ATILIM UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS MASTER'S PROGRAMME

AUTHORITARIAN STABILITY: THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE IRANIAN REGIME'S SURVIVAL

Master's Thesis

Fatemeh LESANI

Ankara-2023

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I accept and acknowledge that I have prepared this thesis study, prepared in line with the Thesis Writing Guidelines of Atılım University Graduate School of Social Sciences;

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ÖZ

LESANI, Fatemeh. Otoriter İstikrar: İran Rejiminin Hayatta Kalmasında Uluslararası İşbirliğinin Rolü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi Ankara, 2023.

Otoriter rejimlerin yükselişi, bu rejimlerin demokratikleşme baskılarına karşı direnerek uzun süre hayatta kalmasını araştıran yeni bir araştırma dalgası yaratmıştır. Bu çalışmalar çoğunlukla demokratik kurumların rolü üzerine odaklanırken, bu tezin amacı otoriterliğin direncini güçlendiren mekanizmaları inceleyerek otoriter rejimlerin farklı şekillerini analiz etmek için bir konfigüratif yaklaşım belirlemektir. Böylece farklı otokratik rejimlerin mekanizmalarını kullanarak nasıl varlıklarını sürdürdüklerini, neden bu stratejilerin bazı rejimler için diğerlerinden daha önemli olduğunu ve bu ülkelerde demokratikleşmenin neden başarısız olduğunu analiz etmeyi amaçlamıştır.

Bu tez için nitel analiz ve vaka analizi olmak üzere iki temel araştırma stratejisi belirlenmiştir. İran'ın bölge olarak seçilmesinin sebebi bölge istikrarsızlaştırılmasında önemli bir rol oynayan en karmaşık rejimlerden birine sahip olmasıdır.

Bu tezin kavramsal çerçevesi, empirik bulgularla desteklenmektedir. Bu bulgular, otoriter liderlerin ortak eylem, halk hareketliliği, muhalefet partisi adayları ve toplumsal huzursuzluk gibi tehlikeli koşulları hafifletmek için işbirliği, baskı ve meşrulaştırmayı nasıl kullandığını değerlendirmekle kalmaz, aynı zamanda özellikle otokratik rejimler arasındaki belirli farklılıklara rağmen, otoriterlik propagandasını desteklemek için nasıl birbirlerini desteklediklerini gösterir.

Bu tez ile; İran kurumlarının, rejime karşı içerideki konumunu koruma imkanı verdiği, ancak en sert baskılar altında bile İran İslam Cumhuriyeti'nin varlığını sürdürebilmesini sağlayan uluslararası otoriter desteğin etkili olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Otoriterlik, otoriter direnç, İran, meşruiyet, uluslararası işbirliği

ABSTRACT

LESANI, Fatemeh. Authoritarian Stability: The Role of International Cooperation in the Iranian Regime's Survival, Master's Thesis, Ankara, 2023.

The rise of authoritarianism has generated a surge of new research on how these regimes resist democratization pressures to survive so long. While their focus is mostly on the role of democratic institutions, this dissertation investigates more mechanisms that justify authoritarianism's resilience by examining authoritarian characteristics using a configurative approach that allows us to analyze how the different forms of autocratic regimes utilize various mechanisms to persist, why certain of these strategies are more significant to some regimes than others, and why democratization fails to materialize in these countries.

I employ two major research strategies for my thesis: qualitative analysis and utilizing Iran as a case study since it is almost the most complicated regime which plays a crucial role in destabilizing the region. The authoritarian stability framework is utilized in this thesis, and supported by the empirical findings, which not only evaluate how autocrats use co-optation, repression, and legitimization to alleviate dangerous conditions associated with elite collective action, public mobilization, opposition party candidates, and civil unrest but also, it especially demonstrates that despite the certain differences among autocratic regimes, they share several similarities to support each other in order to promote authoritarianism.

Furthermore, analyzing the international cooperation of the Iranian regime is the main merit of my study. As a result, this thesis concludes that while Iranian institutes grant the regime an opportunity to maintain its position internally, it is international authoritarian support that has enabled Islamic Iran to persist under the harshest pressures.

Keywords: Authoritarian, resilience, Iran, legitimacy, international cooperation

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INTRODUCTION

The two topics that have brought attention to the phenomenon of authoritarianism in the past 20 years are the failure of the third wave of democracy prediction in many countries and the threat to global freedom. According to the latest survey by Freedom House, just 20 percent of people now live in free countries, "which is the result of global freedom declining for 16 years" (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2022). Therefore, these matters have encouraged scholars to investigate the causes of the persistence of autocracy.

The extant literature in this area mostly focuses on the roles of institutions in supporting autocrats in maintaining their positions of power. Whether institutional arrangements help preserve authoritarian regimes and ensure their existence is the scholars' principal concern. Although it may be viewed as a democratizing bias, given that institutions serve as a criterion for determining whether a country is democratic or not, the scholars have tried to understand how non-democratic regimes abuse institutions to legitimize their rules and satisfy the opposition. Gandhi and Przeworski (2006) attempted to implement these matters in contemporary authoritarian governments. They conclude that these regimes are more willing to give policy privileges to the public when they need popular support. Other scholars (Albrecht & Schlumberger, 2004; Hinnebusch, 2006) look for reasons why democratic institutions are being used more frequently in authoritarian regimes.

Democratic institutions are employed for legitimization and to gain the support of both the ruling class and the population. Such institutions serve as "window dressing" and as tools to promote cooperative aspects and stabilize their power (Gandhi, 2008; Schedler, 2013). Political parties also serve as a means of regime survival (Geddes, 1999; Gandhi, 2008; Gerschewski, 2013, p. 16). Apart from the role of institutions in ensuring autocratic durability, there are other conditions under which such regimes can resist democratization and survive for a long time. Therefore, compared to the literature on the function of institutions as internal instruments, my research fills the gap by finding more conditions under which these regimes will use different types of tools.

This thesis aims to answer two questions: how do authoritarian regimes defuse and promote their power against democratization pressures? and how has Islamic Iran been able to survive?

In order to answer these questions, both internal and external instruments in an authoritarian stability framework will be examined to fill the gaps in the literature. The ability of authoritarian regimes to preserve their power is referred to as authoritarian stability. This can be done in several ways, including through legitimacy, repression, co-optation, or a mix of these tactics. The authoritarian stability framework may examine and clarify the elements that contribute to the durability, resilience, and endurance of such regimes. Authoritarian regimes may also benefit from the support or tolerance of external players, such as strong states or international organizations, who can offer them some degree of protection and legitimacy.

This dissertation uses two major research strategies: one is a qualitative analysis by archival, official documents, reports, elite interviews, data bases, and secondary sources on the topic; the other is a case study utilizing the post-revolutionary period in Iran, since it is almost the most complicated regime, plays a crucial role in destabilizing the region, and has shown exceptional resilience. The conceptual framework of this thesis is supported by the empirical findings, which not only evaluate how autocrats use co-optation, repression, and legitimization to alleviate dangerous conditions associated with elite collective action, public mobilization, opposition party candidates, and civil unrest but also especially demonstrate that despite the certain differences among autocratic regimes, they share several similarities and support each other in order to promote authoritarianism. They were able to learn from one another how to deal with the threat of overthrow as well as the demands of democracy (Ambrosio, 2008; Hoffmann, 2011; Erdmann, Bank, Hoffmann & Richter, 2013, p. 5; Sottilotta, 2013; von Soest, 2015; Tansey, Koehler & Schmotz, 2016, p. 7; Hall & Ambrosio, 2017; Schmotz & Tansey, 2018, p.664).

I argue that while many authoritarian regimes employ similar mechanisms to oppose democratization and the restrictions imposed on their ambitions, international authoritarian cooperation is the primary reason for the Iranian regime's survival. The thesis is composed of five sections, of which the introduction and conclusion come in the first and last, respectively. The first chapter will deal with literature based on a configurative approach to understanding the role of institutions in autocratic regimes

and authoritarian stability as an internal instrument, which has already been examined in the literature. Co-optation, repression, and legitimization are the three methods that are highlighted in this type of conceptual framework to demonstrate how these mechanisms support the durability of authoritarian regimes.

Since co-optation and repression come at a high cost, most autocratic regimes use legitimacy as a mechanism for their survival. This legitimacy covers both internal and external aspects, which can be divided into several categories, including identity-based, procedural, performance-based, and international engagement (Soest & Grauvogel, 2017, p. 289). Co-optation concentrates on institutions to satisfy the opposition by giving them concessions, which minimises the risk of challenging governments and eliminates "moral hazard problems" (Gerschewski 2013). Co-optation is the practice of offering advantages to political competitors in return for their collaboration and support (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007; Gerschewski, 2013), and it may imply through formal and informal channels (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 28). When it comes to mechanisms, repression, be it soft or hard, is recognized as both the most severe and costly option (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 21). This technique is employed to induce fear through threats or physical sanctions like arrests, beatings, and torture to make sure that no action against governments will be taken.

Then, the international cooperation of authoritarian regimes will be examined to illustrate that the process of learning is not limited only to democracies and how autocratic regimes support each other to stabilize authoritarian rule, as well as how authoritarianism's diffusion and promotion work (Hall and Ambrosio, 2017). It is worth mentioning that such autocratic regimes believe that if democratization can spread, why couldn't authoritarianism do the same more effectively? This mechanism has received more attention, especially after the Arab Spring. On the other hand, the role of linkage among the autocratic will be examined to explain how they support each other's specialty in crisis times, and the relationship between internal legitimization and international cooperation will be studied as well (Levitsky & Way, 2006; Hoffmann, 2011; Erdmann et al., 2013, p. 11; Tansey et al., 2016, p. 6; von Soest, 2015). Moreover, authoritarian countries can create and promote international organizations through a coordinated policy to shield their own and aligned authorities from the danger of a regime shift (Ambrosio, 2008).

The second chapter deals with the Iranian regime as a case study for showing how we can apply the mentioned framework to Iran. It offers a thorough explanation of the research question that must be answered. It will describe how the mechanism and research problem align and why the case study was chosen as the primary research strategy. Thus, I shall first go over this nation's history to better illustrate the emergence of authoritarianism, then discuss the role of domestic legitimation, co-optation, and repression strategies. It shows the role of different types of legitimization and various channels of co-optation through distributing spoils and rent with the most significant elites and utilizing the high repressions in the regime's persistent, and it induces how some internal events, especially the Green Revolution in 2009, paved the way for the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to gain more power internally and externally, and how they exerted control over the nation's most significant economic and governmental institutions and used the national wealth for their own ambitions in the region.

Chapter three is the most important part of this thesis and deals with the role of international cooperation as the most significant strategy for the Iranian regime's survival. My research will reveal that the survival of the Iranian regime is a result of international cooperation. This section will illustrate how Iran was aware that it could not rely on internal mechanisms alone and that internal legitimacy is not a guarantee of the government; therefore, after the Islamic Revolution, with the loss of external legitimacy, it has attempted in various ways to involve itself in the foreign policy scene.

Methods such as the use of soft power, participation in international organizations, and the nuclear deal have been some of the most important of these methods. This strategy has been one of the mechanisms for the regime's durability in the international community, allowing it to be more present and receive foreign legitimacy. This method is important for the regime's survival by enhancing its legitimacy, increasing its international standing, and creating a favorable image of the regime among its supporters and sympathizers. The Iranian regime has used various soft power tools to achieve its goals. These include cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, and media outreach, and cultural diplomacy is more significant for this regime.

Another important element that has contributed to Iran's international legitimacy is the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Despite the JCPOA's criticism and rejection from some parties, its implementation gave Iran a considerable boost in international legitimacy and provided it with a way to interact with other nations. China and Russia's roles will be examined to better comprehend how they support Iran in the international community, either by utilizing the veto and vote rights in the United Nations or by assisting in the bypass of sanctions. External economic performance has been instrumental in the survival of the Iranian regime, as it has relied on various factors such as its geostrategic position, natural resources, trade relations, and foreign investments. These elements have contributed to the regime's ability to navigate economic challenges, maintain stability, and secure the resources necessary for its continued rule. Iran's geostrategic position in the Middle East, with access to key waterways and proximity to energy-rich regions, has been a crucial matter to its economic survival. The nation has considerable leverage in the global energy market thanks to its location along the Persian Gulf and control over the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial shipping route for the movement of oil throughout the world. Iran is a major energy player, giving it the ability to influence and bargain favorable terms with countries that import energy, assuring a consistent stream of revenue. Natural resources, especially gas and oil reserves, have played a key role in Iran's economic development and have provided the regime with a vital source of revenue. The nation is one of the leading producers and exporters of oil in the world thanks to its abundant energy resources. The dictatorship receives significant income from this resource wealth, which allows it to pay for domestic initiatives, uphold social stability, and fund its political agenda.

Iran also has established commercial relations with several nations, including regional powers, developing states, and major actors in the world economy. Such trade ties facilitate the exchange of services, cargo, and investments, providing the regime with access to essential commodities and technologies. Trade contracts and economic cooperation help the regime circumvent international sanctions and restrictions while maintaining its economic stability. This regime has received financial assistance from foreign investments. It has drawn global investment despite sanctions in industries like manufacturing, infrastructure, and energy. These investments support economic growth and technical improvement in addition to providing financial resources.

Understanding the role of external economic performance in the Iranian regime's survival provides insights into the dynamics of its authority, resource management, and engagement with the international community. Analyzing how geostrategic positioning, natural resources, trade relations, and foreign investments shape Iran's economic trajectory helps contextualize the regime's decision-making processes and its resilience in the face of economic pressures.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE ON AUTHORITARIAN STABILITY

1.1 Internal Mechanisms

For almost fifty years, scholars have attempted to investigate the conditions for democratization and how to overcome its obstacles, but the given the prevalence of autocratization over the last two decades and democratization failure have persuaded them to identify the factors that contribute to the persistence of some autocratic regimes. Numerous reasons have contributed to the failure of democratization, including poor economic conditions, weak civil society and elite resistance to democratic reforms (Diamond, 2002). These factors can create significant obstacles to the establishment of democratic governance and undermine the efforts of pro-democracy movements. In addition, autocratic regimes often employ a range of tactics to survive, and such strategies make it difficult for pro-democracy movements to gain traction and build momentum.

While the scholars such as Geddes, Schelder, Gerschewski, Przeworski and Gandhi claim that all nondemocratic regimes face almost similar barriers to democratization, and their findings primarily focus on domestic factors, which can be challenged (Geddes, 1999; Schedler, 2002; Gerschewski, 2013; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006, 2007). My findings will attempt to illustrate how democracy efforts are more difficult for some autocratic regimes, and how international factors can play a role in a regime's survival as well. This research will shed light on the complex relationship between authoritarianism and stability and provide insights into the challenges of promoting democracy and human rights in authoritarian contexts. Such findings can assist in halting the authoritarian process and even combating it. To do so, a conceptual framework is needed to understand how different regimes use some or all mechanisms which are crucial for ensuring that authoritarian governments can withstand domestic and international pressures and maintain their grip on power.

Before discussing the mechanisms used by autocratic regimes, a literature review can provide a clearer picture of an explanatory framework to better grasp these concepts. The literature on autocratic regime stability has evolved significantly over time, as scholars have improved their knowledge of the elements that contribute to the durability of these regimes by developing new conceptual frameworks. In general, three research phases can be distinguished that started from the 1930s to the 1960s in

which the notion of totalitarianism was used, and “six-point catalog” introduced by Friedrich and Brzezinski for describing the totalitarianism’s character (Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1956), then Hannah Arendt considered terror and ideology as the main aspects of a totalitarian, and the next research was based on political religion which has been used as an analogy to explain the "tremendum et fascinosum" of autocratic ideologies. But in the 1960s totalitarianism was replaced by authoritarianism based on Linz’s work in 1964 (Linz, 2000, p.77). One can say that the conceptual framework of "authoritarian sustainability" was first introduced by Juan J. Linz, known as "Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes" in which he argued that authoritarian regimes could survive over time by maintaining a balance between coercion and consent (Linz, 2000). He identified three key factors that help to the stability of authoritarian regimes: 1) The regime's capacity to control and influence over the political process, 2) the ability of the regime to maintain a monopoly on the use of force and repression, and 3) the ability of the regime to generate a degree of popular support or acquiescence, via providing economic and social perks, or through the use of ideology and propaganda. Following Gerschewski, the second research was about “bureaucratic authoritarianism” for explaining regime type, then he pointed out the role of socio-economic components in both the creation and preservation of authoritarian regimes. The two last schemes in this phase involved the study of one-party, military, and neo-patrimonial regimes using an expansion of subtypes and a localization of description. And it concluded that autocrats need to produce stronger socioeconomic performances, sometimes centered on informal reward programs, and couldn't just rely on ideology and terror (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 15).

Linz's conceptual framework has since been further developed and refined by other scholars, and some have focused on the role of institutions in autocratic regime stability. As a result, the last phase is considered as a “renaissance in studies of autocracies”, and the scholars have examined the ways in which autocrats use formal and informal institutions to maintain their grip on power (Gerschewski, 2013, p.14). For example, Barbara Geddes has argued that autocrats may use elections to legitimize their rule and co-opt opposition forces (Geddes, 1999), while Andreas Schedler has emphasized the importance of patronage networks in sustaining autocratic regimes (Schedler, 2002). Przeworski and Gandhi also, have solely addressed the role of institutions and associated them with democratic strategies applied by autocratic

regimes. They believed that institutions were "window-dressing" to justify their role as a democratic confusing factor. While a dictatorship controls political parties and elections under the guise of legitimate institutions (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006, 2007). On the other hand, Acemoglu and Robinson introduced "optimal" degrees of repression and intra-elite cohesion under the rational choice approach, and they mentioned the important role of co-opting institutions in eliminating the issue of moral hazard (Gerschewski, 2013, p.16).

More recently, scholars have focused on how popular support contributes to the longevity of autocratic regimes. For example, Christian von Soet and Julia Grauvoge focused on the various sources of legitimacy that authoritarian regimes can draw on to maintain their power (von Soest & Grauvogel, 2015, 2017). Another approach to understanding autocratic regime stability focuses on the role of formal and informal institutions, such as the judiciary, the media, and civil society, in shaping the balance of power between the ruling elite and opposition forces introduced by Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, they argue that competitive authoritarian regimes can pose a challenge to democratization, as they provide the ruling elite with opportunities to co-opt opposition forces and maintain their grip on power (Levitsky & Way, 2002, p. 9).

