War with Baath Iraq reaffirmed that Iran was under permanent siege. Even in the post-war era, the US-orchestrated crippling sanctions intensified Iran's historical strategic loneliness. For more than four decades, Iran has lacked great power allies in confronting the United States of America. Not surprisingly, the Revolutionary leaders reached a similar determining conclusion that Iran has no choice but to rely on strategic connections with military and political non-state actors in the region to keep the

country's national security safe. Succinctly put, what lurks beneath Iran's non-state foreign policy is less predicated on Iran's ideology and the policy of the export of the Revolution rather than its historical strategic loneliness.

Strategic loneliness, a major driving force for Iran's non-state foreign policy, has led to a crucially lasting consequence for Iran's geopolitical strategy: defending the country's national security and territorial integrity beyond its borders. Iran's strategic loneliness lead to the very consequential facts for Iran's regional policy. First, and as history proves, there has been a naturally strategic alliance among Iran's regional foes. Phrased differently, pressing and even destroying Iran is the key commentator of the regional states and their great allied powers, despite their harsh tensions. Second, a mere defense of its national integrity at the frontline borders would lead to destructive defeats and national humiliation. Within this context, building strategic connections with non-state actors—the Iraqi Kurdish guerillas in the Pahlavi era and then Shia groups during the Islamic Republic—is a vital asset for Tehran to contain regional and global threats. In other words, the deployment of Iranian forces to conflict abroad is a notable struggle of Iran's power projection beyond its territory to compensate its strategic loneliness and to deter external threats. From Pahlavi to the Islamic Republic, Iranian leader has been confronted by similar, durable consequences rooted in Iran's strategic loneliness. It does not matter if the ideology of those in charge is nationalist/secular or Islamist/religious—Iran lacks natural defensive borders and its strategic loneliness is still vivid. On the contrary way, they took the same geopolitical strategy in keeping Iran's national integrity through siding with political and militant non-state actors in the region. Phrased differently, strategic loneliness has convinced the Iranian leaders to seek to defend Iran's national integrity beyond its borders through an effective non-state foreign policy. In short, strategic loneliness is the foundation of Iran's geopolitical strategy that guides the country's regional policy in the West of Asia.

## III. Historical Insecurity

Iran's 'strategic loneliness is rooted in its historical insecurity (Reisinezhad, 2018: 325). A summary of Iran's long history shows a durable pattern that shaped its strategic loneliness and, in following, geopolitical strategy. As the oldest, vivid nation of the world, Iran was born as a regional hegemon when Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon on 29th October, 539 B.C. Since the collapse of the Achaemenid in 330 BC, Iran's fate oscillated between 'destructive occupation' and 'military encirclement'. After its glorious dawn at history, Iran was, by and large, forced to take the defensive position, rather than offensive ones. Regional powers and nomadic invasions imposed non-stopping threats to Iran's national integrity and security. The only exception was Nader Shah's short reign (1736-1747 AD) who revived Iran's regional hegemony temporarily. Furthermore, non-stopping wars with major regional powers sapped Iran's capacity, while left the country weak to contain more unknown, yet dangerous, external threats. Continuous geopolitical pressure also made Iranian sovereigns preoccupied constantly with fighting external invaders. Not surprisingly, Iran's central power was prone to internal threats and riots that challenged the country's national security. Succinctly put, Iran was under siege, destructive occupation, and internal collapse for more than two millenniums.

The first Persian dynasty, the Achaemenid (550-330 BC), was founded by Cyrus the Great (559-530 BC). Conquering Lydia in Minor Asia and Neo-Babylon in Mesopotamia and the Levant, Cyrus established from Fergana Valley and Indus River in the east to Gaza Strip and Bosphorus Strait in the west. His son and successor, Cambodia (530-522 BC), conquered Egypt, Nubia, and Eastern Libya. Later, Darius the Great (522-486 BC) ruled the vastest empire the world had seen, from Libya and Danube in the West to Kashmir and Pamir Plateau in the East (Hinz, et al, 1992). Iran's regional dominance at the time was not merely based on military achievements; rather, it was also predicated on an unprecedented religious-cultural tolerance first imposed by Cyrus the Great (Koch, 1992; Holland, 2005). Heralding a cosmopolitan view of human rights much earlier than its modern version, this

unique vision of religious freedom legitimized the longevity of the Achaemenes dynasty for about two decades. It was only the Greek city-states of Athens and Sparta that challenged 'the Pax Persica'. The Greco-Persian Wars of 499-449 BC ended the Persian's successful military campaigns and left the Europe safe of the Persian rule. In response, the Persian kings began adopting a policy of divide-and-rule (Dandamaev, 1989: 256), setting Sparta against Athens to prevent the Greek city-states from turning their military campaigns to Persia. The Peloponnesian Wars of (479-431 BC) were major manifestations of the Persian version of 'Dual Containment' policy, ultimately led to the 'King's Peace' that recognized Persian hegemony in the Aegean Sea (Xenophon, 2000). Surprisingly, the Persian Empire was collapsed in 330 BC by a new-emerged, yet unknown, force: the Macedonian. It was Iran's first state destruction.

Iran was then ruled by Alexander and his successors in Asia, the Seleucid (312 BC–63 BC), for more than a century. Iran eventually revived again under the Parthian Arsacid (247 BC-224 AD). Extending Iran's territory from the Euphrates to Indo-Kush for almost five centuries, the Parthian Empire was surrounded by the Romans in the west and the Kushan Empire in the east (Sarkhosh and Stewart, 2017). It was Iran's first military encirclement in history. In contrast to the Achaemenid, the Parthian never enjoyed a strong will for regional hegemony nor had the capacity to impose it (Farrokh, 2007; Rae, 2014). Unstoppable wars with the eastern nomads and, particularly, the Roman legions put the country in a defensive position (Sheldon, 2010). The geopolitical power competitions sapped the Arsacid government and left the country prone to domestic challenges as such that the Parthian reign was finally overthrown Persian Sassanid.

Iran's defensive regional policy did not, by and large, change during the second Persian Empire, the Sassanid (224-651 AD), that ruled a vast territory from Kashmir and Transoxiana to the Euphrates and the Black Sea. Although the Sassanid kings were

more successful in defeating regional threats, they were, just like their Parthian processors (Daryaee, 2014), surrounded by the Roman and then Byzantium in the west and the Huns and then the Turks in the east for more than four centuries. In this era, Iran's military encirclement became harsher since in several instances there were strategic alliances between the Byzantium and the Turks in launching invasions of Iran's territory (Dignas and Winter, 2007; Maksymiuk, 2015). Continuous wars in eastern and, particularly, western fronts weakened Iran's military forces and paved the way for its second destruction. For the second time, a new-emerged, yet unknown force of the Arab Muslims conquered Iran.

Under the Arab Caliphate rule of the Rashidun (632-661 AD) and, especially, the Umayyad (661-674 AD), Iranians challenged Arab racist dominance—in contrast to Islam's message of equality and fraternity of all Muslim—through sequential, yet unsuccessful, uprisings.[1] Led by Abu Muslim,[2] Iranians ultimately overthrew the Arab Umayyad and replaced them with the more-Persianized Abbasid in 750 AD. They gradually re-established their local governments; however, the nomadic Turkmen invasion of 1040 AD postponed Iran's full revival. Notwithstanding, the strength and attraction of Iranians culture and civilization Persianized TurkIC dynasties.[3] In the end, unknown military forces of Mongols and then the Tatar totally destroyed the country in three waves of invasion—led by Genghis Khan, Hulagu Khan, and Tamerlane—and left the country in the dark decades between

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2. His real name was Behzadan son of Vandad Hormoz.

3. These dynasties included Ghaznavid (977-1186 D), the Seljuk (1037-1194 AD), and the Khwarazmian (1077-1231 AD).

the mid 12th to the late 15th centuries.

After three centuries of continuous destruction, Iran finally reemerged under the Safavid (1501-1756 AD). Shah Ismail I (1501-1524 AD) reunited the country and ruled a vast territory from Euphrates and Transcaucasia to Hindukush and Oxus (Newman, 2008). More significantly, he reconstructed Iran's national identity by injecting the Twelver Shia Islam onto the Iranian plateau. The emergence of a new, powerful Shia state in the region had a huge ramification for other Shia communities in the West Asia while urged Sunni powers of the Ottoman Empire in the west and Uzbek Khanate in the east to ally against the Shia Safavid. For the next time, Iran was surrounded, though this time it was much more intensified since the geopolitical competition in Western Asia overlapped by geocultural forces of the Shia-Sunni dichotomy (Fragner, 2005). Such a harsh encirclement put the country again in the defensive position, made Safavid kings be constantly preoccupied with fighting Sunni powers in the western and eastern fronts, and ultimately left the country prone to domestic rebels. In the end, the Safavid kingdom was overthrown by Sunni Afghan rebels of Qandahar (Matthee, 2011).

For almost a century, Iran fell in the pitfall of chaos until Nader Shah (1736-1747 AD) emerged. As the last 'conquer of Asia', (Axworthy, 2009) Nader decisively defeated the Sunni powers of the Ottoman Turks and Uzbek Khans. The zenith of his undefeatable military campaigns was the conquest of Delhi, the capital city of the Indian Great Mughal. In the aftermath of the fall of the Persian Achaemenid Empire, it was the only time that Iran revived its regional preponderance, though time its regional hegemony was short. With Nader's assassination in 20 June 1747, chaos became omnipresent in Iran until the establishment of the Qajar reign in the late 18th century. The only exception was a short period of Karim Khan Zand (1751-1779 AD) who brought peace for the country for only two decades.

**Search for Strength**: In the aftermath of Nader Shah's assassination, Iran's encirclement was gradually revived;

however, this time western powers of Tsarist Russia and the United Kingdom surrounded the country. In the early years of the Qajar reign, the Russian began making effort to reach the Persian Gulf to compensate for their historical lack of warm-water port. Russia finally conquered Iran's historical territories of the Caucasus in the Russo-Persian Wars (1804-1813 and 1826-1828). Since then, Russian expansionism permanently overtook Qajar kings' nightmares. At the same time, the British completed conquest of the Indian subcontinent.[1] Since then, defending the jewel in the British crown determined the trajectory of the Persian-British relation (Mahmud, 1999). Fully aware of the historical fact and geographical logic that the only land route to conquer India was Khyber Pass,[2] London obsessively intervened in Iran's domestic affairs to prevent the rise of 'Nader the Second'. Not surprisingly, they attacked south of Iran when Tehran had retaken Heart from the Afghan rebels and then forced Naser al-Din Shah Qajar to cede Heart and western Afghanistan to British-backed Kabul emirate in the Treaty of Paris (1857). Indeed, Iran's first encounter with international level of global politics ended in humiliating defeats.

Beyond the Qajar's weakness, what lurked beneath these sequential defeats was the 'Great Game' as the hallmark of Russian-British geopolitical competition of the 19th century in Eurasia. While Russian tsars were worried about the British annexation of Emirate of Afghanistan and Central Asia, the British planned to contain Russian inroads into South Asia by making Afghanistan a protectorate and using a geostrategic belt of buffer states stretching from Khanat Khiva in the east to the Ottoman Empire in the west (Gebb, 1983). At the center of this

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1. Nader's conquest of Delhi after the Battle of Karnal of 24 February 1739 facilitated the British dominance over the Indian subcontinent. In other words, while his victory confirmed Iran's regional preponderance in the short term, it paved the way for the British final defeat of the Great Mughal.
2. The eastern point of Iranian Plateau and northwest of modern Pakistan border with Afghanistan.

belt lied Iran. Thus, efforts of controlling Iran determined the trajectory of Russian-British friction while transformed Iran to its major battlefront of the Great Game (Ewans, 2004). Within this context, Iran's full independence vanished by unstoppable loss of national territory. Surrounded by two powerful empires of the time, the Persian kings followed a delicate, yet notorious, balance by giving the Russian and the British economic privileges to prevent Iran's full disintegration. Until the end of the Great Game, Iran had lost vast territories in the northeast to Russia and southeast to the British-backed Kabul and British India.[1] The Great Game had kept capturing the Iranian Court and elites and shaped Iran's regional and internal policies.

In the middle of all these dark days, Iran lacked a strategic ally in crafting its independent foreign policy. Moscow and London never accepted the presence of the third power, including the French and the American, in Iran's affairs. Neither French nor American was permitted as a major player in Iran. The worst yet to come. The UK and Russia ultimately agreed to stop the Great Game competition in the Pamir Boundary Commission protocols of 1895 only to prevent Germany (Gerard, 1897; Siegel, 2002). Later, the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 divided Iran's territory into three zones of influence and paved the way for a broader London-Moscow alliance against rising Germany. Indeed, the centroid of anti-German alliance was neither in Eastern Europe or the Western Front; rather, it was Iran (Frankopan, 2016). These transformations showed a bitter reality to Iranian

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1. According to the Treaty of Akhal of 1881, Iran ceased claim to Khwarazm and Transoxiana and lost its provinces in Turkestan. The treaty also set the Atrek River as Iran-Russia border in the east of the Caspian Sea and recognized Moscow's sovereignty over Iranian historical city of Merv and Eshgh Abad. Iran also lost eastern part of Baluchistan (modern Pakistan Baluchistan) to Britain in Haldich (1896) and first Goldsmith of 1863 arbitrations. Iran's Qajar ceded eastern Sistan (modern southwestern Afghanistan provinces of Nimruz, Helmand, and Farah) in the Second Goldsmith of 1872 and MacMahon 1903 Arbitrations.

elites that a long-term, yet catastrophic, the balance of Russia and Britain would not be effective if their surrounding predators put aside their rivalries.

Humiliating defeats and treaties, particularly Turkmenchay and Paris, shattered down the country's national pride. Iran's fiasco in Russo-Persian Wars and loss of Heart constructed a severe 'geopolitical headache' for a country with a deep-rooted 'sense of greatness'. Emerged out of the Iranians' vivid collective memory of their country's past glory, Iran's sense of greatness has been a major driving force for both the polity and society. Influenced by the European Enlightening, a newly-appeared class of Iranian intellectuals began seeking a solution to disentangle the country from national humiliation (Tabatabaie, 2007). Considering that revision of history plays with collective memory, these intellectuals injected a popular demand for national strength to contain regional and global threats in a newly-constructed civil society by highlighting Iran's glorious past. These efforts triggered the rise of national sentiments in the country, and ultimately culminated in the Constitutional Revolution of 1906. Phrased differently, continuous geopolitical headache along with a national sense of greatness was culminated in a domestic pressure and revolution in the hope to strengthen the country and contain regional and global threats.

Nevertheless, the next catastrophes plagued Iran: World War I and II. Although Iran declared neutrality in both destructive wars, the country was occupied due to its geostrategic position and vast oil fields. In World War I, Iran became a major battleground in Asia wherein the Russian Tsarist and the UK fought the Ottoman army and German fifth column. State collapse delegitimized Qajar monarchy and paved the way for Reza Khan—later Reza Shah Pahlavi—who reunited the country and revived national security. Less than a quarter of a century, Iran was occupied, this time by the Soviet Red Army and the British Royal Navy, in 1942 under the excuse of preventing the fall of the country into German Nazi orbit. For the next time, Iran was not able to escape from its

destructive fate of foreign occupation.

Such a destructive pattern continued after the world wars. Post-War Iran experienced another round of instability. In the early 50s, the Oil Nationalization Movement, led by Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh, aimed at reviving Iran's full sovereignty by nationalizing oil. Nonetheless, his national struggle soon encountered the same fate as the UK militarily surrounded the country in the Persian Gulf and imposed sanctions on Iran. Ultimately, the British-American orchestrated coup overthrew Mosaddegh's democratic government in 1953 and shattered down the Iranian longstanding struggle to unchain the country from the Great Powers' interventions (Kinzer, 2008). Despite the continuous search for strength to prevent national humiliation, Iran was not able to contain regional and global threats, mostly due to the country's lack of geopolitical strategy in the region.

## IV. The Shah, the Islamic Republic, and Iran's Non-State Foreign Policy

Iran finally disentangled itself from its longstanding fate of state collapse and military encirclement. An opportunity for this crucial transformation came knocking in the middle of the Cold War. In the post-coup era, Pahlavi Iran apparently became the U.S. major ally in the Middle East. In the meantime, the Soviet infiltration of the region, combined with the rising tide of Pan-Arabism, intensified external threats to Iran's national integrity. These threats reached their zenith with the Coup of 1958 that toppled the pro-west Hashemite monarchy and then put the Pan-Arab republic of Iraq on Moscow's orbit.

The Coup of 1958 was a turning point in Iran's geopolitical strategy in the region, though. As pro-Moscow Abdel-Karim Qasim, Iraqi new leader, threatened Iran's national security by claiming over Iran's southwestern, oil-rich province Khuzestan, SAVAK—Pahlavi Iran's National Intelligence and Security Organization—was instructed by the Shah to build a strategic connection with the Iraqi Kurds who had been subjecting to Baghdad racial discrimination policies. With Iran's full support,

Mullah Mustafa Barzani, the Kurdish leader, tied down Baghdad military machine and turned away pan-Arab Iraqi threat to Iran's territorial integrity.

Iran also supported a much more remote non-state entity: the Lebanese Shia. In the late 50s, Colonel Mojtaba Pashaie, head of the Middle East Directorate of SAVAK, suggested that "We should combat to and contain the threat in the East coast of the Mediterranean to prevent shedding blood on Iranian soil" (Reisinezhad, 2018: 1). It was the beginning of Iran's support for the Lebanese Shia. Indeed, the seed of Iranian-Lebanese Shia networks was planted in the middle of the Cold War, rather than 1979 (Reisinezhad, 2018: 2).

Direct and indirect support for the Lebanese Shia and, particularly, the Iraqi Kurds was the beginning of Iran's innovative geopolitical strategy, called 'non-state foreign policy', in the Middle East. For the first time in its long history, Iran was able to contain regional threats through its effective non-state foreign policy. Throughout his reign, the Shah stick to this type of geopolitical strategy to contain threatening Marxism and Pan-Arabism in the region. Iraqi leaders, from Qasim and Arif Brothers to al-Bakr and Saddam Hussein, were never able to crush Iraqi Kurds— Pahlavi Iran's proxy at the time—until Baghdad was forced to concede in Arvand Rud in Algiers Agreement of 1975.

Interestingly, revolutionary Iran did not change Iran's non-state foreign policy and kept supporting military proxies, though this time mostly Shia non-state actors, in the West Asia. As a "lonely yet globalized" state (Mesbahi, 2011), revolutionary Iran has massively and acutely invested on strategic capacity building power via its non-state foreign policy to contain systemic pressure. Galvanized by its popular revolutionary idea, the Islamic Republic of Iran transformed the geocultural power arrangement in the region mainly through processing a successful non-state foreign policy. Despite its sharp contrast with Pahlavi Iran's policy toward the U.S., the Islamic Republic utilized the same

geopolitical strategy in the region. This fact shows that Iran's non-state foreign policy is less an ideological policy rather than a geopolitical strategy with strong historical and geographical roots and driving forces.

**Historical Insecurity and Encirclement Mentality**: Sequential state destructions and continuous military encirclement provided Iran's durable 'historical insecurity'. Such a deep-rooted character has also been manifested in Iranian leaders' views over national security in a way that most of them believe that the country had a sharp and acute security problem (Reisinezhad, 2018: 327). This view has equalized development with 'becoming strong' ['Ghavi-Shodan' in Persian], particularly in the military domain. The Shah's vision of modernization differed significantly from the western recipe as he believed that the path to the modernization passed through heavy military reorganization, rather than socio-economic development. The Islamic Republic has also emphasized military achievement as a key figure of development and national strength. Not surprisingly, endemic missile projects are appreciated and framed as the pinnacle of the country's development. Indeed, the Iranian leaders rely less on culture or economics rather than military. What lurks beneath such a durable pattern is Iran's historical insecurity.

Iran's historical insecurity has been also manifested in its national culture, particularly in dealing with the foreigner. Highlighting pessimism, xenophobia, and conspiracy theory, Iranian national culture lacks specific elements in facilitating and easing trust to and deal with non-Iranians, particularly the great powers. In a similar vein, this view naturalizes connections between the external foreigners/non-believers and internal spies/hypocrites within Iran's dominant national culture and political psychology (Reisinezhad, 2018: 330). This context facilitates securitization of internal opponents, while, by and large, invigorating Iranian sovereigns in dealing with domestic uprisings and riots. That is why challenging the central political system would be difficult in a country with durable historical insecurity.

**Vulnerability and Proximity to the Threat Sources**: Historical experiences feed us with ideas about the meaning of geography (Gray and Sloan, 2014: 168). The historical impact of the geographical features, according to Fernand Braudel, constitutes a 'longue duree' that shapes non-altered trends and behaviors (Lee and Braudel, 2012: 2). Colin Gray is right as he cogently argues the *longue duree* is a "structure, an architectural outline that time alters little (Gray and Sloan, 2014: 16). From this point of view, any country's specific geographical features drive historical patterns. Located at the heart of the Greater Middle East, between Nile-to-Oxus, Iran sees itself as the castle of the Near East. As Robert Kaplan argues, "Just as the Middle East is the quadrilateral for Afro-Eurasia, that is, for the World-Island, Iran is the Middle East's very own universal joint. Mackinder's pivot, rather than in the Central Asian steppe-land, should be moved to the Iranian plateau just to the south" (Kaplan, 2012: 158). Indeed, Iran is a very strategic joint that bestrides in the mouth of Asia, Africa, and Europe and sits between the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea. Specific rules of geography and history are strong and transparent in Iran where territorial integrity is hard to defend. Such specificity includes two factors of 'geographical proximity to the threat sources' and 'geographical vulnerability' (Reisinezhad, 2018: 328).

Iran's proximity to the sources of the threats has been consequential for its national security and regional policy. While Tsarist Russian made efforts to reach warm water of the Persian Gulf, the UK was confident in turning a threat away from the Indian subcontinent by expanding its leverage in Iran. The historical Russian threat was then intensified with the establishment of the communist empire of the Soviets, while the rise of the Cold War pushed a new-coming superpower—United States of America—to replace the British forces in the Persian Gulf. It was in this context that the Shah argued, "We are forced to be counted as a pro-West state because we can never trust the Soviet" (Alam, 1995: 328). The Islamic Revolution, the Hostage

Crisis, and then the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War gave fertile ground for the U.S. to launch its military presence in the Persian Gulf under the 'Carter Doctrine'. Iran's proximity to the threat sources did not disappear by the collapse of the USSR; rather, it got deepened by the U.S. increasing presence in the region through chain of military bases in Iraq, Afghanistan and South shore of the Persian Gulf. In short, Iran's physical adjacency to the threat sources has not vanished yet and, in return, posed existential threats to the country's national security.

Furthermore, Iran historically suffers from its geographical *vulnerability*, referring to the fact that the country's lack of natural defensive borders (Reisinezhad, 2018: 328). In contrast to the UK and the U.S.—whose territories are surrounded by seas and vast oceans—or Switzerland—whose territory lies at the heart of mountains—Iran's borders do not overlap natural defensive lines. Such a crucial characteristic, along with Iran's geostrategic location, has historically attracted different tribes and nations to the Iranian Plateau and, in return, shaped a bedrock for Iran's 'Curse of Geography' (Reisinezhad, 2018: 329). For more than three millenniums, several nations and tribes invaded the country for 232 times and from all directions. Despite Iranian central governments' continuous defensive policies, the country was savagely devastated by the Macedonian, the Arabs, and Mongols. If God had built mountains or oceans around Iran's borders, then the Iranian Plateau would not have been such inviting territory for these invaders. It is a pure manifestation of the curse of geography.

Geography also refers to the interconnection of identity and place, rather than merely physical borders. Throughout history, Iran's geographical curse has been intensified with the country's two exclusive characteristics: Iran is the only 'Persian' and 'Shia Muslim' nation in the Middle East. Indeed, Iran has been surrounded by the sea of the Arab-Turk and Sunni people. Despite several destructive conquests of Persia, the Iranian did not lose their Persian culture and civilization—as, for instance, the

Egyptian lost their ancient identity and became Arab—and even Persianized the Macedonian, Arab, Turk, and Mongol invaders. The Iranian also demarcated their identity with the rest of the Arab-Turkic Muslim as the Safavid injected the Twelver Shia Islam onto the Iranian plateau. Since then, the expansion of the Shia branch of Islam has been intertwined with Iran's regional power. Concisely put, to be Persian and Shia have deepened Iran's strategic loneliness.

**The Middle East and Iran's Geopolitical Predicament**: Iran's non-state foreign policy has been part of Iran's geopolitical strategy of 'Containment' since 1958 (Reisinezhad, 2018). Designed to stop enemies' strategies, Iran's non-state foreign policy has targeted a specific set of threats against its national security. In the decades after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iran expanded its strategic ties with the Shia militant proxies to disentangle itself from great power politics, while highlighting his independent, yet challenging, regional policy. Strategic connections with its, mostly Shia, proxies in the region has been a central pillar, along with its endogenous missile program, in Iran's defensive policy in the region. indeed, these strategic connections have been framed as Iran's major assets, though destructive ones, in Tehran's regional foes' eyes.

Furthermore, Iran's non-state foreign policy has been a major tool to legitimize its crucial role in the West of Asia. Iranian leaders have been well aware that a state's role was the currency of power, granted to a state by its neighbors by recognizing the legitimacy of the state's interests (Doran, 1971). The focal problem here is that revolutionary Iran's regional power has not been accepted by its neighbors, thus widening a diverging gap between its current power and demanding regional role. In this situation, Tehran invests more on its strategic connections with non-state entities. In other words, the more revolutionary Iran is kept away from the regional decision-making process, the more Iran sticks to its non-state foreign policy. Therefore, this specific foreign policy has potential to be a critical tool in pushing the

regional states to grant a major regional role to Iran.

Nevertheless, Iran's non-state foreign policy has unintentionally intensified regional tension(s). One reason is rooted in the fact that the modern Middle East still lacks a strong, inclusive security institution or multi-lateral pact(s). Indeed, it has been a conflict-formed region with autonomous domestic and regional security levels. A major part of the Middle East was shaped out of the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916; therefore, the regional countries—except for Iran and Turkey—have been postcolonial insecure states with weak national identity. The regional dynamics have been also driven by ideological competitions, religious-ethnic division, oil rival policies, border disputes, and power status. According to Barry Buzan, the Middle East is a 'Classic Regional Security Complex' that reminds pre-Cold War Europe (Buzan and Waver, 2003: 187). Mainly demonstrated in harsh patterns of 'enmity-amity,' (Buzan and Waver, 2003: 9) like Persian-Arab-Turk competition as well as Shia-Sunni and Islamic/Jewish one, the regional insecurity dynamic was vigorous and durable that no great powers have effective control over the region. On the contrary, the great powers have deepened, whether deliberately or unintentionally, patterns of enmity and decreased the possibility of regional cooperation. Besides, state cooperation, particularly economic interactions, among the regional states is exceptionally low. The lack of states' overlapping interests has tarnished a dream of the establishment of a regional security institution. Within such a tense context, the security dilemma is an omnipresent issue, framing state actions, even defensive ones, as offensive actions. That is why Middle Eastern states highlight their defensive intentions while, at the same time, frame the others carry offensive actions. Not surprisingly, security and threat are keywords and common demand in the Middle Eastern, including Iranian, leaders' words.

Within this context, Iran has been trapped in a 'defensive-offensive complex' in the region (Reisinezhad, 2018: 330). As a

lonely strategic state, Iran has suffered from lacking geographical impediments, meaning that it has never been able to defend its vast territory and uncontrollable borders in the frontier zone. Notwithstanding, Iran's non-state foreign policy—a long-running search of its 'defensive' strategy beyond its borders through building strategic connections with non-state actors—facilitates framing it as Iran's 'offensive' strategy in the Middle East. In the region without a strong, comprehensive collective security institution(s), state's defensive power projection beyond its borders would be soon framed as destabilizing moves. To put it more plainly, the historical lack of regional collective security institutions has translated Iran's defensive decisions, strategies, and moves—under both Pahlavi and the Islamic Republic—to "Persian" or/and "Shia" expansionism. It is, in short, Iran's durable 'geopolitical predicament' (Mesbahi, 2011). On the other side, the U.S. orchestrated 'containment' of Iran is perceived by the Iranian leaders as 'rollback' that ultimately ends in regime change and state collapse in Iran. It is the other side of Iran's geopolitical predicament.

Iran's specific geographical curse and historical insecurity—manifested in its strategic loneliness—combined with the lack of collective regional security pacts and institutions intensified Iran's strategic loneliness and, in following, Iran's non-state foreign policy. Notwithstanding, this policy has put Iran's national security in danger. First, following a complicated non-state foreign policy in the crisis-driven Middle East needs vast, reliable financial resources. Although Iran's proxies in the region have been seemingly successful in turning threats from Iranian borders away, they have been sapping the country's financial resources. The U.S. crippling sanctions and then the Syrian Civil War, along with deepening socio-economic crisis in the society, have waned sources of Iran's non-state foreign policy. Recently, Iran has lost the major figure of its non-state foreign policy, General Qasim Suleiman. At the same time, Iran has suffered from its lack of power of 'influence translation'. Despite expanding its political-

military leverage in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, Tehran never shows its capability to translate its hard power to money. The key point for Iran is its will and capacity to cash its political influences on economic leverage and financial achievements. Without imposing 'true agency' in acting 'upon', rather than 'within', regional structures by making transformative decisions (Mesbahi, 2013: 7-51)—like settling nuclear crisis—Iran's current financial deficit preludes a threatening decline of its power projection in the region (Sariolghalam, 2016: 101-139). Second, Iran's non-state foreign policy has been securitized by the West and Iran's regional foes. Its support for the regional non-state entities, particularly Hezbollah, Hamas, and recently the Yemeni Houthi, has portrayed the country as a top state "sponsor of terrorism" and framed it as a major threat to international peace and security. Constructing and amplifying the discourse of 'Iranophobia' is the main manifestation of the anti-Iran campaign of 'threat inflation' (Rousseu and Rocio, 2006: 16-39) policy imposed by Tel-Aviv, Riyadh, and the White House to contain Iran's growing power in the region. More significantly, Iran's ties with non-state actors have extended the longevity, breadth, and depth of cycle of security dilemma in the region, in general, and offense-defense complex for Iran, in particular. In the region without a strong, comprehensive collective security institution(s), state's defensive power projection beyond its borders would be soon framed as destabilizing moves. Succinctly put, insisting on the current trajectory of Iran's non-state foreign policy might endanger Iran's national security in the long run.

## V. A New Framework for the Analysis of Iran's Geopolitical Strategy

Iran's specific geography and historical insecurity are integral elements and dimensions of regional policy and strategy. In addition to its geostrategic location and geographical proximity to the threat sources, Iran's geographical vulnerability and its lack of natural defense impediments have shaped the country's fate of territorial occupation and military encirclement for more than

twenty-five centuries. This fact has nourished and galvanized Iran's historical insecurity. The final product is Iran's strategic loneliness. For a country with a deep sense of greatness, Iran's strategic loneliness pushes the country to take a dynamic geopolitical strategy—namely, non-state foreign policy—to preserve its national security and territorial integrity. Indeed, the very logic of geography and history reveals the fact that Iran's ultimate deterrence capabilities have been mainly predicated on its ability for the external power projection (Reisinezhad, 2016). Nonetheless, the lack of regional collective security institutions and pact(s) has trembled the credibility of this geopolitical strategy. Although Iran's non-state foreign policy has been partially effective in keeping the country's security safe, it has weakened Iran's financial sources and, more significantly, entrapped the country in a durable offensive-defensive complex. It is Iran's durable geopolitical predicament. (Figure 1)
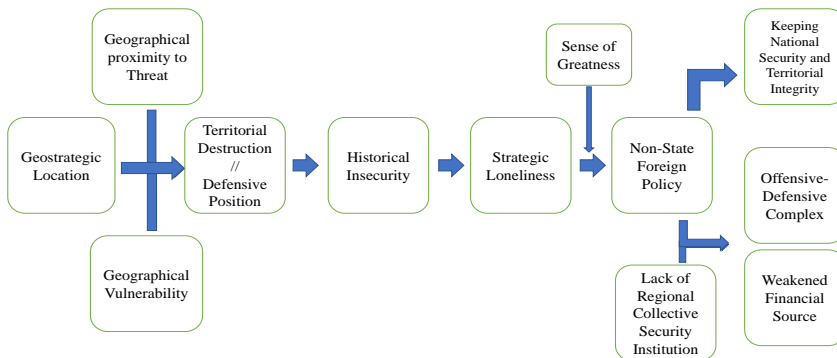


**Figure 1**

Iran's specific geography and history have crucially shaped its geopolitical strategy. However, it should be important to disentangle the argument from geographical and historical 'determinism'. At first glance, putting emphasis on these two factors opens door for fatalism while ignores human agency. Geography and history by no means determine state's approaches to use military force and regional strategies. In reality, human

agency matters since it is men who decide and take action. There are still historical instances wherein men overcame the dictates of geography and unchained historical patterns. Nevertheless, "in the long run, those who are working in harmony with environmental influences will triumph over those who strive against them" (Parker and Mackinder, 1982: 121). Indeed, geography and historical trends limit human choices by constraining or instigating states' actions. To be more precise, geography and history provides a framework within which geopolitical strategy is formulated and implemented. They set contours on which trajectory and path is achievable and which is not. As Robert D. Kaplan cogently argues, "the more we remain preoccupied with current events, the more that individuals and their choices matter; but the more we look out over the span of the centuries, the more that geography plays a role (Kaplan, 2012: 28). Therefore, a balance between geography and history, on the one side, and the decisions and actions of men, on the other side, matter for a deeper analysis of Iran's regional policy. In short, geography and history imprison Iranian leaders and delimit, rather than determine, their choices and opportunities for regional maneuver. The ideas emerge and vanish, the leaders are born and then die; but what remains durably is Iran's geography and history!

**Conclusion**

For more than half century, Iran's connections with its proxies have been the country's pivotal geopolitical strategy crafted to contain regional and global threats. In contrast to the mainstream view, this strategy is rooted less in Iran's revolutionary ideology rather than its specific geography and history. The paper shows that Iran's strategic loneliness is a very historical product of its specific geography and history. It also argued how Iran's geopolitical strategy has intensified its geopolitical predicament and entrapped the country in the offensive-defensive complex. Within this situation, regional cooperation in several domains, particularly the conflict resolution processes, is vital and necessary for Iran's regional policy. The establishment of a path-dependent bilateral or multilateral security institution(s) with regional states would be crucial for the stability of the Middle

East. As the regional tensions spiraling out of control, building comprehensive collective security with tripartite power centers of Tehran-Ankara-Riyadh would deescalate geopolitical competition in the Middle East.

While it is a major driving force for the country's power projection beyond its borders, strategic loneliness sets Iran's center of gravity within its internal territory. Relying on the inside shows that Iran's center of gravity has predicated on 'state-society relation'; rather than on strategic alliance with whether the Great Powers or non-state actors. In other words, Iran's strategic loneliness shows intrinsic and independent foundations of Iran's national security. Within this context, popular support and legitimacy are the most crucial and vital assets for a country whose borders have been historically bloody frontier zone. It was this very fact ignored by the last Shah of Iran.

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# The Outlook of the World Order during the COVID-19 Pandemic Era

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## Abstract

The Coronavirus phenomenon should be considered as an issue that will cause damage to other countries in the context of international interdependence. At the same time, the structure of the international system has placed a responsibility on China, as well as on international organizations and other countries in the fight against this transnational threat. China wants to change its international face, from security and disruptive acting to economic-security acting and protesting the existing international order. As a result, such events tend to have the least impact on the country's international relations and, above all, at the international level, overcoming this crisis will benefit it. At the international level, given China's position in the international economy and the interdependence of many countries, while overcoming this dependence on other areas and the interaction of the economy of all international countries, the Corona crisis is a matter of cooperation and convergence. Currently, under the auspices of the United Nations and the World Health Organization, countries are trying to do their utmost to help reduce this devastating phenomenon. The US approach so far, unlike Japan, which has been trying to resolve the crisis, has been more concerned with China's fear and instrumental use of the crisis to compete with China and define itself as a superpower. In contrast, pro-multilateralist countries, especially US allies in Europe, have used a pragmatic approach to focus on their national interests and help resolve the international crisis.

**Keywords***: COVID-19; Multilateralism; Global Crisis; World Order; Security*

## Introduction

The fact that international risks of today's world trespass the natural borders of countries and engage all societies at a universal scale indicates a kind of political maturity in all international actors. The politicization of economic issues, increasing importance of environmental pollution and its hazards to communities influence international relations and thereby indicate the vulnerability of states and societies to events and currents that are created in the territory of other countries. Under these conditions, the main characteristics of the international system are complex, numerous and interconnected relations, conflict and cooperation. The Coronavirus, now officially known as COVID-19, is a phenomenon from which, according to the head of the World Health Organization, "no country could think it may evade. This notion is not only wrong, but also it will be irremediable. The virus does not respect international borders (Lovelace, 2020)." This transnational phenomenon has challenged all international actors and has forced all of them to turn to cooperation and convergence to keep the crisis under control.

With the spread of COVID-19, in addition to the fatalities in China, the country's economy has also faced its most difficult challenge since the 2008 global economic crisis (Jie, 2020). Some analysts state that if the coronavirus is controlled within three months, the country's GDP will be reduced by 0.8%, and if it is controlled within nine months, the GDP be reduced by 1.9% (McCloskey and Heymann, 2020). However, compared to the outbreak of SARS in 2003, currently, China's economy is more fragile and more government measures are required (Jie, 2020).

Like any other country, China does not intend to hurt its people and its economic interests. The outbreak of the virus has emerged outside the control of the Chinese government, and even according to the World Health Organization, the source of the outbreak is still unknown. However, China's position in the international system is such that the country's misfortune has propagated rumors of its recklessness. Travels, high population numbers, economic mutual effects, etc. are issues that make China's role in the world significant, but at the same time, they increase the costs of such events for other states. In this case, identification of the source of the outbreak, preventing its spread, management and accumulation of the necessary resources to fight the disease and eradicate it is firstly a responsibility of China and related international specialized institutions, and then, that of other governments in an interconnected global system.

## I. The International Response to the Coronavirus Outbreak

The international response to the coronavirus shows that when the spread of the epidemic threatens the economy and credibility of countries globally, the complex link between public health, science and politics finally shows up. Reactions to the emergence of coronavirus at the national, regional and international levels can be examined. At the national level, each country has developed its own experiences, which are varied greatly. At the regional level, especially in Europe, cooperation and convergence occur before the involvement of international organizations, but at the global level, we need to look at the approach of the United Nations and its affiliates, which have entered the scene very strongly. Also, the role of the international media could not be denied, which is considered both positive and negative.

**United Nations**: In a situation where criticism of international institutions, especially the United Nations, has become a pervasive trend and there is a kind of mistrust to this organization and its affiliates, the coronavirus showed the benefits of the

United Nations and its affiliates and proved that multilateralism is still a prerequisite in the world for maintaining international security and peace (Boniface, 2020). Within the framework of international institutional order, international governments have reciprocal rights and responsibilities. In a crisis such as the coronavirus, which is not limited to a specific geography and has particularly affected one of the world's largest economies, the need for cooperation, multilateralism and the strengthening of regional and international cooperation is felt more than ever. In this crisis, mutual rights and responsibilities have been set out between the WHO and China, between the WHO and other countries, and between China and other countries.

**World Health Organization:** In the meantime, the report by World Health Organization has played one of the most important roles in combating the corona phenomenon. By declaring Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) and subsequently, announcing special travel restrictions and bans, the Organization has an important responsibility in controlling international infectious diseases. Although, according to the news, many countries have imposed restrictions on travels to and from China before the announcement of World Health Organization, the announcement of this situation will make the issue more global and official.

**WHO Subordinate Institutions**: The World Health Organization learned from the outbreak of SARS and is aware of the absolute need for empowerment to coordinate international resources during an epidemic and focus resources in order to identify priorities and find solutions to the problems, and finally, provided tools to deal with SARS. At present, these institutions have expanded even more and have higher synergies with one another. These organizations include: The Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN), The Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), Global Research Collaboration for Infectious Disease Preparedness (GloPID-R), and The Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID) (McCloskey

and Heymann, 2020). The role of the collection of countries committed to multilateralism: The use of these tools will be fruitless except with a mindset that requires international cooperation and participation in the global information network. It should be clear that actors are committed to their international obligations; for example, some European countries or some others in the southwest Asia have demonstrated their commitment to international cooperation to play a facilitating role in strengthening the cooperative mentality. In return for the assistance of the WHO, China has committed itself to show the maximum international cooperation. Similarly, China's neighbors have been tasked with cooperating with both the WHO and China.

**international media**: It should be said that international media and social networks are the most important sources for information, showing both positive and negative effects. There is a need for cooperation between national and international surveillance systems to find information about the coronavirus countermeasures. The existence and synergy of national and international surveillance systems allow scientific information about the disease to be used in epidemic diagnosis in a timely manner and prevent outbreaks, correct clinical encounter with patients, and help with modeling and understanding the possible future directions and useful interventions (Heymann, 2020). At the same time, the media may cause fear and insecurity and mental uncertainty in communities and provoke reactions that make the crisis more difficult to manage by creating cluster problems (such as reducing crisis control devices, in this case, medical masks). In general, China's crisis management methods and its cooperation with the World Health Organization, accompanied by the rapid delivery of information, showed that the "World Network" and the international associations that currently exist can gather experts from around the world to facilitate the focus of research and development efforts on crisis, in order to maximize the impact (Boniface, 2020). According to many experts, as a specialized institution, the WHO has performed well

in its mission to work with China. The organization's management of international-scale epidemics not only shows that the organization is functional, but also highlights its essential role and inevitable position. As a result, once again it became clear that in the face of a global threat, only a multilateral response focusing on the role of international institutions may be sufficient. This important result, which has been accepted at the operational and medical levels, should also be considered at the strategic and policy-making levels (Boniface, 2020).

## II. The International Level

Not only the spread of the COVID-19 is not limited to health care section, but also it is not limited to only one country. This is a multidimensional and international issue that is, in general, effective in six aspects (Brown, 2020) of the international affairs in the short- and the long-run:

- Impacting global economy: This crisis will impact the global economy because it has caused a major stagnation in China's economic activity, and of course, economic effects of international travel restrictions must also be taken into account. Therefore, this will slow down the world's second-largest economy, which is the driving force of the growth of global economy. The World Bank estimates that the crisis could cause up to a 5% drop in global GDP or, in other words, a loss of $3 trillion, affecting all countries in the world.

- Interference in the global supply chain: The second problem is the interference in the international supply chain, because China is the largest manufacturer in the world who takes part in almost all sectors of the global economy and holds about 30% of global value-added in production.

- Reduction of China's diplomatic commitment: The coronavirus crisis could overshadow international meetings, such as the EU-China summit in Beijing in March, although Xi Jinping has taken steps to be able to take part in appointments such as the trip to Japan.

- Influencing on countries involved in the "One Belt, One Road" initiative: Given the closure of roads and travel restrictions and bans, China will not be able to deliver the goods required for production to countries involved in the initiative. So, there will be a break in the form of idle capital, which will affect all partner countries in this project and their partners.

- Possibility of damage to the international reputation of the Chinese government: As the crisis the "China's delays in public information" may be further emphasized, questioning the credibility of the Chinese government as a responsible actor in the international system, in the sense that other countries can no longer be prevented from reacting to restrict or remove China from their political relations circle.

- Possibility of a decreasing dependence on Chinese goods: The crisis not only has caused a deferment in Chinese exports in the short run, it may also cause a reduction in the countries' dependence on Chinese goods. Of course, these two are only assumptions that may not be very accurate in the real-world economy.

According to the above, the coronavirus is a phenomenon that will cause damage to other countries in the context of international interdependence. In 2003, China accounted for 4% of the global GDP, and today it accounts for 17%. The country also accounted for 70% of the world's economic growth last year alone, and it is clear that the economy is something that affects all international affairs by creating sectional convergence, that is, the crisis in China will affect the whole of world (Huang, 2020).

## III. Coronavirus, and Damaged Multilateralism

With the awareness of the principal of the national interests, the compass of foreign activities, as well as US "competition" with China at all economic, military, political and technological levels, the US has been criticized that it has ignored the multilateralism approach to dealing with the crisis, or at least, it can be said that the country has tried to use it in opposition to China. Clearly,

identity debates shift the existing realities which should be treated in a pragmatic manner to the value debates which create the never-ending game of blaming, accusation and fear. In conflict with the coronavirus, the world, especially Europe and the United States, has been plagued more by rumors than the disease. People change their route on the streets to avoid confrontation with the Chinese. This behavior brings to the mind that all Chinese are infected with the virus and it turns them into unloved "others" Some US media outlets have used headlines to inform about the Corona virus which are obviously directed toward China: "Coronavirus Is a Bigger Threat than Terrorism (Boniface, 2020)", "Don't Buy China's Story (Mosher, 2020)", and so on. However, the Professor David Heymann, one of the top officials at the WHO for 22 years has stated in his article: "China has quickly (within a day) shared information with the World Health Organization (WHO) and has formulated a coordinated response to it at the national and international levels, which is a clear indication of the lessons it learned from the outbreak of SARS." In his view, the criticism of China's reputation [and other countries involved] at the international level, especially if these criticisms are void, will be detrimental in itself, especially in the context of the next crisis (McCloskey and Heymann, 2020). So, in Heymann's view, the question is whether American critics want better or worse human conditions. This selection is a fateful challenge for the human beings, which specifies the future boundaries of countries and their intention to converge and cooperate to improve the international problems. There have been lots of debates about the US president's unilateral behavior, especially given that the country is in the midst of the next presidential election, but with more than 50 positive cases of COVID-19 (according to the World Health Organization) in the country, and the probability of the spread of the virus, it remains to be seen what the government will plan for.

## IV. Convergent and Divergent Forces

In addition to the spatiality of the corona crisis and its effects on international security, the temporality of the issue should also be considered, at a time when we observe a confrontation between the supporters of the pessimistic attitude and those of the optimistic attitude towards the cooperation between the great powers. From the pessimistic perspective, this cooperation could be regional, including that between China and ASEAN, to create and strengthen international regimes in order to curb the security threats. On the other hand, there is a pessimistic view that there should be a resistance to globalization of the economy and communications by closing borders and looking inward to avoid the damages of globalization. This approach will do its best to put pressure on other countries and international institutions and regimes by various structural pressure power tools to make them weaker. The timing dimensions of this crisis can be considerable for us. In fact, by addressing the timing of the crisis, in this paper, we are to understand the type and nature of interactions between the great powers, because these interactions and the environment in which the great powers act and react can be effective in resolving the security crises.

**Rivalry Among the Great Powers**: As mentioned in this paper, the perception has always been around that the globalization in economy and communications among countries in the global community increases dependence and convergence between governments, and on the other hand, the vulnerability resulting from these dependencies has increased during a security crisis, including the outbreak of infectious diseases. Following this notion, the international observers believe that countries, especially the great powers, are forced to take co-operative approaches because of these dependencies and in order to reduce the level of security threats and vulnerabilities they face. Attitudes toward such taking these approaches and actions by the great powers and their willingness to deal with the spread of contagious disease in the form of soft security threats are optimistic attitudes,

especially at the present time, and these should indeed be viewed from a pessimistic perspective. Looking at the current peculiarities, we will observe that countries are incapable of adopting a cooperative approach. The reason for this notion, i.e. taking a pessimistic view toward the cooperative approach and strengthening international institutions and regimes among the great powers and the lack of willingness to resolve threats to international security, relies on the acquisition of temporal peculiarities or, in other words, temporality of the crisis. The reality is that the United States, as a superpower in the world has taken an aggressive approach toward other countries and its rivals, as well as in international agreements and treaties during the past four years and since Trump took the office. American strategists explain this approach under the framework of "the age of power competition." They know the countries that they believe are trying to challenge America's dominant power as their strategic rivals. Regardless of how the United States treats the other global agents, including its competitors, and the intensification of its competitiveness with them over the past few years, the weakening of international institutions and regimes which is considered a kind of consolidating factor for the Americans is on the agenda. Withdrawal from the nuclear agreement with Iran, known as JCPOA, withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement, withdrawal from the so-called Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty "INF", withdrawal from UNESCO, and disputes on the Euro-Atlantic axis over security issues such as the NATO Pact, or the JCPOA, are among the issues that have resulted from US aggressive approach over the past four years.

