

IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY IN THE 2000s:
A NEO-REALIST PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis aims to analyze the foreign policy of Iran in a historical perspective in the 2000s. In this context, the details of the 9/11 attacks to the US, its foreign policy change as a response to the terrorist attacks and the region-wide uprisings called as Arab Spring were underlined and their effects towards the Iranian foreign policy were discussed. The thesis argues that Iranian foreign policy in the 2000s can best be explained via neo-realist theory by attaching highest importance on the country's survival in the anarchic nature of the regional system and its national/regional interests in the regional balance of power considering the capabilities of the state and the structure of the regional and international systems. Despite the arguments claiming that Iran's foreign policy was driven by ideological motives or based on a cycle of idealism and realism since its establishment, this thesis maintains that the calculation of opportunities and threats in each case and the positioning of Iran prioritizing state interests following this calculation are the dominant motives in Iran's foreign policy behavior since 1979. This study also asserts that although the Arab Spring uprisings posed major threats while also offering great opportunities to Iran to follow an ideologically-motivated foreign policy, Iran did not change its neo-realist foreign policy outlook considering its capabilities and the limits of the regional and international political systems.

Keywords: Iran, Foreign Policy, Neo-realism, the 9/11, the Arab Spring,

ÖZ

İRAN'IN 2000'LERDEKİ DİŞ POLİTİKASI: NEO-REALIST BİR BAKIŞ AÇISI

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Bu çalışma, 2000'lerdeki İran dış politikasını tarihsel bir çerçeve içerisinde incelemeyi amaçlamıştır. Bu çerçevede, ABD'yi hedef alan 11 Eylül saldırıları, bu saldırılara cevap olarak değişen ABD dış politikası ve Arap Baharı olarak adlandırılabilir bölgesel ayaklanmaların üzerinde durulmuş ve bu gelişmelerin İran dış politikası üzerindeki etkileri tartışılmıştır. Bu çalışma, 2000'lerdeki İran dış politikasının en iyi, devletin kudretini ve bölgesel ve uluslararası sistemlerin yapısını dikkate alarak, bölgesel sistemin anarşik yapısı içerisindeki ülkenin bekasına ve bölgesel güç dengesi içerisindeki ulusal/bölgesel çıkarlarına en yüksek düzeyde önem atfeden neo-realist teori yoluyla açıklanabileceğini savunmaktadır. Kurulduğundan bu yana İran dış politikasının ideolojik amaçlarla yönlendirildiğine veya idealizm ve realizmin bir döngüsüne dayandığına dair iddialara rağmen; bu tez yaşanan her bir olayın yaratacağı fırsat ve tehditlerin hesaplanmasının, ve bu hesaplamayı takiben İran'ın, devletin çıkarlarını ön planda tutarak konumlanmasının İran'ın 1979 sonrası dış politikasındaki baskın nedenler olduğunu belirtmektedir. Bu çalışma ayrıca, Arap Baharı ayaklanmaları İran'a tehdit yöneltmenin yanı sıra ideolojik bir dış politika izleyebilmesi için önemli fırsatlar sunsa da; İran'ın, kudreti ve bölgesel ve uluslararası siyasi sistemlerin sınırlarını gözeterek, neo-realist dış politikasında bir değişikliğe gitmediğini savunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İran, Dış Politika, Neo-realizm, 11 Eylül, Arap Baharı

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAGIARISM	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
ÖZ.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	ix
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: 1979-2001	9
2.1. Foreign Policy of the New Regime until the Iran-Iraq War	9
2.2. The Iran-Iraq War	22
2.3. The Gulf War of 1991 and the Collapse of the USSR.....	27
2.4. Conclusion	36
3. THE PERIOD FROM 9/11 TO THE ARAB SPRING.....	38
3.1. The 9/11 Attacks and the US Invasion of Afghanistan	39
3.2. The US Invasion of Iraq	42
3.2.1. Alliance Building with the Regional Actors	47
3.2.2. Benefiting From the Shiite Empowerment.....	49
3.2.3. Nuclear Program as a Tool for Regional Leadership	52
3.2.4. Embracing the Arab-Israeli Conflict	56
3.3. Conclusion	58
4. THE ARAB SPRING AND BEYOND	60
4.1. The Arab Spring and Its Geostrategic Effects	60
4.2. The Maghreb Region	64
4.3. The Gulf Region	69
4.4. The Levant Region	78
4.5. Conclusion	86
5. CONCLUSION	88

REFERENCES.....	101
APPENDICES.....	111
A. TURKISH SUMMARY.....	112
B. TEZ FOTOKOPİSİ İZİN FORMU	123

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AWACS	Airplane Warning and Control System
CENTO	Central Eastern Treaty Organization
EC	European Community
EU	European Union
FJP	Freedom and Justice Party
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NPT	Non-Proliferation Treaty
OIC	Organization of Islamic Conference
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
US	United States of America
USSR	United Soviet Socialist Republic
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the beginning of the 2000s, international political scene and the Middle East region experienced significant developments. First, a series of coordinated terrorist attacks were launched upon the US. The planes which were hijacked by terrorists crashed into the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon in Washington D.C. and a field in Pennsylvania, in September 11, 2001. As a response to these attacks, the United States launched a war against terrorism and invaded Afghanistan and Iraq in two years after the 9/11 attacks. Therefore, the balance of power in the Middle East changed fundamentally in the aftermath of the growing presence of the US in the region and the elimination of the ruling regimes in the two countries by force.

The Islamic Republic of Iran was one of the actors in the region that were affected by these developments and the changes in the balance of power. It was labeled as one of the “Axis of Evil” countries with Iraq and North Korea, which were helping terrorism or seeking weapons of mass destruction by George W. Bush, who has been the 43th President of the US from 2001 to 2009. In addition, the presence of the US military grew in Iran’s borders and this growth posed a major threat against Iran’s national security and interests. On the other hand, the elimination of Taliban and Saddam Hussein regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq created a power vacuum in the regional politics. In parallel with the regional political system based on the power struggle and the balance of power principles, it was expected that this vacuum would be filled by one or more actors. Therefore, as an isolated country from the regional and global politics since its establishment because of its policies which were perceived as a threat by the regional and outside countries against their security; Iran necessitated positioning itself in response to these opportunities and threats.

In addition, the Middle East region has experienced a similar period since the end of 2010. The mass movement, called as “Arab Spring” or “Arab Awakening” has essentially affected the regional politics. The waves of protests which first emerged

in Tunisia have spread to different countries in the MENA region with similar demands. With respect to the domestic characteristics of these uprisings, it can be argued that they are all linked with common problems for the regional countries. In brief, the power struggle and the regional balance of power which were altered in the aftermath of the 9/11 events and the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, evolved into a different context. Because the uprisings have threatened the existence of the ruling regimes in many regional countries, Iran, like other actors, felt obliged to position itself according to the uprisings and their outcomes.

With a view to have a better understanding of this positioning in Iranian foreign policy, great deal of studies have been conducted by researchers from a wide range of theoretical perspectives. The literature on the foreign policy outlook of Iran since its establishment has made great contributions to our knowledge and enriched our understanding of the motives which drive the Iranian foreign policy. Therefore, this thesis aims to analyze the Iranian foreign policy in the 2000s by focusing on the 9/11 attacks, the Arab Spring and their aftermath. It uses the conceptual framework of “neo-realism” to understand the motives affecting the foreign policy-making of the Iranian elite. In this respect, the studies of Kenneth Waltz, who is known as the father of neo-realist theory in the international relations, have been very valuable for this study.

In this context, this study started with the question of which motives drive Iran to determine and follow its foreign policy, following the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. In addition, this thesis exerts efforts to answer the questions on whether ideological motivations defined in the Constitution of Iran or by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, which was the leader of the Islamic Revolution, affected the foreign policy outlook of Iran and to what extent and through which tools and strategies these motivations affected Iranian foreign policy.

As one of the factions of realism, neo-realists or structural realists followed a different path when trying to understand the states’ actions in the system. By accepting some of the main propositions of classical or modern realist thinkers (anarchic nature of the system, sovereign states’ primal role as the actors of the

system, the role of power among the interactions of states, etc.); they preferred a different level of analysis in order to define the structure of the system.

Like the realists claim, fundamental ordering principle of the international system is the state of anarchy. This does not refer to a situation of chaos and violence instead it refers to the absence of a central monopoly of legitimate force which is able to enforce rules and other behavior. States are taken to be the system's constituent units and they generate the order in the system. This leads to the idea that the existence of other constituent units is not denied.¹ However, their influences over the foreign policy decisions of the nation states are very limited.

Moreover, states are unitary actors whose primary concern is their survival. As system theories explain the reason why different units in the system behave similarly instead of explaining the reason of behaving differently despite their similar placement in the system; structural realism tells us about the forces to which the units are subjected. According to Waltz, what we have to do is to take states as states without paying attention to the differences among them.² The questions are then answered with reference to the place of the units in their system not with reference to the internal qualities of the units.³ Based upon the assumption of anarchy in the international political system, the primary desire of the states is their survival. The lack of a central authority above the states effectively guarantees it; self-help and the pursuit of security through their own efforts are the "rational" principles of action for the states operating in this order.

¹ Waltz classified theories of international relations into three categories or levels of analysis: international politics driven by primarily actions of individuals, or levels of psychological forces; driven by the domestic regimes of states; driven by the systemic factors or the effect that international anarchy was exerting on state behavior. However it should be accepted that in the era of globalization, a forth level of analysis need to be added to the theory: transnational actors and motives such as international terrorism, NGOs, international religious and/or political movements and multinational corporations. These are the newly appeared units having impact on inter-state politics. For details, see: Kenneth Waltz, "The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol.18, No.4, (Spring 1988), p. 619.

² Waltz (1988), *Ibid.*, p. 619.

³ *Ibid.*

According to Waltz and other structural realists, security is a scarce resource and there is no absolute security as the nature of it implies. It only exists in the lack of insecurity relative to the perceived threats.⁴ The perceived threat is commonly referred to as “military insecurity”, the potential of mass violence of “others”. The most widely accepted pragmatic solution to such threats has been self-armament, and display a sufficient level of martial prowess to deter aggressors. Due to the anarchic order of interstate politics, such threats to the security of national states are abound.⁵

There is a significant divide between structural realists about how much power is required to perceive security. Defensive realists like Waltz maintain that only to gain as much power as they can assure their security comparing to the other countries is wise because otherwise, the system will punish them if they attempt to gain too much power. On the other side, offensive realists like Mearsheimer, supports gaining as much power as possible and if possible pursuing hegemony.⁶ For structural realists, power is a means to an end and the ultimate end is survival.

Because “measures that enhance one state’s security typically diminish that of others” and of the relative conventional insecurity of how actors traditionally remain suspicious to each other and often hostile to the motives of the other; there is always a “Security Dilemma”, where competing countries compare their strengths and where the (in)security perception of a country depends on how it compares to others in the quantity and quality of its weaponry, the suitability of its strategy, the resilience of its society and economy and the skill of its leaders.⁷

The “dilemma” arises when this country’s amassing instruments of war even for its own defense, are (so often) perceived by others as a threat requiring a response. Thus, this perception leads to a counter-armament of other countries and in the end, mutual armament to enhance security is finalized with the increasing

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ John J. Mearsheimer, “Structural Realism”, *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, Vol.83, (2007), p. 72.

⁷ Waltz (1988), *Ibid.*, p. 627.

insecurity in the international system. According to Waltz, the pre-occupation of nation states by identifying threats and counteracting them becomes “a way of life”.⁸ This dilemma and conundrum are major sources of instability and conflict because in addition to the individual actions for self-help, collectivity of these actions yields arms races and alliances. Therefore, the anarchy has become the norm throughout the human history.⁹

As nature abhors vacuum, the international politics abhors unbalanced power, according to Waltz.¹⁰ Therefore, even without the existence of a clear and grave threat, the mere existence of an unbalanced state creates the insecurity of the weaker ones. So, this gives the weaker nations a reason to strengthen their position with alliances and armament. Waltz argues that because the concentrated power invites mistrust and the possibility of misuse, overwhelming power leads others to try to balance against it.¹¹

In consistent with the neo-realist argument that the events such as victories in major wars dramatically skew the balance of power in the system, when a dominant coalition emerged, international equilibrium is broken until the inevitable restoration of the equilibrium through balancing behavior of the other side(s). This is because a powerful state’s behavior for even acting for the sake of justice, peace and well-being in the world will be automatically perceived as threats to the interests of the other states.¹²

Within this scope, this thesis aims to question the argument that Iran has followed a neo-realist foreign policy since its establishment, as Barzegar, Ehteshami and Zweiri also claimed. In line with this thought, this thesis maintains that considering the opportunities and threats of the international and regional political

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 619.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Kenneth Waltz, “Structural Realism After the Cold War,” *International Security*, Vol. 25, No.1 (Summer 2000), p.28.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

systems, the foreign policy outlook of Iran was driven by neo-realist considerations via prioritizing country's survival in the anarchic nature of the international system, maximizing its power for self-help, strategic calculations of opportunities and restraints of each case individually towards Iran's interests and role in the international and regional balance of power. Although on the contrary it has been asserted that since its establishment, "Iran's foreign policy is based on a holistic constructivism mostly driven by its revolutionary values and ideological perspectives than the logic of the state"¹³, or "there has been a tension between ideology and pragmatism and a cycle of idealism and realism"¹⁴ in the making of Iranian foreign policy"¹⁵; this thesis stands with the first group and tries to demonstrate that although emergence of the sectarian politics and the Shiite empowerment since the US invasion of Iraq created new dynamics in the region, they were rather seen as a strategic instrument for Iran's regional role than creating an ideological outlook in Iran's foreign policy. Because of the effects of these new dynamics towards the regional balance of power and Iran's role in it, this study aims to focus mainly on 2000s in order to test the argument that Iran has continued to follow a neo-realist foreign policy in this period. The question whether there is any change in Iran's foreign policy after the Arab Spring is discussed in the fourth chapter.

This thesis consists of three main chapters. The first chapter analyzes the historical background of Iranian foreign policy-making from the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979 to the 9/11 events in 2001. This chapter is divided into three main sections, each focusing on major regional events which can be considered as milestones for the regional politics. The first section mainly focuses on the period between 1979 and September 1980, when the Iran-Iraq War started, the second section focuses on the period from 1980 to 1990, when the Gulf War of 91 started,

¹³ Mahdi Mohammad Nia, "A Holistic Constructivist Approach to Iran's Foreign Policy", *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, Vol.2, No.4, (2001), pp. 282-283.

¹⁴ The concept refers to a series of change in the Iranian foreign policy in which at times ideology overbalanced Iran's interests, and at times state interests prevailed. For details, see: Rouhollah K. Ramazani, "Ideology and Pragmatism in Iran's Foreign Policy", *The Middle East Journal*, Vol.58, No.4, (2004), pp. 1-11.

¹⁵ Ramazani (2004), Ibid., pp. 1-11

and the third section focuses on the period from 1990 to 2001, when the 9/11 attacks occurred. The main idea of dividing the chapter into these specific sections is emphasizing the effect of these events towards the balance of power of the region. Both the Iran-Iraq War and the Gulf War fundamentally affected the relative power of Iran and its role within the regional balance of power. The chapter is vital for this thesis because the Iranian foreign policy in the aftermath of the 9/11 events and the Arab Spring uprisings, was defined and tested for the first time in this period within the context of this study. Therefore, the ideological motivations, which were defined in the Constitution and announced by Khomeini in this period, made great contributions on testing the argument that Iran followed a neo-realist foreign policy since the 9/11 events.

After examining the historical background of Iranian policy-making until 2001, the study continues with analyzing the period from 2001 to 2010. In this chapter, the dramatic alteration in the regional balance of power in the aftermath of US foreign policy change towards the region as a respond to 9/11 attacks and Iranian positioning towards this change in response to the threat directed towards its national security are examined under two main sections. The argument that Iran followed a neo-realist foreign policy is tested via focusing on the major events which affected the regional balance of power and power struggle for and against Iran, and the major strategies and tools to implement its foreign policy in this period. In the first section, how the 9/11 attacks and the US invasion of Afghanistan affected the regional balance of power and how Iran responded to these changes are analyzed. In the second section, the impact of the US invasion of Iraq towards the power struggle in the region and Iran's foreign policy are examined by underlining the main strategies and tools to implement its foreign policy after this event.

Finally, the third chapter focuses on the Arab Spring uprisings which emerged in Tunisia in December 2010 and their effects on the regional system. After underlining the details of these uprisings in different countries in three sections, each spotlights the regions where the uprisings emerged; this thesis seeks to find out

whether there are any changes or continuities in Iran's foreign policy in response to these events and their outcomes.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: 1979-2001

The main aim of this chapter is to analyze the foreign policy of the newly established Islamic Republic following the Islamic Revolution in 1979 until the 9/11 attacks to US in 2001. The analysis is going to be made in three different sections. In the first part, how the foreign policy outlook of the newly established Islamic regime was defined by the rulers, and how successful they were to follow the elements on the foreign policy agenda is going to be discussed. Since it is believed that the Iran-Iraq War and Iran's experiences in it were quite instrumental on affecting the regional balance of power, the second section is going to focus on Iran's foreign policy between the periods of the Iran-Iraq War and the Gulf War. By highlighting the end of the Cold War and the periods of Rafsanjani and Khatami's presidencies, systemic changes in the regional politics and as a response, Iran's restructuring of its foreign policy discourse and outlook is going to be examined in this part. Finally, the chapter will be concluded with the 9/11 events in 2001, when the regional power struggle and its rules were completely changed following a series of terrorist attacks to various targets in the US.

2.1. Foreign Policy of the New Regime until the Iran-Iraq War

Following the establishment of the Islamic Republic, Iran has defined the main objectives of its foreign policy based on the revolutionary spirit and ideological characteristics of the revolution, in theory by Khomeini's statements and by the constitution. As it will be mentioned below, Iran has mainly focused on following a neo-realist foreign policy based on rational principles of action considering the relative power of the new regime and the limits of the regional and international political systems. In some exceptional cases, the ideological discourse of the Islamic regime dragged the country into a conflict or crisis with regional or outside actors. During these cases, the pros and cons of continuing and fuelling this conflict were always calculated by the rulers of the regime and a decision was made according to

the calculation. However, when the security and survival of the regime and state were in significant danger, the foreign policy behavior prioritizing Iran's national interests became predominant.

As Ehteshami and Zweiri underlined, all revolutions declare their guiding ideals, creeds, and principles at one time or another and in one form or the other. The Americans declared their "unalienable rights" and "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness", the French proclaimed their commitment to "*liberté* (liberty), *égalité* (equality) and *fraternité* (brotherhood)"; and the Iranians called for *Esteqlal* (independence), *Azadi* (freedom): *Jomhuri Eslami* (Islamic Republic)".¹⁶ In line with the Islamic Republic's ideological credentials, its constitution states that Iran's foreign policy is based on four fundamental principles: the rejection of all forms of external domination; the preservation of Iran's independence and territorial integrity; the defense of the rights of all Muslims without allying with hegemonic powers; and the maintenance of peaceful relations with all non-belligerent states. The hatred towards the Shah rule, his close alliance with the US and the active presence of the US in the region either physically or strategically via its crony regional states strongly affected the motives of the Islamists who came to power after the Revolution.

All of these abovementioned fundamental principles of the new regime's foreign policy were rooted in Islamic terms and concepts. According to Khomeini, "Islam is everything...and as the only country being ruled by guardianship by a jurist (*Velayet-i Faqih*) system, the Islamic Republic must be the leader of the Muslim community (*umma*) and all the suppressed people (*mostazafin*) of the world through their fight (*cihad*) against the suppressors (*mosteqbir*)".¹⁷ Therefore, the adaptation of the Islamic concepts of the doctrine of Oneness/unity (*tevhid*), community (*ummah*), fight (*jihad*) and oppressed (*mostazafin*) led to an automatic theorization of a foreign policy outlook based on holism and negation. Khomeini's ideology

¹⁶ Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Mahjoob Zweiri, eds. *Iran's Foreign Policy: from Khatami to Ahmadinejad*, Sussex Academic Press, 2008, p. 1.

¹⁷ Rouhollah K. Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran: Challenge and Response in the Middle East*, Vol. 237, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press (1986), p. 142.

combining populism, Shi'ism and revolutionism constituted the ideological basis of Iranian foreign policy¹⁸ and it will be seen that this ideological outlook defined by Khomeini continued even after his death and Iran's foreign policy was constricted to the ideological framework Khomeini defined.

In parallel with its negative and ideological outlook, Iran rejected the Westphalian concept of the international system and the nation-states' role as "the creatures of weak human minds".¹⁹ Considering the revolutionary characteristic of the Islamic Republic, the challenge it posed towards the international system is normal as experienced in French and Russian revolutions. The rejection of the system and the emphasis on the concept of the oppressed (*mostazafin*) in the revolutionary ideology automatically brought the rejection of the hegemony of the outside actors (mainly the US and the USSR) which have at most benefited from the current system. Due to the fact that the current regional and international political systems were established by the US and the USSR, which were labeled as "satans" and "arch-enemies of Islam" by Khomeini, in favor of their national, regional and global interests; the continuation of the system would pose threats against the empowerment and regional role of Iran, and any normal relation with them is impossible.²⁰

Of course, the ideological framework attaching importance on the oppressed gave birth to an enmity towards Israel since the establishment of the Islamic regime. Since both countries were perceived as enemies and extrinsic actors of the regional politics by the Arab states, Iran and Israel had benefited from a strategic alliance in the past, in order to balance the Arab states in the regional political system. Nevertheless, since 1979, Israel has remained the enemy of Iran and Islam, and a

¹⁸ Rouhollah K. Ramazani, "Khumayni's Islam in Iran's Foreign Policy," *Islam in Foreign Policy*, (1983), p. 29.

¹⁹ Ehteshami and Zweiri (2008), *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²⁰ Shireen Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Resisting the New International Order*, Preager, 2010, p. 29.

threat to mankind, in the view of the Islamic regime.²¹ It is interesting that although many elements of the ambitious foreign policy outlook of the new regime had to be replaced with more neo-realist policies prioritizing the national interest of Iran, and the regime gradually renewed its ties with most countries which had been found blameworthy for the problems of Iran; Iran's attitude towards Israel has not yet changed.²² In fact, the rationale of this policy is the relatively low cost of such a conflictive outlook against the Israeli regime and the noteworthy benefits of embracing the Palestinian cause in the Arab-Israeli conflict for Iran in the Arab Street and regional politics.

In line with this outlook, the "Neither East, Nor West" understanding which rejected all kind of hegemony whether it comes from East or West, was defined as the fundamental principle of the Iran's foreign policy. The nature of this rejection made a confrontation between Iran and the great powers and their client states in the region as Israel, Egypt and Gulf kingdoms inevitable. That's why, a conflictual foreign policy rather than a reconciliatory one was the natural consequence, at this point.

"Non-alignment" was also understood within this general framework of the East-West dynamics. Khomeini saw the non-aligned foreign policy as a resistance against great powers on political, economic and cultural bases. According to him, the elimination of their hegemony on these bases must be one of the main goals of the non-aligned foreign policy outlook. Therefore, he called Iran's neighbors for "establishing similar governments with Iran, cutting their subservient ties with the superpowers, and to seek safety under the Iranian security umbrella (*chattr-e amniyat*)."²³ Therefore the "export the revolution" strategy of Iran became as much

²¹ David Menashri, "Iran, Israel and the Middle East Conflict 1", *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 12, No.1, (2006), p. 108.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 109.

²³ Ehteshami and Zweiri (2008), *Ibid.*, p. 8.

important orientation as the Neither East, nor West strategy.²⁴ This strategy aimed at establishing the Islamic Republic in Iran and strengthening it in the short run; securing the national interests of the country both in the region and the international system in the medium run; and creating a world order where Islam is dominant in the long run.²⁵ When this strategy first appeared as a theoretical goal to unite the Muslim community, it came into prominence as necessary for practical reasons. According to the classical revolutionary understanding, the security of the regime can be provided via the establishment of similar kinds of regimes in the neighboring countries.²⁶

Defining the enmity between the US and Islam instead of Iran was a strategic policy within this context in order to resist and fight the US. Considering the relative weakness and vulnerability of Iran following its establishment, it would not be for Iran's interests to single-handedly conflict with the US. Such a policy would lead to the elimination of the regime and preventing this kind of an event was one of the major priorities of the new regime at that time. However it was calculated that if Iran was successful in exporting the revolution to the Muslim countries and uniting the Islamic front against the great powers, the regional system at that period would collapse and a new system in line with Iran's interests would be founded. Therefore, although the roots of Iran's foreign policy were ideologically defined in the Islamic Republic' constitution and in the statements of regime's "Guardian", Khomeini, as underlined above; the continuing process of state building and power concentration in Iran and the limits of the regional and international systems restrained the implementation of a purely ideological foreign policy as stated by Khomeini. However, the ideological motives were utilized to mobilize the masses and maximize consolidation of power and the legitimization of the regime in the hearts and minds of Iranian people.

²⁴ Maziar Behrooz, "Trends in the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979–1988", Teoksessa: Nikki R. Keddie & Mark J. Gasiorowski (toim.), *Neither East nor West: Iran, the Soviet Union, and the United States*, (1990), pp. 14-15.

²⁵ Rouhollah K. Ramazani, "Iran's Export of the Revolution: Politics, Ends, and Means", *The Iranian Revolution: Its Global Impact*, (1990), p. 50.

²⁶ Ramazani (1990), *Ibid.*, p. 41.

Just after overthrowing Reza Shah and the return of Khomeini to Iran, a provisional government was established with the premiership of Mehdi Bazargan in February, 11; 1979. There was a dual structure in the ruling regime in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution. While the government machinery was dominated by the liberal and nationalist moderates; the Islamists controlled the Revolutionary Council.²⁷ Because both factions supported a different political model for Iran following the Shah rule, there has been an ongoing struggle to maximize their role in the process of state restructuring.

The provisional government tried to maintain a neo-realist foreign policy by avoiding any direct conflict with any regional or outside powers in order to prevent any kind of a US intervention to topple the new regime and to ensure the survival of the regime. Although shocked by the toppling of the Shah, both the US and the USSR recognized the new regime in a short period of time because the existence of an Islamic Republic of Iran was now a reality. Within the context of the Cold War, it was rational that both countries should search for channels of dialogue with the new regime in order to attract Iran to their blocs.

The provisional government under Bazargan rejected the foreign policy roots of the Shah and put an independent and non-aligned foreign policy into practice. This foreign policy orientation was identical with the “negative balance doctrine” of Taqi Khan²⁸ in the mid-19th century and of Mohammad Mosaddegh²⁹ in the 1950s: Staying neutral and non-aligned towards Britain and Russia. According to Bazargan, the elimination of the close ties with the US that was established during the Shah

²⁷ It was a group formed by Khomeini to manage the Iranian revolution since his return to Iran until the establishment of the first parliament. For details, see: Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *After Khomeini: The Iranian Second Republic*, London: Routledge, 1995.