However, Johannes Gerschewski is another scholar who identifies “three pillars”: Legitimation, Repression, and Co-optation in Autocratic Regimes, and the presence of them over time is regarded as the primary contributing factor to this process. He emphasizes that authoritarian regimes must generate a sense of legitimacy among their populations in order to sustain their rule. According to him, this can be achieved through a combination of propaganda, ideology, and material incentives. Repression as an ability of the regime to use violence and coercion to suppress dissent and opposition is essential for maintaining order and control. Gerschewski argues that repression has several negative impacts domestically and internationally in the long term which must be calibrated carefully so as not to provoke widespread resistance or backlash. Finally, he emphasizes the role of co-optation in authoritarian stability. By co-opting key groups or individuals, such as business elites or political rivals, authoritarian rulers can secure their loyalty and support. Co-optation can take many forms, such as offering economic benefits or political opportunities (Gerschewski, 2013).

On the other hand, the work of Steven Levitsky and Lucan Ways has had a significant impact on the impact of international cooperation. They introduced the terms "Western leverage" and "linkage to the West" to describe the relationship between Western democracies and authoritarian regimes. According to them, the former refers to the prospective ability of democratic regimes to influence authoritarian regimes' conduct through several strategies, such as diplomatic pressure, and financial incentives, the latter is related to the degree of reliance and integration that a totalitarian government has with Western democracies. Trade ties, foreign direct investment, cultural exchanges, and membership in international organizations can all lead to this connection (Levitsky, &Way, 2010, p. 6).

Tansey and Koehler focus solely on the role of linkages among the autocratic regimes to show how these regimes support each other to prevent democratization attempts. They claim that geography is a crucial factor in the learning process. Because the possibility of regime changes increases in the countries of a region that have experienced a revolution, these regimes can learn how to control the situation (Tansey et al., 2016, p.12). Stephen G.F. Hall and Thomas Ambrosio also provided a comprehensive conceptual framework to explain the role of coordination between non-democratic regimes. They argue that diffusion and the learning process are important in autocratic regimes' resilience. Authoritarian governments can strengthen their capacity for control, modify strategies to shift conditions, and respond to new challenges by monitoring and learning from the experiences of previous regimes (Hall & Ambrosio, 2017, p. 4), both locally and globally. By giving authoritarian regimes a wider range of tools and strategies to keep their grip on power, diffusion might accelerate the learning process (Hall & Ambrosio, 2017, p. 6). And they consider Russia and China as promoters of dictatorship, and they argue that international organizations act as conduits through which these regimes promote totalitarian principles and support non-democratic regimes (Hall & Ambrosio, 2017, p. 11).

My primary concentration is on Gershewski's work, as he provided one of the most comprehensive and complete conceptualizations to understand the role of each internal mechanism in non-democratic regimes' persistence and the relationship among each of them. However, this thesis will adopt a slightly different view from his work and will add an international component to this survival, as the previously mentioned scholars talk about. As a result, in this chapter, I will examine each

mechanism based on the sequence of each mentioned phase to comprehend their impact on various types of autocratization. Then, I will evaluate the international cooperation of authoritarian regimes.

1.1.1 Legitimation

Many political scientists have studied the concept of legitimacy for non-democratic regimes, but Max Weber is a well-known scholar in this field who developed a theory of legitimacy that distinguished between traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal kinds of authority. According to Weber, non-democratic regimes may be considered legitimate if they have the support of their citizens and operate within a system of rules and procedures that are seen as fair and just (Weber, 2004, as cited in von Soest & Grauvogel, 2017, p. 289). Thus, it is used to describe the method of getting support (von Soest & Grauvogel, 2017, p. 288). According to Weber, there are three types of legitimacy: traditional legitimacy, charismatic legitimacy, and rational-legal legitimacy. (Weber, [1922] 1978, as cited in Dukalskis & Gerschewski, 2017, p. 252). And legitimacy is also considered to be the potential of a political system to promote and preserve the idea that current political institutions are the most appropriate or accurate ones for society' (Lipset, 1959, p. 86).

In fact, legitimation has a positive meaning that makes it possible to distinguish between democratic and non-democratic systems. Due to its normative meanings, it is clear that the phrase initially served to describe democratic government types, while it has been used by non-democratic regimes to convenience their people and international societies. As a result, it can occasionally seem challenging and confusing to identify a suitable form of government. Since these regimes have utilized this tactic improperly, it is seen as a "claim to legitimacy," which plays a significant role in the resilience of autocratic regimes (Burnell, 2006, p. 552).

Claims to legitimacy, also known as legitimation mechanism, can refer to both political elites' convictions as well as tactical manipulations aimed at preserving their position of power. It also has a significant political impact on opposition activities, regime support, and elite solidarity (von Soest & Grauvogel, 2017, p. 288). Legitimacy is important in an authoritarian regime because, by presenting itself as the legitimate authority, the regime can exercise control over society and repress opposition, aiding in the maintenance of stability (Dukalskis & Gerschewski, 2017, p.252). It can be

gained through a variety of methods, including propaganda and media control, political institution manipulation, and claims to cultural values, national, or religious identity.

Examining literature focused on different examples of legitimizations is crucial to assessing the significance of legitimacy, as it allows us to understand the various forms it takes and how they are implemented by different autocratic regimes. Additionally, by identifying the strategies through which each autocracy justifies its rule, we can gain insights into whether democratization is likely or determine the primary reasons for a regime's resilience. There are various interpretations of legitimacy, but they all refer to collective consent within the legal framework, or, in other words, they allude to a type of authority that the target audience believes to be fair and just (Dukalskis & Gerschewski, 2017, p. 252). Generally, von Soest and Grauvogel have developed Dukalski's and Gerschewski's model and provided the most systematic and comprehensive model for types of claims to legitimacy, including foundational myth, ideology, personalism, procedures, performance, and international engagement (von Soest & Grauvogel, 2017; 2014). Furthermore, there are three common types of legitimacy in the durability of non-democratic regimes: performance-based (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 19), identity-based (von Soest & Grauvogel, 2017; 2014), and procedures-based (Levitsky & Way, 2002).

Therefore, it is important to have a general understanding of the various sorts of these regimes (Sinkkonen, 2021, p. 1179). Regardless of the well-known kinds of authoritarian regimes, including personalist, military, and party regimes, a new type of authoritarianism based on electoral (Linz, 2000; Schedler, 2002) and closed regimes provides an accurate picture of the differences in legitimacy and how they implement each type of claim to legitimacy (von Soest & Grauvogel, 2017, p. 288). Electoral regimes include hegemonic electoral authoritarianism (Diamond, 2002, p. 6) and competitive authoritarianism in terms of the degree of electoral competition (Levitsky &Way, 2002; Hadenius & Teorell, 2006, p. 2; Wahman, Teorell, & Hadenius, 2013).

While citizens have no genuine political rights or freedom in closed regimes and the ruling party has a monopoly on power, elections are held on a regular basis but are not free and fair. The dominant party rules the political system, and it maintains its influence by controlling the media, security forces, and electoral institutions (von Soest & Grauvogel, 2017, p. 292). Finally, competitive authoritarianism refers to systems with considerable democratic institutions and political freedoms, but where

the ruling party manipulates these institutions to remain in power (Gilbert & Mohseni, 2011, p. 274). Elections are held, but opposition parties face significant barriers to participating, and the ruling party makes use of its control to impact the results in its favour. In other words, closed regimes are the least democratic kind of authoritarianism, followed by hegemonic electoral authoritarianism, while competitive authoritarianism is the most complicated form of authoritarianism, combining features of both closed regimes and democratic systems (von Soest & Grauvogel, 2017, p. 292).

When it comes to examining the types of claims to legitimacy in various autocratic regimes, by using ideology as a subtype of identity-based politics, a non-democratic regime is able to legitimise its rule and create a sense of national identity by providing a unifying belief system. Thus, links to nationalism and religion as core aspects of legitimacy can be found in ideology (von Soest & Grauvogel, 2017, p. 290). This strategy is considered the key aspect of authoritarianism (Arendt, [1951] 1966, page 470; Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1956, as cited in Dukalskis & Gerschewski, 2017, p. 254). The regime frequently employs a variety of techniques to promote a sense of identity, including education, media advertising, and official cultural and religious traditions. Some autocratic regimes may boost internal legitimacy by portraying an enemy at their borders, through which they can bring the nation with themselves. Also, these regimes may employ identity-based discrimination to divide society and crush resistance, securing their own dominance (Dukalskis & Gerschewski, 2017, p. 254). In times of crisis, a strong ideology can be used to legitimise the regime's policies and actions as well as to organise support for the regime, leading to more challenging opposition movements to acquire momentum. But if an ideology is viewed as no longer serving the interests of the population, particularly if certain groups feel marginalised or oppressed by the dominant identity, it can contribute to instability in a non-democratic state, especially in ideocratic regimes' such as the Soviet Union (Kailitz & Stockemer, 2017, p. 335).

Authoritarian regimes seek to establish and maintain legitimacy through ideological mechanisms that support their rule, and this has been a source of their legitimacy since the demise of the Soviet Union (Mayer, 2001; Holbig, 2013). But the stability of an autocratic system is not primarily determined by ideology. In such regimes, "procedural legitimacy" refers to the belief that a regime's decision-making process and transfer of power are fair (von Soest & Grauvogel, 2017, p. 291),

transparent, and acceptable to a major portion of society. Elections under non-democratic regimes are often neither genuine nor competitive but rather serve to validate the current regime's dominance or to offer a veneer of democratic legitimacy (Levitsky & Way, 2002). This strategy can serve to diminish the risk of dissent or opposition since the population is more likely to believe that their interests are being considered and that the regime is acting fairly and honestly (von Soest & Grauvogel, 2015; 217; Dukalskis & Gerschewski, 2017).

Elections in non-democratic regimes, on the other hand, can play a range of functions depending on the circumstances and the intentions of the ruling authority. Some of these roles include: 1) power consolidation: non-democratic regimes implement elections to bolster their position of authority by selecting and endorsing a candidate loyal to the government; 2) maintaining democratic appearance: elections create the impression that the regime is responsive to the will of the people, both domestically and internationally; 3) increasing popular support: elections instill a sense of engagement and inclusion in the population, thereby boosting support for the regime. They also serve as a means to assess the strength of opposition, identify potential threats, and 4) managing opposition: elections provide a platform for opposition voices and allow the co-optation of potential leaders. However, the ruling authorities manipulate the results to ensure their continued dominance. (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007; 2006).

However, it is also important to note that procedure and ideology alone are not sufficient to ensure stability in an autocratic regime. Another important factor is performance, which is related to the provision of public welfare and plays an important role in legitimising and sustaining autocratic rule (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 20). If the regime can keep its promises and meet the basic needs and expectations of the population, it is likely to boost public support while decreasing the possibility of dissent. This can involve delivering economic prosperity and fundamental services such as healthcare, education (von Soest & Grauvogel, 2015, p. 10), and public safety (Radnitz, 2012). In other words, economic achievement, notably increases in living standards and financial security, can raise public perceptions of the regime's legitimacy. Autocratic governments can win the support and allegiance of their people by producing economic growth, job opportunities, and higher living standards. Economic success is used to justify the regime's authority by serving as proof of its

efficiency and capacity for administration. And it is also significant for co-optation, which will be examined in detail later. By providing economic advantages, opportunities, and resources, economic success enables autocratic regimes to co-opt various segments of society. The dictatorship can win the loyalty and cooperation of important elite interest groups and supporters by giving them financial benefits (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 25). On the other hand, if the authority fails to keep its promises, it may spark popular discontent and, in turn, protests or other forms of unrest. It can damage the regime's legitimacy and potentially lead to instability and crisis, which "become the cause of change" (Gerschewski, 2013; Volpi & Gerschewski, 2020, p. 12)..

In addition, closed authoritarians focus on identity-based legitimation strategies, while the institution plays a crucial role for legitimacy in electoral regimes, so procedure-based is more important for electoral authoritarianism, but performance-based is significant for all autocracies (von Soest & Grauvogel, 2017, p. 293) because it is linked to the output legitimation to successfully assert their authority to rule (Lipset, 1959; Przeworski & Limongi, 1993). We can point out China as an instant one-party regime in which performance is extremely important for preserving its authority and political stability (von Soest & Grauvogel, 2017, p. 298). With its economic and security achievements, the CCP could persuade its citizens that it is the best and most appropriate governance option for the nation and has turned it into a superpower. Overall, strong claims of legitimacy are highly connected to the durability of authoritarian regimes (Sinkkonen, 2021, p. 1178), but the role of a claim to legitimacy in the persistence of non-democratic regimes is complicated and diverse, and it depends on a variety of internal and external factors, such as the regime's capacity to effectively project its authority, respond to challenges, and maintain public support.

1.1.2 Co-optation

As the presence of one mechanism usually implies the use of another to ensure the longevity of an authoritarian regime, these regimes cannot rely on a single pillar to withstand democratization pressure (Gerschewski, 2013; Dukalskis & Gerschewski, 2017; Kailitz & Stockemer, 2017). Co-optation can be placed as the second pillar (figure 1) because, regardless of any kind of hereditary, religious, or electoral

legitimacy, an autocratic regime cannot survive for a long time without cooperation with actors strategically important to the regime elite (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 26). Co-optation in non-democratic regimes refers to the process of bringing potential opponents or critics into the ruling circle in order to neutralise their opposition (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007, p. 1283). Hence, the purpose of this strategy is to develop loyalty and obedience among individuals who may dispute the regime's authority (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006, 2007).

However, a number of factors impact the nature and extent of this cooperation, including the number of potential opponents, the possibility of destabilising the regime, civil society, the regime's capacity to preserve a balance of control and participation, and economic conditions. (Gerschewski, 2013; Dukalskis & Gerschewski, 2017; Kailitz & Stockemer, 2017; Wucherpfennig & Deutsch, 2009; Levitsky & Way, 2002; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006, 2007; Geddes, 1999). Additionally, following Sinkkonen, elite cohesion is important in this strategy, and the personalization index, administrative centralization, and governmental control over economic assets are components of the often employed co-optation techniques (Sinkkonen, 2021, p. 1173).

A conceptual framework provides a comprehensive picture of various collaboration tactics in such regimes. Generally, "policy concessions and spoils distribution" (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007, p. 1282) through "formal and informal channels" (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 22) are two mechanisms utilized by authoritarian regimes to obtain collaboration. While the former requires an institutional framework, the latter is implemented in autocratic systems such as "neo-paternalism" (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 16), in which political leaders exploit state resources, such as patronage and rent-seeking, to maintain power and control over the state (Burnell, 2006, p. 553), even if they go against formal institutional practises and legal frameworks. For example, in a neo-patrimonial system, a political leader may utilize their network to appoint friends or family members to influential positions inside the state apparatus, even if they are not suitable for that role (Levitsky & Way, 2002; Gerschewski, 2013). While by providing material rewards, the regime hopes to create a patron-client relationship with people or groups that can serve as a source of support and loyalty, the goal of policy concessions is to forge alliances and foster a sense of shared purpose around certain policies or crises (Linz, 2000, p. 156).

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that these two channels are typically related, as the presence of institutions provides jobs, which are the most common kinds of patronage, corruption, and governmental rent. Yet their difference is in legal implementation. The distribution of spoils does not necessarily need to be legal (Collier, 1982; Zolberg, 1969, as cited in Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007, p. 1282), but political actions and compromises take on a legal form within institutions and legislatures (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007, p. 1283). As a result, legislatures, political parties, and elections play a crucial role in this strategy (Gerschewski, 2013; Kailitz & Stockemer, 2017; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006, 2007; Levitsky & Way, 2002). And it becomes more significant when some scholars examine co-optation based on the relevance and existence of a legislative act (Kailitz & Stockemer, 2017, p. 335). The legislature may function as a "rubber stamp" institution, with no independence or ability to oppose the governing elites' decisions. The non-democratic regime utilizes a legislative body to justify its policies, provide the appearance of public representation, or offer a veneer of legality for its activities. The legislature can also be used by the dictatorship to co-opt and manage opposition groups, as well as to project an image of political pluralism and freedom of opinion, even if these institutions lack real strength and independence (Burnell, 2006, p. 551). In some scenarios, the government may use the legislative body to enact restrictive laws and regulations to suppress opposition and limit civil rights. It also supplies rulers with information about the loyalty and competency of regional and local leaders (Gerschewski, 2013). In other cases, the legislature may only be employed to give the illusion of a functioning political system, while true power is controlled by ruling elites outside of the legislative body.

Autocratic regimes can utilize elections to co-opt opposition coalitions or candidates, either to divide the opposition (Helms, 2022, p. 11) or to create the impression of competition. While autocrats may not conduct fully competitive or free and fair elections, they might utilize election trappings to co-opt opposition parties and neutralise any challenges to the government (Grauvogel & von Soest, 2014). Elections can also be used for co-optation through influencing the electoral process, such as by vote fraud or restricting access to the ballot box, in order to assure that the regime's favoured candidates or parties win while showing a competitive election (Dukalskis & Gerschewski, 2017; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007; Levitsky & Way, 2002). Political parties can also help with co-optation by providing a system for monitoring political

opposition. The party's role is to generate a following for the dictators (Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1961, p. 26, as cited in Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007) within society.

A party is a dictatorship's strategy for influencing and governing society (Gershenson & Grossman, 2001), or, as Mussolini interpreted it, the "capillary" through which the dictatorship's blood pumps throughout society (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006, p. 15). They may create a false sense of competition and pluralism or allow other parties to participate in the political process, but only to a limited extent to keep them from wielding too much authority; otherwise, they may pose a threat to the system. In other words, co-optation has its limits, particularly if opposition groups maintain their independence and continue to press for greater political freedoms or democratic reforms (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006, 2007; Helms, 2022). Overall, the role of opposition parties in co-optation can be complicated and dependent on several variables, including the degree of repression and the level of public support for the system (Sinkkonen, 2021, p. 1177; Gerschewski, 2013; Gerschewski, 2013). In some cases, autocratic regimes may form their own "opposition" parties. These parties are frequently founded and controlled by the dictatorship, and their objective is to provide the appearance of political opposition while still serving the interests of the ruling elite (Turovsky, 2014, p. 71). In addition, as Gandhi and Przeworski had already proved, the existence of inherited parties, which are regarded as potential oppositions, pushes the regime to increase cooperation with them as a policy compromise to mitigate any threats (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006, p. 19). Therefore, it makes sense that the role of institutions is crucial for non-democratic regimes, especially when opposition parties with a large organizational structure and internal decision-making authority are less prone to co-optation (Kavasoglu, 2021), and they can destabilise the hegemonic party structure accordingly.