In such a situation, which is caused by the aggressive actions of the global dominant power, the situation has not been favorable for other actors in this system; for example, the European Union is going through a difficult period since its formation; on the other hand, Britain has left the union, and on the other hand, member states are facing internal problems such as the ambiguous future of immigrants and asylum seekers, budget deficits and the

emergence of extremist right parties in their countries, which has widened the gap between the union's member states. Players outside the Euro-Atlantic axis are also not in a better position than the countries on the axis. The prominent country outside this axis is China. American strategists see China as a strategic competitor to the United States. Therefore, during the past four years, China has come under structural pressure from the global dominant power, the United States. The European Union also sees China as a systematic rival, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) considers the country a political and military threat to the union. China, on the other hand, has found that the West, led by the United States, pursues only a policy of containment and siege against Beijing. Russia is also trying to free itself from the US and European pressure strategy while consolidating its superpower position and its ability to influence global issues. By presenting such temporal peculiarities of the crisis, it should be said that the outcome of these peculiarities, and of course the type of interactions between the great powers based on competitive and aggressive approaches, will be nothing but the spread of anarchy and instability at the global system level.

In such situations, the concerns and interactions among the great powers on the issue of international security are related to the topics and agendas which are generally hardware issues. The point is that in this situation, soft security threats in various fields and dimensions will not only insignificant, but also will turn into a tool for the divergent forces, by which they are to weaken the convergent forces in terms of cooperation strengthening and international regimes. Based on such peculiarities, it should be concluded that divergent forces, which have a pessimistic view of the globalization of the economy and communications and are only pursuing their own interests in this chaotic and unstable environment, will have an upper hand over the pro-cooperative forces, both at regional and international levels. The international community is now facing the spread of a contagious disease called the COVID-19 in the form of a soft security threat that has

emerged in China. Such a crisis in China requires countries and major powers to work together to combat and control the virus and its international consequences. However, in terms of temporality of the crisis, the virus is spreading at a time when divergent and anti-globalization forces have an upper hand over the forces who believe in collective cooperation to resolve international crises. The sensitivity of the issue for the two sides during the outbreak of the coronavirus is because of the main target of this incident in China.

In the confrontation between pro-divergence and convergence forces, the main basis in the argument between the two sides is that China's development in terms of global communications and globalization over the past few decades have led to its global economy and communications to become dependent on the country; more than anything else, the Chinese could Chinesize the world. Now the spread of the virus and its global consequences have given a tool to the pro-divergent sides to be used against China and to develop Sinophobia. It is of significance here that on January 30, 2020, with the increase in the number of fatalities from corona, the World Health Organization declared an emergency situation. However, the head of the organization told a news conference that the organization had not advised the countries to impose travel and trade restrictions, and that the organization was opposed to these restrictions, while having confidence in China's control and containment of the situation. Then, we observed serious travel and trade restrictions between China and various countries.

In fact, a reflection of the upper hand of the pro-divergence forces against the pro-convergence ones can be seen in the statement of the World Health Organization as well as the reactions of other countries to the organization's recommendation. The reality of the international politics is that countries and governments with independent and separate sovereignty are the ultimate decision-makers in implementing measures to counter the threat of soft security threats, including the spread of contagious

and deadly diseases, because it deals with the life of humans and citizens. In addition, there is a belief among many countries that by taking special measures, specifically the flight and travel restrictions, the spread of the virus could be prevented. To what extent these approaches and measures will have fruitful results is beyond the scope of this article, but the reality is that adopting the approaches and measures aiming at protecting the lives of citizens against the deadly virus is one thing, and trying to politicize the matters and adopt a self-centered approach by the pro-divergence forces against the spread of a deadly and contagious virus is another. Speaking at the 56th Munich Security Conference on February 15, 2020, Tedros Adhanom, President of the World Health Organization, called on world leaders not to politicize the outbreak of the deadly virus. "We have to give up the hatred," he told in the conference. "It's easy to blame, it's easy to politicize, but the hard thing is to deal with a problem and find common solutions to overcome it. We will all learn from the spread of the virus, but now is not the time to politicize the issues." Wang Yi, the foreign minister of China said on a trip to Germany and in the security conference in Munich: "It has been proven that the epidemic can be controlled and largely treatable. He said: "Any impact that the coronavirus may have on the Chinese economy will be temporary. China's economy is in a good position to overcome all the risks and challenges." China's foreign minister is the country's first high-rank official who has traveled abroad since the outbreak of Coronavirus in order to try to reassure the world at this important security forum that China has the ability to overcome the virus and that stability will return to the economy.

The interactions of the great powers in the current situation and the dominance of competitive approaches toward each other as well as the rise of divergent forces at the global level have made it impossible for these powers to face the soft security threat at this time. Regardless, given the current atmosphere and the emergence of divergent actions from US aggressive behaviors over the past four years, pro-divergence forces are trying to make

the most of existing atmosphere and inflict tensions on pro-convergence forces in resolving the important international crises. This is now true in US-China relations: one side is the dominant power in the global system, and the other, is its major strategic rival and, of course, it tries to counter the threat of this rival. In the meantime, there will be a tense and conflicting atmosphere in my relations between the two great powers; as we may have observed tensions in the relations between the two countries in various fields over the last three years (from economics and trades to politics and security), and the Chinese and Americans are suspicious of each other.

**Coronavirus and the Phenomenon of Sinophobia**: Now the spread of a deadly virus in China and its spread to other countries, in the midst of political and economic turmoil in China's relations with the West, and especially the United States, has grabbed the attention of the public and international observers. In the relations between China and the United States, US officials are now trying to fish in troubled waters and intensify their political pressure on China, given the outbreak of the deadly coronavirus in China. In the wake of the US-led spread of anti-China propaganda using a problem such as the Coronavirus could be an attempt to continue the so-called "Sinophobia" phenomenon in the Western world, which seeks to put China in a difficult psychological and propaganda war under the framework of the so-called "Chinese threat" theory. It is a common phenomenon in international politics that the two countries are both the world's great powers, each trying to advance their own interests with the various tools at their disposal and seize every opportunity to take over the other. But the transmission of this interaction model between these two great powers and how they deal with a soft security threat, which has been manifested in a contagious and deadly virus, is a worrying sign for the international community, that indicates the strengthening of trends related to pro-divergence tendencies at the domestic political level and its spread to the international system, increasing the skepticism of the agents of this system towards

each other, closing the borders and weakening international cooperation to resolve the crises. Over the past three years, the US government has sought to consider China and its behaviors in various dimensions and areas (including the economy, trade, and information technology) as a threat to global security. These efforts now appear to have doubled since the outbreak of the COVID-19, and in the following, on the basis of several senior US political officials, the perceived threat of China is going to be analyzed. During a visit to London on January 30, 2020, US Secretary of States, Mike Pompeo, in a meeting with his British counterpart Dominic Raab, called the Chinese Communist Party a major threat at the present time. Also in a presentation at the 56th Munich Security Conference on February 15, 2020, the Secretary of State enumerated the threats of China to the West and the US without referring to the coronavirus, and announced that despite the skepticism and tactical disagreements on the Euro-Atlantic axis, the West will overcome Russia and China.

Speaking at the Security Council, Mark Spencer, the Secretary of Defense described China as an emerging threat against the world order and said: The most populous country in the world robs the West of its technology, intimidates its small neighbors, and seeks superiority at any cost. The two remarks by two high-ranking US officials, amid China's involvement with the Coronavirus, show that the United States continues to use political and security pressure on China and the Communist Party, even when it is threatened by a soft security threat, i.e. the prevalence of the deadly and contagious virus, and so, it could have serious consequences for the health of citizens of other countries. In an interview with Fox Business on January 31, 2020, Wilbur Ross, the US Secretary of Commerce took a stand against the outbreak of the coronavirus. He believes the spread of the virus could have a positive effect on the North American job market, namely the United States and Mexico. "The fact is that this is a thought-provoking issue for the supply chain," he said. "So I think that will help accelerate the return of jobs to North America." The

statement goes on to say that trade and commercial pressures have intensified in the wake of the US trade war against China, which recently reached a ceasefire by concluding the first phase of trade agreement. In a report on February 13, 2020, CNBC quoted a senior US government official as saying that the United States has no confidence in China in terms of the information that the country gives on coronavirus. The US official added that China still rejects US offers to help the country. This report quoted Reuters and Larry Kudlow, Director of the United States National Economic Council at the White House, as saying that China did not appear to be clear about the outbreak of the coronavirus. White House National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien also previously warned of China's rejection of the offer. It is not clear exactly why China rejected or ignored US assistance offers to deal with the spread of the virus. However, since the outbreak of the virus in late January, China has repeatedly criticized the United States for its behavior and intimidation of Corona. The United States was one of the first countries to impose travel restrictions on China after the declaration of emergency by the World Health Organization, and President Trump signed a decree ordering travelers who had traveled to China fourteen days before will not be allowed to enter the country. Another issue of significance is the accusation of China for lack of transparency on the part of some US officials, including Larry Kudlow. Given the non-openness of the media space in China and the lack of independent media and press in the country, one cannot expect Beijing to publish accurate information on the number of people infected with the virus and other important issues, and it seems that the control over the flow of information in China, by the Chinese government and the Communist Party, is aimed at preventing further intimidation of the international community and sending alarming signals to the international economy and trade.

Overall, considering the temporality of the crisis, the adoption of aggressive and unilateral measures by the dominant power at the system level, not only puts other powers under structural

pressure in various aspects, but also will spread chaos and instability. The emergence of such an atmosphere will threaten and weaken the international cooperation in the face of a soft security threat. Now, specifically on the issue of Coronavirus, the type of interaction between the dominant and the other big powers at the international level, namely the United States and China, has not been able to bring the two closer together taking into account the soft security threat in the last four years. The emergence of a security threat in the form of a contagious and deadly disease not only creates a fatal threat to the citizens, but also stagnates the international trade and economy. However, due to the existence of a background of competitive and divergent relations between the great world powers, this crisis has not only caused international cooperation to become weaker, but the created atmosphere has been used to serve the divergent forces in order to put their competitors under extra propaganda and psychological pressures.

**Narrative and Reality in the Post-reality Era**: Public opinion, media and social networks can be effective in dealing with a security threat, including the occurrence and spread of the COVID-19 and its management methods. In recent decades, with the development and intensification of globalization in economy and communications, we have observed the development of social networks in cyberspace and its public access thanks to the creation of lots of communication software. The expansion of these communication networks and their impact on how the trends of political and security crises in the world are such that their weight cannot be ignored. The onset of the coronavirus crisis should be analyzed base on temporality within such a framework. In fact, in such cases which incur soft security threats to human life and health, if public opinion could not be properly managed, monopoly in information or imposing bans on their use and censorship will only lead to the spread of misinformation among citizens and the creation of conspiracy theories about the origin of the global crisis. Also, a background of competition and suspicion between the great powers, between the United States and China,

and the divergent trends in today's world, given the prejudice among western media and elites (trying to calumniate) and especially in the crisis that China is facing, would create a good platform for spreading false information and conspiracy theories. On the other hand, China could also play a role in this trend due to lack of free and independent media in the country, as well as a ban on the use of Western social media inside the country. In fact, both on spatial and temporal scales, all of these factors will work together to create the right platform for the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories that have a profound effect on divergent trends, hatred, and xenophobia.

A reflection of this situation can be observed in the World Health Organization's warning that Internet trolls and conspiracy theories are weakening their response to the coronavirus. "Disseminating misleading information makes it even harder for our heroic agents," said the president of the World Health Organization. "I want to talk briefly about the importance of facts, not fears," he added. "People need to have access to accurate information in order to protect themselves and others. Misleading information about the new type of coronavirus confuses people and frightens them. In the World Health Organization, we are not fighting the virus; we are fighting Internet trolls and conspiracy theories that weaken our response." In a detailed report on January 29, 2020, the British newspaper "The Independent" addressed the issue of conspiracy theories and false information about the Coronavirus outbreak. Here are two examples:

1. Although it seems that the exact origin of the virus has been in China's Wuhan seafood market, but it is still unknown. It is also thought that the first people infected with the new coronavirus caught it from animals because it was diagnosed that the virus is transmitted from animals to humans. A report from the Wuhan Institute of Virus Studies shows that 96% of the genetic arrangement of the new Coronavirus virus is similar to that of bats, which has been a major source of the SARS virus, too. According to the report, videos showing Chinese eating bats have

been released over the past few weeks, and some people are blaming Chinese food habits for the spread of the disease. In a widely circulated video, a young Chinese woman named Wang Mengion is shown eating a bat. However, Ms. Wang said that the film was shot in Palau in 2017 and is not related to the recent outbreak. "I had no idea during the filming that such a virus may have existed," she said. Bat soup is not a common food in China, although recent research has shown that bat can be a possible origin of the virus.

2. Another baseless theory that has surfaced on social media is that the virus is linked to a covert biological weapons program in Wuhan or has been smuggled from a laboratory in Canada. There is no evidence to support any of these claims. The talked-about Canadian Laboratory is the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg, Canada, which examined a new cluster of coronavirus infections in 2013. However, as mentioned earlier, there are several types of coronavirus, and the lab was investigating MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome). Another unfounded claim that propagated in the cyberspace says the virus is part of China's covert biological warfare program and is likely to be disseminated by the Wuhan Institute for Virology. China has denied the allegations in a statement and said that there is no relationship between this laboratory and the claimed biological weapons program. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention, a US-based institution, said the virus was caused by seafood and the animal market in Wuhan. The Center and, of course, the World Health Organization, are still investigating the source of the virus, but none have linked it to biological weapons.

According to the BBC, Russia's "Channel One" broadcasted the conspiracy theories about the coronavirus during the peak hours of the evening. The presenter at Vermia (Time) program links the virus to US President Donald Trump and claims that US intelligence agencies or pharmaceutical companies are behind the outbreak. Another important issue is the articles published in the western media and newspapers in opposition to China, which

shows that some Western elites are still trying to carry out propaganda attacks in the face of a soft security threat that has manifested itself in the form of a contagious and deadly disease that threatens the lives of many citizens, both in China and elsewhere, so that they do not lag behind in competition with this country. Here are just a few examples Walter Russell Mead, a former member of the US Council on Foreign Relations, a member of the Hudson think tank, a US foreign policy expert and columnist for the Wall Street Journal, misusing the effects of the Coronavirus on the global economy, tried in a note on February 3, 2020, entitled "China is a real sick Asian man" to frighten the world and public opinion of China's economic power and the world's dependence on it. He believes that China's financial markets are likely to be more dangerous in the long run than the country's animal and wildlife markets. The author writes about the destructive effects of the world's economic dependence on China, and believes that while China is an influential power, it is also fragile. From the author's point of view, the spread of a more deadly virus could change and transform China's political and economic landscape at any time. "It seems that the most important long-term consequence of the outbreak of the virus is to "De-Chinese" their supply chains," he said. "Currently, many fear that the coronavirus will become a global epidemic. The effects of thesis issue on China's economic collapse will be widespread: commodity prices will fall around the world, supply chains will be disrupted, and only a few financial institutions can escape the consequences. Improvement of the situation in China and elsewhere can be slow, and its social and political implications can be significant."

**China's reaction**: According to the "Global Times", Chinese spokesman for the Foreign Minister, Gang Shuang, said: "The racist title of the article by Walter Russell Mead is contrary to the reality and is a violation of professionalism". Accordingly, media, the Chinese asked Wall Street Journal to apologize and to inquire about those responsible for the article; but the letter newspaper

does not claim responsibility. "This article has caused outrage in Chinese society since its publication," the article continued. "Many citizens are asking how a world-renowned journal can publish such an intolerable racist title."

Also on February 7, 2020, the China Daily made a response to the American expert in its commentary section a note entitled "Who is the real patient; China or a biased author?" "Not only is this article a manifestation of the author's deep anti-Chinese sentiments, but it also shows his empathy and lack of compassion for humanity. It demonstrates the author's inability to see a great picture of what is happening in Wuhan, capital of the Hube Province, as well as other countries, in addition to the denial of Chinese aids as a responsible member of the international community. Prevention and control of epidemics is China's top priority. Walter Russell Mead should put aside his fearful Chinese mentality and try to pay attention to what the president of the World Health Organization has said: "This is a time of reality, not of fear; this is a time for science, not for rumors; this is a time for affinity, not shame". Also, another Chinese journal, named "China Plus", in an article entitled "Xenophobia, more dangerous than the coronavirus" on February 11, 2020, considered conspiracy theories in xenophobia. The author of this article states that the conspiracy theory is spreading faster than the Coronavirus itself. Instead of showing the human health issues as it is, the authors and publishers are eager to convey their fears of xenophobia. "Herald Sun" published in Australia, called it a "Chinese virus" and "Die Zeit", published in Germany, called it a "political virus". Issuing messages on Facebook, Abdul Halim Abdul Karim, a teacher from Singapore, called the virus a rage of God against the Chinese because of the oppression of Muslim Uyghurs. When China is combating this unknown enemy and is taking serious measures to stop the transmission of the virus from Hube to other provinces and countries, these types of articles are damaging the efforts made. Under these circumstances, China is also witnessing internal rumors about the virus stating that it is a virus designed

outside and against China, just as some people abroad are suspicious of China in this regard. Fortunately, the issue of so-called freedom of expression does not prevail here. The spread of such rumors is not allowed in the mainstream media and is not allowed to be published by public figures or celebrities; while in some countries, there is public debate in the defense of freedom of expression, regardless of what is being said. The author finally writes: "Since the World Health Organization calls for global solidarity and putting an end to the epidemic of false rumors or misinformation, it is time to reconsider the social responsibility of the media, because what is at stake is the fight against a danger against the human health and life. This new virus does not know borders, race or politics, like Ebola, SARS and H1N1".

The above-mentioned issues and examples, such as the spread of false information or false news, conspiracy theories, calumniation by creating content on social networks or the media, and even by some elites are real signs of the phenomenon of xenophobia and traces of hatred in the form of racist attacks and ridicule of a particular race in our world today. This shows that the development of global communications and the increase in interdependence, both in trends related to economics and international trade and in processes of the cyberspace and media and the use of social networks, despite its benefits in today's world, can cause discrimination and even hatred of human races, even in the face of the virus and the epidemic that threatens the life and health of humanity. However, the major cause of such interactions, or attacks and counter-attacks, of the media on such an important subject that is related to a soft security threat should be seen in the bigger picture and frame. This picture is a platform for the parties to the crisis to calumniate against each other (a country that is itself involved in the crisis and other countries that are trying to use this crisis to intensify the psychological and propaganda war against China).

**Regional Convergence in Southeast Asia**: The competition between China and the United States, and of course the structural

pressures imposed by this country, will not make China a neutral force and a country that only observes the spread of the instability and turmoil at a macro level in the resolution of the crisis. In fact, the crisis of COVID-19 appears to be a serious threat to China's neighbors, including countries of Southeast Asia; and China and other actors in the region will not allow all-round structural pressure from the United States to overshadow China in confrontation with COVID-19. In fact, it seems that we are witnessing the efforts of some international parties to strengthen the convergent trends to fight against the coronavirus. These parties include China and its trading and economic partners in Southeast Asia, the member states of the ASEAN Assembly. Given the economic and trade interdependence, as well as China's investments in the region, it is imperative that these countries work with China, regardless of the tensions between the major powers at the macro level, to make coordination to counter the threat of the soft security threat, i.e. COVID-19. ASEAN and China receive more than 65 million tourists a year, many of whom are Chinese tourists. Some of these countries have taken precautionary measures against the outbreak of the COVID-19, which can be considered as a response to the warnings of the World Health Organization (WHO) on January 30, 2020. However, it should be noted that the implementation of protective measures and the recommendations of the World Health Organization, and consequently, the travel restrictions in the world do not necessarily mean aversion to cooperation at regional and even international levels in fighting against COVID-19.

In this regard, an emergency summit of ASEAN foreign ministers, along with the China's foreign minister, was held in Vientiane, Laos, on February 20, 2020. Wang Yi, a member of the State Council and Foreign Minister of China, and Theodore Lichen, the Foreign Minister of the Philippines, the country coordinating ASEAN's relations with China, jointly held the meeting. "One billion and four hundred million Chinese people, led by Chinese President Xi Jinping, are fighting against this

contagious disease with unparalleled determination and solidarity," said Wang Yi, China's foreign minister. "By implementing the most complete and serious measures necessary, we have created an effective system to prevent and control the coronavirus, and we have demonstrated the "speed" and the "strength" of China in rescuing patients and sufferers; thus, we made time that for all of the world in this path, which illustrates the responsibility of a great country. With the strong leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, the great impetus of the nation, the superiority of workings and the high power of a great country, our country is confident that it will win the fight against the coronavirus as soon as possible. The outbreak of the coronavirus posed challenges for China's economic and social development, but this effect is temporary and limited. China's strong, energetic and growing economic trend will not change". China's foreign minister has made four proposals to fight the new coronavirus:

1. Strengthening the coordination in prevention and control of the disease;

2. Creating an effective long-term working mechanism;

3. Dealing with gossip and prevention of intimidation;

4. Turning hazards to opportunities for the new growth and development.

The foreign ministers of the respective countries agreed to share their regional information and the use of the best timely methods for the exchange of available epidemiological information in order to strengthen their technical guidelines and solutions related to prevention and control, diagnosis, treatment and monitoring. They also agreed to strengthen their capacity to prevent and control infectious and contagious diseases and their re-emergence and to strengthen the exchange of data and information, technology and personnel training. The foreign ministers of the ASEAN countries believe that the meeting was very important and timely. They believe that the global and comprehensive system of controlling disease in China has been unique and respectable. ASEAN members are going to exchange

the experiences with China to enhance the health security of the region. On the other hand, China is trying to promote the messages of friendship to ASEAN members and the countries of the region so that it can neutralize Western attacks and propaganda against itself. The development of China's integration with the region could be an effective and efficient way to expand international cooperation and attract the attention of other countries to help fight and control the virus.

## V. Iran and the New Coronavirus "COVID-19"

Iran is also involved in this virus and its epidemic. According to the latest official statistics, 57 people have died of the virus in Iran so far. The president of the World Health Organization said, "The increase in cases of and fatalities from the coronavirus has caused a great deal of concern in Iran, as the cause and origin of the corona outbreak in Iran could not be traced. This outbreak, which is outside the origin of the epidemic, China, is very worrying; because it is not clear where its main source comes from. It is really difficult to stop the spread of the disease in countries outside China and it can spread rapidly." The fact is that, Iran and the outbreak of new coronavirus in the country cannot be analyzed outside the framework of spatiality and temporality. In fact, as with China and other countries, Iran is also faced with its own challenges and problems. China is Iran's biggest business partner; thus, within both spatiality and temporality frameworks, Iran will be affected by the outbreak of COVID-19 and its effects on the international trade and economics. On the spatiality of the crisis, it should be noted that the shutdown of businesses and their economic activities in China, followed by a decline in China's demand for oil, will have serious consequences on the oil market, and this will definitely affect Iran. The bulk of Iran's exports to China include energy, i.e. oil and its products. Given that China has reduced its demand for oil, Iran's oil exports to China and its revenues will be undoubtedly damaged. Of course, the damage is definitely based on the assumption that China, in the most

optimistic scenario possible, will continue to receive 250,000 barrels of oil per day from Iran and make its payments, but this is not the end of the story. The problem will become clear by addressing the temporality of the crisis. Putting this crisis in the context of temporality will complicate the issues for Iran, because, regardless of the effects that this crisis will have on China and the global economy, this crisis will be a little more complicated in Iran than in other countries. The variable that can be important to Iran in terms of the complexity of the situation in the context of the temporality of the crisis is the US and the maximum pressure strategy that is imposed on Iran through its unilateral sanctions instruments. Even prior to the outbreak of the new coronavirus, economic and trade relations between Iran and China had undergone a change and have also been affected by this variable. The decline of the volume of the Iranian oil imported by China and the reduction of bilateral trade between the two countries is due to the unilateral sanction imposed by Washington against Tehran, and now, with the spread of the COVID-19, it is not expected that any significant changes could be observed in the current trade situations.

In this regard, the German Deutsche Welle news agency reported on the reduction of Iran's foreign trade on November 23, 2019. "China's customs statistics show that total oil and non-oil imports of China from Iran during the three quarters of the year 2019 have reduced 37% to reach $ 10.940 billion. Also, China's exports to Iran have reduced 38% to reach $ 7.23 dollars". On January 24, 2020, China's customs also reported on the significant reduction of the mutual trades between China and Iran in 2019, "Iran's exports to China during the last year (2019) reduced 36% to reach $ 13.434 billion and China's exports to Iran reduced 31% to reach $ 9.590 billion." Statistics show that before the COVID-19 crisis, Iran-China trade relations were subject to negative transformations due to the US strategy of maximum pressure on Iran; and China, fearful of US Treasury sanctions against the country, has been forced to align with Washington's sanctions

against Iran. If, in the most optimistic scenario, the coronavirus does not worsen the relations between Iran and China, definitely, no positive change will be going to occur. Here, the effect of the US pressure and the strategy of maximum pressure on Iran and the trade situations between Tehran and Beijing, and its coincidence with the COVID-19 crisis will cause dealing with this virus to be overshadowed by tensions in Iran-US relations. And Washington's sanctions seem to be an obstacle to Iran's response to the virus. In this regard, in a report in the Newsweek on February 24, 2020, entitled "American sanctions, obstacles in the path of controlling coronavirus in Iran", Tom O'Connor wrote "Iran is trying to combat the spread of the coronavirus; however, these efforts have become complicated by the severe economic sanctions posed by the United States."

## Conclusion

According to the above, the coronavirus should be considered as a phenomenon that will cause damage to other countries in the international interdependence context. At the same time, the structure of the international system has placed a responsibility on China, as well as on international organizations and other countries, to combat this transnational threat. In addition to controlling the issue at the national level, China seeks to pursue its foreign policy by taking a decisive policy that has been used from the start of Xi Jinping administration with the aim of getting achievements and moving away from a peaceful and soothed politics. It should be said that since 2002, the occurrence of SARS, until 2019, reappearance of COVID-19, the variable of spatiality of the crisis, that is, the weight of the global economy in trade equations and the global economy has become clearer. In 2002, unlike now, we could not observe any discrimination or even competition among the great powers. Although China was an emerging power, it did not have much economic weight and was not at the center of global attention. At the time, the international community's focus was on the fight against terrorism, and the

spread of epidemics had led the international community to reach a consensus on soft security threats, both on terrorism and the disease. The type of reaction of the international community and international institutions to epidemics at that time and in the early 21$^{st}$ century is important.

The outcome of the confrontation between pro-divergence and pro-convergence forces at the global level (within a temporality framework) can be clearly seen in the trade and economic relations between Iran and China due to the influence of the United States and its maximum pressure strategy against Tehran using unilateral sanctions. It is too early to estimate the effects of COVID-19 on the process, but it is clear that the outbreak of the coronavirus in the country will cause damages to various commercial sectors. The outbreak of a deadly and contagious virus within Iranian borders, regardless of whether it could threaten human life in the first place and economic and commercial activities in the second, will be followed by the reactions of Iran's neighbors.

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# Turkish Foreign Policy and Palestinian Issue: an Iranian Perspective (2002-2020)

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## Abstract

The AKP's policy towards Palestine is the main core of this article. The Turkish authorities have tried to play as the mediator in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and have attempted through various political and economic initiatives to support a peace agreement between both sides. However, after the 2008 Gaza war, the AKP government's foreign policy stance towards Israel began to change, at least officially. This war, alongside to other events such as 2009 Davos, the 2010 Low Chair and the 2010 Mavi Marmara, produced a public political conflict in the Turkish-Israeli relations. This tension extended from the 2008 Gaza war until the normalization deal between the two countries in June 2016. But this political tension did not have very impact on the other current fields of cooperation between Ankara and Tel Aviv. This emphasizes clearly that both countries were pragmatic in maintaining efficient and strategic ties. The major research question can be stated as the following: What has been the Turkish government's policy on the Palestinian issue between 2002-2020? In addition we want to assess the proximity and distance of Turkey's policies from Iranian perspectives and positions.

**Keywords***: Turkish Foreign Policy, Palestinian Issue, Israel, Constructive theory, Iran*

## Introduction

The AKP government's policy has been a sort of interaction between several factors which contributed significantly to the formation of the country's orientation. It sprang from the history of Turkey, Turkish geopolitical and geostrategic location, the existence of internal polarization between various political parties and influential groups as well as regional and international developments. The conceptualizations of the AKP policy had also been influenced by the doctrine of strategic depth which was drawn up by Ahmet Davutoğlu. The core of this policy was based on strengthening the policy of zero problems with its neighbors, as well as the great importance of soft power in its political implementations. This soft power is displayed through the expansion of Turkish relations in various fields including trade, diplomacy, energy, tourism and security, from the Balkans to the Caucasus and the Middle East.

After 2002, the Turkish foreign policy witnessed more sensibility towards regional issues, especially those regarding Israel and Palestine. The AKP's policy towards Palestine is the main core of our essay. The Turkish authorities have tried to play as the mediator in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and have attempted through various political and economic initiatives to support a peace agreement between both sides. However, after the 2008 Gaza war, the AKP government's foreign policy stance towards Israel began to change, at least officially. This war, alongside to other events such as 2009 Davos, the 2010 Low Chair and the 2010 Mavi Marmara, produced a public political conflict in the Turkish-Israeli relations. This tension extended

from the 2008 Gaza war until the normalization deal between the two countries in June 2016. But this political tension did not have very impact on the other current fields of cooperation between Ankara and Tel Aviv. This emphasizes clearly that both countries were pragmatic in maintaining efficient and strategic ties.

At the same time, the AKP headed government expanded its relations with the Palestinian Authority (PA). After Hamas won the parliamentary elections in 2006, most of the Turkish support (politically and humanitarian) turned towards Hamas and Gaza. The AKP government expressed their greater willingness to engage Hamas in the regional and international political field as well as to dismantle the imposed political isolation on them. Of course, this does not conceal the fact that the AKP government also attempted to maintain good diplomatic relations with the Palestinian Authority.

Relying on constructivist theory, Islamic and Turkish historical values, of course, as seen, presented and used by AKP, play a significant role for justifying internal legitimacy in the foreign policy.

As Turkey was inspiring the Arab peoples in their revolutions against dictatorial regimes, the AKP saw this as a great opportunity to fulfil the role of a leading country in the Middle East. Yet, at the same time, despite *redirection* of the Turkish political priorities, economic cooperation mechanisms with Israel remained in place, and various Turkish-Israeli secret meetings occurred in order to normalize the political relations between the two countries.

The major research question can be stated as the following: What has been the Turkish government's policy on the Palestinian issue between 2002-2020? In addition, we want to assess the proximity and distance of Turkey's policies from Iranian perspectives and positions.

As our hypothesis, we argue that the AKP government used the Palestinian issue, the Palestinian-Israeli conflicts and the political conflict with Tel Aviv as a means to benefit from and

reinforce its internal and external positions. Relying on our mixed conceptual framework, Turkish politics are relatively in line with Iran's perspectives insofar as it is inspired by national and Islamic values (i.e. Constructive theory) , but they, which in the framework of realism theory, are oriented very far from the path of Iranian politics.

In order to provide a deep analysis, away from repetition, speeches or the bias to one of the parties, this research is relying on proofs and investigations. Based on a documentary research, we attempt to form our analysis by a content analysis combined with a descriptive explanatory.

## I. Theoretical framework:

In fact, there are interrelated factors across multiple levels, which determine Turkish foreign policy. Because of this complexity, the old paradigms or classical theories would be unable to provide a theoretical frame. In other words, this complexity has created many misunderstandings in academic and policy circles. This encouraged us to search for a more dynamic type of analysis.

Relying firstly on constructive approach or better to say, on Societal Constructivism and Identity, we try to shape our mixed framework, which seeks in parallel to apply some traces of neorealism.

Constructivism primarily seeks to demonstrate how core aspects of international relations are, contrary to the assumptions of neorealism and neoliberalism, *socially constructed*, that is, they are given their form by ongoing processes of social practice and interaction. Alexander Wendt calls two increasingly accepted basic tenets of Constructivism "that the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces, and that the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature" (Wendt, 1999:1)

The main assumptions of constructivism are "International system" which is a set of ideas, a body of thought, a system of

norms, and has been arranged by certain people at a particular time and place'' (Jackson and Sorensen. 2010:160). So international system is socially constructed and changeable (Akam, 2019:6)

Constructivists hold that normative or ideational structures are just as important as material structures in defining the meaning and identities of an individual or a state (Ruggie 1998:860). In brief, constructivists highlight the significance of identity in international relations, and underline intersubjective opinions such as ideas and ideas (Akam, 2019:7).

The main conceptions of the constructivism approach could be stated as identity, ideas and norms. Constructivists put emphasis on the role of ideas, identity and norms which, as they discuss, play an important role in foreign policy (Flockhart, 2012:82).

## II. Turkish Foreign Policy Formation

Muslim identity of Turkey is one of the multiple identities it has. Turkey's Muslim identity is domestically driven. It is originated from the Sunni sect of Islam, particularly the interpretations of the Naghshbandi and Sufi brotherhoods (Heper, 2013:144).

This Muslim identity has increasingly been raised since the end of the Cold War and particularly after the AKP came to power in 2002 (Dalay, 2013:125). As Jenny White (2014) argues, Turkey's national identity has been in a process of redefinition from Islamism to Muslim-hood since 2002. Muslim-hood, according to her, implies a different understanding of personhood and a pluralist vision of an Islamic public sphere that allows people with different languages to have a collective identity. In this sense, Kurds, Arabs and Turks have a collective identity but they could still hold a second ethnic identity; that of Turks, Kurds and Arabs.

There is a common dogma that depoliticizes radical nationalism or Communism/Marxism(White, 2014). The Muslim-hood identity aims for the integration of Turkey into the "Islamic

community of nations" and presents Turkey as likely leader of the Islamic world, particularly the Sunni communities (Heper, 2013: 147).

The prevailing Islamic discourse, such as Muslim-hood, fellow brothers, etc., has influenced the formation of the country's preferences and the construction of the national interests because they have created structural norms (Cornell, 2012:17). Cornell (2012) argues that Turkish foreign policy is largely ideologically driven because the two influential politicians, Ahmet Davutoglu and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, have strong Islamic ideological incentives (Cornell.2012: 18-19). His analytical argument is based on speeches, writings and emphases on the Islamic values. For example, they define who is an enemy and who is a friend based on the Sunni branch of Islam. It defines the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad and Kurdish forces in Syria (Akam, 2019:13).

As a result, the process of Turkish Decision Box in foreign Policy can be analyzed in two dimensions. Recourse to the theory of constructivism based on domestic values and ideas for internal legitimacy as well as recourse to the theory of neo-realism for playing safe in the regional and international arena.
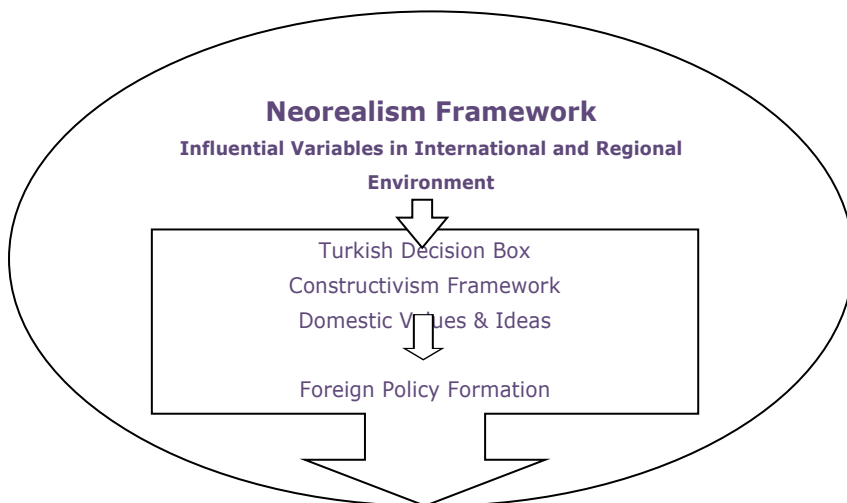


**Figure 1. Framework of Turkish Foreign Policy Formation**

**AKP Policy Towards the Middle East**: Until 2002, Turkey

followed Western prescriptions and guidelines in implementing its foreign policy. It also undertook efforts not to intervene in the Middle East political affairs. This was the main policy line, along with the impression that the state should be entirely away from the Ottoman structure, and should be based on secularism and nationalism.

Turkey under the AKP rule has become a key player in Middle East politics, basing its new foreign policy on the concept of strategic depth. This policy transformed Turkey into a central country in the region. Additionally, Turkey appeared as a model, which could unite both the Western democracy project and the Eastern political Islam project. The AKP policy towards the Middle East including its mediating role in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as well as the Syrian-Israeli conflict has had widely contrasting interpretations from different scholars, politicians and journalists. Some of them have interpreted the new Turkish role in the Middle East as an attempt to cover the real goal, which the AKP government wanted to achieve.

**Palestinian Issue:** When the AKP came to power in 2002, Palestine has been considered as one of the main concerns of the AKP foreign policy. The AKP government firstly tried to play a balancing role in its foreign policy towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Later one, because of the unstable domestic situation in Turkey, and because the Turkish internal politics and foreign policy are intrinsically interrelated, the AKP government took advantage of the Turkish conservatives' desire to support the Palestinian issue, especially after Hamas won the parliamentary election in 2006. The AKP labelled itself as the guardian of the Palestinian issue.

Following the Turkish efforts and initiatives to keep the Palestinian-Israeli process on track, Bülent Ecevit, the then Turkey's Prime Minister sent a message through his deputy under-secretary Ali Tuygan to the Palestinian and Israeli leaders in order to encourage both of them to return to the negotiating table and stop the violence (Hürriyet Daily News, 2002).

At the peak of tension in March 2002, Bülent Ecevit intensely criticized the imposed siege on Yasser Arafat, the former Palestinian president, and the Battle of Jenin, which took place in the Jenin refugee camp in 2002. Ecevit described these violent actions against the Palestinians civilians as genocide (Alsaftawi, 2017:87). Ecevit declared: "*Not only Arafat, but all of the Palestinian state is being destroyed step by step. In front of the world's eyes a genocide is being committed*" (Asbarez, 2002).

The Palestinian issue was present within the Turkish political scene and especially within the AKP agenda. In a speech of İlker Başbuğ, the former Chief of Staff: *"Without a resolution of the Palestinian question, there could be no peace in the Middle East"* (Altunışık & Cuhada, 2010: 373).

A range of key parameters including domestic, regional, and international ones has affected the decision-making process in Turkey concerning the Palestinian cause.

**Domestic Level:** Despite the fact that the Turkish Republic was born out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish Republic could not totally separate itself from its Ottoman heritage. On the domestic level, there is a common cultural and historical heritage from the Ottoman Empire, as well as a shared sense of Islamic belonging that binds Turkey to Palestine (Saleh, 2014). The AKP support for the Palestinian cause did not stem only from an ideological background as many scholars have analyzed. In the political calculations of the AKP, the Palestinian cause is considered a silver bullet to win much more voters, either internally or externally.

According to Zeynep Kosereisoglu: "A pro-Palestinian stance highlights solidarity with a Muslim cause. Indeed, Erdoğan has been seen as the first Muslim leader in the last decade (outside Iran) to take a bold and leading stance in support of Palestine. This has not only enhanced Turkey's profile but also increased Erdoğan's popularity in the region. In this way, Palestine has been an effective vehicle for AKP to reach out to the Arab street" (Kosereisoglu, 2013).

The AKP foreign policy's bias to support the Palestinian cause including mainly Hamas and the Gaza issue became particularly obvious after the start of the 2008 Gaza war, the 2009 Davos incident, the 2010 Low Chair incident and the 2010 Mavi Marmara attack. The AKP's support of Hamas and Gaza was used as an instrument by the party's elites to strengthen AKP's internal and external position. What deserves to be mentioned here is that despite the AKP's ostensible formal and informal bias towards the Palestinian cause, this support does not exceed the vision of the "*two-state solution*" and "*the Arab-Israeli peace initiative*", and does not harm the strategic interests of the regional and Western states, especially Israel.

**Regional Level***:* From the beginning, the Palestinian issue was not just an internal Palestinian affair, but it was a regional or even international matter. Given the importance of the Palestinian issue and its impact, many political leaders rushed to find a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Within this context, the AKP government has been instrumental in the Palestinian cause as well as in its mediating role in order to increase its influence in the regional and global arenas. Besides, it facilitates the rebuilding of Turkish relations with Arab countries, especially after the Kemalist policy tended to distance themselves from the region (Cohen & Freilich, 2014: 44).

This gave Turkey an opportunity to play a major role in the region where this issue is crucial. As Meliha Altunışık has pointed out: *"If you want to have popularity in the Arab world and if you want to be a regional power, you need to lead the Palestinian issue; Iran was doing the same thing, and in the Lebanon war, Nasrallah and Ahmadinejad became very popular in the Arab streets. With the Gaza war of 2008, this has changed, and suddenly it was Erdoğan. I see that in the context of regional strategic competition"* (Altunışık, 2016).

**International Level***:* The AKP government shows itself to the world as a modern democratic government that believes in the principles of human rights, public freedoms, human civilization

and the right of peoples to independence. Therefore, the AKP government has explained its interference in the Palestinian issue.

Internationally, the Turkish position was based on the rejection of the gradual Israeli move to the occupied territories. What is more, the AKP support for the Palestinian cause was limited since the Turkish financial assistance to the Palestinians only consisted of aid and humanitarian relief projects, as well as some infrastructure support.

This is because, primarily, the AKP had a commitment to its broad lines including the Turkish National Security. Besides, the AKP government tried to prevent any Arab concern regarding the Turkish support to the Palestinian cause, especially from Egypt. Ahmet Davutoğlu acknowledged that: "*The Turkish role can be helpful or complementary, but not a replacement for the Egyptian role*" (Rahman, 2010).

Additionally, the AKP government was impatient not to harm the strategic interests of the regional and Western states, especially Israel. Within these political restrictions, the AKP support for the Palestinian cause does not exceed the vision of the "two-state solution" and "the Arab-Israeli peace initiative" (Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, 2011).

Up until now, Turkey has hardly played as a mediator role in the Conflict. Meanwhile, it should be notified that Turkey has refrained from pursuing a "power politics" strategy as third party intervention, but rather preferred softer strategies of conflict transformation and structural prevention. Power mediation would require a third party to not only facilitate communication between the parties and suggest options, but also bolster these suggestions with rewards and punishments in order to make the parties accept and implement these options. Turkey did not have enough leverage on the parties to set a negotiation agenda, suggest options, and use its muscle to implement these suggestions and the reward and punishment mechanisms effectively (Çuhadar Gürkaynak, 2007:103).

## III. The Turkish Positions on Various Conflictual Events

**Hamas Election Victory***:* The Turkish-Palestinian relations witnessed vast improvement with the victory of Hamas in the PLC election. The Islamic background of both parties contributed to deepening the relationship. Of course, there was a prior relationship between Hamas and the AKP. This relationship was based on sharing the same intellectual ideology. In the 1990s, various youth meetings and shared conferences brought together the leaders of the two parties.

Furthermore, the Turkish government recognized the results of the 2006 elections and demanded that the rest of the world respect the Palestinians' vote (Saleh, 2014). Turkey under the leadership of the AKP was diplomatically engaged in the Palestinian issue, attempting to increase its influence and stature. The AKP government tried to engage Hamas with international politics and granted it legitimacy. This became evident when the then-Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated, *"I do not see Hamas as a terrorist organization. Hamas is a political party"* (Haaretz, 2011).

The AKP claimed that they could push Hamas away from its doctrinaire past, towards more practical and open-for-compromise politics.

Despite the international boycott of the government of Hamas, Turkey did not stop dealing with the caretaker government led by Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Additionally, the Turkish government condemned the existing blockade of the Hamas government. The AKP government considered Hamas to be democratically elected by the Palestinian people, and to be an important player in the Palestinian political scene. They urged the other regional governments to give Hamas some space to prove itself and asked the international community to take a positive stance on the Hamas government.

Khalid Mashaal's visit created a shock in the international community. This visit also created a heated debate inside the Turkish Foreign Ministry. Furthermore, AKP's openness towards Hamas was criticized from Israel. Israel directly reacted to this visit

through its Ambassador to Turkey Pinhas Avivi (Demirelli, 2006).

Turkey made different efforts to support the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks and in the same vein tried to involve Hamas indirectly in these talks. The AKP tried to push Hamas away from its dogmatic past, towards more practical and open-for-compromise politics. However, all of the Turkish government's attempts encountered problems, and in the end, were not very effective in making a positive change in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This follows the lack of real power that the Turkish authorities' government could exercise over Israel.

In contrast, it could be argued that the AKP government does have substantial political leeway concerning the Palestinian cause. This stems from Turkey and Palestine's shared historical geographical unity, mutual culture and religion.

**The Israeli Military Operation in Gaza (2008):** The Israeli military operation in Gaza in 2008 and the news of an increase in casualties provoked a sharp reaction from Turkey, leading to a deterioration in relations between the two countries. The lead cast operation against the people of Gaza came exactly three days after Israeli President Ehud Olmert visited Ankara to thank Turkey for its mediation in resolving the Israeli-Syrian conflict. Erdogan was outraged by the operation. Erdogan has made it clear that he no longer considers Olmert a "peace partner" and has lost confidence in Israel. Erdogan refers to one of the verses of the Torah in Hebrew which states: "thou shall not kill" (Efron, 2018:8).

In the weeks since the ceasefire between Hamas and Israel, Turkish-Israeli relations have been reduced. However, despite these positions, Turkey has worked hard to end the Gaza war in any way possible. Erdogan's senior foreign policy adviser Ahmet Davutoglu appears to have played a key role in convincing Hamas to end rocket attacks on Israeli headquarters after Israel unilaterally announced that it had ended military operations on January 17, 2009 in the north and east of Gaza.

**Davos case**: The heightened political tension in the Turkish-Israeli relations was increased during a panel debate titled *Gaza*:

*The Case for Middle East Peace* at the World Economic Forum in Davos, in Switzerland on 29 January 2009, after just about eleven days from the termination of the *Operation Cast Lead*. Erdoğan pulled out from the Forum because he was prevented from replying to the comments made by Shimon Peres regarding the attack on Gaza. The reason behind Erdoğan's anger was Peres' refusal to recognize the humanitarian toll, which was the result of Israeli attacks on Gaza, as well as Peres' defense of Israel as "*a state exercising its legitimate right of self-defense*" (Migdalovitz, 2010).

Erdoğan had a public confrontation with the then Israeli President. He described the Israeli military offensive activities in Gaza as a *war crime*. The discussion of the Gaza attacks was lively, with contributions from Ban Ki-moon, the former Secretary-General of the UN, Amr Moussa, the former Arab League secretary-general, Peres and Erdoğan (Kastoryano, 2013). Erdoğan spoke to Peres: "*You are speaking with a raised voice. This is the psychology of guilt. You know very well how to kill.*" Moreover, Erdoğan continued to quote from the Torah: "*Article 6 of the Old Testament reads: Thou shalt not kill.*" After Erdoğan departed, Peres said: "*Turkey would have reacted the same way if rockets had been falling on Istanbul*" (Bennhold, 2009).

The Davos incident opened a new dimension in the Turkish-Israeli political tension. The Davos incident can be considered as the first public strong rhetoric from Erdoğan towards the 2008 Israeli military operation. This incident contributed to increasing the atmosphere of mistrust between Ankara and Tel Aviv (Alsaftawi, 2017:192).

**Mavi Marmara**: Turkish-Israeli relations soured in May 2010 with the deployment of several humanitarian ships to Gaza to break the siege of the region and the deadly clash of its passengers with the Israeli navy. The ships were expedited on the initiative of Turkish NGOs, and Ankara was aware of that.

Tensions between the two countries continued throughout 2010. Meanwhile, Turkey's emphasis on Israel's official apology to the country for attacking the peace ship, the cancellation of the

two countries' military maneuvers and the cancellation of the Turkish Foreign Minister's visit to Israel added to the strained relations. Turkey has asked an official Israeli apology for attacking the peace ship and declared it as a condition for improving relations.

In September 2011, Erdogan announced that the Mavi Marmara incident could pave the way for war, and that the Turkish navy had been instructed to provide shipping security in the region. The Turkish Foreign Minister even called on the United Nations to take action against Israeli aggression in the Gaza Strip (Akgün, 2014:6).

A year and a half after the incident, in March 2013, Benjamin Netanyahu will finally formally apologize due to Barack Obama's mediation (Arbell.2014: 1-2). The United Nations has sent an investigation team led by the Prime Minister of New Zealand to investigate the incident (Akgün, 2014:5).

Meanwhile, some news sources reported that the Israeli Minister of Industry had a secret meeting with the Turkish Foreign Minister in Brussels, which showed the special views of the two countries for the continuation of political relations.

Following the Mavi Marmara incident, Turkey reduced its relations to the level of second secretary, and Israel recalled its ambassador. Until 2016, relations between the two countries fluctuated in a series of fluctuations and two series of negotiations, until finally, the two sides decided to strengthen relations again in June 2016.

If the determination of Turkey to make Israel apologise for the Mavi Marmara incident was viewed in Turkey as the restoration of Turkish national honor and the acknowledgement of its superiority, the acceptance to apologize was considered a huge insult in Israeli circles (Goren, 2012: 128).