²⁸ He, Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir, was the Prime Minister of Persia under Naser al-Din Shah of Qajar dynasty and known as a modernizer who initiated important reforms in virtually all sectors of the society. Thanks to his negative balance doctrine, foreign interference in Iran’s domestic affairs was curtailed, and foreign trade was encouraged. For details, see: http://www.iranchamber.com/history/amir_kabir/amir_kabir.php, internet access: 04.05.2013.

²⁹ He was the democratically elected Prime Minister of Iran from 1951 until 1953, when his government was overthrown by a *coup d’etat* orchestrated by the British and American intelligence agencies. For details, see: <http://www.mohammadmosaddegh.com/biography>, internet access: 04.05.2013.

period was the prerequisite to follow an independent and non-aligned foreign policy.³⁰ This orientation was suitable with the Neither East, nor West strategy of Iran: It was announced that the relation with the US would be based on the principle of “equality” and the Islamic Republic would not play the role of US’ gendarmerie to protect its interest in the Middle East anymore.³¹ In parallel with Khomeini’s declaration on “re-organizing the Islamic Republic’s relations with imperialist countries or all the other countries being the tools of those imperialist ambitions”; the diplomatic relations with Israel and South Africa were also ceased. The new government declared that Iran left CENTO and 15 days after this declaration, Iran applied for the membership of the Non-Alignment Movement. Moreover, the PLO was officially recognized and the Embassy of Israel in Tehran was transformed into the Representation of the PLO. It was also declared that all the agreements signed with the US during the Shah period were cancelled (and other agreements with imperialist states would be reviewed) and all the military bases will be evacuated. Finally, many banks and corporations which were established as joint undertakings with foreign capital were nationalized. In short, all the steps were taken in order to negate the foreign policy outlook of the Shah’s rule and reset the factors of inter-state relations with regional and international actors. The common feature of these actions was that their political costs for Iran were minor in comparison to their considerable benefits for the internal balancing of the new regime.

Nevertheless, although the above-mentioned realities reflecting the paths followed by the Islamic Republic differing from those of Pahlavi’s Iran were compatible with the ideologically-defined foreign policy orientation of the new regime; the new government, in fact, tried to avoid any direct conflict with the US and the USSR. As experienced after nearly all revolutions, the primary focus of the new regime was to avoid any action which may threaten its survival and to primarily focus on constituting the domestic stability and power concentration. Therefore, because of the relatively weak position of the new regime, the provisional

³⁰ Ramazani (1990), *Ibid.*, p. 51.

³¹ Shireen T. Hunter and David D. Newsom, *Iran After Khomeini*, New York: Praeger, 1992, p. 109.

government was not willing to follow a conflictual and ideologically-driven foreign policy, but instead preferred a moderate and neo-realist foreign policy aiming at preserving the ongoing order within the system.

On the other side, because of the strategic importance of Iran, both great powers also attached great importance to dialogue with Iran in favor of their hegemonic interests. However, as the US Embassy Political Officer of Tehran at the time puts it, all attempts for the normalization of relations between the Carter administration and new provisional government were seen as the destruction of revolution by the students and a considerable part of the clergy.³² There was a dual understanding about the existence and continuation of the relations with the US in Iran. While the provisional government was willing to build relations with the US based on equality and neutrality because of the national interests of Iran, the Iranian public and the Islamists were against any alliance with the West or even any neutral relations toward it. They blamed Iran's problems on the West, and particularly the US.³³

Nevertheless, the two major events fuelled the anti-American feelings in Iran and manipulation of these feelings by Khomeini led Iran to a conflict which was against the country's national interests. First one was the Shah's admission to the US for medical treatment on October 22, 1979. Although he had cancer and needed treatment, "the sense of plot" was so widespread in Iran that it was "almost impossible to find anyone who believes the Shah is actually sick."³⁴ The revolutionaries in Iran perceived this event as the first step toward another *coup* to topple the government whose ideology is based on anti-Western feelings, similar to the 1953 *coup* that had overthrown the government of Iran's national hero, Dr. Mohammed Mosaddegh. The 1953 *coup* had become "the stuff of Iranian folklore

³² Interview with Micheal Metrisko by Charles Stuart Kennedy, 26.08.1999, <http://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Metrisko,%20Mike.toc.pdf>, internet access: 04.05.2013

³³ Mohammad Sahimi, "The Hostage Crisis: 30 Years on", *Frontline*, 03.11.2009, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009/11/30-years-after-the-hostage-crisis.html>, internet access: 04.05.2013

³⁴ David Patrick Houghton, "Explaining the Origins of the Iran Hostage Crisis: A Cognitive Perspective", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol.18, No.2, (2006), p. 269.

during the years in which the students were growing up, but this was something which US decision-makers never understood.”³⁵

Secondly, on November 1, 1979, the moderates of the government Mehdi Bazargan, the prime minister; Dr. Ebrahim Yazdi, the foreign minister; Dr. Mostafa Chamran, the defense minister, met briefly and secretly with the National Security Adviser of President Carter, Zbigniew Brzezinski in Algiers in order to discuss the Shah and the future of the US-Iranian relations. As a significant evidence for the government’s understanding on the foreign policy as struggling to gain a place in the regional political system by normalizing the relations with one of the dominant power of the regional and international political systems; this event led to the international crisis called as the “Hostage Crisis” only after 3 days from the meeting.

On November, 4, 1979, the American Embassy in Tehran was seized by the radical students; and 52 American diplomats were held captive for 444 days. Considering the admission of the Shah in US for medical treatment and the meeting of Iranian and American politicians in Algiers; the radical Islamist students from various universities, who were united under the Office for the Consolidation of Unity (OCU)³⁶, thought that something had to be done to send a message to the US and to prevent another *coup* by the US to topple the government. According to the students, the temporary closure of the embassy would also lead to the fall of the Bazargan government because he was fiercely opposed to such radical actions.³⁷ It happened as expected and in the aftermath of the seizure, Bazargan immediately resigned when he understood that Khomeini would not give order to the students to release the hostages and end the seizure. It is still ambiguous whether the takeover of the

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

³⁶ It was the Iranian student organization created in 1979 to combat leftist, more secular student groups with the initiative of Ayatollah Mohammad Behesti, who was Khomeini’s top confidant and a key figure in the clerical leadership, at a time. For details, see: Mehrdad Mashayekhi, "The Revival of the Student Movement in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol.15, No.2, (2001).

³⁷ Mohammad Sahimi, “The Hostage Crisis: 30 Years on”, *Frontline*, 03.11.2009, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009/11/30-years-after-the-hostage-crisis.html>, internet access: 04.05.2013.

Embassy took place with the implicit approval of Khomeini, but it is quite clear that the effect of this ideologically-motivated action was perfectly utilized by Khomeini and clergy to eliminate the moderate government, to consolidate their power in the regime, and to unite the Iranian people against an enemy.

In short, during the provisional government of Bazargan, despite some symbolic actions to prove the negation of Shah's foreign policy, the Islamic Republic followed a neo-realist foreign policy concerning the level of internal balancing of the new regime and the limits of the regional and international political systems by also avoiding to conflict with the ideological principles of the new regime as defined in the Constitution and declared by Khomeini. The government's main focus was to consolidate its domestic power and not to take steps to endanger the regime's survival in its foreign policy. Even the Hostage Crisis which led to a dramatic radicalization in foreign policy based on ideological motives and historical experiences was embraced by Khomeini only until the national interests of Iran and the survival of the regime fell into danger.

Although according to Khomeini, the seizure of the embassy had potential to lead to an attempt by the US aiming to end the crisis and topple the regime at the beginning (that's why he told Yazdi to "keep the students out"³⁸), he changed his mind when he saw the popularity of the takeover among the public. The crisis which emerged following an ideologically-driven action by the radical students has continued until the time when Iran's economy was hit by the US action on freezing Iran's assets in the US, totaling billions of dollars, and when the threat of war against Iraq appeared. Iran needed American-made spare parts for its military weapons, which it had already paid for.³⁹ In other words, although Iran utilized the ideological motives and fuelled the crisis for a period; when the country's interests were under threat, Iranian clerical rule made a decision by prioritizing Iran's national interests. As a consequence, the negotiations to end the seizure resulted in the Algiers Accord

³⁸ Houghton, *Ibid.*, p. 266.

³⁹ Mohammad Sahimi, "The Hostage Crisis: 30 Years on", *Frontline*, 03.11.2009, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009/11/30-years-after-the-hostage-crisis.html>, internet access: 04.05.2013.

of January 19, 1981 with the US promise on not intervening directly or indirectly, politically or militarily in Iran's affairs.⁴⁰

After the Khomeini's consolidation of power, the conflictual nature of the Islamic Republic reached its peak and the policy-makers of the country found the necessary power to follow an aggressive and ambitious foreign policy in parallel with the principles and motives which were stated in the Constitution. They embraced a different version of the Neither East, nor West strategy than what Bazargan and Bani Sadr, the first president of Iran, did. Unlike the policy based on neutrality and avoiding any conflict with great powers; they applied a more negative and conflictual version of this policy.

When Khomeini and radicals in the political power consolidated their rule, they placed their foreign policy origin more to the export the revolution strategy with preserving the Neither East, nor West outlook. Iran determined target countries which were Gulf monarchies (Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait), Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Central Asia and Muslim countries of Soviet Union (Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan) to export the revolution in the first phase. Because of the considerable Shiite population in these countries, they were seen as the "first wave" and the Islamic Republic supported radical Islamist groups in these countries, although the leading figures of the Islamic Republic underlined the peaceful means to export the revolution.⁴¹ The primary goal was "spreading Islamic model of Iran as much wider as possible", because only this kind of a revision in the system would secure the regime stability and survival.

Lebanon was one of the countries where Iran operated the most in parallel with this strategy. Benefiting from the Iranian clergy's influence over the Shiite population, Iran actively and successfully operated in Lebanon in accordance with its

⁴⁰Algiers Accords Bind US to Non-Interference in Iran – And Are Always Forgotten, *Global Post*, 26.07.2013, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/middle-east/iran/130725/algiers-accords-iran-forgotten-in-us>, internet access: 05.05.2013.

⁴¹ Shireen T. Hunter, "Iran and the Spread of Revolutionary Islam", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.10, No.2, (1988).

anti-Zionist policies. However, maybe the most crucial reason for the interference on Lebanon was the perception of a threat from Israel towards Iran's national security and the survival of its regime. Because of Israel's invasion of Lebanon in order to prevent the settlement of the PLO in Lebanon, and Israel's unwillingness for withdrawal from Lebanese territories; Iran's intervention to Lebanon was essential and necessary for its national security.

Iran has intervened into Lebanon via supporting Hezbollah rather than direct political or military interference. Although it is not certain that Hezbollah was founded by Iran, it can be claimed that Iran played a crucial role in the organization's establishment process in the 1980s. In the aftermath of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Syria changed its policy on not permitting the Shiite and Islamist based revolutionary government's direct involvement in Lebanese affairs, and permitted Iran to dispatch around 1,000 *Pasdaran*⁴² to the Beqa'a Valley, an area occupied by Syrian forces. By this way, the Iranian delegation consisting of both military and religious instructors recruited a number of young, militant Lebanese clerics who had connections with Lebanese branch of al-Dawa, a radical Iraqi Shiite fundamentalist group, and with Islamic Amal, a faction of the Amal movement which had been secularized under the leadership of Nabih Berri.⁴³ Although founded with national objectives to liberate the Lebanese territories from American, French and Israeli influence and intervention, in time, the organization transformed into an influential political figure both in Lebanon and regional politics with cooperative support from Iran and Syria. Iran's main goal was to spread its influence to Lebanon via Hezbollah by defeating Israel and afterwards, exporting the revolution to the country.

Palestine was also considered as another important country targeted to export the revolution. Iran supported the PLO and made a claim to the Palestinian issue in parallel with the rhetoric of "the revolution of suppressed people". However after the

⁴² Members of the Revolutionary Guards

⁴³ For details, see: Gary C. Gambill and Ziad K. Abdelnour, "Hezbollah: Between Tehran and Damascus", *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol.4, No.2, (February 2002).

PLO gave support to Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War, Iran deflected the way of support to more radical and Islamist groups such as Islamic Jihad and Hamas. Considering the Sunni identity of Islamic Jihad, it can be claimed that the rhetoric and the basis of Iran's foreign policy were neo-realist and non-ideological, and could change according to the needs and interests of Iran case by case. Furthermore, the strengthening of radical Islamist movements which has received moral, financial and strategic support from Iran and their increasing role in the Palestinian issue have made a substantial contribution to Iran's influential role on regional problems and politics.

The export the revolution strategy was also targeted to Gulf monarchies. Although the Islamic Republic's anti-Israeli/pro-Palestinian stand and ceasing of its links with the US was welcomed by the Gulf monarchies in the beginning; the non-aligned characteristic and the anti-American/anti-Western discourse of Iran, and its strategy of exporting the revolution threatened the Gulf monarchies. Furthermore, Khomeini's branding of Saudi Arabia as "the symbol of religious corruption" and the Saudi understanding of religion as "American Islam" and the monarchy as "un-Islamic"⁴⁴ increased the threat perception of Gulf countries from the Islamic Republic. This threat perception has led to the establishment of the GCC with the leadership of Saudi Arabia in 1981 in order to strengthen the cooperation among a group of Gulf monarchies (Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, UAE, Bahrain and Kuwait) whose political legitimacy and regime security were under the threat of Islamists pioneered by Iran, and to balance the rising power of the Islamic front in the region. In time, the GCC became a regional actor following the period of the post-US invasion of Iraq but especially following the Arab Spring with the pioneering of Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

Another -maybe the most important- target to export the revolution was Iraq. Especially after the revolution, Iran supported the Shiite groups in Iraq economically and even provided them with military training. The Islamic Dawa Party and its leader, Ayatollah Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr started an armed struggle against the

⁴⁴ Ayatollah Khomeini's Tormentors, *Media Monitors Network*, 10.08.2003, <http://www.mediamonitors.net/abbaszaidi7.html>, internet access: 11.05.2013.

Iraqi Sunni and Ba'ath rule relying on the support of the Islamic Republic. Following the domestic disorder in the country, the Ba'ath rule executed al-Sadr to consolidate its power. Khomeini's call towards the Shiite community in Iraq to rebel against the Ba'ath rule and Iran's interference to Iraqi politics created a tension between the two countries and this tension evolved into a war. In addition, because of geostrategic needs of Iraq, the relative weakness of the newly established Islamic Republic, and the opportunity of being the leader of the Arab world with the isolation of Egypt after the Camp David Accord with Israel; an 8 years long war began with the attack and the march of Iraq to Iranian territory in September, 1980.

2.2. The Iran-Iraq War

The Iran-Iraq War was a critical milestone for the regional balance of power and offered many opportunities to different actors in the region. The war which continued until the ceasefire in 1988; symbolized a chessboard where all major powers influential in the region were the pieces of the game and were exerting efforts to maximize their interest in the balance of power of the region.

The war offered Iranian regime great opportunities although paying attention to its cost for Iran as the loss of 1 million Iranian lives and more than 500 billion dollars⁴⁵. First of all, thanks to war and the security condition it has led, Islamist faction in Iran completed the consolidation of their power by eliminating all other political groups of the Iranian society they had collaborated for toppling the Shah. The economic and political struggles became of secondary importance by prioritizing the survival of the Islamic regime and the elimination of an anti-Islamic coalition of forces. This trend continued until a level where the suffering of the Iranian people overrode the ideological motives. When the new regime realized this level, considering the threat towards the survival of the regime and the growing economic burden they had to bear because of the war; they calculated that accepting the ceasefire offered by the UNSC with the Decision of 598 was in favor of Iran's

⁴⁵ Iran-Iraq War 1980-1988, History of Iran, http://www.iranchamber.com/history/iran_iraq_war/iran_iraq_war1.php, internet access: 11.05.2013.

national interests. In brief, as the war prolonged and its effects multiplied; the clarity and the dominance of rational principles of action in Iran's foreign policy increased.

Moreover, although its roots lied before 1979, Iran-Iraq War led to a creation of an alliance among secular, pan-Arabic Syria and religious, pan-Islamic Iran. Since 1979, both countries consolidated and deepened their alliance contrary to expectations. The alliance itself and its maintenance through history is one of the major verifications for the neo-realist outlook in Iran's foreign policy. It has been a defensive and strategic alliance in order to neutralize Iraq and Israeli offensive capabilities in the region and to prevent American encroachment in the Middle East.⁴⁶ While the Iraqi invasion of Iran served as a catalyst in bringing both countries closer to the Gulf area, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon also highlighted both countries' collaborative response to new challenges in new areas (Levant) and the victory in their goals as forcing Israel, the US and France to withdraw from Lebanon. Following their withdrawal, Lebanese civil war symbolized the test arena of both countries' relations and conflicting agendas over the same country. After a disagreement on the future of Lebanon and of the Iran-Iraq war, the two allies were able to prioritize their interests, resolve their differences and redefine the parameters of cooperation during 1985-1988 through constant consultations, thereby leading to the maturing and consolidation of the alliance.⁴⁷ Finally, the strategic cooperation between Iran and Syria following the war would prove to be the longest enduring alliance in the region.

Moreover, in parallel with the threat that Iran posed, the Gulf countries were the main supporters of Iraq during the war in order to eliminate the Islamic Republic as an aggressive, revolutionary and conflictual state. For the Gulf countries Iraq played the role of a "contracted killer" hired to kill a potential rival (Iran) against their rule, ideology and power in the regional politics. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait sent

⁴⁶ Jubin M. Goodarzi, "Syria and Iran: Alliance Cooperation in a Changing Regional Environment", *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, Vol.4, No.2, (2013), p. 35.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

more than 40 billion dollars in sum to Iraq.⁴⁸ Saudis also provided service of intelligence to Iraqi officials via AWACS planes and contributed to the common efforts of Kuwait, UAE and the US on regulating the market price of oil.

The war also gave an opportunity to Egypt to re-join the balance of power struggle as a crucial actor for the stability in the region. Egypt tried to benefit from the confrontation between Iran-Syria-Hezbollah coalition on one side, and Iraq-Gulf countries on the other side by normalizing its relations with the Arab countries, which were destroyed with the Camp David. At the end, the two regional opponents of Egypt for the leadership of the region came out of war with relatively diminished power while Egypt made itself accepted as a crucial actor for the security and balance of the Arab world and the Gulf region.⁴⁹

The outside actors also benefited from the conflict as an opportunity of interfering on the regional power struggle. The US and the USSR stood up for a balance in the region and neither of them tolerated the too powerful Iran or Iraq to threaten their dominance and hegemonic interests in the region. They gave support to Iraq (the US since the beginning, the USSR since 1986) as long as the elimination of the Islamic Republic became possible. And when it was the case, they switched the way of support and started to exert efforts to counter-balance Iraq. While the US declared their passive support of a solution based on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of both countries in 1982;⁵⁰ they changed their passive policy and interfered to the conflict directly by bombing the off-shore oil well of Iran in 1987.

Also, the USSR's direction of support in the war and Iran's perception of USSR were fluctuating according to the balance of power in the region. While the existence of the USSR as a great and influential actor in the region was of paramount importance for Iran to balance the US and its allies; the USSR's link with the Tudeh party and its potential threat against the Islamic regime affected the nature of the

⁴⁸ İzzetullah İzzeti, *Iran ve Bölge Jeopolitiği*, Küre Yayınları, 2005, p. 91.

⁴⁹ Shireen T. Hunter, *Iran and the World: Continuity in a Revolutionary Decade*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990, p. 100.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

relations between two countries negatively. However in time, the isolation and loneliness of Iran against the regional and outside actors gave birth to a strategic alliance with the USSR and Iran since mid-1988. Following the withdrawal of the USSR from Afghanistan and the cease-fire with Iraq gave opportunities for better relations among the USSR and Iran. The relations improved with bilateral letters among Khomeini and Gorbachev, and visits among high level officials of both countries. In short, during the war, both great powers tried to maintain the status quo in the regional balance of power. The end of war with the relative weakening of both Iraq and Iran, and elimination of their regional ambitions was the best scenario for their regional interests.

The end of the war led to the rapprochement and normalization of Iran's relations with the European countries. Actually, Iran's relations with European powers like France, Britain and Germany had been stable and relatively better than its relations with the US in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution. Because of the apparent non-involvement in Iranian affairs, most of the anti-Western rhetoric against the US, did not direct towards European countries, albeit Britain can be relatively seen as an exception.⁵¹ Considering the newly established regime's relatively weak position in the regional and international political system, Iran calculated that it could not afford to confront both Europe and the US simultaneously.⁵² As a consequence, although almost all the European states supported Saddam morally and militarily during the war; the relations were kept limited with the economic and commercial basins where both sides have mutual benefits, until the end of the Iran-Iraq War and the collapse of the USSR.

However following the end of the war with Iraq (and especially after the demise of USSR), the relations with the European powers were expanded through a

⁵¹ Because Britain was deeply involved in the internal affairs of Iran, first in collaboration with tsarist Russia when two great powers divided Iran into their spheres of influence; and second collaborated with the CIA to overthrow the Mosaddegh government in 1953. For details; Adam Tarock, "Iran-Western Europe Relations on the Mend", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.26, No.1, (1999).

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 44.

political basin due to the fact that European powers were seen as an “equalizer” against the dramatic increase of US’ regional power and role by the ruling elites of the Islamic Republic. From the Iranian perspective, Western Europe is a “strategic gateway to international accessibility, economic development and a route to escape the US attempt to keep Iran isolated internationally.”⁵³ Therefore, the relations with France, Britain and Canada (although not Western European) started to be built and the level of relations with Germany increased through dialogue and high level bilateral visits. Nevertheless, beyond their calculations and expectations, the relations between European powers and Iran did not offer room for maneuver because there was no deep conflict between European powers and the US.⁵⁴

After the end of the Iran-Iraq War with a UNSC-offered cease-fire in 1988, the death of Khomeini in 1989 and Rafsanjani taking the power; the main foreign policy orientation of Iran evolved into a moderate and neo-realist foreign policy again following the aggressive and ideologically-driven motivations in the aftermath of the Hostage Crisis and the Iran-Iraq War. When the Iraqi threat was temporarily and partially eliminated with the cease-fire, the main efforts were transformed into providing stability and security in the Gulf area by building bridges of dialogue with the countries of the area.⁵⁵ While Iraq was carrying on arming as the same level as the pre-war era; Iran followed a dual policy of arming for self-help and regime survival on one side and of driving a wedge between Gulf countries with Iraq through dialogue on the other. In parallel with this aim, the support of radical Islamic movements in the region was scaled down or changed, and the need of cooperation and dialogue for the stability and the security of the region were highlighted. Iran’s support on terrorist organizations (which was always claimed by regional and European powers but denied by Iran) and Shiite groups especially in Lebanon and

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁵⁴ Fred Halliday, "An Elusive Normalization: Western Europe and the Iranian Revolution", *Middle East Journal*, Vol.48, No.2, (1994), p. 315.

⁵⁵ Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *Syria and Iran: Middle Powers in a Penetrated Regional System*, 1997, p. 44.

Afghanistan also decreased in parallel with the changing methods of the export the revolution strategy through “peaceful export”⁵⁶ of the revolution by offering an economically and socially successful country model to the Muslim world.

However, because of this aggressive and ideological discourse, Iran found itself in a condition where the foreign policy strategies to empower itself and increase its role in regional power politics via eliminating the system almost gave rise to the collapse of the regime and the country. At the end of the war, Iran was excluded from the regional politics and was in a difficult condition with the disastrous effects of the war towards its society and economy. Some of the regional actors, especially the Gulf countries, perceived a major threat from Iran towards their national unity and interests and this ongoing threat perception did not contribute positively to the efforts of Iran to win a respectable place for itself in regional and international politics.

Despite its efforts for rapprochement with the US, the USSR and European powers to normalize the relations, this position continued until the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the Gulf War of 91, where Iran gained its relative power and role in the regional politics thanks to its constructive and cooperative role in the war. Iran’s only consolation was its strategic alliance built with Syria. This alliance and its enhancement by including Hezbollah and Hamas in the future would be one of its main strategic assets of Iran’s neo-realist foreign policy.

2.3. The Gulf War of 1991 and the Collapse of the USSR

The significant changes in regional and international politics (the withdrawal of the USSR from Afghanistan, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the collapse of the USSR) offered greater opportunities, room for maneuver and the beginning of a new era for Iran in the regional and international political game.

At first, the invasion of Kuwait posed a twofold threat towards Iran’s national interests in the region: on the one side ignoring Saddam’s behavior would mean the exclusion of Iran from a major regional conflict and a decrease of Iran’s relative

⁵⁶ Ramazani (1990), *Ibid.*, pp. 54-57.

power in the Gulf region; on the other side, supporting the direct intervention of the US and allied forces would intensify outside countries' but especially the US' relative power and military existence in the region. Therefore, considering the double-edged effect of the crisis, Iran tried to take a firm stand in favor of the end of the conflict with an unchallenged victory of neither side. With the removal of the Iraqi forces from Kuwait and the limitation of Iraqi power in the region, Iran became one of the countries which benefited the foremost gain in the conflict.⁵⁷ The subversion of military capabilities of Iraq forced Saddam Hussein to agree the terms of Algiers Agreement on *Shatt al-Arab* by giving up its claim of full hegemony in 1990. In addition, Iraq withdrew from the territories of Iran under occupation and released all the prisoners of the Iran-Iraq War. Because of the diminishing power of Saddam Hussein, the relations with Iran and Iraq entered into a phase of normalization, however both countries' threat perception from the other side still continued.

After the diplomatic and strategic victory of Rafsanjani on the *Shatt al-Arab* issue, the Islamic Republic launched an era so-called the "era of reconstruction". The aggressive and ideological discourse and foreign policy of to export the revolution to the region were left behind and a new foreign policy outlook prioritizing economic, political and national needs and interests of Iran was embraced.

The export the revolution strategy by provoking Shiite groups and radical Islamic movements was partially suspended and a pursuit for dialogue and cooperation on economy and security was embraced. During the Kuwaiti crisis, Iran supported the territorial integrity of Iraq and Kuwait and even built a *de facto* collaboration with the allied forces against Iraq (including the US and European countries), and Iran's valuable contributions to controlling the international sanctions against Iraq helped the victory of allies. Iran's cooperative manner proved its significance for the security of the Gulf region and paved the way for the improving relations with the Gulf region and European countries.

⁵⁷ Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *After Khomeini: The Iranian Second Republic*, London, Routledge, 1995, p. 151.