On the other hand, the possibility of forming "pre-electoral coalitions" (Gandhi & Reuter, 2013, p. 152) among both the opposition and the regime's supporters increases. While the opposition attempts to alter the regime, the loyal party seeks to thwart its efforts by infiltrating the opposition and adopting the cooperation mechanisms of the loyal members (Helms, 2022, p. 11). This kind of cooperation could take the form of appointments to government positions, inclusion in advisory bodies, the leadership of an apparent opposition party, or providing rent to the opposition. As

a result, the role of parties becomes more prominent, even in the context of informal channels.

As mentioned above, giving rewards or privileges, such as jobs, contracts, or resources, to people or groups in exchange for their support or loyalty is referred to as co-opting via distributing spoils (Turovsky, 2014). (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006, p. 15; Geddes, 1999). This strategy is more common in "rentier states" (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007; Hinnebusch, 2006, p. 383; Wantchekon, 2000), which use natural resources to distribute spoils to potential opponents. By providing material rewards, the regime hopes to create a patron-client (Burnell, 2006, p. 249) relationship with these individuals or groups, which can serve as a source of support and loyalty (Turovsky, 2014, p. 79).

Moreover, these states frequently have a small, rich elite class that dominates the resource wealth, while the majority is restricted from these perks. They use co-optation in a variety of ways, including by providing credit to significant social groups or individuals in exchange for their loyalty and support. Subsidies, positions, or other forms of patronage may be provided to select segments of the population (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007, p. 1283), such as the military, civil servants, or members of powerful communities. Co-optation in an informal channel can also aid in the prevention of the creation of opposition movements or political parties that would question the rentier state's monopoly over national resources. They also use this mechanism by establishing state-led institutions or organisations that act as channels for distributing spoils to individuals. In such a way, the "public wage fund" increases, which prevents "policy polarisation" (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006, p. 20) and creates a new coalition due to wage equality. The role of coalition is crucial to supporting the regime in staying in power (Mesquita et al., 1999, as cited in Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006, p. 3), and in other words, the types of coalitions backing resource-rich regimes may have a larger impact on the stability of these regimes than "patronage and coercion" (Smith, 2004, p. 233). As a result, monarchy-based regimes like those in the Persian Gulf benefit more from rent sharing due to the presence of inherited parties that already have an institutional framework and the possibility of challenging the regime, making the regime compromise with them more.

It is worth noting that since the performance-based approach is significant for all non-democratic regimes (von Soest & Grauvogel, 2017, p. 293),, they attempt to

increase outcomes (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006) by sharing rents for political consent, and natural resources facilitate the ability for dictators to preserve their power (Wantchekon, 2000, p. 4; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006, p. 3). However, economic dependency on rent resources in rentier nations can occasionally pose obstacles to societal cooperation and coordination. Political leaders, for example, may prioritise their personal or factional interests over the larger requirements of the community, resulting in corruption, conflict, or civil upheaval. This is not always the case, and there are forms of rentier regimes that successfully manage their resource wealth by investing in diverse businesses and social programmes to promote cooperation and stability (Hinnebusch, 2006, p. 379).

Non-rentier states, on the other hand, derive their income from a more diverse range of economic activities, which may include agriculture, services, or other industries. While non-rentier states may not face the same economic motivations to preserve control over natural resources, they may confront a variety of political and social issues that have an impact on cooperation levels. Ultimately, the level of cooperation in each state is determined by a variety of elements, such as political institutions, social norms, economic situations (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007), and historical legacies (Helms, 2022, p. 5). However, non-democratic regimes must strike a balance between promoting economic expansion in their nation and warding off opposition groups that may coalesce around influential economic entities, and this is what we observe in communist countries when the government maintains control over the major corporations and relies solely on institutions that back the government (Sinkkonen, 2021, p. 1183).

Yet co-optation can be regarded as a double-edged sword (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007, p. 1283). While it may temporarily protect the regime's hold on power, it can also foster reliance and favouritism, jeopardising the regime's legitimacy in the long run (Turovsky, 2014, p. 74). It can also lead to factionalism and infighting among individuals who have been co-opted as they compete for position and influence inside the system. Finally, the effectiveness of co-optation as a policy is determined by a variety of elements, including the extent of opposition to the regime, the resilience of civil society, and the regime's ability to achieve an equilibrium between control and participation (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 18). Overall, co-optation plays an important role in a regime's resilience, as it is challenging for opposition forces to remove the ruling

elites in an autocratic system that promotes elite unity (Kailitz & Stockemer, 2017, p. 333).

1.1.3 Repression

Repression can make a major contribution to the survival of non-democratic regimes. Repression is the process of shutting down opposition, dissent, or revolt using force, violence, or other forms of "coercion" (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 21) as a means of maintaining control and staying in power, and this can use a variety of strategies, including censorship, monitoring, arrest, or torture. Following Gerschewski, repression is a main pillar of autocracies and is often cited as one of their distinguishing characteristics (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 21). In other words, it refers to an expansive variety of coercive measures implemented by political authorities to influence those whose territory they control, including obvious and secret, violent and nonviolent, subsidised by state (such as militias) and state-affiliated (such as death squads) actions, as well as successful and ineffective ones (Davenport, 2007, p. 3).

According to Levitsky and Way, repression in non-democratic regimes can vary in intensity, with two broad categories being "high" and "low" intensity repression (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 21), and they are frequently discerned in datasets as "political rights" and "civil liberties" (Sinkkonen, 2021, p. 1179), presented by Freedom House (FH) or the Cingranelli-Richards Human Rights Dataset (CIRI), which is regarded as having a "New Empowerment Index" for low intensity and a "Physical Rights Index" for high intensity repression (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 21).

The intended individuals or organization and level of "coercion" and violence involved are the primary distinctions between the two types of repression. Low-intensity repression generally refers to more covert, indirect forms of coercion and control over less significant groups (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 21). They could involve intimidation, censorship, propaganda, media manipulation, harassment, and surveillance. Along with constraints on access to information and education, it can also involve restrictions on political freedom (Gerschewski, 2013). Compared to severe repression, this sort of repression is frequently less obvious. As Levitsky and Way mentioned, when an autocratic regime faces less imminent challenges to its survival, such as during times of relative stability or when opposition groups are weak or "fragmented," this sort of repression is frequently employed. Low-intensity repression,

which can be employed to suppress dissent and restrict political involvement without resorting to extreme violence (Grauvogel & von Soest, 2014, p.639), is frequently harder to identify (Gerschewski, 2013, p.21).

High-intensity repression, on the other hand, refers to more overt and violent forms of control, such as extrajudicial killings, physical violence, disappearances, and prison, as "visible acts" (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 21). It is frequently employed when the regime detects a serious threat to its authority, such as during demonstrations or uprisings, or in situations of civil war, when opposition groups try to topple the regime, especially through coups, as it has traditionally served as the primary tool for regime change (Hinnebusch, 2006, p. 382). Hence, the role is that of an insider to avoid an "intra-elite" coup (Shkel & Gareev, 2014, p. 88). Besides, this kind of repression is usually linked to serious human rights violations and can lead to high levels of fear and trauma among the population. It is important to note that both forms of repression are frequently combined, with regimes utilizing a variety of strategies to uphold power and quell dissent.

Repression can have several effects on the durability of non-democratic regimes. Firstly, it might discourage potential rivals from challenging the ruling party. Many people may refrain from protesting the dictatorship out of fear of being detained, imprisoned, tortured, or even killed. The public may get dejected as a result, making it less likely that they will organise an uprising against the regime. Certainly, the isolation brought on by repression and terror allowed for greater mass mobilization and manipulation (Linz, 2000, page 19). Besides, repression may weaken opposition groups and hinder their ability to successfully organise. It can prevent opposition groups from coordinating and communicating with one another by focusing on activists, organisations, and leaders who constitute a threat to the regime (Sinkkonen, 2021, p. 1179). This can make it harder for them to mobilize and challenge the regime (Shkel & Gareev, 2014).

Finally, repression can lend the regime legitimacy by giving the impression of stability and order. The regime can portray itself as the only source of stability and security in the face of turmoil and disorder by repressing opposition and keeping control. This may make it easier for the dictatorship to defend its activities in front of the public and foreign nations (Hinnebusch, 2006, p. 382). However, while this mechanism can be effective in the short term, it can also have negative long-term

effects on the ability of non-democratic systems to persist. The outcome of using repression in such regimes can be measured according to Davenport's interpretation, known as the "punishment puzzle," under which the effect of repression on public dissent has been proven to be either positive, negative, or nonexistent (Davenport, 2007, p. 9).

It can fuel anger and resentment among the populace, increasing dissent and rebellion. The reputation and legitimacy of the regime may also be harmed, which would make it more difficult to sustain public and international support. In the event of any domestic resistance to the regime and increasing repression, the autocracy's claims to legitimacy might be shown for what they are. And if the state is a signatory to a pertinent international treaty, there may in some cases be a solid legal pretext to at least hold autocratic leaders accountable under international conventions such as those that forbid war crimes, crimes against humanity, or more specific crimes like torture (Burnell, 2006, p.560). Repression is thus not always a viable long-term strategy as it is costly (von Soest & Grauvogel, 2015, p. 5), even if it can be a useful weapon for autocratic regimes to maintain power. As a result, an effective autocratization approach necessitates more nuanced methods that would prevent jeopardising the regime's legitimacy and popularity. This is what Acemoglu and Robinson mentioned as "optimal" levels of repression, which are especially important in determining how long autocratic regimes last (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 16).

To that end, non-democratic regimes attempt to rely more on covert repression mechanisms, and thanks to technology, this method has been facilitated for such regimes. "Digital repression" is regarded as a new tool by which autocratic regimes can persist and is seen as more effective and cost-efficient (Frantz et al., 2020). This technique is a growing concern for human rights advocates and political activists around the world; it has important ramifications for the future of free expression, democracy, and human rights in the digital age as non-democratic governments are increasingly exploiting digital technology to monitor, control, and suppress opposition. On top of that, the importance of using this method becomes more prominent when we intend to examine one of the factors affecting the durability of the most repressive regimes, namely China and Russia. The Kremlin floods the Internet with pro-regime narratives, diverting attention away from bad news and sowing doubt and confusion.

In contrast, China imposes censorship via artificial intelligence and the "Great Firewall," identifying regime opponents through high-resolution cameras and facial recognition, monitoring regime insiders on domestic social media such as Weibo, and compelling compliance through smart cities (Frantz et al., 2020, p. 3). It should be noted that, just as foreign support for the opposition in international communities can provide a challenge for authoritarian regimes, it can also assist some governments in using various forms of repression. Repression, on the other hand, involves the use of force to suppress dissent, opposition, and any other forms of political or social activity that threaten the regime's authority. This mechanism, in either soft or hard form, can help reduce the likelihood of rebellion or revolution and increase the regime's durability over time. Repression, though, can also have unfavourable effects on autocracies. Overusing repression can increase opposition and provoke animosity among the people, making it harder for the regime to preserve its power (Grauvogel & von Soest, 2014, p. 639). Repression can also lead to international condemnation and isolation, which can weaken the regime's legitimacy and reduce its ability to maintain order and stability (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007).

While each of these strategies has its strengths and weaknesses, successful non-democratic regimes often use a combination of all three to maintain their power. Following Gerschewski, the use of one mechanism can stimulate another one, and they are linked together (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 28). In addition, regimes with weak legitimacy rely on harsh repression, while regimes with high legitimacy favour soft repression (Grauvogel & von Soest, 2014, p. 639). Besides, relying too heavily on any one of these strategies can also be risky, as over-reliance on repression, for example, can lead to popular backlash and even revolution, or relying on co-optation may pave the way for empowering the opposition (Kailitz & Stockemer, 2017, p. 333). Therefore, the balance between legitimacy, co-optation, and repression is crucial for the long-term stability and durability of non-democratic regimes. But this matter is usually relevant to the link between legitimacy and repression, as long-lasting regimes typically seek a balance between soft repression and performance-based legitimacy (Grauvogel & von Soest, 2014, p. 639; Burnell, 2006), because, as mentioned above, economic development is significant for all regimes and rich autocracies are less likely to face crises (Kailitz & Stockemer, 2017, p. 341). However, one can say that dictators utilize either an "over-politicization" or "under-politicization" system, while in the

former there is a combination of high legitimacy by ideology-based hard repression and co-optation by formal channels, and the latter refers to high legitimacy by performance-based soft repression and co-optation through informal channels (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 30).

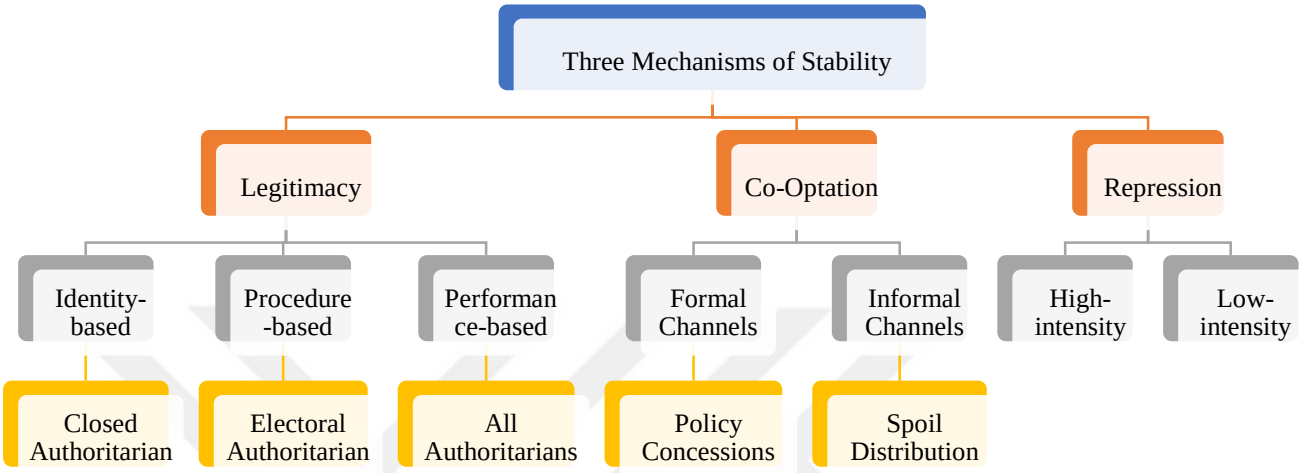


figure 1: Three Mechanisms of Stability

1.2 International Cooperation of Authoritarian Regimes

Von Soest & Grauvogel argued that international engagement is a mechanism for increasing the domestic legitimacy of authoritarian countries by which autocratic regimes justify their presence in the international arena and their fighting against foreign foes (von Soest & Grauvogel, 2017, p. 291), but they did not separate internal and external aspects of survival. My study adopts a slightly different view from the literature on survival and evaluates international cooperation as an external survival mechanism for Iran, which will be evaluated in the following chapters. One can say that political stability and regime longevity are equivalent. For a variety of reasons, stability is important, but one of the main ones is that it gives outside actors the advantage of working with a predictable government (Sottilotta, 2013, p. 2). The ability to keep alternatives from gaining power is the key to the stability of an authoritarian system (Hoffmann, 201, p. 23). So, authoritarian regimes' primary concern must be thwarting any challenges to their authority in order to guarantee their stability and maintain their hold on power (von Soest, 2015, p. 4).

Apart from the role of domestic factors in authoritarian regimes' resilience, external influences are considered to be important contributors to the persistence of authoritarian regimes as well. International cooperation is at the core of such external factors. A significant obstacle to the expansion of democracy around the world is the rise of authoritarian collaboration (von Soest, 2015, p. 2). In general, cooperation is commonly viewed as the antithesis of conflict, antagonism, and competition. The examination of cooperation aids in considering agency and the interactions between two states, which simplifies the study of the international aspect of authoritarianism. Cooperation indicates a concerted effort between sender and receiver (Erdmann et al., 2013, p. 25). This mechanism can have an effect on the domestic level through diffusion and the learning process by which the autocratic regimes learn from each other, and the powerful dictators diffuse authoritarianism as an opposing to "democracy promotion" (Ambrosio & Tolstrup, 2019, p. 2779) in other countries and support dictatorial governments to persist against democratization (Erdmann et al., 2013; von Soest, 2015, p. 2) and build external barriers against diffusion effects at home (Hall & Ambrosio, 2017, p.148). In other words, supporting other autocrats is primarily motivated by the desire to increase the likelihood that one's own dictatorship will endure by limiting the adverse effects of democratization and by advancing geostrategic and developmental interests (von Soest, 2015, p. 2).

According to Ambrosio, factors such as geography, linkages, international organizations, major powers either globally or regionally, and reference groups may have a moderating effect on the diffusion of authoritarianism (Ambrosio, 2010; Ambrosio & Tolstrup, 2019, p. 2748). Links may make promoting ideas and strategies among states easier (Hall & Ambrosio, 2017, p.154), and international organizations are significant for such linkages, as such regimes can legitimise their authoritarianism. In order to sustain their separate political systems, authoritarian regimes might cooperate with their non-democratic counterparts through international organizations. This is referred to as a coordinated strategy (Figure 2). Authoritarian countries can create and promote international organizations through a coordinated policy to shield their own and like-minded governments from the danger of a regime change (Ambrosio, 2008, p. 1325).

But, before we consider the function of international organizations in resilience, it would be beneficial to realise how some forms of autocratic regimes use

cooperation mechanisms because there is a relationship between the essence of autocracy and the different ways they cooperate (von Soest, 2015, p. 2). One can comprehend the significance of the function of legitimacy in international cooperation by looking at some forms of autocratic regimes, as it is important to understand how authoritarian regimes use their various claims to legitimacy, which may clarify why authoritarian regimes continue to exist despite external pressure (Galtung, 1967; Grauvogel & von Soest, 2014, p. 638).. As a result, there is a linear relationship between strong legitimacy at home and weak ties with the sender internationally (Grauvogel & von Soest, 2014, p. 637). Therefore, scholars admit that elections for competitive autocratic regimes are a means to alleviate internal and external pressures. But since it is considered a "double-edged sword," which can either legitimise or jeopardise authoritarianism, elections could become the opposition's main focus for pressure from the opposition, public protest, and external supporters (von Soest, 2015), and thus, in order to prevent democracy in its "near abroad," countries like Russia often support elections as a top priority (Tolstrup, 2015).