**Jerusalem Issue**: In the case of the transfer of the Israeli government headquarters to Jerusalem, Erdogan told US officials that Jerusalem was the red line in the Muslim world. Netanyahu eventually accused Erdogan of killing his compatriot Kurds and

helping Iran escape sanctions and collaborating with terrorists (Zaman, 2017).

Erdogan's serious confrontation over the transfer made him the hero of this confrontation. While the main allies of the West Bank Autonomous Government, namely Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan, only verbally opposed (Efron, 2018:28).

On May 14, 2018, when the United States recognized Jerusalem as the center of the Israeli government, following the subsequent events of the repression of the Palestinians, Erdogan accused Israel of genocide and described it as a terrorist state. (Independent.UK`s Largest Quality News Brand, 2018) Even Turkey declared three days of public mourning (Alkaç, 2018).

## IV. Turkish Orientation and Iranian Perspectives

According to our mixed conceptual framework, Turkish politics are relatively in line with Iran's strategies insofar as it is inspired by national and Islamic values, but they, which in the framework of realism theory, are oriented very far from the path of Iranian politics.

Mir Hosseini believes that Turkey and Israel in the Middle East have overlapping interests in vital areas of security-military, and both have a completely security and confrontational view of the axis of resistance, especially Syria, Iraq and Iran. Because, first, Syria and Iraq are the refuge of the opposition of Turkey and Israel, and the Kurdish groups and the Palestinian and Lebanese resistance against Israel are present there.

According to his analysis, "in the case of Iran, Turkey sees Iran as its main regional rival, which has achieved regional power and balance in its favor, and on the other hand, Iran is the main and ideological enemy of Israel" (Mir Hosseini, 2020:319).

Turkey's general policy has fluctuated in favor of Palestinian rights and non-hostility to Israel. There are the signs indicating that the AKP's policy has been a moderate one: Erdogan's reaction to Israel's invasion on Gaza and Rafah, criticizing Israel's influence in the Kurdistan Regional Government, deepening ties with Hamas,

condemning Israel's attack on Lebanon in summer 2006, suspending military exercises in 2009 following Israel's repressive operation against the Gaza Strip. If the AKP adopted a pro-Palestine and anti-Israel policy, it would face domestic problems (questioning its legitimacy by military and laic parties) on the one hand and foreign problem (decreasing the West's economic and military aids) on the other. Thus, the AKP's foreign policy has been fluctuated between pro-Palestine and pro-Israel trends.

Therefore, it can be argued that tensions between Turkey and Israel in this period within the dominant norms of Turkish foreign policy do not mean to deny Israel's legitimacy but they mean to protest Israel's performance or to correct it. The reason for this claim is that these tensions have never culminated in a crisis cutting their relations. The definition of Turkey's identity on a mixed basis has caused that this state's politics be influenced by both Western and Islamic norms and manifested a character, which is the result of this identity combination. In fact, Turkey's policy based on strategic alliance with Israel and approaching Islamic countries have been accompanied by a kind of moderatism that gives Turkish Islamism a particular and unique nature in the Islam World (Soleimani Poorlak, 2012:124-5).

**General Differences**: There are fundamental differences between Turkey and Iran. First, despite profound Islamization processes, Turkey has a Sunni majority and its regime maintains liberal characteristics; while revolutionary Iran is a Shiite religious state.

Second, both Turkey and Iran, each for various historical, geographical and material reasons, see themselves as a regional – if not global –power, which may over time result in heightened competition and even overt rivalry between the two. Iran and Turkey also disagree on the nature of the desired regime in Iraq, the situation in Lebanon, and the Arab-Israeli peace process. Furthermore, Turkey is closely tied to the West (Guzansky, 2011:2).

Despite the ties between Iran and Turkey, therefore, the potential for disagreement and competition for regional

dominance also exists. In general, Turkey does not share Iran's ideology or interests, and in its conduct, it still seeks to maintain a balance between East and West to help it preserve its regional status. Thus in the long term, strengthening Iran's status at the expense of other elements in the region would be problematic from Turkey's perspective (Guzansky, 2011:2).

Another possible locus of friction between two states is the struggle over image and leadership in the Muslim world. It has been claimed that Turkey's image in the Arab world today is the most positive that it has been since World War I (Guzansky, 2011:2).

Progress in Iran's nuclear program has several negative implications for Turkey-Iran relations. First, the Turks have on numerous occasions stated that they oppose nuclear proliferation in the Middle East. While this pronouncement primarily targets Israel's nuclear policy, Turkey is in principle still opposed to Iran acquiring nuclear weapons (Guzansky, 2011:3).

**The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**: Even with the current poor relations between Israel and Turkey, Turkey still supports a settlement, whereas Iran denies the basic legitimacy of the State of Zionist regime. Iran lies outside of the Arab-Israeli /Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and it is doing all in its power to undermine any possible settlement by financing, training, and shipping arms to Palestinian organizations such as Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas. By contrast, the relationship between Turkey and Hamas (Turkey recognized the Hamas government as early as 2006 and even hosted Khaled Mashal in Ankara that same year) stems not necessarily from a desire to strengthen the organization's control of the Gaza Strip, rather from its stance that to advance negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians (Guzansky, 2011:5).

Beyond this, Turkish public opinion has long empathized with the Palestinian struggle; there is also some sense of responsibility for the fact that the Palestinian problem was created during the end of the Ottoman era. The result, at least for the Palestinian issue, is that Erdoğan is trying to position Turkey somewhere

between the Arab/Muslim world and Israel/the West, thereby impeding Iran's attempt to take exclusive control of the issue as a way of increasing its influence on Arab public opinion above the heads of Arab leaders (Guzansky, 2011:5-6).

By exploiting the Palestinian issue, Erdogan tries to present Turkey to the Arab public as a leading power in the Middle East, to gain Islamic legitimacy, and to build an economic infrastructure in the region.

Speaking in September 2014 in New York at the Foreign Relations Council (CFR), one of the leading think tanks of the United States, Erdogan declared: "*The Palestinian issue is an important issue that has an impact not just on the Palestinians, but on all the Muslims and everyone who has a conscience in the world. And in fact, the Palestinian issue lies in the heart of many of the issues in the region. And the Israeli government, although they know this sensitivity very well, has not refrained from putting its own people and the people of the region on fire*" (Karmon, 2018:75).

Farhad Rezaei speaks about an odd Turkish policy. He claims "while Iran's efforts to support Palestine and oppose Israel have been exploited to enhance its popularity in the Arab world, Turkey's assertive support for the Palestinians has been an important factor that has contributed to the deterioration of Iran's popularity in the Arab world. This particular Turkish policy has been interpreted by Tehran as a threat to Iran's role as the main state sponsor of anti-Israel movements"(Rezaei, 2017:65). Rezaei`s comments present a special image of the issue :"There are a number of other issues that are causing tensions between Turkey and Iran including the fact that Turkey, which considers itself to be a leading regional leading power due to its democratic political system and high economic growth rate, has become a model for the political development of countries in the region" (Rezaei, 2017:65).

Turkey was allied with Hamas in its fight for ending the Gaza siege by Israel, its search for domination in the internal Palestinian arena and its quest for gaining international legitimacy. But at the

same time Hamas has been strategically allied since 1992 with Iran, which has bolstered its military capabilities and largely financed its resistance activities against Israel. Moreover, Iran, like Hamas, openly professes the destruction of the Zionist Regime.

In this sense, there is a constant competition between the two regional powers, Turkey and Iran, for the "hearts and minds" of the Palestinian people and close relations with Hamas. The sectarian war in Syria and the larger Sunni-Shia conflict have tilted Hamas towards Erdogan's Turkey while relations with Iran have suffered ups and downs since 2012. The change of regime in Cairo and the closing of the Gaza border and destruction of the smuggling tunnels by Egypt have limited Iran's military and financial support to Hamas (Karmon, 2018:80).

When the Palestinians express their preference between Tehran and Ankara, it is found that a significant strata, from the resistance and the negotiation streams alike, they are inclined more towards the former`s adoption of their cause more than the latter's support (Abu Amer, 2013:8-9).

However, after a period of tension and uncertainty and on the backdrop of Trump's decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem, Tehran and Hamas recently took steps to improve their relationship. Tehran may be finding comfort now that Hamas is returning to the Iranian orbit. In October 2017, a senior Hamas delegation visited Tehran and met with top Iranian leaders. In January 2018, the Hamas representative thanked for their support to the "anti-Israeli resistance front". Soon after Trump's announcement, both President Hassan Rouhani and Ex-Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani (martyred by US Force) called leaders of Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups to pledge Iran's "all-out support" for their struggle against Israel (Karmon, 2018:80).

Turkey supports a settlement between two sides, while Iran does not accept the legitimacy of Israel's existence. Iran believes in full supporting resistance groups like Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (Lindenstrauss, 2011: 2).

While Ankara and Tehran have not been willing to coordinate

their policies on Palestine, from the Iranian perspective Turkey's pro-Palestinian stance is indicative of the changes within the country. The issue of Palestine has been at the heart of the revolutionary ideas of the Islamic Republic since 1979, and while Iran is not willing to concede its role for regional leadership in that regard, it routinely displays an automatic proclivity towards countries like Turkey that embrace the cause for Palestinian statehood (Adib-Moghaddam, 2018: 5).

**Neorealism Framework**
**Influential Variables from International and Regional Environment**
Turkish Geopolitical Position as a Central player in South Caucasus, West and Central Asia, Mediterranean Coasts, NATO Membership

**Turkish Decision Box**
**Constructivism Framework**
**Domestic Values & Ideas**
**New Ottoman, Islamic Values**
**(Near to Iranian Perspectives)**

**Foreign Policy Formation**
**Maintaining strategic relations with Israel**
**while providing political support to the Palestinians**
**(Far from Iranian Perspectives)**
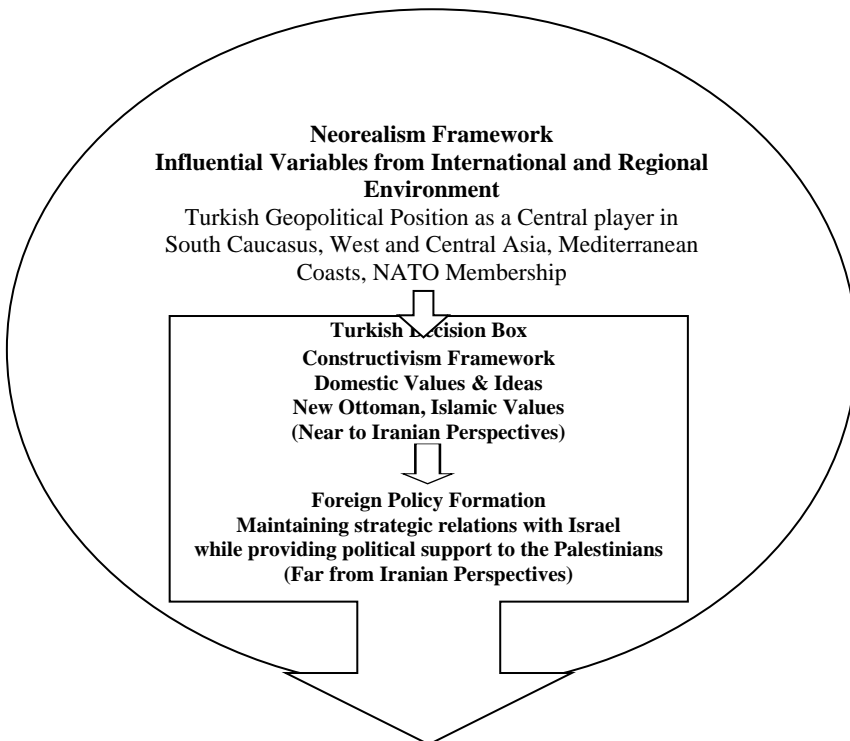
**Figure 2. Theoretical Framework of Turkish Foreign Policy Formation towards to Palestinian Issue**

## Conclusion

Palestinian issue is not only historic, religious or sentimental issue for Turkey, it is instrumental in managing Turkey's relationship with the Arab world, with Israel and the West, and a domestic issue due to its sensitivity. As the controversy after Trump Declaration of

December 6, 2017, moving US Embassy in Tel Aviv to Jerusalem showed Turkish government reacts, and will react in the future to any kind of arrangements about Palestinian territories and will not remain indifferent to changes in Palestinian problem.

Palestinian question is also helping the governments to mobilize people in domestic politics and provide a source for support, especially from the right constituents. Supporting the Palestinian cause and degrading relations with Israel is also regarded as proof of "independent foreign policy" and deviation from the "old-fashioned secular establishment" and liberating itself from the tutelage of the military.

Apart from yield in domestic politics, supporting the Palestinian cause plays important role in Turkish Foreign Policy. Moving away from its alliance with Israel, Turkey sends positive message to Arab countries that they are more valuable for Ankara. With this, Turkey hopes to improve its image, its trade and tourism with the Arab world. Turkey also uses its deviation as a leverage to the United States, tries to play a role in Arab affairs. Assuming the role of guarding Palestinian rights, especially that of Hamas', Turkey also portrays itself as a pro-democracy power in the region. This message is also being used for domestic expenditure.

It can be said that Turkey will continue to use its support to the Palestinian cause. Israeli military operations in Gaza will further escalate the tension and open a field for Turkey to maneuver in diplomacy. Despite the fact that Turkey is, and probably will remain as a part of Western security institutions like NATO, Turkey is looking for other options to make Turkish foreign policy more independent.

Consequently, the AKP's pattern that has accepted the Western secularism and civilization, on the one hand, and respects Islamic traditions, on the other, actually is a combination that makes peaceful coexistence with the West possible and prevents from identity crisis and radicalism among Muslim groups. On this basis, among Muslim states, Turkey established the warmest relations with Israel.

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# China's Belt and Road Initiative Dominance or Development and American Response

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## Abstract

Chinas` ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has attracted the eye of the many economists worldwide. Many of these economists believe that the Belt and Road Initiative is part of China's vision of a world where America will no longer be the dominant superpower. It is possible that this may be true. China has committed an outsized chunk of its resources towards this project. More than $1 trillion worth of investments are poured into projects which are directly or indirectly associated with the Belt and Road Initiative. the question is of what else the U.S should do if it's serious about countering Chinese influence.? Will the developing world fall under China's sway? whether the U.S should worry about the economic and political influence these projects may bring for China? This paper to both identify areas of common interest and possible cooperation, also as shed light on areas of disagreement that need further work.

**Keywords:** *America, China, Belt and Road initiative, Negative, Positive*

**Introduction**

One Belt One Road initiative of China is that the most vital megaproject of international economics within the current situation. With this plan, China pursues major goals in terms of economic process, especially energy security, expanding its influence in various regions, access to global markets, also as creating more cost effective communication and transportation. The idea is to facilitate the availability of energy, goods, and convey the varied parts of the world closer to China.

Originally named the "One Belt, One Road" Initiative, BRI comprised of "the Silk Road Economic Belt" and "the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road" was suggests by Chinese President Xi Jinping in Astana, Kazakhstan, and Jakarta, Indonesia, in September and October 2013. BRI proposed five Corridor that integrate the Eurasian. They include policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and people-to people communication (Rolland, 2017 :43). These links reflect Beijing's vision that mixes both soft connections like policy cooperation and hard connections including transcontinental networks. These connections are divided mainly into six economic corridors: China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor, New Eurasian Land Bridge Economic Corridor, China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor, China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor(Hong Kong Trade Development Council , 2017). China has mobilized an enormous amount of political, financial, technical, and human resources at different administrative levels to urge BRI started.

This plan consists of two parts: One New Silk Road and therefore the second Sea Silk Route. China by introducing this plan is pursuing ambitious goals. These goals include economic process, ensuring energy security, expansion of the sphere of influence, access to world markets and building cost effective transportation and transit routes. This project seeks to facilitate the transfer of energy and commodities to China and from China to other parts of the planet within a brief span of time. The sea route consists of two directions: First a route from the coasts of China through the South China Sea and then the Indian Ocean to Europe and the second from the shores of China to the South Pacific Ocean.

several financing institutions have been erected to support the flagship initiative. Officially launched in June 2015, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) gathered 57 founding countries, among which 18 are European nations (Rolland, 2017: 195). Despite U.S. warnings, major European countries including Britain, France, Germany, and Italy became signatories at AIIB's opening ceremony (Matthias and Jasone,2018). next another 13 countries and regions. 42 regional members, 22 non-regional members, and 20 perspective members located in all continents joined AIIB. (Rolland, 2017: 57). Besides AIIB, China also secured $100 billion from the New Development Bank created by and for the BRICS countries. Apart from multilateral financing, China has also mobilized its domestic resources to support its flagship initiative. Drawing from its foreign reserve and its policy banks, China created the Silk Road Fund that will allegedly provide $40 billion to profitable mid- and long-term projects (Rolland, 2018:51). China's policy banks the Export-Import Bank of China and China Development Bank will also invest in major projects abroad based on the necessity of development goals. (Sicilia and Scissors ,2018).

Security-wise, China has built up its naval base at Djibouti, and officially opened it in early, 2017. Located near the Gulf of Aden where the busiest maritime routes cross, the Djibouti base is

said to be able to provide logistic support for the People's Liberation Army (PLA) (Blanchard, 2017). Although this is the first Chinese naval base abroad, Navy has involved in escort missions in the Gulf of Aden for more than a decade. A strengthened PLA Navy presence in the Indian Ocean would protect Chinese investment and constructions along the 21st Maritime Silk Road.

## I. Belt and Road: Initiative or a Strategy

The Belt and Road Initiative is a completely Chinese initiative. But what exactly is the One Belt and a Road initiative? This initiative supports five principles at the outset: Mutual respect, Non-aggression, No interference, Equality and Mutual Interest, Peaceful Coexistence (Gion, 2018). The B&R initiative also comes in five areas: Political Coordination, Connect to infrastructure, Advanced Business, Currency support (currency exchange), People exchange, Cultural diplomacy.

China has a global economy recovery plan. The project begins with China itself. From 1912 to 2020, China followed the process of modernizing its society and implementing a middle class structure. But to win the world, it has to face big challenges. China has the power to implement this strategy, but it has no attack power. According to this view, the initiative of a Belt and a Road of China is quite a peaceful strategy to improve relations between the peoples of the world. The goal is to peacefully link Asia, Europe and Africa on the basis of economic initiative. global economy will gradually play into the Belt and Road Initiative, if successful, will include a population of nearly 4.6 billion, which is more than 60% of the world's population, and total GDP of $ 20 trillion, that is, 1/3 of global GDP (Boric, 2018). For some commentators, the Belt and Road project is a response to Western globalization to build a better world. Competition between China and the US has intensified as China strengthens and perhaps weakens US global dominance. Despite the interdependence and hope for Achieve at a win-win situation

instead of a zero-sum game, Historical experience shows that competition between important countries can easily be influenced by irrational factors, with unexpected or even undesirable outcomes. China enters the 21st century as a nation claiming universal relevance for the proper culture and institutions with the culture and global institutions. The Belt and Road project verifies this.

## II. Chinese and American Perceptions

**Chinese Perception:** A Safer Neighborhood: Lessening threats in western China is a perennial challenge for Beijing. Basic problems include Tibetan and Uighur breakaway movements and their cross-border advocates, narcotics transit, influence of Islamic saboteurs into western China at Through Central Asia, and even concerns about External support "color revolutions" in border areas (State Council Information Office ,2015). Strengthen infrastructure development and Connecting the territorial economy, in the Chinese analysts' point of view, could support by eliminating the roots of poverty and insecurity, reinforcement (often authoritarian and China-friendly) regimes, and tying Xinjiang more closely into the regional economy. A connected profit, although not expressly argued in Chinese sources, is that a safer western border region implies fewer strategic distractions and additional resources obtainable for China to expand its influence across Asia (Joel, 2018).

More Secure Energy Supply and Transport Routes: Another great challenge has been manifold China's energy supplies, which stay deeply affiliate to maritime transport routes via the Strait of Malacca and other chokepoints (US, 2015). Dubbed the "Malacca Dilemma" during the Hu Jintao era, there was concern that Chinese oil imports may be banned by the foreign navies during the crisis. BRI projects such as an oil pipeline linking Pakistan's Gwadar Port with Xinjiang and a second Sino-Russian oil pipeline could help reduce, but not eliminate, China's overreliance on vulnerable sea lanes. The BRI's maritime component, known as

the Maritime Silk Road, could also help secure China's continuing maritime shipments through additional port development, including the opening of new People's Liberation Army (PLA) navy overseas logistics bases (Joel, 2018).Stronger Chinese Economic and Diplomatic Influence:   Chinese Experts describe the display of BRI projects as the realization of a "march west" the premise being that the absence of the U.S as a strategic heavyweight in Eurasia has created an opportunity for China to extend its diplomatic and economic influence in the region while avoiding a costly direct competition with *Washington (Wang, 2012:1).*

**American Perception**: U.S Analysts generally hold a more pessimistic vision towards the economic profit BRI could bring to other countries. They worry about whether China's partners will benefit a lot from BRI projects, and whether China is able to carry out the Initiative in the long run. According to their evaluation, "BRI is best understood as construction projects worth many billions of dollars taken on by state-owned enterprises (SOEs) (Perez and scissors, 2018)."

They believe that most BRI projects are construction projects rather than investment, in which Chinese money is used to hire Chinese contractors. They worry that these projects may not create as many jobs for local people as promised by the Chinese government. In addition, most money came out from Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs). other scholars, believe that BRI has the potential to change the Eurasian landmass, and that the U.S. should collaborate with China when possible (Hart and Gewirtz, 2018:51). The U.S. would marginalize itself economically if it chooses to totally disregard BRI. Otherwise, the U.S. may lose in the process of the change of the economic balance of power internationally, and undermine the leading position of the U.S. in the world economy. Toward whether BRI is able to achieve its stated goals, American attitudes are more varied, with some believing that it could be beneficial to the region while other saying that it stems from selfish ends.

Different analyses from the military, major think tanks, and the government hold a consensus view that, through BRI, China is able to stabilize its western provinces that are threatened by separatist powers, secure energy supply routes from Central Asian countries and Russia, establish a larger military presence abroad than before, cultivate a stronger than ever political influence to its partners, and pivot away from the pressure exerted by America's rebalance to Asia .In fact, America's concerns over China's strategic and security gains in the region reflect a fundamental assumption that these gains undermine American hegemony and its relative advantage over China(Ratner, 2018). American allies and partners would possibly choose to abandon the U.S. and bandwagon with China for fear that the U.S. may not honor its security commitment.

Besides a direct competition, Washington also showed its concern over the future of international institutions and norms. China's power in international institutions grows despite whether AIIB (Asian infrastructure investment bank) challenges or supplements the existing system (Ikenberry and lime, 2017). AIIB could gain power either by threatening to set up an alternative to the current system or by tightly connecting AIIB with the World Bank or the Asian Development Bank (ADB). With the reduction potential   in institutional power, the U.S. is worried that the appliance of rules and norms would also change in favor of China and against the interests of the U.S. Over a longer period of time, it could challenge U.S hegemonic power within the arena of worldwide institutions and order.

## III. Consequences BRI for U.S

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) represents an elementary play by China to reshape the globe around it. It involves the expenditure of enormous amounts of cash quite US$1 trillion in line with some sources in developing property and alternative essential infrastructure across Eurasia, the Indian ocean region, Africa and South Pacific, and so a lot of the globe. whether or not

the initiative mainly has economic motivations however it definitely has considerable strategic consequences.

The BRI is provocative in its envisioned scale and attain. But China's Targets and benefits in pursuing the BRI have come under severe critique from the U.S, other Western developed countries, and even developing nations along the BRI for faults in transparency, economic sustainability, and good quality. These concerns are combined by worries that the BRI has underlying strategic motivations with the potential to modify the geopolitical perspective and universal governance standards of the international society.

**Negatives:** For the U.S these outcomes can go far beyond concerns about the control of foundation plans or the economic and political impacts those projects may bring for Beijing (David, 2018). In opposition to China's BRI initiative, the United States begins with several disadvantages: Washington lacks Beijing's appetite to expend money, as well as its ruthlessness in transactions. Besides that, the United states-private sector does not have a persuade interest in deploying large sums of money in the developing world given investment opportunities elsewhere (Kapsten and Shapiro, 2018).

Transparency and External Participation: The lack of transparency around the project has been one of the largest sources of U.S. objections to the BRI's performance. ambiguity makes it difficult for External firms to become involved in BRI-related projects until they are already in motion, and it may also create a fertile environment for corruption. These concerns are not special to the BRI and are also reflected in the broader ongoing U.S.-China commerce and economic disputes over fairness and reciprocity for Unites states firms operating in China. Beijing continues to encourage External investment to help dominate the enormous deficit of capital needed to complete its vision, but there is a disconnect between those looking to participate and actual opportunities. Low standards, difficulties competing in the procurement and bidding process, and riskiness of investments are

further impediments to joining (Max, 2018).

Geopolitics and Global Governance**:** As long as opacity is the norm in BRI initiative, it will be tough for the U.S and other like-minded countries to view the initiative in a positive light. Not only does it encourage corruption and intensify the debt woes of developing nations, the lack of transparency also fuels suspicions that BRI works as a Trojan horse for Chinese supremacy. China religiously repeats that it "has no geopolitical calculations" for the BRI (Verma ,2018). However, the initiative's scale means that it necessarily has geopolitical implications. When this is the Issue with a lack of transparency, Beijing's assertions of "win-win cooperation" and a "community of common destiny" seem disingenuous at best, and at worst a mask to conceal the real intentions of the initiative. In conditions of rising tensions between the U.S and China, it is not surprising that the more skeptical observers in Washington assume the Belt and Road projects to be a strategy aimed at replacing the United States as the world's dominant power and cementing China's rise.

The BRI has already begun to affect the region, not always the ones China intended. It catalyzes modernization drives from Pakistan to Myanmar, Investments that can actually help countries diversify their economies and achieve a decent level of investment. At the same time, it has awakened these countries at risk of over-indebtedness without delivering growth and so they are captured in China's political circuit. Importantly, this has given rise to a welcome "infrastructure arms race" in which Japan, India, Europe and even, belatedly, the United States are beginning to actively race with China to finance the productive grounds and help BRI members to eventually resist Chinese dominance (Schuster, 2018).

Losing friends and influence: There are many implications for the United States of a step-change in China's role in the BRI. One of the main impetus for U.S. resistance to the Soviet presence in Afghanistan in the 1980s came from the scare that Russia would catch the 'warm water' port of Gwadar, allowing it to breach the

U.S. attempts to contain the Soviet Navy in icebound or geographically limited ports on Russian scope.A Chinese naval presence at Gwadar, or in Myanmar, Sri Lanka or Tanzania would be no less significant (David ,2018). The United States may not try to contain China completely like the Soviet Union, But the US Navy can nevertheless use the "Pacific Island Chains" as the carrier of indescribable aircraft to restrict the Chinese naval movement from its Pacific coast ports in the event of a conflict. With China's significant sea presence in the Indian Ocean, this strategy will be greatly weakened.

Most importantly, the land link between China and the Indian Ocean has the potential to fundamentally alter the economic and political orientation of many Indian Ocean nations. Again, the most prominent example is Pakistan, where Islamabad now looks to Beijing for economic and political support. But it also happens to a greater or lesser extent in many countries on the periphery of South Asia (Sri Lanka, Maldives, Myanmar) and the African coast (Sudan, Nigeria, Tanzania, Mozambique). America will find itself slowly but surely losing political and economic influence among those nations, and the security relations with it (David ,2018).

The United States strategic center of control at the IOR has always been the Persian Gulf, where the US Fifth Fleet rules the waves. This dominance may not be under threat at the moment, but China is already planning for the day when the Fifth Fleet moves on. This contains building warm relations with Persian Gulf countries such as Qatar (which currently hosts the forward headquarters of USCENTCOM) (Roy ,2018).

**Positives:** Many observers picture the BRI solely as a Chinese geopolitical poly for global hegemony or the expression of a ferocious economy (Tamkin and Gramer, 2017). However, the reality is that the One Belt Road Initiative is not entirely in conflict with US interests and may even support them in specific cases.There are no inherent obstacles to investing in infrastructure or promoting global connectivity in the developing world. truly, the U.S has an interest in supporting both of these targets. If

Washington is to form a logical response to the BRI, it must affirm where the initiative may align with U.S. interests.

The United States must also understand that the BRI is moving fast, not just because it is a priority for the president, but because there is an actual demand for what China has to offer. According to the Asian Development Bank, Asia alone requires $26 trillion in infrastructure investment by 2030 to sustain current growth rates (Asian Development Bank ,2017). According to the International Monetary Fund in other areas where the BRI is active, such as Latin America and Africa, Lack of sufficient infrastructure is one of the biggest obstacles to growth and development (Hamid and Berkmen, 2017:15). Given the scale of global infrastructure development needs, BRI is just a drop of water from a bucket of water, yet it also dwarfs what anyone else is doing to meet the challenge.

Beijing has concentrated on more of its consideration on emerging states and districts where Western investment is sizeable absent. Western expert's inclination to concentrate on valuable projects in large countries, but the BRI's largest achievement has possibly been smaller-scale but truly targeted investments in developing countries. Because these countries often lack the required subtraction, the marginal benefit of each yuan spent is greater than in more developed regions. One region of BRI's recognized benefit to the United States is in the security area. The United States has attention to infrastructure investment in an attempt to secure peace through development in Afghanistan.

**BRI's Legal Issues:** 1.Onerous' concession terms**:** While it is common for sponsors to provide legal terms, these railway concessions have a wide range of long taxation periods, long term rentals for Chinese companies and imports, plus Exemption from foreign workers' quota. Which in the long run is likely to raise issues regarding the competitiveness of existing domestic industries?

2. Contradictory priorities: The impact of the national government playing the dual role of actor and commercial

regulator becomes difficult if the regulator needs to take a back seat for the commercial actor or vice versa. This can lead to bias towards large infrastructure projects that must be economically and environmentally significant. Allow for "heavy" privileges The conditions disable the government's primary responsibility for managing the country's resources, including the protection of the environment and the rights of its citizens. It is therefore important, within the framework of concessional agreements, to determine how much the government waives its traditional responsibility for its population.

3. Financing: Properly funded arrangements are a critical element of any BRI project. Many of these projects are expected to be financed through the help of Chinese banks, financial institutions such as Asian Infrastructure Development Bank, Silk Road Fund and the new Development Bank. China is going through a steep curve in financing BRI projects, for example in export credit insurance, international cross-border transactions, project financing models and security law (Chance, 2017). It is no surprise that the deployment of funds raises issues because there is a lot to be gathered, especially a surveillance system capable of working across borders, providing transparency and a balanced approach to bridging the gap between public and private loans (McKinsey and Company, 2016). Some of the complications are related to the credit ratings of the BRI countries. Some countries in the project have no rating at all They have no credit. Investors, especially China's policy-makers, may not pay off their debt on regulated assets, so they can add to domestic debt items that are not already in their balance sheets (Deloitte, 2018).

4. Debt hangover: In addition to raising problems, the BRI also raises debt risks, such as debt repayments in some lending countries. Eight BRI member countries are now identified as potential BRI borrowers in debt risk based on the BRI project's loan pipeline (Hurley and Morris, 2018).

Looking at the BRI budget arrangements, recipient countries seem to have to bear the most financial risk, while China benefits

from both for those seeking BRI projects, while the economic outlook Tempting, the terms of the loan must be carefully considered (Aljazeera, 2017).

## IV. US Interests or International Order

While some observers acknowledge China's Tangible progress in using its soft power and organizing itself as a world leader with the BRI Initiative, there are also many Warning reactions to China's new diplomacy. One concern often raised in the American press is that China attempts to establish new international organizations or economic frameworks that work as parallel alternatives to or totally replace US-led regimes such as the Bretton Woods organization (the WTO and IMF) or the dollar-based financial system. To some experts, BRI and AIIB point to an "important point" that challenges the foundations of the American economic order and introduces beginning of a "Sino-Centric"(Worthington and Manning, 2018). A saying often used in such discussions, "all roads will lead to Beijing," It is reminiscent of the old saying about the ancient Roman Empire that "all roads lead to Rome"(fallon, 2015:140). What, exactly, it means can vary a big deal, from China, making regional economic affiliation favorable to it, China is trying to turn Europe into a "mere peninsula at the end of the Asian continent"(Rolland ,2018). Despite Chinese promises to upgrade the inclusive framework, BRI appears "Quite unique" of the USA and its interests (Fallon, 2015:146).

More worrying is that China's monetary and political investment in BRI projects will commit it to more security activities outside China. Many analysts note that the PLA or other forces are likely to be called upon to protect Chinese nationals who may be threatened or harmed by terrorists while working on BRI projects (Djankov, et al, 2019).

Establishing a BRI security coordination mechanism as "inevitable" with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization now provides the possible basis for such a body (Lin ,2019). Some

believe that the division of Russian / Chinese labor in Central Asia, where Russia will continue to play a dominant security role despite China's economic dominance (Swaine, 2014: 43).

US observers have focused on specific discussions in China about the strategic consequences of the BRI, to some in the United States, this discussion illustrates the essence of BRI: A competitive gamble aimed at separating the EU and Japan from the US. For others, this simply draws attention to the fact that BRI may be a useful tool for various programs within China, some of which may influence its future (Mustafa, 2015:3).

5.1 How has the United States responded to China-led regional integration

The development of South and Central Asian economies is a long-standing goal of the United States that intensified after the US-led war in Afghanistan with President Barack Obama's axis in Asia. The Obama administration has often emphasized the need for the Afghan economy to help foreign pasts, and in 2014 the United States pledged to restore Central and South Asia to its "historic role as a key hub of world trade, ideas, and culture. "In doing so, the Obama administration supported the $ 10 billion gas pipeline through Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. It has also spent billions of dollars on projects and roads and energy projects in Afghanistan and has used its diplomatic muscle to help create new frameworks for regional cooperation to strengthen Central Asian economic relations (Chatzky and Bride ,2018).

The Trump administration, unlike Obama, is pursuing a more confrontational strategy in the region against China. Some commentators have called on the United States to deepen its relations with its Asian partners. the Obama administration sought to work more broadly with the Trans-Pacific, an agreement rejected by Trump in favor of boosting bilateral ties. The Trump administration, backed by two parties in Congress, has instead tried to counter the BRI through BUILD law. The Overseas Private Investment Company (OPIC), a US government agency

for development finance, merged the components of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) into a separate agency with $ 60 billion of investment funding. Although this is insignificant compared to the more than $ 1 trillion that financial analysts expect China to spend on BRIs, Supporters believe it seeks to crowd in a larger pool of private investment by underwriting risk. the U.S could use BRI projects as a way to have China pay for infrastructure initiatives in Central Asia that are also in the U.S. interest (Chatzky and Bride, 2018).

The United States is the leader in this partnership. That is why it has pledged $ 200 billion for Indian-Pacific projects. Other partners, such as Japan, have volunteered $ 50 billion to help. While these amounts are substantial, they are very small compared to the one trillion dollars China is willing to spend. However, it seems that the US strategic goal is not to beat China but to control it (Prachi ,2019).

**Quadrilateral: US Strategy to Contain China:** One of the most heavily scrutinized aspects of the Donald Trump administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy is the role played by the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or "Quad," comprised of Australia, India, Japan, and the United States. Since the Quad's resurrection from a decade-long hiatus in November 2017 (Mehra, 2020), the group has met five times and has emphasized maintaining the liberal rules-based international order, which China seeks to undermine or overturn. the Quad signals unified resolve among these four nations to counter China's growing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific. Under Trump, the United States has named the Quad as a mechanism to protect the "free and open" Indo- Pacific regain against increasing Chinese power. The United States has the most Politics anti-Chinese as bilateral relations rapidly spiral over a range of challenges, including coronavirus fallout, Taiwan, the South China Sea, trade, human rights in Xinjiang, Hong Kong, intellectual property theft, press freedoms, and others. Indeed, Washington is the only country to directly label China an "adversary" in its National Security

Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and Indo-Pacific Strategy Report (Grossman, 2020).

**Taiwan Leverage:** the Taiwan Lever, it can be seen as an implication to the US-China relations against BRI. US makes it clear that he is expanding the US interest to Asia, deploying the Pivot to Asia strategy as the key policy to be implemented. In addition, the strategy also includes Taiwan as one of its key elements due to Taiwan position as strategic leverage for the US against China. The strategy was not met with direct military confrontation by China, but with increased Chinese capabilities and power projection in Asia. This leads to an ongoing security dilemma between the two most influential states in the world with each state pursuing its own interest (Poulsen, 2017:372). Thus, both states use its national power and capabilities to pursue its national interest, one state pursues its aspiration as a hegemon while the other pursues its survivability as a state. The clash between Offensive and Defensive Realism represented by the interest of the US and China is the implication that is caused by the US-Taiwan relations. Taiwan becomes a part of the cycle as both countries pursue of interest covers Taiwan. Nevertheless, the intricate relations between the US and Taiwan causes implications to the US and China relations that perpetuate the ongoing dilemma between the two countries. Both China and the US project their respective power to the point that they are locked in a vicious cycle of security dilemma and arms race with each other as result of Taiwan position within the US and China bilateral relation (Ai and Chang, 2016:81).

## V. China's Responses

**Doubts and Criticisms:** The repeated doubts and criticisms that the BRI has faced include: The BRI is China's foreign geopolitical strategy while China is undermining the existing international order; The BRI is China's attempt to create an area of influence - the participating countries are trapped by Chinese investment and compelled to supply Beijing with goods and raw materials before

the dumping of Chinese products, China will transfer its industrial overvalue to External countries; China is exporting its economic development model through the BRI, which will lead to overdevelopment, environmental pollution, debt traps, and more.

The most famous of those is probably about the BRI as China's new geopolitical strategy. This comment mainly says that China has grabbed the opportunity when Russia, the United States, and Europe left a geopolitical Empty in Central Asia. advocates of the idea believe that not only is the BRI a way to ensure energy supply security but it also helps China improve cooperation with its western neighbors and disrupt the balance of power in Central Asia to the detriment of the United States.

Indeed, this is a rang impression, according to this Assumption that Beijing and Washington are closed in a zero-sum game, has intrinsic contradictions. First, Russia, the U.S, and E.U have major interests in Central Asia and are until now pursuing their own strategies, so there is no vacuum. Secondly, however, the U.S. strategy of rebalancing has brought new difficulties to China, Beijing cannot give up its strategic interests in East Asia (Kendall &Shullman, 2018).

**Interpretation and Response:** The Chinese government Opinion that these skepticism and critique are usually reason by miscalculation and falsification (Yu, 2018). Some countries and commentators misunderstand the BRI because of inadequate enlightenment. Some negative aberrations come from prejudice against China and serve to help restrain China, and when compound with misanalysis of China's Targets, they connect the BRI with eloquence about China as scaring, thereby publishing a negative picture of the BRI .in addition, the gap between what is being proposed and how it is implemented will lead to a lack of understanding. Of course, some BRI projects have shortcomings, and many of its programs and work mechanisms need further strengthening. The China-Europe Railway Express, for example, has improved links between Chinese states and EU countries, but the service is costly and needs to be better managed.

**The Role of Multiple Actors:** Different players must perform their duties when executing BRI projects. This means that the basic relationship between government and business, politics and economics must be rational. In particular, the government is the policymaker, but the main jobs and communities are BRI practitioners and makers. The BRI pattern has been shaped by government and organization over the past five years. It would be misleading to confuse Chinese companies with Chinese government policy tools when thinking and analyzing BRIs.

It is difficult to conclude from this fact, while it should not be overlooked that there are differences between the interests of the Chinese government and Chinese businesses in the process. Indeed, jobs are the key to driving BRI progress. Their targets and actions are sometimes consistent with government policies, and sometimes they are too contradictory. Therefore, on the one hand, the Chinese government is actively working with other governments in coordination with new BRI policies and arrangements to improve the business environment, as well as support Chinese companies. This is an important guarantee that BRI can make progress. On the other hand, the Chinese government also monitors and regulates the conduct of companies through international norms and laws, and prevents companies seeking excessive profits that could harm the BRI. it also prevents market capture by enterprises and capital (Rowley ,2018).

**Rebalancing the Structure:** Standardization has been an important part of Beijing's efforts to develop the BRI over the past two years. Initially, China and the countries involved were at the forefront of the international market, so Chinese businsses and social organizations were encouraged to enter other countries' markets. In fact, BRI is a strategic plan based on Chinese policy to open its domestic market. One of the main goals of the BRI is to strengthen economic and social relations between China's seaside and inland areas and to solve a long-term development barrier that China is currently facing: the dual nature of the East

and West regions and urban and rural is a big challenge for this country (Kelly, 2019). With foreign challenges rising and the dividend decline following its entry into the World Trade Organization, rebuilding relations between these regions has become an urgent task for China. The global financial crisis of 2008 has accelerated China's need to address the problem, while accelerating China's response.

## VI. Consequences for Iran

the active Iran participation and engagement in the BRI can only further enhance its regional role. On the other hand, the BRI may help to solve some problems and eliminate some divisions in the Middle East.  The current level of Iran's relations with the People's Republic of China could be described as positive and constructive. Such a pragmatic alliance is a result of the political pressure from the West, as well as economic necessity. Both the Chinese and Iranians perceive the American presence in Asia as a threat to their national security. For this reason, the China and Iran undertake activities that aim at limiting the U.S.'s sphere of influence in the Middle East, Central Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia. Moreover, this is the main reason why their policies are also attractive to the Russian Federation. This powerful political trio has an almost unlimited political potential to block any American or any other Western initiative in Asia.

With the advent of Joe Biden and the possible lifting of sanctions against Iran, a major obstacle to the expansion and deepening of Sino-Iranian relations will be removed, while providing a new impetus for Beijing's goal of integrating the Middle East into its ambitious OBOR plan.

Iran can serve as an important hub in this evolving transportation network" (Calabrese, 2018:174–175). Undoubtedly, the Belt and Road Initiative creates new opportunities for the People's Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Both partners have complementary political as well as economic interests in this case. Iran has been trying to limit the U.S.'s

presence in the Middle east and Central Asia region, which is in line with Beijing's expectations and foreign policy objectives. It is clear that the BRI's role is not only to promote cooperation, peace, and trade in Eurasia, but also to limit the American sphere of influence as well as the U.S.'s naval superiority.

that the BRI may seriously affect Iran-China relations. Iran should maintain a constructive approach towards the BRI, both in case of the construction and its future operation. China can only benefit from this cooperation, especially in regard to the import of fossil fuels and export of industrial products to Iran. Furthermore, Iran's geopolitical position enables China to exploit existing trade routes connecting Central Asian states with the Persian Gulf region and to create new transport corridors, with particular reference to the so-called Southern Corridor of the BRI, which is to cross Central Asia, Iran, Turkey, and the Balkans (Gao, 2018).

All in all, the ultimate success of the Belt and Road Initiative depends to a large extent on Iranian participation and support, especially as far as geopolitical and logistical issues are concerned. For this reason, the Chinese will do a lot in order to please their Iranian counterparts and Iranians will do a lot to attract Chinese investors and benefit from the project.

## Conclusion

From the US perspective, policymakers need to weigh several competing factors to design a coherent response. On the one hand, too much confrontation with Beijing will have a stimulating role in US-Chinese relations and it will potentially increase the cost for US companies to participate in BRI projects. On the other hand, US partners such as Japan and India have voiced serious concerns about China's activities and are expanding China's strategic goals beyond its current level. BRIs, including the potential to work with its Indo-Pacific allies and partners. US officials should also anticipate that the expansion of BRI projects is likely to boost Chinese military diplomacy across Eurasia. Over the past 15 years, China has expanded empowerment, combination training

and high-level engagement with countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan. These efforts may continue as part of broader efforts to strengthen bilateral relations and help strengthen closer relationships with BRI partners (Blackwell and Harris, 2016). As China's military diplomacy expands, partners can have an incentive to play Beijing and Washington against each other to secure better deals.

In many cases, the BRI has produced positive results for developing countries, however, from a US view, BRI projects are frequently unsuccessful in their commitment to transparency, justice, sustainability, and good governance. Without this profile, in an environment of increasing tension between Beijing and Washington, policymakers in Washington are likely to view the BRI with suspicion and even hostility. In fact, such views have been already prevalent in the United States. until now, government officials have shown order when explaining the Trump administration's "free and open Indo-Pacific strategy," exhibition it primarily as a project for U.S. Regional Interactions. To double down on this approach, the United States and its democratic allies should concentrate on the tendency for transparency and good ruling among developing states, America' Indo-Pacific diplomacy can and should support its values overseas. China's relative power in the Pacific is on the rise and is apparently weakening US hegemony in the region. Precisely because there is so much interest in sharing with China, the United States should not avoid engagement and should not use BRI as a tool to do so. And the key point is that the increase in the number of projects on the Belt and Road project is evidence of America's dwindling power.

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# Turkey's Cultural Diplomacy in Afghanistan during the AKP Era

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## Abstract

Turkey as one of the regional actors in the Middle East has taken the 'Look East' policy in its foreign policy since 2002, when the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has come to power. Although the relations between Turkey and Afghanistan have a historical background dating back to the Ottoman, but the geopolitical and geostrategic position of Afghanistan has doubled its significance for Turkish politicians during the Neo-Ottomanism, the situation which has emerged in Turkish politics, especially its cultural diplomacy over Afghanistan Since the rise to power of the AKP. So, in this article, the main question is, what are the objectives and tools of Turkish cultural diplomacy in Afghanistan during the AKP era? In response to this question, the main hypothesis is that Turkey's cultural diplomacy during the AKP era was based on the use of shared linguistic, ethnic and religious values to strengthen Turkey's soft power in Afghanistan as well as the hegemony of Turkey in the region.

**Keywords:** *Turkey, Afghanistan, Cultural Diplomacy, Ethnicity, AKP, Neo-Ottomanism*

## Introduction

With the end of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of the new nation of Turkey, its former role, influence and power as the Muslim Caliphate within most of the Islamic world started to wane dramatically. This change of perception was partly due to the new geopolitical realities in Turkey, the Middle East and Europe, but also to Turkey's own inward looking cultural policies.

With the 1979 Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan however the Turkish government had to reexamine its relations particularly within the region and the Islamic World. However, with the launch of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) by the USA in Afghanistan in 2001, Turkey as a NATO member and US ally entered a new phase in its relations and influence in Afghanistan.

Although the relations between Turkey and Afghanistan date back to the Ottoman Empire, but the geopolitical and geostrategic position of Afghanistan has recently doubled its significance for Turkish politicians especially in the neo-Ottoman politics of the ruling Justice and Development Party.

Previous studies and articles associated with Turkey-Afghanistan relations has been mostly about historical ties and Turkey's presence in Afghanistan in post-September 11 attacks in terms of hard power. Any basic research on the cultural policy of Turkey is yet to be conducted in which Turkey soft power should be considers. For example, the book by Mir Mohammad Sedigh Farhang "Afghanistan in the last five centuries", the most writings and references have been limited to Military advisors of German and Ottoman presence in the middle of WWI such as Ottoman

representative Al-Beik who arrived through Iran to Afghanistan.

The above researches are mainly focused on the historical-cultural relations of Turkey and the influence of Turkey in the process of modernization of Afghanistan due to the coexistence and religious affiliation of the Afghan people towards the Ottoman Caliphate. But in the present study, while pointing to such a background, which can be considered the foundation of Turkish cultural diplomacy in Afghanistan, the main focus is on the strategies and policies of the AKP at the beginning of the third millennium. The most important of these is the Eurasian strategy of Davutoglu, which includes a set of new cultural policies of the Islamic Caliphate, Neo-Ottomanism and Pan-Turkism. Afghanistan has a special place in this strategy as a link with the Turkic-speaking republics of Central Asia and the Turks in Xinjiang. So, in this article, the main question is, what are the objectives and tools of Turkish cultural diplomacy in contemporary Afghanistan during AKP era?

And in response to this question, the main hypothesis is that Turkey's cultural diplomacy during the AKP era was based on the use of shared linguistic, ethnic and religious values

with some ethnic groups to strengthen its soft power and influence in Afghanistan and the its hegemony in the region. According to many international relations theorists, cultural diplomacy is a typical example of the application of soft power which allows countries to influence the others and encourage them to collaborate through elements such as culture, values and ideas. (Hassankhani, 2005:138) In order to address and examine these issues this paper is divided into three parts. First, the theoretical framework of the article is discussed as constructivism and its characteristics. Second, the history of the relations between Turkey and Afghanistan as well as the issue of ethnicity in Afghanistan will be examined. Third, Turkey's cultural diplomacy and its instruments and objectives will be examined in Afghanistan.

The research method in this research is qualitative, based on

'Grounded Theory' in which the Turkish cultural diplomacy in Afghanistan is studied inductively. The article also attempts to collect and analyze information through regular collection and finally to conceptualize and prove the phenomenon of Turkish cultural diplomacy in Afghanistan.