Iran-Saudi Arabia relations were attempted to be rectified via bilateral visits of high level officials, however, despite many improvements on economic and commercial bases; the improvement of the relations remained limited because of the factors like the level of relations with the US, adverse perspectives on the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Mecca incident⁵⁸ and competition over the production and pricing of oil. For other countries of Gulf region, the Kuwaiti crisis proved that the responsible party in the Iran-Iraq War was not Iran, but rather Iraq due to Saddam Hussein's aggressive policies for Arab leadership in the region. Iran was seen as crucial on economic and commercial bases and they were willing to improve relations on these bases despite the potential threat they perceived from Iran. However at the end, the US-led bilateral/multilateral security agreements and collectives (Damascus Declaration⁵⁹) against Iran signaled the failure of Iran's reconstruction policy on collective security expectations with its leadership in the region.

In the beginning of the 90s, the relations between the US and Iran also improved. In response to the partial cooperation of Iran with allied forces and its positive and effective role in the hostage crisis in Lebanon; the US released the money Iran paid to buy military weaponry before the revolution. However the encouragement of Arab-Israeli peace talks and the tracing of an Israeli-centered policy posed a threat against the position of Iran in the Arab-Israeli peace process. Moreover, a peace deal led and achieved by the US would expand the US' influence in the region, and this was against the national interest and relative power of Iran in the region. Therefore, Iran increased its support of Palestinian radical groups like

⁵⁸ It was the incident which started with the political demonstration of Iranian pilgrims via chanting "Death to America' Death to the Soviet Union! Death to Israel!" after Friday's midday prayers in 1987. Following the intervention of the Saudi riot policemen, more than 400 Muslims died. For details, see: 400 Die As Iranian Marchers Battle Saudi Police in Mecca; Embassies Smashed in Tehran, *The New York Times*, 02.08.1987, <http://www.nytimes.com>, internet access: 18.05.2013.

⁵⁹ It was a Declaration signed by 6 GCC members with Egypt and Syria in March, 1991 and that was based on the deployment of an Arab military force with 100.000 soldiers at Gulf region. For details, see: Ehteshami (1995), *Ibid.*, p. 154.

Islamic Jihad and Hamas, and Hezbollah in order to sabotage the process⁶⁰, as it always did upon realizing the fact that the resolution of regional conflicts would diminish its regional power.

In addition, the end of the Kuwait crisis with the victory of the US-led allied forces initiated a direct US hegemony in the region via the military capabilities of its proxies in the Gulf region. With the presidential victory of Clinton, the foreign policy based on balancing Iraq and Iran for the security of the region and the “Dual Containment” of both countries in order to neutralize their threat potential towards regional peace, Israel’s existence and the US’ interests; was embraced as the main strategy of the US in the region in 1993. As a response to this policy in order to balance the power of the US⁶¹, Iran tried to build relations with European powers, China, Russia and some Central Asian, Saharan, Southeast Asian countries.

In the aftermath of the terrorist action of Hamas in Tel Aviv in 1994 (the US and Israel saw Iran responsible for this action because of its links with Hamas)⁶², and escalating opposition of Iran toward the Arab-Israeli peace; the economic sanctions were also included in the policies in which stick was preferred to carrot. The D’Amato Act (Iran-Libya Sanctions Act-ILSA), in which all the enterprises investing more than 20 million dollars in Iranian oil industry were subjected to penalty, was signed in 1995 and with this act, the US forced Iran to make a choice between its economic needs and foreign policy outlook.⁶³ However because of the reaction that came from European and Asian enterprises (and American enterprises afterwards the 1998 amendment), the act became null and void in practice.

⁶⁰ Shaul Bakhash, “Iran Since the Gulf War” (Freedman, Robert Owen, ed.), *The Middle East and the Peace Process: the Impact of the Oslo Accords*, University Press of Florida, 1998, p. 245.

⁶¹ Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Islamic Governance in Post-Khomeini Iran", *Islamic Fundamentalism*, 1996, p. 148.

⁶² Attack in Israel: The Overview; 20 Killed in Terrorist Bombing of Bus in Tel Aviv; 48 Are Hurt; **The New York Times**, 20.10.1994, <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/10/20/world/attack-israel-overview-20-killed-terrorist-bombing-bus-tel-aviv-48-are-hurt.html?src=pm&pagewanted=2>, internet access: 19.05.2013

⁶³ Jahangir Amuzegar, "Iran's Economy and the US Sanctions," *The Middle East Journal*, 1997, p. 188.

Moreover, between the period from the end of the Iran-Iraq War to the end of the Kuwaiti crisis; since Iran remained neutral and Syria directly joined the US-led coalition in order to get rid of Saddam Hussein and to play its part in response to Bush's promises on solving the Arab-Israeli conflict, it was thought that the Iranian-Syrian alliance was about to fall apart. Since the unresolved nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict was one of the strategic elements of this strategic alliance for Syria, it was thought that in case of a peace between Arabs and Israelis, Syria does not need a partnership with Iran and would not support the activities and existence of Hezbollah and Hamas. However, it was a time when both countries needed the other more than ever before due to the fact of the US' expanding hegemony in the region, the exclusion of the USSR from the regional political game as a source of balance against the US and the changing conditions of the regional political landscape. Therefore, Iran and Syria consolidated and institutionalized their alliance by establishing the Joint-Higher Syrian-Iranian Cooperation Committee, chaired by their respective vice-presidents and foreign ministers.⁶⁴

The collapse of the USSR also affected Iran both in good and bad ways. While the elimination of a great power balancing the other great power in a bipolar political system was perceived as a security threat and an uncertain political environment; the collapse of the USSR created a group of Muslim states between its territories and Russia and these countries were considered as a great opportunity for Iran to increase its political and economic gains. Although the details are beyond the primary focus of this study, one of the main bases of Iran's foreign policy on newly emerging Central Asian and Caucasian countries was to strengthen its relations with those countries on economic and commercial bases. Another main basis was to influence them by offering its political, economic and social model as an alternative to Israeli and Turkish democratic models, disseminated by the US in order to prevent the spread of Islamic revolution to this region. However, it attached importance on following this policy carefully by not offending Russia, showing respect to its domestic matters (for example in Chechnya) and collaborating with it when needed.

⁶⁴ Goodarzi (2013), *Ibid.*, p. 46.

When Kuwait was invaded by Iraq, the relations between Iran and European countries were in a situation of temporary suspension because of the Rushdie affair. As previously discussed, the relations with Iran and European powers have been relatively stable albeit the Islamic revolution. Nevertheless, there were some international crises which led to a strain in relations between Iran and Europe, and the Rushdie affair was one of them. It was the diplomatic crisis which started with Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa against Salman Rushdie, the author of "The Satanic Verses" in February 1989. The fatwa was issued on the grounds that the book blasphemed Islam, the Prophet, and the Koran. Khomeini sentenced Rushdie and the publishers who are aware of its content to death and called "all zealous Muslims to execute them quickly, wherever they find them."⁶⁵ In the aftermath of Iran's demand from Britain to confiscate copies of the book and ban its future publication and Britain's refusal for that kind of an action would be interpreted as condoning the suppression of freedom of speech, Western European countries recalled their ambassadors from Tehran in the end of 1989.

However as noted above, Iran's cooperative manner and its contributions to the victory of the US-led coalition in the Gulf War opened the way for political dialogue and rapprochement between Iran and the European powers. EC countries removed the economic sanctions on Iran in 1990 and they accepted Iran's regional role and strategic importance.⁶⁶ Following that period, European countries preferred to separate politics and economy for the sake of their interests. Despite the diplomatic crises (for example the assassination of Shapour Bakhtiar, the last Shah's prime minister and the Mykonos incident⁶⁷) Europe tried to embrace the "critical dialogue"⁶⁸ strategy by staying out of the "dual containment" of Iran.

⁶⁵ Ayatollah Khomeini's 1989 Fatwa on Salman Rushdie Over 'The Satanic Verses', *The New York Times*, 15.02.1989, <http://www.nytimes.com>, internet access: 19.05.2013.

⁶⁶ Halliday, *Ibid.*, pp. 309-326.

⁶⁷ One another example was the Mykonos incident, which was the name of the Greek Restaurant in Berlin, where four Kurdish leaders were gunned down in September 1992. In 1997, a German court implicated the Iranian leadership involvement in the incident. For details, see: Marcus Wilford, "The Assassins' Trail: Unraveling the Mykonos Killings", *World Affairs Journal*, (November/December

Mohammed Khatami's accession to the presidency in the 1997 elections marked a deepened and updated version of Rafsanjani's foreign policy of dialogue and détente with regional powers by excluding ideological motives from it. His foreign policy was based on three fundamentals: dignity, wisdom and prudence; détente in foreign relations; and "dialogue among civilizations".⁶⁹ Khatami defined his foreign policy outlook as follows: "foreign policy should be based on avoiding violence and on establishing friendly relations with all countries which recognize Iran's independence and also not follow aggressive policy toward Iran".⁷⁰ When highlighting the diversity of Khatami's foreign policy from the Neither East, not West strategy of post-revolution Iran, as Alnahas argues, "in Khatami's world, there is East and West, North and South, Islam and other faiths rather than confrontation, they are all brought together through dialogue in which no one group holds the monopoly on morality".⁷¹ His presidency brought hope and expectations to the regional actors like Gulf countries, European powers and the US.

Good relations with the Persian Gulf countries were defined as one of the top priorities of Iran's foreign policy because the stability and security of the region without the interference of outside powers has been vital for the country's national interest.⁷² The relations with neighboring Arab countries improved very quickly as

2011), <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/assassins%E2%80%99-trail-unraveling-mykonos-killings>, internet access: 19.05.2013.

⁶⁸ It was a policy founded by Klaus Kinkel, German Minister of Foreign Affairs, and announced at the European Council in Edinburgh in December 1992. It raised four concerns with respect to Iran: the abuse of human rights, the fatwa against Rushdie, arms procurement by Iran and its approach to the Arab-Israeli peace process—all issues which remain a focal point of tension between both Iran-Europe and Iran-US. According to this policy, Iran should be included to the system with persuasion and mutual trust rather than excluding from the international system. For details, see: Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Mahjoobi Zweiri, eds. *Iran's Foreign Policy: from Khatami to Ahmadinejad*, Sussex Academic Press, 2008, p. 58.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁷⁰ Rouhollah K. Ramazani and John L. Esposito, eds. *Iran at the Crossroads*, Palgrave, 2001, p. 116.

⁷¹ Ibrahim Mahmoud Yaseen Alnahas, *Continuity and Change in the Revolutionary Iran Foreign Policy*, Doctoral Dissertation, West Virginia University, 2007, p. 199.

⁷² Christin Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy: From Khomeini to Khatami*, Routledge, 2003

was experienced in the Iran-Saudi Arabia relations. It was the first time an Iranian head of state visited Saudi Arabia in May 1999 since the revolution. The rapprochement between two countries bore its fruits in the OPEC arena for the first time since 1960, price limits were defined and a mechanism was developed to guarantee this limit. The signing of a security pact with Saudi Arabia in April, 2001 was another step towards Iran's major goal of pushing outside actors out of the Persian Gulf though it was not achieved. Moreover, Kamal Kharrazi, the foreign minister of Khatami, reiterated on several occasions the possibility of negotiating with the UAE regarding disputes over the three islands (Abu Mosa, Greater and Lesser Tunbs) in the framework of mutual confidence and understanding. This was also the first time a possibility for dialogue between Iran and the UAE appeared since the revolution. In addition, the 8th summit of the OIC in Tehran in 1997 and Iran's announcement for solving regional problems and supporting the unification of the Muslim world further helped the détente among Iran and Arab countries.

Khatami also declared his and Iran's readiness to improve the relations with the European powers. The importance of Europe for Iran was twofold: first, it was a regionally and internationally powerful actor to balance the US in the region. Following the demise of the USSR, Iranian foreign policy lost one of its significant strategies of negative balance doctrine between the US and the USSR. Although there were major conflicting arguments on whether the demise of the USSR offered an extra room for maneuver for Iran; Iran, as a less powerful and relatively smaller state compared to the great powers of the international system, needed new ties and alliances in order not to be excluded from the regional politics totally.

Second, Iranian economy was in a malaise and there was a crucial need for immediate economic aid and foreign investment in order to heal this malaise by carrying on the post-war economic restructuring initiated by Rafsanjani, and it is beyond doubt that the northern, southern and eastern neighbors of Iran and the Muslim world did not have the capacity that Western countries could offer Iran.⁷³ Considering the strong anti-American feelings in Iran and the relatively worse

⁷³ Ehteshami and Zweiri (2008), *Ibid.*, p. 62.

condition of the relations with the US than the European powers; Europe was the best alternative for Iran to reach Western capital, technology and science. On the other side, Iran played an important regional role to secure Europe's interests in Iraq (its links with the Shiite population and a possible role for stability and peace in there and Persian Gulf), Afghanistan (drug trafficking and global fight on terrorism) and Iran's wider environment.

Albeit at the time of Khatami's coming to power, the relations with Europe were in a crisis because of the Mykonos incident; Khatami and his foreign minister, Kamal Kharrazi were quite successful to repair the relations on short notice. Following the visits of Khatami to Italy, France and Germany; several economic contracts for loan and development of oil fields with European companies were signed⁷⁴. Although the differences and disagreements (on human rights record and the nuclear program of Iran) continued; European powers and Iran tried to cooperate for their common political, economic and strategic interests and they succeeded in achieving cooperation more than what was achieved with the US. However it is indisputable that the deepening and sustainability of Iran's relations with Europe are conditioned with its relations with the US and with the regional/international system.

In addition to the Iran-EU reconciliation, there were also growing hopes for an improvement in relations between Iran and the US after Khatami took the power in 1997. In parallel with his theorization of "dialogue among civilizations" in response to "clash of civilizations" theory of Huntington, Khatami underlined to develop a formal US-Iranian relationship within the framework of mutual respect. In his interview on CNN in 1988, Khatami declared "Iran and the US should create a 'crack in the wall of mistrust' by exchanging writers, scholars, artists and thinkers...and all doors should be open for such dialogue and understanding between Iranian and

⁷⁴ A contract for \$998 million for the development of the Dorud oilfield in the northern Persian Gulf with the Italian *Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi SpA* and the French oil company *Elf*, a rescheduled loan for \$370 million with Italy, a credit for \$2 billion given from *Credit Lyonnais*, *Société Générale*, *Credit Agricole* and *Paribas*, a loan secured for \$550 million for Iran's National Petrochemical Company in June from a German-led consortium of European banks, an increase in credit risk coverage in *Hermes* to one billion marks, and so on. For details, see: Ehteshami and Zweiri (2008), *Ibid.*, p. 64.

American citizens”.⁷⁵ The invitation of American wrestling team to Iran by Khatami in 1998, Clinton’s positive speech in 1999, Madeleine Albright’s expression in 2000, of the US’ regret from US involvement in the 1953 coup; all contributed positively for the détente between Iran and the US, although many disagreements and conflicts continued in the relations. However this positive environment of dialogue and cooperation with the Gulf countries, the EU and the US were halted with the group of terrorist attacks to US in September 11, 2001.

2.4. Conclusion

During the period between 1979 and 2001, considering the effects of the regional developments like the Iran-Iraq War, The Gulf War of 91 and the collapse of the USSR towards the regional balance of power, Iran has followed a neo-realist foreign policy considering the capabilities of the state and the limits of the regional system although it used the ideological motives which was defined in the Constitution and the statements of Khomeini, to mobilize the masses and to consolidate its domestic power. When the national security and the regime survival fell in danger, the rational decision-making became the dominant motive for the foreign policy of the Iranian regime.

When the rulers were convinced that they eliminated their political opponents and consolidated their power in the aftermath of the Hostage Crisis and the Iran-Iraq War by using ideological motives, they changed their focus to exporting the Iranian model of Islamic Republic to neighboring countries. Nevertheless, this policy led to growing loneliness of Iran in regional politics and dragged the country into a war with Iraq, which fundamentally affected the regional balance of power. Therefore, Iran has built alliances and strategic relations to involve in regional political system in response to the alliances which surrounded Iran.

Iran has successfully gained its relative position which had lost in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War, since the Gulf War and the end of the Cold War thanks to its

⁷⁵ Interview with President Mohammad Khatami by Cristian Amanpour, *CNN*, 07.01.1998, <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/9801/07/iran/interview.html>, internet access: 25.05.2013.

“era of reconstruction” and “dialogue among civilizations” strategies by normalizing its relations with regional and outside actors. However in some cases like the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Iranian regime also followed destructive policies to sabotage the peace process to maximize its role in the regional balance of power because a peaceful solution with the legitimization of Israel via the efforts of the US would not be in favor of Iran’s interests. In brief, the state interests have always been the dominant motive of Iran’s foreign policy during this period.

However, with the 9/11 attacks, a new era started for the Middle East region, where all the determinant factors of the regional balance of power were again altered.

CHAPTER 3

THE PERIOD FROM 9/11 TO THE ARAB SPRING

It is beyond doubt that the 9/11 attacks to the World Trade Center and the Pentagon symbolized a major milestone for the Middle Eastern regional political system. The political environment and power relations among the actors of the region entirely changed in the aftermath of these attacks. The unipolar structure of the international politics and the US's dominant role in the regional and international political system since the end of the Cold War remained unchanged. However, following the emerging threat against its national security and hegemonic role, the US redefined its priorities and changed the foreign policy outlook in the aftermath of the 9/11. Naturally, this change necessitates the alteration of foreign policies of the other actors of the region in order to adapt them to the new power struggle. And Iran was one of these regional countries.

In this chapter, Iranian foreign policy following the 9/11 attacks and the foreign policy change of the US in response to the threat directed towards its national security will be analyzed. The main argument is that Iran followed a neo-realist foreign policy by attaching importance on enhancing its regional role and maximizing its power with the desire of survival and self-help. The argument will be tested in two sections, each focus on major regional events that can be considered as milestones for regional politics. In the first section, the changes in the regional political system in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and the US invasion of Afghanistan, the opportunities and restraints of these major events for Iran, and Iran's response and positioning towards them will be discussed. The next section will mainly focus on the US invasion of Iraq and the change on the regional balance of power in favor of Iran's national and regional interests. When describing the regional system and underlining the opportunities and restraints for Iran following the US invasion of Iraq, four sub sections focusing on the alliance building strategy of Iran, Iran's benefiting from the regional Shiite empowerment, the nuclear program of Iran as a tool for regional leadership and Iran's embracing of the Arab-Israeli conflict will

be helpful to understand the main tools of Iran to follow a neo-realist foreign policy in the period of post-invasion Iraq in favor of its national and regional interests. Finally the chapter will be concluded with the emergence of region-wide protests called as “the Arab Spring”, which affected the regional balance of power fundamentally.

3.1. The 9/11 Attacks and the US Invasion of Afghanistan

Before the terrorist attacks in 2001, following the electoral victory of George W. Bush, the U.S foreign policy towards the Middle East did not alter from the policies of the previous decades. Except an offer to refine the sanctions by focusing them more narrowly on military-related items, US policy on Iraq remained unchanged with air strikes, economic supports to Iraqi opposition, and calls for the return of UN arms inspectors into Iraq⁷⁶. The failure of the US policy to create a “new Middle East order” in the aftermath of the Gulf War became more visible⁷⁷ and the newly elected Bush administration failed to offer something different for the Middle East. However, the 9/11 events gave a justified reason to the US (and the Bush administration) to initiate a drastic shift in its foreign policy towards the region. This policy change directly affected the Middle Eastern politics and transformed it into a totally different game.

The Bush administration announced a new foreign policy strategy called the “Bush Doctrine” or “war on terror” and launched a global war against terrorism. The U.S. Congress passed the “Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Terrorists”, which gave the president the authority to use “all necessary and appropriate force” against those whom he determined “planned, authorized, committed or aided” the 9/11 attacks.⁷⁸ Three weeks after the authorization, the US and British forces initiated the invasion of Afghanistan by the aerial bombing

⁷⁶ Meliha Benli Altunışık, "The Middle East in the Aftermath of September 11 Attacks", *Dış Politika*, No.1, (2009), p. 455.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 452

⁷⁸ S.J.Res. 23 (107th): Authorization for Use of Military Force in US Congress, 18.09.2001, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/107/sjres23/text>, internet access: 06.07.2013

campaigns targeting Taliban and al-Qaeda camps, to overthrow the Taliban government which they claimed for harboring al-Qaeda, which is the terrorist organization responsible for the 9/11 attacks. Nevertheless, considering the fact that there is a thin line between being a liberator and an invader; after a period of time it was understood that while overthrowing the Taliban government was relatively easy to achieve, establishing the stability in Afghanistan in the aftermath of the invasion, and to secure the lives of American and British military personnel were rather difficult tasks. Therefore, both the US and Britain fell into a different position from which they had not foreseen prior to the invasion: They realized the collaboration of regional actors were vital to achieve a successful outcome in the US's global war against terrorism.

In fact, the discussions on Afghanistan among Iran and the US did not start with the 9/11 events and both sides had involved in secret, back-channel talks before. Prior to the invasion, Iranian efforts to convince the outside world to stop the radical Sunni Taliban government which was considered a serious national security threat for Iran and its Central Asian neighbors, "had fallen on deaf ears". Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the 9/11 events, the US and the European powers were overnight convinced to share the Iranian perception of the Taliban menace⁷⁹ and realized that the contribution of Iran as a neighbor country was of paramount importance for the stability of Afghanistan. Therefore, Iran strategically calculated the potential costs and benefits of such cooperation with its main outside rivals and rationally positioned itself by condemning the 9/11 as a terrorist attack and president Khatami expressed his condolences to American people.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Khatami favored improved relations with the US and European countries because time proved that enmity towards the US, Europe and their regional allies only deepened the isolation of Iran from the regional politics. Inasmuch as, despite the threatening condition of the enhanced US military and political presence in Afghanistan and Central Asia towards the national security of Iran, Iran chose to cooperate with the US and US-led international coalition forces

⁷⁹ Kaveh Afrasiabi and Abbas Maleki, *Iran's Foreign Policy After 11 September*, The Brown Journal of World Affairs, Volume IX, Issue 2, (2003), p. 258.

to topple the Taliban government and to provide stability in post-invasion Afghanistan. Considering the political environment of the time and the US-led coalition's need of the regional actors' collaboration in restructuring Afghanistan, Iran found a great opportunity to end its isolation in the regional politics. In addition, it was a perfect chance to contribute to the elimination of the Taliban regime, which was a direct threat against Iran's national security and regional ambitions.

Therefore, in the 6+2 Group talks in Geneva,⁸⁰ Iran cooperated with the regional and outside actors including the US to find a solution to Afghanistan's role in global drug trafficking. Beside Iran's offer to rescue the American servicemen stranded near its borders in Afghanistan; Iran promised to apprehend al-Qaeda fighters fleeing through its borders, and subsequently handed over scores of al-Qaeda to the countries of their origin.⁸¹ Nevertheless, Iran's constructive role in the UN-brokered, US-sponsored Bonn Conference in December of 2001⁸² was probably the most prominent proof for Iran's willingness to collaborate with Western powers. At the domestic and regional level, Iran had supported the Northern Alliance for years politically, financially and militarily; and through its political, economic and cultural pressure against Taliban and with the coordination among regional powers like Russia and the Central Asian states, Taliban's power has gradually weakened.⁸³ Therefore, Iran's role in the establishment of a transition government by the Northern Alliance forces and their bloodless takeover of Kabul could be seen as explicit.

⁸⁰ "Six plus Two Group on Afghanistan" indicates an informal coalition of six nations bordering with Afghanistan (China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) plus the US and Russia. This group was functioned under the aegis of UN to develop a plan to topple the Taliban. For details, see: Mir H. Sadat and James P. Hughes, "US-Iran Engagement Through Afghanistan", *Middle East Policy Council*, Vol.XVII, No.1, (Spring 2010).

⁸¹ Afrasiabi and Maleki, *Ibid.*, p. 259.

⁸² It was the Conference where the transitional government (the Afghan Interim Authority), a path for how to draft a constitution, and a permanent government following the US invasion of Afghanistan were created by the participant Afghan factions. For details, see: Afghanistan's Bonn Conference: 4 Things You Need to Know, *The Cristian Science Monitor*, 29.11.2011, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Global-Issues/2011/1129/Afghanistan-s-Bonn-Conference-4-things-you-need-to-know/What-was-the-first-Bonn-Conference>, internet access: 07.07.2013.

⁸³ Kayhan Barzegar, "Roles at Odds: The Roots of Increased Iran-US Tension in the Post-9/11 Middle East," *Iranian Review of International Affairs (IRFA)*, (2010a), p. 91.

Following the collaboration with Iran, the US and allied forces were convinced to play their card on the Northern Alliance in the post-invasion Afghanistan to restructure the country in favor of stability and their interests.

In brief, Iran followed a neo-realist foreign policy by prioritizing to maximize its power and enhancing its role in the regional politics following the 9/11 events and the US invasion of Afghanistan. In response to the critical change in the US' regional foreign policy and the power vacuum which emerged following the US invasion of Afghanistan, Iran calculated the benefits of these changes and positioned itself in rational principles of actions by condemning the 9/11 as a terrorist attack and cooperating with its main outside rivals through the restructuring of Afghanistan. At the end, Afghanistan case became a perfect example to prove that at the point where their interests overlap, the US and Iran can collaborate in a power competition game whose general nature was its zero-sum equation, and build a bridge of dialogue (although indirect). Nevertheless, when the empowerment and security of Iran by utilizing the opportunities of the US invasion of Afghanistan and the elimination of Taliban regime, was perceived as a threat by the US against its security and national interests; the nature of the relations between both countries transformed into a different basis.

3.2. The US Invasion of Iraq

The cooperation in Afghanistan raised hopes for an improvement in the US-Iran bilateral relations. Unfortunately, as Iran began to fill the vacuum emerging in the region after the collapse of the Taliban regime, the US perceived this development as a threat against its interests in the region. Along with the effects of the *Karine A* crisis in January 2002; the President George W. Bush's State of the Union speech expressed the US goal to "prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or their friends and allies with WMD". In the speech, Iran was labeled as one of the "Axis of Evil" members along with North Korea and Iraq.

These states, as Bush argued, “pose a grave and growing danger” to the security of the US and the world and they “must be opposed.”⁸⁴

The tone of the speech and its content represented a great threat towards the national security and survival of Iran as much as North Korea and Iraq. Therefore, many of the high officials of Iran changed their rhetoric from a cooperative stance to a hostile tone. While Rafsanjani claimed that the US intended to “make a nest for themselves in Central Asia”; Rouhani underlined “the Bush Doctrine’s goal to destabilize Iran”.⁸⁵ Following the Bush’s State of the Union speech, it was expected that the next target of the US within the framework of its “war on terror” would be Iraq.⁸⁶ As expected and signaled, Saddam Hussein’s Iraq was invaded in 19 March 2003 by a combined force of troops from the US, the United Kingdom, Australia and Poland. They deposed the Ba’athist government in less than 2 months with the aim of disarming Iraq from WMD, ending Saddam Hussein’s support on terrorism, and “democratizing Iraqi people”, according to US President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair.⁸⁷

The main goal of the US (and the neo-conservatives in power) with the invasion was to build a new Middle East. Following the 9/11 events, which dramatically showed the willingness of terrorists to inflict large-scale destruction and death on American soil,⁸⁸ the US must deter and defend against the threat before it is

⁸⁴ Text of President Bush’s 2002 State of the Union Address, 22.03.2003, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030322.html>, internet access: 07.07.2013.