On the other hand, Geddes' typology regarding military, personalist, and party-based is very important as their traits may shape a regime’s willingness to cooperate with an authoritarian ruler, the nature of that cooperation, and the foreign attitude of authoritarian countries. The party-based regime's legitimization tactics emphasise its economic progress (von Soest, 2015, p. 3). Hence, as performance is crucial here, cooperation can improve a regime's chances of surviving by giving it access to natural and energy resources to support both its national security and economic growth strategies (von Soest, 2015; Hall & Ambrosio, 2017). In order to further economic and national goals, an autocratic regime generally supports other regimes on an as-needed basis (Hall & Ambrosio, 2017). The strong claims to legitimacy stabilise the ruling elite's cohesion in authoritarian regimes, and they provide regimes with the ability to delegitimize criticism by transforming criticism against the system into a critique of the nation. Ultimately, effective legitimation may assist the populace in accepting these claims (Grauvogel & von Soest, 2014, p. 644).

However, different legitimation methods explain the reason for resistance to external pressures as an autocratic regime uses them as tools in its battle for legitimacy (Galtung 1967). For instance, a regime may use any defamatory sanctions to support its claim that it has the right to rule, or the specific penalties could result in "rally-

around-the-flag" consequences, which would aid the survival of authoritarian leadership. Authoritarian regimes can successfully instill a sense of being under siege when they can successfully legitimise their actions, particularly when they can use sanctions of any type to attack the entire populace to gain public support. In other words, it's common practise to portray distant senders as foes and their sanctions as an illegal imperialist invasion of the nation's sovereignty (Grauvogel & von Soest, 2014, p. 647).

In addition, two concepts of "defensive" and "expansive" factors may explain how authoritarian regimes' attempt to gain legitimacy in the international sphere. The defensive legitimation strategy is normal for regimes that make strong nationalist or anti-hegemonic declarations and are likely to inflame conflict with an outsider to gain internal legitimacy for justifying the militarization and even accuse domestic opposition as proxies of the external foe. While the expansive legitimation strategy attempts to gain a larger support from the international realm. This support can be derived from official foreign policy methods, coalitions, various projects of soft power, military projects, ideological interests, or charismatic leadership that transcends a country's domestic borders (Hoffmann, 2011, p. 5).

Although some scholars adopt the traditional democratization perspective to identify the role of international cooperation, they are unable to demonstrate how autocratic regimes utilize this aspect to maintain their power. In this regard, the most comprehensive framework is proposed by Levitsky and Way. They claim that their suggested framework can explain the international influence for democratization, and the international sphere works in two dimensions: "Western leverage" and "linkage to the West" (Levitsky & Way, 2006, p. 379). The former involves the government's weakness to external democratizing pressure (Levitsky & Way, 2006, p. 382; Erdmann et al., 2013, p. 16), and it implies integration in the international community, punishment mechanisms, military invasion, and diplomatic ways. As it is essentially based on the size and robustness of states and economies, it might be substituted by a regional power for financial, military, or diplomatic resources, or a rival foreign policy could restrict the West's ability to exert influence (Levitsky & Way, 2006, p. 385). The linkage "multidimensional notion" refers to a country's connectivity to the U.S., the EU, and other western-dominated international organizations (Levitsky & Way, 2006, p. 383; Erdmann et al., 2013, p. 16). Following Erdmann and his colleagues, the

influence of undemocratic powers as a reverse wave is ignored by Levitsky and Way (Erdmann et al., 2013, p. 17).

However, it is feasible to assess the effectiveness of international cooperation more simply by substituting the Western link with an authoritarian one (Schmotz & Tansey, 2018, p. 4; Hall & Ambrosio, 2017, p. 150). Recent research has also highlighted the necessity to consider how connections between regimes and international powers might reinforce rather than diminish domestic authoritarian rule (Schmotz & Tansey, 2018, p. 663). While the Western linkage may pave the way for democratization, the linkage with non-democratic regimes may reduce the possibility of regime failure and even strengthen autocratic regimes. Following Levitsky and Way in considering "geographic proximity" as the main source of Western linkage (Levitsky & Way, 2006, p. 382), Schmotz and Tansey emphasize regional linkage among non-democratic regimes to demonstrate why this connection is crucial in authoritarianism.

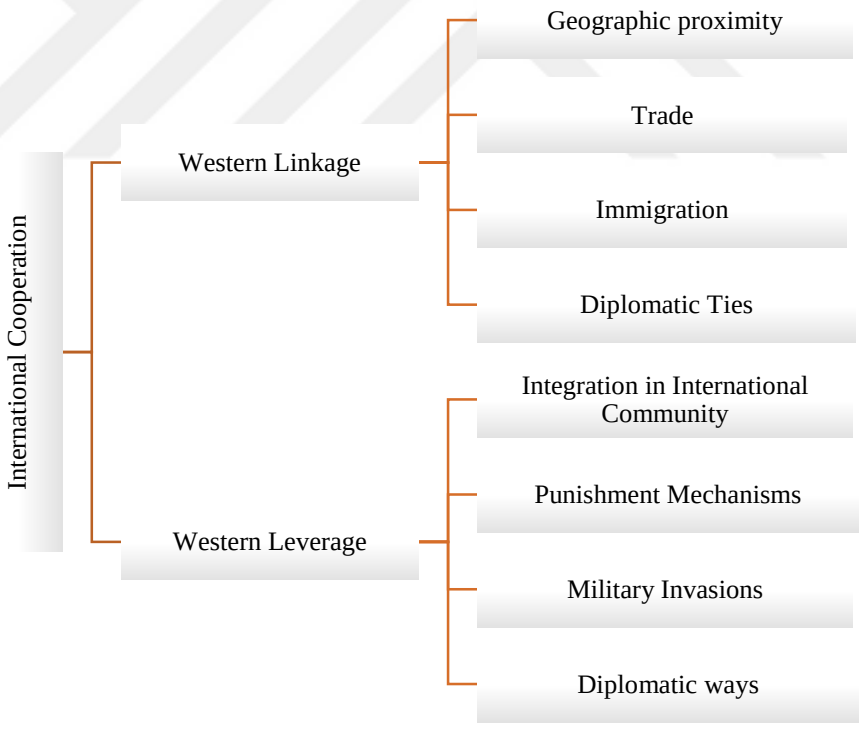


Figure 2: International Cooperation

They believe that, in contrast to the Western connection, through which democratization pressures increase due to elites' willingness to maintain their ties via political and economic relations with the West to prevent any isolations, the important members of the ruling coalition will be motivated to support the autocratic rulers if

there are high levels of autocratic linkage. If an authoritarian action has taken place, it is less likely to be subject to democratic consequences if there is a strong linkage because, in contrast to the Western linkage, the other autocratic regimes are not motivated to reprimand authoritarian behaviour. Their connection also increases their support for one another during times of crisis due to the threats of diffusion across the cross-border. Last but not least, the strong autocratic linkages can promote elite learning and emulation associated with diffusion just as they can promote the spread of contagious concern, and they have been seen as a crucial component of authoritarian persistence. And like the Western linkage, autocracies are linked through a variety of channels, including trade, immigration, geographic proximity, and diplomatic ties (Schmotz & Tansey, 2018, p. 663; Tansey et al., 2016, p. 13).

With diplomatic contacts as a crucial factor for "elite learning", autocratic governments are usually aware of the types of protests occurring in their allies' nations and the potential hazards they bring. Migration plays a role in the development of anti-regime activism; it heightens the concern over contagion that develops when one autocratic regime faces an unstable crisis, and immigrant groups can operate as a corridor for political unrest from their country to the destination country. Because actors believe that situations in surrounding states are the most similar, signals of regime conflict frequently have a greater impact on those nations than on those further away from the initial movers; thus, any political crisis in a state can have an impact on its neighbours, which encourages the rulers to support each other to alleviate any challenges against their regimes, and this strategy is crucial for learning from others since it provides the opportunity to understand how others manage such crises so they can use those strategies at home (Tansey et al., 2016, p. 12). Overall, autocratic leaders will be hard to overthrow until they have a strong connection (Schmotz & Tansey, 2018, p. 663; Tansey et al., 2016, p. 29).

Nevertheless, just as the existence of international organizations can be effective in the diffusion of democratization, on the contrary, in autocratic regimes, it causes the consolidation and strengthening of despotism among its members (Grauvogel & von Soest, 2014). Therefore, international organizations, as another factor in the diffusion of authoritarianism, have the greatest ability to influence political change in the states. Given that democracy is widely accepted around the world, authoritarian regimes are unlikely to openly coordinate their foreign policies to

safeguard their own security. Rather, they would establish either national or worldwide norms that made it illegal to interfere with or criticise a nation's internal affairs by using international organizations they would form and use, and "critical states" can play a crucial role in this effort to advance authoritarian norms. Eventually, the principles of non-democracy, which endorse authoritarianism or perpetuate it, will take the place of democratic principles (Ambrosio, 2008, 2010; Hall & Ambrosio, 2017; Ambrosio & Tolstrup, 2019).

The "SCO" and "ASEAN" provide the best examples for such claims, as they have worked to maintain their autocratic regimes by discrediting the idea of political transition (Ambrosio, 2008, 2010; Hall & Ambrosio, 2017; Schmotz & Tansey, 2018, p. 668), elevating "stability" as the region's top political ideal, and advocating the moral parity of democracy and other kinds of administration. It has justified the authoritarian impulses of its members by several "declarations and resolutions" (Ambrosio, 2010). However, one can claim that strong legitimacy, soft repression, and strong international relations significantly contribute to preventing the collapse and durability of autocratic regimes (Hoffmann, 2011; Grauvogel & von Soest, 2014, p. 639). The remaining autocratic countries have also dramatically strengthened their ties with one another, which is a severe concern for global democracy even though it may appear that the number of authoritarian states is declining (Schmotz & Tansey, 2018, p. 681; Tansey et al., 2016, p. 29).

1.3 Conclusion

The stability of authoritarian regimes is heavily dependent on a variety of factors, including legitimacy, repression, co-optation, and international cooperation. Legitimacy is crucial for authoritarian leaders to maintain public support and justify their rules, and it can be achieved through various means. Non-democratic regimes that focus on performance-based legitimacy are more fragile because economic sanctions can rapidly undermine them and eventually cause public discontent. Although these situations may not have too many consequences for those states that are enjoying globalization beyond the authority of the West (Burnell, 2006, p. 556),

However, for non-democratic regimes that highly rely on identity-based legitimacy, external pressure for democratization is seen as "cultural imperialism" (Burnell, 2006, p. 556), which has targeted society's cultural and religious values. This

matter can prove what Liz mentioned: that non-democratic regimes are not defined by ideological objection but rather by what he referred to as "mentalities" (Linz, 2000, p. 162). Because, in this context, a sizable segment of the religious population regards any external pressure as a breach of religious beliefs, Therefore, promoting democracy in such regimes is challenging. Moreover, even though the dependence on elections to maintain legitimacy can make electoral autocratic regimes more fragile to popular mobilization and political opposition, democratization is challenging in such regimes because these regimes are designed to maintain the ruling party's grip on power and limit political competition. In some cases, even when opposition parties are able to gain some representation in the government, the ruling party may resist democratic reforms and maintain control over key institutions of power. On the other hand, the claim to legitimacy in a non-democratic regime may be challenged over time by internal and external variables such as economic instability, corruption, or altering social norms. A loss of legitimacy in these contexts can lead to increasing political chaos and threats to the regime's hold on power. Therefore, autocratic regimes must struggle consistently to preserve their legitimacy, since it is critical to their durability. Although the importance of legitimacy in preserving stability has been criticised in recent literature, some scholars such as Gerschewski believe that every political order requires legitimacy (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 18). As a result, legitimacy can be seen as the first pillar, which has a significant connection with co-optation. Repression, on the other hand, is a common tactic used by authoritarian regimes to quash opposition and dissent. Co-optation can also be used by authoritarian leaders, either through formal channels or informal ones, to appease potential opposition and create a sense of participation and inclusion. Furthermore, international cooperation can play a significant role in either bolstering or weakening authoritarian regimes. Countries that engage in trade and diplomatic relations with authoritarian regimes can provide them with economic resources and political legitimacy. However, international pressure and criticism can also undermine the legitimacy of authoritarian leaders and weaken their grip on power.

Overall, the combination of these factors can either strengthen or weaken the stability of authoritarian regimes. The success of an authoritarian regime in maintaining power ultimately depends on its ability to balance these factors to maintain a delicate equilibrium. Ultimately, the long-term stability of authoritarianism remains

a complex issue with numerous variables at play, and it will continue to be the subject of ongoing debate and analysis.

Yet, the Iranian regime, characterised as an authoritarian system, employs a combination of legitimacy, co-optation, and repression strategies to ensure its resilience in face of domestic challenges and external pressures and maintain control over the country. These three pillars of stability play a crucial role in solidifying the regime's authority and managing potential challenges to its rule. Therefore, in the next chapter, we will discuss how it implements these mechanisms.

CHAPTER 2: THE CASE OF IRAN

The Islamic Republic of Iran emerged as a result of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which overthrew the Pahlavi dynasty and established a theocratic government led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The revolution was the culmination of years of political and social unrest in Iran, fueled by a variety of factors, including modernization, economic inequality, political repression, and cultural conflicts between the traditional and modern elements of Iranian society. The creation of the Islamic Republic marked a significant shift in the political landscape of the Middle East and beyond, as it introduced a new model of government that combined Islamic principles with modern governance structures. The new regime emphasized the role of religion in public life, enshrined Islamic law as the basis for the legal system and implemented policies aimed at empowering the poor and marginalized segments of society. The emergence of the Islamic Republic of Iran also had a significant impact on the international community, as it challenged the dominance of Western-style liberal democracies and advocated for a more independent and assertive role for developing nations. Iran's revolutionary ideology and anti-Western stance led to a period of tension and conflict with the United States and other Western powers, which continues to this day. Despite its controversies and challenges, the Islamic Republic of Iran has remained a major player in the Middle East and a significant force in the global political arena. Its emergence marked a turning point in the history of Iran and the wider Muslim world, and its legacy continues to shape political discourse and debate both within and outside the country.

By analyzing the different mechanisms that have helped the Islamic Republic to form and remain in power, this chapter seeks to clarify the broader dynamics of

authoritarianism and legitimacy in Iran, therefore, it is divided into three sections, the first of which deals with the creation of the Islamic regime and related factors such as the role of Islam, modernization projects, Islamic parties and their ideologies, and Khomeini's activities and his legacy. The second section aims to contribute to the understanding of the factors that determine the resilience of the Islamic regime despite challenges both internally and internationally. One of the key factors in this resilience is the regime's ability to cultivate domestic legitimacy through a combination of co-optation and repression. The regime's ability to maintain its grip on power can be attributed to a variety of factors, including the legitimacy it has gained through its religious credentials, its ability to co-opt certain segments of society, and its use of repression to control dissent. In terms of its legitimacy, the regime's founder, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, was a prominent religious leader who led the Iranian Revolution and established the Islamic Republic of Iran. Since then, the regime has maintained its legitimacy by portraying itself as the true Islamic government and by using religion to legitimize its policies and actions. The regime has also been able to co-opt certain segments of society to maintain its power. For example, the regime has co-opted the Revolutionary Guard, which is responsible for maintaining internal security and suppressing dissent. The Revolutionary Guard has been given a significant amount of economic and political power, which has made it more difficult for other groups to challenge the regime's authority. The regime has also co-opted certain elements of the business community and other key social groups to ensure their support. Moreover, the Iranian regime has a long history of using repression to control dissent. The regime's security forces, including the Revolutionary Guard and the Basij militia, have been used to suppress opposition and intimidate critics. The regime has also established a system of surveillance and censorship to control the flow of information and prevent dissent from spreading. In this chapter, root of the creation of Islamic Republic of Iran will be examined to understand its policy and the role of the Islam in the regime's durability, then we will analyze the internal mechanisms separately.

2.1 The Emergence of Islamic Republic of Iran

The Pahlavi monarchy was overthrown, and an Islamic republic was established with the founding of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, which was a turning point in Iranian history. Based on a report by the Council on Foreign Relations, the Iranian Revolution was sparked by a number of issues, including economic

grievances, political repression, and a sense of national humiliation (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019). And the revolutionaries were driven by a desire to create an Islamic state that would represent their nationalist and religious ideals (Alamdari, 2005, p. 1285) and act as a role model for other Muslim nations.

The creation of the Islamic Republic represented a significant shift in Iranian politics and society and has been the subject of much academic study and analysis. In this section, we will examine the factors that led to the creation of the Islamic Republic, the nature of the Islamic revolution, and the implications of the new regime for Iran and the wider world. But what is crucial is to investigate the role of Shiite Islam and its roots in Iran as the most significant component of the establishment of a dictatorial Islamic government so that we may better comprehend Khomeini's executive strategy as the founder of this government and the nature and method of this regime's durability.

The Safavid dynasty, which ruled over Iran from 1501 to 1722, established Shi'a Islam as the official religion of Iran for political reasons (Chehabi, 1991, p. 69; Matin, 2007; 2010). When the Safavid dynasty came to power, Iran was a predominantly Sunni Muslim country. However, the Safavid rulers wanted to establish a distinct Iranian identity and separate themselves from the Sunni Ottoman Empire, which was their main rival (Matin, 2007; 2010). They also used Shi'a Islam to justify their rule and legitimize their authority, claiming that they were the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad and the rightful leaders of the Islamic world (Matin, 2010, p. 118). Moreover, during the Qajar dynasty, Shi'a ulama grew in strength and prominence (Ismael & Ismael, 1980; Matin, 2010, p. 114).

It can be said that the Iranian revolution has its roots in modernization, which began in the Qajar period. The Qajar era in Iran was marked by a period of modernization and reforms that began in the mid-19th century and continued into the early 20th century. This period of modernization was characterised by a series of political, economic, social, and cultural changes aimed at modernizing the country and adapting to the challenges of the modern world. But some Shi’a ulema considered these reforms a threat to traditional Islamic values and practises. They saw the growing influence of Western ideas and culture as a challenge to their authority and to the religious foundations of Iranian society (Uzun, 2018). As a result, Bazaar merchants with influential Shi’a ulama and liberal and socialist ideas staged a revolution against Qajar, inspired by the Russian revolution in 1905. By establishing Majlis to monitor

foreign and trade affairs, the Constitutional Revolution modernised Iran's government structure, which played a crucial role until the Iranian Revolution (Matin, 2010, p. 114). The Qajar state was toppled by Marxist forces following the Russian Revolution in 1917, which helped the Pahlavi regime gain power. (Matin, 2019, p. 127).