## I. Theoretical Framework

Basically, the emergence of the role of culture in national security and strategic behaviors has been accompanied by the collapse of the Soviet Union. During the Cold War, realism shadows all over the strategic issues of this era and especially cultural theories in description and analysis of strategic behaviors were severely marginalized. (AbdullahKhani ,2011:9) The collapse of the Soviet Union and the inability of the realists to analyze and anticipate this event based on its teachings undermine this theory and cause the re-emergence of cultural and constructivist theories. The constructivist approach, which is referred to as the meta-theory, tries to coordinates culture, politics, and the inner community that is linked to the identity and also conduct of the state in global politics will be examined. (ibid: 9)

Cultural diplomacy reflects this reality that theory of constructivism with sociological roots has enjoyed the knowledge of greater capability than conventional theories for explaining cultural diplomacy. By compiling the book of "The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge", Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman in the 1970s introduced this theory, (Berger & Luckman,1976:13-15) whose roots go back to Chicago school and Phenomenology.

The first major ontological point of constructivism is that intellectual and normative structures are as important as material structures, because systems of meaning define how actors should interpret their material environment. The second point is that identities shape the interests and actions.

Understanding how the interests are shaped is the key to explaining a wide range of international phenomena which are not

well understood or neglected.

Based on its third proposition, Agencies and structures interact with one another. According to constructivists, structures are not essentially material, but are based on imagination and thoughts. These include norms, beliefs, practices and habits which have a material consequence. In this way, internal identity policy provides facilities and limitations for government behavior in abroad. Hence, the State needs to act through a national identity inside in order to legitimize the authority that affects its identity abroad(Wednt ,2006: 248). So countries are trying to expand their culture as a soft power to achieve three goals including; promoting the degree of legitimacy of the system in political views of the international public opinion, gaining international prestige and ultimately managing public opinion.

In general, one of the major features of constructivist theory is the attention to the cultural and normative structures alongside the material elements. So that even in these circumstances of global conflicts, these are ideas that make sense of the material elements of power, weapons, land, and population, moreover, norms have a major role in the organization of interests. In fact, Constructivists provide a new definition of power and power relationships, in which, a powerful government does not necessarily have to possess economic and military power, rather, it must have the ability to create such a normative space that can easily create behaviors of his own consideration. (Checkel,1998: 472) For example, the new Turkish approach proves this constructive argument, despite the limitations of military and political power, Turkey is trying to create political and religious norms in the Afghanistan, in a way that poses itself as an active and powerful actor in the region.

## II. Afghanistan's Unfinished Nation-State Building

Afghanistan is a society in which ethnicity and tribal ties are more

important than any other factors in identifying an individual. The hard and heavy ethnic-tribal atmosphere in Afghanistan has always been able to cast its heavy shadow on the modern structures of this country such as legal and executive institutions.

The division of power on the basis of ethnic and linguistic criteria goes beyond the references of the people, indicating the adherence of modern institutions to the tribal and ethnic equations in Afghanistan. This important component is also evident in the field of Afghanistan's foreign policy and has always been a good platform for other countries to intervene and exert influence in Afghanistan. Therefore, in this article, in order to understand Turkish cultural diplomacy in Afghanistan, in which the ethnic approach is obvious, we have to study the ethnic and racial groups in Afghanistan in details.

The main ethnic groups of Afghanistan are as follow: Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Aimak, Turkmen, Baloch, Pashai, Nuristani, Gujjar, Arab, Brahui, and Pamiri. The Pashtuns form the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan of around 40%. The vast majority of the population of southern Afghanistan belongs to this group, according to different reports and statistics. However, they are also present in the East and West regions and belong to the denomination of Hanafi Sunni Islam. Their language is Pashtu which is a branch of the Persian language. Those Afghan tribes living in the south are consistent with Durranor Abdali and Ghilji tribes who are known to Durrani. After the arrival of Ahmad Khan Abdali, ( Valian, 1961:36) Afghans living in the East; means Yusufzai and the other tribes were split from the Peshawar desert and northern canyons. Some Pashtuns oppose the Afghan name and consider that the Pashtun name is prior to Afghan. Nevertheless, those ethnic names which are accepted among Afghans; do not have a long history. For the first time, the word Afghan is recorded in the 16th century in the form of "Avagāa" by the Indian astronomer VarāhaMihira in his Brihat-samhita. (Septfonds,2017) On the other hand, Pashtuns, despite Afghanistan's mistreatment of the Jews, associate

themselves to the Jewish people, even if there is no valid document. For example, orientalists such as Sir William Jones and Major Raverty have supported the theory of physiognomy, and declared that there are similarities between the Pashtuns and the Jews. Although they are Indo-Europeans in terms of language, but they are ideologically twin with Wahhabism. Also, in many cases, like as the implementation of Islamic law, they are extremists. (Najafi , 2010:51) The government has always been exclusive between the Pashtun tribes in Afghanistan. For centuries, the Durrani and Yusufzai tribes have been fighting over pasture with each other. (Ali Abadi,1996:51).

Tajiks are the second ethnic group and they are the men of letters and pen, those who have inherited the Iranian bureaucracy and are capable of speaking and writing Persian. These ethnic groups make up almost 30% of Afghanistan's population. (Ibid) Though the Tajiks are predominantly Sunni and Hanafi Muslims like much of Turkey yet Culturally and linguisticly linked to Iran. Despite the religious affinity Turkey has little influence over them.

Other ethnic groups which are the focus of this paper are the Hazaras and they are descendants of Mongol - Tatar and from the thirteenth century onwards, they have been sent into the area. These ethnic groups form the Altaic language group which in Afghanistan includes the Turco-Mongols Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Aimaq, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Ghezelbash and other tribes called *Chagatai,* but due to racial mixture there is no absolute claim descent. (Hopkins,2012:5).

For example, it is told that Hazaras are the descendants of Genghis Khan and the Mongol soldiers who were present when Genghis Khan set expedition against the region in the 13th century. Hazaras are Shiite but they speak Persian language. Hazaras can be divided into three groups, Daikundi, Dayzngy and Bihsud and residents are in the mountains of central Afghanistan. They are a mixture of different races and ethnic groups and form a part of the mass armies of Genghis Khan and Timur. Despite

Persian and Shia identity, they are the Huns people in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran and live with the same title. In Afghanistan, they are considered as the natives of the central regions and most of them are Twelver Shia .They speak Persian with their own, the dialect of Dari. Some of them are Shia Ismaili while others belong to the Sunni Hanafi religion. In the AbdurRahman Khan period there was a great injustice with the Hazaras as a result of being Shiite. Most of their lands were confiscated. Yellow skin or ethnic Uzbeks named after one of the Turkic-speaking Uzbeks living in Central Asia are known as the descendants of Genghis Khan who live around the cities of Mazar-i-Sharif, Maymana, Khanabad, Kunduz and Badakhshan. (Ali Abadi, 1996:21) They are regarded as a branch of the Jochi Khan's Mongol tribes and clans after Uzbek Khan. Of their commanders, Uzbek Khan and his son Jani Beg on before Timur, whose name has remained as the leader of the Uzbeks, the Uzbek Khan caused Golden Horde to become a Muslim. (Akiner,۲۰۰۸:238) It is stated that Turkmen and other ethnic groups are ethnically Asian yellow-raced from the plains of Manchuria and Mongolia, their initial home, but another measurement says that Turkic people appearance look likes to Circassian. Under pressure from the Chinese emperors from the East in the third and fourth centuries, also because of the spread of Islamic conquests Turkmen immigrated from the mainland to the West and entered into areas of Oxus and the north of Khorasan. (Goli, 1987:16-17) (see Table1)

| EHTNIC GROUP | "Afghanistan: Where Things Stand" (2004–2009) | "A survey of the Afghan people" (2006) | "A survey of the Afghan people" (2007)" | "A survey of the Afghan people" (2010)" | "A survey of the Afghan people" (2010) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pashtuns | 33-41% | 36% | 35% | 35% | 35% |
| TAJIKS | 32-14% | 32% | 32% | 32% | 32% |
| Hazaras | 13/6% | 34 % | 10% | 11% | 11% |
| Uzbeks | 7/5 % | 9% | 8% | 9% | 9% |
| Baloch | 10-3% | 10% | 10% | 10% | 10% |
| Turkmen | 2/1% | 2% | 3% | 2% | 2% |
| Aimaqs | 0% | 0/1% | 2% | 1% | 1% |
| Other (Pashai, Sadat, Nuristani, ...) | 0/4% | ¼% | 2% | 3% | 5% |

**Table 1. Statistics taken by the Asia Foundation in 2004-2010 to 32 out of 34 provinces in Afghanistan**

available online at https://asiafoundation.org/where-we-work/Afghanistan (accessed 02 October 2018).

Ethnic diversity in the country resulted in the conflict so that the nation-state building process has always received a lot of damage in Afghanistan. Ethnicity, Tribalism, cultural and linguistic bias has overcome the social component such as the rule of law, national unity, and national solidarity. The incitement of ethnic issues in this country has always been associated with many wars and conflicts.

The involvement of other extra-regional countries was not only unable to diminish its intensity; but also gave speed to the wheel rolling downhill and caused chaos and strife. None of the ethnic groups in the short history of Afghanistan could and would form a strong and stable central government that has elements of political progress. The ethnic composition of Afghanistan has always been afraid of a strong and stable government and the context of such a government is also excluded by the ethnic–centered society. For the first time in communist ideology and the

former Soviet Union were given the ethnic color. Marxist groups such as the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) with regard to their ethnic background ended in chaos. Such sectarian tendencies of the Communist leadership, justified the widespread presence of the Red Army in Afghanistan. The Soviet and their internationalism aspirations, regardless of the cultural background of the people and religious structure of the country, started to build the nation-state which was far from reality. The government has always been exclusive between the Pashtun tribes in Afghanistan and there has been conflict over the power gained which existed between them. It is common among Afghans that the throne of Afghanistan has not been seen on non-Pashtuns. Durrani and Yusufzai  tribes have been fighting each other over the pastures. (Ali Abadi, 1996:15)

According to Maxwell J Fry the revolution of the Afghan race occurred, when people and the ethnic structure of Afghanistan declined to pay direct taxes on different economic activities. Ethnic and religious leaders were the leaders of rabble-rousing to give up the government. (Rasanayagam,2003:54-55) Such a ban from the society was considered as the final blow to the government and caused crisis which reached Nadir and revealed the status of government in Afghanistan. Talking about ethnic structure in Afghanistan, in chapter five of his book, Fry calls the Afghanistan economy the Fragmented Economy: "In the minds of a number of economists in Afghanistan to an understanding of the economy, the idea of a fragmented economy is considered here. The central hypothesis is that the economy has consisted of distinct segments which have been only very loosely linked to one another. This fragmentation has occurred in three ways. The first is the separateness of the public sector from both the modern private sector and the bazaar economy. The second is the lack of cohesion between economic sectors, particularly agriculture, construction, industry and foreign trade, and the isolation of the subsistence economy. The third is the separation by distance of Afghanistan from the rest of the world and of regions within the

country itself." (Fry, 1974:44)

After the Taliban defeat, the nation-state building in Afghanistan by US demonstrated that in the case of the existence of ethnicity; as well as the Marxist ideology, the country will experience many challenges with its democracy. The last Afghanistan presidential election (held in 2014) was met with questions and doubts. The presidential election by the people in this country was not based on political wisdom, social promise, freedom and social justice and the common slogans of the presidential candidates in the rest of the world but has been based solely on ethnic orientation. (Byrd, 2015) The political order in Afghanistan has been individualism, tribal alliance, ethnic background and power. This is because the social structure is coupled with violence, like as the enormous political powers of kings, presidents and rulers of this country which have not changed peacefully and have been linked to murders, coups and brutal murder. The Afghan society approach towards political phenomena is an old approach and has no compatibility with the policies of nation-state. In this approach, the person in the family as defined by their ethnic identity depends heavily on the ethnic group. The emphasis is on the blood and race. For example, Hazaras and Pashtuns can be from this kind of identity. This study considered some ethnic identification archaism. For example, a person who calls himself Tajik rarely introduces himself as Afghan. Here, Persian and Afghan governments have put together two identities, to create a defined and accepted identity for the person there. The policies adopted by the trans-regional governments in Afghanistan. In this country, in such a situation, the instrumentalist approach is not seen; this is because people are trying to justify their presence and culture.

As a result of the subsistence economy and rural population in Afghanistan; more than 53% of the country, has caused unresolved ethnic conflicts. Rural population in Afghanistan was reported at 72.87 % in 2016 according to the World Bank collection of development indicators. (Trading Economics,2016)

The general dominant ideology in the nineteenth century Afghanistan relied heavily on the caste, class consciousness, class struggles and set of welfares that were undeniable and were rooted in the economy but in this set, insisting on the economy caused ethnic cultural realities to stay hidden. In fact, the social and the ethnic matter are two permanent and general categories which existed in all human societies and can serve as a source of similar conflict, misunderstanding and intolerance. In the depths of human life, there are always two powerful dynamics. The socio-economic dynamics and ethno-cultural dynamics were effective. Economic and social dynamics have not met in ethnic states. Afghanistan is a country whose population is mostly rural with a very small percentage in the urban areas. In Afghanistan, most of the people are not class-conscious. Afghan ethnic groups, especially Pashtuns, are based on religious and tribal factors. Since the central government budget and treasury has been suffering, there has not been any contribution to the creation of a dynamic ethno-cultural measurement.  This is the reason why the structure of an ethno-tribal character is strong. Another negative feature of the Afghan society is failure to enter the country due to modernity. During Amanullah Khan Period, Afghanistan began entering into the modern era before Iran and Turkey, but because of the colonial intervention in Afghanistan, the modernism process remained unfinished. Staying away from modernity has brought devastating effects on the Afghan society and the people and nationality are yet to be formed. Afghanistan is a country where ethnicity concepts are highlighted every day.

From the perspective of Max Weber, ethnic group is one of the most annoying concepts, because it is full of emotions. Weber opined that human groups are referred to as ethnic groups because their beliefs are subjective to the shared ancestry. This occurs due to any physical similarities, customs, or both or because of memories of colonization and migration. (Stone, 1995:391) Weber says that the concepts of "nationality" with the concept of "the people" are ethnically rooted in the ambiguous connotation that

whatever is felt to be particularly common must be due to common ancestry. People who consider themselves as members of a nation are often much less shared by generations are interdependent rather than people who belong to different nationalities and hostile ( Ibid) as the 2014 presidential elections in Afghanistan was ethnic. Voters did not pay attention to the strategies of the candidates and every person just wanted the triumph of their candidate. Afghanistan's society, even today, is in a state of society before modernization. But what is striking in the Afghan society in the form of hostile and fanatic tribes is religious fundamentalism and chaotic situation due to ethnic clefts in the body of the Afghan government.

## III. Relations Between Turkey and Afghanistan

Relations between Turkey and Afghanistan have a long history dating back to the Ottoman Empire. In the twentieth century, the two countries had close ties with each other. Moreover, after the former Soviet Union, Afghanistan was the second country to recognize the new republic of Turkey in 1921. Meanwhile, Turkey due to its Ottoman heritage in the Muslim and Sunni world in particular has a spiritual influence amongst most of the Muslim population in Afghanistan, and both sides, have always tried to enjoy good relations with each other.

In WWI and during the Ottoman Empire by aligning itself with Germany and subsequent loss it lost nearly all of its colonies in North Africa and other areas. However, in Afghanistan, Ottoman Sultan prior and during WWI was officially regarded as the Caliph of Muslim countries and enjoyed good relations especially during the time of Habibullah Khan as the ruler of Afghanistan. The Ottoman government tried to grant him the Order of Mejidie. With the arrival of the World War, Mahmoud Tarzi's most influence was in publishing Seraj-al-Akhbar, and had Pan-Islamism thoughts similar to Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn Afghani. During the Battle of Gallipoli Campaign between Britain and Turkey in 1915, Tarzi's wrote in favor of the Ottoman and was

their speaker in Afghanistan. ( Ruttig, ,2011) He absorbed many Anti-British Afghans in the favor of the Turkish government. In fact, the first political tendency of Turkey to Afghanistan was because of the hostilities and military confrontation between Turkey and Britain.

In 1955 Davoud, the Prime Minister of Afghanistan refused to join the Baghdad Pact which was formed by Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Iraq, USA and Britain. (Ibid)The Soviets occupied Afghanistan in 1979 and1980; hence, Turkey decided to stay away from the events in Afghanistan. After the defeat of General Dostum from Taliban, Turkey accepted him as refuge and attempted to influence the political environment of Afghanistan under Taliban control and sent some instructors to Afghanistan under the Taliban religious cooperation. The President Süleyman Demirel established Turkish schools in Afghnistan in 1994, which welcomed by Mujahideen. Later, the Taliban identified Turkish schools and their intentions against Islam and somehow a nationalistic movement. These schools were closed because they were considered as centers to promote Turkish language and Turkish Nationalism. (Gülen , 2015).

The social fabric of Afghanistan is in favor of religious and ethnic tendencies toward Turkey. Turkey intended to increase the grouping of society as its own cabals by participating in Afghanistan. By the primary objectives of the US engagement with Turkey in Afghanistan, Turkey was recognized as a postwar peace force like those in the third option of the Bush administration in Iraq. (Ullman,2002:204) Today, there is a new face of Turkish Islam that tries to spread Turkish nationalism in religious and cultural packages. There are dramatic differences in the understanding of Islam among Muslim Turks and other Muslims such that some kind of compromise knocks gently on the waves. The moderate Islam is a mean in the hands of the foreign policy of Turkey in achieving the goal of promoting Turkish national interests.

It should be noted, however, that there were many

components and commonalities between the two countries that strengthened relations between them. In the meantime, the two elements of the Sunni majority in Afghanistan, followed by the minority languages of the country (Uzbeks and Turkmen), were another important pillar.

When Taliban were defeated, Turkey recognized Hamid Karzai's government and actively participated in Afghanistan after the September 11 events.

As a member of NATO, with respect to national interests, commitments to this organization and a link with US policies, Turkey sent troops to Afghanistan and tried to expand its influence in the country, taking into account various political, economic, security and cultural issues.

At the same time, with the arrival of Turkish foreign policy theorist Davutoğlu and the policy of a more eastern perspective, more attention was paid to Afghanistan. (Davutoğlu, 2001:459) And, apart from its past policies in Afghanistan, Ankara is trying to expand its role and influence in Afghanistan. In recent years, the country has hosted several conferences on Afghanistan such as quadrilateral intra-Afghan peace dialogue including Taliban's Qatar Office members, Mullah Mohammad Rassoul splinter faction members, the Afghan government representatives and Hezb-i-Islami Afghanistan (HIA) members which had been hold in 2018. (Hamim Kakar, 2018) Ankara has announced that it will not refuse to do anything to help maintain peace and stability in Afghanistan.

## IV. Turkey's Cultural Diplomacy in Afghanistan

**The Idea of Pan-Turkism:** The belief in the immense role of Turks in the history at the beginning of the 20th century has been the subject of the "Pan Turkism" term(Kalın, 2009: 83). As a matter of fact, the terms Pan-Turkism, Turkish nationalism or ethnic Turk union, Pan-Turanism, all emerged from Turkey's nationalistic views. Mehmed Ziya Gökalp was one of the intellectuals of Pan-Turanism. One of his poems about Pan-

Turanism has been established in the Magazine of Young Pens:

"Homeland of the Turks, not Turkey/ Not Turkestan, farther The territory is vast and eternal/ In the name of Turan. (Gökalp,1959:38). The poem implies the depth of thought on the idea of Turkish nationalism in the region; while the scholars of Turk **ethicists** never had a realistic look in the history of areas such as Central Asia and the Middle East. (Berkes,1954: 386) The Young Turk Revolution in 1908 brought the Committee of Union and Progress to power in the Ottoman Empire. Several Turkish intellectuals participated in its policy-making bodies. The committee supported the establishment of various organizations such as the Türk Ocaği (Turkish Hearth, established in 1912) and journals were being published such as *TürkYurdu* (Turkish homeland) promoting cultural or political Pan-Turkism and Pan-Turanism. (Louis,1993:46)

The government of Young Turks fundamentally transformed the ideas of Pan-Turanism, which is now referred to as Pan Turkism. As mentioned earlier until the 1990s, Turkey was faced with a significant obstacle, the former Soviet Union, and there were no national advertising and promoting opportunities in the region. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the idea of Pan-Turkism was greatly exported. With the advent of the Republics of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the thought of Pan Turkism passed the boundaries of Turkey and reached some parts of the region. During the first years after the Cold war, some Kemalists tried to make Pan-Turkism, based on the teachings of Eurasianism, replacing Kemalism's teachings in the type of Turkey's engagement with its peripheral regions.

In the following years and at the time of Erbakan, attempts were made to consider the look East Policy in the regional and even international interactions of Turkey. With the advent of the Justice and Development Party in 2001, the neo-Ottomanism and the attention to the historical and strategic depth of Turkey has been taken. Overall, these attitudes indicate that during the Post-

Cold War period, Turkish elites believed that Turkey could obtain hegemonic status in specific areas of its peripheral regions.

**Media:** Since the 1980 that Freedom of the Press Act was adopted in Turkey, the media had a significant impact on public opinion, both inside and outside Turkey. ( Erdem,2018:3-4)

The Turks, with the emphasis on the distribution of Turkish as the fifth language in the world, put the language component in the center of their cultural magnetism in the region.

And this component is used to deepen its relationship by creating satellite networks such as Eurasia that broadcast 24 hours a day in Central Asia and the Caucasus. (Basiri & Khânsâri-Fard, 2016: 79)

Turkey's TV, especially the TRT's public channels, is the soft power of Turkey in the region, especially in the region of Turkic language countries. (Sedqizadeh, 2010:82-83)

Private Turkish channels such as NTV, Channel D, Channel 6, each one belongs to one of Turkey's cultural-economic complexes, which are in fact the levers of political power in Turkey. By producing films such as "Fetih 1453", Turkey has been fully aligned with Neo-Ottomanism politics. Meanwhile MensurAkgün says: "In the direction of this regional influence, Turkish cinema has played its role and the Turkish series has been considered among the Arabs." (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2008:67) Turkish series are considered as the soft power of Turkish diplomacy and their growth is a successful example for cultural globalization. And has social, political and economic consequences. (Arisoy, 2016)

Ticka, Kizi La, the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, the State Department, the TRT, the Younes Emere Foundation, the Investment and Support Agency, the Media Information Office and other institutions, along other entities such as

NGOs, rescue organizations, human rights organizations, foundations, universities, media and other civil society actors are all active in Turkish public diplomacy. (Kalin,2011:21)

Turkey has been very successful in the field of cinema and

visual media, especially in series broadcast in Afghanistan. Despite the limitations in Hindi serials broadcast by the Afghan Government, Turkish series is aimed at targeting the indigenous culture of the Afghan people. Of course, the series took place with the teachings of Islam and promote Turkish culture. (Turkish language frenzy in Afghanistan,2014)

In December 2016, the president of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani met Erdogan during his two-day visit. Both presidents signed a memorandum of understanding, a declaration of intent, and also an agreement to collaborate on security matters. Cumhuriyet and Akşam supported the Turkish government on the matter of expanding media collaboration with Afghanistan. The coverage suggests that the Turkish government views its relationship with Afghanistan as businesslike. (Hawk,2016)

**Establishment of Turkish Schools**: The history of Turkish educational presence in Afghanistan dates back to the early twentieth century, 1901, when Mahmoud Tarzi returned to Afghanistan from exile in Turkey and got a high ranking governmental post. (Gregorian, 2013:297-298) He used the advantages of being son-in-law of Amanullah Shah. This influence has been effective in Amanullah Shah. The first girls' school opened in the same period. The Amanullah Shah Reforms in education began with the recruitment of Egyptian and Turkish teachers. In 1924, Amanullah also founded the four-year school, the Board School or Maktabe-Hokam. The aim of the school was to teach the fundamental official basics in Afghanistan. Amanullah tried to make Afghanistan educational structure like that of Turkey; hence, the Turkish language was taught as a second language. (ibid) There were two opportunities for Turks to visit Afghanistan; one was the Pan-Islamism which had been reinforced by the German government of Kaiser Wilhelm. The other was the Ottoman Empire, which had led the Indian Islamic Reformists who had anti-British nature in Afghanistan, would accept the attendance of representatives of the Ottoman Empire. With this not-so-old history, the reformist King, Amanullah also

intended to achieve modernity in Afghanistan, by using the experience of a regional country. Turkey has legitimacy among Muslims, thus sending students to Turkey for entering the spirit of modernity was reasonable.

In the post-Cold War, especially in AKP periods from 2002 there are new Turkish cultural and instructional entities which are established in other countries. One of the most influential Turkish institute in this field is Yunus Emre Institute which is a world-wide non-profit organization created by the Turkish government in 2007. Named after the famous 14th-century poet Yunus Emre, it aims to promote Turkish culture around the world. It also has been regarded a Turkish soft power institution and cultural section of the Turkish embassy in different countries including Afghanistan. (Yunus Emre Institute,2019)

This institution has several programs in this regard. Including the call for Turkish professors to teach Turkish language in different countries, the establishment of specialized Turkish libraries, the provision of digital resources and the establishment of protocols for cooperation with universities in order to establish a Turkish language and literature courses. (Kürşad, 2005)

So, the presence of Turkey in Afghanistan on education is wider than the past. During a ceremony on the 24th of July 2016, Dr. Serdar ÇAM the Turkish International Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) executive, inaugurated the Turkish Language and Literature Department at the University of Kabul, aimed at strengthening the social infrastructure, with more than 700 projects in various fields and the projects in the fields of education and health. One of the most important activities of Turkey is the training of Afghan soldiers. In this context, TIKA re-activated the Kabul Military School which was founded in 1933 by the government of Turkey. (Faaliathaye Tika dar Afghanistan,2016) It also established 42 schools in Mazar-i-Sharif province. The schools had an internet system as well as laboratories for chemistry, biology and physics, with 8 thousand students. So far, more than 90 schools have been built by TIKA in

Afghanistan. In development and humanitarian assistance, Turkey has implemented a significant workforce in Afghanistan for road-building and technical skills.

The establishment of Turkish schools as well as the granting of scholarships to students is one of the strategies of the Turks in creating a well-educated, who are inclined to them. (Adami & Noori ,2013: 8) Another association which is active in this field can be "Community solidarity and sympathy with Afghan refugees in Turkey " that recruit and train Afghan refugees in Turkey and even send Turk teachers to Afghanistan for the training of students and to send them to scientific Olympiads. (Report produced on Afghan Refugees in Turkey: Living Conditions and Reasons to Escape to Europe,2018)

According to an expert on Afghan affairs, "In Afghanistan, seven high schools in the centers of major cities such as Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, Mazar-e- Sharif and Jalalabad have been launched by Turkey." So, that there is a chance for Afghan students of ethnic Uzbeks to complete their education and undergraduate studies by travelling to Turkey. (Salehi,2018)

However, one of the most important cultural diplomacy efforts of Turkey in Afghanistan is Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi's tomb restoration project. Rumi was born in Balkh about eight hundred years ago and died in Konya so he is the symbol of the relationship between Afghanistan and Turkey. In this regard, Turkey planned to establish a college with the same name over there in Afghanistan. According to the reports, the International Coordination and cooperation Agency has set a special team who are rebuilding the house of Rumi in the city of Balkh, and at the end of it, this place will become Mawlānā Cultural Center. (Sadeghi, 2017)

Another Turkish educational influence in Afghanistan is achieved through teaching of the Turkish Language and Literature among young people of Turkish origin in Afghanistan. The Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency, TIKA has established Turkish language classes in Mazar-e- Sharif in northern Afghanistan. Kara Dogan TIKA coordinator in Mazar-e

Sharif added: "Turkish languages with the age of 8500 years, has a long history and is one of the richest languages in the world." This statement reflects the intention of the country to promote the historical knowledge with academic facts among Hazaras, Uzbeks and Afghans, the situation that reflects the intention of the country to promote the historical knowledge with academic facts among Hazaras, Uzbeks and Afghans. (Kelâs'ha-ye âmozesh-e zabân turki dar Afghanistan,2018) Accordingly, to promote the mentioned diplomacy in Afghanistan, Kabul University and the University of Jowzjan established the Turkish language teaching department. In light of these classes, 140 students, boys and girls will learn the Turkish language. In the face of increasing demands, the classes will continue.

**Neo-Ottoman Reflection:** As mentioned earlier, the roots of Turkey's legitimate presence in Afghanistan should be sought in the First World War, where Pan-Islamic and anti-British tendencies legitimized the Ottoman Empire. Religious institutions of Muslims in India influenced Afghans' thoughts. The political-religious teachings of anti-British Deobandi schools made the idea of the Abbasid caliphate alive. The First World War brought the two anti-British groups and Pan-Islamists closer together, following the Ottoman Empire. (Binder,1963:16)

In recent years Turkey shares some enthusiasms with the Uzbeks and for the last ten years has supported them in political issues in Afghanistan and tried to be powerful by the support of Uzbeks in northern Afghanistan and promote its influence in the shape of light Pan-Turkism in the region. As a result of this goal, Turkey explicitly supported "Abdul Rashid Dostum" as the representative of Uzbeks and his party, the Northern National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan which represents the Uzbeks and tries to expand the scope of jurisdiction of Uzbeks in northern Afghanistan.

Since the fall of the Taliban, Turkey has tried to cooperate with the Bonn conference and in this respect, had close relations with the interim government and the then Transitional

Government of Afghanistan and has also actively participated in the reconstruction of Afghanistan to establish security in the country. This has been a major concern for Turkey through its major contribution to the International Coalition for Afghanistan (ISAF). (Tarjoman newspaper,2010)

Another agency in this regard is the Presidency of Religious Affairs, *Diyanet İşleri Baskanlığı,* the state agency which is responsible for regulating and monitoring the conduct of religious services (in mosques and elsewhere), as well as for the imposition of 'proper Islam.' (Kenar & Gürpınar,2013:21-46).

The overseas activities of *Diyanet* includes activities in the countries where many Turkish citizens live or in the countries whose people speak Turkish languages; such as Germany, America, Australia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Among the important services of the organization includes establishing organizations of Religious Affairs, holding consultative religious meetings, holding three common religious conferences, building mosques on a distinct map and design, delegating the administration of mosques, Center for Research, Development and Documentation (AR-GED), Centre for international Research and Dialogue, religious services and educational services. (Islamic Republic of Iran Cultural Center in Ankara,2016) For example, in 2016, Afghan officials announced that the *Diyanet* organization of Turkey as past years, shared sacrificial meat among two thousand needful families in Faryab province in northern Afghanistan in Eid al-Adha. The regional distribution of sacrificial meat is important because it is considered as charity (Sâdât Khodâverdi,2016) Also, between 2005 and 2009, Turkey allocated about US $ 400 million ODA to Afghanistan. One year later, Turkey allocated US $ 107 million. It has been said that US $ 130 million was allocated in 2011 (Kardaş, 2013:8)

## V. Iran Cultural Diplomacy in Afghanistan

Iranian cultural diplomacy in Afghanistan is based on historical,

cultural, religious and linguistic commonalities. These components have naturally formed the basis of foreign relations between the two nations as a result of which other areas of economic, political and security relations between the two countries are influenced by the historical roots and common culture of the two nations. Therefore, Iran has always tried to develop and extend its relations with Afghanistan in other areas by relying on such cultural resources and commonalities in order to set up friendly and fraternal relations with all Afghan groups and ethnicities. In other words, contributing to the maintenance of peace and tranquility in Afghanistan has always been a constant component of Iranian policies toward this country.

Iran sticks on the policy of good neighborliness and defends Afghanistan's territorial integrity and independence. As a result, Tehran is one of the most solemn opponents of foreign interference in Afghanistan, especially by the United States. This opposition is rooted in history and dates back to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, which coincided with the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Despite Iran's problems during the early months after the victory of the Islamic Revolution and the start of the Iraqi-imposed war against Iran, the Iranian government and people openly opposed the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and supported the Muslim people of this country and the Afghan Mujahedeen.

Despite being involved in a war imposed on it by the Ba'thist Iraqi regime, Iran supported the Afghan Mujahedeen against the occupying Soviet forces and their allies during the occupation of Afghanistan. Following the Red Army's withdrawal from Afghanistan and the start of conflict among the Mujahedeen factions, Iran endeavored to establish peace and reconciliation in this war-torn country. These endeavors continued until the emergence of Taliban, who occupied most parts of Afghanistan. Iran's relations with the Taliban deteriorated in 1998, with Taliban forces seizing the Iranian consulate in Mazar-e-Sharif, killing 11 Iranian diplomats and massacring thousands of Shiites. Consequently, Iran deployed

300,000 troops along its borders with Afghanistan and got ready to invade this country. But Iran's political and military leaders eventually decided to avoid conflict with Afghanistan. (Fitzgerald: 2011, P.3) In the post-Taliban era, Iran also made extensive efforts to establish peace in Afghanistan and facilitate the return of Afghan refugees to their homeland.

If we would like to study and explore the developments that have taken place between the Iranian and Afghan governments since the independence of this country until very recently, we must scrutinize them in terms of common history, Persian language, and Iranian culture. From the perspective of diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Afghanistan is a country that has historical and cultural commonalities with Iran.  Seeking to respect Afghanistan's territorial integrity and independence, Tehran endeavors to use both countries' cultural commonalities as a basis for interaction in other fields.  Even efforts should be made to take advantage of the people as the second route of interaction along the first route (government-official route), because the lengthy settlement of Afghan refugees and migrants in Iran has provided a fair ground for public understanding and dialogue over the last few decades.

After the AKP came to power in Ankara, the Turkish government, by shifting to its periphery, in addition to hard power has tried to use its soft power levers to expand its regional influence over regional rivals such as the Islamic Republic of Iran. To this end, while strengthening its scientific and cultural diplomacy in Afghanistan and providing targeted education to the youth of this country, At the same time, it hosts tens of thousands of Afghan students at Turkish universities who pursue Turkish cultural goals in their country after graduation(irna.ir/news/ 82905880/).

According to the "strategic depth" doctrine of current President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, they are trying to spread the Neo-Ottomanism in Central Asia and the Caucasus, the Middle East and even

Eastern Europe. Therefore, certainly they cannot ignore Afghanistan. But since Turkey's policies in North Africa and the Middle East did not work well after Arab Spring revolutions due to complicated competition with other regional powers like Iran, Turkish leaders try not to neglect strategic fronts on other fronts, including in Central Asia, to revive the strategic depth and soft power of Turkey.

In other words, now that Turkey sees the prospect of joining the European Union as well as emerging as the only regional power in the Middle East as bleak and gloomy, Ankara will try not to miss at least two regions in the east, the Caucasus and Central Asia, including Afghanistan.

## Conclusion

Pan-Turkism believers in more formal and informal circles, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, tried to increase their presence in Afghanistan through utilizing ethnic and linguistic characteristics. But now, in the light of the policies of the Erdogan Islamist government, this is not the only leverage of Turkish influence in Afghanistan, but it is undoubtedly a permanent leverage in the regional influence of Turkey. In the cultural dimension, Turkey is highly active after the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Afghan schools of Turkish language supported by Turkey.

The number of Turkish scholarships in Afghanistan is increasing, and every year Afghan students, especially Turkish ones, are more likely to go to Turkey.In the economic dimension, Turkey in recent years, apart from the large-scale economic assistance program for Afghanistan (at a cost of 200 million dollars), has been active in the widespread investment in the construction of hospitals and emerging market of Afghanistan.

In the military dimension, indeed, among NATO members, it was only Turkey that had many potentialities and commonalities with Afghanistan. Apart from helping train Afghan forces during the past years, Ankara also gained a respectable role in this

country. Additionally, at the political level, Ankara has been pushing for a secular political model of its government (largely backed up by the United States and Europe) as a model for governance in Afghanistan. Turkey tried to replace Pan-Turkism based on the teachings of Kemalism with the teachings of Eurasianism in the type of Turkey's engagement with its peripheral regions. But due to challenges and formal resistance of this region against Pan-Turkism, Turkey has changed its Pan-Turkish policy and taking into consideration a realistic and pragmatic measure in the field of culture and economics.

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# The U.S. Military Presence in the Middle East and Central Asia; Iran`s Security Concerns

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## Abstract

The purpose of this article is to describe the extensive military buildup of the United States in these regions during George W. Bush presidency (Jan 20, 2001 to Jan 20, 2009) and suggest the reasons for it. Since there were also U.S. bases in the two Caucasian states of Azerbaijan and Georgia, they are included in this study as well. The countries of these strategically important regions are not only significant for their vast oil and gas reserves but also they are seen as actual markets for American goods and services. Moreover security issue seems to be important as well. Similar to the threats posed to the security of Iran from the US presence in these regions.

**Keywords***: US Military Presence, Middle East, Central Asia, G.W. Bush presidency, Iran's Security*

## Introduction

During the Soviet era, the presence of the great powers in Central Asia was diminished due to the Communists' domination of a large part of the region and the unwillingness of the great powers (especially the United States) to clash with the Eastern superpower and recognize each other's spheres of influence. This area (except for areas under Iranian rule) was under the exclusive influence of the Soviet Union. Hence, there was relative stability in the region. But after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the geopolitical, geostrategic and geo–cultural importance of the Central Asian region gave rise to dynamics in the region that not only competed regional and supra-regional powers. Meanwhile, the United States, under the influence of the special situation in the region, pursued policies in the region, one of the main manifestations of which was security concerns for Iran.

After the Sep11 terrorist attack a new strategy in US foreign Policy started in which the neo-cons found new opportunities under Bush presidency. The new strategy of unilateralism tried to establish US hegemony in the world particularly the most important regions i.e. the Middle East, Persian Gulf and Central Asia which can be summarized as: 1. Effective control of energy resources of the Persian Gulf and central Asia. 2. Gaining political influence in these regions to tackle the Russian and Chinese influence there even through military presence. 3. Containing states like Iran and Iraq (the so called Axis of Evil).

Apparently military presence is the hardware backup for political influence and a sign that United States is serious in her intentions in the region. It is obvious that such a military buildup

presents serious menace to national security of regional states including Iran.

Whereas, Barack Obama who entered the White House in 2009 found Central Asia and especially Afghanistan in different conditions comparing to the year 2001, so his administration pursued American grand fixed strategy to maintain American global hegemony with some different tactics. In fact, he commenced the "Policy of Change" in order to rectify the image of the United States of America which as a result of the invasion of Afghanistan and vast military presence of American troops all over the region was damaged and impaired. In addition, the U.S. Department of State with "Hillary Clinton", tried to "reset" the bilateral relations with Russia with which during Bush's presidency was impaired. Thus, in contrary to George W. Bush, the Obama administration acted multilaterally based mostly on soft power and through business and economic apparatus. The Oval Office, first and foremost set the agenda of diminishing the number of U.S. troops on the ground in Afghanistan. On the other hand, the United Stated accepted the Kyrgyz Parliament order to withdraw U.S. troops from Manas Air Base and left this country in 2010.

The White House in the Obama presidency also initiated "New Silk Road" and "Northern Distribution Network" (NDD) as two vast, huge business and transformational projects to enhance its non- military presence in Afghanistan nonmilitary as well as approaching China and Russia as two strategic allies and rivals in Central Asia. The United States also during Obama's presidency seriously pursued the gas and oil pipelines projects which were outside Iran and Russia's main land such as "Trans-Afghanistan Pipeline" or "Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India Pipeline" called (TAPI) and "Trans-Caspian Pipeline" in order to contain Iran and Russia economically and politically. This is based on the United States' official stated policy and the Obama energy team pursued this policy. The White House in the Obama presidency also initiated "New Silk Road" and "Northern

Distribution Network" (NDD) as two vast, huge business and transformational projects to enhance its non- military presence in Afghanistan nonmilitary as well as approaching China and Russia as two strategy (Koohkan and Sahabi, 2018: 2015).

Although Trump has a different logic than Obama in the field of foreign policy, in dealing with the Middle East, he wants to place the main burden of maintaining security in the Middle East on his allies by weakening other rivals. After taking office at the White House, Trump carried out his first foreign policy measures at home under executive orders, which, although considered national and domestic, encompassed all Muslim countries, especially those in the Middle East. His first order was a 90-day visa ban and the entry of nationals of seven Muslim countries, which was met with a backlash from those countries and Muslims inside the United States. Trump believes the move is necessary to protect the United States from Muslim extremism, while his order did not include Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

US President Donald Trump recently announced in a statement that the country has put the Islamic Revolutionary Guards in the list of terrorist groups. Shortly after the United States placed the Revolutionary Guard on the terrorist list, Iran's Supreme National Security Council also introduced the US government as a supporter of terrorism. Iran also considers all US troops in the Middle East to be terrorists. By placing the Revolutionary Guard in the list of terrorist groups, it is possible for the US president to take military action against the IRGC on the Iranian soil without having violated the congressional resolution to ban unauthorized attack on Iran. Of course, this is a violation of the United Nations Charter, but it is a kind of battle without a declaration of the beginning of the war.

Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the military presence in the region of the Middle East and Central Asia, as well as to analyze the security concerns of Iran in the countries of the region .In this article first US strategy in these regions are examined and then the US military programmes are studied and finally the

threats to Iran's national security are discussed.

## I. US Military Threats Foundation Against Iran

The conservative system has had three main periods: First, liberal conservatism, which at the height of liberalism had lost its influence on land ownership and political and social patriarchy, embraced the principles of liberalism. Second, patriarchal conservatism, which, with the rise of interventionist governments and the crisis in the market economy, returned to the principles of patriarchy and supported the inclusive government. Third, neoconservatism, which has returned to the principles of free economy and has created a doctrine called "new right" within the framework of liberalism (Musainejad and Hosseinpour, 2008: 40). Conservative ideology evolved in the 1970s. With the onset of recession and inflation in Western countries, the effectiveness of welfare state policies became questionable, and conservatives reacted to these developments by returning to the principles of the free market system.

But Neoconservatism is not just about economics. The neoconservative system is culturally and socially conservative and advocates the preservation of natural inequalities. Politically, it strengthens order and security and maintains a strong government. Neoconservatism in international politics also relies on the idea that democracies must be able to suppress their enemies with full authority, even by force. Thus, neoconservatism is a political, social, economic, and international system that, in response to the welfare state (a post-World War II regime) in capitalist countries, has led to their turning to the right, including the neoconservatism of traditional conservative parties. (Ghafouri and Davand, 2016: 363). Thus, the use of force to establish and spread democracy is not only permissible, but necessary. They also believe that any political regime has to draw an external enemy to create national unity (Mousavishfaei, 2009: 135-134).

Therefore, the international political structure has always given rise to numerous threats against Iran. The international

system reacted dangerously to the material power of the Islamic Republic of Iran, including: Iraq imposed war on Iran; Imposition of various types of sanctions; Blocking all assets of the Central Bank and the Government of Iran in the United States; Prevent peaceful activities of the Iranian nuclear program; Iranophobia; Creating an arms race in the region; Presence of US and NATO military forces in neighboring countries; Territorial illusory claims on the three Iranian islands. (Kouzehgar Kaleji, 2012: 142-145).

## II. U.S. Strategy  in the Middle East And Central Asia

In the US National Security Strategy documents released before 2005, the regions of Central Asia, the Caucasus and Russia were often mentioned side by side. But in 2005, following the aftermath of 9/11 in Afghanistan and Pakistan and the US strategic need for the Central Asian region, as well as plans such as the Greater Central Asia and the New Silk Road, this traditional approach changed. And the regions of Central Asia, Afghanistan, and South Asia came together. Following these changes, the Central Asian region was separated from the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs and merged with the Bureau of South Asia.Thus, a new section entitled "Central and South Asian Administration" was formed in the organizational structure of the US State Department. "Assistant Secretary of State for Central and South Asian Affairs" is in charge of this section (Kouzehgar Kaleji, 2018).

In a strategy statement for Central Asia, Daniel Fried, Assistant Secretary for Eurasian Affairs, stated before the Subcommittee on Middle East and Central Asia of the House International Relation Committee on Oct. 27, 2005 that the United States of America pursues three sets of strategic interests in Central Asia; "Security; Energy and regional economic cooperation; and Freedom through reform." He further stated that the three sets of strategic interests are pursued "in tandem, because failure in one area will undermine the chance of success in another." Particularly after Sep. 11, 2001 the United States undertook " an ambitious forward strategy in Central Asia

(Fried,2005) and all five nations of the region Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan provided support to Operation Enduring Freedom in various forms including; bases, over flight rights and refueling facilities. These co-operations were further strengthened by participation of these countries in military training and exercises through NATO's Participation for Peace Programme (NATO,2008).

In energy and economic co-operation, which is one of the three sets of American interests, efforts were made to open this region to global access and vice versa by investment, building roads and bridges "essential for revitalizing regional and global trade" and the governments of the region were encouraged "to create welcoming environments for foreign trade and investment" (Fried,2005).

Central Asia with its huge reserves of oil, gas and minerals as well as its strategic position was already a key arena of sharp rivalry between U.S.A., Russia, Europe, Japan and China. All of these major powers along with transnational corporations had been seeking alliances, concessions and pipeline routes in the Central Asian republics. In particular the size of the Chinese economy was more than doubled in 1990s and was expected to at least double again by 2010, resulting in growing oil imports from 20 to 40% by then (Chan,2001).

China had an increasingly important position in this region if not in military terms, in which Russia still dominated, but in the financial realm. China's important investments in this region had great impacts on regional infrastructure which were fundamental for the economic development of Central Asia. These investments were not only limited to the oil and gas sector but general trade had also increased. In the transport sector, which Russia traditionally controlled, China was a heavy investor as well. Although there was competition in the oil and gas sectors but in the ordinary economy Chinese merchandise dominated. In military area, which was the monopoly of Russia, China was also making its way in Central Asia (Sawnstorm, 2001).

Japan and South Korea were also interested in oil and gas pipelines to diversify the present vulnerable sea routes from the Middle East and to develop secure continental access to the Middle East and Central Asian oil and gas reserves. Moreover, Japanese corporations and banks were also attracted by the prospect of super profits from exploitation of the region's resources as much as major US and European transnationals were (Chan,2001).

The U.S. wanted to gain commercial advantages over Japan, South Korea and Europe, as well. Although they are under the same umbrella of interests and general aims but they do not have identical goals and priorities, particularly regarding commercial rivalry (Aras,1997).

Limiting Russian and Iranian influence in the region was another important consideration. Obviously Russia continued to be the most important among the regional powers. Russia had restructured Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to tighten co-operation and improved economic and political links to China and Iran, because American and European activities in Central Asia Were (and still are) seen as a menace close to its own southern borders (Aras,1997). China's rapprochement with Russia enhanced their overlapping interests in the region and they were co-operating in the *Shanghai Five* group of nations along with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. But more than economic considerations were at work, because both Russia and China were bitterly opposed to the development of an American missile defense system in Europe which would nullify their nuclear deterrence against US aggression. Consequently the two states were seeking closer relations with other key regional players such as Iran to counter US influence in Central Asia (Chan,2001).

Iran had also made initiatives towards the states of Central Asia by offering them free passage through its own territory but it lacked the capital to finance the region's needs, and thus sought a big partner like Russia, China or India in the region. Therefore possibility of Iranian alliance with them altogether or on one-to-

one basis was of grave concern to the United States. Another concern was the Iranian support for Islamist activists in the region. Thus one of the most important US policies was to contain Iran and block its power in Central Asia (Aras,1997). To have a clear perspective of U.S. economic objectives in these regions, during the presidency of George W. Bush[1] the population, territory, GNI per capita and oil & gas reserves of these countries are presented.

| Country U.S. $ | population (million) (U.N. 2005-2006) | Area (sq km) | GNI per capita U.S. $ (World Bank) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Afghanistan | 26.00 | 652,225 | N/A |
| Azerbaijan | 8.400 | 86,600 | 1,240 |
| Bahrain | 0.754 | 717.00 | 14,370 |
| Georgia | 5.000 | 69,700 | 1,350 |
| Iran | 68.5(U.N.2006) | 1,650,000 | 2,770 |
| Iraq | 26.5 | 438,317 | N/A |
| Kazakhstan | 15.4 | 2,700,000 | 2,930 |
| Kuwait | 2.7 | 17,818 | 24,040 |
| Kyrgyzstan | 5.1(U.N. 2006) | 199,900 | 440 |
| Oman | 3.00 | 309,500 | 9,070 |
| Qatar | 0.628 | 11,437 | N/A |
| Saudi Arabia | 25.6 | 2,240,000 | 11,770 |
| Tajikistan | 6.3 | 143,100 | 330 |
| Turkmenistan | 5.00 | 488,100 | 1,340 |
| United Arab Emirates | 3.1 | 77.700 | 23,770 |
| Uzbekistan | 26.9 | 447,400 | 510 |
| Yemen | 21.5 | 536,869 | 600 |
| Source: (BBC, 2006) | | | |

1. Visit the Pennwell Corporation website for updated information: https:// www. eia. gov/ international/overview/world or: https://www.worldometers. info/

| Country | Oil & Gas Reserves Oil (Billion Barrels) | Gas (Trillion Cubic Feet) |
|---|---|---|
| Azerbaijan | 7.000 | 30.000 |
| Bahrain | 0.125 | 3.250 |
| Iran | 136.270 | 974.000 |
| Iraq | 115.000 | 112.000 |
| Kazakhstan | 30.000 | 100.000 |
| Kuwait | 101.500 | 55.000 |
| Oman | 5.500 | 30.000 |
| Qatar | 15.207 | 910.000 |
| Saudi Arabia | 262.300 | 240.000 |
| Turkmenistan | 0.6000 | 100.000 |
| United Arab Emirates | 97.800 | 214.000 |
| Uzbekistan | 0.594 | 65.000 |
| Yemen | 3.000 | 16.900 |
| Total | 774.968 | 2850.150 |
| World Total | 1,317.44 | 6182692 |
| Source: Pennwell Corporation,2006 | | |

**Military Buildup:** The US was not only quick to recognize the newly independent republics of Central Asia after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, and to establish different kinds of link with them, but also it started building up its military bases there, in addition to already existing bases in the Middle East after the USSR invaded Afghanistan and particularly after Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990. The US military buildup was further expanded in the Middle East and especially Central Asia after Sep.11, 2001 terrorist attack (Fried,2005) and the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. There were then US military bases in Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Georgia, Iraq, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan and Yemen, and agreements had been made with Kazakhstan and Tajikistan to use airfields for military operations which might later develop into US bases. Even neutral Turkmenistan had granted permission for military over flights

(Maitra,2005). Moreover, all the states of Central Asia and Caucasia had joined NATO's Partnership for Peace Programme on individual and collective basis.