⁸⁵ Mohsen Milani, "Iran's Policy towards Afghanistan", *Middle East Journal*, Vol.60, No.2, (2006), p. 248.

⁸⁶ After Afghanistan: Is Iraq Next?, *The Cristian Science Monitor*, 30.11.2001, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2001/1130/p1s1-wogn.html>, internet access: 13.07.2013; Powell Says Iraq May Be Next Target, *BBC News*, 08.11.2001, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1644508.stm>, internet access: 13.07.2013; Bush Signals Iraq May Be Next Target, *ABC*, 27.11.2001, <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2001/s427107.htm>, internet access: 13.07.2013.

⁸⁷ Text of President Bush’s 2002 State of the Union Address, 22.03.2003, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030322.html>, internet access: 07.07.2013.

⁸⁸ Brian C. Schmidt and Michael C. Williams, "The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War: Neoconservatives versus Realists", *Security Studies*, Vol.17, No.2, (2008), p. 197.

unleashed.⁸⁹ “Democracy promotion” towards the Middle East region because it was the remedy of the rise of terrorism plaguing the region,⁹⁰ was one of the main elements of the Bush Doctrine. According to many analysts in the US, “strong measures to spread democracy are needed...and liberating and democratizing Iraq will not only produce democracy there, but it will also encourage democracy in the rest of the Middle East.”⁹¹ A free and pluralist system is the “natural order” and more democracies will mean greater stability, peaceful relations with neighbors, and less terrorism.⁹² Moreover, the message to the “Axis of Evil” powers was clear both before and after the invasion of Iraq: Saddam’s fall represented (was wished to represent) a clear warning to other regimes which support terror.

Following the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, the relative balance of power in the region was broken with the elimination of two crucial regional actors (Afghanistan and Iraq) which had restrained the other regional actors’ (Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Syrian, etc.) dominance in the region. The US, in addition, appeared as a “new balancer” and became the most powerful outside actor as a direct part of the region. The GCC countries’ relative power also increased. However maybe the most apparent impact of US policies and actions in Afghanistan and Iraq by toppling Taliban and Saddam, was helping Iran to fill the power vacuum appeared in the post-Iraqi invasion environment in the region, and to transform Iran from an actor which could not benefit from its potential and regional opportunities considering its significant resources of power as big size and population, energy resources and economic potential, into a regionally influential actor.

⁸⁹ National Security Strategy of the United States, Washington DC, September 2002’ <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf>, internet access: 07.07.2013.

⁹⁰ Schmidt and Williams, *Ibid.*, p. 198

⁹¹ Robert Jervis, "Understanding the Bush doctrine" *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol.118, No.3, (2003), p. 367.

⁹² Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, "Democratization and War", *Foreign Affairs* (1995), pp.79-97.

By realizing this fact, the US and its allies in the region followed “a dogged policy of refusing to recognize Iran’s regional role”⁹³ and tried to implement policies to contain and constrain Iran’s role and influence in the region. However this policy did, as a matter of fact, lead to an outcome as the opposite of what was aimed: A new level of political-strategic zero-sum game, emerged between the US and Iran, where both countries now regarded any growth of each other’s role in the region as a threat towards their national interests and security.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the geopolitical changes following Afghanistan and Iraqi invasions, which placed Iran at the center of regional politics and while creating various opportunities, also posed serious security challenges for Iran’s national security.

Although on the one hand Iran opposed the American invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq because of the growing American presence on its borders; it was pleased for the elimination of Taliban and Ba’ath regimes on the other. However, the speed of the military victory and the presence of the US raised fears that Iran would be the next target in the Bush administration’s “war against terror”. Therefore, Iran responded to this dilemma and threat perception with a twofold strategy, as Barzegar claimed.⁹⁵ On the one side of this strategy, by avoiding a direct military conflict with the US, Iran exerted efforts not to take a step apparently against US interests in the region and to expand dialogue and cooperation with the main US-allied Arab (and Sunni) actors (such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia). Considering the vital interests of the US in Iraq and unwillingness to leave the region completely, the main goal of this strategy was to act rationally by finding a middle ground in order to “establish a new kind of balance of interest and security between Iran and the US”.⁹⁶ This was, of course, a reflection of Iran’s strategic recognition of the US’ role in Afghanistan and Iraq.

⁹³ Barzegar (2010a), *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁹⁵ Kayhan Barzegar, "Iran's Foreign Policy Strategy After Saddam", *The Washington Quarterly*, No.33, No.1, (2010b), p. 173.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

However this recognition did not automatically mean that the establishment of a pro-American client regime in Iraq, which would act in favor of the U.S. interests and against Iran, would be accepted and welcomed by Iran. Therefore, preventing such an establishment constituted an important part of Iran's strategy in the post-Saddam era. Both Iran and Syria fuelled the insurgency in Iraq just after the invasion only for a period "to prevent the US from using its foothold in Iraq as a "springboard" to attack them."⁹⁷ However Iraq's national unity was one of the main priorities of Iran in the post-invasion Iraq. What seemed crucial for Iran was to keep the country united and to sustain the security status in its border with Iraq by preserving Iraq's territorial integrity.⁹⁸ Because Iraq's failure would not be in Iran's favor, its efforts for the instability of Iraq were only adequate to keep the US occupied in Iraq rather than damaging the country's unity. The collapse of Iraq would lead to a civil war and emergence of an independent Kurdish state in the northern parts of Iraq, which would be against Iran's national security and regional ambitions.⁹⁹

Following the electoral victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in June 2005, the other side of the strategy became of paramount importance for Iran's national interests. Considering the relative empowerment of Iran by filling the power vacuum that emerged after the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, Ahmadinejad appeared to take seriously the old revolutionary goal of positioning Iran as the leading country of the entire Muslim world. This was an ambition which attached great importance on maximizing Iran's power and enhancing its role in regional politics. In order to achieve this ambition and implement this foreign policy outlook, Iran benefited from four main strategies: building alliances with regionally influential actors, benefiting from the Shiite empowerment after the invasion of Iraq, attaching importance towards the nuclear development that would increase Iranian power and bargaining

⁹⁷ Goodarzi (2013), *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁹⁸ Kayhan Barzegar, "Iran's Foreign Policy in Post-Invasion Iraq", *Middle East Policy*, Vol.15, No.4, (2008), p. 49.

⁹⁹ Barzegar (2008), *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

capacity and focusing on regional themes like the hostility against Israel that tend to bring Arabs and Iranians, Sunni and Shiites together.

3.2.1. Alliance Building with the Regional Actors

Although a sustainable and solid cooperation with the US and main US-allied Arab actors were still important, what became more important in the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq was to build alliances which would enhance Iran's regional power and influence.

Tehran exerted great efforts to maintain and cultivate close ties with different but all the ethnic factions in Iraqi politics in order to ensure that the new government of Iraq would not be hostile to Iran like Saddam Hussein. The national interest of Iran necessitated a balance among these factions as the Iranian regime thought no faction should be strong enough to dominate the post-invasion politics of Iraq. Otherwise, it was thought an Iranian control over Iraqi politics or any kind of cooperation among two countries would be impossible.¹⁰⁰ The discrepancies over issues about the future of Iraq among different ethnic factions have restrained the unity in Iraqi politics, and this provided a favorable playground for Iran to shape the Iraqi politics in favor of its national interests.

Considering the demographic condition and two countries' long-standing commonalities and strategic interests; the Shiite groups in Iraq have shown strong propensity to maintaining close relations with Iran.¹⁰¹ Therefore, a Shiite-led Iraqi political restructuring by adding the Kurdish factions to the equation was the long term goal of Iran. In addition, including Iraq in the Rejection Front which consisted of Iran, Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas was an important part of the alliance building strategy of Iran. From the viewpoint of Iran, shifting Iraq to a friendly state would mean "discarding the traditional designation of Iraq as Iran's counterbalance in the

¹⁰⁰ Geoffrey Kemp, "Iran and Iraq: The Shia Connection, Soft Power, and the Nuclear Factor", *United States Institute of Peace: Special Report* (2009).

¹⁰¹ Barzegar (2010a), *Ibid.*, p. 100.

Persian Gulf” and to turn the new relations into a “balance of interests”.¹⁰² Although there were conflicting factions in Iran about the nature of the relations between the two countries even before the fall of Saddam Hussein’s rule; the national interest of Iran necessitated ending the US presence in Iraq and increasing Iranian influence over Iraqi reconstruction, and political establishment after the US invasion.

Both Iran and Syria continued to enjoy the strategic benefits of their alliance during this period. As described in the previous chapter, both countries have benefited from this alliance in varying degrees. Thanks to the alliance with Syria and also Hezbollah, Iran has had great power to influence Lebanese politics even after the withdrawal of Syria from Lebanon in 2005 and the Palestine issue. In addition, the alliance with Hezbollah was crucial on obtaining benefits of strategic significance to both parties, such as tackling the Israeli military threats and institutionalizing the Shiite role in the region’s power politics. Moreover, the alliance with Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Palestine enabled Iran to be involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict as a non-Arab regional actor and to win the hearts and minds of the Arab and Muslim people in the region.

In brief, the alliances provided Iran a great opportunity to become a regional actor which was capable of affecting all the regional grievances (Iraq’s stability, the Arab-Israeli conflict, minority politics, and Lebanon politics). By drawing a broader circle of security, Iran has linked its security with regional dynamics, enhancing its role to tackle the current threats emanating from its immediate security environment.¹⁰³ Iran’s interconnected security strategy was based on the fact that Iran’s security was a *sine qua non* for the Middle East security architecture.

¹⁰² Barzegar (2008), *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁰³ Barzegar (2010b), *Ibid.*, p. 183.

3.2.2. Benefiting From the Shiite Empowerment

Tehran's strong hand in Iraq, both in relations with the Shiite and Kurdish communities, has sent "a ripple of fear across the Arab world and Turkey."¹⁰⁴ Since the late 2004, Arab neighbors of Iran started to openly criticize Iran's growing role over the Shiite groups in the region and its ideological politics which could lead the region to a sectarian war among Shiite and Sunni factions and states. As commented by King Abdullah II, who is the reigning king of the Kingdom of Jordan since 1999, "in case of pro-Iranian parties or politicians' domination of the new Iraqi government, a new crescent of dominant Shiite movements or governments stretching from Iran into Iraq, Syria and Lebanon could emerge...and this would alter the traditional balance of power between the two main Islamic sects and pose new challenges to US interests and allies".¹⁰⁵ Iranian interference in Iraqi affairs and elections was underlined with concerns by Iraqi politicians.¹⁰⁶ Concerns were followed by the assessment of the Saudi foreign minister about the failure of the US policies over Iraq after the invasion and the "handing Iraq over to Iran" despite the efforts of Arab states on the opposite since 1991.¹⁰⁷ In 2006, Egyptian President in that time, Hosni Mubarak enhanced the ground of potential threat from Iraq to the region. He highlighted that "most of the Shiites are loyal to Iran, not to the countries they are living in."¹⁰⁸ In brief, the Shiite empowerment in Iraqi politics and

¹⁰⁴ Ehteshami and Zweiri (2007), *Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹⁰⁵ Iraq, Jordan See Threat to Election From Iran, *The Washington Post*, 08.12.2004, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A43980-2004Dec7.html>, internet access: 21.07.2013.

¹⁰⁶ Ghazi Yawar's concerns in an interview with the Washington Post, *The Washington Post*, 08.12.2004, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A43980-2004Dec7.html>, internet access: 21.07.2013.

¹⁰⁷ Saudi Arabia Fears Another US Disappointment in Syria, *Al-Monitor*, 25.06.2013, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2013/06/saudi-arabia-iran-us-foreign-policy-syria.html>, internet access: 21.07.2013.

¹⁰⁸ Mubarak's Shia Remarks Stir Anger, *Al-Jazeera*, 10.04.2006, <http://www.aljazeera.com>, internet access: 22.07.2013.

inspiration of Shiites across the region to clamor more rights and influence following the fall of Saddam Hussein, were perceived by the Sunni Arab actors in the region as a threat toward their unity, stability and national security. US invasion of Iraq has re-written the rules of the Middle East political system by adding sectarian loyalties to the power equation among the actors of the regional system.

Although the role of the US invasion of Iraq was undeniable for a Shiite revival in the region, the effect of the Lebanon War in 2006 between Hezbollah (and Iran) and Israel to the political and ideological competition, was also newsworthy when analyzing the regional system. The war showed the power of Iran and its proxy, Hezbollah for the stability of the region. Although the international community and the Lebanese government blamed Hezbollah for causing massive damage to Lebanese infrastructure, economy and people, and dragging the country into a military conflict with only for Hezbollah's interests; the war was recorded and remembered as a first Arab (Iranian-backed Hezbollah) victory against Israel in the Jewish state's 60 year history.¹⁰⁹ Hezbollah, as a paramilitary force, single-handedly fought Israel and forced it to agree on an internationally-negotiated ceasefire. This record gave an enormous prestige and "soft power" to Hezbollah and Iran not only among Shiite population in the region but also in Sunni and Arab streets.

Hasan Nasrallah, the Secretary General of the Hezbollah, and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad were portrayed as heroes fighting bravely while facing an unjust onslaught¹¹⁰ and they were compared with President Nasser of Egypt. In addition, Lebanese Sunni-Christian-dominated government's hosting of Iranian foreign minister at the height of the crisis and the refusal of the US Secretary of State's visit to Lebanon on her tour of the region, raised Iran's standing ever further.¹¹¹ The popularity of Hezbollah and Iran in the region increased so much that the Sunni Arab states felt obliged to alter their expression toward the conflict from criticizing

¹⁰⁹ Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Iran's Politics and Regional Relations: Post-Detente", *Perceptions*, (Spring 2007), p. 34.

¹¹⁰ Neil MacFarquhar, "Tide of Arab Opinion Turns to Support for Hezbollah," *The New York Times*, 28.07.2006, <http://www.nytimes.com>, internet access: 22.07.2013.

¹¹¹ Ehteshami (2007), *Ibid.*, p. 35.

Hezbollah for its recklessness to great support for the Lebanese resistance against Israel. To conclude, Iran played its part successfully in Lebanon within the framework of the regional power struggle with the US following the invasion of Iraq. It evaluated this conflict as a testing ground of its power over the region and against Israel, and at the end of the conflict, its influence and relative power over the balance of power in the region became obvious.

The claims of “Shi’a crescent” of King Abdullah II or “Shi’a revival” of Vali Nasr can be regarded as partly true considering the political condition of the region after the July War in 2006. As described above, a sectarian division among the regional actors and ideological motivations in the power struggle were obvious. One side was composed of Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, and partly Iraq which were politically ruled by Shiites and their relative power comparing the other side had gradually increased since the 9/11 events. On the other side, the Sunni and Arab states where a reputable Shiite population lived started to feel their gradual power degradation against Iran and its allies, and the demands of Shiites in their countries. They perceived a major threat against their national unity and Sunni rule from the other side of the balance.

However it is vital to understand that although a Shiite empowerment was clear since the 9/11 events, Shiites do not owe their empowerment to Iran’s ideologically-driven foreign policy. Rather, the political architecture following the 2003 war offered a great opportunity to the Shiites in the region, to increase their power, and also to Iran to benefit from the new structure in its favor. Iran’s foreign policy outlook in supporting the Shiite communities in the whole region has been more oriented towards “establishing a strategic linkage between friendly states and political factions in the region” rather than pursuing purely ideological/doctrinal ulterior motives.¹¹²

¹¹² Barzegar (2008), *Ibid.*, p. 78.

3.2.3. Nuclear Program as a Tool for Regional Leadership

The nuclear program of Iran is another tool within Iranian foreign policy through the ambitions of the regional leadership. Although the roots of the program rested upon the Shah's rule and were re-initiated by the Islamic rule which principally remained aloof from the program following the Iran-Iraq War; the program came into the global political agenda as a threat to world peace according to the US intelligence officials' reports on Iran's missing or false declarations about the scope of its nuclear program, which raised suspicions about its true nature. Following the allegations, Iranian authorities were forced to acknowledge that they had in fact sought enrichment facilities, separating units and nuclear weapons designs. They also revealed the existence of two unknown nuclear sites in Natanz (uranium enrichment facility) and Arak (heavy water facility) in 2002, and in early 2003 that Iran's nuclear program aimed "to complete the cycle of fuel for plants for peaceful purposes."¹¹³ These announcements did not alleviate the international concerns about Iran's nuclear ambitions but rather heightened them.

Although Iran invited the inspectors from the IAEA to visit the two sites immediately, the existence of them were of particular concern to the IAEA because the agency had first learned their existence via US intelligence services rather than Iranian officials. This increased the suspicion for the reason that the Iranian authorities found it necessary to hide their existence, though late notification was legal under the NPT terms. The evidence on the resemblance between Iranian gas centrifuges and Pak-1s centrifuge¹¹⁴ increased the concerns of the international community about Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapon technology. After a time, the argument was not "if" but "when" Iran might be able to acquire and deploy home-

¹¹³ Ehteshami and Zweiri (2007), *Ibid.*, p. 122

¹¹⁴ It is the model developed by Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan, who confessed to transferring nuclear technology to Iran and Libya, is regarded as a national hero for helping Pakistan become a nuclear state. For details, see: Profile: Abdul Qadeer Khan, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3343621.stm, internet access: 28.07.2013.

grown nuclear weapons.¹¹⁵ However during the Khatami administration, considering his moderate and neo-realist foreign policy to normalize the relations with the US and the EU; Iran reached an agreement with EU3 countries (Britain, France and Germany) in Paris. The “Paris Agreement” in November 2004, stated that in return for security guarantees and substantial economic support Iran would agree to suspend uranium enrichment.

When analyzing the factors which motivated Iran to develop its nuclear technology through the levels in which possessing nuclear weapons will only be a matter of choice; it can be claimed that there are two parts of the story. On the one side, since its establishment, Iran has perceived major threats against its national security and regime survival and this threat perception is probably one of the primary motives of Iran. Whether this threat came from Iraq as experienced in the Iran-Iraq War (it was probably a turning point for the understanding of Islamic Republic’s rulers on the necessity and strategic importance of nuclear weapon capacity considering the devastating consequences of a conventional war over the economy, demography and psychology of Iran); from the US as experienced in the aftermath of the “Axis of Evil” speech of President Bush and of the invasion of Iraq; from Israel, or the GCC countries as experienced in the newly established regional system following the 9/11 attacks is not clear. However, the primary motive of Iran to develop its nuclear technology which could enable the development of nuclear weapons has been the “acute sense of insecurity and vulnerability with the perception of encirclement, and a strong desire to secure the freedom to project power unhindered”.¹¹⁶

As experienced in the example of the nuclear pursuit of India, Israel, Pakistan and North Korea; the threat perception of those countries from the power competition in their geography was the real driver to acquire a nuclear-weapon capacity. Looking at the motivation at these countries, the possession of nuclear

¹¹⁵ Ehteshami and Zweiri (2007), *Ibid.*, p. 125.

¹¹⁶ Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Iranian Perspectives on the Global Elimination of Nuclear Weapons", *Palestine-Israel Journal*, Vol.16, No.34, (2010), p. 23.

weapon capacity would deter any direct or indirect attack either conventional or nuclear.¹¹⁷ For Iran, re-initiating the nuclear program and developing its capacity has been a complementary tool along with the alliance-building strategy with an aim to secure its environment in the regional balance of power. Without the nuclear capacity of the Islamic Republic; the alliance among Iran, Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas would not pose any threat towards the nuclear Israel and the GCC countries whose security has been under the protection of the nuclear US. Because of the power politics which continued to dominate the Middle East region's inter-state relations; as long as the nature of the system remains unchanged and Iranian threat perception exists because of being excluded from the system and labeled as "antagonist", so does nuclear weapon capacity pursuit of the country. However this is only a part of the story, the "defensive part" of it.

The nuclear weapon capacity pursuit has also been vital for Iran's regional and global ambitions. Following the mutual agreement on suspending its nuclear enrichment activities among 5+1 countries in Paris in 2004 in Khatami rule, the foreign policy direction of Iran altered with the electoral victory of Ahmadinejad. First, talks between Iran and the EU had been broken off in September 2005 because Iran decided to resume uranium conversion after a nine month suspension, and this decision led to the IAEA board pronouncing Iran as "non-compliant" with the NPT, of which it is a signatory, and to refer the matter to the UNSC.¹¹⁸ Due to the power vacuum appeared because of the elimination of Taliban and Saddam following the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, Iran demonstrated its ambition to dominate the region and "fulfill its historic mission to lead the region and the wider set of Muslim countries to a just world".¹¹⁹ As a country with no relative economic and military (conventional) power adequate to dominate the region; the easiest and cheapest way is to develop nuclear weapon capacity to increase the relative power of Iran *vis-à-vis*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹¹⁸ For details, see: Tehran Ends Freeze on Nuclear Program, *The New York Times*, 08.08.2005, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/08/world/africa/08iht-iran.html?_r=0, internet access: 28.07.2013.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

the GCC countries and Israel, which are the most powerful and effective actors on the regional power competition.

In addition, in the aftermath of the economic pressure from the US and the EU with the UNSC sanctions since 2006, when Iran was subjected to three UNSC resolutions, each imposing economic and commercial sanctions toward Iranian economy; Iran shifted its financial roots from Europe to Far East. In the regional balance of Asia, though Iran sees itself as a key actor and stakeholder; Iran is less of a significant actor than its ambitions indicate.¹²⁰ The dynamics of Asian politics, which are defined according to nuclear weapons possession and economic power bases, also affected Iran's motivation for nuclear weapon capacity. Iran realized that in order to become a regionally and globally influential actor, the nuclear program offers a perfect opportunity to increase its power base *vis-à-vis* other regional and global actors. As Ehteshami underlined, "a nuclear posture strengthens Iran's profile in an Asian neighborhood full of heavy-weights and nuclear weapons states, and also strengthens its negotiating hand with its adversaries".¹²¹ Because of this fact, there is a strong elite consensus in Iran about an independent nuclear fuel cycle. The nuclear program is perceived as a "matter of technological advancement, national pride, and solidarity that bolsters Iranian identity and status regionally and internationally."¹²²

It is obvious that the key policy makers in Iran were fully aware of the advantages of nuclear capabilities for the country's regional and global power game. However on the other hand, they were also aware of the potential threat that the pursuit of nuclear weapons produces. The case of Iraq in 2003 was a perfect example for the possible consequences of nuclear capability pursuit which can't be controlled, leading to military confrontation. Besides, Iran also learned from the North Korean example of nuclear capability pursuit that the more complex the program the greater the opportunities for negotiations. The nuclear issue, both a mark of power and a bargaining chip, can therefore serve as the fulcrum for changing Iran's regional and

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹²² Barzegar (2010b), *Ibid.*, p. 184.

international role only so long as the international community does not reach a consensus on stopping its nuclear program. Once that line is crossed, the nuclear program will likely be as much a burden as an asset to an ambitious Iran.¹²³ Since the Iranian rulers believed that line was not crossed yet, they continued keeping the problem unsettled by linking the nuclear program with broader regional dynamics. In this way, Iran has sought to package together Iran's nuclear program with outstanding regional disputes and Iranian security concerns in order to afford greater strategic value and bargaining power in any future negotiations.

In response to Iran's abovementioned maneuver about its nuclear program, the alliance among the US, the EU, Israel and the GCC countries only produced strategies as economic and commercial sanctions since 2006. Although there has been an ongoing debate about whether a military attack was necessary towards Iran to prevent the nuclear weapon possession US and EU officials have sought the solution of the problem via diplomacy, additional to the UNSC sanctions.

3.2.4. Embracing the Arab-Israeli Conflict

Following the electoral victory in 2005, Ahmadinejad started to give signals about his foreign policy outlook immediately. In his speech at the UN meeting in September 2005, he emphasized "the unjust order of the UNSC", the inequality among the members of the organization, and the need of justice, peace and respect to human beings in the international system.¹²⁴ Just after a month, he initiated an open hostility to Israel by reminding and praising Imam Khomeini's speech on "wiping Israel off the map"; by embracing the Palestinian cause, and by rejecting the conditions of Palestinian people. He also condemned all Muslim leaders "who accept

¹²³ Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, W.W. Norton&Company, (2006), p. 10.

¹²⁴ For details, see: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's Speech in the 6th Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 17.09.2005, <http://www.un.org/webcast/ga/60/statements/iran050917eng.pdf>, internet access: 04.08.2013

the legitimacy of Israel has in fact, signed the defeat of the Islamic world.”¹²⁵ This provocative stance reached its peak in December when Ahmadinejad raised doubts about the validity of the Holocaust and made a call for all Western countries to “carry the burden of their anti-Jewish policies by finding a state for the Jews on their own land”¹²⁶, rather than a land where Palestinians had historical rights. He further added by claiming that “a world without the US and Zionism is possible” although claimed otherwise. These remarks were naturally condemned by all the regionally and globally influential actors except the allies of Iran, and the longevity of détente among Iran and the GCC countries (and the US) started to be questioned.

Through these remarks, after a period of relative softening against Israel and the harsh stance of Iran about the Arab-Israeli peace process in Khatami’s rule, Ahmadinejad returned to the revolutionary and ideological language of Khomeini just after the establishment of the Islamic Republic. Although Iran has never fought a war with Israel and has no territorial dispute with the Jewish state; the policy-makers of the newly-established Islamic Republic adopted a different manner from what the Shah had adopted in his rule. In parallel with their revolutionary identity and Islamic ideology, they have put the Arab-Israeli conflict on a totally different footing as a religious crusade as opposed to a political-national conflict¹²⁷, and this footing alteration led to a natural hostility towards Israel and its existence in the Palestinian land. Following the loosening of the revolutionary ideology in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War and of the death of Khomeini, Iran tried to act strategically in the Arab-Israeli conflict convenient to its national interests. The main goal of Iran for the conflict was to keep the problem unsettled because any peace between Palestine, the Arab states and Israel would mean total isolation of Iran in the Middle East region. Therefore, in order to sustain its alliance with Syria and Hezbollah which have been the friendly actors and factions increasing the relative power of Iran in the power

¹²⁵ For details, see: Text of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s Speech, *The New York Times*, 30.10.2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/30/weekinreview/30iran.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>, internet access: 05.08.2013

¹²⁶ Ehteshami and Zweiri (2007), *Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹²⁷ Menashri, *Ibid.*, p. 109.

competition of the region; and in order to keep involved in major regional issues as a regionally influential actor; Iran has continued its hostility towards Israel and rejection of any peace among the Palestinians and the Israelis.