Iran's history underwent significant transformations at the beginning of the Pahlavi era, the consequences of which are still felt today. The real modernization of Iran began with the Pahlavi dynasty (Rahmani & Azghandi, 2016; Matin, 2010, 2019). Reza Shah, following Ataturk (Bhagat, 1987, p. 33; Matin, 2019, p. 128), instituted numerous changes, including the introduction of Western-style and education, industrialization, aiming to reduce the influence of Islam, which he considered archaic (Brendan, 2008), and the abolition of the hijab (Kia, 2000). And at this time, a Shia cleric called Ayatollah Rohollah Khomeini began to show himself in the political arena of the country, although he did not have enough courage to confront the monarch directly (Kia, 2000). Only in 1941 did he claim that Reza Shah's dictatorial commands were illegitimate (Bhagat, 1987, p. 33).

During World War II, pro-German Reza Shah was compelled to quit in favour of his son. Following his father, Mohammad Reza Shah continued modernization projects. In the meantime, democratic freedoms were developed, different forces such as liberals and communists expanded (Matin, 2019), and the Tudeh Party was established in 1941 (Dabashi, 2006). Now Khomeini seized the opportunity and published his book "Kashf al-Asrar (The Discovery of Secrets)" (Dabashi, 2006; Brendan, 2008; Kia, 2000), a political treatise in which Khomeini outlined his vision for an Islamic government, criticized Western-style democracy, and criticised opponents of Islam such as Kasravi (Dabashi, 2006).

On the other hand, Fadayian Islam, an Islamic fundamentalist organisation, was announced in 1945 by Navvab Safavi. Their doctrine mixed parts of Iranian nationalism with a passion for religion and a conviction in the superiority of Shi'ite Islam (Kazemi, 1984). And this group gained notoriety for its violent tactics, which included assassinations of government officials, intellectuals, and members of the Iranian monarchy, such as Iranian Prime Minister Ali Razmara and Kasravai (Dabashi, 2006; Kazemi, 1984). However, we may claim that their ideology and strategies had a lasting impact on the development of radical Islamic movements in Iran and the rest of the Muslim world, and they also paved the way for other militant groups, such as

the Mojahedin-e Khalg and the Islamic Republic Party, who were instrumental in the overthrow of the Pahlavi regime.

Another important event happened in 1951 when Mosadegh became prime minister of the nation's parliament, and then the 1953 coup d'état was due to the nationalization of oil by him. But the CIA removed him (Tarock, 2006, p. 651; Gasiorowski, 1987, p. 261), which caused Khomeini to take political advantage of it under the pretext of interference by foreign agents who "do not sleep in the country" (Ismael & Ismael, 1980, p. 611). One may say that Mosaddegh's fall was a turning point that eventually led to the Iranian Revolution (Brendan, 2008). After this event, the Shah changed his policy and limited the activities of political parties; Tudeh party members were arrested or executed in 1953 (Kia, 2000; Dabashi, 2006; Rahmani & Azghandi, 2016), and Navvab was executed in 1956 (Kazemi, 1984).

On the other hand, the most important event that paved the way for the emergence of Ayatollah Khomeini as a religious political leader (Alamdari, 2005, p. 1286) was the "White Revolution." Following the rapid economic and social changes in Iran, Mohammad Reza Shah launched an unprecedented modernization programme between the 1960s and 1970s, including land reforms and giving the right to vote to women, which infuriated the clergy (Dabashi, 2006; Brendan, 2008; Bhagat, 1987; Kia, 2000; Alamdari, 2005; Chehabi, 1991; Haleem, 1990; Matin, 2010; 2019; Kusha & Jones, 2012). As a result, Khomeini attacked the Shah's policies as the foremost foe of the White Revolution (Kia, 2000, p. 218; Chehabi, 2001), and he mobilized different sections of society, especially the seminary, against the Shah, which led to violent demonstrations in 1963 (Chehabi, 1991; Dabashi, 2006; Martin, 2000; Bhagat, 1987; Kusha & Jones, 2012). Khomeini was detained for his actions in the same year and released after a short time (Kusha & Jones, 2012). But after approving the law granting American diplomats' immunity from retribution in Iran in 1964, Khomeini attacked Shah aggressively, and he exiled him first to Turkey and then to Iraq (Ismael & Ismael, 1980; Bhagat, 1987; Chehabi, 1991; Kia, 2000; Dabashi, 2006; Brendan, 2008).

It is worth mentioning that during this time, Dr. Ali Shariati was a crucial founder of "Revolutionary Islam" in Iran and not only was active and anti-Shah abroad, but also after returning from France in 1964, he continued his activities, which finally led to his arrest (Matin, 2010; 2019). Shariati was a staunch supporter of Islamic liberation theology, which sought to utilize Islam to liberate the oppressed and subvert

the political and social status quo. He claimed that "true" Islam is innately equitable and thus preferable to socialism in the sense that it has a deeply moral dimension that gives societal and human life normative significance and an ethical orientation. In this regard, his "Revolutionary Islam," influenced by Marxists (Uzun, 2018), was a concept that sought to combine Islamic elements with principles of social justice and political liberation, by which Islam had the potential to be a powerful force for social and political change and could bring social justice and equality. And another method for changing society that he mentioned was the Shi'i principle of imamate," linked to ghayba," which was used in Shi'i Islam to legitimise violence. Finally, he mentioned "Umma" as another crucial factor of Islamic ideology for social and political change. He believed that the Umma should stand in solidarity with other oppressed communities and work towards the common goal of social justice and a perfect society (Matin, 2010; 2019). Ayatollah Motahari, like Shariati, believed in Islamic ideology, and both helped the Iranian Revolution's political rule come about (Kia, 2000; Dabashi, 2006). Consequently, they had already prepared society to accept Khomeini's recall against Pahlavi. Hence, it is not surprising that when Khomeini employed the term 'revolutionary Islam', he could persuade all opposition, from leftists and Fedayin-i Islam to the Mojahedin.

Yet, one may say that the Shah's biggest mistake was the exile of Khomeini to Iraq, the cradle of Shiism, because it provided the best opportunity for Khomeini to expand his religious and political activities. In Iraq, he could develop his new political ideology and had several lectures there, and he used the term "Velayate-e Faqih" in 1970 (Chehabi, 1991; Ferdowsi, 2004; Dabashi, 2006; Brendan, 2008; Uzun, 2018; Kusha & Jones, 2012). This term had already been discussed in Shia society in Iraq in the 1960s, and the political Shia Ulama in Iraq affected him (Uzun, 2018). Thus, Khomeini utilized this term for his political ambitions, and after his return to Iran, he considered this term one of the main principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran's government (Matin, 2019, p. 132), which has had a huge impact on the internal and external policies of the regime (Sayyed Al-Sayyad & Alwadai, 2021). Following Shariati and Motahari, he claimed that Islam had the capacity to be a force for positive change in society. Velayate-e Faqih, or "guardianship of the jurist" (Matin, 2019, p. 132), was considered the greatest political power of a supreme leader and also a leading Islamic scholar; in other words, it refers to the idea that the most learned and

pious Islamic scholar should have the ultimate authority in the government (Dabashi, 2006).

One of the key aspects of Shi'a Islam is the idea of the imam, who is a spiritual and political leader chosen by God. Emphasising the belief in twelve imams, Khomeini claimed that during the absence of the twelfth imam, the responsibility of guiding the Muslims and providing the conditions for the appearance of the Mahdi rests with a Muslim scholar who has the conditions for leadership, and that person is only Valie-Faqih or imam (Ismael & Ismael, 1980; Gulf & Ramazani, 1985; Bhagat, 1987; Bakh Shaul, 1989; Chehabi, 1991; Hiro, 2000; Kia, 2000; Chehabi, 2001; Houghton, 2014; Matin, 2019). He introduced himself as an imam, which provided him security (Bhagat, 1987), especially in the post-revolutionary era when he claimed that to oppose the government was to fight Sharia, Islam, and God (Kia, 2000, p. 220).

Another important event that provided the conditions for mobilizing the people under Khomeini was the celebration of 2500 years of rule by kings in Iran, and Khomeini called the secular government illegitimate (Chehabi, 1991; Brendan, 2008). Yet, until the 1970s, modernization continued at a rapid rate (Matin, 2019), but it reached its peak in 1973. Following the 1973 oil embargo, oil sales increased drastically, and the Shah started investing vast sums of money in modernization projects, especially in buying expensive military equipment. With economic improvement, foreign investment increased as well, which subsequently caused the loss of marketers and an increase in class differences and social inequality. The Shah was accused of being anti-Shiite (Bhagat, 1987, p. 35). His policies caused widespread dissatisfaction in society. Following Bhagat, having an enemy is necessary for all revolutions, and Khomeini considered the Shah and his partner "America" (Bhagat, 1987, p. 37) as the most important enemies of Iranians to convince the public to deny the Shah’s policies. As a result, by stimulating various societal groups, particularly marketers and Shiite scholars, Khomeini caused the formation of dispersed uprisings in several cities, which were put down by SAVAK and imperial forces (Ismael & Ismael, 1980; Rasler, 1996; Bhagat, 1987; Kia, 2000; Kusha & Jones, 2012). One may say that the Shah erred by employing a high level of repression because it was a temporary measure that helped protests spread (Rasler, 1996) and provided a big opportunity for Khomeini to implement his strategies (Kia, 2000, p. 218). It is also important to note that Khomeini would not have been able to create the conditions for

the protests and revolution without the backing of the general population, particularly the Shiite clergy. Because these places, which served as Shiites' meeting places and venues for the lectures of Shiite clergy, were open despite military control and the ban on gatherings, different strata of people went there to participate in congregational prayers (Rasler, 1996).

As the demonstrations intensified and pressure on the Pahlavi government grew, the Shah displayed more flexibility and made some concessions to the protesters, including releasing Khomeini so he could return to the country. Khomeini did not accept this and instead only called for the Shah's removal from office. As the Shah could not follow a consistent policy against the opposition, Khomeini profited from the errors of the Shah (Rasler, 1996; Kia, 2000). Moreover, in France, he cooperated closely with some educated liberals, including Abdolhassan Bani-Sadr, Sadegh Ghotbzadeh, and Ibrahim Yazdi, for political activities abroad, including meetings with students, and each of them gained a short political position in the period after the revolution (Houghton, 2014, p. 88; Kia, 2000, p. 220).

In the end, the ground was laid for Shah's removal and Khomeini's return to Iran. Contrary to the expectations of the public and political parties, including the People's Mojahedin Organization, Khomeini tried to prove his role as a political leader by forming a temporary government (because he was expected to act as just a religious leader in Qom). Thus, he nominated Mehdi Bazargan as the Prime Minister and head of the interim government, Bani-Sadr as Foreign Minister, and later as the first President of Iran. Bazargan was a liberal educated person who opposed Khomeini’s policies, especially after Khomeini called for a referendum to establish an Islamic government because there was no other option for people to have a secular government (Brendan, 2008), and they had to choose "Yes" or "No". Yet a large number of people participated in this referendum, in which the majority voted to have an Islamic Republic. And the reason behind that may be lowering the voting age and increasing the voting period, which had a significant impact on public participation and legitimizing Khomeini's government (Hiro, 2000).

As Khomeini did not trust the seculars and liberals from the beginning, he created loyal and radical organisations, including the "Islamic Republican Party" (IRP), the Komitehs (the revolutionary committees), the Pasdaran (the revolutionary guards), and the Hezbollah (the Party of God), which aided him in suppressing all

opposition (Kia, 2000, p. 220). It is important to note that Mohammad Beheshti, Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Ali Khameneh'i, Javad Bahonar, and Ayatollah Abdolkarim Musavi Ardabili were the initial founders of the IRP, which played a crucial role in the political future of Iran, although later they disagreed with each other about Iran's constitution, which will be mentioned later (Chehabi, 1991, p. 75; Hiro, 2000).

Moreover, one of the reasons that may justify the hybrid nature of Iran's government is the fact that Khomeini was able to guarantee the durability of the regime by forming democratic organizations, including the Majlis (Parliament), which appoints the presidential contenders, and the Guardian Council, which appoints the Supreme Leader (Chehabi, 2001; Brendan, 2008; Houghton, 2014), and this is what Khomeini left as a memory for the Iranian nation. The second and most significant method that could gain enough control over the internal situation was an international conflict, including the war with Iraq and the seizing of the American embassy (Houghton, 2014).

It is worth mentioning that Khomeini initially allowed different political parties to be free in order to consolidate his power and gain support for his policies. By allowing various parties to operate freely, Khomeini demonstrated his commitment to democracy and pluralism, which helped garner support from a wide cross-section of Iranian society. Additionally, Khomeini may have seen the benefit of allowing these parties to operate in terms of creating a more stable political environment during the early stages of the revolution (Houghton, 2014). However, once Khomeini and his supporters had firmly established control over the government, they moved to suppress political opposition and consolidate power under their leadership. For instance, in August 1979, the people of Kurdistan demanded an independent government, but by order of Khomeini, Sadegh Khalkhali brutally suppressed them (Brendan, 2008). Khalkhali revived the Fadayan Islam Party to suppress and assassinate the opposition (Kazemi, 1984; Hiro, 2000).

However, Khomeini came under fire from moderates and Communists for his extreme policies, and they referred to him as a dictator and a fascist (Brendan, 2008). As a result, the 1979 seizure of the US embassy in Tehran by his followers allowed Ayatollah Khomeini and his supporters to consolidate their power and eliminate opposition, especially because he did not need liberals anymore (Kia, 2000). They

portrayed the US embassy as a den of spies and traitors who were plotting to undermine the Islamic revolution and used the crisis as a means of rallying public support for their cause. Despite his efforts to promote democracy and moderation, Bazargan was ultimately unable to prevent the hardline factions within the revolutionary government from consolidating power and imposing their own agenda on the country; thus, he had to resign against the seizure of the US embassy, which he believed would harm Iran's international reputation and damage its relations with the US (Bakh, 1989; Chehabi, 1991; Said, 1997; Kia, 2000; Houghton, 2014). For Khomeini, the resignation of Mahdi Bazargan's government meant the victory of Islam over liberalism (Kia, 2000, p. 221). By holding Americans hostage for 444 days, Khomeini was able to implement his ambitious policies, which centred on the approval of the Constitution. Even Bani-Sadr quoted Khomeini as saying, "We keep the hostages, complete our internal work, then release them." This matter has brought our people together, and we can finish, first, legislative elections and the constitution, then we can release captives (Kia, 2000, p. 221).

In a very short time, to dominate the country, the regime formed political, judicial, economic, and security organizations to carry out his brand of Islamic justice. (Haleem, 1990; Hiro, 2000). The second foreign policy that enabled Khomeini to carry out his hardline ideals was the Iraq War. This war, which started following the policy of "exporting the revolution" and the promotion of Shia Islam (Ramazani, 1985; Brendan, 2008; Sariolghalam, 2007), helped Khomeini gain legitimacy for the brutal suppression of his opponents and also provided the conditions for establishing the power of his extremist supporters. By relying on martyrdom for God’s pleasure (Said, 1997; Brendan, 2008), he was able to bring small soldiers with himself into the war and form the Basij group (Brendan, 2008), which later played a significant role in the survival of the government and suppression of the people. Bani Sadr disagreed with Khomeini on ending the war and opposed the command of the war by the IRP, and he was ultimately impeached by the conservative-dominated parliament in June 1981. and finally, he fled Iran with the Mojahedin Khalq group (Kia, 2000; Brendan, 2008).

It might be claimed that Lebanon played a greater role in Khomeini's ambition to gain power in the Middle East under the guise of a revolution since it was not only near Israel, Khomeini's enemy, but also had the greatest concentration of Shiites. On the other hand, the Shiite Islamic groups needed Khomeini's support to gain power,

and in 1982, when Israel attacked Lebanon to crush a Palestinian extremist group, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps rushed there to aid Lebanon (Brendan, 2008). This support led to cooperation in the post-revolution period, and even the IRGC trained these groups, and whenever Iran was in a critical situation, the "Hizbullahi" groups came to the aid of the regime (Hiro, 2000).

Also, two other foreign policies of Khomeini in the Middle East were supporting the Shia rebellions in Bahrain in 1981 and the 1983 bombing in Kuwait with the aim of overthrowing the kingdoms, which led to the expulsion of Iranians living there. And he asked all the religious scholars to propagate Islam all over the world (Ramazani, 1985, p. 7). In this way, he was able to bring allies against Israel and America, both inside and outside. On the one hand, Khomeini submitted the draught of the constitution in which Velaye-Faqih was nominated as the Supreme Leader, and only Ayatollah Montazeri, Araki, and Golpayegani had the required factors to be his successor. He dismissed any democratic suggestions from different parties. According to principle number 110, he claimed that the legislative and executive branches, wealth, natural resources, and command of all the armed forces should be under the jurisdiction of only Faqih, and parliament should be run by someone who is conversant with the relevant rules. Only jurisprudents who are familiar with Sharia are permitted to perform judicial duties. (Ramazani, 1980, p. 183; Chehabi, 1991; Hiro, 2000). On the other hand, some key figures who were very close to Khomeini expressed their opposition to the principle of the Supreme Leader; among them were Ayatollah Montazeri and Ayatollah Shariatimadari (Mavani, 2013, p. 227).

Montazeri believed that such a principle could lead to dictatorship, and he was eventually dismissed as Khomeini's designated successor. Shariatmadari believed in the separation of religion and politics. He was concerned about the concentration of power in the hands of a few individuals and the potential for abuse of power. Shariatmadari argued that the constitution should establish a government that is accountable to the people and not based on the absolute authority of a single individual (Chehabi, 1991; Gieling, 1997). Additionally, in order to get rid of all opposition parties and individuals, Khomeini needed a convincing reason to suppress them; therefore, by assassinating political figures such as Qarani as the first figure, then Beheshti, Bahonar, and Rajaei, the IRGC took responsibility for the repressions (Houghton, 2014), and even Sadegh Qotbzadeh was tried for the crime of organizing

a coup, and 'up to seventy army officers accused of conspiring with him' were executed, and Shariatmadari was charged with being aware of this matter (Hiro; Kia, 2000, p.222). With the end of the eight-year war in 1988, there were no political parties or a free press, and an unprecedented wave of executions began, especially of the Mojahedin and generals of the imperial army, in the name of "making war against God" and "spreading corruption on earth" (Bhagat, 1987; Bakhsh, 1989; Brendan, 2008; Rahmani & Azghandi, 2016).