In addition to the existing bases the US was also setting up nine new bases in Afghanistan in provinces of Helmand, Heart, Nimrouz, Balkh, Khost and Paktia. Indeed all these bases were at the crossroads of three major areas: Middle East, Central and South Asia, which were not only rich in oil, gas and other minerals but also at the meeting points of three growing powers-China, India and Russia. Thus Central Asia, Caucasia, all of Iran, the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz and northern Arabia up to Yemen's Socotra Island came under operational scope of the US Air Force, which not only provided the US with commanding position regarding India and western China (Maitra, 2005) but also a higher position in its rivalry with Russia, China, European states and Japan in these regions.

White House officials believe that the United States, because of its universal values and norms, is the only power that deserves to lead the world and must defend justice and freedom in the world. The realization of the American hegemonic dream required the conditions that were concentrated more than any other region of the world in the Middle East. Of the US military bases, Washington has more than 50 military bases in Central Asia and the Middle East. Therefore, it is important to know the US military bases in these areas, given the growing threats to the country, and the use of space statistics can help us better understand these bases. The data show that the bases with a distance of less than 620 km to the borders of Iran, have been created mostly with the aim of covering and direct control over the territory of Iran, and in contrast to the bases with a distance of more than 620 km from the borders of Iran, US support and other goals have been established in the region (Mohammadpur and Atar, 2018: 377).

## III. Threats Against the Iran National Security

The system of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which has had the anti-hegemonic nature since its inception, is one of the obstacles to normalizing relations between Iran and the United States. In fact, a revolution that is counter to the domination of great powers is unlikely to be easily influenced by American strategic culture. The features of American strategic culture are: intolerance of independent powers, hostility to non-liberal governments unless their foreign policy is dependent on the United States (Leverett, 2013: 333-335). Consequently, the US imperialist tendencies in the Middle East have forced Iran's leaders to consider those who oppose its policies as Satan. One of the best examples of the problem of refusing and abandoning non-liberal systems is the order that has emerged since the revolution in Iran and through the Islamic Republic of Iran - the convergence of democratic institutions with the sovereignty of Islam that has come with an independent foreign policy. In our view, we are faced with two strategic cultures, both of which are based on conflicting ideological foundations: one has a dominant nature, and the other is the nature of resistance to domination. Thus, one of the issues that we will continue to face in the coming years is the Islamic Republic's opposition to the policy of American intervention and domination in the world and specifically in the Middle East (Chitsazian and Shafaie, 2018: 47).

The author believes Islamic Republic of Iran according to principles and structures of the revolution has affected transformation of Islamic Resistance through three ways in West Asia. First, Iran has strengthened the foundations of resistance in Lebanon. Iran also has supported Islamic movements in the region, such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad movement. Second, the Islamic Republic of Iran has tried to unite movements and NGOs to counter the Neo-conservatism in West Asia. Third, values and fundamental belief in the Islamic Revolution discourse has created a huge revolution in the field of Islamic resistance. This is exactly what may be the root of the military struggle between the United

States and Iran in the future. Therefore, the U.S. military presence in the Middle East and Central Asia will threaten Iran, which will lead to containment of Iran.

As part of the containment project, the United States seeks to strengthen centrifugal tendencies in West Asian countries by fomenting social and ethnic crises, in order to implement the project of Balkanization of countries such as Iran (the axis of Islamic resistance) in the long run. . This is important for upsetting the balance of regional power in favor of the Zionist regime and paving the way for the realization of the "Greater Israel" project. In the case of countries opposed to reform, the United States wants to guarantee the implementation of dictated reforms from abroad and to destroy the identity and culture of these countries (Dehshiri, 2004: 124-125).

**U.S Military Presence in Afghanistan:** The US presence in Afghanistan due to its proximity and cultural and political commonalities between Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran directly affects the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The presence of Taliban forces in Afghanistan and ideological confrontations and the support of some countries in the region posed a threat to the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, from the very beginning, the confrontations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States in Afghanistan became apparent over time. The security problems of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the part of Afghanistan before September 11, 2001 had their strengths and weaknesses and included various dimensions. With the US presence in Afghanistan and the occupation of this country, on the one hand, past threats from Iran's neighborhood with Afghanistan, such as the issue of drugs and refugees, faced various fluctuations, and on the other hand, new threats emerged in other areas. The US presence in Afghanistan was irrelevant.

By invading Afghanistan the United States has an upper hand in controlling the huge energy resources of Central Asia which is landlocked, and so there are several plans to transfer oil and gas

through pipe lines via Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Indian Ocean, bypassing Iran as the most viable route, to decrease the influence and economic advantages Iran could otherwise enjoy. It seems that physical presence in military form is a classical strategy of guaranteeing influence. This is why America arranged for the most extensive availability of troops of US and NATO allies in Afghanistan. This military buildup presents two security menaces to Iran. First north-eastern parts of Iran are within US access in case of a military showdown with Iran and second the mere presence of US and western troops stimulate potential development of fundamentalism, terrorism and instability near eastern borders of Iran (Shafiei et all, 2013:111).

A former US Air Force officer has stated that one of the main reasons for Washington's military presence in Afghanistan is to contain Iran, because that country is a source of concern to Israel. Karen Kwiatkowski stated that the reason for the US military presence in Afghanistan is Iran. He added: "The United States wants to be in an operational position to somehow threaten (Iran) and show that it is implementing its threats." (Aria news, 07/01/2019).

**Pakistan**: It is reported that in early 2002 more than 30,000 Us troops were stationed in Pakistan and US Air force has access to four bases in Baluchistan State of Pakistan close to south-eastern borders of Iran (Davand, 2014:120). Therefore the eastern borders are open to attack by American troops as well (Ahmadpour et all, 2011:32). Indirectly, US military presence in Pakistan threatens Iran. Because terrorist groups may have access to nuclear weapons.

The 9/11 incident made the Western countries more concerned about the possibility that "the rise of political instability in Pakistan could not only lead to building nuclear weapons in this country, but also bring about risks such as dangerous and vulnerable nuclear materials being stolen by extremist groups" (Mustafa, 2013: 2). From the perspective of the Western countries, Pakistan is a suitable place for fundamentalist

organizations seeking nuclear weapons and materials, since first of all, the central government is not able to fully monitor all the country and second, there is evidence that many extremist organizations have penetrated Pakistan's security system (Goldberg & Ambinder, 2011).

Al-Qaeda has endeavored to access nuclear weapons at several points in recent history. On early December 1998, Al-Qaeda revealed a determination to obtain atomic bombs for the extensive destruction of atheists (the Westerns). This group believes that possessing atomic bombs is a religious duty, which according to some is the reason for Al-Qaeda's attempt to establish relationships with South Asia for obtaining nuclear materials, as well as its effort to purchase a nuclear warhead from Chechen rebels in Russia. After the September 11th incident, Bin Laden threatened to attack the United States with chemical, nuclear and biological weapons, if the United States used its weapons against Bin Laden's group or teammates. Therefore, the fact that none of the extremists have yet carried out an atomic attack on the West does not guarantee that such attacks from Al-Qaeda and other extremists in Pakistan will not happen in the future (Bokhari, 2006: 31-32).

**Iraq**: After the invasion of Iraq in 2003 western and south-western borders of Iran are also vulnerable to US and British attacks which constitute serious threats to Iran's security both militarily and by terrorism  of fundamental groups like Al-Qaeda. More than 100,000 US troops have access to almost all military bases in Iraq. Considering that Turkey is a member of NATO, we can say that all western borders of the country are also under direct threat by the US troops which may be used against nuclear facilities in Iran (Sohrabi, 2017:61).

The United States also uses its military to support ISIS against Iran. The main goal of the United States in bringing terrorists back to the field and continuing the attacks is not limited to putting more pressure on the popular mobilization organizations on the battlefield, and they are trying to put the representatives of the

Resistance Front in the political arena and surrender. They seek to seize power completely in Iraq, and one of the consequences could be the repeal of the law on the expulsion of foreign troops from Iraq. With the withdrawal of the popular mobilization forces from these important and strategic areas, the secret elements of ISIL can maneuver more and multiply their power and will no longer be under pressure, and the way will be opened for the Americans to move in these areas as well.They are located in these places. Some experts believe that the issue of the withdrawal of foreign troops from Iraq, and in particular the US military, has caused concern and dissatisfaction in Washington in recent months, especially by some Shiite political and military groups. Because they do not want to empty the field in favor of Iran and gain more power of Shiite military groups in Iraq. For this reason, the United States intends to find a reason to continue its presence in Iraq by reactivating ISIS and creating insecurity (Irna, 2020).

**The Persian Gulf**: Bahrain, Qatar and the Emirate are among the most important Persian Gulf states where US military bases are located. The US Fifth Fleet in Bahrain, Al Udeid Military Base in Qatar and Al Dhafra Air Base in the UAE will be specifically mentioned here.

The Fifth Fleet is a numbered fleet of the United States Navy. It has been responsible for naval forces in the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, Arabian Sea, and parts of the Indian Ocean since 1995 after a 48-year hiatus. It shares a commander and headquarters with U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) in Bahrain. Established in 1944, the Fifth Fleet conducted extensive operations against Japanese forces in the Central Pacific during World War II. World War II ended in 1945, and the Fifth Fleet was deactivated in 1947. It remained inactive until 1995, when it was reactivated and assumed its current responsibilities (Wikipedia, (a) 2021). Al Udeid Air Base is one of two military bases southwest of Doha, Qatar, also known as Abu Nakhlah Airport  It houses Qatar Air Force, United States Air Force, Royal Air Force, and other Gulf War Coalition personnel and assets. It is

host to a forward headquarters of United States Central Command, headquarters of United States Air Forces Central Command, No. 83 Expeditionary Air Group RAF, and the 379th Air Expeditionary Wing of the USAF (Wikipedia, (b) 2021). Al Dhafra Air Base  (IATA: DHF, ICAO: OMAM) is a military installation in the United Arab Emirates. The base is located approximately 20 mi (32 km) south of Abu Dhabi and is operated by the United Arab Emirates Air Force. The US and French air forces are also stationed at the base. The American RQ-4 Global Hawk drone, which was destroyed by the IRGC, had taken off from the base (Wikipedia, (c) 2021).

The most important US military threats and capabilities in the Persian Gulf to counter the IAEA include: US superspectral technology, unmanned spy planes, US use of military bases in the region, strategic aircraft, US military capabilities In the use of smart weapons, aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines, the deployment of the US Navy in the Persian Gulf, reconnaissance aircraft and flying radars, US military aggression against all sensitive military and civilian centers of the Islamic Republic of Iran, cruise missiles and Smart bombs (Moradian and Sadeghi, 2013: 146).

**Azerbaijan and Georgia**: After the collapse of the Soviet Union and independence of the Caucasian states of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia US, other western countries and Israel have tried to fill the power vacuum in the area. They have established vast economic, political and military ties with Georgia and Azerbaijan to curtail Russia and Iran's influence there. Especially important for Iran is extensive military agreements with and presence of American and Israeli military advisers and a number of military bases they are either using or are allowed to use in these two countries which may in any conflict be used against Iran (Hakim, Jafari Valadani; 2015:55).

The United States has been one of the most influential trans-regional actors and has played an important role in this region. According to this view, the United States, which seeks to expand

its hegemony in the world as part of its hegemonic strategy, cannot be indifferent to this region, which is the center of Eurasia. The strategic importance of this region is such that it is surrounded by a wide range of nuclear or potential nuclear powers, namely Russia, China, Pakistan and India. The Republic of Azerbaijan is located in the heart of this region, quite strategically, and this geographical feature has given it a privileged position compared to other countries. It is because of this geopolitical position of the Republic of Azerbaijan that Iran, the Ottomans and Russia have been at loggerheads over the region at various times. This time, the United States is trying to use its strategic position for its hegemonic goals. The position of the Republic of Azerbaijan, given its proximity to Iran and Russia, its location on the shores of the Caspian Sea and its ownership of significant oil and gas reserves, has attracted the attention of the United States. The Republic of Azerbaijan shares a 279-kilometer border with the Russian Federation to the north, including the border with the North Caucasus republics; This is a point that is very important for Russia's national security and is full of important conflicts that act like fire under the ashes in the current situation. The Republic of Azerbaijan has a very important position in the US security perspective, and as mentioned, its strategic position has created additional motivation for its politicians. Given this strategic situation, Hillary Clinton stated during her recent visit to Baku: "The Republic of Azerbaijan is the key king by which Washington can easily achieve its goals in the region." In any case, the United States is pursuing long-term security-military interests in the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the need of the Republic of Azerbaijan for US support can facilitate the US military presence in this country (Hamshahri, 31/07/2010).

## Conclusion

Washington's outlook for engagement and intervention in the region changed dramatically after 9/11. Undoubtedly, as in the past decade, there was still interest in pursuing a political and

economic reform agenda, but military and security considerations became key elements of US policy toward Central Asia. Logistical requirements Supporting the United States' extensive operations in Afghanistan and, as a result, its heavy reliance on access to military facilities in the region took precedence over its commitment to political and economic reform and human rights. The United States enhanced the importance of security cooperation with major countries in the region and, more broadly, the US geopolitical position in Central Asia. Central Asia has become a region with marginal status and importance as one of the top priorities of the United States' strategy, although its importance was primarily due to its contribution to the stability of Afghanistan rather than to its own priority.[1]

It is clear that such an extensive presence had different reasons in addition to the existence of huge oil and gas reserves in the Middle East, Central Asia and Caspian Sea regions. The states of these regions were developing and underdeveloped which were actual markets for American goods and services and thus to be open to the US access. Moreover in the era of globalization, which demands free and fluent flow of capital anywhere in the world where there are ample cheap labor and raw materials, these areas were most appealing and therefore rivalry with China and Russia apart from rivalry with other western industrial countries and Japan on these issues were important factors for the US extensive presence in these areas. Of course, another important matter was the containment of Iran which is the only country opposing American influence and interests in these regions. It is clear that the American bases closed the circle around Iran which is a potential threat against the national security of Iran in case of any military showdown. Moreover the mere presence of American forces around the country increases political instability and tension on the periphery of the Iranian borders, so to create a security dilemma identical to the Soviet position during the cold war.

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1. See (Rumer and others, 2016)

So, in brief, the threats of the American military presence against Iran are almost entirely in the region. These restrictions include the US military presence in Afghanistan, the most important of which are the spread of extremism, the spread of terrorist movements and the escalation of spy activities in the region. In connection with Pakistan, the most important threat is the siege of the eastern and southeast borders by the United States. In the case of the western borders, Iraq and Turkey are the options that the United States can attack against its nuclear facilities. In the context of Central Asia, the main danger of the US military presence in this region being coalition against Iran within the framework of NATO is the restriction of Russia (the strategic alliance of Iran), and also that the Caspian Sea can serve as a base for attack to Iran.

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# Bahrain and Axis of Resistance: Geopolitical Implications for Iran

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## Abstract

In the late 2010 and early 2011, the Arab Islamic countries in the Middle East and North Africa underwent developments which were unforeseen and shocking in the view of global observers. The growth and spread of popular protests caused some rulers in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Yemen to be dethroned in the form of a domino; however, in Bahrain, the popular protests faced severe squash by the Al-Khalifa rule. Nonetheless, revolutionary movements in Bahrain are of a long record in the country and the demonstration on 14 Feb. 2011 was the onset of geopolitics of resistance in the state. Despite Shia majority against the ruling minority, the revolutionary movement came to failure for a number of reasons including Bahrain's geographical location and the revolutionists' aspirations were unrealized. In the meantime, the present study aims to clarify the Bahrain's geographical location in the geopolitics of resistance in the country and its impact on the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). The outcome of the study suggests that being in energy transit line and proximity to energy resources, the island location and the strategic value of the country, the 5th US Fleet deployment, being in the Persian Gulf and its neighborhood to Iran and Saudi Arabia affect the Bahrain's geopolitics of resistance and breed negative consequences for Iran.

**Keywords***: geographical location, geopolitics of Bahrain, geopolitics of resistance, Iran*

## Introduction

The widespread developments which occurred in Sept. 18, 2010 following Muhammad Buazizi's self-immolation, the Tunisian street vendor, in protest to the ruling cabinet's policies, affected many countries in the Middle East and Africa which have continued up to now. These developments abysmally affected the state policies at home and abroad an also the international system in a way that it stirred the regional and supra-regional actors to act and take position as well as seek the interest of themselves and their allies in shaping the new regional order with varied and occasionally adversary strategies. The geopolitical developments in the Middle East and north Africa highly affected the role and position of Shiites which intensified their resistance against political orders and reduced their social isolation. Likewise, it paved the social ground for maximum political movement and recreation of action by Shiites.

In the meantime, the island of Bahrain with her geostrategic situation in the Persian Gulf has always been into the consideration of regional and supra-regional powers. On the other hand, the Bahraini majority of population are Shiite who are under the Sunni minority rule that this has encouraged them to play a bigger part in administering the country. Although the protests in Bahrain are of a long-standing and fundamental record and stem from the incremental fissure between the government and society and the discriminatory policies adopted by Al-Khalifa dynasty, this time, the Bahraini Shiites were inspired by the events in Tunisia and Egypt and launched their demonstration on Feb. 14, 2011. Gradually and with the height of popular unrest and

demonstration, the number of protesters reached the peak on 22 Feb. in a way that more than 100 thousand of protestors gathered in LoLo square together with old factions and opposites. Consequently, the Bahraini government severely cracked down protests and sentenced the outstanding opposite leaders to long detainment. The developments in Bahrain, in various periods particularly in 2011, herald the geopolitics of resistance as a concept which has been developed by the Shiite majority against the ruling minority; however, because of different causes including the geographical location, the squash of the Shiite for political stability and maintenance of the status quo, was adopted by the rulers. By the same token, this article seeks to deal with the impact of Bahrain's geographical location on the geopolitics of resistance as a question; to that end, it exploits description-analysis as regards the matter and gathers data on desk and refers to Persian and Latin books, articles and internet sites. Similarly, the main purpose of the study is to account for the geographical-geopolitical location in Bahraini geopolitics of resistance and the possible consequences for Iran, which the outcome of the study suggests that the location of Bahrain as an island, the 5th US Fleet, being in energy transit line and in proximity to energy resources, being in the Persian Gulf and neighboring Iran and Saudi Arabia are of the factors which affect the geopolitics of resistance in Bahrain, and despite the Shiite majority in Bahrain, Shiites have failed to reach their political aspirations, bringing up negative consequences for Iran.

## I. Bahrain and Axis of Resistance

Bahrain as one of the most considerable Shiite centers in the world could be historically introduced as the third Shiite center after Iran and Iraq. The connection and interest of the islanders in the Shiite religion is so strong that among the people of the peninsula and the coasts of the Persian Gulf, the word "Bahraini" is used synonymously with the word Shiite, and the Sunni minority on the island is called "Ahl al-Bahrain", not Bahraini.

The Sunni population of Bahrain are mostly Maliki and some Hanbali. Many of Bahrain's Sunnis are Arabs or the Arabs who once lived on the southern coast of Iran. Despite the numerical majority of Shiites in the country, the government rests in the hands of the Sunni Al-Khalifa dynasty. The system and the type of government in Bahrain is an absolute autocracy, which since the 18th century has been in the hands of the Al-Khalifa dynasty (Mohammadi, 2007).

Making up seventy percent of the population, Shiites are mostly from the working class, and Sunnis often make up the urban population and hold the government power. Shiites, on the other hand, are economically poor and politically marginalized. The composition of the Royal Court, the National Guard, the Intelligence Service and the National Security Service is based solely on the principle of "only Sunni". Shiites only make up 3% of Bahrain's Interior Ministry and Army (Pankraton Ko, 2011).

Bahrain, both before and after the Islamic Revolution of Iran, has been the center of Shiite resurrection in the Persian Gulf states, and the people this country, particularly the Shiites have never tasted justice and freedom over the past few centuries. The Bahraini revolution, which follows developments in other Middle Eastern countries, including Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, and Libya, is the continuation of a massive wave of awakening in Islamic countries, which particularly stirred the rapid and violent reaction of Al-Khalifa and other neighboring Arab countries for suppression. The Bahraini Shiite groups call for fundamental reforms in all political and social spheres, specially in the following areas: The overthrow of the Al-Khalifa monarchy and the dissolution of the cabinet of ministers and the formation of an elected parliament; Indiscrimination to Shiites and their enjoyment of equal political, economic and social rights and their freedom to practice their religion and worship; Release political prisoners and intensify the fight against corruption at all levels; Lifting the ban on the formation of politico-religious parties and activities and ensuring the freedom of expression and the press;

Abolition of political citizenship granted to foreigners and stopping the process of granting citizenship based on religious and political goals; Withdrawal of foreign forces, specially the Saudi forces from Bahrain (Akhavan Kazemi & Shah Qale'h, 2014: 22).

With the outbreak of the Arab revolutions, political protests in Bahrain intensified against the rule of minority over majority. The protests culminated on Feb. 14, 2011, which was met with an inappropriate response from Al-Khalifa and violence by Bahraini security forces. The Bahraini government tried to quell the protests by imprisoning protesters, torturing detainees, and prosecuting them in repressive military courts; however, the actions were opposed by human rights groups (Yung & Roylance, 2012: 21).

As the protests continued and politico-religious figures joined the protesters, a nationwide political movement was launched in Bahrain, which gradually promoted its demands  from  reform to revolution; but for some reason, the Shiites of Bahrain were unable to meet their revolutionary demands and goals, because the consequences of regime change in Bahrain overturned the geopolitical structure of the Middle East, specially in the Persian Gulf, and increased the geopolitical weight of the Shiites in the region.

**Bahrain's Strategic Value and US Fifth Fleet**: Bahrain, as an island position in the Persian Gulf, has always been into the attention of regional and supra-regional powers. Noam Chomsky attributes Bahrain's importance to two factors: a) its long-standing geostrategic-geopolitical position, lacking a strong defensive system, its propensity for powers such as the United States and Saudi Arabia, and its geostrategic position as an island in the Persian Gulf which has always been into the attention of regional and supra-regional powers; b) enjoying a %70 Shiite population (Touti & Doustmohammadi, 2013: 214).

The stationing of the US Fifth Fleet in Bahrain, Bahrain's geographical proximity to Iran, and the subservience of its Sunni rulers to US have led to US-Bahrain very close relations, and the

ruling system in Bahrain has always been a US ally in the region; accordingly, any change in the region could completely affect the interests of the United States and her allies (Adami et al, 2012: 148).

In Dec. 1971, four months after Bahrain's secession from Iran, following an agreement between the US embassy and the Bahraini regime, the base was ceded to the United States for a total of 25 million Sterling lira along with using all facilities at Al-Jafir Port, airport, Salman Port and other port facilities. The base is the US intelligence hub and the leading US naval command center between the Philippines and the Mediterranean, and also the Middle East Special Command Center.

From 1985 onwards, US activities at the base gradually increased in a way that the United States evacuated all military equipment in Bahrain in 1987 and increased the number of warships and military personnel in the emirate. In addition to the naval base, the US possesses two other military bases in Bahrain, al-Muharraq and al-Hamla, both of which are at the disposal of the US Rapid Deployment Force. Likewise, more than 150 US Navy advisers with their affiliates, and about 3,000 US marines are in Bahrain together with their families (Saif Afjaei, 2002: 20).

Beyond hosting the US Navy headquarters, Bahrain was part of the US-led coalition that ousted Iraq from Kuwait in 1991. Bahrain allowed 17,500 troops and 250 US fighter jets to be stationed at Sheikh Isa Airbase to take part in the Desert Storm offensive against Iraqi forces. The US Command has been stationed off the coast of Bahrain since war against Iraq in 1991. Formerly, the US naval base in Bahrain was a command ship that docked mostly in Bahrain and it was technically stationed offshore. Afterwards, Bahrain and the United States decided to recognize the development of their cooperation by signing the Defense Cooperation Agreement on Oct. 28, 1991 for a 10-year period (Katzman, 2014: 22-24).

The agreement not only provides US access to Bahraini airbases, but also calls for consultation with Bahrain if her

security falls into danger, and includes training of Bahraini forces (Hajjar, 2002: 27). In the 1990s, under a Bahrain-US cooperation agreement, about 1,300 US troops were stationed in Bahrain to deter Saddam Hussein. Bahrain also hosts UN international headquarters. Weapons inspectors in Iraq from 1991 to 1998 and the US-led multinational deterrent forces that enforced UN sanctions on Iraq from 1991 to 2003 were stationed in the country. US military bases in Bahrain have two special features. Its naval aspect is very clear, which is highly substantial in the important strategic region of the Persian Gulf, and from the air point of view, it should be taken into account that the US airforce deploys its fighters to Afghanistan and Iraq through airbases in Bahrain. It deploys and manages its air operations from this base, accounting for why the Pentagon's vital lever is at Bahrain's military base. Bahrain is more important than any other country in which the United States has a military base (Adami, 2012: 165). As of March to April 2003, the US fighter jets flew from Sheikh Isa Airbase in both Afghanistan and Iraq operations. In Jan. 2009, Bahrain assigned 100 police officers to Afghanistan on a two-year mission to assist a NATO/ US-led stabilization operation, extended until the end of NATO mission in 2014 (Katzman, 2014: 22-24).

Bahrain, on the other hand, has always defined its part in the regional policies adopted by the United States. With the beginning of Trump's presidency, relations between the United States and Bahrain entered a new phase after a period of tension. In a meeting with the King of Bahrain, Trump described the expansion of US-Bahraini relations as a sign of a new movement and forgetting the tensions of the Obama era. The increase in the level of relations between the two countries and the approval of the US Senate for the sale of an arms package worth $ 3.8 billion to Manama, indicates the issue (http://irna.ir/fa/news/82659371).

The United States is well aware that if major revolutions or political upheavals like the that in Iran take place in the littoral Persian Gulf states, it could easily shake the US position in the

region; hence, it supports the Bahraini government as the most likely option for such an event; because in case of regime change in Bahrain, the US interests will fall into danger by the new government and the bilateral politico-security relations will turn over (Afzali et al., 2013: 221). The unrest and uprising of the Bahraini people has set difficult conditions for the United States, confronted with an unstable ally. Thus, the loss of supervision and control over Bahrain means the loss of control over the Persian Gulf. In the event of the fall of the Al-Khalifa dynasty, given the presence of a majority of Shiites in Bahrain in the next government, the Shiites will undoubtedly take a larger part, and the United States is concerned that the rise of Shiites in Bahrain will end her military presence in the Persian Gulf.

**Geographical Proximity to Iran**: Despite the Bahraini opposition's deep-rooted demands for change, neither the regime has changed nor the power has been equally distributed; in contrast, officials in the Persian Gulf Cooperative Council (PGCC) exploit the old tactic of blaming Iran for interfering in their home affairs. This tactic is employed for two purposes: first, the (Sunni) regime, combining the issue of Shiite loyalty and Iranian intervention as a threat, delegitimizes any activity of the opposition (Shiites) who call for reform; second, introducing the protesters as infidels to the Bahraini government and playing with the traditional classic card of sectarianism, the regime seeks to prevent the emergence of a cohesive and united opposition. Both of these tactics were frequently used in Bahrain and other Persian Gulf states in 2011 (Coates Ulrichsen, 2013: 9). Accordingly, Bahraini leaders accuse Iran of complicity in the protests and claim that Tehran is training, arming and financing Bahraini Shiites directly or with the cooperation of Lebanese Hezbollah. In Oct. 2012, for example, Bahrain summoned the charge d'affaires of the Iranian embassy in Manama for interfering in the affairs of the country and for believing that Iran was stirring up unrest and sectarianism in Bahrain. Shortly afterwards, the US secretary of state Hillary Clinton stated: "We share the view that Iran's

activities in the Persian Gulf are aimed at undermining peace and stability" (Pletka & Kagan, 2014: 36).

Thus, one of the US tactics is to highlight Bahrain's position in Saudi foreign policy and Iran's threshold of success in establishing a Shiite state in Bahrain. The military presence of Saudi Arabia until the end of the elimination of the foreign threat shows that Saudi Arabia is affected by the propaganda attacks of Iranophobia and Shiism (Delavarpour Aqdam & Fardipour, 2011: 6).

Undoubtedly, the recent developments in Bahrain have led to the qualitative growth of Shiites in the field of indirect political participation and widespread civil disobedience. This has highlighted the role of the Shiites in Bahrain's existing order, and it is clear that if the regime in the Bahrain falls into the hands of the Shiites, its wave will spread to all states in the region, including Saudi Arabia. Saudi Shiites live in the strategic oil-rich areas of Qatif and are of geographical-emotional ties to Bahrain's Shiites (map No. 1). This issue will create a serious change in the Shiite geopolitics in the region, leading to the adjustment of Sunni governments in the region, which will inevitably make the future new governments closer to the Islamic Republic of Iran. The importance of these developments is for the strong presence of the Shiite element and its impacts on the form of power and politics in the Persian Gulf; therefore, Iran's strengthening and supporting Shiite element in the Middle East is not only to strengthen ideological grounds, but also to strategize the part of Shiites in the regional power and political developments, and subsequently, to consolidate and stabilize Iranian position and clout in the areas of competition and influence in the Middle East, specially in the Persian Gulf (Adami, 2012: 161-162).

Fulfilling the demands of the revolutionaries and the gradual democratization of Bahrain will further strengthen the considerations of the Bahraini Muslim nation in the field of foreign policy, leading to more independent and indigenous approaches to foreign policy orientations. In addition, the

legitimacy and domestic support in Bahrain will enable the government to operate more independently in foreign policy without relying on foreign powers, and to overcome obstacles to establishing normal and friendly relations with Iran. In the short to long term, these conditions will allow Iran to experience a moderate and even friendly government in its periphery, which is less affected by the West, and will improve Iran's environmental security situation and bring about great changes in coalitions and politico-security arrangements in the region. With Bahrain's withdrawing from the coalition of Western allied states, we could gradually see a kind of arrangement in which actors such as the United States, the Zionist regime and Saudi Arabia will take a minor part (Hatami, 2013: 21).



**Map 1**

Source: www.maps.google.com

**Proximity to Energy Resources**: Oil has always been a major driving force behind foreign interests, the balance of domestic and regional power, and territorial disputes in the Persian Gulf (Le Billon & El Khatib, 2004: 109). The major resources of oil and gas in the Persian Gulf littoral states has aroused the sensitivity of political actors to political developments in Bahrain. In addition to the fact that world powers have always sought to ensure the

continuity of energy flow and prevent price fluctuations by pursuing conservative and detention policies, energy resources within countries have also been a factor in adopting certain policies towards citizens.

Shiites make up more than 61% of the population in the Persian Gulf states (Leigh & Vukovic, 2010: 11); however, some sources estimate the 80 percent of the native population in the Persian Gulf region. On the other hand, about 30 percent of oil production and half of its reserves are in the possession of the Persian Gulf states (Luomi, 2008: 27-29). In addition to the West's concern about the concentration of energy reserves and production in the region, what has caused concern in Western countries and governments in the region is the overlap and geographical compatibility of oil fields and the concentration of Shiites. At the regional level, oil-rich countries seek to prevent ethnic, religious and minority groups from dominating the oil fields; this is because, in addition to reducing the central government's power over ethnic-religious areas, it has the potential to facilitate their process of independence and autonomy. Saudi Arabia is tightening its grip on the Shiite minority in the oil-rich areas of Asharqia in this regard, as most of Saudi Arabia's oil is extracted from the region's fields. Although Bahrain produces little oil, its location in the Persian Gulf and proximity to Saudi Arabia (as Bahrain and the eastern regions of Saudi Arabia are geopolitically complementary), have given it a favorable geopolitical position.

Oil has been one of the influential components of US and Western policy towards the developments in the Middle East in a way that despite issues such as the need to democratize the region and fight terrorism, oil-supplying countries have been an exception to this rule. It is clear that in the 9/11 terrorist attacks, several Saudi citizens were identified as the perpetrators; but the West's policy towards the country did not change significantly. Instead, the countries threatening the flow of oil, were attacked. This is why many experts see US campaigns in the Middle East not for the establishment of democracy and the liberation of the

people of the region from the clutches of terrorism and authoritarian rulers, but for the liberation of oil (Le Billon & El Khatib, 2004: 120-127). The reason why the United States wants the Persian Gulf oil to flow primarily, secondarily relatively cheaply, and thirdly uninterruptedly is that the foundation of the global economy has been built on cheap, high-quality oil in the past 50 years, which if destructed, the global economy will collapse. Therefore, Western countries, and specially the United States, prevent any action that could disrupt oil exports; subsequently, supporting the advancement and establishment of democracy and human rights is of secondary importance.

**Persian Gulf Element:** The Persian Gulf as one of the most important centers of gravity for geopolitical-international relations is one of the regions that has long been the scene of widespread geopolitical rivalry between the littoral states as well as the great powers. Today, it is clear that the chessboard of the powers is in Eurasia, and the Persian Gulf, as the heartland, is the site where the interests of the powers are intersected (Adami, 2012: 162).

Bahrain, the smallest country in the Persian Gulf, includes an archipelago composed of 33 big/small and residential/non-residential islands with an area of 760 square kilometers. Bahrain's strategic position has been strengthened by establishing a land connection with Saudi territory through the construction of a 25-kilometer bridge that opened in 1986. In addition, the construction of this bridge has taken a key part in the political, security, economic and tourism dimensions (Map No. 1).

The history of Bahrain's political developments has always been affected by her strategic location in the Persian Gulf. The country has long been home to foreign ships due to her rich wealth, specially in pearl fishing. Also at the height of European rivalry over the colonies, the country was the scene of war between the British and the Portuguese, and after India became an important British colony, Bahrain's position as a link between Europe, the Persian Gulf, India and the Far East found a particular importance (Saif Afjehei, 2002: 19-20). To achieve their goals,

including influence in the Persian Gulf, the fight against piracy, the anti-slavery, the establishment of telegraph lines and their protection, arms trade and its control, the British, aware of the strategic position of Bahrain, took over the protection of the island. Commercially, Bahrain also served as a trading center due to its convenient location on the road between the regional countries and India. With the development of trade relations and economic growth in the region, the country is now the center of international trade and monetary affairs in the region with a number of two thousand branches of domestic, regional and international banks, active in the country; similarly, about ninety regional and international insurance branches operate on this island (Amir Abdullahian, 2011: 153).

Bahrain's reputation for international trade and monetary affairs is not based only on the oil. Her location in the heart of the oil-rich countries of the Persian Gulf has made it a good place for leading the money earned out of the oil sales to international banking and monetary networks (Saif Afjehei, 2002: 22).

In the same vein, Bahrain's location on the southern shores of the Persian Gulf has strengthened her geopolitical position and importance for regional and international actors. Despite the socio-political context for democratic movements in Bahrain, due to Bahrain's importance in the Persian Gulf, the West, specially the United Kingdom, not only did not welcome the pro-democracy movements but in the Bahraini protests of 1895 and 1938 for political stability, it allowed for suppression of protests and political reforms by providing military support to the Al-Khalifa dynasty. Even during the recent popular protests in Bahrain, the British provided Bahraini authorities with intelligence assistance to identify and demobilize the opponents of the Al-Khalifa government (Silver, 2012).

Bahrain also has four Arab countries in her neighborhood, all of which are under the rule by monarchical and undemocratic systems that have been effective in Bahrain's unwillingness to pursue political reform in her own home. With the exception of

Kuwait (a country that experiences a minor parliamentary democracy, which is usually not immune to the intervention of the ruling family), in Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, the authoritarian monarchies are at the top without the least adherence to democracy, and the parliaments of these countries lack legislative oversight powers. The rulers of these countries are essentially traditional and conservative, and they avoid the slightest change in ceding political freedoms and democracy. Likewise, Arab rulers oppose democratic movements in Bahrain and other neighboring countries for fear of the spread of liberal movements to their home, given their proximity to Bahrain and similarities in culture, social structure, and government. This is even more true to Bahrain[1]; because they are concerned about the emergence of a pro-Iranian Shiite government within the PGCC, a process that could lead to a split in the adoption of coordinated policies in the face of Iran.

**Geographical Proximity to Saudi Arabia**: The Islamic Awakening in Arab countries was accompanied by intervention in favor of opponents of dictatorial regime in Libya; however, foreign actors did not much intervene in other countries like Bahrain. As soon as the developments in Bahrain began, Saudi Arabia, the stronghold of dictatorial regimes in the region, became the main supporter of the Al-Khalifa dynasty against the people of the country and posed the most substantial regional obstacle to Bahrain's transition to democracy. Applying the Brezhnev doctrine, the country began military intervention in Bahrain. The Saudis took the key part in suppressing the Bahraini protests, and they did not only oppose any minor talks and reforms by moderate Bahraini officials such as Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad, but they deemed the protests as a sectarian aspect between Sunnis and Shiites (Takeyh, 2011). Therefore, the reasons behind Saudi

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1. The enter of police and military forces of Bahrain's neighboring countries into the state to quell protests in 2011 and 2012 was conducted in line with "Island Defense Shield", i.e. the joint PGCC's military force which has been configured for defense against foreign invasion.

intervention in Bahrain are based on sectarian, economic and geopolitical issues.

Bahrain is adjacent to the oil-rich region of Saudi Arabia, specially the Safwa oil wells, which include a quarter of the world's proven oil resources. Bahrain and Saudi Arabia share the control of some of the oil fields with Aramco's lion share. As Bahrain's oil reserves dwindle, much of the country's budget comes from the Abu Safwa region. Any unrest in Bahrain and its spread to the areas could shake the global oil market. Saudi Arabia, along with other members of the PGCC, pledged $ 20 billion in economic aid to Bahrain in March 2011 (Bronson, 2011: 2 & Downs, 2012: 14). Bahrain, in rivalry with Dubai, became a safe haven for foreign banks and corporations in the Middle East in 1975, when Lebanon lost its position due to the civil war. Subsequently, the insecurity resulting from the second wave of the transition jeopardizes the economic interests of Saudis (Nuruzzaman, 2013: 5).

Bahrain, on the other hand, is Saudi Arabia's largest trading partner in the region. According to the State Department, Bahrain accounted for 26.7 percent of Saudi Arabia's imports and 3.4 percent of its exports before 2011. Among the countries to which Saudi Arabia exports, Bahrain ranks the first. Seventy percent of tourists who visit Bahrain annually are from Saudi Arabia (US Department of State, 2012 & Trade, Arabia, 2011). Bahrain is geopolitically considered the vital space of Saudi Arabia, so the Saudis provide the most financial and economic assistance to it. Saudi Arabia, by supplying 100,000 barrels of oil per day to Bahrain and handing over oil wells to it, has exercised its influence in Bahrain (Rezaei and Jahanian, 2014: 193). Thus, the economic factor is one of the incentives for Saudi Arabia to intervene militarily in Bahrain in a way to keep the Al-Khalifa regime.

The confrontation with Iran, preventing the spread of the Bahraini popular uprising to Saudi Arabia, and also preventing the formation of a Shiite alliance is one of the goals of Saudi military

intervention in Bahrain. According to some experts, three factors are involved in adopting this approach: the first is the geographical proximity and geographical-religious connection of the Shiites of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, and consequently the rapid and inevitable impact of developments in Bahrain on Saudi political stability; the second concerns the politico-security ties of the Al-Khalifa government with the Al Saud monarchy; and the third relates to Saudi Arabia's regional rivalries with the Islamic Republic of Iran and its efforts to strike a balance with Iran.

Saudi leaders, dissatisfied and worried about Iran's role in regional developments, claim that Iran is infiltrating the Arab sphere (Downs, 2012: 12). Therefore, they are very concerned about any change in Bahrain that would raise the Shiites to power and, as a result, increase Iran's influence near their borders, so they would act to prevent it.

## II. Geopolitics of the Bahrain

The aforementioned geographical factors have prevented the Shiites from achieving their political aspirations despite their majority in Bahrain, having several negative consequences for Iran as follows:

**Ethnic and Religious Tensions**: Although, the unrest in Bahrain initially involved various factions, including Shiites and Sunnis, as well as secular and religious parties, and the primary demands of which were democratic reform and the elimination of religious discrimination, many efforts were made by the Al-Khalifa regime and the Arab media to display the issue of the Bahraini uprising as a sectarian and Shiite movement influenced by Iran. Such accusations and approaches were not ineffective in the rift between Shiite and Sunni in Bahrain who participated in the uprising, as well as in laying regional and international ground for suppressing the it (Asadi, 2011: 75).

Undoubtedly, these intra-religious discourse rivalries (Shia & Sunni), if left unchecked, have a negative impact on regional relations on the one hand, and stability and peace in the Bahraini

state-building process on the other, and exacerbate internal ethnic and religious divisions in the region. As the differences and rivalries between the discourses ultimately damage the security of each one of these countries, the proponents of the discourses seek to expand their differences across the region by expanding tensions in bilateral relations or by creating a barrier for the rival at the regional level. For example, the serious rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran to offer their model of government to the regional countries has extended from the arena of discourse to the internal affairs of Syria and Iraq, exacerbating their conflict and ultimately affecting the security of the entire region. The expansion and continuation of these tensions, along with strengthening the presence and role of supra-regional forces as well as the United States, will have negative consequences for Iran's national security (Dehqani Firoozabadi, 2012: 178-181).

Other consequences of Bahraini Shiites' failure are the increase in verbal tensions between the PGCC members and the Islamic Republic of Iran and the scenario that their relations would lead to the severance of relations from the stage of tension, the evidence of which could be seen the act of Kuwait for the pretext of espionage of Iranian nationals for the Revolutionary Guards (Delavarpour Aqdam & Fardipour, 2011: 169).

**Supporting Terrorist Groups Against Iran**: One of Saudi Arabia's concerns is to increase the likelihood of spontaneous formation of resistance cells following the model of Lebanese Hezbollah in Bahrain and Yemen, and consequently to increase the Islamic Republic of Iran's sphere of influence in its backyard which partly provides Saudi's incentive to deploy force to Bahrain for the suppression of Shia. In this regard, the most important reasons behind Saudi Arabia's presence in Bahrain are: projecting internal problems on the interventions of the Islamic Republic of Iran, sending a message to Bahraini protesters to adopt an iron fist in response to the spread of protests, maintaining the status quo in Bahrain, preventing a Shiite government from coming to power in Bahrain and inciting the Islamic Republic of Iran to enter a

military confrontation in Bahrain. It is also possible that Saudi Arabia, with its destabilizing approach to the Islamic Republic of Iran, increase its support of Wahhabi and Salafi terrorist groups in Pakistan, opposition groups or Kurdish militias opposed to the IRI in northern Iraq to carry out terrorist acts, specially in the border provinces of Iran in Kurdistan and Baluchistan (Delavarpour Aqdam & Fardipour, 2011: 15).

**Israeli Influence**: Bahrain sees its survival in developing relations with regional actors and gaining the security support of supra-regional countries, and defines its role in the region as a function of the policies adopted by Saudi Arabia and the United States. Of course, another factor must be added to this tripartite equation, which is the Zionist regime.

Bahrain's foreign policy towards the Zionist regime is based on moderation and the agenda of the peace process is in line with the US Middle East strategy. Naturally, the Zionist regime considers the Islamic Republic of Iran its enemy, fearing Iran's advocates specially the Shia's rise to power in the Middle East; therefore, the Zionist regime's security strategy towards Bahrain is in line with the regime's security interpretation of the Middle East.

At the same time, the Zionist regime's approach to the popular uprisings in Bahrain is to be taken into consideration in that the Bahraini regime's close relationship with the United States generally means its non-hostility to the Zionist regime.

By the same token, the Zionist regime, in line with the policies adopted by the United States and its allies, considers the option of preserving the Al-Khalifa monarchy to be in its desired interests in the Middle East (Niko, 2012: 140).

The joint views of the Bahraini and Israeli governments towards the threat posed by the Shiites and the Islamic Republic of Iran will bring the two countries closer together. As a result, it has several negative consequences for Iran. The first consequence goes back to the anti-Zionist ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The IRI's basic ideology regarding the existence of Israel in occupied Palestine is a significant issue. Therefore, the emergence

of Israel in the public opinion of the region as a political, economic and strategic partner could legitimize the policies of Tel Aviv at odds with the IRI's anti-Zionist ideology and the normalization of ties with Israel could likely lead to the Iranian isolation in the region and even in the international community. Another consequence of Israeli influence in Bahrain is the pose of security threats to the IRI. The establishment of official diplomatic ties between the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf and Israel means that Tel Aviv is close to the southern borders of Iran. In other words, the opening of the Israeli embassy and consulate in Bahrain will increase Tel Aviv's influence in Iran's neighboring countries. In this regard, the Yedioth Ahronoth newspaper stated that the normalization of relations with Bahrain takes part in strengthening Israel's power to deal with Iran in intelligence and even military spheres. The goal is not Bahrain to fight instead of us, however, it allows us to access varied facilities (www.iiwfs.com).

**Intensification of Iranophobia and Shiaphobia**: One of the US tactics is to highlight Bahrain's position in Saudi foreign policy by claiming Iran's close threshold of success in establishing a Shiite state in Bahrain. The Saudi military presence until the end of the foreign threat elimination indicates Saudi Arabia's being affected by Iranophobia and Shiaphobia propaganda.

Iranophobia is not an emerging issue in the Middle East. The West and the United States have always sought to reinforce their arms sales and politico-military presence in the Middle East by propagating Iranophobia. We are currently witnessing a securitized image from Iran in the region, which affects the military policies of the PGCC members (Asgarkhani & Babaei, 2012: 169). Some of Iran's tensions with the Persian Gulf states could be reflected at the level of international Islamic organizations, such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference or the Asian Parliamentary Assemblies. Apart from domestic and international issues, the unrest in Bahrain has also led to a

renewed focus on this issue and additional pressures on Iran due to the developments, the pressures that drastically reduce Iran's soft power in the region and the world and could bear negative security consequences (Dehqani Firoozabadi & Farazi, 2012: 184).

## Conclusion

The findings show that Bahrain's geographical location and strategic value led to the deployment of the US Fifth Fleet and Rapid Deployment Force. Regime change in Bahrain means the loss of US control over the Persian Gulf. In the event of the fall of the Al-Khalifa dynasty, the Shiites will undoubtedly take a strong part, and the United States is concerned that the rise of Shiites in Bahrain could lead to ending the US military presence in the region.

Iran's support and strengthening of the Shiite element in the Middle East, on the one hand, and the geographical-emotional connection between the Shiites of Saudi Arabia and those in Bahrain, on the other hand, together with realizing the demands of the Shiites of Bahrain and the strategic role of Shiites in the development of power and politics in the region, will create a serious change in the geopolitics of the region in a way that it stabilize Iran's influence in the areas of competition in the Middle East and particularly in the Persian Gulf. In the long run, these conditions will change the coalitions and politico-security arrangements in the region and improve Iran's environmental security situation.

Geopolitically, Bahrain is Saudi Arabia's backyard, and the reasons for Saudi intervention in Bahrain refer to sectarian, economic, and geopolitical implications. The geographical-religious proximity of the Bahraini and Saudi Shiites and the consequent rapid and inevitable impact of developments in Bahrain on the Saudi political stability, the Al-Khalifa government's political and security ties with Al-Saud, and Saudi Arabia's efforts to strike a balance against Iran are the major

reasons for Saudi military intervention in Bahrain. Bahrain's proximity to Saudi oil wells, as well as her economic, military, and security dependence on Saudi Arabia, have made any unrest and change in Bahrain at odds with Saudi strategic interests; as a result, Saudi Arabia strongly opposes any change in Bahrain that would drive Shiites to power and increase Iran's influence near its borders, thwarting such revolutionary movements through military intervention.