3.3. Conclusion

Following the 9/11 attacks, the rules of the power competition game in the Middle East altered because of the US policy change from dual containment to war against terror towards the region. The US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the Axis of Evil speech in the Congress in 2002, and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 led to a drastic alteration and power vacuum in the regional balance of power because of the elimination of Taliban regime in Afghanistan and Ba'ath regime in Iraq. All these events offered both opportunities and threats to Iran, as an actor which had been isolated from the regional politics since its establishment. In the aftermath of the calculation of both opportunities and threats, Iran followed a neo-realist foreign policy by prioritizing its survival and its regional role.

On the one hand, Iran's isolation from the regional politics has gradually ended by choosing to avoid direct conflict with the US and cooperating with its main regional and outside rivals on establishing stability and peace in Afghanistan and Iraq in order to protect its national security. However on the other hand, because of Iran's transformation into a regionally influential actor, the US and its allies in the region followed policies to limit the empowerment and influence of Iran. In this way, a zero-sum game emerged between the US and Iran, where one's security would lead to the insecurity of the other.

Besides, the speed of the US' victory in Iraq, a general expectation that Iran would be the next target of the US and the growing presence of the US near Iran's borders were responded via a twofold strategy by Iran. While avoiding direct conflict with outside actors and expanding dialogue with their regional allies on the one side; Iran followed a neo-realist foreign policy by maximizing its relative power through four main strategies as building alliances and utilizing them in order to enhance its regional role, utilizing the Shiite empowerment emerging in the post-invasion Iraqi

political scene in its favor by supporting Shiite factions in Iraq, developing the nuclear program and benefiting from it as a foreign policy tool for both defensive and offensive reasons, and embracing the Arab-Israeli conflict in order to mobilize the popular support of the people and inject its voice to the most significant debate in Arab politics.¹²⁸

However the chain of events called as “the Arab Spring”, which had greater potential to affect the characteristics of the power relations of the region, emerged at the end of 2010.

¹²⁸ Trita Parsi, "Israel and the Origins of Iran's Arab Option: Dissection of a Strategy Misunderstood", *The Middle East Journal*, (2006), pp. 510-511.

CHAPTER 4

THE ARAB SPRING AND BEYOND

4.1. The Arab Spring and Its Geostrategic Effects

The mass movements called as the Arab Spring (or the Arab Awakening, the Arab Uprisings, depending upon the authors' theorizations and classification of the movements) have started in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia on 18 December 2010 following Mohammed Bouazizi's self-immolation in protest of police corruption and ill treatment for years. He was carrying the financial burden of his relatives with only \$140 per month by selling fruit and vegetables on the street. After he set himself on fire, a wave of unrest, sparked by Tunisian "Burning Man" arose in Algeria, Oman, Yemen, Egypt, Libya and spread to other countries of the Middle East region.

Protests had different implications in different countries of the region: In four countries (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen) governments have been overthrown; in Syria, a major civil war has erupted; in Bahrain, a civil disorder led by Shiite majority mass of the country has emerged but violently crushed by the governments of the GCC countries; in four countries (Jordan, Iraq, Morocco and Kuwait), protests led to major governmental changes; in another nine countries (Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan, Algeria, Mauritania, Djibouti, Somalia, Iran), major and minor protests have appeared. Although no single ideology was behind these events, all the events were linked to each other with common problems as political repression, corruption, unaccountable and ineffective governments, and unemployed urban youth. In addition, people in those countries have shared many common demands: respect and dignity, human rights, employment, and effective, representative and accountable governments. However, this doesn't mean that all of the movements in the region are identical, but all have their country specific demands instead. The Arab Spring may be best defined as "a shared wave" which paves the way to different social movements with different demands in various countries.

No matter what the consequences will be; these mass movements symbolized a milestone in the political history of the MENA region. On the contrary to the common belief of Western academic and political circles, people of the region stood up, raised their voice, and decided to fight neither for jihad and region-wide war against Israel nor for the exclusion of the US from the region, but for their political, economic and social rights. This was a great surprise for the whole world. As Ajami underlined, waves of democracy has swept over from Europe to Latin America, from East Asia to Africa for almost two generations, but not to the Middle East because the tyrants had successfully closed up the political arena.¹²⁹ Of course, the events of the Arab Spring cannot be thought independent from the regional dynamics. It was the next stage of the series of events starting with the US invasion of Iraq, continuing with firstly, the democratic elections in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine, and secondly, the Cairo speech of Obama and his messages to the people of the region.

Furthermore, the regional balance of power which was fundamentally shattered in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq; has received another major blow by these events. Because nobody was successful to predict this wave of events¹³⁰; no country in the regional political system was able to position themselves prior to the events and the political environment that the events created. The upheavals in Egypt, Bahrain, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, and their political consequences in these countries fundamentally affected the regional balance of power. Both Saudi-led and Iran-led fronts within the frame of “regional cold war”,¹³¹ which began with the July 2006 War, have perceived a significant threat against their regional interests and strategically positioned themselves to maximize their relative power and to protect their role in the regional politics.

In general, the events have affected the region both geopolitically and ideologically. On the geopolitical consequences; the toppling of US-allied autocrats

¹²⁹ Fouad Ajami, “The Arab Spring at One”, *Foreign Affairs*, March/April (2012).

¹³⁰ Jeff Goodwin, “Why We Were Surprised (Again) by the Arab Spring”, *Swiss Political Science Review*, Vol.17, No.4, (2011), p. 452.

¹³¹ Morten Valbjørn and André Bank, “The New Arab Cold War: Rediscovering the Arab Dimension of Middle East Regional Politics”, *Review of International Studies*, Vol.38, No.1, (2012).

in Tunisia, Libya but especially in Egypt, and the civil war in Syria, dramatically affected the regional balance of power and gave birth to a region-wide reconfiguration of foreign policy strategies of regionally influential powers. By failing to anticipate it, the US found itself a “bystander”¹³² during the Arab Spring. As Kissinger argues that the US calculated the costs and benefits of opposing the events because of the emergence of anti-American regimes in the related countries and supporting them because of their “democratic” flavor. At the end, the US decided that aligning itself with revolutionary movements and following a foreign policy on promoting humanitarian and democratic values¹³³ would be the best for its regional interests. As Gause argues, because this kind of a general strategy was seen as a major threat towards their authoritarian Arab allies in the future¹³⁴; the US preferred to be selective in specific cases.

It can be argued that in the regional cold war among the conservative monarchies that can be called as “the GCC front” led by Saudi Arabia and “the rejection front”,¹³⁵ led by Iran; losing one of their constituents would not be in favor of any fronts because this would mean a major rupture in one front and automatically the empowerment of the other. After all, this would endanger the survival of both the regimes and states in one front. However the US’ declining power and unwillingness to involve in regional power competition and its tendency to support democratic movements against tyrant regimes under Barack Obama;¹³⁶ undermined the relative power of the GCC front, which was still very much dependent on the US security

¹³² Shahram Chubin, “Iran and the Arab Spring: Ascendancy Frustrated”, *GRC Gulf Papers*, (September 2012), p. 6.

¹³³ Henry A. Kissinger, “Defining a U.S. Role In the Arab Spring”, *The International Herald Tribune*, 02.04.2012, <http://www.henryakissinger.com/articles/iht040212.html>, internet access: 07.09.2013.

¹³⁴ F. Gregory Gause III, "Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring: The Myth of Authoritarian Stability", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.90, (2011).

¹³⁵ Chubin, *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹³⁶ For details, see: George Friedman, "Obama and the Arab Spring", *Stratfor: Global Intelligence*, (2011), 24.05.2011, http://www.relooney.info/SI_ME-Crisis/0-Important_196.pdf, internet access: 08.09.2013.

umbrella. In this context, the GCC countries have sought to diversify their security options and as will be argued in the following pages, the events of the Arab Spring in the Gulf region has represented a perfect example of this policy change.

The Arab Spring, as the democratic wave spreading to whole region, posed a grave threat towards the rule (and rulers) of almost all countries. They have faced a dilemma: either to back the regimes and rulers, try to keep them in power for the sake of sustainability of their alliances and at the expense of the reflections of this stance on their domestic environment; or to choose to back the opposition even if that would mean losing one or more allies in the regional power game. In a region where authoritarianism is dominant and regime survival is the most important issue, it was almost impossible to expect the countries to choose the second option. So they exerted efforts to keep their front united and defend it against the other front at the expense of the demands of their own people or of the hearts and minds of the Middle East street as long as this kind of a policy was for their benefits.

In this chapter, the main aim is to analyze the political environment that the Arab Spring created and the stance of Iran towards these events. Given the claim in the previous chapter that Iran followed a neo-realist foreign policy in the aftermath of 9/11 and the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, the question whether there is any deviation from this policy following the Arab Spring will be analyzed considering its actions and strategies towards the each case. The main argument is that when the region-wide upheavals occurred, Iran saw an Islamic character in these movements and tried to build its foreign policy strategy towards this feature to benefit from it. Although it was ambiguous whether defining and perceiving the events as “the natural extension of Islamic Republic in Iran” was due to a misreading of these movements by Iranian rulers or on Iran’s conscious policy to manipulate the Islamic character to mobilize the “Arab Street” in order to topple their US-allied autocratic regimes; Iran embraced this discourse for a period of time. However the regional structure evolved into a different extent when the uprisings spilled over to Syria, “Iran’s oldest, most dependable and the only Arab ally.”¹³⁷ The discourse of Iran

¹³⁷ Chubin, *Ibid.*, p. 32.

towards the events transformed from embracing the movements as “explosion of sacred anger”¹³⁸ against their autocratic, secular rulers into labeling them as “foreign plots instigated by a trilateral front of Western, Arab and Zionist countries.”¹³⁹ Therefore, this rational but not consistent shift in its discourse and foreign policy, led to the decrease in Iran’s popularity in the Arab Street and its relative power in regional politics. At the end, while Iran had been one of the regional actors which had benefited most from post-9/11 developments in the Middle East, it lost most of its gains with the regional environment following the Arab Spring.

Because it is argued that the appearance of uprisings in Syria dramatically changed the positioning of Iran towards the Arab Spring, the analysis will be made in three different sections: first two sections will mainly focus on the events in the Maghreb and Gulf regions and Iranian response and positioning towards them by welcoming the protests. On the other hand, the third section will focus specifically on the events in the Levant region and the alteration of Iranian positioning and discourse towards the events.

4.2. The Maghreb Region

When the protests began in Tunisia, in Egypt, and in Libya; Iran faced a dilemma as all the countries in the region did: Supporting either the Arab street who were demanding political freedom and economic development, or with the side of autocratic rulers who have been in close cooperation with the US for years and ensured their legitimacy by suppressing the people with military and police forces.

Actually a side was already chosen by Khomeini after the establishment of Islamic Republic of Iran and by Ayatollah Khamenei following the death of his predecessor. Since the inception of the Islamic Republic, Iran’s clerical leadership has been waiting for the day that the Muslims will rise up and overthrow their pro-

¹³⁸ Iran’s Khamenei Praises Egyptian Protestors, Declares ‘Islamic Awakening’, *The Cristian Science Monitor*, 04.02.2011, <http://www.csmonitor.com>, internet access: 08.09.2013.

¹³⁹ West, Arab, Zionist Trio Targeting Syria to Curb Islamic Awakening, *Press TV*, 02.05.2013, <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2013/05/02/301480/syria-targeted-to-curb-islamic-awakening>, internet access: 08.09.2013.

Western Arab regimes¹⁴⁰. In order to facilitate this desire, as briefly discussed in the previous chapters of this study, Iran has followed the export the revolution strategy by supporting peoples' movements in those countries. Therefore, it was seen by the Iranian regime that the 2011 events in Tunisia and Egypt have heralded Khomeini's and Iran's rightfulness, and not only protests in Tunisia and Egypt but also in Bahrain, Jordan, Algeria, Morocco, Oman, Libya and Kuwait represented a wave of "Islamic awakening" which is long overdue. These events now represented an unstoppable force, according to the Iranian regime.¹⁴¹ Iranian rulers have also underlined that the "global arrogance" has exerted real efforts to distort the "truth" by underlining that the uprisings were secular and democratic in character and were based on socio-economic reasons however this did not change the Islamic character of these uprisings.

Apparently, one of the rationales that Iran analyzed the regional uprisings as Islamic awakening and the "long-awaited next phase of Islamic revolution" was the emergence of political Islam following the democratization in the region.¹⁴² As proved by the elections in Iraq in 2004, Palestine in 2005, Lebanon in 2006, Tunisia and Egypt in 2012; Islamist factions appeared as the only organized and mobilized political alternative for the people of the region in democratic elections. Iran was aware that the Arab Street was not only composed of Islamist factions but also of secular or other factions, in regard to its past experience. As experienced in Islamic Revolution in 1979; the uprising against the Shah was led by many divergent groups including constitutional monarchists, secular liberals, nationalists, leftist factions and Islamists. However when the Shah was toppled with the collaboration of all these factions, the Islamists proved to be the best organized and most ruthless, had succeeded in seizing power by eliminating the other factions. Therefore, the "Islamic

¹⁴⁰ Ehteshami (1995), *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Supreme Leader's Friday Prayer Address, 05.02.2011, http://english.khamenei.ir//index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1417&Itemid=4, internet access: 14.09.2013.

¹⁴² Ali Parchami, "The 'Arab Spring': the View from Tehran", *Contemporary Politics*, Vol.18, No. 1, (2012), p. 38.

awakening” argument of Iran was the prediction that history will repeat itself and the collaborative efforts of various political factions to overthrow their autocratic rulers will be finalized with the political rule of Islamists. From this point of view, Iranian rulers were confident that the outcome of the events was going to be in line with Iran’s interests. Any form of political opening will pave the way to increasing political presence of Islamist factions and Iran calculated that given its successful experience with Hezbollah and Hamas, Iran can reach some form of accommodation with the new governments and can offer them support and even sponsorship.¹⁴³ Democracy in the region meant change and revision in the status quo of the region and Iran equated this change with opportunity.¹⁴⁴

In parallel with this calculation, the upheavals in Tunisia which forced Ben Ali to resign in January 2011 and led to the electoral victory of moderate Islamist Ennahda Party; and in Egypt which forced Hosni Mubarak to resign in February 2011 and led to the overwhelming electoral victories of Muslim Brotherhood (the FJP) and Salafist *al-Nour* Party in 2012; were saluted by the Islamic regime of Iran. It was thought that the victory of Muslim Brotherhood (the FJP) in Egypt, as other Salafist groups and organization would “proffer fertile grounds for Iran’s growing influence.”¹⁴⁵ In this thinking, the growing influence of Iran over Egypt, maybe even the inclusion of Egypt into the regional geostrategic power competition as an ally of Iran and a part of Rejection Front would mean a break in the balance of power in favor of Iran. Therefore, Iran embraced the transition to democracy and the victory of political Islam in Egypt. The main motive behind this policy was not an ideological but rather a neo-realist one based on the regime survival, and national (and regional) interests of Iran.

However the hopes of the Iranian regime for Egypt were dashed in a year. Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood publicly declared that the revolution belonged to the

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁴⁵ Naysan Rafati, "After the Arab Spring: Power Shift in the Middle East?: Iran and the Arab Spring", *LSE IDEAS Report*, 2012, p. 50.

Egyptian people and rejected any inspiration from the Islamic revolution of Iran.¹⁴⁶ In addition, Syria's Muslim Brotherhood commented that they were impressed with the Turkish governance system and they added, "we are not keen on the Iranian model."¹⁴⁷ These attitudes represented a significant proof of Iran's failure to analyze the real essence of the region-wide upheavals as Islamic awakenings by ignoring their social and economic elements.

Besides, although Iran calculated that the democracy which will lead to the domination of Islamic factions will be in favor of Iran; the other side of the coin was against Iran's interests. It can be considered that Tehran's influence has always been greatest in countries being ruled by authoritarian, US-allied regimes, where Iran could successfully exploit the illegitimacy of these rulers by highlighting their dependence on the US and their ambivalence on pan-Arab issues, such as the conflicts in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine.¹⁴⁸ Although the Iranian officials have continued this strategy by labeling the uprisings as anti-US and anti-Israel¹⁴⁹, this slogan became empty for the new type of populist force emerging among the region's more pragmatic and less ideological youth. Even it can be argued that the US and Israel are the main responsible actors behind the political, economic and social burdens Arab people are facing and complaining; the main motive of the protestors was to topple their tyrant rulers and address their economic problems. Maybe it is the first time that the people of the region raised their voice not for an ideology spread via the regimes and targeting a state, or for oppressed people of Palestine; but only for their own lives. The slogans at Tahrir Square were

¹⁴⁶ Meris Lutz, "Iran's Supreme Leader Calls Uprisings an Islamic Awakening," *Los Angeles Times*, 05.02.2011, <http://articles.latimes.com>, internet access: 21.09.2013.

¹⁴⁷ Massoud A. Derhally, "Syria's Muslim Brotherhood Favors Turkey Model Over Iran in Plan for Power", *Bloomberg News*, 28.11.2011, <http://www.bloomberg.com>, internet access: 21.09.2013.

¹⁴⁸ Dalia Dassa Kaye, Frederic Wehrey, and Michael Scott Doran, "Arab Spring, Persian Winter," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.90, (2011), p. 2.

¹⁴⁹ Palestine, Pillar of Islamic Awakening, *Press TV*, 17.09.2011, <http://www.presstv.com/detail/199671.html>, internet access: 21.09.2013.

representing the core message of Egyptian protestors¹⁵⁰ and none of them vindicated Iran's argument. For this reason, any government taking the rule in Egypt by the democratic elections even the Muslim Brotherhood or *al-Nour*, was likely to mainly focus on domestic arena to consolidate their power. Therefore any calculation expecting Egypt to involve in regional power game by joining either front, which automatically leads the country into a military conflict, would be mistaken.¹⁵¹

Another calculation of Iran was the consequences of the region-wide protests on the US-allied, repressive tyrants. Iran believed that the fall of US-allied autocratic rulers in Tunisia and Egypt will spread to the region successfully and this will at the end lead to the demise of the power of the US' (or West) and its crony regional states (especially GCC countries and Israel). It would be impossible, in this respect, that the people of the region would not see the Western hypocrisy and double-standards (brutality towards Qaddafi regime but remaining silent towards Bahrain and Yemen) towards their demands with the availability of mass communication and technology, better education, and rising political awareness. In fact, according to Iranian perspective, the power of the US has started to fall following the dramatic military failure of US invasion in Iraq on 2003. Finally, the diminishing power of outside powers and their regional allies automatically translated to an increase in Iranian relative power and role in the region.

Nevertheless, the reality is totally different. Iran was seen as a spoiler, disrupter regional actor and a "destabilizing force"¹⁵² in regional politics by the regional actors and in fact, it has never held enough power to act as a "builder". Moreover, the nuclear program of Iran has threatened the security of regional actors and this fact has led to the perception that Iran has been considered the main enemy of Arab states instead of Israel especially since post-US invasion of Iraq period. Iran's policy on the region-wide protests and its attitude towards them by labeling as Islamic awakenings

¹⁵⁰ Mahmood Sariolghalam, "Transition in the Middle East: New Arab Realities and Iran", *Middle East Policy*, Vol.20, No.1, (2013), pp. 121-134.

¹⁵¹ Kaye, *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁵² Rafati, *Ibid.*, p. 50.

and anti-US, anti-Israel protests have not contributed to its reputation among regional political regimes positively.¹⁵³

4.3. The Gulf Region

As discussed in previous chapters, one of the major strategic goals of Iran since the establishment of the Islamic Republic has always been the declining power of the US from the region and, in this way, the elimination of the US security umbrella towards Gulf countries, which became the regional rival of Iran following the fall of Saddam Hussein and the exclusion of Iraq from the regional balance of power. Iran is well-aware that the relative power of the GCC front is mainly based on their economic power from their oil wealth, and the US has been the main facilitator and provider enabling this wealth accumulation by establishing a secure environment via its presence in the region. The main sources of this presence are military bases in the Persian Gulf, whose main priorities are: securing the Gulf and oil resources, guaranteeing the security of the state of Israel, and combating threats to American interests. The US presence has increased over the decades since its creation in 1990 to protect the Gulf region from Saddam Hussein; and as time passes, it was complemented with air bases, continued sales of arms and their deployment to the Gulf. Considering the regional balance of power and the zero-sum power struggle, it is beyond doubt that the presence of the US bases and its gradual expansion threatened the regional position and interest of Iran.

The Arab Spring opened a new era in the regional power struggle among both fronts and this time the stakes are bigger: it is about defining the shape of the wider regional order¹⁵⁴, steering the course of events and influencing decisions according to political interests. The Gulf region (Bahrain and Yemen) was one of the main battlefields where both sides have strained every nerve in order to first survive, and

¹⁵³ Peter Jones, "Hope and Disappointment: Iran and the Arab Spring", *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, (2013), p. 80.

¹⁵⁴ Chubin, *Ibid.*, p. 19.

second to defeat the other side. One of the major revelations of the Arab Spring about the regional rivalry among two fronts has been the dramatic strategy change in the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia had preferred to stay passive and to avoid direct confrontation with the regional enemies until the Arab Spring. Thanks to its “deep pockets”, it has benefited from its economic power to influence the regional politics and to mediate the conflicts which may halt the secure environment which Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies owe their financial strength. However following the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia began feeling uneasy about the current dynamics of the regional balance of power and its reliance on American patronage to protect its national and regional interests.

The general perspective of US towards the region by morally supporting and encouraging region’s democratic movements, by limiting its active role and direct involvement to regional affairs with the withdrawal from Iraq, which started in 2009 and completed at the end of 2011 following the rule of Barack Obama; led to a decision by the Saudis that their traditional American allies cannot be fully counted on.¹⁵⁵ Although spearheading the NATO intervention following the UNSC authorization of “all necessary measures” to protect civilians from their tyrant ruler in Libya, and its moral support for the suppression of Shiite upheaval in Bahrain because of high cost of a losing Bahrain to Shiite majority and of its meaning: handing one of their strategic regional bases to their regional rival, Iran; US was not much willing to directly interfere to the political and social turmoil in Bahrain. Thus, this dramatic policy alteration of the US and the relative strengthening of Iran (and the Rejection Front) caused a sense of vulnerability in Saudi Arabia, especially following the post-Iraqi invasion regional environment by increasing their involvement in Iraq, the electoral victory of Hamas in 2005 and 2006 in Palestine, the Lebanon War in 2006 and the Gaza War in 2009. And this has led Saudi Arabia that discovered the geostrategic instrumental utility of the GCC beside its economic

¹⁵⁵ Mehran Kamrava, "The Arab Spring and the Saudi-led Counterrevolution", *Orbis*, Vol.56, No.1, (2012), p. 98.

power,¹⁵⁶ to change the way to cope with the threats it faced by quitting its passivity and flinging down the gauntlet to Iran, and even adopting a more independent policy towards the US.¹⁵⁷

The protests in Bahrain represented (and was perceived as) “the critical verge” for Saudi Arabia to push back the Rejection Front. The Arab Spring was maybe the most serious crisis that the conservative monarchies of the Persian Gulf have faced since the Iranian revolution which put the region into a chaotic situation in the early 1980s. The survival of these regimes was on thin ice, therefore, according to the Gulf countries, the uprisings must be suppressed or defused either by using their soft power as economic incentives (like in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait) or using their hard power as brutal and uncompromising use of force (like in Bahrain) depending upon the domestic political environment in related countries. These are the only policy tools that conservative monarchies were able to use because of the demographic conditions in their countries where the elites are well aware that they don’t represent a plurality of the populations of their state.¹⁵⁸ Therefore, all they can do is first try to purchase “the political quietude of their domestic audience.”¹⁵⁹ When this is not enough, the last method would be usage of force to preserve serenity, as experienced in Bahrain. A successful Shiite-led pro-democracy struggle in Bahrain might not only encourage pro-democracy elements in the Gulf region but also might encourage the restive and oppressed Shiite minority in Saudi Arabia –

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹⁵⁷ Yoel Guzansky, “Saudi Activism in a Changing Middle East”, *Strategic Assessment*, Vol.14, No.3, (October 2011), p. 57.

¹⁵⁸ The ruling family of Saudi Arabia is only 100.000 out of population of roughly 20 million while more than 80 percent of the inhabitants of the UAE are imported labor without citizenship and two-thirds of Bahraini citizens are Shiite while the ruling family is Sunni.

For details, see: Iran Sees an Opportunity in the Persian Gulf, *Forbes*, 06.03.2011, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/energysource/2011/03/06/irans-opportunity-in-the-persian-gulf>, internet access: 28.09.2013.

¹⁵⁹ Beginning in February 2011, the Saudi state began spending \$130 billion to pump up civil servant salaries, promising to build 500,000 additional units of low-income housing, and substantially increasing its financial support for religious organizations. For details, see: Kamrava, *Ibid.*, p. 98.

which is concentrated in the oil-rich northeastern part of the country – to rebel as well.¹⁶⁰

The Arab Spring in Bahrain started in February 2011 when demonstrators occupied Manama's Pearl Roundabout with demands of more democracy and an end to discrimination against the majority Shiite Muslim community by the Sunni rule. Following King Hamad's declaration of a state of emergency and request, Saudi Arabia directly interfered to the protests by sending the "Peninsula Shield Force", which is the military unit of the GCC and was established to deter military threats against any of the GCC members but first time used in relation to an internal threat.¹⁶¹ Over 40 people have been killed by security forces and pro-government mobs and more than 1,600 have been arrested. Many detainees have been tortured and even killed in custody. More than 4,400 people have been dismissed from their jobs for participating in protests and religious sites which have links with the protestors, were destroyed.¹⁶² In short, the upheavals in Bahrain were a critical milestone in the region's history because of their relative magnitude to the size of the country, and of the force used to suppress the resistance.

On the other side, Bahrain was seen as prominent by Iran, though not as much prominent as by the GCC countries. First, the majority of the country's population and the bulk of the protestors are Shiite and for many people in the Islamic Republic, they are seen as sectarian brothers and Iran's natural constituencies. Considering Iran's inability to shape the characteristics of the protests in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya; Iran may find an opportunity to directly influence the protests and the destiny of the country. Second, as discussed above, Bahrain hosts the US 5th Naval Fleet since 1990, and the existence of this base is perceived as a strategic threat against Iran's survival and regional interests. Consequently, if protests succeed in toppling their autocratic regime, democracy would lead to a political rule of Shiites

¹⁶⁰ Stephen Zunes, "Bahrain's Arrested Revolution," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol.35, No.2, (2013), p. 150.

¹⁶¹ Saudi Troops Enter Bahrain to Help Put Down Unrest, *The New York Times*, 15.03.2011, <http://www.nytimes.com>, internet access: 29.09.2013.

¹⁶² Zunes, *Ibid.*, p. 149.

considering their majority in Bahraini population. And this empowerment or even the fear of this future situation would eventually lead the US 5th Fleet's withdrawal from Bahrain.