However, a struggle for power began a year after the revolution (Said, 1997). With the removal of Montazeri, Khomeini chose Ali Khamenei as his desired successor, but as he was not qualified, Article 109 of the constitution, which mandated that the leader be a Marja-e taqlid, was repealed on Khomeini's orders (Kia, 2000, p. 223). Although some clerics were against his choice, among them was Montazeri. After the death of Khomeini, Khamenei became the temporary leader, but with the deaths of Golpayegani in 1993 and Araki in 1994, the Assembly of Experts gave him the title of Marja Taqlid and Rafsanjani became the president. (Chehabi, 1991; Gieling, 1997; Alamdari, 2005; Mavani, 2013). After he was elected as Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei assumed the role of the highest authority in Iran's political system. As Supreme Leader, Khamenei is responsible for making key decisions on matters of national security, foreign policy, and other important issues. He also serves as commander-in-chief of the Iranian Armed Forces (Kusha & Jones, 2012). However, Khamenei, following Khomeini, considers any criticism of his policies to be an attack on God because, as stated above, they regard themselves as the successors of the Twelfth Imam and the representatives of God on earth. So, it is one of the repression mechanisms for its persistence. Overall, Khamenei's succession to Khomeini and his long tenure as Supreme Leader have been central to the evolution of Iran's political system and its relations with the international community.

2.2 Domestic Legitimization

What was discussed in the first part provides a better understanding of how the Iranian regime implements resilience mechanisms to survive. We will see how this regime has been able to resist change for a long time by legitimizing itself through ideology, international conflicts, using official and unofficial channels, dominating Iran's natural resources and economy, and severely suppressing the opposition.

However, to examine the manner of claims to legitimacy in Iran, we must first assess its regime type. The Islamic Republic of Iran is classified as an Islamic theocracy, which means that the country's political and judicial systems are founded on Islamic principles and religious leaders' authority (Skocpol, 1982; Chehabi, 1991; Burnell, 2006). Iran's political system is a hybrid of democratic and authoritarian features, and the country's Supreme Leader, a religious figure, wields considerable political power and influence. Also, the ruling elites control the country's political structure and procedures, and opposition parties and dissenting voices are frequently silenced (Chehabi, 2001; Alamdari, 2005; Gilbert & Mohseni, 2011, p. 292).

The Islamic Republic uses a combination of different sources to legitimize its authority as one of its resilience mechanisms, which we will discuss below. To begin examining the role of ideology as the first tool to legitimize the government, we can begin with religion. At the heart of the Islamic Republic's legitimacy is its adherence to the principles of Shia Islam (Aburaiya, 2009, p. 61). As mentioned in the previous section, Khomeini was able to legitimize his government as the supreme leader of the revolution by using ideology, and he took the most important step: he introduced himself as the world's Muslim leader, believing that the most ideal government as the best alternative to monarchical governments was a religious one, according to which all people can be equal and social justice is according to the Islamic government, and he attempted to export "Shia" to other Islamic and non-Islamic countries and even challenged Saudi Arabia's leadership.

Moreover, when Khomeini gave himself the title of imam as the representative of God on earth (Chehabi, 1991, p. 72), he legitimized his authority. Here we can point to the Weberian view of 'legitimacy belief', which holds that the essence of every system and every kind of willingness to obey is a perspective that gives authoritative figures dignity. As a result, authority can exist only when the ruler has the acknowledged right to rule and the people have the acknowledged obligation to obey (Weber, 1978, as cited in Dukalskis & Gerschewski, 2017). In any case, the legitimacy of the Shiite Islamic government is completely different from Western legitimacy. Political legitimacy in the West is the result of people's approval, legally, while the Shiite government determines the laws and values. In a theocracy, laws get their legitimacy only from religious texts (like what Khomeini referred to for Velayat al-Faqih), while in the Western type, there are many sources to refer to each law. In Shia

legitimacy, contrary to the Western type, the authority of the jurist (Velayate-Faqih) is preferred in the opinion of the nation (Chehabi, 2001; Sayyed al-Sayyad & Alwadai, 2021). On the other hand, the regime derives its legitimacy from its history as a revolutionary movement that overthrew the monarchy and established a new order. The regime portrays itself as a continuation of the revolution and as a force for change and progress in Iran and the wider region. Hence, religion is an integral element in determining Iran's political and social identities. (Keddie, 2003; Dabashi, 2006; Ramazani, 2004; Özdalga, 2009). It is also important to remember that autocratic regimes that originate from a revolution and emphasize revolutionary totalitarian doctrines that are frequently supported by exterior "enemy-at-the-gates" and external scapegoat rhetoric have a tendency to last a long time (Dukalskis & Gerschewski, 2017, p. 255), because the regimes' domestic legitimization can be aided by portraying Israel or America as evil (Burnell, 2006, p. 549). As Martin Wight also correctly mentioned (Terhalle, 2009, p. 584) "Revolutionaries are constantly at war with the majority of the world on moral and psychological grounds".

This matter is more pronounced in the case of the Iranian revolution and the emphasis on nationalism (Hinnebusch, 2006). For its legitimacy, the Islamic regime views nationalism as a subtype of identity-based legitimacy, which emphasizes the importance of Iran's sovereignty and independence. It can be said that one of Khomeini's goals for capturing the American embassy was to prove the Islamic government's non-dependence on the West to legitimize his policies. And in this way, he showed that the Islamic government's foreign policy has three main characteristics that make it unique: "anti-imperialism, Islamic unity, and non-alignment" with the West. Khomeini constantly emphasized that the imperial system was a servant of the American government, whereas he believed the Islamic regime to be an independent government founded on the Islamic school of thought. (Ismael & Ismael, 1979, p. 615).

The regime also portrays itself as a defender of Iran's interests against foreign powers and as a champion of the Iranian people. This regime has utilized this tactic to reinforce its legitimacy as a guardian of the Iranian nation's interests, and the opponents are seen as "foreign-backed elements" who intend to undermine these values. As a result, it has tried to persuade the population that its regime can ensure the country's security against the West and its alliances (Hinnebusch, 2006). The emphasis on Iranian identity and the promotion of the idea that Iranians are distinct

people with a rich cultural heritage were key aspects of nationalism in post-revolutionary Iran. This was employed to counteract the influence of Western values and ideals as well as enhance national solidarity and pride (Aburaiya, 2009).

In many speeches, Khomeini referred to the word "Umma" more than the nation of Iran, which can be interpreted as a call for the solidarity of the Shia community (Limoni, 2021). In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the concept of Umma plays a significant role in the way the government legitimizes its authority. Umma refers to the global community of Muslims who share a common religious identity and a sense of solidarity (Brubaker, 2012, p. 13). The Iranian government uses this concept of Umma to legitimize its authority and promote its policies both domestically and internationally. Domestically, the government portrays itself as the true representative of the Muslim Umma and justifies its actions by claiming that it is acting in the interest of the Umma. Internationally, the Iranian government promotes the idea that it is a defender of the Muslim world and seeks to promote unity and solidarity among Muslim countries. This helps the government gain support from Muslim countries and justify its policies in the international arena (Ramazani, 2004, p. 555).

For instance, Khomeini was able to stabilise his government by mobilizing a large section of the nation against the war with Iraq for eight years, and even after the war, he was able to acquire public support to rebuild the country and prevent foreign interference. And by prolonging this war, he could gain credibility in the international community as a victim of an unfair war. As mentioned in the previous section, by using the ideology of martyrdom (Said, 1997), he was able to incite a large group of people to participate in the war with various methods, such as religious and cultural propaganda, such as epic poems, and announce that every Muslim must rise up against oppression and become a martyr in the way of God (Zonis, 1985; Farhosh-van Loon, 2016).

However, for non-democratic regimes that highly rely on identity-based legitimacy, external pressure for democratization is seen as "cultural imperialism" (Burnell, 2006, p. 556), which has targeted society's cultural and religious values. This matter can prove what Liz mentioned: that non-democratic regimes are not defined by ideological objection but rather by what he referred to as "mentalities" (Linz, 2000, p. 162). Because, in this context, a sizable segment of the religious population regards

any external pressure as a breach of religious beliefs, Therefore, promoting democracy in such regimes is challenging (Burnell, 2006, p. 559).

This mechanism is also crucial for the Islamic regime, through which it has been able to deter any kind of international pressure through "indoctrination" (Dukalskis & Gerschewski, 2017, p. 254). The cunning use of ideology in the form of anti-imperialism vocabulary is considered to be one of the mechanisms that has greatly contributed to its durability. And Ali Khamenei has utilized the "culture war" and "cultural NATO" as a manner through which the enemy tries to destroy Islamic values (Milani, 2022, p. 376). This regime spent a lot of money to brainwash society into believing that superpowers are devils who seek to divide the country through the spread of Western culture. Despite being questioned in recent years, this strategy has attracted religious people via significant propaganda to demolish democratization, particularly through the media and the speeches of representatives of the Islamic leader in Friday prayers, and by chanting slogans of death to America and death to Israel as one of the methods of promoting the ideology founded by Khomeini (Chehabi, 2001). A procedure-based legitimation strategy through democratic processes is another method that this regime utilizes. The government, which considered itself the result of a national and popular revolution, took the most significant step towards legitimizing the Islamic government by holding a glorious election and referendum, which was to say "yes" to the Islamic Republic (Hiro, 2000; Brendan, 2008).

Using the word "republic" to signify a democratic government based on Islamic values became the cornerstone of its legitimacy, bringing a huge number of opponents with it, especially from active political groups such as "Fadayian Khalgh" that had already supported Khomeini and suggested using the "democratic" word, but he denied it, claiming it was a Western word (Hiro, 2000). However, Khomeini's regime used this strategy to label any group or individual who opposed the regime as an enemy of the nation, gaining enough legitimacy to suppress them, and this process has even persisted to the present day.

Despite having two prominent fundamentalist and reformist parties (Terhalle, 2009; Asayesh, Jawan & Shojaei, 2011), the regime has instilled the notion that people may choose their preferred party by participating in free and fair elections. However, both parties are loyal supporters of the regime (to confirm this claim, we can point to critical times when both parties supported the regime and provided the conditions to

suppress the opposition, such as the protests in 1999, 2017, and 2019), and the election is merely a deceptive appearance to legitimize the mullahs' government. In fact, the regime did not allow the real parties to exist, and these two parties operate under the supervision of the leadership, and the government believes that the nation does not need more parties because they have complete trust in the clergies (Fairbanks, 1998). Yet, the last round of the parliament and the current president show the existence of only one active party, the fundamentalists, in the country's political system (Zweiri & Nassar, 2021, p. 107; Iran International, 2023). However, even though the dependence on elections to maintain legitimacy can make electoral autocratic regimes more fragile to popular mobilization and political opposition (Burnell, 2006, p. 556), democratization is challenging in such regimes because these regimes are designed to maintain the ruling party's grip on power and limit political competition. In some cases, even when opposition parties are able to gain some representation in the government, the ruling party may resist democratic reforms and maintain control over key institutions of power.

In this regard, we can point out the incident of Iran's 1999 student protests (the Kuye Daneshgah Disaster) (Middle East Eye, 2019) and the formation of the first public protests in the society to implement some reforms (Mashayeskhi, 2001; Brownlee, 2007; Rivetti, 2012), then elections in 2005, as mentioned above, prompted the regime to create a system that was extremely loyal to the leadership in Majlis and limited all independent parties and individuals' activity, as well as its monopoly over the parliament, in which the representatives loyal to the regime are from the fundamentalist party (Brownlee, 2007; Milani & McFaul, 2008; Terhalle, 2009). In order to achieve such a goal, by manipulating the 2009 elections, he approved Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for the second round as president, and the event of the Green Movement (Rivetti, 2012, 2017; Niakooee, 2020, p. 10) followed, which provided the conditions for the role of the IRGC to become more prominent (Thaler, Nader, Chubin, Green, Lynch, 2010; Wehrey, Green, Nichiporuk, Nader, Hansell, Nafisi & Bohandy, 2009; Zweiri & Nassar, 2021), which will be examined more in the next chapter.

As pointed out earlier, this strategy provides advantages for non-democratic regimes, including Iran, the most important of which is controlling the electoral institutions, identifying potential opponents, and reducing internal and external pressures (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006, p. 14; Grauvogel & von Soest, 2014).

Moreover, elections are considered the cheapest way for public participation to show the world that the nation legitimizes the regime's authority, and even in the international problems that the regimes are involved with, they have a great impact (Yazdi & Masomi, 2016, p. 45). In each round of elections, the Iranian regime encourages the public to participate more passionately in the elections by introducing a limited number of approved candidates, significant advertising, and a pre-planned programme in order to demonstrate its legitimacy to the international community. In other words, elections serve as a forum for public engagement and are symbolic of the populace's strength and its approval of the system (Yazdi & Masomi, 2016, p. 45).

Last but not least, the Islamic regime is conscious of performance-based legitimation as well. One may say that the role of ideology in legitimizing the system has diminished, so it tries to claim legitimacy based on its capacity (Afshari, 1996). Despite the national wealth and abundant natural resources in Iran, social welfare is not as true as it is stated, but Iran has compared its achievements with those of the imperial government since taking power. For instance, it has been claimed that the percentage of literate people rose from 50% in 1980 to 78% in 2002, or that the population's per-capita number of doctors has doubled (Hen-Tov, 2006, p. 173). In addition, by asserting its presence in the scientific, economic, and security scenes, it can earn internal and external legitimacy. Particularly, by maneuvering its achievements in various fields, this regime is constantly attempting to persuade the nation and the international community that obtaining nuclear energy is peaceful (Albright & Stricker, 2010, p. 1), army equipment manufacturing is for border defense (Terhalle, 2009), and it claims that the West is preventing the Iranian nation's development in these industries (Bahgat, 2006; Parchami, 2022). Additionally, the supreme leader of the Islamic Revolution described Western sanctions against the Iranian nation as cruel to halt their progress. Such claims can legitimize the regime's unwillingness to commit to the articles of the JCPOA (Terhalle, 2009; Grauvogel & von Soest, 2014), and they consider the nuclear program to be a valuable resource for the country’s development and could justify accessing it (Borszik, 2014, p. 7).

However, non-democratic regimes that focus on performance-based legitimacy are more fragile because economic sanctions can rapidly undermine them and eventually cause public discontent. Although these situations may not have too many consequences for those states that are enjoying globalization beyond the authority of

the West (Burnell, 2006, p. 556), this is especially true for oil-exporting countries like Iran (Borszik, 2014, p. 10). Going back to Iran's 44-year history, it is evident that the country has been constantly exposed to harsh sanctions, but the system has not been subjected to much pressure. On the contrary, this regime was able to bypass the sanctions with the backing of some other countries and sell more oil. And this is one of the drawbacks of economic sanctions, which bring such countries closer together by supporting one another (Grauvogel & von Soest, 2014).

As has already been examined, the claim to legitimacy in a non-democratic regime, on the other hand, may be challenged over time by internal and external variables such as economic instability, corruption, or altering social norms. A loss of legitimacy in these contexts can lead to increasing political chaos and threats to the regime's hold on power. Therefore, autocratic regimes must struggle consistently to preserve their legitimacy since it is critical to their durability (Gerschewski, 2013). As a result, to neutralise internal and external threats caused by sanctions, the regime uses the method of cooperation to maintain its stability. In other words, examining the strategies of legitimization utilized by Iran's regime reveals that it does not rely on a single method since the regime knows that applying one tactic can make it vulnerable.

2.3 Co-Optation

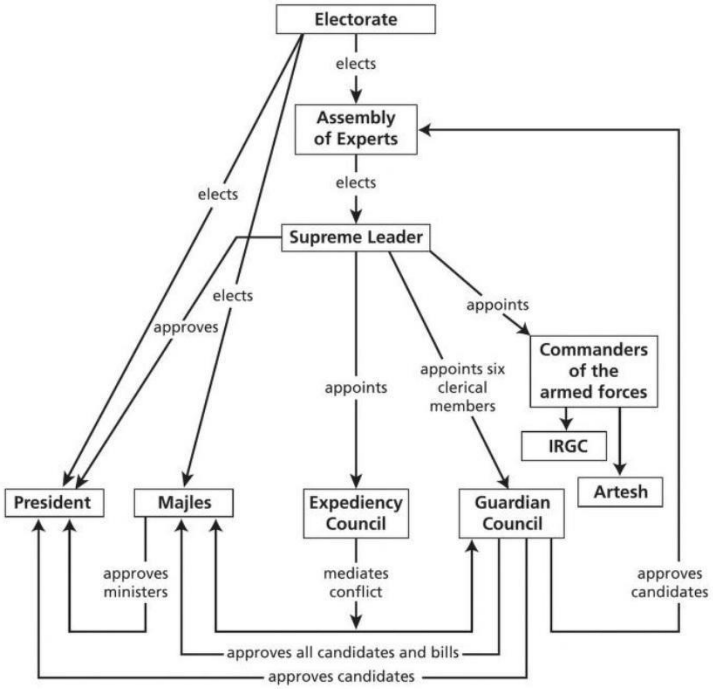
The Iranian regime deploys co-optation in one of the most notable ways through its political system (Zweiri & Nassar, 2021). Since Iran has a complicated political structure with multiple layers of authority, it might be better to examine its political structure first to gain a better understanding of the co-optation process in this system. The highest point of the political structure is occupied by the Supreme Leader (Vali-e-Faqih), who holds various roles such as the religious leader of the nation, the official head of state, and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The Assembly of Experts, which is elected by the general public, elects him forever based on the constitution. And before anyone can join the Assembly of Experts, they must receive the approval of the Council of Guardians, a powerful body that oversees the entire political system in Iran and is composed of twelve members, six of whom are appointed by the Supreme Leader and six of whom are appointed by the judiciary. The Council is responsible for ensuring that all legislation and candidates for public office are under Islamic laws and the Constitution. Interestingly, half of the Council members

are indeed chosen by the Majlis from a group of people nominated by the Chief Judge, but the Supreme Leader again personally appoints the Chief Judge. Majlis representatives must receive the Council of Guardians' approval for religious aspects before the elections. Similarly, the President must also be approved by the Council of Guardians and confirmed by the Supreme Leader after being elected by the people. The current president serves as the vice chairman of the Assembly of Experts, where the Supreme Leader is elected. All the significant players in the system, therefore, depend on one another for their positions (Afshari, 1996; Thaler et al., 2010; Abdolmohammadi & Cama, 2015).

Now, to address the role of co-optation as an effective internal mechanism for the durability of the Iranian regime, we must know how this regime employs its formal and informal channels to control and mitigate potential threats. As the first institutional channel for autocracy is comprised of "political bureaus", and "consultative councils," which eliminate dangers from ruling elites, legislatures, and parties, the second institutional channel is intended to combat dangers from society (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006, p. 17). The Iranian regime also co-opts these two channels to mitigate internal and external threats.