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# The U.S. Role in Iran- EU Relations (1990-2020)

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## Abstract

In view of the EU's position in international policy arena and its evolving foreign relations with I.R.I, this research first attempts to elucidate the background of EU-I.R.I foreign relations as well as the EU foreign policy towards Iran and then proceeds to address the importance of Iran for the EU. Efforts have also been put into giving an account of the US role in convergence and divergence of such relations followed by examination of the EU and the Middle East, Iran and WMD as well as issues of human rights and democracy in Iran-EU relations. However, due to interruptions in discourse making in all fields of Iran-EU foreign relations, it seems that these two important actors have not utilized the available opportunities in political terms with significant impacts on their bilateral commercial and economic ties.

**Keywords***: EU, Iran, Foreign Policy, Human Rights*

## Introduction

The European Union (the EU) is composed of 28 European countries the initial core of which was formed around the Rome Treaty of 1957. This union which primarily intended to further an economic, trade and customs agenda has now permeated into political, security and cultural spheres following a vast expansion of scope. With a population of over 500 million and undergoing numerous peaks and troughs from its inception, the EU has turned into an important actor in international politics. The EU members have been attempting to further cement the union's position in the international system through extending their roles into a variety of fields. The EU has been particularly passionate about playing a role in resolution of regional and international crises. Iran nuclear has been a prime example in which the EU has established itself as a primary actor. Therefore, this is the research question: what factors influence the EU foreign policy regarding the I.R.I and what role is played by the US in this process? It appears that this policy has focused on a number of issues such as the US role, the human rights situation in Iran and the latter's decision to implement Additional Protocols. The US and the EU converge on strategic policies, notably on security while pursuing an Atlantic convergence. However, they compete with each other in economic, political, security and international fields and the means of their attainment while trying to boost regional convergence which reveal signs of trans-Atlantic divergence. As we proceed, the EU's position concerning each issue as well as Iran's relevant views and impressions will be covered.

## I. Backgrounds of EU-Iran Relations

In years following the victory of the Islamic revolution, although both Iranian politicians and European observers believed that compared to the US and USSR, West Europe could carve a better, distinguished and more stable position in both political and economic fields in Iran, a series of challenging issues at the early and Mid 80s (Iraq-Iran armed conflict, Iran's bid to export its revolution, Western hostages in Lebanon and the issue of Selman Rushdie) strained these relations. The crisis in bilateral relations reached its tipping point when the Mykonos Incident unfolded in 1992 shortly after the formation of the EU. Reviewing the background of Iran-EU relations is important on several accounts:

1. Iran's relations with Western Europe countries constitute an important part of Iran's foreign policy background as well as European countries' relations with the Middle East 2. European countries (Western Europe) contribute to over than one third of Iran's foreign trade  3. Due to primarily trade disagreements rather than political ones, Iranian politicians believe that they are capable of creating a divergence in the Western block (Europe and the US) 4. The EU and Iran foreign policies converge on opposition to a unipolar order and the US-led unilateralism in the world of post-cold war (Holiday, 1998: 130-151).

A study of developments in Iran relations with Western Europe could mark the general direction of Iran's foreign policy towards Europe and vice versa. It also could explain how the escalating factors in Iran's relations with the European Community in the past are still relevant. As a matter of fact, the conduct of Iran's foreign policy indicates a series of domestic and international considerations which persisted up to the end of 90s. These considerations were fuelled by pre-Revolution interventions and hostilities and a post-Revolution divided society (along the lines of extremists-moderates). Problems Iran faced in and out of its political boundaries meant there was no firm diplomatic determination for resolution of issues. Iran, like all other revolutionary countries, followed a two-track policy as its

revolutionary diplomatic policy which made I.R.I's foreign policy unpredictable in the eyes of Westerners (Ehteshami, 1995: 15-17). The end of Iraq-Iran armed conflict and adoption of pragmatic political and trade policies by Iran's then president (late Hashemi Rafsanjani) as a reflection of domestic economic needs for reconstruction of the country revived the hopes of normalization of Iran's relations with the West (with the exception of the US).

There were a number of arguments in favor of improved Iran-Western Europe relations in post-Revolution era:

1. In the first place, the Western Europe countries were among Iran major trading partners. On the other hand, because of commitment to the policy of "neither East nor West", Iran was logically expected to be more inclined to Western Europe and Japan in absence of any relations with the US. In the second place, while the UK had a background of colonialism and interference in Iran, other West European countries had no such history (Holiday, 1998: 130-151).

France as the most secular country in the world had the opening to establish the best relations with I.R.I thanks to Imam Khomeini's stay in Neauphle-le-Château in 1977. However, France's decision to grant asylum in early 80s to the ousted President Abolhassan Banisadr and Massoud Rajavi (the MKO chief) and two countries' disagreements over Lebanon put them on opposing sides. This was further compounded by France's refusal to refund Iran for its last monarch's investment of 14 billion USD in Eurodif project. Ultimately, France selling Dassault Mirage fighters to Baghdad, detention of an Iranian diplomat in Vahid Gorji in Paris and murder of Shahpour Bakhtiar in Paris drove the relations into a no man's land for an extended period of time. It seems that Germany was in a better position compared to France thanks its favorable commercial and trade ties with Iran. Iran's imports from Germany rose to 26% in 80s from 22% in 1987. Also, following the conclusion of Iraq-Iran war in August 1988, then Germany Foreign Secretary, Hans-Dietrich Genscher was the first high ranking European official to pay a

visit to Iran in November 1988 (Holiday, 1998: 134).

With the institution of the EU political identity in the wake of Maastricht Treaty, Europe that had founded a second pillar under the title of "foreign policy and joint security", embarked on a series of talks with other countries individually or within regional agreements to create a free trade zone and conclude bilateral trade arrangements for the ultimate goal of advancing its influence and playing the role of a global actor. As regarding Iran, the EU adopted the policy of critical dialogue. In contrast to the US political-trade sanctions, the EU's policy was seeking both establishing diplomatic relations with Iran and engaging Iran in disputed issues such as human rights, the Middle East peace process and WMD proliferation. It should be noted that dialogue has invariably been a fixed component of Europe's policy regarding Iran. In spite of serious disagreements and strained relations on a number of occasions, EU-Iran political relations have never been ruptured. Although the decision of Mykonos court in Berlin in 1997 marked the end of critical dialogue era, the new round of "constructive and comprehensive" talks were kick started in following years (Byman and Chubin, 2001: 34-46). As a matter of fact, Europeans believed that the window of talks with Iran should always be open due to Iran's geo-economic and strategic location, its possession of rich energy resources and communication routes and failure of the policy of Dual Containment on Iran, yet with a different tone. Moreover, this dialogue should adopt an extensive agenda including signing a trade agreement and expansion of EU-Iran cooperation (The Christian Science Monitor, 1997). Before 9/11, there was no precondition to conclusion of this agreement. However, this incident seemed to have engendered a massive development in Iran-EU ties. In post-9/11, the EU subjected continued talks with Iran to alleviation of predominantly security concerns and the human right situation in Iran. As a matter of fact, we would like to find out whether such relations are based on a mutual political will to extricate Iran from a political isolation and further EU influence

and presence in the region or it intends to create reciprocal economic dependence through enhancing investments and foreign trade to serve the goal of stronger security. On political and economic grounds, the EU seeks closer links with Iran (The Christian Science Monitor, 1997). The EU-Iran trade relations play an important role in shaping the ties between the parties. According to statistics on the trade volume of Iran and the EU in 2007 which amounted to 317.25 billion Euros, Iran exported 126.14 billion Euros worth of goods to Europe and imported 17.11 billion Euros worth of goods. It should be noted that 88% of Iran's exports to the EU was energy supplies while major part of the EU's exports to Iran was industrial machinery and transportation vehicles worth of 4.3 billion Euros which displayed a 9.21 decrease compared to the corresponding period of the previous year. A study of Iran-EU exchanged trade commodities shows that the main components of this trade have not undergone significant changes compared to the previous year with oil still ranking top of Iran's exports to the EU with an 88% share while the EU's exports to Iran had an even growth. As per Euro Start (EU Statistics Center), Italy, Germany, France and Spain were EU's biggest Iran's trading partners in the first eight months of the year 2012 with Germany ranking first with 53.2 billion Euros of exports to Iran followed by Italy with 41.51 billion, Spain with 23.1 billion and France with 930 million Euros. In terms of imports from Iran, Italy came first with 903.2 billion Euros followed by France with 562.1 billion, Greece with 347.1 and Spain with 931 million Euros while Germany only imported 338 million Euros worth of goods in the same period (The Christian Science Monitor, 2008).

It goes without saying that Tehran-Brussels underwent numerous ups and downs in post-Revolution era with 4 distinct eras:

**Era of Hostility and Mistrust**: Prior to the statement of the UK-led European Community Summit in Edinburgh (December 1992), an atmosphere of mistrust prevailed over Iran-European

Community relations. With the USSR disintegration and issuance of the aforementioned statement, this hostile policy was abandoned; Europe recognized the change of political system in Iran and opted for critical engagement with Iran which placed critical dialogue with Iran on the agenda of the European Community.

**Era of Critical Dialogue**: Once Iran's then president sent a letter to heads of European Community signaling Iran's readiness to start dialogue and Denmark Prime Minister as the then president of European Community replied to this letter ( March 1993), Iran-European Community relations took a new shape and continued in form of critical dialogue. At the conclusion of European Community Summit in Edinburgh (11 and 12 December 1992), a statement issued in which the necessity of sustained dialogue with Iran was stressed in view of the latter's importance in the region. For the EU, issues such as human rights situation, Imam Khomeini's fatwa against Selman Rushdie, terrorism, weapons etc had to be addressed within the framework of critical dialogue. The first round of I.R.I and the EU (England, Denmark and Belgium) took place in Copenhagen in June 1993 and focused on Iran's relations with USSR and (Persian) Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members, arms control, human rights, the Middle East Peace Process, Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asia's republics. The second round of I.R.I and the EU negotiations took place in Brussels in October 1993 and focused on narcotics, arms reduction, recognition of IAEA's representative and convention of joint human rights seminars. The third round of I.R.I and the EU (Belgium, Greece and Germany) negotiations took place in Athens in May 1994 and focused on supporting the peace and compromise process in the Middle East, refugees in Iran, Iran's hostages in Lebanon and narcotics.

The fourth round of I.R.I and the EU negotiations took place in Copenhagen in December 1993 and focused on praising Iran's humanitarian measures for refugees, significant advances in Iran's legal system, continuation of democratic elections in Iran,

criticizing the activities of foreign groups against Iranians and France's ban on Hijab (veil) for Muslim students. The fifth round of I.R.I and the EU negotiations took place in Paris in June 1995 and focused on criticizing human rights situation in Iran, slamming the EU's double standards and arbitrary approach to human rights and the situation of Muslim minorities in Europe by Iran etc.

The sixth round of I.R.I and the EU negotiations took place in Rome on June 2, 1996 during which the Middle East peace process, terrorism, Selman Rushdie, human rights, regional security and Bosnian issue were raised by European side while Iranian delegations talked about the why and how of continuation of critical dialogue, reaping the benefits of NPT and Convention on Chemical Weapons, the status of refugees in Iran, the EU behavior towards terrorist groups and Iran's previous proposals for scientific cooperation with the EU.

The seventh round of I.R.I and the EU negotiations took place in Dublin on November 29, 1996 and focused on Iran criticizing the mechanism of dialogue, the EU's critique of the Berlin incident (Mykonos) and expression of solidarity with Germany, Selman Rushdie, the EU's critique of human rights situation in Iran, negotiations on the situation of the Middle East, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Iraq etc. The critical dialogue came to halt following the crisis prompted by decision of the Mykonos court (Berlin court) in April 1997.

**Era of Comprehensive Dialogue**: The presidential election of May 23, 1997 put an end to the process of critical dialogue and ushered in a new discourse environment for Iran's relations with the international community, the EU in particular. This time the parties agreed on continued dialogue within the framework of comprehensive talks. European ambassadors who had left Iran in the wake of the Mykonos incident returned to their posts in October 1997 and the first round of comprehensive talks were held in summer 1998 during the term of Austrian presidency of the EU. These talks continued for 5 years (up to 2003) and

covered 10 rounds of negotiations.

Iran-EU comprehensive talks were a far cry from previous talks in terms of format, content and organization mechanism. In addition to issues of concerns for the EU (terrorism, human rights, disarmament and the ME peace), these talks addressed bilateral cooperation in fields of energy, trade and investment, narcotics, asylum seekers and refugees, exportation of non-petroleum products to European markets, reducing the risk of investment in Iran, environment, regional issues (Iraq, Afghanistan, the Persian Gulf, the Caspian sea, Central Asia, Caucuses, the Balkans and the ME) as well as a number of international issues such as Dialogue of Civilizations and cooperation between ECO & OIC with the EU.

**Era of Unmitigated Mistrust**: Once Europe became suspicious of Iran's peaceful nuclear program, comprehensive talks and its associated cooperation programs were suspended. The characteristics of this era are as follows:

Europe's persistent suspicions on the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program and cessation of progressive and constructive talks with Iran; Europe's demand for suspension of uranium enrichment which was rejected by Iran; Iran's rejection of the EU's incentive package table by then High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Javier Solana; The EU Referring Iran's nuclear dossier to UNSC; UNSC passing 3 resolutions for sanctioning Iran; Iran's insistence on legitimate and peaceful nature of its program within the framework of NPT; Javier Solana visiting Tehran and presenting a new package prepared by 5+1; Iran presenting EU with a counter-package in an preemptive initiative

## II. EU's Foreign Policy Towards Iran

On July 2, 2001 the EC sent a report to both European parliament and European council detailing the nature of the EU's relations with I.R.I. This landmark report possesses such importance that could be seen as a seminal document in shaping EU's foreign

policy towards Iran. Another equally important document was the meeting of the EU's foreign secretaries in Greek Thessaloniki (19-20 June, 2003). For this, the EU's foreign policy position regarding Iran as well as the remarks and statements of European high ranking officials will be addressed for better understanding of the EU's foreign policy.

**European Commission Report**: In November 2001, the EC as the EU's executive entity submitted a 7-point report on the status of its foreign relations with Iran and stated that EU currently had no contract-based relations with Iran. Also on July 2, 2001, this commission submitted another 7-point report on the status of its foreign relations with Iran to both European parliament and European council detailing issues such as the "background, the current status of Iran, trade and economy, Iran-European Community cooperation, the EU's interests and existing challenges to further cooperation" (European Commission, 2004: 1-8). According to the report of the commission, the EU's agenda within the framework of constructive talks which revolve around "constructive dealing" should cover three fields:

*A. Global Issues* which primarily follow challenging issues with Iran within the framework of conflicting interests. The issues in question were "terrorism, WMD proliferation and human rights"

*B. Regional Issues* as a combination of relations which are informed by cooperation and rivalry within the framework of parallel interests, such as "Arabs-Israel Peace process, Iraq, Afghanistan, Central Asia countries and Caucuses".

*C. Cooperation* that is manifested in common interests such as "trade and investments, energy, displaced people and drug trafficking" (European Parliament and Council, 2001: 2). Along these lines, concluding a commercial agreement with Iran with developmental goals could be an option. This agreement would be a non-preferential one centered on financial and economic cooperation in fields of mutual interests and trade liberation which includes provisions such as "the most favored principle",

avoidance of discrimination and WTO standards. It also considers development of closer cooperation with Iran in fields such as energy, transportation, environment, drug control, migration, asylum-seeking and human rights. EU Council of Ministers agreed on June 17, 2002 to recognize EC's directive for conclusion of a Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) and initiate a series of talks with Iran on human rights with no precondition. It also decided to further political cooperation in parallel with the TCA.

**Iran's Position in the EU's Stances Toward the Middle East**: The Middle East is one of the five priority areas in the EU's joint security and foreign policy. It has been included to support the peace process in this region through applying economic and political mechanisms (Bretherton and Volger, 1991: 183-184). The Middle East, a traditional sphere of influence for Europe before the US hegemony over the international system, was suddenly fell into grips of a unipolar international order in the wake of declining power of European countries and USSR disintegration. This led to loss of spheres of influence in the region for Europe. Furthermore, existing political disagreements among European countries, particularly about the US invasion of Iraq rendered Iran as an important country in the ME for retention of the influence. As regards the importance of EU-Iran for creation of regional peace and stability in the ME, the spokesperson for policies of development of faction of Christian Social Union and Christian Democratic Union (CSU/CDU) parties, Christian Rook who had visited Iran as a member of a parliamentary delegation summarized the results of his talks with Iran's parliament officials as "the ME stability and in particular Iran are in line with our strategic interests". He added "we have to lay the grounds for closer and more extensive cooperation with Iran for establishment of peace and security and expansion of welfare in the ME. We have to demonstrate that we attach great importance to Iran's participation, in particular for crises in the ME, Iraq and Afghanistan. Iran should be actively involved in the

ME peace process and take on more responsibilities in this respect. Iran should support "two-state solution" based on the "road map". This issue should be included in the framework of constructive talks with Iran (Shargh Daily, 2003). The ME's importance for Europe should be seen from security, political and trade perspectives. As a matter of fact, European Community's overarching goal in the ME is tied to the furtherance of its political, security and economic interests. These policies have been adopted for enhancing regional stability and security, supplies of raw materials, oil in particular which are crucial to the EU. For this, European Economic Community has plans in place to intensify mutual economic dependence with ME to prevent any country from risking its good relations with the EU for a regional conflict. To meet such goals, the EU has initiated profitable economic ties with one of the richest and biggest import markets in the world (the ME) in exchange for development and aid programs (Von Leevmen, 1999: 8). Therefore it is obvious that EU will enter into a series of cooperation agreements with a large number of regional states including Israel owing to the importance of ME (Alibani, 2001: 224). Joffe, George, a political analyst, in his think piece titled"relations between the ME and the West: perspective from the South" has defined the EU's foreign policy regarding the ME in a new format:

1. Since we are witnessing a growing trend of integration of regional countries in global economy, the Mediterranean-Europe economic initiative which is envisioned to extend to the Persian Gulf is the best methodology to contribute to this trend.

2. Subjecting Western political and economic aids to observance of western norms in the region (respecting human rights, guarantees on rights of minorities and establishment of democratic states) along with the Mediterranean-Europe economic initiative could be a potent tool in imposition of Western pressures.

3. There are new regional security issues indicating Western concerns about access to energy resources and stability of

dependent and friendly regimes. These concerns would be aggravated in case of integration of Central Asia into the Great Middle East plan. On the other hand, oil and water as two crucial resources could threaten the regional stability. Besides, the involvement of non-ideological state actors that rival the regional states with political Islam persuasions is another major concern of the West in the ME (Joffee, 1998: 51-52).

As a matter of fact, the EU dependence on the ME energy resources and on a wider context, the importance of the ME security are much greater for the EU than the US. Economically, the EU members are closer to Iran and Libya compared to the US and have a bigger dependence than the latter on the oil of these countries, Iran in particular (Aliboni, 2001: 226). A large number of European countries have mutual traditional relations with Iran and Libya. For example, while French and German companies do business with Iran and Italian companies have trade ties with Libya, US has categorized these countries as rogue (Von Leevmen, 1999:14).

It seems that EU-ME interdependence far exceeds the US economic ties with the latter. For instance, the EU's oil imports from the ME is double as much as that of the US and for this the EU opposes US trade tariffs as they feel more vulnerable in case of uncertain energy supplies or a security vacuum (Marr, 1998: 74-104). Michael George Johansson, a political analyst stated "the more Europe manages to make Iran as the base of their strategic policies in the ME, the better they could rival the US in setting up the Great ME plan". A terrorism lawyer in Europe also remarked that "Iran for Europe is the same as Iraq for the US. Without Iraq, the US would have never been able to stabilize its presence in the region and secure a landing place for its troops to implement its long-term strategic policies. Now Europe seeks to turn Iran into a base. We of course are trying, through our strategic policies, not to incur so much cost as the US did. What matters most that a safe Iran that is allied to Europe is the best weapon to contain terrorism against Europe" (Shargh Daily, 2004). For Europe, a safe and

reliable Iran means security in ME. Security in ME is defined as the EU's vast investments, stopping unchecked immigration and ultimately inhibiting spillover of potentially security crisis to the EU. For this, in contrast to their northern counterparts, Europe's southern countries have primarily a security attitude rather than a human rights one. Because of their geographical location, they are the first to be affected by outbreak of crises in the Mediterranean and the ME. However, since the EU lacks means of political influence, the best solution lies in wielding political-economic tools in the ME rather than resorting to military might (Colombia international affairs online, 1999: 2-4).

It appears that the foreign policy of I.R.I's 8$^{th}$ Administration is to a great extent in line with the EU's foreign policy of playing a role in the ME. As proof of our point, it is just enough to analyze the statements and remarks of EU's high ranking foreign policy officials. For example, in negotiations of Iran's then minister of foreign affairs, Kamal Kharazi with his Spanish counterpart Jose Maria Aznar on October 23, 2000, the former referred to better EU's understanding of the advances made in the ME and praised the EU's efforts for resolution of crises in that volatile region. Mr. Kharazi also stressed that the ME should not be monopolized by a single power (www.mfa.gov.ir) although there are disagreements between Iran and the EU over terrorism and terrorist groups, particularly concerning issues in the ME.

**The EU and Iran's Nuclear Case**: When it came to the resolution of I.R.I's nuclear crisis, the EU's preferred diplomatic solutions to hard options. Tehran's declaration marked the start of EU-Iran negotiations. Although the EU shared the US intention to stop Iran from going nuclear, it adopted a totally different mechanism. The EU's dual policy sent Iran's nuclear dossier to UNSC where a resolution had been drafted by France and the UK (Ebrahimi Far and Arian Far, 2010, 109).

Following the referral of Iran's case to UNSC in February 2006, 5+1 adopted the policy of stick and carrot regarding Iran. In an atmosphere of mistrust, UNSC adopted five resolutions against

Iran's nuclear program. The UK, France and Germany played a key role in both the drafts and final texts of the resolutions. The resolution had called on Iran to suspend all its uranium enrichment and heavy water projects and take some confidence-building measures.  In February 2000, the EU trio called for imposition of harsher sanctions on Iran. Through massive efforts of European countries and the US, UNSC passed Resolution 1929 on June 19, 2010 with 12 affirmative votes (Farhang, 2013: 11-16).

EU involvement in these inhumane sanctions reveals its visible permeability to the US and the Zionist regime's policies against Iran. New sanctions were a significant change in policy for Europeans who by the time were attempting to impose certain economic restrictions on specific individuals and companies. The EU has been intentionally slower than the US in instatement of sanctions against Iran as it is not willing to punish ordinary Iranian citizens because of their government's acts. At the same time, the EU was seeking to adopt an act on banning exports of oil from Iran effective from July 2012. In a pre-emptive act in February 2012, Iran's parliament passed a 2-star motion forbidding the government from selling oil to the EU members so long as Iran oil sanction act was in place (Wagner and Onderco, 2014: 718-720).

European states had a consistent position regarding sanctions on Iran. They had disagreements only on the severity and timing of the sanctions. They believed Iran's development of nuclear capability would project Iran's power across the region and would grant it a regional hegemonic position that could endanger international security and thus were struggling to rein in Iran's influence (Onderco, 2015: 54-58).

**The EU and Iran's Nuclear Case**: A new chapter was opened in nuclear negotiations after direct negotiations between Iran and the US's foreign secretaries followed by a phone conversation between two presidents. In next round of Iran and 5+1 negotiations in November 2013 in Geneva, Iran's foreign

secretary met the EU's then Foreign Policy Chief Catherine Ashton prior to the start of negotiations. On the sidelines of Iran and 5+1 negotiations, Iran and Germany's foreign secretaries met and talked about issues of mutual interests. However, 3-day intensive Geneva talks were inconclusive and the parties agreed to resume negotiations 10 days later in the same city. Before the third round of Iran-5+1 negotiations, Iran's foreign secretary Zarif travelled to Rome upon the formal invitation of Italian foreign secretary and talked to his counterpart about mutual regional and international issues (Entessar and Afrasiabi, 2015: 11-14). On the sidelines of the negotiations with 5+1, Zarif met Swiss foreign secretary and thanked Swiss government for arranging the talks. The positive environment led to the conclusion of Geneva 6-month agreement on November 24, 2013 which was the first effective step in resolution of Iran's nuclear program issue in the last ten years (Entessar and Afrasiabi, 2015: 78-79). The agreement provided for Iran to reduce its enrichment to 5% and avoid increasing its centrifuges and in return 5+1 would lift some of the sanctions and restore Iran's frozen assets with foreign banks. According to this agreement, Iran was allowed to export petrochemical and polymer products to the EU. On March 2, 2014 Spanish foreign secretary visited Tehran and expressed his satisfaction with the new developments in nuclear talks and underlined his country's readiness to expand cooperation with Iran in a variety of political, economic and cultural fields. In March of the same year, then EU then Foreign Policy Chief Catherine Ashton visited Iran and met Iran's President, Speaker of the parliament and Secretary of National Security Supreme Council. In August 2015, Iran and 5+1 agreed to extend Geneva interim agreement for another four months up to November 24, 2014. In January 2015, the parties agreed to extend the interim agreement for another 7 months to pave the way for conclusion of a final, comprehensive deal (Adebahr, 2017: 37-44).

**Human Rights and Democracy in Iran-EU Relations**: The relation between the processes of creation of democracy and

Western economic interests has not been systematically examined. Although many see the international capital as the primary driver of democracy, the reverse is also true. In other words, democracy could fuel stronger economic growth and gaining the power in a developing world (Bernstein and Berger, 1998: 38). From a radical perspective, trans-national capital plays an important role in approaching a weak version of democracy while promotion of democracy should be studied as a political manifestation of a trans-national economic project since Western powers consider democracy and neo-liberalism as inextricably linked (Young, 2001: 13). To back up this claim, one the criticisms leveled at the US policies for promotion of democracies in 80s via multinational companies was manipulation of democracy by these companies as a bargaining chip to serve their own interests and suppress social uprising in authoritarian regimes followed by introduction a weak version of democracy in such countries that mainly served their political and economic interests (Gills and others, 1993). For skeptics, economic issues and terms such as global commercial arrangements, economic conditions and development of standards have a much profounder impact on international processes of democracy than political conditions or political aid projects. In other words, this idea that democracy promotion agendas were compatible with Western security and commercial interests found a foothold in Western countries. This made the imposition of punitive measures for violators of Western democracy wrong and thus a constructive approach characterized with dialogue and economic aid was chosen as the favorable mechanism of engagement (Young 2001: 26-27). In addition to such positive tools, coercive options were as well considered. The EU picked up such tools to suspend or cancel its contractual relations with third parties seen as violators of democratic principles followed by stipulation of honoring human rights in Lomé Convention of 1989. In May 1992 it was decided that any cooperation and participation agreement concluded with Central and Eastern Europe countries should carry the stipulation that "any violation

of human rights, democracy and free market economy triggers the suspension of such arrangements". Furthermore, the EU standardized human rights concepts to neutralize the critiques and pressures of developing countries that had accused the EU of adopting double standards and make democracy and human rights apolitical issues to win the trust of developing countries (Young, 2001: 34-36).

Another accusation leveled by developing countries to adoption of double standards is that a number of developing countries that possess strategic-security importance and have energy resources have prompted discriminatory behaviors in European countries. For example, the Mediterranean is the primary cause of security concern for Europe, particularly Southern Europe. The geographical proximity with these countries has led to emergence of two policies in the EU in dealing with the ME and the Mediterranean. While Europe Southern Wing (Italy, French, Spain, Portugal and Greece) are demanding less democratic and political pressures on these countries in favor of having more cooperation with moderate reformist movements and stress a security attitude with strategic necessity, the Northern Wing insist on moral principles. This ultimately led to a third solution which was removal of the provision of democracy from Barcelona Process (Young, 2001: 47-64).

EU north countries were still flagging this argument that more pressures could be imposed on authoritarian and repressive regimes without jeopardizing the short-term regional security. Germany has shown the strongest willingness to play a median role between north and south EU states for meeting this ultimate goal: placing pressure on development of an independent civil society should take place in a discreet manner and through NGOs rather than resorting to coercive methodologies and pressurizing the states. Therefore the promotion of democracy in the Mediterranean is supposed to take place through market reforms and economic means. However, Southern Europe insisted that even with the option of economic pressures, any decision to freeze

aid to developing countries on account of their violation of human rights had to taken with consensual voting to make trade sanctioning more difficult while Northern Europe (except for the UK) insisted on adequacy of majority of votes (Kohler, 1998: 1-3). This account has been given (the EU's position on the Mediterranean) because of its similarities with the process of the EU's stances regarding human rights and democracy Iran. In 2001, the mechanism of renewing rapport between Iran and 15 European countries led to an outbreak of disagreements between Northern Wing led by the UK & Nordic countries and Southern ones. While Northern Europe voiced their dissatisfaction with Iran's human rights profile and its attempts to acquire WMD, Southern countries were in favor of further communication with reformist government of Mohammad Khatami to both gain trade opportunities and strengthen his government (Dawe Newspaper, 17/2/2007). Then European Commissioner for External Relations, Christopher Francis Patten offers an in-between view on the link between human rights and conclusion of trade and cooperation agreements with Iran "There are some of our agreements [with third countries] which include human rights clauses. I'm not sure whether Trade and Cooperation Agreements customarily do. But certainly, what I explained to the minister [Kharrazi], was that human rights would be a part of our dialogue. EU has serious concerns about the abuse of press freedoms in Iran and the suppression of political opposition, as well as Iran's policy of publicly executing criminals" (Lobjakas , 2001). Also, Christian Rook said "although we have some democratic institutions and structures in Iran along non-elected political institutions, the elected parliaments and the voters have negligible influence in Iran's political structure. Critics of the state are under pressure as was the case in the past and any effort for social freedom is blocked. So long as Iran does not adequately respect democracy and human rights, finding ways of economic cooperation with Iran is challenging" (Shargh Daily, 2003). This opposition has been intensified since the start of the 9th Administration.

Introduction of the Social Security scheme which required dealing with mobs, individuals harassing people, public nuisances and drug dealers subjected Iran yet again to accusations of violation of human rights.

In return, Iran has challenged the Western approach to human rights in international organizations, dissuaded them from pursuing human rights issues and instrumental use of this issue and maximized the costs of such acts for them thanks to assistance from its co-thinking countries (Schumacher, 2015: 132-133).

Every year, the EU presents a human rights report offering the EU's vision and assessment of it measures in field of human rights, particularly on Iran. Iran human rights experts have criticized the EU for stoking Islamophobia in Europe, discriminating Muslims, instrumental use of freedom of expression and criminal punishments, its extensive efforts to project itself as perfect and ignoring fields in which Iran has notched massive advances in recent decades (Katzman, 2017:13-14).

## III. EU-Iran in Post-JCPOA Era

Resolution of Iran's nuclear case and the post-JCPOA environment created a new field for Iran and the EU to revive their relations based on new and mutual needs. Mutual relations, Syrian and the ME crisis, post-JCPOA cooperation and expansion of cultural and economic cooperation were shared points in agendas of all European officials' visits to Iran. Major axes of these negotiations could be placed in two economic and political-diplomatic categories.

**Economic Relations**: JCPOA managed to defuse, to some extent, the tension between Iran and European countries. However, this deal was given the brush-off by Europeans. The nuclear deal could have transformed Iran-EU mutual ties to place them on a natural growing trend. Having welcomed JCPOA and the subsequent openings, the EU intended to demonstrate the importance of Iran in the EU's foreign policies. For the EU, the

political and economic-trade calculations have always carried massive importance. In the first four months of 2015, Iran-EU trade exchanges rose by 9% to 2.4 billion Euros. The trade volume of the corresponding period of the previous year stood at 2.2 billion Euros. The trade exchanges of two parties had experienced a 20% increase in the entire 2014. In contrast, these exchanges had dropped by 47% in 2013 compared to its previous year (Erlanger, 2018: 62-67).

According to the reports, the EU's exports from Iran in the first four months of 2017 had reached 413.3 billion Euros with a five-fold increase. The exchanges went down to 557.6 billion Euros in first four months of 2016 from 887.2 billion Euros of the corresponding period of the previous year. EU's export to Iran had a 44% growth from January to April 2017 compared to the corresponding period of the previous year and reached 144.3 billion Euros. With JCPOA and lifting of sanctions, EU's imports from Iran had a dramatic growth with Italy topping the chart of importers. While Italy had imported just 121 million Euros in the first quarter of 2016, this experienced an 8.2-fold increase in the first four months of 2017 to a 1 billion mark (Vaez, 2018: 1-2).

In the same period, Iran-EU trade relations significantly improved. The most important points negotiated between Iran's President of Customs Administration and EU's Director General for Customs and Tax were related to Electronic Information Exchanges, authorized economic actors, R&E, countering drug trafficking and customs irregularities (Erlanger, 2018: 67-69).

**Political and Security Relations**: In July 2015, European Council on Foreign Relations published a report titled "Engagement with Iran: A European Agenda". While proposing high-level engagements with Iran regarding regional security objectives, the report states that" the JCPOA gives policymakers the liberty to step out of the nuclear-centric vision on Iran and to highlight areas in which Europe can benefit from engaging with Tehran, notably on regional security. Difficult though it may be, to make the greatest contribution towards establishing regional

order, Europe should distance itself from taking sides in regional struggles and allow for maximum flexibility in policy choices by considering the option of actively dealing with Iran where this best serves European security". The strategic document of "EU's Post-JCPOA Strategy Regarding Iran" which has been drafted by European Parliament's Foreign Relations Committee and dictates the EU's strategy regarding post-JCPOA Iran sees JCPOA as the foundation of political talks between Iran and the EU. Federica Mogherini's trip to Iran on April 16, 2016 is assessed within the framework of creation of firm economic bonds with Iran to access its domestic market. In European Parliament's Road Map for the EU's future relations with Iran, the European Council's decision to lift the sanctions in the wake of JCPOA has been mentioned as factor in renewed EU-Iran participation (Colleau, 2017: 18-21).

The EU's joint foreign policy in the ME is based on a number of general security and economic policies along with countering US unilateralism. Security is one of such interests. Iran and the EU share a number of concerns about some places in the world. Some believe that in post-JCPOA world, the parties should not be just concerned about their bilateral relations. Rather, they should as well address the regional security (Stanzel, 2016: 8-9).

Combating terrorism is another important ground for cooperation. Emergence of ISIS in the region was a challenge for West Asia up to a certain time. With aggravation of clashes in Syria, refugees' march toward Europe and execution of terrorist operations in some European capitals such as Paris, the alarm bell was ringed for the EU. It is obvious from statements of Western officials that resolution of regional crises without Iran is out of question and thus they are seeking cooperation with Iran in this regard. The interface of EU-Iran security and political cooperation lies in countering the expansion and influence of extremism. Rouhani's administration believes in security for all actors (Schumacher, 2015: 45-47).

To strike balance against the US, Iran has shown inclination to the EU. This has been the case in Iran's policy from the very

inception of I.R.I. However, it is not realistic to expect too much from Europe when Iran challenges the US. As a matter of fact, European came up with the idea of a union after WW2 thanks to the right security atmosphere created by the US. For this reason, Europe will never lock horns with the US on account of Iran. Rather, Europe has been acting like a US proxy at some points; the EU's interventions in Chechen, Caucuses, Valley of the Kings and the ME peace process have been proxy interventions or in assistance to the US plans (Erlanger, 2018: 1-2).

## IV. The US Role

Absence of any political will on the part of the US and the US to employ diplomacy in dealing with Iran's nuclear program has been glaring in recent years.

The US has had a limited involvement in nuclear negotiations with UK, France and Germany practically mediating Iran-US talks. This does negate any EU interest in such negotiations. Rather, an acceptable agreement is concluded when those refraining from negotiating with each other engage in bilateral talks (Dobbins 2006: 21).

Since Iran epitomizes Islamic fundamentalism, the EU is concerned that Iran may transfer nuclear technology to other regional countries, something that may vigorously challenge most of the regional and international principles and practices. Politically speaking, it seems that the primary reason behind US & EU opposition to Iran's nuclear program is not just their genuine fear of Iran's deviation from international regimes for prevention of WMD proliferation, but also concerns about Iran's breach of the new international order envisioned by global liberal democracy values, Iran's support of Islamic movements in the region like Hamas and Hezbollah, its prevention of institutionalization of political stability in Lebanon, interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan as the new Western security ventures, expansion of the so-called Islamic fundamentalism and putting at peril the status quo through adoption of revisionist policies. For

Europe, Iran is similar to Germany at the turn of 20st century: too big to manage to create balance and yet too small to become a hegemonic power. EU believes that Iran has no friend in the world and is neighbored by troublesome states (Fallahi 2008, 191). For Europeans, Iran is a faltering regime and thus any instability or abrupt changes in its ruling system may lead to the loss of government's control over nuclear weapons and installations. They also see Iran's nuclear activities as a threat to Israel's existential security and thus are pushing for a concrete guarantee from Iran. This is why they don't wish the progress of a country's nuclear program regardless of its adherence to NPT. Furthermore, they hold that the ME is a sensitive region and Iran's possible plans to develop military nuclear capability could trigger an arms race in this volatile region which is a serious trouble for the international community (Meier, 2005).

Broadly speaking, Iran's bid for nuclear technology has prompted convergence in great powers' relations, EU-US in particular, which otherwise were diverging for a range of issues like Iraq. Both sides stress the necessity of pressuring Iran in an attempt to stop its nuclear programs, abandoning its uranium enrichment and complete observation of NPT provisions. However, there are still disagreements between the two in connection to Iran's nuclear program. While EU believes Iran deserves beneficial engagements as an agent of regional stability and an important actor in regional equations, US sees Iran's access to nuclear energy a danger and a threat to both regional and global peace and security and hence calls for action against it. As opposed to the US, the EU acknowledges Iran's right to peaceful nuclear energy and believes that Iran's decision making could be better influenced through prioritizing economic incentives and shunning coercive policies. It thus prefers political tools and diplomatic efforts to the US preventive policies. In general, it could be claimed that Iran's nuclear case presented an opportunity for the EU and the US to heal the rift induced by the occupation of Iraq (Dehshiri, 2004, 82, 87-88). The EU and the US share the

same interest and approach to nuclear weapons proliferation and Iran's nuclear case, yet their methodologies and tactics are not the same. To save its convergence prospects as also its trans-Atlantic ties, the EU needs to resolve Iran's case in a manner to A. lend international recognition to EU foreign policy , B. Not counter the US foreign policy as a characteristic of its independent European policy and be its supplementary instead (Div Salaar, 2005, 156-157).

In a new strategic environment and enjoying different characteristics in comparison to the past, the EU is thinking of advancing a European view in global political arena, playing a role befitting its standing in the international system and pursuing the policy of equal status with that of the US which may not necessarily lead to convergence and harmony with the latter. The EU's pursuit of an independent security-defense policy outside the NATO framework could be construed with such a mentality. The EU-US relations divergence and convergence dimensions are primarily fed by their respective interests and different roles they play in international relations. In spheres of shared or parallel interests or where an international role should be played, a stronger tendency for convergence and cooperation is noted in the EU - US relations. However, where there exist conflicts of interests or national roles are involved, divergence and competition come to the fore. There has been trans-Atlantic convergence-oriented cooperation between the EU and the US in strategic policies such as security and political fields that are driven by their international roles. Yet, they ways and/or means of meeting the goals may differ. However, in economic and cultural fields which are mostly reinforced by their national roles and accordingly possess weaker sensitivity and relevance, these two run a competition for stronger regional integration.

The experience of the past few years reveals no satisfactory results for Iran in orientation towards development of its relations with the EU. European countries have always been trying to secure concessions from both sides of the dispute, i.e. Iran and the

US. They have used Iran as an ace in their dealings with the US. Although Iran tends to wield European countries as a counterweight against the US, the EU prevailing conditions hinder any individual venture by the members. Furthermore, in view of the EU's willingness to establish relations with the US, there is this opportunity for the EU to gain more leverage in international equations such as the case of Iran while cooperating and aligning with the US. In other words, despite a number of trade rivalries, differing political tactics and the EU's stronger emphasis on issues such as human rights and democracy, they share the same tactics and principles. The prime example has been the alignment of the EU's development of views concerning Iran's nuclear case in recent years and its cooperation with the US (Rostami, Ahmadian and Karimi, 2019, 246-247).

The biggest EU-US disagreements broke out during Trump's reign over the US in NATO summit (25 May, 2017) as well as G7 group meeting (27 May, 2017). The biggest issue in connection to NATO relates to the spending in this organization on which Trump took a strong, unfriendly tone while addressing EU and NATO's senior representative. As regards G7, Paris Agreement was the bone of contention between Trump and G7 members. In 2015, G7 reached an agreement on countering global warming and green house-induced climate change which came to be known as Paris Agreement. Trump had fundamental differences with other G7 member about the agreement. He believed that not only this agreement would introduce stringent economic restrictions for the US citizens, but also could not result into any environmental improvements. In the end, he withdrew the US from this agreement a week after the summit (Shokouhi, 2017, 1).

One week to the presidential elections of 2016, Trump announced in annual meeting of AIPAC: his top priority would be scrapping the JCPOA if he won the election. In his speech, Trump ripped through the nuclear deal and called it a disaster for the US and Israel (Mark, 2017: 1). However, in view of its interests in Iran, the EU has a firm will to implement the deal. European

countries, France in particular, have relied on the deal to enter Iran's market and utilize the numerous opportunities of investing in Iran and strike further trade deals (Yousefi, 2017: 1).

## Conclusion

Although Iran and the EU share interests in fields of energy, countering a unipolar order and resolution of the ME crises, a number of factors triggered a decline in the EU's relations with Iran from 2005 to 2008 and subsequent pressures of this union on Iran. Despite the fact that internal development and changes inside the EU and transition of power in Iran have played an effective role in this rift, it seems that the US pressure on the EU members has been the strongest factor. This has been the case while Iran and the EU members have tried to prevent further deepening of this division. However, the events of recent years could have further strained the EU-Iran relations. Due to interruptions in discourse making in all fields of Iran-EU foreign relations, it seems that these two important actors have not utilized the available opportunities in political terms with significant impacts on their bilateral commercial and economic ties. Naturally, lack of appropriate grounds for promotion of political discourses has led to wastage of economic drivers and stabilizers with subsequent damage to both parties. In view of peaks and troughs witnessed in relations of these two important actors, strengthening of diplomatic stabilizers are suggested for production of political rapport which could lay the foundation for opening a new chapter of economic and trade initiatives across the diplomatic discourse-making sphere.

The EU still endeavors to improve its relations with the US and would not miss any chance to strengthen such relations in line with its strategic reason. Preserving the JCPOA and at the same time committing to sound trans-Atlantic relation would best serve the EU interests. The EU does not seem to have any intention of revisiting the deal even if the US were to take a harder line on the JCPOA.

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# Great Powers and Iran-Saudi Relations

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## Abstract

The Middle East and the Persian Gulf have witnessed an escalation in conflict and instability over the past few years where tense relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia has had an undeniable effect in creating such a situation. From Iraq to Syria and from Lebanon to Yemen, the two countries have been competing with each other. Furthermore, Tehran-Riyadh disagreement over energy strategy and nuclear activities has been other source of tension and confrontation between the two countries. There is a concern among researchers that how this crisis can be managed. While some scholars see hegemony of a superpower like the United States or a regional power as the best solution to handle this challenge and the others believe that collective security system is the best option, the research aims to illustrate balancing is the most possible and realistic scenario in the Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalry for the foreseeable future. Accordingly, first we canvass these two regional powers rivalry in historical context and then offer practical implications and recommendations to change the status quo and reach to the more stable region. The research method would be descriptive-analytical and the data is provided from library and Internet sources.

**Key words:** *Balance of Power, U.S. Foreign Policy, Iran-Saudi Arabia Ties, Middle East Region*

## Introduction

While Trump's presidency term ended in January, he has not been able to make a sweeping change in Iran's behavior in the Middle East- a region which is reckoning; with uprising, chaos, disturbance, and instability. Although the state to some extent has stemmed from the internal crisis of the countries in the region, the role of regional and trans-regional actors is undeniable. In fact, the rivalry of regional powers that have been accompanied by the presence and influence of superpowers, play an unmatched role in the emergence of this state. Meanwhile, the role of Iran-Saudi Arabia relations as two pivotal regional powers has been out-sized of importance on this trend. These bilateral relations have experienced many ups and downs over the past decades and were heavily influenced by the policies of the great powers. However, a few turning points have been Tehran-Riyadh ties entered into a new stage of tension and hostility.

First, The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 removed a military counter-weight on Iran, has raised Tehran's influence in Iraq ever since and eventually has led to the Tehran-Riyadh competition on Iraq. Then, the rivalry exacerbated as both countries were going to expand their influence when Arab world developments in the North Africa and later in Middle East caused political unrest and upheaval. Syrian civil war has intensified tensions in Iran-Saudi ties since Iran has completely supported Bashar Al-Assad regime throughout the war and in return Saudi Arabia has backed opposition groups including radical Jihadists Sunni militias. Finally, not long after Mohammed Bin Salman took over the Saudi defense minister, Kingdom's foreign policy transformed

from defensive to offensive and confrontation between Iran and Saudi Arabia has escalated in the region. He has waged a war by the military coalition against Iran-aligned Houthi forces and has tried to portray himself as a reformer leader on international arena although; the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi overshadowed his efforts. In 2016, Donald Trump came to power in the United States and the state has been more complicated. Saudi Arabia-Unites States ties strengthened under Donald Trump presidency and he has backed Saudi-led military coalition against Houthis forces. Trump pulled out of Iran's nuclear deal and has operated maximum pressure campaign against Tehran while former U.S. President Barack Obama wanted Iran and Saudi Arabia to solve their problems together.

This is a question among scholars and politicians how could orchestrate Tehran-Riyadh relations to achieve more stable and peace and are there practical solutions to mitigate confrontation, tension, and hostility? While some countries like Pakistan and Iraq has striven to Play the role of mediator, some scholars see the hegemony as the best solution to handle regional challenges and others believe that a collective security system is the best option, the present research aims to illustrate balancing is the most possible and realistic scenario in the region for the foreseeable future; A strategy in which the great powers, especially the United States have a major impact in its operation. In practice, Washington should give up unconditional support from Saudi Arabia and tries to be as a balancer in Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalry. Likewise, Iran and Saudi Arabia have to put zero-sum game aside and begin negotiating on less sensitive issues and expand it to political and security matters.

## I. Theoretical Framework

However, realism theory deals with the ties between great powers; it could be applied in regional powers like Iran and Saudi Arabia especially when and where world powers play a significant role. In the meantime, balance of power has a pivotal position. There is

no single theory regarding the balance of power, but there are different theories. However, the theory of balance of power is conceptually based on two fundamental propositions. First, accumulation of power in any actor will basically reduce the security of other actors. Second, in an anarchic international system, governments for survival and security are forced to counter the concentration of power in the international system. As such, states in an anarchic situation resist actor that seeks hegemony. Based on these propositions, the research defines balance of power as a state in which actors have relatively equal power (Waltz, 1979: 58-69).

To fulfill these conditions in the Middle East which can contribute to peace and stability the research aims to apply contingent realism; The view that has received little attention and for the first time is addressed by Charles Glaser in 1994. Among realists there are fewer theorists who would be optimist and Charles Glaser can be an exception. He is one of these theorists who seek conditions that make cooperation between countries possible despite the existence of anarchy in the international system. Although, Glaser, is structural realist and accepts most of the structural realism, But he believes that if conditions are met, enemies can achieve their security goals by working together. Glaser argues under a wide range of conditions, rivals and even adversaries can achieve their military and security goals through cooperative policies, not competitive ones, and should, therefore, choose cooperation when these conditions prevail. For example, when countries face hesitation and uncertainty about the arms race as it was in the 1970s and 1980s, they will prefer to cooperate (Glaser, 1994: 51). In fact, if the rivals reckon that an arms race would be risky and they do not know who the winner is, they do prefer cooperation rather than competition.

Finally Glaser rejected this preposition that states try to maximize relative power which creates a zero-sum game situation. The claim in favor of maximizing relative power overestimates the security dilemma: a situation that increased its relative power

could make its rivalry less secure and safe, which could in turn increase the value its rivalry places on expansion. War could become more possible, since any deterrent value of increased relative power might be outweighed by the increased benefits that a security-seeking rivalry would see in expansion. As a result, a country could reasonably conclude that accepting rough parity in military capabilities would supply greater security than maximizing its relative power. Second, trying to maximize power could enhance the probability of defeating an arms race. Even a country that would prefer superiority to parity might choose cooperation over arms racing to avoid the risk of losing the race. Furthermore, as the security dilemma stipulates, it is better to accept approximate equality, Instead of maximizing interests which will form a new round of arms race and it costs a lot (Glaser, 1994: 71-72).