Because of the abovementioned reasons, Tehran celebrated the protests in Bahrain and reacted with fury towards the GCC intervention to them. The political actors and institutions of Iran defined this interference as “massacre” towards the Shiite population of the country and it was seen inadmissible for the state of Iran. In addition, it was claimed that the bloodbath in Manama was ordered by the US in order to solidify the political power of *al-Khalifa* dynasty with the suppression of Shiite protestors. Iran underlined the hypocrisy of US by interfering to Libya to protect the civilians from the brutal use of force but remaining silent (even ordering disproportional use of force) for the brutal crackdown of a pro-democracy movement by the hands of the political rule. According to the calculation of Iran, a Shiite-led rule in Bahrain would certainly be friendlier to Iran and it would be anti-American because the people of the Islamic world will no longer be duped by Western hypocrisy and double-standards. When the masses succeed in toppling their suppressive regimes, they will not forget the fact that Western powers have long supported the regimes which has suppressed them for years. Therefore, Iran foresaw that democracy in Bahrain would mean the regional empowerment of Iran against the US and the Saudi Arabia.

Due to all these abovementioned reasons, Iran has been accused of using “sectarian card” and following ideologically-driven foreign policy to shape the political and social order in the Persian Gulf in favor of its national and regional interests. This is an allegation prolonged since the establishment of the Islamic Republic but was put into words louder especially following the US invasion of Iraq. Although the Islamic Republic of Iran followed an ideological foreign policy or to be more precise, followed a foreign policy including ideologically-driven motives time to time between the period of 1979 and 2001; as discussed in previous chapters, the main rationale of its foreign policy has been mainly based on neo-realist motives

prioritizing the state and regime survival, and Iranian's regional and global interests. And Bahrain was not an exception.

As specific for Bahrain, both Sunni rule in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia underlined Iranian meddling into the domestic affairs of Bahrain by provoking the Shiite population to rebel. The main rationale behind this argument is to gain support from Sunni minority in Bahrain and Western audience and convince them the disorder is not based on democratic demands or autocratic rule but Iranian provocation. However it is erroneous because of both (internal and external) basins.

First, Bahrain is one of the relatively liberal monarchies in the region and possesses a largely moderate and middle class opposition. Indeed, the complaints of Bahraini masses did not start with the Arab Spring. Though its condition as the banking and financial services center of the region, and its small and reasonably prosperous economy; the political, economic and social demands of the opposition, mainly with the lead of Shiite majority of the population, have been on the table since 1990s but suppressed by the ruling regime. Despite the relative political, economic and social reforms as promised by King Hamad, the problems were not completely solved and masses have continued to suffer from the domestic condition of the country. Therefore, underestimating the demands of the masses and protests, which first started peacefully but transformed into a violent crackdown because of the harsh intervention by the hands of Bahraini and Saudi police force, and labeling them as the puppets of Shiite Iran were neither correct nor logical.

Second, unlike claimed by GCC and Western countries, Iran's ability to influence Shiite opposition was limited. Although there is a spiritual guidance and emotional affinity for Iran from many Shiites in Bahrain, the majority of them embrace Iraqi spiritual and religious leaders not Iranian ones to provide them inspiration and legitimizing support in Bahraini politics.¹⁶³

Finally, Bahraini Shiite factions have exerted real efforts to be careful to frame their activism in nationalist, nonsectarian terms because of the ongoing claims of Iranian backing by the Sunni rule of Bahrain. Indeed, the vocal critics towards Iran's

¹⁶³ Kaye, *Ibid.*

regional ambitions have been made by Shiite people in Bahrain. When Iran declares its long-lasting claims of Bahrain as Iran's rightful territory, the loudest protests come from Shiite parliamentarians. Inasmuch as, Tehran's interests in Bahrain transcend sectarianism and ideology, and its foreign policy is based on neo-realist basis whose main logic is to support change in the country because of the close relations between Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and US. Due to the fact that the calculations of Iran about any possible change in Bahrain would certainly pave the way of political victory of the leadership of Shiite faction, the protests should be embraced and welcomed. Despite the rationale of this calculation is based on deterministic and ideological assumption that all Shiite regimes in the region would have close relations with Iran if they take the political power in their countries; this is only a discourse and foreign policy tool to reach its main geostrategic aims in the region: To preserve Iran's survival in the regional power struggle against the GCC front, to derail the US presence in the Middle East, to break the unity of the GCC front, and to become the lead actor of the region. Nevertheless, it would also appear that the elimination of regional power of the US doesn't automatically lead to regional empowerment of Iran and this would be discussed below.

The situation in Yemen is also significant for the regional rivalry among the GCC front and the Rejection Front. Yemen has been called as "quintessential failed state", the Arab world's "least governable country", resembling "Afghanistan but with a coastline"¹⁶⁴, lacking its lack of resources (notably water) but with many warlords and tribal antagonisms. The significance of the poorest and least developed country of the Arab world for the US and the GCC front is based on the country's strategic location and its domestic conditions. Yemen has been negotiating with the GCC for membership although it has no coastline of the Persian Gulf however because of its shared culture and history with the other members of the GCC. Moreover, the country shares a long border with the Saudi Arabia and the Kingdom has long had a proprietary interest in developing its neighbor. Therefore, any political or social turmoil in Yemen leading the dislocation of the country or the

¹⁶⁴ Chubin, *Ibid.*, p. 27.

political empowerment of extremist and religious factions would be notably against the regional interests of the Saudi Arabia, the GCC front and also of the US.

The ruling regime has been in battle with Houthi insurgency since 2004 but since 2009-2010, this insurgency turned into a sectarian conflict among Shiite (Zaidi) Houthis and Sunni Salafis, especially in Sa'dah province.¹⁶⁵ Because of the regime's failed status, extremists and religious factions have been influential on legitimizing their existence and on mobilizing the masses in favor of their interests. Following the beginning of 2011, when demonstrations spilled over Yemen calling for the end of Ali Abdullah Saleh's rule, who has continued for 33 years; the GCC led by the Saudi Arabia, with the implicit support of the US, has offered him to hand over power and a peaceful transition with the establishment of a national unity government.¹⁶⁶ However although the offer was accepted by General People's Congress of Yemen in April, 2011; the offer was not signed by Saleh until November 2011. Since that time, President Hadi, who was elected as president in February 2012 elections with no opposition, has been struggling to tackle Islamic insurgency led by AQAP (Al-Qaeda of Arabian Peninsula), a secessionist movement in the south called as "*al-Hirak*" and Zaidi Houthi rebels in the north.

As experienced in Yemen, because of the presence of Shiite Houthi faction in the opposition movement against President Saleh, Saudi Arabia and the GCC front preferred to consider the uprisings as the provocations and encouragements of Iran with an aim to topple the regime and to initiate the political rule of Shiite Houthis. This kind of a development would lead a wave of "Shiite-led rebels" through the Gulf region and threaten the rule of conservative monarchies of Sunni regimes. Therefore, the governments of Yemen and Saudi Arabia have publicly pointed fingers at Iran, accusing it by giving financial, ideological and military support to Shiite Houthis and by following distortive foreign policy against the unity and

¹⁶⁵ The Yemeni Way, *The New York Times*, 12.05.2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/12/opinion/sunday/friedman-the-yemeni-way.html>, internet access: 05.10.2013.

¹⁶⁶ Arab Uprising: Country by Country - Yemen, *BBC News*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-12482293>, internet access: 05.10.2013.

stability of the GCC. Nevertheless, it is argued that one would be mistaken to hold Iran responsible for the domestic turmoil of Yemen.

First of all, like in Bahrain, Yemen's internal problems were crystals clear both for the regional actors and the masses in Yemen. In the aftermath of the union of South and North Yemen in 1990 and the civil war breaking out in 1994, the southern factions, that were defeated by the northern forces in the civil war, kept continuing to raise their voice against the injustice towards them and the widespread corruption, electoral fraud and mishandling of the power-sharing arrangement to by both parties in 1990, whenever they were able to. The restructuring of the country after the unity was made in favor of North's interests and southerners felt that the ruling regime has treated them unfair about their land, the resource and wealth distribution, their positions in the military. Therefore, the upheavals in Yemen are largely a product of domestic forces and come at a period of heightened Iran-Saudi rivalry and deepened sectarian divisions.¹⁶⁷ No matter how much support Iran has given to opposition factions, once for all, considering Yemen's condition as the region's least developed, poorest and disaggregated country; any kind of a protest should be first evaluated as internally-born.

On the other side, although there may be few affinities between Iran and Yemen with a little historical interaction, Yemen's importance for Iran is only limited with its potential as focal points and likeliest sources of change¹⁶⁸ in the regional balance of power. Like Bahrain, Yemen is also seen as a promising prospect for Iran because of its major Shiite population. However, if Iran followed ideological foreign policy in Yemen, it should have supported only Shiite Houthis not a Sunni extremist movement. Even it can be claimed that Iran would have chosen to support President Saleh because of its Zaidi Shiite Muslim origin by simply ignoring the regional balance of power and Yemen's importance for Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, this is no more the case.

¹⁶⁷ Chubin, *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁶⁸ Parchami, *Ibid.*, p. 39.

In fact, Iran's interest in Yemen is limited with its potential as a strategic bargaining chip for pressure on the Kingdom within the frame of regional "shadow war"¹⁶⁹ where both sides have exerted efforts to maximize their regional influence. However the fact is that Yemen is seen as the backyard of the Kingdom and Iran's interest in Yemen is not as much vital as Saudi's. Therefore, Iran has avoided direct intervention or confrontation but it has not been totally inactive. As a respond to Saudi Arabia's generous aids to Yemen regime and collaboration with the US against extremist and religious factions to keep the country allied and united; Iran has followed a famous "enemy mine" rational foreign policy doctrine of Second World War. In parallel with this doctrine, Iran has supported financially and strategically all the opposition factions including AQAP by using Hamas and Hezbollah links¹⁷⁰ because unlike the claims, the main goal of Iran for the Gulf region is to divide the GCC front and herald its regional leadership.

4.4. The Levant Region

Until that stage, as previously described, the Arab Spring posed grave threat towards the status quo of the region. In Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen, political rulers and/or political regimes have changed and both fronts of the regional balance of power, with the involvement of outside actors like US and Europe, tried to affect the changes for their maximum benefits. Especially in the Gulf region, the GCC front's political and ideological roots have been attacked by the demands of their population in Bahrain and Yemen. Because they successfully predicted the possible consequences of such a domestic turmoil, which would be in favor of Iran's and the Rejection Front's interests, they managed to take immediate action and prevented any nightmare scenario come true for their existence. As a response to this move,

¹⁶⁹“A ‘Shadow War’ in Yemen”, *International Herald Tribune*, 16.05.2012, <http://find.galegroup.com/gic/infomark.do?&source=gale&idigest=e00c570417b0eb514f1a6e98f0db297d&prodId=GIC&userGroupName=king46652&tabID=T004&docId=CJ283073980&type=retrieve&contentSet=IAC-Documents&version=1.0>, internet access: 11.10.2013.

¹⁷⁰ Parchami, *Ibid.*, p. 40.

Iran was not able or willing to directly confront any regional or outside actors and its response stayed limited with moral support or limited financial and military support. Since the potential threat the upheavals posed was suppressed for the moment, the protest movements in first two regions did not bring many changes to the status quo. Nevertheless, the spillover of the protests to Syria has greater potential to lead dramatic changes in the regional power struggle and status quo than another wave of uprisings in other countries of the region.¹⁷¹

The very first reason of this potential is Syria's regional role and its domestic characteristics which caused the appearance of the regional and global effects of the upheavals. As described in previous chapter in details, Syria and Iran has built a close relationship following the Iran-Iraq War in 1980 and Syria played a crucial role on supporting Iran diplomatically and strategically during the war. Despite its symbolic meanings, the strategic support of Syria and the alliance meant so much for Iran which had been isolated from the regional politics at that time. It has been always a win-win alliance for both countries and as it is not based on any ideological roots but on both states' strategic interests. It was experienced in the past that when one side of the alliance became vulnerable and its regime survival was under threat, the other side exerted efforts to support it strategically.

Syria's critical and strategic role for Iran as a strategically vital part of the Rejection Front, made the country become a stage where almost all regional and outside actors slug it out to break the balance of power. Especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar as two leader countries of the GCC front have calculated that any change in political rule of Syria would hit the relative power of Iran and the Rejection Front. Therefore, they started to support the opposition factions in Syria not only financially but also militarily via weapons transfers from GCC countries to the Free Syrian Army and other opposition forces which has been fighting against the Assad rule,¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ Chubin, *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹⁷² Syrian Rebels Get Influx of Arms with Gulf Neighbors' Money, U.S. Coordination, *The Washington Post*, 15.05.2012, <http://www.washingtonpost.com>, internet access: 11.10.2013.

considering that Iran which occupies to deal with the turmoil in Syria would not able to play an active role in the regional politics.¹⁷³

Another reason for Syria's potential to shatter the regional status quo has been the evolution of the protests in time. When the uprisings first spread to Syria, protests demanding freedom and end of corruption began in the southern city of Dera'a in March 2011 however, in the following period, security forces opened fire on demonstrators and exerted ruthless efforts to crush the opposition factions, the uprising escalated with opposition's taking up arms to defend themselves and to oust loyalist forces from their areas.¹⁷⁴ Considering the Shiite origin (Alawite) of Syrian rule and collective support from Iran, Iraq and Hezbollah towards it, and the Sunni origin of opposition and collective support from GCC countries and Egypt; the protests starting peacefully by demanding freedom and end of corruption evolved into a sectarian conflict. And for this way, the sectarian-based regional conflicts, first started following the US' invasion of Iraq and the Shiite political empowerment in Iraq and Lebanon after the invasion, found themselves a new base. This new base has offered Sunni leaders "a golden opportunity to push back against Shiite Iran and the Rejection Front."¹⁷⁵

Besides, lessons learnt from the past experiences affected the outside actors' willingness for direct involvement to the Arab awakenings in Syria. Considering Bush's regional foreign policy, US invasion of Iraq and its consequences for both the US and the region, Obama rule has been unwilling for a military intervention to Syria in order to solve the problem. Although they are well aware that the fall of Assad causes a dramatic decrease in Iran's relative power and for this way, the bargaining power of US against Iran about nuclear issue and region's security strengthens with no question; a direct involvement of the US would only ruin everything and push up

¹⁷³ Mohammed Ayoob, "The Arab Spring: Its Geostrategic Significance," *Middle East Policy*, Vol.19, No.3, (2012); Meliha Benli Altunışık, "Ortadoğu'da Bölgesel Düzen ve Arap Baharı", *Ortadoğu Analiz*, Vol. 5, No.53, (2013), p. 77.

¹⁷⁴ For details, see: Syrian Troops Open Fire on Protestors in Several Cities, *The New York Times*, 26.03.2011, <http://www.nytimes.com>, internet access: 11.10.2013.

¹⁷⁵ Chubin, *Ibid.*, p. 31.

the anti-American feelings among the Arab masses. On the other side, US' concerns about the developments of protests in other countries and any possible consequence of the protests in Syria with the political empowerment of extremist and religious political factions like al-Qaeda, would make a fully passive positioning impossible. In addition, with reference to the position they were in Libya when their assents were misinterpreted and stretched by NATO, Russia and China have not been so much willing to agree on any measures against Syria.¹⁷⁶ The main rationale of this policy is to protect both states' commercial and strategic interests in the region because according to the calculations, any foreign intervention would no doubt lead the political empowerment of radical Islamist political factions in Syria, and this is neither Russia's nor China's favor. They have not supported Assad's power but rather tried to establish stability of Syria.¹⁷⁷

Meanwhile, Iran's initial optimism about the consequences of the Arab Spring turned to first a growing concern, and then to an outright worry,¹⁷⁸ especially since the events in Syria fundamentally altered the nature and implications of the Arab Spring. The fall of Assad regime and a possible Sunni rule in Syria would be highly costly for Iran. It is without question that the most significant geostrategic setback of Iran would be the loss of one of its vital strategic assets enabling to keep the Iran linked with Hezbollah and Hamas and a conduit for its covert operations in Levant.¹⁷⁹ For these reasons, the position of Iran is quite certain: Assad rule have to stay in power in any case.

While the uprisings in Syria can be seen as the continuation of the change-demanding upheavals taking place elsewhere, and bringing together various factions of the society; the narrative of "Islamic awakening" or "democratic" nature of the

¹⁷⁶ For the detailed information about where regional and outside countries stand in Syria, see: Syria Crisis: Where Key Countries Stand, **BBC News**, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23849587>, internet access: 11.10.2013.

¹⁷⁷ Ayoob, *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹⁷⁸ Jones, *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹⁷⁹ Jubin M. Goodarzi, *Syria and Iran: Diplomatic Alliance and Power Politics in the Middle East*, Vol. 55, IB Tauris Publishers, 2006.

uprisings by Iran can only be maintained by separating the protests in other countries from those in Syria. Therefore, Iran condemned the protesters and labeling their protests as illegitimate and pioneered by imperialist-Zionist forces. For the Iranian regime, what is happening in Syria is not an Islamic awakening or a democratic demand from the masses but an explicit manifestation of an American-Israeli plot against Syrian government. They want to take revenge from Syria for their relative defeat in the region and to weaken the Rejection Front because the policies of the Front and Syria have conflicted with their interests in Palestine, Lebanon and all other strategically important places in the region. Iran has assisted Syria financially by helping to defy the UN oil embargo by shipping oil on its own and other carriers,¹⁸⁰ ideologically, and logistically with direct involvement by using its Qods forces, its ally, Hezbollah, and its intelligence and security officials to consolidate Assad's power by suppressing the opposition faction.¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, that kind of a rhetoric and assistance towards the Syrian rule would reduce the regional image and appeal of Iran. Iran being blamed the Western powers with hypocrisy in Libya and Bahrain, has been now blamed with the same guilt by the Arab people demanding political, economic and social freedoms.

In fact, when the regional protests first started in Tunisia and Egypt where Iran heralded the protests as Islamic awakenings and democratic demands, Iran's regional popularity eradicated dramatically because of its hypocrisy toward the protests with the leadership of "Green Movement" since 2009 and the protests in other countries as a part of the Arab Spring. The region-wide protests towards their suppressive rulers for more social freedom and good governance were logically perceived as a threat by the Iranian rulers and they followed a strategy with two pillars to prevent any possible spillover of the protests to Iran and the re-birth to the Green Movement, which had raised their voice following the debated electoral victory of Ahmadinejad

¹⁸⁰ Lina Saigol, "Iran Ships Syrian Oil to Breach Sanctions," *Financial Times*, 18.05.2012, <http://www.ft.com>, internet access: 14.10.2013.

¹⁸¹ On the extent of the relations, see: Karim Sadjadpour, "Iran's Unwavering Support to Assad's Syria", *Carnegie Endowment*, 27.08.2013, <http://carnegieendowment.org>, internet access: 14.10.2013.

but suppressed by the Islamic regime.¹⁸² On the one hand, as underlined above, Iran embraced the protests but by labeling them as “Islamic awakening”. Defining the movements as nothing more than another Islamic revolution in the path of the Iranian experience of 1979 would automatically legitimize the argument that it would be meaningless for Iranian people to demand what they have already achieved 33 years ago.¹⁸³ On the other hand, Iranian rule resisted any protests in the country by using force and legitimizing it by defining the protests as symbols of Islamic plots devised by Western powers. This “rational” theorization of Iran to protect the national interests was unfortunately convincing neither for Iranian masses nor Arab Street. As a continuing of this strategy, while embracing Islamic protests in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain and Yemen, Tehran has labeled the protests in Syria as Western and Zionist plots. After all, while Iran pursues rational strategy towards Syria, its reputation and popularity in the Arab Street because of ignoring the real motives of the protests by labeling them as anti-US and anti-Israeli movements, along with its consistency in regional foreign policy have hit bottom.

When the conflict in Syria turned into a sectarian civil war, its effects spread to Lebanon as a sectarian conflict too because of the cultural and historical ties between both countries. Following this development, the cadres of Hezbollah were also faced with a dilemma: Are they going to support the democratic or Islamic protests against their repressive rulers, or are they going to position themselves behind the political rulers whose existence and legitimacy have been under attack? The main root of the problem for Hezbollah is its dual role in Lebanese and regional politics. They are both a national militia group but also a democratically elected political party influential in Lebanese politics. Therefore, narrowing down its focus on only Shiite constituency by supporting Assad rule as following the steps of Shiite Iran would undermine its claim to national role and about not being a proxy of Iran. Considering

¹⁸² For details, see: Iran’s Green Movement Prepared For Street Protest Against Hardline Regime Mullahs, *The Telegraph*, 26.12.2009, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/6891257/Irans-Green-movement-prepared-for-street-protest-against-hardline-regime-mullahs.html>, internet access: 15.10.2013.

¹⁸³ Hamid Ahmadi, "Iran and the Arab Spring: Why Haven't Iranians Followed the Arabs in Waging Revolution?", *Asian Politics & Policy*, Vol.5, No.3, (2013), p. 412.

the dilemma of Hezbollah, Iran has step up its investments by covering all the Lebanese population¹⁸⁴ in order not to lose Hezbollah, which exemplify for Iran the power of religious motivation in resistance and embodies Iran's support for the "oppressed".¹⁸⁵ Hezbollah's presence as a strategic ally of Iran and a key part of the Rejection Front has been vital for Iran's regional policy against Israel. Considering its relative victory against Israel in 2000 and 2006, Iran would not dare to risk losing one of its major strategic assets in its struggle against the status quo of the region. This was a rational move by Iran to increase its popularity and reputation among Lebanese society and by this way, to legitimize any future Hezbollah support to Assad rule and Iran in the eyes of the people. Due to the fact that Hezbollah still needs the support of Iran and has no other option unlike Hamas, the discourse and general understanding of Hezbollah about the Arab Spring has been the same as Iran by labeling them as Islamic derivatives of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and as resistance against the existence of Israel.¹⁸⁶ Such a discourse has brought the same outcome: a dramatic decrease in its influence and popularity among the Arab masses. The consequences of rational but not credible actions and discourses of Iran and Hezbollah were taught a lesson to Hamas and it followed a different path by supporting and praising the revolution in Syria.

Maybe one of the main drastic changes that the Arab Spring led is the changing role of Hamas in the regional balance of power. Iran's relationship with Hamas started in a marginal basin in the late 1980s but transformed into a full-blown alliance¹⁸⁷ in the period between the second intifada on 2000 and the electoral victory of Hamas in Palestine on 2006. This was mainly due to the rationale of Iranian foreign policy of finding new allies enabling its entry into the Levant and

¹⁸⁴ Neil MacFarquhar, "Iran is Seeking Lebanon Stake as Syria Totters", *The New York Times*, 24.05.2012, <http://www.nytimes.com>, internet access: 16.10.2013.

¹⁸⁵ Chubin, *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁸⁶ After Mubarak: Autumn of the Partiarchs, *The Economist*, 17.02.2011, <http://www.economist.com/node/18186984>, internet access: 16.10.2013.

¹⁸⁷ Meyrav Wurmser, "The Iran-Hamas Alliance", *inFocus*, Vol.I, No.2, (Fall 2007).

diversification of its bases of influence.¹⁸⁸ The relationship has also served in Iran's favor from another perspective: The existence of Hamas in the Rejection Front, whose other elements have been either ruled or dominated by Shiite political factions; has supported the basis of Iranian claim of not following sectarian and ideological path in its regional foreign policy. When Hamas was faced with the developments where Assad regime waged an open war on Sunnis in Syria in order to suppress the protests and to end the civil war in the country; unlike Hezbollah, Hamas has made its choice by turning its back to the Assad regime. As an offshoot of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, it would not be logical to support Syria's Muslim Brotherhood's opponent in a conflict. Therefore, it did not approve the killings in Syria and left the country to find an alternative base. Following the decision to settle in Qatar, in February 2012, the Political Bureau Head of Hamas, Khaled Mash'al has signed Doha agreement with Mahmoud Abbas, the head of Palestine Authority with the initiative of Qatar.

Following this positioning of Hamas towards protests in Syria, the relations with Iran unquestionably strained. Although Iranian rulers have blamed that Mash'al was fooled by the petrodollars of Qatar and Saudi Arabia to shift its loyalty in the Arab-Israeli conflict; as Abbas Abdi from the daily *Etemad* claimed, Hamas made a rational choice. The first concern of Hamas was to guarantee its interest on the liberation of Palestine as well as supporting Assad no longer served to its benefit. When Hamas' financial relationship with Iranian and Syrian patrons soon became a liability following the sectarian tug of war between its Shiite financiers and the Sunni bloc, and Western sanctions' effect on Iran's ability to bankroll its proxies;¹⁸⁹ it has changed its policy and side.¹⁹⁰ This decision is as much rational as the decision of relying on Iran's support when other channels were closed during the Mubarak era.

¹⁸⁸ Chubin, *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁸⁹ How Hamas Lost the Arab Spring, *The Atlantic*, 21.06.2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/06/how-hamas-lost-the-arab-spring/277102/>, internet access: 17.10.2013.

¹⁹⁰ A. Savyon & Y. Mansharof, "Iran-Hamas Crisis: Iran Accuses Hamas of Relinquishing the Bath of Resistance", *MEMRI*, 09.03.2012, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/6158.htm>, internet access: 17.10.2013.

Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the leader of FJP¹⁹¹, Mohamed Morsi's toppling in Egypt by the military and unwillingness of Qatar and Turkey to directly support Hamas,¹⁹² the organization has started to exert efforts to build closer ties with Iran again and the future of the relations are ambiguous as the future of the civil war in Syria.

4.5. Conclusion

The protests called as "Arab Spring" emerged in Maghreb and Gulf regions symbolized a major milestone in the political history of the MENA region. The regional balance of power which was already shattered with the 9/11 attacks and its outcomes, has received another major blow by these events.

Iran, at first, has embraced the protests as natural extensions of the Islamic Revolution in 1979. This positioning of Iran was based on the calculation that political Islam would be the victor of the structural change through democratization in the region and Iran would build closer relations with the countries being ruled by Islamist factions than US-allied tyrants considering the past experience with Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine. Then Iran labeled the protests as anti-US, anti-imperial and anti-Israel movements to increase the country's popularity and soft power by benefiting from these motives among the Arab masses. Nevertheless, it was seen in a short time that both calculations were wrong.

When the protests spilled over the Gulf region, the potential of the uprisings to affect the balance of power grew. Iran took an opportunity to end the US military presence in the Gulf region via supporting popular protests with the calculation that

¹⁹¹ It was the political party officially founded on 30 April 2011 by the Muslim Brotherhood and gained official status on 6 June 2011. For details, see: Muslim Brotherhood to Establish 'Freedom and Justice Party', *The Egypt Independent*, 21.02.2011, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/muslim-brotherhood-establish-freedom-and-justice-party>, internet access: 17.10.2013; Profiles of Egypt's Political Parties, *BBC News*, 25.11.2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-15899548>, internet access: 18.10.2013.