In Iran, the bureaus refer to the Nehads, such as the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC), Basij, the Foundation of the Dispossessed, the 15th Khordad Foundation, Imam Khomeini’s Relief Committee, etc., which are under fundamentalist faction control (Terhalle, 2009, p. 570), and the Consultative Council is the Assembly of Experts, which is mentioned above. The legislatures, also known as the Majlis, are an important component of its political system as a method of co-optation, helping oppositions to participate in the legislative process or form political parties and factions within the Majlis. These parties and factions are given a forum to express their views, and they sometimes have an impact on the outcome of policy (Thaler et al., 2010; Abdolmohammadi & Cama, 2015). But the regime closely monitors them and can restrict their activities if they become too critical; thus, the voices of the opposition are often marginalized. On the other hand, such regimes are aware that unified elite cores may be feasible through the supremacy of a leader over the other members of the ruling elite, through the development of trust among them, and by association among leaders with "trusted men" who are responsible for the fundamental objects of power (Hinnebusch, 2006, p. 382). Therefore, we can comprehend the sensitivity of

the leader’s position in Iran for the durability of the regime. In addition, due to the experience of coalition formation among opposition parties in 1979 (such as the Communist Party, Mojahedin-e Khalq, Iranian People’s Fadaian, and Tudeh Party), the opposition's existence has a considerable impact on the Iranian regime's



willingness to compromise on policy. Making political concessions to opposition individuals and groups by allowing them to take part in elections and hold influential positions inside the system (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006, p. 14) is one method by which Iran uses policy concessions to keep control over the decision-making process while still claiming to be a democratic regime. Although time has gone on and societal turmoil has occurred, the country is now ruled by just one party. The Islamic regime uses a combination of co-optation and repression to maintain control over the political system, and its response to the opposition depends on the degree of threat that it perceives from these groups.

Figure 3: Structure of Islamic Republic of Iran (Thaler et al., 2010)

It is worth mentioning that the peak of the presence of reformists, through which society felt a bit of freedom, was during Khatami's presidency in 1997, when the parliament members were replaced by radical fundamentalists (Gheissari & Nasr, 2005; Asayesh et al., 2011; Zweiri & Nassar, 2021), but the IRGC was given more latitude to repress the opponents when the leader saw the threat of overthrow from the educated elites in 1999; as a result, the fundamentalists acquired more influence in the

Islamic Majlis after Khatami's presidency ended in 2005 (Bahgat, 2006; Terhalle, 2009, p. Additionally, Khamenei permitted the IRGC to assume more political authority from the clergy following the Green Movement, which served as a more serious warning to the regime, and members of the parliament and the president were elected from those who remained loyal to the leadership (Alamdari, 2005; Wehrey et al., 2009; Thaler et al., 2010; Tezcür, 2012; Zweiri & Nassar, 2021). In order to unify the parliament in the last election period, he also did not allow any critical groups or individuals to enter it and chose Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, a fundamentalist from the IRGC, as the speaker of the parliament in 2020 (Zweiri & Nassar, 2021, p. 109). It can be seen as a militarization (Zweiri & Nassar, 2021, p. 106) and clientelism as a "multi-power structure" by which the power structure in the country has altered and elevated the IRGC to a crucial position in all political and economic decision-making (Alamdari, 2005, p. 1291). However, as we mentioned before, it is crucial to note that reformists are not considered real opposition or a threat to the regime and are most loyal to the system and leadership, as in all sensitive domestic and foreign fields that include protests or nuclear decisions, they did not take independent action against the leader of Iran (Gheissari & Nasr, 2005). In the following section, it will be discussed how the regime deals with real opposition.

Moreover, the chance of coups is predicted to reduce under elected legislatures, which are tools used by leaders to co-opt members of the current "coalition" (Bove & Rivera, 2015, p. 459); thus, one way that the regime co-opts the legislature is through the electoral process, which has already been discussed. But following Geanhi and Preworski, we may add that elections are only window dressing for autocratic regimes (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007, 1280), and Iran also tried to show that it has a free and independent electoral system, while the elections are manipulated by using oil rent and the clientelism system (Alamdari, 2005, p. 1289). It was able to introduce the person approved by the leader as the elected president despite public protests. In practise, the number of candidates is nevertheless restricted by the regime’s stringent screening procedures, notably for those who hold opposing views to the ruling party's or Islamic Republic's ideology (Afshari, 1996; Alamdari, 2005). Due to the widespread disqualification of opposing candidates, election results are frequently predictable. In this context, we can mention the eleventh legislature, where a considerable number of candidates were disqualified, primarily reformists (Zweiri & Nassar, 2021, p. 109),

and even some fundamentalists whose ideologies had altered. By allowing or disallowing candidates to run for office depending on their ideological allegiance to the regime, they can successfully manage the political system of the nation (Afshari, 1996). As a result, the Iranian regime can maintain a tight grip on power and stifle any dissent or challenge to its rule by co opting the key institutions and making sure that their members are loyal to the Supreme Leader (Afshari, 1996; Thaler et al., 2010). This has produced a highly centralized, authoritarian system that is frequently criticized for its disregard for accountability, transparency, and human rights (Afshari, 1996).

On one hand, to co-opt guarantees the loyalty of important groups, and the distribution of patronage was adopted by autocratic regimes (Hinnebusch, 2006, p. 382), either through compromise by giving key positions or through the distribution of spoils (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006, p. 1), and the Islamic regime has already appointed its supporters to important and delicate positions to guarantee its authority and prevent any internal and external threats. On the other hand, Iran employs co-optation through its economic structure as well, and rent plays a crucial role in shaping the Iranian economy (Mahdavi, 1970). As a result, the servicing of clientelist networks both inside and outside of regime structures was made possible by the flow of oil profits (Alamdari, 2005, p. 1289). Thus, patrimonial customs were mixed with bureaucratic systems (Hinnebusch, 2006, p. 382; Wehrey et al., 2009). In other words, in Iran, natural resources serve as the source of wealth in the current form of clientelism, and patrons in contemporary political clientelism strive to hold governmental posts (Alamdari, 2005, p. 1289). Another crucial aspect is that a system of repression and "patronage" that reinforces the base of support and stifles opposition is built on oil revenues (Hen-Tov, 2006, p. 173). Moreover, this regime utilizes co-optation to control dissent and opposition within the religious establishment. By giving them financial and political privileges, including access to public resources and the ability to influence policy, the regime has co opted prominent religious leaders (Alamdari, 2005; Zweiri & Nassar, 2021). As a result, the regime has been able to uphold its standing among religious leaders and neutralise the rise of discontent.

The regime's dominance of key institutions, including the oil and gas industry, banking system, and state-owned businesses, enables it to shape economic policy and decision-making and to allocate resources towards its desired sectors and groups. It

also utilizes policy concessions by implementing economic reforms that benefit specific interest groups. For instance, it may provide tax exemptions or "subsidies" to certain companies and industries to win their support (Wehrey et al., 2009, p. 28). Because this method prevents the creation of coalitions against the regime (Hinnebusch, 2006, p. 385). It is worth mentioning that the mass protests in 1999 and 2009 paved the way for the IRGC to gain power both politically and economically (Gheissari & Nasr, 2005; Wehrey et al., 2009; Thaler et al., 2010; Tezcür, 2012; Zweiri & Nassar, 2021), and the "privatization programme" was a policy by which it was able to control the economic power of the country (Zweiri & Nassar, 202, p.107). However, under its ownership and control over numerous important industries, such as energy, telecommunications, and construction, it could exert control over public resources. The IRGC has great control over decision-making and resource allocation for a sizable number of businesses in these industries. This enables the IRGC to use resources to support its favoured entities and to make money from the sectors it owns and controls, such as "Khatam al-Anbia, which has many projects in the profitable energy industry" (Wehrey et al., 2009; Thaler et al., 2010; Zweiri & Nassar, 2021, p. 107).

Corruption is also a significant factor in Iran's dominance over economic institutions. Because it is normal that corruption comes from clientelist connections, by which there is no economic progress (Alamdari, 2005, p. 1289). Those with links to the government frequently have access to resources and opportunities that are not available to others, and bribery, nepotism, and cronyism are prevalent in many economic sectors. As a result, a system of "patronage" develops in which individuals who are obedient to the regime can prosper financially while others are left behind (Alamdari, 2005; Hinnebusch, 2006, p. 379). Additionally, IRCG is known for its cronyism and corruption, and there have been reports that it abuses its power and authority to advance the interests of its members and loyalists. It's noteworthy that Iran's IRGC is committed to combating corruption as well. While it runs various anti-corruption units, it has recently been involved in several "high-profile corruption" cases (Wehrey et al., 2009).

However, as has already been discussed, co-optation is not a guarantee of resilience for autocratic regimes. In the short term, this strategy may help to neutralise opposition and build a base of support, allowing the regime to shape economic policy and direct resources towards its preferred groups; however, it may also lead to

corruption and significant inequality and hinder economic growth and development, which can undermine the regime's legitimacy over time. This would eventually result in using repression to prevent unrest and instability. And one common factor among autocratic regimes is that using repression is crucial for their durability (Hinnebusch, 2006, p. 382). And according to the reports of international organizations, Iran is considered one of the most repressive regimes, even for its transnational repressions (Freedom House, 2023). In addition, it should be noted that this regime also uses repression to cope with the dissatisfied segment of society due to sanctions-induced economic stagnation and corruption (Hen-Tov, 2006, p. 169).

2.4 Repression Strategies

In Hinnebusch's words, "a successful repression rests on a combination of variables, including the party's infiltration of the army, the recruitment of security personnel from trustworthy in-groups, and the nationalist legitimacy obtained from the struggle against foreign opponents" (Hinnebusch, 2006, p. 382), thus it can be referred to the repression system in Iran as well. Because the IRGC and Basij, as the repression machine, belong to the radical fundamentalists who are loyal to Velayate-Faqih, and they get their legitimacy from the war with evil powers like America and Israel (Milani, 2022). The government of Iran, which gained its legitimacy with the slogan of divine justice and relying on Islamic rules, was able to take control of the country's affairs with brutal repressions, one of its initial measures is the arrest and execution of the Shah's loyalists, particularly the elites and rank-and-file of the imperial army who were likely to pose a threat to the government in the future (Bhagat, 1987; Hiro, 2000), and with the end of the Iran-Iraq war, thousands Mujahide-Khalq were executed (Kia, 2000; Brendan, 2008) for the crime of treason and despite the protests even among clerics including Montazeri (Akhavi, 2008), he did not stop this brutal action, and legitimized his repressions under the pretext of executing divine justice (Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2000).

As mentioned above, the Iranian regime, which is conscious of the significance of the opposition's role, has employed various tactics to suppress them from its inception in various periods, and by examining its 44-year life, it can be concluded that it has used a combination of both forms of repression internally and externally. In 1981, radicalism groups closed 105 newspaper offices, the compulsory hijab and

separation of genders were implemented, and the opponents of this plan were arrested and executed. In the same year, almost 4000 people were executed, and in 1984, 12000 people were executed and assassinated, and 14000 people were imprisoned as well (Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2000, p. 37). In the summer of 1988, after accepting UN Security Council Resolution 598 and by order of Khomeini, thousands of political prisoners were put to death by the regime after being found guilty in blatantly unjust trials and buried in mass graves in Khavaran-Tehran. Most of them were members of the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization, the Organization of Iranian People's Fadaian, and the Tudeh Party (Montazeri, 2000).

In addition, the 1999 student protests, also known as Kuye Daneshgah or the "Dormitory City" events, were a series of protests that happened in Tehran and other Iranian cities in July of that year. The Iranian regime's decision to close the reformist journal "Salam" was the initial cause of the protests (Zweiri & Nassar, 2021), which quickly spread to include a wide range of grievances about political, social, and economic concerns (Gorgin, 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2020). The Iranian regime responded to the protests with a heavy-handed crackdown that included the use of force, arbitrary detention, torture, and even extrajudicial killings. Human rights organizations claim that thousands of students were arrested by the government, many of whom were then beaten, tortured, and subjected to other sorts of abuse.

The security forces, including Ansar-e Hizbullah, the Basij ("Organization for Mobilization of the Oppressed), and the Revolutionary Guards (Zweiri & Nassar, 2021, p. 97), used tear gas, batons, and live ammunition to disperse the protesters, resulting in the deaths of several students. A media blackout was also implemented by the dictatorship, and journalists who tried to report on the protests faced harassment and even detention. After the demonstrations, the regime held widespread tribunals for the students, in which many of them were found guilty of "spreading corruption on earth" or "enmity against God." Dozens of students were sentenced to long prison terms, and several were executed (UANI, 2022). An important turning point in Iran's history of political repression was the student uprisings of 1999. In other words, the Iranian regime's reaction to the demonstrations revealed its readiness to employ extreme violence and repression against any challenge to its authority and signalled a turning point in the Islamic regime's increasingly authoritarian nature, which paved the way for the IRGC's domination (Wehrey et al., 2009; Zweiri & Nassar, 2021). At

the same time, political leaders preferred to keep quiet, as the brutal behaviour of the IRGC was beneficial for them (Alamdari, 2005).

The 2009 presidential elections caused massive protests and a brutal crackdown. The security forces, including the police and the "Basij militia,", used tear gas, batons, and live ammunition to disperse the protesters, resulting in the deaths of several people (Wehrey et al., 2009; Zweiri & Nassar, 2021), and according to Human Rights Watch, three instances of sexual assault happened in prison (Human Rights Watch, 2020). As part of soft repression, the Iranian regime imposed a media blackout, and the IRGC made a significant investment in the telecom sector so that it could have control over Iran's Internet and limited access to social media and other websites used by opposition supporters to coordinate and share information (Amnesty International, 2021). The leaders of the "Green Movement" were sentenced to house arrest as well (Zweiri & Nassar, 2021, p. 108; Niakooee, 2020, p. 10). However, the regime linked the internal crisis to the foreign agents to justify its repression (Thaler et al., 2010).

Moreover, the protests in November 2019 occurred due to Iran’s economic suffering, political repression, and corruption (Zweiri & Nassar, 2021, p. 99). The Islamic regime responded to them with extreme repression (UANI, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2020). The security forces, including the police and IRGC, fired at the protesters; more than 1500 people were killed. However, the Iranian authorities shut down almost all the internet (Amnesty International, 2021), which made it challenging for opponents to arrange and communicate with one another. Additionally, the regime detained thousands of people, including journalists, human rights activists (Human Rights Watch, 2021), and opposition leaders, and many of them were tortured or suffered other forms of abuse. and opposition leaders, and many of them were tortured or suffered other forms of abuse. According to Amnesty International, "detainees were flogged, sexually abused, and given electric shocks" (Amnesty International, 2021; 2022). On the other hand, 2022 can be regarded as the year with the most protests in the history of the Islamic regime, and except for scattered protests among different classes and groups, the Khuzestani people demonstrated against a lack of water, which was suppressed by completely cutting off the Internet, arbitrary arrests, and massacres of protesters (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Along with the regime's attempts to associate domestic dissent with foreign powers seeking to destabilize Iran, thousands of protesters persisted. However, the current protests are linked to the most severe

repressions as the last and longest national demonstration, which sparked following the killing of a woman by Iran's Morality Police in September 2022 (Fahim, 2022; Far, 2022). The remarkable aspect of this period of extensive and unique demonstrations was the unprecedented presence and support of the community, and at the forefront of that were the high school students, who were dealt with by the regime in the most brutal way possible (Van Esveld, 2022). Due to the serious threat posed by internal protesters and foreign support, the regime is attempting to control the situation by utilizing all capacities of the repression machine, whether low or violent. Among these, we can mention the widespread arbitrary arrests, detentions, kidnapping, brutal torture, rape, execution, and murder of teenagers, students, elites, actors, journalists, athletes, and military personnel by the regime to create terror among people (Lee, Le, Mirza, & Dehghanpisheh, 2022; Dehghanpisheh, 2023).

It also tries to maintain power by cutting off the internet, censoring or filtering social media, preventing influential figures such as celebrities and athletes from leaving the country, and, most recently, installing face recognition cameras on opponents with the help of the Chinese communist party (Lee, 2023). In addition to using brutal repressions against the opposition, depending on the level of their threats, this does not end only with the domestic opposition, and by reviewing the reports of different organizations, we may understand how many times kidnapping, assassination, and extrajudicial killing have been carried out against external oppositions (*Human Rights Watch*, 2021; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2021). This regime has repeatedly carried out brutal assaults against exiles since the 1979 revolution (Iran Human Rights, 2021).

Since in Iran, "politics is still a game of dominance and submission, It is important to remember that the entire organization is based on the ongoing employment of oppressive methods against outsiders. (Afshari, 1996, p.583). Iran depicts its attacks on exiles as a policy of self-defense against Israel and America and under the pretext of cooperation with terrorism (Tehran Times, 2020). Iranian refugee Mohammad Reza Kolahi Samadi, who had resided in the Netherlands since 1981, was assassinated in December 2015 for his involvement in a 1981 Mujahedin-e Khalq attack in Iran (Farda, 2019). 2017, Molla Nissi, former leader of the Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahawaz, was killed in the Netherlands. He had formerly been a leader of the Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahwaz

(ASMLA) (NU.nl., 2019). Saeed Karimian, a proprietor of Iranian media, was also assassinated in Istanbul in May 2017 (Daragahi, 2017). In 2019, Former Iranian intelligence official Masoud Molavi, who had left the country, was assassinated in Istanbul for disseminating information on the regime from abroad (Pamuk, 2020; Staff, 2020). The regime attempted bombings against the Mujahedin-e Khalq in Belgium and Albania in 2018 and 2019 (Irish, 2018). The violence of this regime has not only ended with brutal repressions, but it also employs another method under the programme of abducting opponents. In October 2019, the owner of a channel on social media called Ruhollah Zam was kidnapped by the IRGC when he travelled from Paris to Iraq (Fazeli, 2020), and then he was executed in 2020. A businessman called Rasould Danialzadeh was robbed in Dubai in 2019 (Farda Radio, 2019). In 2020, the IRGC brought Jamshid Sharmad from Dubai to Iran for committing a terrorist attack (Associated Press, 2020). Habib Asyud, a leader of the ASMLA and a Swedish-Iranian citizen, was abducted by the IRGC in October 2020 when he was travelling through Turkey (Ahmed, 2020), and he was executed in May 20203. Masih Alinejad, an Iranian journalist and political activist, was threatened with abduction and murder (Alinejad, 2020).