## II. Islamic Revolution and the Balance of Power

Until the end of World War II, ties between Tehran and Riyadh had limited to Iranian annual pilgrim from the holy cities namely, Mecca and Madina and restricted trade of goods. British residency in the Persian Gulf had ensured balance of power and stability to protect security of India which had known as the Jewel of its Empire and communication paths particularly sea routs. In the late 1960s, the British decided to leave the Persian Gulf and consequently, the region faced with a power vacuum. Since the United States was involved in the Vietnam War, decided to assign regional security and balance of power to the countries of the region. Accordingly, Nixon had adopted twin pillar policy where Iran and Saudi Arabia had taken over regional security to counter the threat of communism, Arabian nationalism, and fill the power vacuum. In fact, U.S. foreign policy decision makers concluded due to the political, economic and geopolitical rivalries in Tehran-Riyadh relations, the only way to maintain stability in the region is to establish a balance of power between the two regional powers. Hence, Iran as a military-security power and Saudi Arabia

as an economic pillar implemented U.S. strategy in the Middle East (Hiro, 2018:51-52).

However, the Yom Kippur War as a turning point provoked rivalry between the two countries where Tehran as the only oil producer in the region did not adhere to Arab oil sanctions against US and European countries in the 4th Arab-Israeli war and continued to export oil to Israel. Following this event, the price of oil soared and Mohammad Reza Pahlavi reached the conclusion that if he dominates the Arabian Peninsula, he will be able to have the main part of oil global demand under control and Iran's position would be impregnable in the region. In achieving this purpose, the only adversary was Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, not have enough power to dominate the region and being under the U.S. strategy, prevented the intensification of competition between the two countries (geopolitical futures, 2016). Of course, the differences between both oil-rich states over oil prices remained until 1979.

Islamic Revolution and The overthrow of the Pahlavi regime fundamentally changed regional balance of power. In bipolar system Tehran ignored both superpowers and adopted independent foreign policy "Neither East nor West but the Islamic Republic". In the wake of the Hostage crisis, the U.S. which was strategic ally of Saudi Arabia severed formal and diplomatic relations with Tehran and imposed sanctions on Iran. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini called for exporting the revolution and sought to sweeping change to establish a fair order in the international relations (Khomeini, 1389: 311). From the Saudi leaders' perspective, Iran's revolution was a rival since it challenged their claim to Islamic leadership, was appealing to deprived Shi'a minority in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, and offered a new definition of resistance to Islamists across the Middle East irrespective of their sectarian hue. Apart from these, Islamic Republic provided a religious model of government and cast a spotlight on the perceived impiety of the Saudi royal family (Wehrey, et al, 2009:13). In September 1980, Iraq invaded Iran

and Saudi Arabia backed Iraq as a buffer against Iran.

Conservative Saudi leaders in support of some Arabian countries formed the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and strengthened ties with Washington to counterweight Iran. Iranian leaders contended that Iraq has started the war with the encouragement of the United States and Saudi Arabia. During the war Riyadh along with GCC members and the United States had backed Saddam Hussein Regime. Saudi leaders like Prince Nayef believed Iraq is the only deterrent force against Iran's export of revolution. This point of view also supported in Washington as U.S. National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski underlined that Iraq has a pivotal role in containing Iran (Safran, 1985: 364). Baghdad was also backed by Russia and European powers, while Iran received only a limited amount of some of its military and logistical needs from North Korea, Libya and China. Kingdom used the oil weapon as a political tool against Iran and in 1986 had doubled its production under the pretext of punishment those states did not observe their production quotas. Given the fact, the global oil price was almost halved and Iran perceived it as a hostile action and direct attack to undercut Tehran's position in the war. In the period, Tehran had not only needed more oil revenues to reinforce its military equipment but also, it was going to strengthen its domestic economy (Amirahmadi and Entesar, 1999: 143). Kingdom also contributed more than 24.8 billion dollars to Iraq financially and logistical support (Hadzikadunic, 2019: 8).

Tehran, by contrast, in the wake of the failure of the peace talks on the Palestine-Israel conflict and failing Prince Fahd's proposal for a two-state solution supported Palestinian groups opposed to the peace talks. Iran allied with Syria a country that had failed to reclaim the Golan Heights from Israel (DW, 2019). Syria shut the flow of Iraqi oil down that crossed through its territory although Saudi Arabia reconstructed an alternative pipeline for Iraq. Tehran-Damascus also together supported Shias when Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 (Gelbart, 2010: 73).

In August 1987, the violent clash of Saudi securities forces with demonstrations of pilgrims led to the killing of more than 400 pilgrims including 275 Iranian. Following this incident, Iran's leaders strongly criticized Saudi Arabia (Maloney, 2004: 4). In April 1988, Saudi Arabia severed relations with Iran due to disagreement with Tehran over the quota of Iranian pilgrims and Tehran's call for international intervention to manage *Haj*. This Kingdom's approach towards Iran coincided with the US attacks on Iran's oil platform and right before that, US Congress agrees to sell 450 million dollars arms to Saudi Arabia (Keynoush, 2016: 123-124) That indicated how much the Saudi Arabia's position on Iran is influenced by US policy. On June 1988, following the US attack on the Iranian passenger plane, Iran-Iraq war ended and it resulted in undermining the two regional powers as United States and its allies wanted.

In 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait and Iran was the first country in the region to condemn the Iraq. The U.S. forged a military coalition with its allies and liberated Kuwait in the so-called Operation Desert Storm in February 1991. Iran adopted neutral and nonalignment policy during the First Persian Gulf War and the approach was received a warm welcome by Saudi Arabia and As a result of these developments Tehran-Riyadh diplomatic bilateral ties was resumed in June 1991. President Hashemi Rafsanjani called on King Fahd to expand cooperation between the two countries in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Due to economic debt, both sides needed to increase oil prices, while the Iraqi oil embargo had reduced oil supply. As a result of Saudi-Iranian détente and cooperation between the two countries oil price had been raised (Devine, 2017: 4).

Rafsanjani's pragmatic foreign policy followed a plan which proposed Iran as an energy bridge between the Persian Gulf and Central Asia. He also offered to cooperate with GCC members on disarmament, restrict the purchase of military weapons and exchange military information. But these proposals which

eventually led to balance of power between regional players did not materialize as they were accompanied by Washington's dual containment policy. Martin Indyk, Advisor to the President explained "we do not accept the argument that we should continue the old balance of power game, building up one to balance the other" (Hiro, 2003: 69). In fact, the United States had adopted Iran-Iraq dual containment policy and largely due to that, GCC members, led by Saudi Arabia, had refused to cooperate more with Iran. Simultaneous, Washington backed the proposal that would ensure the collective security of the Persian Gulf states in the presence of GCC members plus Syria and Egypt. This proposal known as a Damascus Declaration had failed because of mutual mistrust (Yetiv, 1997: 106). However, in mid-1996, Mousavian, met Crown Prince Abdullah first in Casablanca and then in Jeddah and they agreed on a comprehensive package to improve Iran-Saudi ties. Later, Hashemi Rafsanjani met King Fahd and it is interesting that King of Saudi Arabia emphasized on preserving the balance of power between Iran, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. He added Kingdom does not like to expand its relation with Iran if Tehran ignores Saudi Arabia's strategic ties with the United States.

In August 1997, Khatami took office, and even though he did not have full control over Iran's foreign policy, adopted the policy of detente. During his presidency, Tehran-Riyadh bilateral ties expanded, leaders on both sides traveled to each other's country and agreed to maintain high oil prices. Moreover, these two regional powers signed an agreement to cooperate on terrorism, illegal immigration and drug trafficking in 2001. The agreement also considered Middle East tensions, condemned Israel's policy toward Palestine and supported the right of Palestinian to return to Occupied Territories. They legitimized the right of Hezbollah as a resistance group against Israel and backed Syria's right to retrieve Golan Height from Israel (Hiro, 2005: 334).

## III. Turning Points Identify Rivalry

Following the events of 11 September 2001, U.S. president George W. Bush decided to invade Afghanistan and Iraq. When U.S. began the war both Tehran and Riyadh cooperated with Washington and provided humanitarian helps and material aids to build new Afghanistan. However, Washington selected sideline Riyadh and did not look at Tehran as a reliable partner. Tehran even tried to convince Northern Alliance to cooperate with new interim administration where both Iran and the United States interests overlapped. But, the United States tried to go it alone in Afghanistan and even George W. Bush branded Iran as a part of Axis of Evil. Shortly after the events of 9/11, Iran-Saudi Arabia signed an oil agreement that resulted in the increase of the oil prices in international market. However, Kingdom trade minister Osama bin Jafar Faqih believed that U.S. policy toward Iran has severed enhancing Tehran-Riyadh bilateral relations (Keynoush, 2016: 155).

Meanwhile, the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the fall of Saddam opened a power vacuum, changed the Persian Gulf geometry of power and radically shifted the regional balance of power. Iraq as a battle ground has been a balance of power game and contest for regional influence between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Both states have sought to fill power vacuum through their partners including parties, groups, figures and political currents. The replacement of Saddam Sunni-dominated government with Tehran friendly Shi'a-dominated has tipped the regional balance of power in favor of Iran and Saudi leaders criticized the U.S. for invasion of Iraq since they argue the overthrow of Saddam handed over Iraq to Iran (Milani, 2013: 82).

At the same time, Iran's nuclear program which has begun during the Iran-Iraq war and Sought to enrich uranium created a crisis. Khatami's Administration strived to solve the crisis and negotiated with three European Union powers, Germany, France and British to find a solution. European side admitted to prevent sending Iran's nuclear program to the Security Council in

exchange for temporary suspension of uranium enrichment. Both parties agreed to enter into negotiations to reach a comprehensive and long-term agreement. An agreement that covered a wide range of mutual concerns, however, reached an impasse due to the lack of US support. Tehran even sent a message to President Bush which indicated Iran's readiness for comprehensive talks and grand bargain. But Bush Administration rejected the suggestion and took the path of confrontation with Iran (Radiofarda, 2020). Following the failure of the Iran-West talks, Saudi concerns intensified. In June 2005, Hassan Rouhani, the then Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council traveled to Riyadh and made a proposal which Tehran-Riyadh hold biannually joint security meetings and enrich uranium jointly. Riyadh rejected Iran's proposal and even Saud al-Faisal Saudi Arabia's foreign minister said that Tehran should accept GCC members as a power bloc (Rouhani, 2012). Iran's regional power increased when Hamas gained control of Gaza in 2005 and Hezbollah won the 33-Day War of 2006 against Israel and became very popular in the Arab world since Iranian supplied rocket barrages targeted northern Israel (Pollack, 2017: 3).

In the middle of 2005 Ahmadinejad elected as a president and Iran resumed its nuclear program. By consequence, Iran's case was sent to the Security Council and by 2010 four resolutions had been approved by the UN Security Council against Iran's nuclear program. In the meantime, Saudi Arabia proposed nuclear consortium between regional countries which manage their nuclear program under the supervision of IAEA. Ahmadinejad responded it is an important suggestion but Iran's nuclear file firstly should return to IAEA and it must be closed in the Security Council. Saudi leaders worried that the Progress of Iran's nuclear program fundamentally transforms the balance of power in the region.

WikiLeaks documents demonstrate that Saudi leaders had urged the U.S. to attack Iran because they were worried about Iran's influence in Iraq and its nuclear activities. King Abdullah

had said to the U.S. ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker and General David Petraeus that U.S. should cut off the head of the snake and roll back Iranian influence in Iraq. The U.S. foreign minister John Kerry later confirmed the accuracy of these documents and claimed Obama Administration has under Saudi Arabia pressure been for attack to Iran (WikiLeaks, 2008). The dispute between Iran and the West over Iran's nuclear program continued until the end of Ahmadinejad's term. Obama administration also feared that Israel do attack against Iran's nuclear facilities. So, Obama team started negotiations with Tehran to reach a deal that restore regional order in favor of United States and its allies in the Middle East.

At the same time, the developments in Arab world since 2011 and civil war in the region has made new battleground for reshaping balance of power in the region. When this turmoil began first in North Africa and then in the Middle East Iranian leaders thought that developments are moving in the direction in which power will shift away from the U.S. and its regional allies including Saudi Arabia into the hands of much more independent forces. Although, in Egypt, pro-America president and Saudi partner against Iran, Hosni Mubarak was toppled, the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood did not go a long way and Abdel Fattah al-sisi supported by Saudi Arabia, came to power through a coup. Even if the Muslim Brotherhood and Mohamed Morsi stayed in power, Iran could not have restored bilateral ties since Morsi stirred Shia'-Sunni rift up. In Bahrain, where the United States Fifth Fleet is present, Iranian-backed Shiite majority demonstrations were suppressed by Saudi military intervention.

Tehran-Riyadh tension and strife escalated when Syrian civil war began in 2011, spilled over to Iraq, and instead of power-sharing, zero-sum game was resumed in the region. Iran was the first country rushed in to assist Bashar al-Assad and has backed his government throughout the war. While, Kingdom supported opponents, mainly radical Salafi groups, Tehran along with the Russian Air Force and Militia armed groups, have striven to save

the Syrian regime from collapse, And it has helped the Assad regime exercise its sovereignty over large parts of Syrian territory. Also, when ISIS forces advanced on Iraq, Tehran dispatches military advisers to Iraq and provided government and armed groups with intelligence and logistic equipment. At that time, Saudi Arabia strived to increase its oil export in order to reduce oil prices while due to international sanctions, Iran's oil export had reduced less than one million barrels a day and financial constraints had made it difficult for Iran to access oil revenues. As such, Saudi Arabia sought to harm Iran's economy and military power by reducing oil price. Iran's support for the Assad regime and Saudi's opposition groups in Iraq and Lebanon has prompted Riyadh to be on the agenda such a policy (Mirtorabi, 2019: 211-212).

Ultimately, despite the lack of direct cooperation between Iran and the United States in destroying ISIS, both sides succeeded in defeating this great threat. But what worried Saudi Arabia was JCPOA upon which Iran and 5+1 agreed on Iran's nuclear program. The nuclear deal led to thaw Iran-U.S. relations and former U.S. President Barack Obama invited Iran and Saudi Arabia to work together to share the Middle East and balances their power and influence in the region (Lobelog, 2018). Riyadh feared nuclear deal brings Washington and Tehran closer, by consequence, Kingdom's importance in U.S. regional equations is diminished. The Obama administration's approach brought Saudi Arabia closer to Israel. Meanwhile, Mohammad Bin Salman rise to power and his election as Defense Minister and then Crown-Prince shifted Saudi Arabia's foreign policy from Defensive to Offensive and resulted in invading Saudi led-coalition to Yemen. On 26 March 2015, Saudi leaders launched another zero-sum game with the aim to defeat and destroy the Houthi movement supported by Iran and restore the Saudi-backed Hadi government (Darwich, 2018). They also imposed blockade against Qatar, largely due to Doha's independent foreign policy. It illustrates deep rift among the GCC members, a council created for Iran's

balancing (Fathollahnejad, 2017).

More importantly, new U.S. president Donald Trump, with encouragement from Israel and Saudi Arabia, yanked America out of nuclear deal, began the Maximum Pressure campaign on Iran, and imposed the toughest sanctions on Tehran. Riyadh and Tel Aviv supported the new White House foreign policy toward Iran while it further complicated the balance of power and exacerbated skirmish in the region. In the Persian Gulf, ships carrying fuel were attacked and American drone that entered into Iran's territorial borders was hit and shot down. Likewise, attack by Yemeni Houthi drones to the Aramco halved Saudi oil production in a matter of hours (Ajili and Rouhi, 2019: 147-148). Tehran seized The British-flagged oil tanker off as tit-for-tat move since British Royal Marines seized an Iranian supertanker off Gibraltar carrying oil to Syria two weeks earlier. Following the escalation of tensions U.S. drone attacked Qassem Suleimani and Tehran in retaliation fired more than dozen missiles at U.S. bases in Iraq (Guardian, 2020). Moreover, in the wake of the rising global prevalence of COVID-19 disease, Global oil demand has sharply fallen and Saudi oil revenues are estimated to be halved in 2020. Earlier, given the re-impose U.S. sanctions, Iran's oil revenues have been reached from $100 billion to $8 billion in 2019 (BBC, 2019).

Taken together, despite the destructive economic effects of the maximum pressure campaign on Iran, it has not yet resulted in forcing Iran to return to the negotiating table. Not only Iran's influence in Iraq and Syria has not diminished but Israel has forced to do operations against Iran in these countries. Iran's missile program development has not been suspended and even Tehran has reduced its nuclear commitments (Evental, 2020). In return, Saudi Arabia has not yet to gain a remarkable achievement in the Yemen war and it is encountering with severe budget deficit. These conditions require taking Iran and Saudi Arabia practical steps that help to return to normally their relations. It needs Shifting that should accrue in global and regional sphere.

## IV. U.S. Foreign Policy and Paradigm Shifting

As noted earlier, struggle for maximizing influence and supremacy between Riyadh and Tehran has created conflicts and disputes in the Middle East. It must be considered there are at least four regional peers (Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Israel) with high capabilities and balancing potential which make it almost difficult and impossible to achieve undisputed regional supremacy where states resist against the country that seeks hegemony, governments see each other as a threat and there is a security atmosphere. Likewise, presence of superpowers like United States and Russia has limited the possibility of hegemonic order either in the past or in the future.

Another option that has come up with peace and stability in the Middle East is the establishment of collective security. This idea seems highly unlikely in turbulent region which is in transition and it is impossible at least for the foreseeable future. Regional coalitions and alliances have also been fragile and unstable and that would not be able to balance between Tehran and Riyadh in the future. As the most notable example, there is no coherency and orchestration between GCC members, and Qatar and Oman try to go it alone.

Irrespective of the internal roots of the Middle East crises, whenever the great powers have tried to balance between Tehran and Riyadh, the region has enjoyed more peace and stability. Yet, whenever great powers have shifted away from one and close to the other, peace and stability in the region has been at stake. Therefore, restoring stability and security through the balance of power is the most or even the best possible future form of regional order (Harrison, 2015).

As a strategic road map, balance of power between Riyadh and Tehran must be revived by the number one superpower which itself has destroyed it. However, Donald Trump and his administration have frequently repeated that Washington would not follow regime change policy in Iran, in practice they are looking for such a politics. As Wendy Sherman, former senior

diplomat in the Obama Administration described it "Ultimately what they're apparently trying to do is incite, if not directly bring about, regime change" (Manson, 2018). United States foreign policy decision makers need to know regime change policy is doomed to fail. Increased sanctions on Iran have the capability to unite Iran's political leader. In return, the Islamic Republic's opposition groups do not have an orchestration and will not be able to collapse the regime. They do not even agree on a series of general principles for Iran's future after collapsing the regime. Moreover, Lack of leadership that could organize them causes regime change in Iran will be impossible at least for the foreseeable future. More importantly, there is no alternative regime for Islamic Republic of Iran in the short run.

Likewise, this point must be taken into account that the developments in the Middle East have subconsciously affected the minds of the Iranian people. As such, they have clearly seen the consequences of events that have occurred in Egypt, Syria and Yemen over the past few years. The Arab world experience since 2011 prevents the widespread rebellions and demonstrations since this turning point has led to failing and failed states, demonstrating that inspired regime changes rarely produce the results their advocates predict. Iranian People do not want to lose their security at the expense of obtaining uncertain hopes that may be realized. In addition, the experience of foreign-imposed regime change in the Middle East and elsewhere has not been promising. Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya are the most notable example of the reality (Walt, 2018). United States should recognize Islamic Republic as a legitimate regime and enters directly into negotiation with Tehran. As Glaser argues, sometimes the balance of power gains through cooperation rather than competition or confrontation (Glaser, 1995: 71-72).

There would be some main benefits for Washington if Iran-U.S. ties to be improved. Firstly, steps for normalizing ties to Iran by the United States helps to advance political reform in Saudi Arabia and forces Riyadh to move towards a more democratic

society. The assassination of Jamal Khashoggi clearly indicated Washington could not be relying on a person to carry out reforms in a country. If the United States seeks deep and real reform in Saudi Arabia, it would rely on trends instead of putting emphasis on a person like Crown-Prince Mohammad Ben Salman (Doersy, 2016: 361). Siding with Riyadh against Tehran regionally can only exacerbate an imbalance in which both parties act to preserve their own regional interests, leading to greater escalation. Likewise, the United States balancing policy in Persian Gulf will resume its role as a mediator in the Middle East once again. If the United States be able to balance between Riyadh and Tehran, it would have a greater impact on trends in the region. Finally, it could help Washington to Shift away from the Middle East to East Asia where challenges are increasing between Washington and Beijing to dominate the region.

So, in practice, United States should return to JCPOA. Grand bargain with Iran could not reach in the short run and it should follow step by step since there is historical mistrust between both sides. They also should recognize Iran's right to enrichment like China and Russia and tries to supervise Iran's nuclear program through International Atomic Energy Organization. Withdrawal U.S. from the JCPOA has provoked a sense of distrust among Iranian leaders, and this could encourage Iran to leave the JCPOA or increase its nuclear capabilities and that can ultimately lead to a nuclear gamble between the countries of the region. As the late King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz reportedly warned U.S. officials in 2010, "If Iran succeeds in developing nuclear weapons, everyone in the region would do the same, including Saudi Arabia" (Guardian, 2010). Meanwhile, Washington must ratify a deal with Saudi Arabia on nuclear program, which recognizes its nuclear rights. They cannot dissuade Saudi Arabia from having the right to enrich uranium, While, Iran has could achieve significant advances in nuclear technology over the past years. Washington also should not impose contracts such as the 182 contract to the Kingdom. They should put Saudi Arabia in a deal like Iran's

nuclear deal and assure Riyadh that they will balance between the two countries. This will mitigate Saudi's worries over Iran's nuclear program and causes Riyadh doesn't catapult in this direction (Miller and Volpe, 2018: 30).

If the U.S. worries about Iran's missile and military program, it would end the arms race in the region. The continuous American commitment to Saudi security guarantee and providing its arms orders does surely stimulate Iranian foreign policy decision-makers to have defensive regional policies and vice versa (Perthes, 2018: 100). The reality is neither Iran nor Saudi Arabia cannot destroy each other unless the great powers intervene in the war. While Iran has better military personnel and missile arsenal, Saudi Arabia has better air forces and military equipment. Furthermore, as the security dilemma stipulates, it is better to accept approximate equality, Instead of maximizing interests which will form a new round of arms race and reduce security in the long run (Glaser, 1995: 53). Either Iran or Saudi Arabia is involved in economic challenges and both parties should concentrate on their economic plans as mentioned above.

## V. The Role of China and Russia

This point must be taken into account that Russia as a super-powers and China as a rising or emerging power will be able to help easing tensions Iran-Saudi Rivalry. Unlike trump's "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran which destroyed another opportunity to reach a grand bargain with Tehran, Moscow and Beijing have established deepening ties with both Iran and Saudi Arabia. While U.S. stringent sanctions on Iran's economy, pushing Tehran to an eastern corner, Saudi Arab has becoming strong trade and economic partner with China and Russia in diversified sectors. These two Eastern powers have also expended cooperation on military and security issues with both Tehran and Riyadh.

Russia partly non-ideological, pragmatic, and secular foreign policy allows it to engage with all state actors in the region such

as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. It balances between both Tehran and Riyadh and does not unite with one against the other. Kremlin not only is not neutral but also cooperates with both sides to meet its interests. For example, Russian forces operate in association with Iran in Syria at the same time that Kremlin cooperates with Riyadh to negotiate over oil prices. In the meantime, Russia has Common interest with both Tehran and Riyadh in combating against terrorism and Islamic radicalism. The experience of Islamic State (ISIS), a group even has threatened Saudi leaders, has shown Moscow and its partners should cooperate against common threat where Moscow is encountering with Chechen rebels and Islamic extremists. In fact, Kremlin seeks to maintain regional stability and preserve current regime in the Middle East since failed states spillover terrorism to Russia and its neighbors. In the global oil market also needs to be cooperated between OPEC members like Saudi Arabia and Iran and non-OPEC members, like Russia and America as it recently occurred by persuading Donald Trump (Gardner and Korsunskaya, 2020).

More importantly, Moscow historical deep ties with Tel Aviv allow Russia to have pivotal role in Israel-Arab peace process; the subject that is one of the most challenges between Iran and Saudi Arabia. While, Kingdom has backed Prince Fahd's proposal for a two-state solution, Iran has supported Palestinian groups opposed to the peace talks including Hamas and Islamic Jihad and it resulted in Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalry. As an indication, Moscow has had close coordination with both Iran and Israel in the Syrian theater and strives to be as a mediator these two bitter enemies. In addition, Russia has a warm and friendly relationship with most of the parties involved in the region. While the Russian air force supports the regime of Bashar al-Assad and its allies, it has also had limited ties with some Syrian opposition groups. In Lebanon, Moscow has sought multilateral relations with Iranian-backed Shi'a movement Hezbollah and its Sunni Muslim and Christian rivals. In Iraq, Moscow has ties not only with the Iranian- backed groups and government in Baghdad, but also with the Iranian-

opposed groups and US-backed Kurdish Government. In Yemen, Moscow has recognized the Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi government supported by Saudi Arabia and at the same time is a friend with Iranian-backed Shi'a militia Houthi group as well as its UAE-backed southern ones(Rumer, 2019: 9-20).

China has also strived to balance Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalry, keeping both of them content. China's presence in the Middle East has been more economic than military and security in recent years. Beijing provides most of its energy for development from the Middle East and it is the top oil customer of both Riyadh and Tehran (Gurol and Scita, 2020). Also, One Belt- one Road project crosses the Middle East, by consequence, the security of project would be too important for China. It has signed agreements with 21 countries in the region to join the plan. Moreover, it estimates China's import to double from the Middle East by 2035. It will be motivation for China to cooperate with other players as a mediator to makes the region more stable and secure. Strife and skirmish endanger the security of energy transportation in where a significant percentage of energy resources are produced and exported (Lons, Fulton and Sun, 2019: 19). China even tries to cooperate with United States for stability in the region, however, at the same time it seeks to balance Washington in West Asia.

China has also worried about minority Muslim who are resides mostly in the western region of Xinjiang for joining to the Islamic Radicalism. Diplomatic close ties with Tehran and Riyadh would help Beijing to handle this challenge (Wormuth, 2019: 6). Likewise, trafficking and transnational crime are other subjects in which China cooperates with Iran and Saudi Arabia. In overall, it could mention that China has comprehensive strategic partnership level relations with both Iran and Saudi Arabia.

In short, Moscow and Beijing are good terms with both rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia and all the stakeholders and key players including Israel and Turkish. It gives them the high diplomatic potential to balance regional foes, mitigates tensions among rivals and helps to reach the more stable region. In addition, Syrian war

has demonstrated that the United States is no longer the only decisive actor it once was and to resolve the regional disputes, the participation of other superpowers is needed. Meanwhile, the countries like Iraq, Pakistan and Even Oman that have friendly relations with both sides would be able to play role as a mediator and mitigate tensions between Riyadh and Tehran. However, these countries cannot balance between two regional powers and bring longstanding peace and stability, but they can help ease tensions. As Imran Khan Pakistan's prime minister has said in an interview with Aljazeera "We have done our best to avoid a military confrontation between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and our efforts have succeeded" (Aljazeera, 2020).

## Conclusion

At the same time it is better to begin Tehran-Riyadh negotiating on issues which include mutual interests and are less sensitive than security and military challenges. One of the most significant points is that rulers in Riyadh don't put all the eggs in Donald Trump's basket. As the attacks on Aramco displayed American interests take precedence over Saudi's security in Washington's calculations. Tehran has so far repeatedly stated it is ready to negotiate directly with the Saudi side. Before that, both parties should avoid provocative rhetoric as Crown-Prance Mohammed Bin Salman had said "We will not wait until the battle becomes in Saudi Arabia but we will work to have the battle in Iran rather than in Saudi Arabia.

If Sanctions on Iran to be lifted up, oil market will provide common ground on how to manage Iran-Saudi rivalry where Russia and the United States, two major non-OPEC oil producers play an important role in stabilizing the oil market prices, production quotas and market share. Oil factor could be leverage for improving Tehran-Riyadh ties since both parties needs to restore their economy. Iran's Twenty Year Vision Document requires oil and non-oil revenues and stabilizing and increasing oil prices is inevitable for Saudi vision 2030 while both sides are

grappling with the budget deficit.

The Coronavirus Pandemic has made things worse, has fallen global oil demand and has forced Saudi Arabia not to accept foreign pilgrims and it is limited around 1,000 Muslims already living in the kingdom. However, the two sides would be able to work together on this global pandemic. The challenge requires cooperation between countries more than ever whereas Saudi Arabia has the highest rate of infection recorded among the Arab countries and Iran has the highest mortality rate in the region . If the COVID-19 disease would be controlled, handling the Hajj will provide an opportunity for Tehran and Riyadh to negotiate and if Umrah resumes, parties would be able to use it as a venue for dialogue and rapprochement. However, there have been bilateral differences over the Hajj and it has created tensions, as a sign of goodwill, king Salman Bin Abdulaziz can invite Iran's President to attend the Hajj trip (Aljazeera, 2020).

In the meantime, there are crises in the region that need to be resolved if it is supposed to improve Iran-Saudi ties. By persuading Washington and Moscow, Tehran and Riyadh should come to the negotiating table on Syria, Yemen, Iraq and even Lebanon based on power-sharing policy, recognize the role of each other and don't follow zero-sum game strategy for supremacy that so far are completely stalemated. In countries involved in crises the best solution is holding free elections under international supervision in order to determine the share of each party in the structure of power. Tehran and Riyadh also must have commitment to the territorial integrity of the countries, do not use of their minority as Fifth column and they need to avoid overreach to gain their goals.

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# Iran and Eurasian Economic Union

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## Abstract

Russia's foreign policy has undergone many changes in the last decade. Putin's policies have continued until 2021 and he has changed toward a pragmatic approach to dynamism and initiative in regional and international developments. The Various factors have been influential in this direction. The Regional convergence in the near abroad has always been a priority for Moscow. Russia has tried to use the political, security and economic potential of the Eurasian region in geopolitical rivalries. One of the developments in recent years is the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union, which can play an important and effective role in advancing Russia's foreign policy goals. This study seeks to answer the question of how effective the Eurasian Economic Union will be in achieving Russia's foreign policy goals. What are its prospects and challenges? And what opportunities can be imagined for the cooperation of the Islamic Republic of Iran with this economic union? The theoretical framework of the research is based on the theory of neoclassical realism. This theory considers the factors of domestic, regional level and the structure of the international system in evaluating foreign policy. The research method is descriptive-analytical and uses documentary and library information and data.

**Keywords**: *Neoclassical realism, security complex, Russian*

*foreign policy, Eurasian Economic Union*

## Introduction

It has been more than two decades since the idea of economic cooperation and convergence in the Eurasian region, and this process has led to the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union. Realizing their growing needs, the Central Eurasian republics have reached a common understanding that in the form of a regional economic structure, they can better manage their economic problems and design programs for the development of their regional trade.

Under these circumstances, of course, Russia, which felt more concerned than its surrounding republics, has always put regional convergence plans on the foreign policy agenda.

"In the current situation of the international system, countries alone do not have all the factors of production and face serious limitations in this regard, and on the other hand, convergence and close economic cooperation lead to prosperity, wealth and gaining power" (Soleimani and Suleimanpour, 2016: 70).

In the Eurasian region, "the ideas of economic cooperation have been seriously discussed since 2000 in the form of the Eurasian Economic Community and then the Customs Union, and finally led to the formation and crystallization of the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015, which is a new chapter of cooperation and convergence in Eurasia" (Moldshev, 2015: 2-4).

Among the most important components affecting the success of intra-regional convergence are the level of solidarity, the nature of relations and relations between countries, the amount and levels of power, as well as the arrangements and structure of relations between countries. In this regard, "the degree of similarity and

complementary of political units and their interaction in the economic, political and social spheres, cultural and social relations between people, the potential and actual power and political will of leaders and the influence of elites, as well as stressful areas between units, it is considerable importance in the formation of regionalism and convergence projects" (Cantori and Spiegl, 1970: 8-23).

The trend of economic convergence in Central Eurasia can be defined in the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States in the 1990s, the formation of the Eurasian Economic Community from 2003 to 2014 and the developments leading to the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015.

In fact, the prelude to the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union was the formation of a common economic space by Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus.

"Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus in 2012 created a common economic space with the aim of creating a common market for the free movement of goods and services and capital, labor, development and deepening of industrial cooperation, transit, energy and agricultural programs. They were modeled on the experience of the European Union". (Soleimanpour and Soleimani, 2016: 82).

Despite the weaknesses of the Eurasian Economic Union in various areas that will be addressed during the investigation, this union can be considered as one of the important Propellants of Russian foreign policy, in order to balance the region and strengthen the security complex around the Russian Federation. This hypothesis is examined and analyzed in the framework of neoclassical realist theory.

The question is, to what extent will the Eurasian Economic Union be effective in advancing Russia's foreign policy goals? What are its obstacles and challenges? And, in this context, what opportunities can be imagined for the cooperation of the Islamic Republic of Iran with this field? In response to these questions, the subject is examined and explained in a descriptive-analytical

manner, using documentary, library and electronic data.

## I. Theoretical Framework

One of the concerns of international relations theorists has always been the possibility of creating a theoretical framework for analyzing the foreign policy of governments, and various theories of international relations have been tried to be used in this direction.

In this regard, neoclassical realism has considerable potential for foreign policy analysis. "In fact, this theory seeks to explain why phenomena are influential in foreign policy, while international policy theory seeks to explain international phenomena". (Kitchen and Nicholas, 2010: 121).

Neoclassical realism, at the same time, is an attempt to systematize the broad and diverse views of realism. "It also acknowledges the complexity of the world of international relations and sees events as a reflection of a variety of factors" (Kitchen and Nicholas, 2010: 116-117).

Therefore, in analyzing and explaining foreign policy, it pays attention to various factors and components at the domestic and regional levels and the structure of the system. In this regard, the Eurasian Economic Union is also one of the influential components in Russia's foreign policy and its effectiveness can be evaluated in the framework of this theory.

In the theory of neoclassical realism, the interests of units in the international system should be considered very diverse and variable. Of course, "the first and foremost benefit for all governments, regardless of internal characteristics and distinctions, is the acquisition and increase of security" (Waltz, 1979: 121-123). Neoclassical realism envisions any collective cooperation to strengthen national power, and in fact believes in game with the sum of diverse and plural sums, although it may be zero, or it may be double.

Maximizing power is one of the most important issues for countries. The consolidation and development of the Eurasian

Economic Union is important in maximizing power for Russia. Power refers to the neoclassical realism of the resources and capabilities of governments that are used to pursue their goals. The Eurasian Economic Union has the capacity to act as one of the structures and sources of Russian regional power generation.

"Power is not just a goal or a tool, it is both a tool and a goal. Thus a combination of classical realism and neo-realism in the definition of power can be inferred. In neoclassical realism, power also has two dimensions of hardware and software, material and perceptual. However, in other realistic theories, the software and perceptual dimensions of power are less analytical " (Salimi, 2015: 27-28).

In the theory of neoclassical realism, the perceptual variable is not independent and is also affected by material power.In addition to the formal structure of government, it is important for social elites to assess threats and opportunities (Lobell, 2009: 56-57).

Another important point is that aggressive neoclassic such as Schuler, instead of emphasizing power and security, are the main goals of states, in classical realism and neo-realism, they believe that states seek to maximize their influence in the regional and international environment (Scmidh, 2005: 542-545).

Analytical structure of neoclassical realism, including the independent variable of systemic components, system structure and regional factors including threats and opportunities, mediating variables (domestic policy issues), leaders' perception, internal cohesion, vulnerability, government-society relationship, possibility of resource mobilization, and then the dependent variable (policy) (Rose and Gideon, 1998: 50-51).

Neoclassical realism thus provides a more coherent theoretical framework for understanding Russian foreign policy. Moreover, like other modern realist theories, neoclassical realism is state-centered and believes that competition for power and influence between states in the system of international chaos is an important feature that defines international politics (Rathburn, 2008: 295-311).

"Over the last two decades, Russia's foreign policy has undergone significant changes. In this regard, numerous domestic and regional factors and events, as well as the structural pressures of the international system, have influenced the orientation of Russia's foreign policy. Therefore, in the study and analysis of Russian foreign policy, it is necessary to understand the internal and regional variables and system-level factors. Russia's foreign policy has shifted towards realism and can be analyzed in the form of neoclassical theory of realism" (Wieclawski and Jacek, 2011: 170-172).

Neoclassical realism helps to understand Russia's role in different roles at the international and regional levels and in regulating relations and interactions with the world's leading countries. In this context, Russia, while regulating its interactions in the surrounding areas, has implemented various policies and programs from soft and flexible to hard and harsh.

## II. Eurasian Economic Union

**Backgrounds:** After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the creation of a framework for cooperation in the form of a convergent structure has always been Russia's goal, and of course major republics in the region such as Kazakhstan led by Nazarbayev and Belarus led by Lukashenkov fully supported convergent ideas.

Nazarbayev, as the designer and ideator of regional cooperation and convergence models, has played an important role in regional structures in the political, security and economic dimensions. During his long presidency of more than two decades, he has been active in presenting regional convergence programs during ongoing contacts and consultations with Putin. Some experts in the region attribute the initial idea of the Eurasian Economic Union to Nazarbayev.

The CIS Charter in 1994 contained the first proposals for regional economic cooperation, which underwent fundamental changes following Putin's rise to power in 2000. Continuing this path, a free trade regime and an integrated customs system were

proposed, with Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan known as the Eurasian Economic Community.

The main spark for economic convergence came in 2007 with the signing of the Customs Union Treaty with Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus. The most important issue in the activity of the Eurasian Economic Union has been the removal of customs borders between members with the aim of developing the free flow of goods and services.

In this regard, the study of the role of the Eurasian idea of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan is important. One of the greatest achievements of N.A.Nazarbayev as a leader of modern times who thinks deeply is the advancement of the idea of the Eurasian Union. Over the years, the President of Kazakhstan has developed the conceptual basis of the Eurasian doctrine in his writings theoretically and emphatically promoted the formation of a real and an effective structure of the Eurasian Union at all levels and in all aspects (Sadykova, 2013: 378).

"This stage was the recognition of a common economic space, which is considered a platform to reach the final stage of convergence and implementation of the Eurasian Economic Union program in 2015" (Mirfakhraei, 2015: 153).

"The Russian Federation, Kazakhstan and Belarus are the main members of the Eurasian Economic Union, and the accession of Armenia and then Kyrgyzstan to the puzzle has clarified the union's strategic vision. Following the official announcement of the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union in January 2015, the Russian media considered this event a major development in economic issues and tried to introduce this issue as an important variable in the field of regional trade and trade relations. At this time, Sputnik News Agency called the formation of this union the production of a new economic giant" (Mirfakhraei, 2015: 154-155).

What also needs to be noted is how, 20 years later, all of these institutions have significantly evolved from their modest beginning. This naturally followed Moscow's changing view of

their utility to its practical needs. While not being flawless by any stretch of imagination, the CSTO and EEU made some noticeable achievements in improving regional military and economic cooperation and coordination (Janko, 2019).

"The European Union can be called the greatest case of regionalism convergence in the new era, and in this context, institutions, legal regimes, structures and common laws have been created" (Zarei and Abbasi, 2018: 34).

In fact, regional convergence is a cure for the contagious disease of extremist nationalism, irresponsible rulers and governments, and divergent and non-cooperative schemes". (Polani, 1945: 86-88).

"From Moscow's point of view, Eurasian convergence is not defined solely in the economic sphere, but encompasses all social, cultural and identity aspects of the region. The Preserving Russian identity and the historical and cultural authenticity of the region is one of Moscow's top priorities.

**Objectives of Forming the Eurasian Economic Union**: One of the most important primary goals of the Eurasian Economic Union is to facilitate trade activities between member countries and the development of interregional trade and commerce with neighboring regions and economic structures. It can play a significant role in the context of global economic interactions. It also puts on the agenda interaction and partnership with international organizations, governments and other similar structures.

"The Eurasian Economic Union pursues cooperation with other governments and regional institutions to achieve its goals". (EEC, 2015: 16-18).

"Balancing with other regional structures, including the European Union, has been one of the strategic goals of convergence in the form of the Eurasian Economic Union". (Soleimanpour and Soleimani, 2016: 84).

The implementation of infrastructure projects to improve and eliminate transit and transportation deficiencies, mechanized

agriculture and modernization of equipment related to local agricultural products, industrialization and use of new technologies in order to create suitable conditions for balanced economic development in the union It has been one of the structural and important goals and priorities of the union.

"The formation of the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015 as a final step in economic convergence in this area with the aim of integrating customs policies and facilitating the flow of goods, services and capital, entered a new phase in the Russian Federation's relations with the region" (Sajjadpour and Soleimani, 2015: 106).

The review of the initial goals of the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union in various fields of trade and commerce, customs, labor and capital shows that the principles, rules and regulations of the World Trade Organization have been considered in the drafting of the union's charter. And in trade and commerce between members, the union is moving towards standardizing its rules and principles in accordance with the standards governing international trade, which will play an important role in its reliability and dynamism in the future.

## III. Eurasian Economic Union and Russia's Foreign Policy

**Strengthening Regional Security Complex**: In addition to the Union's stated goals and policies for economic convergence and regional economic and trade development, Russia has long-term goals for the development of regional convergence within the union.

"Examining the goals and structure that Russia has set for the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union, it is clear that the main goal of this union was to create a kind of convergence in the Central Eurasian region against European Union. In fact, by highlighting the economic benefits of convergence in Central Eurasia, Russia explicitly seeks to present the Eurasian Economic Union as an effective and alternative to the European Union. EU

Eastern Partnership programs aimed at influencing Central Eurasian countries" (Sajjadpour and Soleimani, 2015: 106-107).

Russia's institutional push in Eurasia was always driven in part by its regional and global agendas. Regionally, Moscow was concerned by what it saw as an "erosion" of the post-Soviet space, which was particularly visible in a deteriorating security situation stemming from instability in Afghanistan, the civil war in Tajikistan, and the clashes between its former Soviet Republics. Particularly worrying was the rise of the nonconventional threats like terrorism and drug smuggling. Part of this erosion included also a loss of influence over the post-Soviet space, in particular following the "color revolutions" in several former Soviet Republics like Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, which many in Russia saw as West-sponsored plots. Hence, (EEU) and the CSTO are actually sometimes seen as an anti-NATO (Janko, 2019).

Thus, "Russia's view of the Eurasian Economic Union is politico-strategic and important economic and trade concepts for Moscow have not been clarified" (Robert, 2014: 2-6).

In this context, Russia uses all its capacities to achieve foreign policy goals. Regional convergence helps to increase and strengthen the foundations of Russia's national power, and in this regard, the Eurasian Economic Union, in accordance with the theory of neoclassical realism, is one of the most important power-building platforms for Russia and as an important factor in strengthening bargaining. Russia. Of course, it is important for Russia theoretically and practically. The issue of the importance of factors and sources of power in achieving national goals and foreign policy is one of the important issues in the neoclassical realism theory.

"In fact, regional economic convergence has always been one of Russia's most important goals, and of course the importance of this issue has been explained at the academic level, and as a kind of convergence policy abroad it has a special priority for Russia." (Kirkham, 2016: 112-113).

"In many Western scientific and academic papers, the

Eurasian Economic Union has been defined in terms of a realistic approach, describing it as Russia's attempt to implement a new imperialist project, and emphasizing that Russia intends to assert its hegemony in the region, And to exploit this issue in the form of power policy in political, economic and military dimensions". From the Western point of view, this trend is a threat to the process of liberal democracy and can lead to a halt to the process of liberal idealism in the Eurasian countries." (Brzezinski, 1994: 70-73).

"Although the Eurasian Economic Union project is still in its infancy, it can be assessed in terms of Russia's hegemonic goals". (Morto, 2015: 28-30).

One of the most important results of Eurasian economic convergence is the economic growth of the region, political and social stability and, consequently, the strengthening of the security and legal infrastructure of the region.

"The Eurasian Economic Union can be interpreted in terms of Russia's competition with the European Economic Union as well as the development of cooperation with the East" (Dreyer and Popesco, 2014: 25).

**Regional and Trans-Regional Spheres**: The Financing infrastructure projects in each region is one of the most important pillars of regional development. The Eurasian Economic Union Bank, headquartered in Almaty, Kazakhstan, has the potential to invest and finance projects in the region. Which facilitates economic growth, In particular, this financial center can significantly contribute to the implementation of economic projects in the member countries of the union, which have weaker financial strength.

"The Eurasian Development Bank, as a financial and credit agent of the Eurasian Economic Union, is an important fund for financial support and implementation of economic integration projects in the Eurasian area, with the help of regional trade and commerce" (Courtney, 2015: 2-5)

In the modern world, digital solutions on the one hand

simplify life in various fields of activity, ensuring the free movement of goods, services and human resources, on the other hand, play an important role in the competitiveness of separate countries and economic unions. Digital interaction leads to the restriction of the use of paper procedures, providing a complete transition to automated systems and electronic document management, opening up new prospects for economic growth of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). In recent years, tangible progress has been recorded in many areas of digital development. The introduction of digital technologies in transport, logistics, cargo transportation administration and public administration will significantly help to improve the efficiency of transportation. Realization of the transit potential of the EEU is a very relevant topic, which can be achieved through the development and creation of a unified infrastructure of the EEU, as well as by digitizing the logistics of such infrastructure. The prospects for the countries of the member states of the EEU are quite high, and the national programs contain promising indicators for increasing transit volumes, for the implementation of which the created flows within the EEU must be coordinated (Koroleva. Et al, 2019).

"The Creating a common financial market before 2025 is also one of the potential capabilities of the Eurasian Economic Union, which facilitates trade and commerce" (Mirfakhraei, 2015: 161-162).

The integration of energy infrastructure in the Eurasian area is also one of the capabilities of the Eurasian Economic Union, which will facilitate and regulate the transfer and exchange of energy of member countries. It is decided that by 2025, the infrastructure in the field of energy will be prepared for the access of interested members in this field.

"The diversification of energy delivery routes is important for the countries of the region. In particular, Kazakhstan has paid special attention to the capacities of the Eurasian Economic Union in terms of energy transmission and utilization of the facilities of the West China-Western Europe infrastructure project"

(Mukhamediev and Khitakhunov, 2015: 6-8).

## IV-Obstacles

**Internal Challenges**: One of the most important challenges and disputes in Eurasia is the politicization of the Eurasian Economic Union. The republics of the region are concerned that, in addition to economic and trade integration, there are goals behind the aspirations of the Eurasian Economic Union. The dependence of some republics on unions and extra-regional structures can also negatively affect the internal cooperation of the Eurasian Economic Union. Disagreements among union members in the Eurasian area will also play an important role in creating barriers to cooperation.

"The concern of the companies of the member republics of the Union about the dominance of Russian holdings and large companies over the course of trade and commerce and the possibility of their bankruptcy in unequal competition with powerful Russian companies are also important variables that hinder a serious incentive to continue Business activities can be" (Eurasian Europe Studies Center, 2012: 13-15).

Fundamental differences in the economic and commercial structures of the union members can also be among the disturbing variables in developing and accelerating the process of cooperation between the two countries. In this case, we can refer to the economic structure of Russia and Kazakhstan as free market-based economic systems, and on the other hand, as an example, the state economy of the Republic of Belarus can be considered as an example. On the other hand, some of the economies of these members are based on the export of raw materials and products and the sale of raw materials and are competing with each other and there are not many complementary dimensions between them. And others have almost made progress in the industrial sphere, such as Belarus. These fundamental differences are among the things that affect areas of cooperation. Therefore, almost all members of the union depend on Moscow to

provide for their needs.

In this case, "how can expect all the needs of the union members to be provide, if there is no trans-regional development, by restricting economic relations and relying on the Russian economy" (Dobbs, 2015: 4-6).

One of the main potential and deterrent challenges in the future of the Eurasian Economic Union is the conflicting orientations of the main founders of the union. On the one hand, Russia, in addition to the economic and trade characteristics of the Union in various regional and global dimensions, has targeted its capabilities in international confrontations with the United States and Europe, as well as helping its major foreign policy goals. On the other hand, important members of the union, such as Kazakhstan and Belarus, have emphasized the preservation of the union's economic nature and have always expressed concern about any political and identity change in the union that threatens their political independence.

Therefore, "The preserving the separate nature of the political units that are members of the Eurasian Economic Union is one of the main demands of its members" (Mirfakhraei, 2015: 165-166).