¹⁹² How Hamas Lost the Arab Spring, *The Atlantic*, 21.06.2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/06/how-hamas-lost-the-arab-spring/277102/>, internet access: 17.10.2013.

if the protests manage to overthrow the conservative monarchies in Bahrain and Yemen and the new political structure is established by Shiite or radical Islamist factions, this would be in favor of Iran's interests. Nevertheless, because of the existence of a threat towards their very existence, the GCC front has proactively taken action for their benefits and Iran stayed relatively passive and avoided any direct confrontation with GCC front. Although the potential benefits that Iran can get from a political change in the Gulf region are considerable, it has been subordinate to any possible consequences that shatter Iran's national security.

When the region-wide protests have spread to Syria, because of the vital role of Syria for the regional role of Iran and the Rejection Front, Iran has positioned itself for keeping Assad in power with the rationale that the fall of Assad regime and a possible Sunni rule in Syria would be highly costly for Iran and the most significant geostrategic setback of Iran in the regional balance of power. Therefore, Iran supported the Assad rule by labeling the protests as illegitimate and pioneered by imperialist-Zionist forces in order to preserve its relative power against the GCC front.

One of the main features of the power struggle in the Levant region was also its sectarian element following the involvements of regional powers. With the calculation of the GCC front and the outside actors that any change in Syria would hit the relative power of Iran and the Rejection Front, and their involvement to the country by supporting the opposition factions to keep Iran occupied with the turmoil in Syria; the protests which started peacefully by demanding freedom and end to corruption transformed into a sectarian conflict among Shiite and Sunni blocs. However though the sectarian-based establishment of blocs conflicting in Syria for regional leadership, Iran's foreign policy has been neo-realist by prioritizing the national and regional interests of Iran rather than the preservation of a "Shiite Crescent" as claimed.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The Iranian foreign policy and its main motives since its establishment in 1979 have always been in discussion. Iran was blamed by many countries of following an ideologically-driven foreign policy since 1979. According to this claim, this foreign policy outlook is based on the Islamic motivations and populist aims in Iran's Constitution and in the speeches of Khomeini. Especially after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the groups which supported the claim of Iran's ideological foreign policy grew and raised their voice because of the political environment in the Middle East region.

This thesis sought to answer which motives were of primary importance for Iranian regime on defining its foreign policy outlook since its establishment. It was argued in this study that since its establishment Iran has followed a neo-realist foreign policy by prioritizing the regime's survival and interests considering limits of the state and the anarchic nature of regional/international system. In the aftermath of every regional event, which affected the regional balance of power and necessitated all the regional actors of positioning themselves, Iran has calculated the opportunities and constraints that the events offered, and positioned itself according to this calculation. The primary motive of the state has always been its survival in the regional and international system by maximizing its power for self-help and its role in the regional balance of power. Although there were some periods and events in which Iranian foreign policy was dominated by the ideological motives and discourses, the country's survival in the regional and international system and state interests have always been the priority of the Iranian regime. When an ambitious and ideologically-driven foreign policy action threatened the Islamic regime's existence and Iran's interests in the regional system, Iran acted as a rational actor and neo-realist considerations in its foreign policy prevailed.

While this thesis exerted efforts to explain Iranian foreign policy by the neo-realist theory, it is not possible to argue that the neo-realist perspective does not have

any shortcomings to understand the primary motive of Iranian regime in its foreign policy outlook. It is clear that neo-realist theory has many weaknesses in explaining structural transformation and agencies' or other units' role on foreign policy-making of the states. Therefore, considering its weaknesses, many academicians and researchers which have a specific interest on Iranian foreign policy-making, tried to explain Iranian foreign policy via different theories. For example, Ramazani attached importance on a cycle of ideology and interests in Iranian foreign policy since its establishment and according to this analysis, there were periods in which either ideology or interests prevailed over the other. In addition, Mohammad Nia took a different approach to understand the main motives which drove Iranian foreign policy. He emphasized the role of ideology on Iranian foreign policy-making and embraced a constructivist approach for explaining Iran's foreign policy behavior. Based on holistic constructivism, he tried to identify the determinant factors which affected Iranian foreign policy by focusing on the relations between Iran and its regional and outside rivals.

Not disregarding these explanations to Iranian foreign policy, this thesis analyzed Iran's foreign policy behavior through the lenses of the neo-realist theory. It was argued during this study that Iranian foreign policy was driven by neo-realist considerations since its establishment and despite the changes in the regional balance of power in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks with the US' changing foreign policy outlook towards the Middle East region, the potential of the Arab Spring to affect the regional balance of power, and their outcomes over the regional system; there has not been any change in Iran's foreign policy outlook. Iran prioritized its survival in the anarchic nature of the regional system and tried to maximize its power and role in the regional balance of power for its interests.

Because a series of significant developments were experienced in the Middle East region and international political scene at the beginning of the 2000s; this study focused on these developments, their effects on the regional balance of power and their role as the primary determinant of Iran's behavior. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in 2001, and the US' invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq within the frame of the

Bush doctrine and the national strategy of war on terror as a respond to these attacks; the balance of power in the Middle East changed fundamentally with the growing military presence of the US in the region, the elimination of two major constituent units of the regional system and the Shiite empowerment following the US invasion of Iraq. All these alterations in the regional balance of power provided an opportunity to Iran for following an ideological foreign policy by benefiting from the determinants of the regional system as claimed. However, as argued in this thesis, the primary importance of survival in the anarchic nature of the regional system and the relative power in the regional balance of power continued to be the greater concern of the Iranian regime. In addition, because of its potential to change the regional balance of power which was altered following the 9/11 attacks; one of the testing grounds to analyze the neo-realist considerations in Iran's foreign policy behavior in the 2000s was the period which started with the regional uprisings called as the Arab Spring by the end of 2010.

During the period from 1979 to 2001, the Islamic Republic of Iran first defined a foreign policy outlook dominated by the revolutionary spirit and ideological motives. However, considering the capabilities and relative weakness of the country compared to other regional and outside actors, Iran actually tried to follow a moderate and neo-realist foreign policy by avoiding any direct conflict with any of these actors. The country utilized the ideological motives and discourses in the crisis times as the Hostage Crisis and the Rushdie Affair, in order to mobilize masses and to eliminate the moderate factions in the domestic power struggle. The Iran-Iraq War represented the completion of the Islamist factions' consolidation of power in Iran and the war continued until a time when Khomeini realized that continuing the war was not rational considering Iran's economic and political interests. At the end of the 1980s, in order to balance the alliances with four members of ACC led by Iraq and the GCC led by Saudi Arabia; Iran has built a strategic alliance with Syria, utilized Hezbollah in order to involve in the Lebanese politics and cooperated with Islamic Jihad and Hamas to affect the Arab-Israeli conflict in its favor. The strategic alliance with a secular and nationalist Syria and the cooperation with Sunni Islamic factions

like Islamic Jihad and Hamas are the major evidences that proved the non-ideological foreign policy of Iran.

Because it was realized that the aggressive and ideological discourse almost led to the regime in a collapse, following Khomeini's death and the presidency of Rafsanjani, an era of reconstruction based on neo-realist considerations started and this outlook continued during the presidency of Khatami. In the aftermaths of the Gulf War of 1991 and the collapse of the USSR, Iran behaved as a rational actor by positioning itself considering the changes in the regional balance of power and the opportunities and threats which emerged in the regional system. In the end, thanks to its strategic and rational policies which were based on the calculation the costs and benefits of each event individually and determination of its foreign policy behavior following this calculation, Iran gained the regional role it had lost with the Iran-Iraq War and scaled down its isolation from the regional politics.

In the 2000s, it was argued in this study that Iranian foreign policy continued to follow a neo-realist foreign policy since the 9/11 attacks. US foreign policy change towards the region from dual containment to war against terror in order to protect its national and regional interests, and its invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 led to a drastic alteration and power vacuum in the balance of power in the region. Considering these changes in the regional balance of power and the structure of the regional system, Iran's calculation of the opportunities and constraints and positioning itself towards this calculation, maximizing its power in order to secure the regime and to enhance its regional role in the aftermath of the regional political environment, were still the primary motives of Iran's foreign policy during this period. Although the old habit of utilizing the ideological discourse in some cases like the Arab-Israeli conflict in order to mobilize the masses and to win the hearts and minds of the Arab street continued, the primary motivation of the foreign policy behavior of Iran was based on the neo-realist considerations by prioritizing country's survival in the anarchic nature of the regional system and maximizing its role in the regional balance of power.

During the US invasion of Afghanistan, because the event offered Iran greater opportunities to contribute to the elimination of the Taliban regime, the stability of post-invasion Afghanistan and to remove its isolation from the regional politics; Iran cooperated with its main outside rivals considering its national and regional interests. However, in the case of the US invasion of Iraq, Iran saw that a pro-American regime in Iraq would be against its interests, and fuelled insurgency in Iraq via its strategic alliance with Syria and Hezbollah as much as to keep the US occupied with the instability in Iraq. This instability would be kept to the level that it will not affect the national security of Iran. In the end, the neo-realist foreign policy of Iran towards the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq by filling the power vacuum, and its gradual empowerment in the region were perceived as a threat against the US' regional interests. Therefore, the US and its allies in the region followed policies to limit the empowerment and influence of Iran. In this context, a zero-sum game emerged between the US and Iran, in which one's security would lead to the insecurity of the other.

Analyzing the growing presence of the US in the region, the speed of the US' victory in Iraq, the expectation that Iran would be the next target of the US within the scope of its policies of regime change for the region, Iran determined a twofold strategy to secure its regime and to maximize its relative power in the regional balance of power. On the one hand, Iran tried to avoid direct conflict with the outside actors and expanded dialogue with their regional allies. The main rationale of this policy was that with respect to US' interests in Iraq and its unwillingness to leave the region because of its regional interests, Iran tried to find a middle ground in order to establish a balance of interest between the US and Iran. By this way, not the US' dominance but its role in Afghanistan and Iraq was recognized by Iran. On the other hand, Iran followed a foreign policy aiming to fill the power vacuum in the region by increasing its relative power through four main strategies. These strategies are discussed below.

First of all, Iran exerted efforts to build alliances and strategic relations with several factions and actors in the region in order to enhance its regional role and by

this way, to acquire the ability to affect the regional conflicts directly. As a part of this strategy, Iran utilized its strategic alliance with Syria and Hezbollah to influence the Iraqi, Lebanese and Palestinian politics by seizing the opportunity that the Shiite empowerment in the region having given Iran following the US invasion of Iraq. This empowerment presented a model for all the other Shiite communities in the region and Iran, as the only Shiite-led state of the region, benefited from this power alteration in its favor. In Iraq, Iran endeavored to cultivate close ties with almost every faction to ensure that the post-invasion government would not be hostile to Iran as Saddam Hussein did. As the unity and limited power of Iraq were vital for Iran to feel itself secured, Iran attached a great importance to the balance among all the factions. In the end, the main goal of Iran towards post-invasion Iraq was its inclusion to the strategic alliance among Iran, Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas. It was examined that such an inclusion had potential to change the regional balance of power in favor of Iran's interests. Besides, the strategic alliance with Hezbollah and the cooperation with the Islamic Jihad and Hamas gave Iran a great opportunity to involve in Lebanese politics and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Iran linked its security with the regional dynamics via involving itself into all the regional conflicts and by this way Iran's security became a *sine qua non* for the Middle East security architecture.

Secondly, the strategy of benefiting from the Shiite empowerment in its favor was another part of Iran's strategy to enhance its role in the regional balance of power. The Shiite empowerment in the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq leading to Iran's empowerment as well posed a grave threat towards the Arab countries of the region. Arab leaders blamed Iran for following ideological policies to create a "Shiite Crescent" stretching from Iran to Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, and for fuelling the emergence of a sectarian war between two main Islamic sects. This perception affected the nature of the relations between the GCC front led by Saudi Arabia and Iran. However, the fact was that the US invasion of Iraq added sectarian loyalties as a factor into the regional balance of power and the Shiite empowerment did not owe its existence to Iran's ideological foreign policy. On the contrary, the main rationale of

Iran's foreign policy was based on neo-realist considerations of benefiting from a newly-emerged factor in its favor. Iran exerted efforts to establish a strategic linkage between the friendly states and political factions in the region in order to secure Iran's survival by maximizing its power and enhancing its regional role.

Thirdly, using the nuclear program as a tool for the regional leadership was another strategic tool of Iran's neo-realist foreign policy since the 9/11 events. In this period, the program came into the global political agenda as a threat against the security of the regional countries which were allied with the US in the aftermath of the US' intelligence officials' reports on Iran's violations of its responsibilities derived from the Paris Agreement in 2004 with missing or false declarations about the scope of the program. The primary motives which drove Iran to continue the nuclear program after the establishment of the Islamic Republic are twofold. On the one hand, Iran has felt itself insecure and encircled in its geopolitical environment since 1979. Iran's insecurity perception did not scale down in time but rather escalated following the Iran-Iraq War, the Axis of Evil speech of Bush and the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. Therefore, Iran has seen the nuclear program as a deterrent factor against any direct or indirect attack towards its regime and country considering the past experience of India, Israel, Pakistan and North Korea. In short, the nuclear program has been evaluated as a complementary tool with the alliance building strategy in order to provide the survival of Iran in its environment. Although strategic alliances with Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas were vital for Iran's security, Iran must also follow policies to increase its capability of self-help. On the other hand, possessing the nuclear weapon capacity has been a strategic tool for Iran's regional and global ambitions. Considering Iran's historic mission to lead the region and the wider set of Muslim countries to a just world, developing the nuclear weapon capacity is the easiest and cheapest way to reach its goal and increase Iran's relative power and regional role. However, the pursuit of nuclear weapon capacity aiming to secure its environment would ironically also pose a grave threat towards the survival of the country. Although Iran has bared the costs of this pursuit via economic and commercial sanctions for years, the invasion of Iraq revealed the possible political

costs of the quest for nuclear weapon capacity evidently. Therefore, it was clear that the nuclear program can only serve as a useful tool for Iran's regional ambitions until a time when the international community does not reach a consensus to stop Iran. After that limit, the nuclear program will more likely be a burden rather than an asset for Iran's regional ambitions. The rulers of Iran proved that they were well aware of this fact with the Paris Agreement in 2004 and with the Geneva Accord in 2013. In both cases, Iran reached an agreement with the international community to limit its program because it realized that continuing the program would threaten its security and harm its economy severely.

Finally, the strategy of embracing the Arab-Israeli conflict was another tool of Iran's neo-realist foreign policy. Although Iran was blamed for following an ideological foreign policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict; the ideological discourse of Ahmadinejad towards Israel by praising Khomeini's speech on "wiping Israel off the map", condemning the Muslim leaders who accept the legitimacy of Israeli state in the Palestinian territories and raising doubts about the Holocaust can be seen as a strategic move to increase the soft power and popularity of Iran in the Arab street within the context of Iran's regional ambitions. In time when the Arab regimes gradually conceded the legitimacy of Israel, and the regional debates revolved around the borders of the Jewish state rather than its existence, a great opportunity arose for Iran to step into the vacuum by embracing an inflammatory approach to Israel that enjoyed support on the Arab street.¹⁹³ Iran calculated that the benefits of confronting Israel overbalanced the costs of such a policy. Nevertheless, the bellicose nature of the ideological discourse against Israel was perceived as a threat by the US, the European powers, Israel and the GCC countries by taking Iran's foreign policy strategies of benefiting from the Shiite empowerment in the region into account and using its nuclear program as a tool for its regional leadership. In the end, Iran was isolated from its Arab hinterland and also caused a severe disruption in relations with the EU and the US.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Takeyh, *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹⁹⁴ Ehteshami and Zweiri (2007), *Ibid.*, p. 119.

The region-wide uprisings called as the “Arab Spring” or “Arab Awakening” which started in December 2010 in Tunisia, also caused significant changes in the balance of power of the MENA region. The uprisings which were mostly driven by common problems and demands brought different outcomes to the countries of the region. In less than two years, there was almost no country which was not influenced by the region-wide protests socially or politically. As the next stage of the chain of events started with the US invasion of Iraq and continued with the democratic elections in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine, and the Cairo speech of President Obama; the Arab Spring symbolized a major milestone in the political history of the MENA region.

In the aftermath of the uprisings which erupted in the Maghreb and Gulf regions, Iran, like all the countries of the region, faced a dilemma of either embracing the uprisings at the expense of its reflections on its own domestic environment and strategic alliances, or siding with the ruling regimes with the possible cost of losing its popularity in the Arab street. In this context, Iran has embraced the protests as natural extensions of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and long-awaited Islamic awakening of Muslim people against their oppressed and US-ally regimes. This foreign policy outlook was labeled as ideologically-driven by the outside and regional countries, and they blamed Iran to manipulate the uprisings in its favor. Nevertheless, unlike these ideas, Iran’s foreign policy was based on the calculation that political Islam would prevail following the democratization of the region. By examining the past experience of Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine where Islamist factions were the victors of the democratization process; Iran thought that it should built closer ties with the countries which were ruled by the Islamist factions in order to maximize its benefits from this structural change. In parallel with this calculation, Iran has saluted the electoral victories of al-Nahda in Tunisia and the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) in Egypt although both parties are Sunni-based movements. Iranian leaders thought that an Egyptian rule which is powerful enough to contribute and willing to join the resistance against outside actors’ presence and their crony

allies' empowerment in the region would be in favor of Iran's national and regional ambitions.

However, in a very short period, it was seen that both calculations of Iran were mistaken. On the one hand, the FJP's disclaim about any inspiration from the Islamic model of Iran and al-Nahda's admiration on Turkish moderate Islamic model presented the failure of Iran's strategic calculations and claims based on the fact that the wave of uprisings in the Maghreb was the natural extensions of the Iran Islamic Revolution. On the other hand, it was appeared that the strategic policy of Iran as labeling the uprisings which were motivated by the anti-American and anti-Israeli feelings also failed. The wave of uprisings was the first time when the people of the region have raised their voice only for the domestic conditions directly affecting their lives. Besides, Iran was blamed for hypocrisy because of its inconsistent policies of embracing the uprisings and transition to democracy in Tunisia and Egypt but violently crushing its own people in 2009 and 2011 following their democratic protests. In the end, the strategic failure of Iran on calculating the real essence of the region-wide uprisings along with the hypocrisy towards the protests undermined the regional popularity and soft power of Iran among the Arab masses.

When the protests spilled over the Gulf region, Iran found greater opportunities than it found in the Maghreb region. The region hosted several US military bases like the 5th Fleet whose strategic roles were vital for the Gulf countries and Israel in order to benefit from the US security umbrella. Therefore, Iran calculated that if the uprisings erupted in Bahrain and Yemen succeeded in toppling the ruling regimes and this wave of change spread to the whole region, the Shiites or the radical Islamist factions would establish the new regimes and they would be friendlier to Iran than the current ones. By this way, Iran would both eliminate the US-allied, crony autocratic monarchies in the region and end the US military presence in the region. In this context, the GCC's regional role and relative power would dramatically diminish that would be a development in favor of Iran's regional interests and ambitions. Nevertheless, the GCC countries' activism to interfere in the uprisings overbalanced Iran's willingness to directly involve in the events. Although the

potential benefits of a political change in the Gulf region with the direct involvement of Iran were considerable, it was subordinate to any possible outcomes that shattered Iran's national security. Therefore, staying relatively passive in Bahrain and Yemen, and avoiding any direct confrontation with the GCC countries have been the main evidences for Iran's rationally-driven and non-ideological foreign policy in this region.

In March 2011, the Arab Spring uprisings spilled over to Syria and the Levant region and it had greater potential to cause dramatic changes in the regional balance of power than the uprisings in any other region. As Syria is possibly the most vital pillar of Iran's regional foreign policy, Iran sided with the Assad rule following the calculation of the potential cost of losing Syria. It would essentially harm the Rejection Front and break the bond between Iran and Hezbollah. In this context, a possible Sunni rule in Syria with the fall of the Assad rule would be the most significant geostrategic setback of Iran for its regional foreign policy. Inasmuch as, Iran stood behind Assad rule by labeling the uprisings as illegitimate and pioneered by imperialist-Zionist forces on the contrary to its support to the protests in the Maghreb and Gulf regions. As a consequence, Iran's popularity and soft power in the Arab Street, which already diminished following Iran's labeling the protests as the natural extension of Iran Islamic Republic and its violent crush of the Green Movement, hit the bottom following its support to Assad rule. Despite the growing sectarian conflict with the involvement of all the countries ruled by Sunni and Shiite-based regimes in different blocs; Iran's foreign policy has been based on neo-realist considerations by prioritizing the national and regional interests of Iran rather than the preservation of a "Shiite Crescent" as claimed.

When the spill-over of the uprisings to Syria evolved into a sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shiite blocs, its effects automatically spread to Lebanon because of the close cultural and historical ties between Syria and Lebanon. In this context, the cadres of Hezbollah found themselves in a condition where they had to make a difficult choice about supporting the Assad rule. Because of its importance for Iran as a strategic asset for Iran's regional interests to get access to the Arab-Israeli

conflict, Iran strategically supported Hezbollah by stepping up its support by covering all the Lebanese population in order to strengthen both Iran's and Hezbollah's legitimacy and popularity in the Lebanese Street. In the end, the main rationale of supporting Hezbollah has been its strategic benefits for Iran in the regional balance of power, not the Shiite origin of the organization as claimed.

One of the main drastic effects of the spill-over of the uprisings to Syria was Hamas' position towards the events. Hamas' inclusion in the Rejection Front has been vital for Iran to prove its non-sectarian foreign policy because Hamas is a Sunni political faction. In addition, Iran's cooperation with Hamas and Iran's involvement into the Arab-Israeli conflict via Hamas served Iran's interests for years. However, unlike Hezbollah, Hamas decided to turn its back to the Assad regime by not taking the risk of losing its legitimacy among the Sunni masses in Palestine and the Arab Street. In response to this position, Iran changed its support from Hamas to Islamic Jihad in order not to lose its role in the Arab-Israeli conflict. However, in the aftermath of the toppling of Morsi in Egypt and the unwillingness of Qatar and Turkey to directly support Hamas, the future of the relations between Iran and Hamas is uncertain.

Because the Arab Spring has not completed yet, it is not possible to predict the outcome of the events and their effects on the regional balance of power. Since the beginning of the writing process of this thesis, the first democratically elected president of Egypt, Mohamed Morsi was toppled by the Egyptian army led by General Sisi. Although it was expected to be toppled via a military intervention initiated by the US and its allies in the region, Bashar Assad stays in power as the leader of Syria thanks to the great efforts of Iran, Russia and China of convincing the international community about not making the same mistake in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Shiite-based rule's future in Iraq is also uncertain because of the Sunni insurgency which threatened the ruling regime for a period of time. The people of Iran elected a relatively moderate leader, Hassan Rouhani in its presidential elections in August 2013. This change in Iranian politics bore its fruits with the normalization in Iran's bilateral relations with the US and the European powers. Iran and European

powers reached an agreement in Geneva in November 2013 about Iran's limiting its nuclear program to a certain level.

In short, in parallel with the main argument of this thesis, Iran's neo-realist foreign policy towards the region would not change no matter what will be the outcomes of the Arab Spring considering the past experience and the detailed analysis in this study.

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APPENDICES

A. TURKISH SUMMARY

Bu çalışma, 2000'lerdeki İran dış politikasını tarihsel bir çerçeve içerisinde incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. 2000'li yıllar gerek Ortadoğu bölgesi siyasi sistemine gerekse uluslararası sisteme etki eden önemli olaylara sahne olmuştur. Özellikle, ABD'yi hedef alan 11 Eylül terörist saldırıları, bu saldırılara cevap olarak ABD'nin benimsediği terörle savaş stratejisi ve bu strateji çerçevesinde Afganistan ve Irak'ı işgali Ortadoğu bölgesi güç dengesinde önemli değişimlere yol açmıştır. Bu değişimlerin İran'a sunduğu fırsatlar ve İran'ın bölgesel dış politikasına etkileri düşünülerek, 2000'li yıllar, bu tez çalışmasında öne sürülen ve çalışma boyunca savunulan argümanın test edildiği tarihsel çerçeveyi oluşturmaktadır.

1979 yılında, kuruluşundan bugüne İran İslam Cumhuriyeti'nin, devletin gücünü, bölgesel ve uluslararası siyasi sistemlerin sınırlarını ve yapısını dikkate alarak, sistemin anarşik yapısı içerisinde ülkenin bekasına, ve bölgesel güç dengesi içerisinde ulusal/bölgesel çıkarlarına en yüksek düzeyde önem atfeden neo-realist bir dış politika izlediği, bu tez çalışmasında savunulmaktadır. 2000'li yıllarda yaşanan önemli bölgesel ve küresel politik olaylar ve bu olayların bölgesel güç dengesine etkileri sebebiyle bu sav, 11 Eylül saldırıları ve sonrasında yaşanan Afganistan ve Irak işgalleri ile 2010 yılı Aralık ayında Tunus'ta başlayıp Ortadoğu ve Kuzey Afrika bölgesine yayılan, Arap Baharı olarak da adlandırılabilir bölgesel ayaklanmaları analiz eden farklı iki bölümde test edilmektedir.

Kurulduğu günden bu yana İran İslam Cumhuriyeti'nin dış politikasının ideolojik amaçlarla yönlendirildiği, veya idealizm ve realizm döngüsüne dayandığı Muhammed Nia ve Ramazani gibi İran dış politikası konusunda uzman akademisyenler tarafından iddia edilmektedir. Nia, ideolojinin İran dış politikasının temel unsuru olduğunu iddia etmekte ve İran dış politika yönelimlerini açıklarken inşacı bir yaklaşımdan yararlanmaktadır. Ramazani ise, ideoloji ve çıkarların döngüsünün kurulduğu günden bugüne İran dış politikasındaki önemine vurgu yapmaktadır. Ramazani tarafından tanımlanan döngüye göre, İran dış politikasında tarihsel süreçte ideolojinin ve çıkarların, diğerine karşı baskın olduğu dönemler

mevcuttur. Dolayısıyla İran dış politikasını anlamak ve yorumlamak için, bu politikanın izlendiği dönemin bu döngünün hangi dönemine rast geldiği önem arz etmektedir. Bu tez ise, İran'ın dış politikası temel prensibinin, bölgenin siyasi sistemine etki eden her bir olayın yaratacağı fırsat ve tehditlerin stratejik olarak hesaplanması ve bu hesaplamayı takiben bölgesel siyaset içerisinde kendini konumlandırmasına dayandığını savunmaktadır. Bu savını ise, bölge siyaseti açısından önemli olaylar ve bu olayların bölgesel güç dengesine etkileri üzerinden açıklamaya çalışmaktadır.