**Regional Challenges**: The emergence of the Ukraine crisis will create a huge vacuum in the current and future structure of the Eurasian Economic Union. The Republic of Ukraine has a very significant potential in various economic and industrial dimensions and advanced technologies, which is very effective and decisive in achieving the goals of the Union, while the absence of Ukraine in the Union will be irreparable, and The title of the main leader of the union will incur a lot of costs in order to stabilize, strengthen and maintain it.

In the Eurasian Economic Union, Russia controls more than 80 percent of the population and more than 85 percent of GDP.

"Russia's economic capacities and capabilities have led to its excessive influence in the union" (Bordachev and Skirba, 2014).

The growth of trade and commerce, the development of financial, monetary and credit trends, as well as the production of

technical knowledge and its transfer are among the most important necessary components in regional economic convergence. In the Eurasian Economic Union, Russia is the main trading partner of the other members, and trade between members without the Russian Federation is not at a desirable level. And they suffer from weak industrial and economic infrastructure. On the other hand, the turnover of the Union region is completely under the control of Russia and the financial strength of other members is not equal to interact effectively with the Russian financial and banking system in the implementation of economic projects in the region. Therefore, this issue is one of the major challenges in deepening the cooperation of the union.

The Eurasian Economic Union member states, due to the general and common weakness in the production and use of new technologies, are not able to fully provide each other's mutual needs. Attention.

Accordingly, "these structural weaknesses of union members have limited the scope for interaction and cooperation. And will create a competitive pattern for attracting technology from other countries" (Wisniewska, 2013: 28-30).

One of the major obstacles to Eurasian convergence in the long run is the difference in the level of mineral and natural resources of the republics in the region. In fact, it places countries in a range from rich to poor. For this reason, to extent republics benefit from the capacity of the Eurasian Economic Union depends on their economic capabilities, especially in the field of natural resources. Therefore, this issue will have a significant impact on the level of their real participation and regional convergence. Accordingly, "economic inequalities and imbalances in the level of internal development of these republics make the possibility of convergence face significant difficulties" (Soleimanpour. et al, 2016: 90).

In order to maintain and strengthen the presence of the peripheral republics in the Eurasian Economic Union, Moscow must adopt targeted and organized support programs and

development assistance for the poor republics to the level of balance that is necessary for the continuity and stability of economic structures in the union (Bifron and Bruno, 2018: 55-65).

With a GDP of $ 1967 billion in 2020 and a population of nearly 200 million, the Eurasian Economic Union has significant potential to be exploited in various economic, trade and geopolitical dimensions for Moscow's foreign policy objectives.

The lack of attention of some republics around the Eurasian sphere also plays an important role in the future process of the union. The Republic of Moldova has explicitly refused to join the Eurasian Economic Union. "One of Russia's greatest goals in establishing the Eurasian Economic Union is to establish and consolidate its economic influence throughout the region. Meanwhile, the smaller members of the union must also relinquish part of their economic-political independence. Instead, they can use the union's capacity to strengthen its soft power to engage in interactions outside the union. Of course, Russia has to pay more for the development of this region" (Nurgliyeva, 2016: 92-105).

Therefore, as analyzed and examined, several factors such as the existing political, security and economic realities in the security issues of the region as well as in the field of providing consumer and industrial needs of the Eurasian Economic Union members, highlight the role of Russia as a leader of the union.

## V. Iran

"According to the enduring traditions of geopolitical competition and the new principles governing economic competition, Iran is influenced by the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union and it is necessary to look at the new economic and trade requirements after the formation of the union as geo-economic rules and its requirements. It is taken into account in its strategies" (Mirfakhraei, 2015: 171)

Another key capacity for Iran's economic cooperation is its proximity to EEU member states. Iran has a land border with

Armenia and a sea border with Russia and Kazakhstan. One of Iran's trade priorities in recent years has been cooperation with the EEU, and since 2015, Iran has begun extensive negotiations on the establishment of a Free Trade Area (FTA) and has reached a conclusion. In addition, Iran's cooperation agreement with the European Union is a vital opportunity for Iran and its member states. Iran and the Eurasian Union have reached an agreement on preferential tariffs. The Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) is one of the most important achievements of cooperation between Iran and the European Union. Iran's presence in organization such as ECO and its collaboration with the EEU and its pivotal role in the North-South Corridor and the International Silk Road and more importantly, Iran's role in linkage between the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf are reasons which link Eurasia to the Middle East and East Asia to Europe (Sanaei and Karami, 2019).

If Iran provides the necessary conditions for cooperation within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union," an area of more than twenty million square kilometers and a population of almost two hundred million people will have a significant capacity to attract Iranian goods and exports" (Pozo, 2015: 2-3).

**Current Situation and Future Prospects**: With the official announcement of the implementation of the Eurasian Economic Union in January 2015, we witnessed a fundamental and important step in the future convergence of Eurasia, and in fact, this union came into being with ambitious goals. "Economic convergence in this field has been one of the important goals of Russian politicians, and of course in the field of academia and think tanks, the importance of this process has been explained and theorized, and therefore was put on the agenda as a top priority" (Kirkham, 2016: 111-114).

The formation of the Eurasian Economic Union and its relative success in the early stages of its establishment and activation is considered an important factor for Russia, and on the other hand, the emphasis on legal equality of member states, the prospects and success of this group to some extent compared to

previous economic structures. It shows more clearly that it is a positive and important leaf for Russia's foreign policy to be used by Moscow in regional and global interactions when necessary.

"Preliminary studies of the Eurasian Economic Union show that due to the sense of equality and legal equality of the member republics, the grounds for achieving the goals and success of this economic structure are more expected than its predecessor structures" (Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2017: 4).

Russia has used some tempting and incentive methods and means to attract the surrounding republics to the Eurasian Economic Union. Providing subsidies and assistance in various sectors of the economy, including fuel, especially for the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Belarus, has been and continues to be on Moscow's agenda.

At all stages of the formation of this regional economic structure, the Kremlin's leadership power is seriously present. And as mentioned, Russia has always tried to offer an attractive alternative to the European Union.

"By achieving Russia's goals in establishing and activating the Eurasian Economic Union, Russia's position in the Eurasian equations will be further strengthened and it will be more immune to possible harm from regional and trans-regional rivals" (Zagorski, 2015: 4-5).

Of course, it is worth noting that the survival and development of the Eurasian Economic Union will come at a high cost to Russia. It is noteworthy that some peripheral republics are demanding ransoms from Russia in order to be loyal to this regional security-political-economic complex, which the Eurasian Economic Union is an important part. Russia, on the other hand, has the appropriate means of punishment and is likely to use them in certain circumstances.

In the wake of the Ukraine crisis and European sanctions on Russia, Russia reciprocally sought to impose sanctions on European goods, expecting it to use both the Customs Union and the Eurasian Economic Union, and urged Belarus and Kazakhstan

to do so. The parties did not fully comply with Russia's counter-sanctions policy and had their own considerations.

In this regard, "Dmitry Medvedev stated that all members of the Eurasian Economic Union need to use a special labeling system for imported goods in order to prevent the re-export of certain imported goods" (Boguslavska, 2015: 10-13).

One of Moscow's main goals for the Eurasian Economic Union is to establish a link between the European Union and the Far East so that it is completely under Russian control. In this regard, the East-West communication route that passes through the territory of the Eurasian Economic Union can be called the "New Russian Silk Road".

Russia has also increased its trade to provide the basic needs of the republics in the Eurasian Economic Union in order to stabilize the Russian consumer market and reduce the dependence of the Eurasian republics on structures outside the region.

"In the first year of activation of the Customs Union and then the Eurasian Economic Union, Russia has increased its exports to Kazakhstan by more than 25 percent and to Belarus by more than 50 percent" (Mirfakhraei, 2015: 160).

In the field of security, the Eurasian Economic Union, if successful and absorbs the majority of the republics around Russia, which is an ongoing process, can also be effective in advancing the goals of the Collective Security Treaty Organization in sustaining regional security.

"From a security perspective, the Eurasian Economic Union will have broad overlap with members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and will significantly strengthen the CIS security complex" (Laruelle, 2015: 16-18).

"The establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union and the continuation of its success, in addition to the development of trade and economic cooperation for its members, will bring extensive geopolitical achievements and gains in the field of foreign policy for Russia". In this regard, one of the main goals of Russia in the development of the union has been to increase its political

credibility in world affairs" (Zarei and Abbasi, 2018: 46).

"The Eurasian Economic Union is for Russia the primary recognized tool of its global geopolitical guidelines". (Zarei and Abbasi, 2018: 55).

The study of upstream documents determining the orientations and trends of Russia's foreign policy shows that one of the main propellants of Russia's foreign policy in strategic and geopolitical dimensions is the optimal use of regional economic tools. In fact, it considers the strengthening of the surrounding economic and trade structure in order to strengthen the foundations of the regional security complex. And this set will work together in regional and global equations to advance Russia's grand goals. And in addition to creating international political credibility for Russia, Moscow will use the weight of this set of political bargains in interactions within international organizations.

## Conclusion

Russia recognizes the importance of the Eurasian Economic Union's capacity for foreign policy goals, as well as for regional stability and security. Therefore, Russia has always been at the forefront of converging ideas and supporting these structures. Moscow's efforts in this direction have manifested and crystallized in the military-security dimension in the Collective Security Treaty and in the economic and trade dimension in the Eurasian Economic Union.

Of course, these two structures of regional cooperation have significant overlap in members and goals. From the perspective of the United States and Europe, the Eurasian Economic Union is a political project that serves Russia's strategic and geopolitical interests. In fact, the Eurasian Economic Union, along with the Collective Security Treaty Organization, will play an important role in integrating the security complex around Russia. The complex will also be strengthened with China's participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

The core of the Eurasian Economic Union, led by Moscow and with the serious participation of two strong republics in the region, the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Belarus, which have major sectors of population, investment, technology, industrial and production structures and can play a significant role to fulfill the goals of the union.

Despite the existing challenges, the Economic Union has been well received by peripheral countries such as Iran and the Mediterranean and even East Asia, so that several trade agreements between trans-regional countries and the Eurasian Economic Union are under consideration. The overlap of the geopolitical and strategic interests of Iran and Russia in the Caucasus and Central Asia, especially on security issues, has provided the grounds for cooperation in the Eurasian Economic Union for Iran.

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# Trump's Maximum Pressure Policy and Diplomacy

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## Abstract

In the past four decades, the US-Iran relations have been hostile, especially after Donald Trump took office as president in 2017. Since 1979, Washington's official policy toward Iran has been predicated on containment, push-back, and change of behavior. However, Iran usually perceives the US policy regarding itself in terms of regime change or metamorphosis. The United States has countered Iran through coercive diplomacy, crippling sanctions, military blockade, delegitimization, isolation, and demonization. The present paper aims to investigate the antagonism between the two countries in Donald Trump's administration. The main reasons behind Trump's maximum pressure campaign against Iran and Iran's perception of this attitude constitute the main research questions addressed in this paper. The findings show that the two countries have different understandings of their hostilities. Although the US preference in Trump's era for Iran was regime change, it would settle for a non-challenging or so-called a normal Iran. But Iran perceived the US policy as undermining its independence, identity, and existence. In fact Iran perceived Trump's gesture on negotiation or making new deal as just a propaganda show. This paradigmatic different outlooks has blocked diplomacy. The present paper, through a descriptive-analytic method, elaborates on this antinomy mainly from Iranian side.

**Keywords***: The United States, Iran, Trump administration, maximum pressure, regime change*

## Introduction

US-Iranian relations began in the mid-19th century. These relations continued until the Iranian revolution of the 7th of February 1979. Since then, the two countries have had limited political and military connections except in few cases (including the Iran-Contra affair in 1985 and military aid to the US troops and the Afghan Northern Alliance against the Taliban by the IRGC in 2001). They did not have any relationship until June 16, 2008, when three rounds of talks were held between the US and Iranian envoys in Baghdad for the establishment of peace in Iraq, which failed due to sharp divisions. Subsequently, during a series of visits by former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the United Nations headquarters from 2005 to 2013, he put forward proposals for direct talks with Washington, which were met with opposition from Iranian conservatives and drew no response by the US officials (Mousavian and Shahidsaless, 2014:207-229 ).

Bilateral talks between the United States and Iran peaked after Hassan Rouhani took office in August 2013 as the seventh president of Iran. The negotiations over Iran's nuclear case, which lasted for nearly two years, resulted in the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on July 14, 2015. The hammering out of the deal was the highest level of diplomatic relations between Iran and the United States since the Islamic Revolution in Iran. However, the US contribution to the deal was temporary, and the 45th US President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from it on May 5, 2018 (Ritter, 2018). The gap between the two countries has been widening ever since, and Maryland University's survey in 2019 showed over four in five Iranians

expressed negative opinions about the United States—the highest level recorded in 13 years. The majority of Iranians believe the United States is deliberately blocking humanitarian goods being exported to Iran and it is unlikely that a new president might return to the JCPOA after 2020 (Maryland University, 2019). In the last 18 years, according to the findings of Gallup, Americans have viewed Iran as the greatest adversary of the United States (Benjamin and Simon, 2019). The mutual hatred is so deep that even amid the tense situation resulting from the global COVID-19 pandemic, the United States did not ease its paralyzing economic sanctions against Iran.

Tensions escalated to brinkmanship when, on 20 June 2019, Iran shot down a U.S. RQ-4A Global Hawk surveillance drone when it entered the Iranian airspace. On January 3, 2020, the United States assassinated the Iranian Major General Major Qasem Soleimani in an airstrike in Iraq. He was the head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps' Quds Force. The assassination intensified the decades-old tensions between the two countries. On January 7, 2020, Iran carried out a heavy missile attack, launching around 20 missiles to strike multiple US targets in Ayn al Asad Airbase (Iraq) where about 1,500 soldiers are stationed. There have been serious concerns that this escalation might culminate in a destructive regional war (BBC News, 2020).

The main questions addressed in the present research are, "what main drivers have propelled the Trump administration to withdraw from the JCPOA and adopt a hostile policy toward Tehran, and in what ways does Tehran and Iranian leader perceive the US Trump's policy toward itself?"

The main recent works on the Iran-US relations in Trump's era tackled this issue mostly from the US outlook or real-politics. While subjective reasons play a lot in the dynamics of the Tehran-Washington hostilities. Entesar and Afrasiabi(2019) in "Trump and Iran from Containment to Confrontation" seek to examine the fluid dynamic of US-Iran relations in the Trump era by explaining antagonism between Washington and Tehran that may lead to a

disastrous war in the region. They gave a sound insight of the outcome Trump's hostility toward Iran. Albarasneh and Khatib (2019) argue that both Obama and Trump administrations have developed a containment strategy for handling the disputed issues with Iran, but did not succeeded fully. They did not elaborate the problem from Iranian side. Tabatabai(2020) also tackled Iran-US hostilities and concluded that the United States could try to attain a series of comprehensive agreements by tailored processes and mechanisms to address vastly different challenges. The author of current paper believes that Tabatabai is wrong and made a simplified picture of the hostility. Duncombe(2020) shows how emotional factors blocks dialogue between states such as Iran-US, but came short to analyses deeply the Iranian understanding of the problem. This research tries to contribute to the US-Iran hostile relations from an Iranian outlook and concluded the US politicians and even some oversea researchers have not understood Iranian perception of the US arrogant policies deeply.

## I. Theoretical Framework

Perception is a mental process by which individuals understand and interpret data in their surroundings and thereby give meaning to them. Perception may conform with or be very different from reality. Oftentimes, people have different perceptions of the same object. It can be said that people's behavior depends on their perception, not reality. The same holds about the mutual understanding between Iran and the United States. Scholars of International Relations have always attached an important role to the perceiving process of the threat on issues such as war, deterrence, alliances, and conflict resolution. Perhaps for the first time, Thucydides raised the issue of threat assessment, not a real threat, as a factor in the occurrence of wars. (Stein, 2013: 364-366) In some cases, understanding the threat is more important than the expressed threat. In fact, perception is the process of receiving the subject through emotions, intellect, and its interpretation by people's belief sets. Perception is the basis of

understanding, learning, and knowledge and a fundamental motivation for action. In the process of perceiving something, the emotional state, information processing capability, and the characteristics of perceivers are important. A set of individual perceptions can lead to the definition of a collective perceptual situation which leads policy-makers to an assessment of a threat situation. Based on cognitive psychology, Robert Jarvis argues that the main factors involved in perception - and perception of a threat - are images, beliefs, and intentions:

"In determining how he will behave, an actor must try to predict how others will act and how their actions will affect his values. The actor must, therefore, develop an image of others and their intentions. This image may, however, turn out to be an inaccurate one; the actor may for several reasons misperceive both others' actions and their intentions."(Jervis, 1968: 454)

Perception is the process by which an actor produces an understanding according to his belief set and the images he made about other actors and what they are expected to do (intention) in a particular situation. (Jervis, 1968: 455) The intention in this sense is the reactions or actions that one actor expects from another actor in a given situation and may be contrary to the reaction or action that the actor actually intends or hopes to perform. Jervis conforms to cognitive psychologists that psychological factors can reinforce erroneous estimates and thus limit the rationality of decision-makers. (Neack, 2018: 38) He states that an actor who tries to strengthen his defensive capabilities knows his intentions well and assumes that other actors understand his intentions rightly as well, but other actors may misperceive the intention of other states, especially the adversary ones. Jervis devotes his entire book, 'Perception and Misperception in International Politics', to perception dynamics and to how states receive others and their actions, and when and why these perceptions can go wrong. Jervis's main focus in this book is on the interaction between theory and data. In his view, man has a great desire for cognitive consistency and sees what he

expects to see and adapts new information to the images he already established. (Jervis, 2017:117-128) Explaining the effect of expectations on perception, he believes that expectations create a context in which leaders pay attention to some issues and ignore others altogether. New information is always processed from within the prism was formed by previous assumptions (images) about an actor, and is classified and understood accordingly. This creates an incomplete image of others, which in itself leads to misunderstanding or misperception. (Ibid:37) In analyzing information received from a hostile country, leaders tend to get what they expect based on previous beliefs. (Morin and Paquin, 2018:77-78) They tend to accept information and data that is consistent with their previous beliefs. When data contradicts previous beliefs, leaders often retain previous beliefs and reject the data. These psychological dynamics have overshadowed the realities in US-Iran adversary interactions. Therefore, it is not important what is the US leaders' intention in addressing Iran, but it is more important what Iranian leaders perceives the US messages.

## II. Trump's Policy

Donald Trump appears to be a unique phenomenon in American politics. Without any political background or governmental assignment, he ran for the 2016 presidential election and despite his opposition to the ruling political system in the United States, he won the ballot and became the president of a superpower state. He is self-opinionated and is rarely concerned about getting advice from the US bureaucratic and intelligence entities. In this respect, the 45th US president is an exceptional person in the White House (Ricard, 2018).

Trump's inner circle is a radical one rarely seen in the last two decades of US history, bringing together the most hawkish figures of the GOP. As compared to the Obama administration officials, they have huge ideological leanings. In this group, the majority are pro-Israel individuals with an evangelical mindset, believing

that God granted the so-called land of Israel to the Jews. Another characteristic of Trump's cabinet people is that they are hostile to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Most of the people who have worked on Trump's foreign policy have experiences with territories in Iran's strategic neighborhood, including Iraq and Afghanistan. They are of the opinion that Iran's policies and practices make up the main causes of the failure and fatalities of the United States in the two countries. They show great animosity toward Iran (Zamani and Niyakuei, 2019: 103-109).

At the top of them was the former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn, who was in office for a very brief period of time, and had to resign due to a scandalous involvement with the Russian ambassador to the United States. Vice President Mike Pence, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who was later replaced by the CIA Director Mike Pompeo, Secretary of Defense Gen. Jim Mattis who was succeeded by Mark Esper, National security advisor Herbert Raymond who was later replaced with John Bolton and Robert C. O'Brien, Steven Mnuchin as Treasury Secretary, Nikki Haley and Kelly Craft as the US representative to the United Nations, as well as advisors such as Walid Phares, Jeff Sessions, Keith Kellogg, Joe Schmitz, Carter Page, and finally George Papadopolous, are the most imperative people in the formulation of US foreign policy and national strategy concerning Iran (Draitser, 2016).

By examining the Trump policies and actions, it can be concluded that he is pursuing the consolidation of the US global leadership at the expense of others. It means he rescinds or reduces certain foreign policy commitments, but at the same time agrees to the maintenance of some of the other commitments and offers to accept new obligations. He first evaluates the costs of commitments and then tries to forge a foreign policy that serves the US national interests better. In the Trump administration, global political cooperation is selective and based on American national interests. Trump believes the U.S. has to be willing to cut down its cooperation with anyone and any country where needed.

Trump's inattentiveness to the so-called American values is rooted in his pragmatist personality; something that is commonly referred to as 'immoral pragmatism' (Shapiro, 2017). "My job is not to represent the world, my job is to represent the United States," Trump had said in a speech to the Congress. (USA Today, 2017).

In line with the same insight, Donald Trump believes that the JCPOA is not in conformity with the US interests. Trump called the deal "a very bad deal" and "embarrassing" for his country, saying, "the Democrats and President Obama gave Iran 150 Billion Dollars and got nothing, but they can't give 5 Billion Dollars for National Security and a Wall?" Trump's main grievance was that the U.S. had spent a huge amount of money on a "single deal" and did not get much. In this regard, he tweeted: "The Democrats and President Obama gave Iran 150 Billion Dollars and got nothing, but they can't give 5 Billion Dollars for National Security and a Wall?" This is while, the real figure was around $50 billion in "usable liquid assets," according to the 2015 testimony by Adam Szubin, the Acting Undersecretary of Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence (Spencer, 2019). In the same vein, Vice President Mike Pence, the running mate of Donald Trump in the 2016 elections campaign, emphasized that Trump would "rip up" the deal upon arriving at the White House (ABC News, 2016). Corresponding to the same doctrine, Trump pulled out of the JCPOA, endorsed by the Security Council resolution 2231, on May 18, 2018.

The decision by Donald Trump to withdraw from JCPOA and adopt a "maximum pressure policy" have been explained under six reasons:

The first one was personal jealousy and obsession with Barack Obama. He had attacked this agreement throughout the presidential campaign trail and should have kept his word after becoming president. He didn't want to give his supporters the impression of a weak person. So, he withdrew from the deal. For psychological reasons, Trump has been seeking to obliterate major Obama legacies including the Iran nuclear deal. "Through

October, Trump had mentioned Obama by name 537 times during 2019 as a whole -- an average of 1.8 times per day," CNN estimated (Figure 1). Michael Anton, a former top security official, told CNN that "Obama's own decisions are a factor for Trump but denied it was driven by reflexive animus." He argued the president "thinks in terms of correcting the mistakes of not just Obama but George W. Bush and even earlier presidents". (Waren, CNN, 2019)
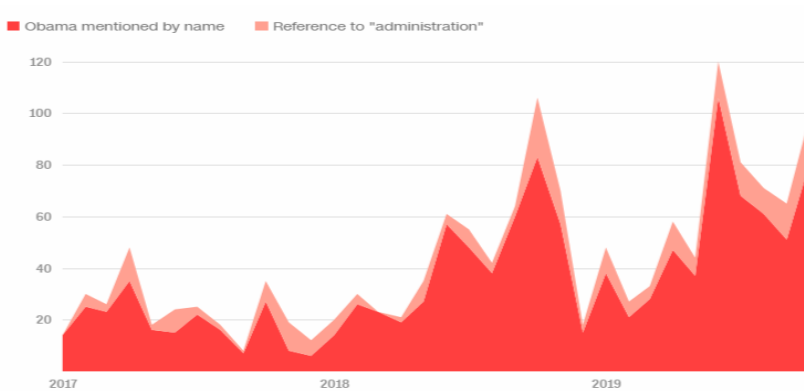


**Figure 1. Mentioning Obama by Trump in 2017-2019(Source: CNN, 2020)**

The second reason is believing in the fruitfulness of the "maximum pressure policy." The rationale behind the maximum pressure policy has been that the United States, as the world's superior financial power, will be able to destroy the Iranian economy by freezing Iran's oil exports, depriving it of foreign business investment and cutting it off from the global financial system. As a result, Iranian oil exports went down from 2.8 million barrels per day in the spring of 2018 to less than 500,000 barrels per day in September 2019, i.e. shrinking by more than 80% (Reuters, 2019). The IMF had predicted the Iranian economy would be downsized more than 9.5% by the end of 2019, and this forecast turned out to be true (Reuters, 2019). That figure will undoubtedly aggravate the unemployment rate and other economic indicators. Amid the coronavirus outbreak, Trump not

only refused to suspend Iran sanctions but also added new sanctions against the Islamic Republic (Press TV, 2020). Stephen M. Walt explains the goals of the maximum pressure campaign by saying: "Hawks see two possible routes to regime change. The first approach relies on ramping up economic pressure on Tehran in the hope that popular discontent will grow and that the clerical regime will simply collapse. The second option is to provoke Iran into restarting its nuclear program, which would give Washington the excuse to launch a preventive war" (Walt, 2018).

Donald Trump assumed that Iran resembles Mexico, in dealing with whom he could impose a new deal named USMCA as a replacement for NAFTA. Trump, with his business background, came to this understanding that he can make gains in changing other actors' behaviors with an economic weapon by imposing costs and offering financial incentives to target people. Therefore, he assumed he will be able to achieve the same result with Iran. This policy was supposed to bring Iran back to negotiations over its nuclear program and even overthrow the Iranian regime through economic pressure. However, he failed to understand that the Iranian regime is an ideology-driven state with historical pride whose economic interests do not count as its top priority. Iran has rejected any further negotiations with the United States as long as it is subjected to severe economic sanctions. Iran has also caused Donald Trump troubles, by launching attacks on the US forces directly or through proxy forces in Iraq after the assassination of Major Qasem Soleimani , and therefore may influence the US presidential elections in November 2020. For sure, the signals coming from Tehran confirm that forcing Iran to a new nuclear agreement with the United States will not happen. All Iranian authorities reiterated several times that Iran will not talk to the United States while under sanctions and while the United States is not upholding the JCPOA (The Atlantic, 2018).

So why didn't the maximum pressure policy pay off? The main explanation is that Donald Trump set his goals unrealistically. Mike Pompeo asked for major concessions that are

implausible without a regime change in Iran. Trump's next rookie mistake was to assume that the U.S. unilateral actions are impactful enough to achieve massive success, and there is no need for international cooperation, unlike previous presidents who relied on it. But he was wrong, and China and other countries that faced financial blackmailing from the Trump administration have been helping Iran quietly to bypass the sanctions. More importantly, Trump's unilateral sanctions have lacked international legitimacy (The Washington Post, 2020).

The third reason has to do with Trump's interpretation of contextual perceived deficiencies in the JCPOA. In other words, from Trump's point of view, a big deficiency within the text of the agreement pertains to what is described as the sunset clauses of JCPOA and other timetables, which levy restrictions on Iran in specific, limited periods of time. The Trump administration maintains that if Iran is supposed to be a non-nuclear country, this clause must change and limitations on Iran must become permanent. If its overall enrichment capability is dismantled, it would better serve the US interests.

Under the JCPOA, different restrictions on Iran will expire and Iran would be permitted to resume its activities regularly. These are the dates when the restrictions will be terminated:

| Date | Expiration of Bans |
|---|---|
| October 2020 | UN restrictions on conventional weapons transfer to Iran |
| October 2023 | The UN ban on assistance to Iran's ballistic missile program. The EU terminates all remaining nuclear sanctions. |
| October 2025 | UNSC Resolution 2231 and all remaining EU and UN measures are terminated. Restrictions are lifted on numbers of centrifuges, centrifuge production, and purchase of dual-use materials. |
| 2026 | The cap of 5,060 IR-1 centrifuges at Iran's Natanz facility will be lifted. Restrictions on centrifuge R&D will end as will the ban on replacing IR-1 centrifuges with more advanced models. |
| October 2030 | Restrictions on uranium enrichment levels, location of enrichment, quantities of enriched uranium, Iran's construction |

| | |
|---|---|
| | of heavy-water reactors will come to an end. |
| 2031 | All restrictions on heavy water reactors, the number, and type of centrifuges, as well as the number of enrichment facilities and the amount and level of enriched uranium Iran may stockpile. |
| 2036-41 | International access to Iran's supply chain of centrifuge manufacturing and nuclear storage facilities. |

More importantly, the JCPOA granted Iran's demands to cease investigation of the possible military dimensions (PMD) of its nuclear activities and, according to Iran's narrative of JCPOA, barred IAEA inspectors from unlimitedly inspecting any site in Iran, whether military or civilian. The U.S. officials maintain that the IAEA has never been allowed to conduct 'anytime anywhere inspections,' and it is a big loophole of the deal (Politi Fact, 2015) (Jewish Virtual Library, 2017).

All the same, the Trump administration maintains that, according to the JCPOA, Iran's uranium enrichment facilities will continue to work, Tehran continues to research and develop the new generation centrifuges, and by the end of the 15 to 25-year-period, it can put these new technologies into practice to enhance its nuclear industry. The neo-cons in Washington believe the nuclear agreement recognizes Iran as a nation on the nuclear breakout threshold: "In fact, the deal allowed Iran to continue enriching uranium and, over time, reach the brink of a nuclear breakout," Trump stated (The New York Times, 2018).  For this reason, they believe that since a substantial portion of Iran's obligations will lapse in a short period of time and restrictions on Iran's nuclear activities will be lifted, the United States will be in an unfavorable position in the next few years by crushing the sanctions regime.

On the hyper-textual aspect, there were two interconnected issues to be taken note of: first, the JCPOA did not cover Iran's missile program, and secondly, it could not restrict Iran's regional activities. Contrary to initial expectations, JCPOA not only did not ease the rivalries in the region, but also intensified tensions

between Iran and its regional competitors. "As we exit the Iran deal, we will be working with our allies to find a real, comprehensive, and lasting solution to the Iranian nuclear threat. This will include efforts to eliminate the threat of Iran's ballistic missile program; to stop its terrorist activities worldwide, and to block its menacing activity across the Middle East," Trump said. He also argued, "And we will not allow a regime that chants 'Death to America' to gain access to the most deadly weapons on Earth" (White House Briefings, 2018).

It seems that the US withdrawal from the JCPOA was underpinned by the impact of the Middle East strategy of President Trump and the alliance of the trio of the United States, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. As staunch adversaries of Iran, Riyadh and Tel Aviv believed that Iran has gained more economic benefits to increase its influence and power in the region after the signing of the deal. This was a hypothetical threat especially perceived by Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United States. These states are concerned that Iran's success in hammering out an outstanding deal with the world's great powers will strengthen its role and influence in the region. "America's interests are endangered, and Iran is seen by America's allies, including Israel and Saudi Arabia, as the main beneficiary of Arab uprisings… In Trump they found a willing ally in not just containing Iran but to try and roll back Iran's influence" explains Anoush Ehteshami, professor of international relations at Durham University (ABC News, 2020).

As a source of insecurity, Israel has considered the Islamic Republic of Iran as the main threatening and a source of instability. Israel has assumed Iran as the 'other-enemy,' viewing the JCPOA to be against its existence and deterring its own nuclear capability. Israel is seeking to extend its supremacy in the region to ensure its survival. Therefore, the further isolation of Iran is in line with Israel's security goals (Haaretz, 2018). On the other hand, Israeli lobbyists have infiltrated the US politics so deeply that the security of Israel has become a redline for the

American politicians and they mostly exert it as an asset in boosting themselves.

The last, but not the least reason, is the logic of cost-effective calculations. It means the United States did not benefit from JCPOA economically. The total US trade balance with Iran was $71.7 million in 2019 (The US Census Bureau, 2020). It means literally nothing in the US foreign trade. The United States, like most states in the world, seeks to achieve its interests and is committed to its international commitments as long as they are beneficial. If a leader in the United States finds out that the benefits of adherence to an agreement are more than its costs, he/she may be persuaded to put it down. That's why the Trump administration decided to withdraw when it found that it would not do much to stay in JCPOA. In general, states do not evaluate the benefits and costs of remaining in an agreement notwithstanding other relations, but consider them collectively and in a holistic way. In other words, considering that there is only one agreement between two states, if its costs outweigh its benefit, or if it doesn't produce considerable benefits, they may be persuaded to abrogate the agreement. In other words, under circumstances where trade and economic relations between the parties are deep and diverse, they will enforce agreements that appear to be less beneficial to them, in order to prevent the violation of agreements that are of interest. The breach of JCPOA was not costly to the United States, because no American company or national have had trade and investment in Iran, the American embassy in Iran is dysfunctional, nor is there any other connection that makes the United States concerned.

All these dynamics may mean that Trump is pursuing the regime change project in Iran. If we contemplate the 12 preconditions which Mike Pompeo elaborated Iran should accede to, it can be easily concluded that Trump has been seeking that project. But there are many shreds of evidence underlining that although he may prefer regime change, he is in practice looking at fundamental behavior change. He became president with anti-war

promises and condemnation of the US military interventions in the Middle East (Iraq, Libya, Syria, etc.). Since regime change requires massive money and produces fatalities, he doesn't like to defame himself at home. He repeatedly pointed out that the US spent $7 trillion in the Middle East wars, killing and wounding thousands of people without any achievement. Trump's mantra was "America First." He said, "We will stop racing to topple foreign regimes that we know nothing about, that we shouldn't be involved with." In October 2015, he told The Guardian, "We're nation-building. We can't do it. We have to build our own nation. We're nation-building, trying to tell people who have [had] dictators or worse for centuries how to run their own countries. Assad is bad. Maybe these people could be worse" (The Guardian, 2016). Speaking at a news conference with the visiting Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, Trump said he had "no preconditions" for a meeting with the Iranians, adding, "I would certainly meet with Iran if they wanted to meet" (Aljazeera, 2018).

Therefore, it is hard to conclude that he is seeking regime change in Iran, even though people around him prefer such an option. After firing John Bolton as National Security Advisor, Trump tweeted: "[He] gets fired because frankly, if I listened to him, we would be in World War Six by now" (Axios, 2020). Or, after Iran's missile attack at the Ain al-Assad airbase, Trump tried to downplay the attack and expressed that Iran appears "to be standing down" after and that "the American people should be extremely grateful and happy no Americans were harmed."(NPR, Jan. 8, 2020) All these stances mean that war against Iran is not his top priority.

## III. Iran's Perception of Trump Policies

The content of interviews and statements of President Trump and other officials of his administration, especially the 12 conditions listed by Mike Pompeo during a speech at the Heritage Foundation in Washington, DC, on May 21, 2018, indicate that

the Trump administration's demands for Iran boil down to four main themes:

1. Iran behaves like a normal state domestically and internationally and stops its "malign activities";

2. Iran dismantles its nuclear enrichment and sophisticated missiles program;

3. Iran stops sponsoring militia groups such as Hezbollah, Hamas, Ansar Allah (the Houthi movement), Al-Hashd al-Shaabi and others;

4. Iran stops threatening Israel and the US allies such as Saudi Arabia.

If we compare these demands with what ex-President Bill Clinton had put forth as his Iran containment policy (1995), we will find out that there is no much difference. Just the wording has changed a little, and the umbrella of the US allies has been extended to states such as Saudi Arabia and does not merely include Israel. The list of militia groups has expanded as well and includes Yemeni Ansar Allah and Iraqi Al-Hashd al-Shaabi.

From the perspective of Iranian Ayatollahs, the US policy against Iran has not changed since Jimmy Carter's time in office in 1979. In 1984, the U.S. State Department identified Iran as a 'state sponsor of terrorism,' and Mike Pompeo termed it "the world's foremost state sponsor of terrorism." The policy of Donald Trump aligns with that of his predecessors and is an extension of the longstanding US animus against Iran. In Iranian leaders' perception, the deep roots of Iran-US antagonism after the 1979 Revolution and in the first Trump administration can be reduced to three denials: denial of Iran's identity, denial of Iran's independence, and denial of the Muslim people's self-determination. Ayatollah Khamenei has set out the current Iranian strategy in response to Trump's 'maximum pressure' as "neither war nor negotiations" (english.khamenei.ir/ May 14, 2019). He has always cast doubt on the effectiveness of any negotiations with the United States with unequal political conditions. Given the overwhelming veto power of the 'Supreme Leader' and the

military-political influence of the Revolutionary Guards in Iran's political structure, it looks no voice inside Iran supports negotiations with the Trump administration, especially after the assassination of Major Major Qasem Soleimani .

The reformists and political wings such as the so-called Green Movement in Iran have signaled that not everybody in Iran views the United States in terms of a good versus evil duality. But the Iranian moderates who have already shown positive signals to the West, especially under Hassan Rouhani era, have been politically discredited after Trump's adoption of the 'maximum pressure policy.' "Power at the moment is invested in the Supreme Leader and with the Revolutionary Guard and these are really the two axes that operate," said Ali Ansari, a professor of Iranian history at the University of St Andrews (ABC News, 2020). After the assassination of Major Qasem Soleimani , IRCG has been representing itself as a forerunner of Iranian nationalism, defending the aspirations of an ancient and proud people (The Conversation, 2020). Now, there is consensus among different political factions inside Iran that the United States is false-hearted, its demands are equivalent to the full capitulation of Iran, it lies by saying that humanitarian transactions are exempt from the sanctions, it doesn't believe in face-saving negotiations and there is no guarantee that likely agreements by the future US administrations will be adhered to. "We know what we are doing. When the US says, 'let us negotiate', it does not mean, 'let us find a fair solution'. No, it means 'let us sit at the negotiating table and then you accept whatever we say.' This is what they mean by negotiations… A negotiation in which we have to accept this and that terms is meaningless" Khamenei said (english.khamenei.ir/ Sep. 17, 2019).

In Iranian leaders' perspective, behaving like a normal state means transforming the identity of Iran as an Islamic system that has challenged the US hegemony in the region. Being a normal state means that Iran ceases being a 'rogue state,' a term that Bill Clinton had coined, and stops opposing the American interests in

the Middle East. Elsewhere, Henry Kissinger had once said, "[Iran must] decide whether it is a country or a cause" (Benjamin and Simon, 2019). The rulers in Iran maintain that one of the most important reasons behind the hostility between Iran and the United States is the formation of a theocratic system, or a so-called 'religious democracy' in Iran, the most prominent characteristic of which is opposition to the US order, arrogance, and domination in the Middle East. In some of his writings, the American scholar Daniel Pipes notes that political Islam is inherently opposed to the West. He writes, "Americans know an opponent when they see him," and, "like Communism during the Cold War, Islam is a threat to the West" (Quoted in Gerges, 1999: 24). Iranian leaders have held this belief, so the phenomenon of the Islamic Revolution of Iran is no longer only a conventional domestic issue; it is the wave that this revolution has created, laying the foundation for Islamic movements across the Middle East and North Africa. That is why Iran's Supreme Leader views anti-US ideology as the main reason for Washington's hostility to Iran: "The position of the Islamic Revolution is the offensive; the offensive against the oppressive and oppressive system [the US] that is rife in today's world politics. It Invades the US domination system" (Resalat Daily, 2009). In his opinion, it makes no difference who is in the White House. The complicated architecture of the longstanding sanctions against Iran since 1979 provides that regardless of who is in the White House - whether Republican or Democrat, an increasing trend of pressure against Iran has been institutionalized as an indispensable component of the US foreign policy. Therefore, the rotation of politicians in the White House only changes the tone of the rhetoric, not the general anti-Iran policy of the United States. "There is the same wolfish quality, the same international dictatorship, the same malevolence, and the same desire for having no limits – it has no limits and borders. The US is the same US. Of course, it has weakened today," Khamenei said (english.khamenei.ir/ Sep. 17, 2019). Therefore, anti-Americanism has become part of the political

identity of Iran in the post-revolution era. "Enmity with the United States is the main pillar of the ideology of Islamic Iran" Sadegh Zibakalam, a professor of political science at the University of Tehran tweeted (@sadeghZibakalam, 2018).

Importantly, Iranian leaders believe the idea which has guided the US foreign policy for the past two hundred years is domination and empire-building. There are no public speeches or statements in which Ayatollah Khamenei does not call the United States' world arrogance' or 'enemy,' which has been seeking to dominate Iran, the Middle East, and even the world. In a content analysis of Ayatollah Khamenei's 51 speeches and messages in March 2019 to March 2020, it is found that he used 131 thousand words in which he applied 451 times the word "enemy" hinting to the US and 424 times the word "US" and its derivatives. Moreover, he applied adjectives such as "malice", "evil" and "satan" for the US performance against Iran (Radio Farda, 2020). This idea has been elaborated by W. E. Williams, author of 'The Empire as a Way of Life,' and is an essential feature of the US culture, reflecting not only the aspirations of GPO strategists, but the aspirations of the majority of the US politicians. He writes, "Empire had been inherent in American history from the outset" (Quoted in Finzsch, Wellenreuther, 2002:129 and 137). Iranian rulers concur with Noam Chomsky who believes the socio-economic elites who exert control upon the United States have pursued an 'Imperial Grand Strategy' since the end of World War II to maintain global hegemony through military, political, and economic means. Chomsky is of the opinion that the end goal of this strategy is to deter any challenge to the "power, position, and prestige of the United States." This dominance–seeking attitude of the United States has been so deeply institutionalized that it has become the basis for its behavior at all domestic, national, and international levels. Contrary to Marxism's determinism, Chomsky maintains that America's dominance–seeking attitude has been chosen deliberately (Chomsky, 2007:11-51).

Iranian leaders believe the United States Empire seeks to

assert its political, cultural, and economic dominance over the entire world in the post-Cold War era, especially the Middle East. So, a country that wishes to resist this domination would face a backlash by the United States. Iranian leaders believe they stand up against this empire and hold onto their independence by fighting tooth and claw and thereby pay heavy costs.

In Ayatollah Khamenei's opinion, the United States has struggled to keep up its technological, military, and monetary superiority to maintain its global dominance. He says it tries to give a humanitarian, altruistic impression to facilitate its dominance. He uses the metaphor of 'iron hand with velvet glove': "The so-called 'gentlemen' around the negotiating table are the same terrorists of the Baghdad airport [hinting at the assassination of Qassem Soleimani]. They are the same. The iron hand emerged from the velvet glove and revealed itself" (english.khamenei.ir/ Jan. 17, 2020).  He believes, "it is in the nature of global imperialism to show enmity towards a system such as the Islamic Republic. Their interests are 180 degrees different from each other. Global imperialism is about treachery, waging wars, creating and organizing terrorist groups, suppressing freedom-seeking groups, and exerting pressure over the oppressed–such as the oppressed people of Palestine and countries like Palestine. This is in the nature of global imperialism" (english.khamenei.ir/ June 3, 2016). To undermine the legitimacy of the competing powers, the United States labels all actors such as Iran who behave outside the framework of the US norm and interests as rogue states, implementing punitive measures against them whenever possible. In line with this idea, Chomsky says, "successful defiance can inspire others to pursue the same course. The 'virus' can 'spread contagion', as Kissinger put it when laboring to overthrow Salvador Allende in Chile. The need to destroy such viruses and inoculate victims against contagion—commonly by imposing harsh dictatorships—is a leading principle of world affairs" (Chomskey, 2019).

As perceived by the Iranian leaders, the influence of the

Islamic Revolution on Islamic movements in the Middle East and the emergence of the Revolution as a model for confronting US policies represent another major reason for hostility toward Iran by the United States. "We do not distinguish between Gaza, Palestine, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Bahrain, and Yemen. Oppression against nations should be condemned everywhere. We approve of national movements that shout Islamic slogans and seek freedom," Khamenei said (english.khamenei.ir/ March 21, 2011).

In Iran, it is believed that Islamic movements across the Middle East including the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Lebanon, Bahrain, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and so on mainly stem from their domestic circumstances, not Iran. Underdevelopment, dictatorship, neo-colonialism, and occupation are the main variables explaining the revival of Islamism in the region. Iran has only become the scapegoat of despots, colonizers, and occupiers (Hedges, 2019). But the ideology of the Islamic Revolution fulfills an auxiliary and facilitating role, because it contradicts the interests of Israel and conservative governments such as Saudi Arabia. It was after the Iranian revolution that the legitimacy and political stability of conservative Arab states such as Saudi Arabia was further undermined. Powerful anti-Israeli movements have emerged in the region as well as inside Palestine after 1979, and Israel has faced an existential threat. It means that Muslim nations across the Middle East, especially in the occupied territories have been seeking self-determination. The Iranian regime considers it its religious duty to assist these movements. But the United States, through supporting Israel and despots in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, and other countries, has denied the basic rights of these people to self-determination. Tehran is of the view that there is now a coalition against Iran under the US leadership connecting three groups: First, the Saudi royal family and other Arab despots; second, the Israeli state, especially under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and third, the US politicians, national security bureaucrats and lobbyists from AIPAC and FDD whose job and financial interests conform to animosity against Iran and

stoking Iranophobia. It is in the interest of these three groups that the Tehran-Washington relationships never improve. Iran's perception is that the Trump administration represents this coalition (Zamani and Niyakuei, 2019: 105-109).

Iranian leader maintains that independence is another important reason for the US' hostility toward Iran. As a country where the former Shah regime had been policing the United States' interests for many years, Iran now can take pride in its independence, which is unacceptable to the United States. In this regard, the Supreme Leader of Iran says, "the US has owned Iran for a long time, the revolution has taken it out; it does not want to stop [destroying it] until it again dominates Iran" (Khamenei.ir, Feb. 17, 2016). In supporting this claim, Noam Chomsky says, "I presume that the main reason is that Iran is just too independent and disobedient. Great powers do not tolerate that in what they take to be their domains" (Tehran Times, 2009). He goes on, "The (US) hatred of Iran is such a deep-seated part of modern American culture. To eradicate it is going to be very hard" (Financial Tribune, 2018). Iranian leaders maintain that the United Kingdom sanctions on Iran in 1953 over Iranian oil and the latest US maximum pressure sanctions share a common goal – to punish Iran for its independence. "Both of them (the sanctions 70 years ago and the new ones) are attempts to punish Iran for its independence," said Stephen Kinzer, the author of 'All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror.' Therefore, the authorities of Iran refer to demands such as the dismantlement of its uranium enrichment facilities, anytime and anywhere inspections, abandonment of its missiles programs, and changing its Middle East policy as evidence that the US cannot tolerate an independent Iran. In other words, the US wants a weakened and tamed Iran, not independent and powerful. Tehran believes the negotiating table with the United States is not a trade-off venue, it is a crucible for capitulation. "The other side [US] considers Iran's accepting and sitting at the negotiating table as bringing the Islamic Republic to its knees. It wants to say that they

have finally managed to bring Iran to its knees with severe sanctions until it agreed to sit at the negotiating table with them" Khamenei said (english.khamenei.ir/ Nov. 3, 2019). Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif interprets Trump's signals to negotiation as Iran's submission: "the U.S. wants regime change, Israel seeks war. Secretary Pompeo puts 12 conditions for negotiations with Iran which means surrender, and I think he is dreaming" (The Iran Primer, 2019).

## Conclusion

After the presidency of Hassan Rouhani in 2013, it was expected that tensions between Iran and the United States would be toned down. However, despite the positive expectations, it appears that there is a deep mistrust among leaders, elites, and even groups of people in the US-Iran relations. In the present paper, from the US perspective, six reasons including Donald Trump's obsession with Barack Obama's legacy, wrong belief in the fruitfulness of maximum pressure campaign, the so-called deficiencies in JCPOA, perceived threats of Iran's regional policy, the so-called threats of Iran's missiles programs, and cost-effective calculations tempted the US president to withdraw from an international multilateral agreement which was endorsed by the UNSC Resolution 2231. To be sure, the pressure groups and think tanks such as AIPAC, FDD, and states such as Israeli regime and Saudi Arabia, as well as ultra-conservatives both in Iran and the United States, have constantly influenced rapprochement in the relations between the two countries negatively. The conflict is sometimes so acute that it has nearly resulted in military confrontations between the two sides, particularly after the assassination of Major Qasem Soleimani .

The prolongation of the conflict is partly due to the longevity of the hostility, nature of the Islamic system in Iran, misperceptions, as well as the developments that have molded the history of the two countries. As it was argued, the Trump administration might prefer a new nuclear deal, but Iranian

authorities perceived it as regime change. So long as Iran perceives the US gesture on negotiation as a precursor to capitulation, degradation, and regime change, and the impasse in Iran-US relations will continue. So a negative and adversary image has been developed of the US by Iranian leaders which look unshakable by changing US presidents. On the other hand, Trump administration often has asked Iran to the negotiation table, but it ignores the splendid Iranian pride, the principles of respect, equality, and fair win-win solutions. This attitude makes Iran consolidate its negative image of the US government and be reluctant to negotiate. As long as Iran perceives the Washington gestures for negotiations as humiliating, arrogant and aimed at capitulation by Tehran, and Washington conforms to the agenda of Israel and Saudi Arabia in framing its Iran policy, it is unlikely that any fundamental improvement will happen in the two state's relations in the near future.

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