1979 yılında İran İslam Cumhuriyeti'nin kurulmasından 11 Eylül 2001 yılında gerçekleşen, ABD'yi hedef alan terörist saldırılara kadar geçen süreçte; İran, İran-Irak Savaşı, 1991 Körfez Savaşı ve SSCB'nin çöküşü gibi bölgesel güç dengesini etkileyen önemli siyasi gelişmelerin yön verdiği, neo-realist bir dış politika izlemiştir. Bu politika kapsamında İran, devletin gücü ve bölgesel sistemin sınırlarını dikkate alan ve yer yer İran İslam Cumhuriyeti anayasası ile Humeyni'nin beyanlarında tanımlanan ideolojik unsurları, kitleleri harekete geçirmek ve iktidarın ülke içi gücünü sağlamlaştırmak için kullanmıştır. Bu çalışma, ülkenin güvenliği ve rejimin bekası tehdit altında olduğunda, rasyonel karar alma mekanizmasının, İran'ın dış politika yöneliminin hâkim unsuru olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Rehine Krizi ve İran-Irak Savaşı yukarıda belirtilen ideolojik söylemin İran'ın neo-realist dış politikası kapsamında bir araç olarak kullanıldığı önemli bölgesel olaylardır. Kullanılan ideolojik söylemler yoluyla, bu olayları izleyen süreçte ülke içi muhalefeti yok ederek gücünü pekiştiren iktidar, İran'ın İslam Cumhuriyeti modelini komşu ülkelere ihraç etme politikasına odaklanmıştır. Bu politika, İran'ın, komşu ülkelerde kendi rejimine benzer rejimler yaratmayı ve benzer bakış açısına sahip rejimler tarafından yönetilen komşu ülkelerle yakın ilişkiler geliştirme hedefine dayanmaktadır. İran, bu politika sayesinde, oluşturmayı planladığı yeni bölgesel düzenin lideri olmayı amaçlamıştır. Fakat olaylar İran'ın öngördüğünden ve amaçladığından farklı cereyan etmiş ve İran, zaman içerisinde ülkenin bölgesel siyasi sistemden dışlanmış ve Irak'la bölgesel güç dengesini önemli ölçüde etkileyen bir savaşa sürüklenmiştir.

Bu gelişmeleri takiben, İran, kendisini çevreleyen Arap ve Körfez ülkelerinin oluşturdukları ittifaklara karşı bölgesel güç dengesini sağlamak ve ulusal güvenliğini korumak için Suriye, Hizbullah, Hamas ve İslami Cihad gibi bölgesel aktörlerle stratejik ortaklıklar ve ittifaklar geliştirmiştir. Özellikle Suriye'yle geliştirilen stratejik ittifak, İran'a bölge siyasi sistemi içerisine dahil olabilmeye olanağı tanımış, Suriye'ye ise özellikle İsrail karşısında sürdürdüğü bölgesel güç mücadelesinde önemli güç katmıştır. İran'ın bölgesel politikasına İran-Irak Savaşı süresince önemli katkı sağlayan bu ortaklık, Arap Baharı Doğu Akdeniz bölgesine sıçradığında ise Suriye açısından büyük önem arz etmiştir.

Sonuç olarak, İran, İran-Irak Savaşı ertesinde kaybettiği bölgesel konumunu, 1991 Körfez Savaşı ve Soğuk Savaş izleyen süreçte önemli ölçüde geri kazanmıştır. İran bu kazanımı, bölgenin güç dengesi ve kendisinin bu güç dengesi içerisindeki rolünü önemli ölçüde etkileyen olayların sunduğu potansiyel fırsat ve tehditlerin stratejik olarak hesaplanması ve bu stratejiyi takiben kendisini siyasi sistem içerisinde konumlandırmasına borçludur. İran'ın bölgesel ve bölge dışı ülkelerle ilişkilerini normalleştirmesine dayanan Rafsancani'nin başkanlığı dönemindeki "yeniden inşa", ve Hatemi'nin başkanlığı dönemindeki "medeniyetler arası diyalog" stratejileri bu hesaplamanın sonucunda oluşturulan ve uygulanan stratejilerdir.

Fakat aynı İran, bölgesel güç dengesi içerisindeki konumunu artırma amacına hizmet ettiği düşüncesiyle, Arap-İsrail çatışmasının çözümsüzlüğüne karşı ABD önderliğinde geliştirilen çözüm önerilerini etkisizleştirecek ve amaçlanan barış sürecini baltalayacak politikalar izlemiştir. Bunun sebebi, İran'ın Arap-İsrail sorununun çözümünün hem ABD'nin bölgesel gücünün artmasına hem de İsrail'in Filistin topraklarında kurduğu devletin meşruiyet kazanmasına yol açacağını düşünmesidir. Bu politikalar, özünde, barış sürecinin sona ermesinden memnun olmayacak, mevcudiyetini ve meşruiyetini bu çatışmanın devamına borçlu Hamas, İslami Cihad gibi radikal İslami gruplara verilen ideolojik ve maddi desteklere dayanmaktadır. Özetle, bahse konu dönemde İran dış politikası, mevcut siyasi sistemin sınırlarını ve devletin gücünü dikkate alarak, devletin çıkarlarını korumayı ve İran'ın bölgesel güç dengesi içerisindeki rolünü artırmayı amaçlayan bir temele

dayanmıştır. Devletin çıkarları, bölgesel rakiplerle ilişkilerin geliştirilmesini gerektirdiğinde İran'ın dış politika yönelimi bu şekilde gerçekleşmiş; mevcut bir bölgesel sorunun çözümsüzlüğü İran'ın çıkarları açısından esas teşkil ettiğinde ise temel dış politika stratejisi sorunların çözümüne yönelik çabaları etkisizleştirecek stratejiler izlemiştir.

11 Eylül saldırılarını izleyen süreçte ABD'nin İran ve Irak'ın karşılıklı olarak dengelenmesine ve güçlerinin sınırlandırılmasına dayanan ikili çevreleme politikasının yerini, saldırılara yanıt olarak geliştirdiği terörle savaş stratejisi almıştır. Bu durum ise, Ortadoğu bölgesel güç dengesinin yapısı ve kurallarında değişikliğe yol açmıştır. Kongre'den ABD Başkanı'na verilen, 11 Eylül saldırılarını planlayan, gerçekleştiren veya gerçekleştirilmesine yardım edenlere karşı gerekli güç kullanımı yetkisiyle, 2001 yılında ABD ve İngiliz askeri birlikleri, uluslararası kamuoyunun manevi ve askeri desteğiyle Afganistan'ı işgal etmiştir. İşgalin amacı, ABD'nin 11 Eylül saldırılarından sorumlu tuttuğu El Kaide terör örgütünü yok etmek ve ilgili örgüte destek vermekle suçladığı Taliban rejimini devirmektir. Sonuç olarak işgal amacına ulaşmış ve Taliban rejimi devrilmiştir. Fakat Afganistan'ın sürüklendiği karışıklık ve iç savaş, İran'ın da içerisinde bulunduğu komşu ülkelerin ulusal güvenliğini tehdit eden bir etki doğurmuştur.

2002 yılında ABD Kongresi'nde dönemin ABD Başkanı George W. Bush'un teröre maddi ve manevi destek veren ve hem ABD hem de dünya güvenliğine ciddi bir tehdit yönelten "Şer Ekseni" ülkelerini tanımladığı ve İran'ı bu ülkeler arasında belirttiği konuşması ile 2003 yılında Irak'ın sahip olduğu kitle imha silahlarını yok etmek, Saddam Hüseyin'in teröre desteğine son vermek ve Irak'ı demokratikleştirme amaçlarıyla ABD'nin Irak'ı işgali; Baas rejimi gibi önemli bir bölgesel aktörün daha devre dışı kalmasına yol açmıştır. Bu gelişmeler, bölge güç dengesinde bir boşluk yaratarak bölge siyasi sistemini önemli ölçüde etkilemiş, kurulduğu günden bugüne bölgesel siyasetten dışlanmış İran'a ise önemli fırsatlar sunmuştur. İran da, bu gelişmelere dayanarak, yaşanan değişimlerin kendisine sunduğu fırsat ve tehditleri değerlendirerek ülkenin bekasını sürdürmeyi ve bölgesel rolünü artırmayı ön plana alan bir neo-realist dış politika izlemiştir.

Bir yandan İran'ın ABD'yle doğrudan çatışmaktan kaçınması ve Afganistan ve Irak'ta istikrarı sağlamak, bu suretle de ulusal güvenliğini korumak amacıyla temel bölgesel ve bölge dışı rakipleriyle sınırlı ölçüde bir işbirliği inşa etmesiyle İran'ın bölgesel siyasi sistemden dışlanmışlığı zaman içerisinde sona ermiştir. Diğer yandan ise, İran'ın bölgesel olaylar ve bu olayların yarattığı fırsatlardan faydalanarak bölgesel güç dengesi içerisinde etkin bir aktöre dönüşmesi, ABD başta olmak üzere bölgesel ve bölge dışı aktörlerin İran'ın etkinliğini ve güçlenmesini sınırlayıcı politikalar izlemesi sonucunu da doğurmuştur. Böylece, ABD ve İran arasında, bir tarafın güvenliğinin diğer tarafın güvensizliğine yol açan sıfır sonuçlu bir güvenlik ikilemi ortaya çıkmıştır. Ayrıca, ABD'nin Irak işgali sonucunda kısa sürede elde ettiği zafer, ABD'nin bir sonraki hedefinin İran olabileceği yönünde İran kamuoyu ve iktidarındaki endişe yaratmıştır. Bu durum ve ABD'nin İran sınırlarında artan askeri varlığı, İran'ın bu gelişmelere cevap olarak geliştirdiği iki yönlü bir politikanın uygulanmasına yol açmıştır.

İran bir yandan bölge ülkeleri ve aktörleriyle diyalog geliştirmeyi, stratejik ortaklıklar oluşturmayı ve doğrudan çatışmaktan kaçınmayı amaçlayan bir politika izlerken, diğer yandan ise ülkenin kendini savunması, ulusal güvenliğinin sağlanması ve bölgesel gücünü artırması amaçlarıyla dört temel strateji geliştirmiştir. ABD'nin Irak'ı işgalini izleyen süreçte İran'ın, bölgesel güç dengesi içerisindeki rolünü genişletmek amacıyla uyguladığı stratejilerden biri, ittifaklar oluşturma ve onlardan faydalanmadır. İran bu süreçte, Suriye, Hizbullah, Hamas ve İslami Cihad gibi, kendisiyle aynı stratejik amaçları paylaşan bölgesel aktörlerle ilişkiler geliştirmiştir. Bu ilişki ve ittifaklar, İran'a bölgesel tüm sorunlara etki edebilme gücünün yanı sıra, ulusal ve bölgesel çıkarlarına göre sorunların çözümü ya da devamına yönelik politikalar izleyebilmesi imkanını sağlamıştır. Öte yandan, ABD'nin Irak'ı işgali sonrası oluşan siyasi atmosferi ve Irak içi siyasi dengeleri etkileme şansını da İran, izlediği bu strateji sayesinde elde etmiştir.

İran'ın 11 Eylül sonrasında uyguladığı stratejilerden biri de nükleer programın geliştirilmesi ve bu programdan bir dış politika enstrümanı olarak yararlanmaktır. Bu politikanın temel amacı, 2001 sonrası değişen bölgesel güç dengesi içerisinde İran'ın

bölgesel rolünü ve bölge siyasetine etkisini artırmaktır. İran'ın ulusal güvenliğine ve rejiminin bekasına dair güvenlik kaygılarını ve jeopolitik olarak çevrelendiği algısını gidermek, İran'ın nükleer kapasitesini geliştirme hedefinin en önemli amaçlarından biridir. Özellikle İran-Irak Savaşı'nın yıkıcı etkisi ve İran üzerindeki etkileri dikkate alındığında, İran devleti ve milletini hedef alan her türlü doğrudan veya dolaylı tehdidi caydırma amacına yönelik nükleer güç, İran tarafından ulaştırılması görece en kolay ve etkili savunma yöntemi olarak değerlendirilmiştir. İsrail, Kuzey Kore, Hindistan ve Pakistan örnekleri, nükleer güç sahibi olmanın, güce sahip ülkelerin ulusal güvenliklerini korumak için ne kadar etkili bir unsur olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca, İran'ın bölgesel ve küresel sistem içerisindeki rolünü artırma amacına yönelik olarak nükleer gücün önemli bir pazarlık unsuru olması da, bu stratejinin uygulanma amaçlarından bir diğeridir.

Arap-İsrail çatışmasında Filistin'in sorunlarının ve mevcut durumunun İran tarafından sahiplenilmesi de bu dört stratejiden sonuncusudur. Özellikle ABD'nin Irak'ı işgalini izleyen süreçte İran'ın bölgedeki Şii nüfus üzerindeki etkisi açıkça ortaya çıkmıştır. Fakat bölgenin lider aktörlerinde biri olabilmesi için İran'ın hali hazırda etkileyebildiği Şii nüfusa ek olarak Sünni ve Arap nüfusa da ihtiyacı vardır. Arap-İsrail sorunu, Sünni Arap devletlerin soruna sahip çıkmayı yıllar öncesinde bıraktığı bir bölgesel siyasi sistemde İran'a çok önemli bir stratejik fırsat sunmuştur. Her ne kadar Sünni Arap iktidarlar, sorunun Filistin lehine çözümü için açık bir destek vermese de Arap kamuoyu bu yönde bir çözümden yanadır. Ayrıca, İran'ın Fars ve Şii nüfusun ağırlıkta olduğu bir ülke olarak konuyu sahiplenmesi Arap Sünni kamuoyu tarafından desteklenmiştir. Böylece İran'ın ve sorunun çözümsüzlüğüne etki etmek için stratejik bir unsur olarak faydalandığı Hizbullah'ın Arap halkı gözündeki popülerliği ve saygınlığı önemli ölçüde artmıştır. Bu artışın belki de zirve yaptığı olay, 2006 yılında Hizbullah ve İsrail ordusu arasında yaşanan ve Arap-İsrail çatışmaları tarihinde ilk kez ateşkes talebinin Arap tarafı yerine İsrail'den geldiği Lübnan Savaşı olmuştur. Savaşın taraflardan herhangi birinin galibiyetiyle sonuçlanmamasına rağmen Hizbullah gibi paramiliter bir gücün İsrail gibi bir devlet

karşısında gösterdiği direniş ve İran'ın Hizbullah'ın bu direnişindeki rolü, her iki aktörün ve liderlerinin Arap halkı gözündeki değerini önemli ölçüde artırmıştır.

İzlenen neo-realist ve ideolojik olmayan politika, İran'ın yumuşak gücünün ve bölgesel rolünün artmasını beraberinde getirmiştir. Fakat özellikle Mahmut Ahmedinecad'ın başkan seçilmesiyle birlikte benimsediği İsrail karşıtı aşırı ve çatışmacı söylem, İran'ın nükleer zenginleştirme faaliyetlerine devam etmesi ve nükleer programının kapsamı ve temel amacı konusunda bölge ülkelerini ikna edememesi, İran'ın bölge siyasetinden dışlanması ve ABD ile AB'yle ilişkilerinde önemli sorunlar yaşamasına yol açmıştır. Fakat sonuç olarak Ahmedinecad tarafından izlenen bahsekonu politikalar, bazı akademisyenlerce iddia edildiği üzere ideolojik temeller üzerinden kurgulanmış bir dış politika izlemek amacıyla değil, yaşanan önemli olayların bölgesel güç dengesini etkileyerek İran'a sundukları stratejik fırsatları değerlendirmek amacını taşımaktadır. Özellikle bölgesel iki rakibinin sistemin dışında kalması ve Şii grupların bölgesel düzlemde güçlenmeleri, İran'a bölgesel bir güç olması ve siyasi sistem içerisindeki rolünü artırması için önemli fırsatlar sunmuştur. Ahmedinecad tarafından izlenen politikalar ve bu politikalar kapsamında geliştirilen stratejiler de bu fırsatları değerlendirmek amacıyla yapılan hesaplamalar ve bu hesaplamalar sonucunda İran'ın kendini siyasi sistem içerisinde konumlandırmasına dayanmaktadır.

2010 yılının Aralık ayında Tunus'ta patlak veren ve daha sonra Mağrip, Körfez ve Doğu Akdeniz bölgelerindeki diğer ülkelere sıçrayan, Arap Baharı ya da Arap Uyanışı olarak da adlandırılabilen ayaklanma ve protestolar, Ortadoğu ve Kuzey Afrika bölge siyasetini önemli ölçüde etkilemiştir. Özellikle 11 Eylül sonrası önemli ölçüde sarsılan bölgesel güç dengesi, bu olaylarla birlikte önemli bir darbe daha almıştır.

İran, bölgedeki her ülke gibi, ortaya çıkan durumu ve olası etkilerini okumaya ve hesaplamaya çalışmış, bu hesaplamasını takiben de ilk aşamada ayaklanmaları İran İslam Devrimi'nin bir uzantısı olarak tanımlayıp kucaklamıştır. Bu konumlanmanın arkasında yatan, İran'ın, bölge halklarının demokrasi yönündeki talepleriyle birlikte bölgede yaşanan ve yaşanacak yapısal değişiklikten, siyasi

İslam'ın galip çıkacağı yönündeki öngörüsüdür. Bu öngörü çerçevesinde 2005 yılında Lübnan'da gerçekleşen seçimlerde Hizbullah'ın görece başarısı ve 2006 yılında Filistin'de gerçekleşen seçimlerde Hamas'ın zaferine dayanarak, İran, bölgede yaşanacak bir demokratikleşme dalgasının, bu dalgayı takip eden seçimlerde İslami grupların zaferiyle sonuçlanacağını öngörmüştür. Bu öngörüye ek olarak İran, ABD müttefiki rejimler yerine İslami gruplar tarafından yönetilen ülkelerle daha yakın ilişkiler geliştireceğini ve böylece bölgesel gücünün artacağını hesaplamıştır. Öte yandan, İran, ayaklanmalar ve protestoları ABD, emperyalizm ve İsrail karşıtı hareketler olarak niteleyerek Arap kitleler arasındaki popülerliğini ve yumuşak gücünü artırmayı amaçlamıştır. Bu politikanın temel amacı, Arap kamuoyundaki ABD ve İsrail karşıtlığını kullanarak bölgesel gelişmeleri kendi ulusal ve bölgesel çıkarına kullanmaktır. Fakat kısa zaman içerisinde bu hesaplama ve öngörülerin doğru olmadığı görülmüştür. Bu strateji, öngörülenin aksi sonuç doğurmuş ve hareketlerin arkasında yatan asıl motivasyonu görmezden gelmesi nedeniyle İran'ın bölgesel gücü ve Arap kamuoyundaki popülaritesinde gözle görülür bir azalmaya neden olmuştur.

Ayaklanmalar Körfez bölgesine sıçradıktan sonra, bu hareketlerin bölgesel güç dengesini etkileme potansiyeli artmıştır. İran da Körfez bölgesindeki ABD askeri varlığını sona erdirmeye fırsatını değerlendirmek için bu protestolara destek vermiştir. İran'ın bu desteği, popüler protestoların Bahreyn ve Yemen'deki mevcut Sünni muhafazakar rejimleri devireceği, sonrasında iktidara gelecek yeni yönetimlerin Şii veya radikal İslami grupların önderliğinde kurulacağı ve bu gelişmelerin İran'ın ulusal ve bölgesel çıkarlarına hizmet edeceği öngörüsüne dayanmaktadır. Fakat rejimlerine yönelik tehdidin farkına varan, Körfez İşbirliği Konseyi üyesi ülkeler ve bu ülkelerin lideri konumundaki Suudi Arabistan, geçmişte benimsediği, ABD askeri gücüne dayanan pasif bölgesel siyaseti terk ederek aktif şekilde harekete geçmiş ve ayaklanmaların yaşandığı ülkelere doğrudan ya da dolaylı şekilde müdahale etmiştir. İran ise Suudi Arabistan ve Körfez İşbirliği Konseyi üyesi ülkelerle doğrudan çatışmadan kaçınmış ve olaylara müdahale konusunda görece pasif kalmıştır. Bunun en temel gerekçesi ise, İran'ın olaylara doğrudan müdahalesinin ulusal güvenliği

açısından yaratacağı tehdittir. İran dış politikası açısından birincil öneme sahip unsur ulusal güvenlik ve rejimin bekası olduğundan, Körfez bölgesinde yaşanacak siyasi dönüşümlerin İran'a sağlayacağı kazançlara rağmen İran olaylara doğrudan müdahale etmemiştir.

Mağrip ve Körfez bölgelerinde yaşanan protestolar, daha sonra Suriye'ye ve Doğu Akdeniz bölgesine sıçramıştır. Bunun sonucunda, olayların kapsamı ve bölgeye etkisi farklı bir boyuta evrilmiştir. İran, bölgesel çıkarları için Suriye'deki mevcut yönetimin devamını asli gördüğünden, bu zamana kadarki, ayaklanmalara demokratik bir hareket olarak destek veren tutumunu değiştirmiş, Esad yönetiminin arkasında durmuş ve ayaklanmaları emperyal-Siyonist güçlerin ön ayak olduğu gayrimeşru hareketler olarak niteleyerek mevcut yönetime destek vermiştir. İran'ın bu politika değişiminin gerekçesi, Suriye'nin hem İran hem de İran, Hizbullah ve Hamas'la birlikte oluşturduğu Ret Cephesi'nin bölgesel güç dengesi içerisindeki konumları açısından taşıdığı önemdir. Çünkü Esad rejiminin devrilmesi ve bu gelişmeyi takiben Suriye'de, Suudi Arabistan'a (ve dolayısıyla ABD'ye) yakın bir Sünni rejimin iktidara gelmesinin İran'a maliyeti büyük olacaktır.

Bölgenin etkin tüm aktörlerinin Suriye'deki karışıklığa müdahil olması ve çatışmanın taraflarının mezhepsel yapısı, demokratik taleplerle başlayan popüler protestoların, protestolara destek veren farklı Şii ve Sünni taraflar arasında cereyan eden bir mezhep çatışmasına dönüşmesine neden olmuştur. Bu mezhepsel çatışma, İran'ın ideolojik bir dış politika izlediğine ve bölgede mezhepsel çatışmayı körüklediğine dair iddialara neden olmuştur. Fakat İran bu süreçte, aksine, bölgesel sistemin sınırları ve anarşik yapısını dikkate alarak, ülkenin gücünü artırarak rejimin bekasını sürdürmeyi ve bu yolla ulusal çıkarların ve ülke güvenliğinin korunmasını esas alan bir neo-realist bir dış politika izlemiştir.

Sonuç olarak, bu çalışmanın iddiası, İran'ın, İslam Cumhuriyeti'nin kurulduğu günden bu yana bölgesel ve uluslararası sistemin anarşik yapısı, sınırları ve kendisine sunduğu fırsat ve tehditleri dikkate alarak, rejimin bekası, ülkenin güvenliği ve ulusal ve bölgesel çıkarlarını esas alan bir neo-realist dış politika izlediğidir. Bu dış politika çizgisi, İran-Irak savaşı, 1991 Körfez Savaşı, Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılması, 11

Eylül saldırıları, ABD'nin bu saldırılara yanıt olarak geliştirip uyguladığı terörle savaş stratejisi ve bu kapsamda Afganistan ve Irak'ı işgalleri ve son olarak da Arap Baharı olarak adlandırılabilir bölgesel ayaklanma ve protestolar, ve tüm bu olayların bölgesel ve uluslararası sisteme (ve dolayısıyla sistemin bir birimi olarak İran'a) etkilerine rağmen değişmemiştir. Bahse konu tüm olayları takiben İran, olayların sunduğu fırsat ve tehditleri hesaplayarak, ülkenin gücü ve ulusal güvenliği çerçevesinde bölge siyasi sistemi içerisinde konumlanmıştır. Bu konumlanma ve stratejik hesaplamalar; 91 Körfez Savaşı, ABD'nin Afganistan ve Irak işgalleri gibi bazı olaylarda İran'ın lehine ve güçlenmesine yol açan sonuçlar doğururken; devrimin ihracı politikası sonucu bölge ülkeleriyle yaşanan sorunlarda, ve Arap Baharı'nın Mağrip ve Körfez bölgesindeki yansımaları gibi bazı olaylarda, öngörülenin tam aksi sonuç doğurmuş ve İran'ın bölgesel güç dengesi içerisindeki konumunu zayıflatmıştır.

Rehine Krizi, İran-Irak Savaşı'nın 1982 sonrası sürdürülmesi, Rüşdi Olayı, Ahmenicad'ın İsrail karşıtı BM konuşması gibi bazı olaylarda, İran dış politikası, ideolojik söylem ve motiflerin etkisi altında kalsa da, devletin çıkarları ve ulusal güvenliği son tahlilde her zaman İran'ın dış politika önceliği olmuştur. İdeolojik ve çatışmacı söylemin rejimin güvenliği açısından tehdit yarattığı durumlarda bu söylem terk edilmiş ve İran, neo-realist kaygılarla rasyonel bir aktör olarak hareket etmiştir.

Arap Baharı olarak adlandırılan sosyal hareketler henüz sonlanmadığından, ayaklanmaların bölgesel güç dengesi ve siyasi sistemini nasıl etkileyeceğini tahmin etmek mümkün değildir. Bu tezin yazılması sürecinde, Mısır'ın demokratik seçimler yoluyla seçilen ilk devlet başkanı Muhammed Mursi, General Sisi önderliğindeki Mısır ordusu tarafından devrildi ve Tahrir Meydanı'nda büyük umutlarla başlayan demokratik süreç bir süreliğine rafa kalktı. Yaklaşık altı ay önce ABD ve müttefiklerinin öncülüğünde gerçekleşecek bir müdahaleyle iktidardan indirilmesi beklenen Suriye lideri Beşar Esad, Rusya ve Çin'in uluslararası kamuoyunu Afganistan ve Irak'ta düştükleri hatayı Suriye'de de tekrarlamamaları yönünde ikna etmesini takiben, görevinin başında kaldı. İki dönem süren Ahmedinecad iktidarını takiben gerçekleşen 2013 Ağustos seçimlerinde İran halkı, seçimini diğer adaylara

göre daha ılımlı ve çatışmadan uzak bir söylem benimseyen Hasan Ruhani'den yana kullandı. Bu gelişmeyi izleyen süreçte İran, bölge devletleri ve bölge dışı devletlerle ilişkilerinde önemli bir sorun teşkil eden ve stratejik olarak ülkenin ulusal güvenliğini tehdit eder hale gelen nükleer programını belli bir seviyede durdurmak konusunda, 2013 yılı Kasım ayında Avrupalı devletlerle İsviçre'nin Cenevre kentinde anlaşmaya vardı. Bölgesel gelişmeler ve siyasi sisteme etkileri her geçen gün değişse de, bu çalışma boyunca yapılan incelemeler ve ortaya konan örnekler çerçevesinde temel iddia; İran'ın gelecekte oluşacak tüm değişimler/dönüşümler sonucunda izleyeceği dış politikanın, değişimlerin yaratacağı bölgesel güç dengesini dikkate alarak ülkenin ulusal çıkarları ve bölgesel rolünü temel alan neo-realist bir dış politika olacağıdır.

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