Although, in the early years, this regime relied more on intensive repression, it also gained an understanding of how other repressions operate. Using social media to sow discord among internal and external oppositions via "manipulating the information" is another tactic of soft repression made possible by technology to prevent the formation of a coalition between them, as social media has played a significant role in mobilizing people and opposition groups (Frantz et al., 2020). But it seems that the harsh repressions used against the nation have forced opposition groups and individuals to genuinely, and for the first time, unite despite the difference in political ideologies. Because if the government decides to harshly repress political protest, especially on a high level, it runs the risk of inciting a chain reaction of populist upheavals and, maybe, a degree of unrest that could hurt its assertion of political legitimacy and jeopardise the political future. Moreover, highly sophisticated spyware campaigns are being operated by Iranian officials, and offensive cyber operations are now a crucial part of Iranian statecraft (Sadjadpour, 2018). Last but not least, the dissidents' travel options are restricted, and their passports are seized (Lipin, M., & Haghjoo, 2020). However, it is apparent that Iranian society continues to protest

sporadically with all the brutal repression of the regime, and the Islamic regime is trying to use stricter laws to control the situation, but it is unclear how long it will be able to continue this situation.

2.5 Conclusion

In summary, the emergence of the Islamic Republic of Iran marked a significant turning point in Iranian history, with profound implications for its domestic and international dynamics. The Iranian regime's survival can be attributed to a combination of factors, including domestic legitimacy, co-optation strategies, and repression. One of the key elements behind the Iranian regime's longevity has been its ability to maintain a certain level of domestic legitimacy. This regime has effectively utilized elements of popular support, especially among conservative and religious segments of society, to bolster its legitimacy. By framing itself as the guardian of Islamic values and the champion of social justice, the regime has managed to maintain a degree of popular support, particularly in rural areas and among the economically disadvantaged. Additionally, co-optation strategies have played a crucial role in solidifying the regime's survival. It has skillfully co-opted various social and political groups, allowing them to operate within the confines of the regime's ideological framework. By incorporating elements of the opposition, such as reformist factions, into the political system, the regime has managed to create a semblance of pluralism while still retaining ultimate control.

However, it is important to acknowledge that repression is significant for the survival of the Iranian regime. The regime has demonstrated a willingness to employ coercion and repression to suppress dissent and maintain control. This has included crackdowns on political opposition, censorship of the media, and restrictions on civil liberties. The use of repression has allowed the regime to neutralize potential threats and stifle dissent, thereby consolidating its power. Furthermore, external factors, such as regional dynamics and geopolitical considerations, have also influenced the Iranian regime's survival. Iran's strategic location in the Middle East, its pursuit of regional influence, and its defiance of Western powers have at times helped to rally domestic support and strengthen the regime's position.

CHAPTER 3: THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE IRANIAN REGIME'S SURVIVAL

The Iranian regime has faced numerous challenges since its establishment in 1979, including economic sanctions, political isolation, and military threats. These challenges have put a significant strain on the regime's ability to maintain its legitimacy and control over its population. However, international cooperation has played a critical role in mitigating these challenges, allowing the regime to maintain its hold on power. Despite being accused of human rights violations and supporting terrorist groups, Iran has been able to maintain relationships with several countries and organizations, providing it with a degree of international legitimacy. Iran's participation in international organizations such as the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation has allowed it to portray itself as a legitimate player on the world stage, which has helped to maintain its domestic legitimacy and support.

The use of soft power has been one of the mechanisms of the regime's durability in the international community, allowing it to be more present and receive foreign legitimacy as well. Anti-American rhetoric has also been a key element of Iran's international legitimacy, particularly in the wake of the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the subsequent hostage crisis. This rhetoric has allowed Iran to position itself as a leader of the anti-Western movement and a defender of Islamic values, which has resonated with many people in the region and beyond. In this regard, soft power plays a crucial role in its survival by enhancing its legitimacy, increasing its international standing, and creating a favorable image of the regime among its supporters and sympathizers. The Iranian regime has used various soft power tools to achieve its goals. These include cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, and media outreach, and cultural diplomacy is more significant for this regime.

Another significant factor that has contributed to Iran's international legitimacy is the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The JCPOA was a landmark agreement reached in 2015 between Iran and the P5+1 countries (the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, China, and Germany) that aimed to limit Iran's nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions. While the JCPOA was controversial and faced opposition from

some quarters, its implementation provided Iran with a significant boost in international legitimacy and provided a pathway for the country to engage with the international community. Finally, Iran has been successful in using alternative payment mechanisms to bypass the effects of sanctions. These mechanisms include barter trade and local currency exchanges, which have allowed Iran to continue to engage in international trade despite being cut off from much of the global financial system. Strategic alliances with countries such as Russia and China have helped to bolster Iran's international legitimacy as well. These countries have continued to support Iran despite international pressure, providing it with political and economic support that has helped it maintain its hold on power.

In terms of external economic leverage, trading in non-sanctioned goods has also allowed Iran to continue to engage in international trade, albeit on a smaller scale. Investing in key sectors such as technology, manufacturing, and roads has also helped Iran diversify its economy. By developing new industries and expanding its domestic capabilities, Iran has been able to create new economic opportunities and maintain a degree of economic independence. Iran has also been successful in attracting foreign investment, particularly in the energy sector. The country's strategic location and natural resources have made it an attractive destination for foreign investors, particularly in the oil and gas industries. In addition, Iran has invested heavily in developing special economic zones, which have helped attract foreign investment and create new economic opportunities.

In addition to providing international legitimacy, international cooperation has also had a significant impact on Iran's external economic performance. Sanctions have severely impacted Iran's economy, with the country facing high inflation rates, declining currency values, and rising unemployment. However, international cooperation has allowed Iran to mitigate some of these effects through expanding trade partnerships with countries such as China and Turkey. Despite the impact of sanctions on Iran's economy, the country has been successful in expanding its oil and gas exports, which have remained a critical source of revenue. Iran has also been successful in developing alternative financial mechanisms, such as using alternative payment mechanisms and investing in key sectors, which have helped it bypass sanctions.

In this chapter, the importance of the role of international cooperation in Iran's durability will be examined. Therefore, after studying the function of international

legitimacy in foreign policy, we will determine the means by which the Iranian regime achieves international legitimacy in the first section. Then we will analyze the role of strategic countries. Finally, the performance of Iran's external economy and how it has managed to endure despite the imposition of severe sanctions will be evaluated in this section as well.

3.1 The International Pillars of The Iranian Regime's Legitimacy

Examining international legitimacy and its significance can give a better understanding of its role in the durability of Iran's regime. International legitimacy is the general approval and acknowledgment of a country's or group's actions, decisions, and institutions by other countries and the larger international community. For international peace, stability, and cooperation to continue, this acceptance and acknowledgment are essential. As the foundation for the legitimacy of international institutions and their decisions, international legitimacy is essential to international law, diplomacy, and governance (Claude, 1966; Abbott & Snidal, 1998, p.28). Nations may be perceived as acting unilaterally and outside of accepted international standards when there is a lack of international legitimacy, which can cause conflicts, tensions, and isolation.

Moreover, all rulers know that domestic legitimacy is not enough to maintain their power (Claude, 1966) and legitimize their policies, and even the superpowers need to be members of an international organization in order to gain international legitimacy. One may say that we cannot imagine "international life" without any recognized organizations (Schermers & Blokker, 1995, as cited in Abbott & Snidal, 1998) as a means of cooperation in which collective legitimacy is considered the fundamental pillar of any policy. On the other hand, it cannot be said that leaders only compete with each other to gain power, but they also need to obtain legitimacy to interact with other powers in the world; therefore, power and legitimacy cannot be considered two separate categories but rather as "complementary" and mutually reinforcing factors (Claude, 1966), and authority is the union of power and legitimacy intent, and even one organization has authority only when it is legitimate (Zürn, Binder, & Ecker-Ehrhardt, 2012, p.83). International cooperation can help facilitate economic growth, stability, and security, which are all critical to the survival of regimes. International legitimacy, on the other hand, refers to the recognition and

acceptance of the actions, decisions, and institutions of a country or group by other nations and the international community at large (Finnemore, 1996).

However, for autocratic regimes, international legitimacy is particularly important because they often face criticism and opposition from the international community due to their lack of respect for democratic norms, human rights, and the rule of law. These regimes may be seen as oppressive and illegitimate, both domestically and internationally. But international legitimacy can help mitigate this perception and provide some degree of legitimacy to these regimes. By gaining recognition from other nations and international organizations, autocratic regimes can strengthen their position and credibility on the global stage (von Soest & Grauvogel, 2015, p.8). International legitimacy can also provide a shield against criticism and sanctions, which can be used by other countries to pressure these regimes to change their behavior. Furthermore, autocratic regimes often rely on international support, whether economic or political, to maintain their power and influence. International legitimacy can help facilitate this support and make it easier for these regimes to "engage" with other nations and international organizations (von Soest & Grauvogel, 2015, p.8).

The Iranian regime, which had the aspiration to lead all Muslims worldwide from the beginning of its formation, gradually came to understand that it faced the challenge of external legitimacy and tried to appear in the international arena in a variety of ways to achieve its domestic and foreign objectives. By examining this mechanism, we will find out that international cooperation has played a significant role in the regime’s gaining legitimacy and keeping its authority. Since international legitimacy is very important for the durability of Iran's government, it has used all its capacities to acquire it and has paid exorbitant costs for it. International agreements, treaties, and diplomatic relations have given credibility to Iran's government and made it the power of the region. As a result, international legitimacy for this regime can be divided into five categories including soft power, participation in international organizations, nuclear deals, and strategic alliances.

3.1.1 Soft Power of Iranian Regime

To begin with, we need to examine "public diplomacy" and "soft power," through which countries are able to influence international opinion and achieve their strategic objectives. Public diplomacy refers to the government's efforts to engage with foreign audiences, promote its policies and values, and build relationships with other countries. Soft power, on the other hand, refers to a country's ability to influence other nations through its cultural, social, and political values and institutions, rather than through military means. In general, public diplomacy provides a tool for the implementation of soft power so that a government can obtain international legitimacy (Nye, 2008).

For the Iranian regime, public diplomacy and soft power are intertwined and crucial for its survival, as they help the regime maintain legitimacy and influence in the face of international sanctions and political pressure. And since the culture and foreign policies of a nation heavily influence its soft power, this regime focuses more on "cultural diplomacy" which means (applying a country's cultural policy abroad through the exchange of knowledge, ideas, culture, and the arts is known as cultural diplomacy) (Price, 2012, p.2397; Wastnidge, 2015, p. 365). The Iranian regime has long recognized the power of cultural diplomacy as a means of projecting its influence and advancing its agenda, such as religious symbolism and Persian culture, but religion has been at the forefront in its foreign policy (Ramazani, 2004; Wastnidge, 2015, p. 367; Ciftci & Tezcur, 2016; Posch, 2017).

However, how it employs these two strategies can paint a more accurate picture of its foreign policy. This regime utilizes cultural diplomacy in the form of establishing links between international organizations and international media to project its image and advance its interests. The state-owned television and radio networks, such as IRIB (Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting), have been used to promote Iranian culture and values, as well as present the regime's perspective on global issues. IRIB has aired Iranian films, music, and TV series to a global audience, promoting Iranian culture and values. Iran has also established international news networks, such as Press TV and Al-Alam, which promote Iranian views on global issues and present an alternative to mainstream Western media outlets (Price, 2012, p.2407; Wastnidge, 2015, p. 372). These networks have been used to project Iran's perspective on regional conflicts, such as the Syrian civil war and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and to present Iran as a responsible and constructive player in the region.

Additionally, the Iranian regime has long used anti-American rhetoric as a form of soft power to advance its cultural diplomacy initiatives. Anti-Americanism is a key component of the Iranian regime's ideology, and the regime has used this sentiment to promote its authority and influence in the region and to position itself as a leader and defender of the anti-imperialist movement. As there are three ways to influence the region: military, economic, and cultural, the regime is not able to compete militarily with America, and because of the severe sanctions, Iran is not able to use its economic capacity to influence the region, so the cultural method is the most suitable option to dominate the region (Ciftci & Tezcur, 2016, p. 377; Posch, 2017). The Iranian regime's anti-American rhetoric is based on its perception of the United States as an imperialist power that seeks to dominate and control the region (Ciftci & Tezcur, 2016, p. 388; Posch, 2017, p. 69). The regime has used this rhetoric to criticize US foreign policy, particularly with regard to its support for Israel, its intervention in regional conflicts, and its economic sanctions against Iran.

The regime has also used anti-Americanism to build alliances with other countries and groups that share its opposition to US foreign policy (Ciftci & Tezcur, 2016, p. 382; Posch, 2017). For example, Iran has established close ties with countries such as Syria, Russia, and Venezuela, which have also been critical of US foreign policy. The regime has also supported groups such as Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Houthis, which have waged campaigns against US allies in the region, such as Israel and Saudi Arabia, and we will illustrate how the relationship with such groups has aided the regime to survive and destabilize the region.

However, we probably shouldn't be astonished by this policy given that Khomeini frequently used the phrase "Neither East, nor West, but the Islamic Republic" as her foreign policy and cultural diplomacy to support the regime's actions both at home and abroad from the very beginning of the Islamic government (Ramezani, 2004; Price, 2012; Wastnidge, 2015, p. 367). In other words, the slogan helped to position Iran as a leader of the Islamic world and to promote its vision of an Islamic revival based on the principles of the Iranian Revolution.

As mentioned earlier, the establishment of international institutions is another method by which the regime implements its cultural diplomacy (Wastnidge, 2015, p. 370). The Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO) is a crucial element of Iranian cultural diplomacy. The mission of the state funded ICRO is to advance Islamic

civilization and culture overseas and to promote intellectual and cultural exchanges between Iran and other nations. By recognizing Iran's contributions to the disciplines of art, literature, science, and philosophy, ICRO is instrumental in establishing Iran's reputation as the Islamic world's intellectual and cultural hub. It accomplishes this by planning cultural events, including conferences, seminars, and exhibitions (Wastnidge, 2015, p. 370).

The projects of ICRO also include academic and scholarship exchanges, facilitation of idea interchange, and promotion of cross-cultural understanding between Iran and other countries. Additionally, the organization publishes books and other materials in a variety of languages about Islamic civilization and culture. Through these programs, ICRO has contributed to the advancement of Iran's soft power and increased influence within the region and beyond. Iran's cultural and intellectual accomplishments have been highlighted by the ICRO in an effort to dispel false impressions about Iran held by the international community and to position Iran as a pioneer of Islamic civilization. Scholarships and academic exchanges are also a part of ICRO projects, which have helped to forge stronger ties between Iran and Muslim nations like Lebanon and Pakistan, which share Iran's commitment to advancing Islamic culture and values, and the Persian world, including countries like Afghanistan and Tajikistan (Wastnidge, 2015).

On the other hand, as mentioned in the previous chapter, this regime has used the term “cultural NATO” to legitimize itself in recent years. This term has been utilized to refer to a perceived Western cultural invasion and the influence of Western culture as a "soft war" that is aimed at promoting Western cultural hegemony and interests, while undermining cultural identity and political stability and promoting regime change in non-Western countries, including Iran, and that it is often accompanied by economic sanctions and military threats (Posch, 2017, p. 78), and it has been a part of the regime’s foreign policy. As such, the regime has responded by adopting a defensive posture and by developing strategies to counter the perceived threats of a "soft war" (Wastnidge, 2015).

Apart from the mentioned tools of cultural diplomacy, it has sought to limit the impact of soft war by imposing restrictions on the media, the internet, and other forms of communication. As a result, with the formation of the soft war headquarters by the IRGC forces called the "Iranian Cyber Army" (ICA), the regime uses digital

diplomacy, including hacking and censorship, and employs jamming projects by the "Unit of the Soft War," created by the Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics, to cope with threats against itself (Price, 2012, p. 2407).

3.1.2 Participation of Iran in International Organizations

After the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the relationship between Iran and the United States became strained. Iran's regime lost its external legitimacy after capturing the American embassy and later issuing a fatwa for the murder of Salman Rushdie, which gave rise to its unfavorable reputation (Ramazani, 2013, p. 313; Franck, 1988, p. 734; Adib-Moghaddam, 2009, p. 521). In 1980, the US imposed economic sanctions on Iran, which have been in place in various forms ever since. Khomeini, who had defined the international system based on the "Umma" (Ramazani, 2004, p. 555) and did not care about relations with other nations, realized the importance of international relations, particularly after the Iraq War ended, and became more aware of its political and economic isolation. Even during his rule, Iran reestablished open trade contacts with Western Europe, making the continent one of Iran's key trading partners. Iran also made covert weapons purchases from Israel (Tessler, 1989, p. 101) and indirect oil sales to the United States. He also allowed the government to join the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) to get rid of isolation, although the regime was not very active in it during this time.

Therefore, by showing Khomeini the green light and saying that isolation in world affairs means destruction, Rafsanjani made an effort to get into international policy in 1981, and he modified the slogan of neither the West nor the East after Khomeini’s death, and then the level of international integration increased throughout that time (Ramazani, 2013, p. 312). During Rafsanjani's presidency, Iran pursued a "pragmatic" foreign policy focused on rebuilding the country's economy and improving relations with neighbouring countries. Iran sought to end its isolation and improve ties with the Arab world and the West. Iran-Eastern Bloc relations re-expanded starting in 1985. Diplomatic ties with Western countries markedly improved in 1986. Tehran has further modified its non-alignment policy since the conclusion of the Cold War, and as the non-aligned strategy's main goal was to give a weaker state greater policy options, by employing this tactic, many NAM governments attempted to avoid incurring expensive costs in the confrontations between the superpowers, and

their slogans implied that they were neither in the Eastern nor the Western camps. As a result, the regime could play a significant role in the stability of the region and its international legitimacy in the leading years (Sadri, 1999, p. 39).

Rafsanjani was also instrumental in ending the Iran-Iraq war and played a key role in brokering a ceasefire agreement (Hunter, 2003). During his administration, Iran adhered to a firm policy of neutrality with regard to the United States throughout the Persian Gulf War. The regime also contributed to the liberation of Western and American hostages in Lebanon. His government laid a new foundation for Iranian-Soviet economic and military relations, and he actively cultivated political, cultural, and economic ties with the newly independent republics in Transcaucasia and Central Asia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He also pushed for improved trade ties with Japan and Western Europe, as well as increased Iran's prominence in the OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) (Ramazani, 2013, p. 312).

On the other hand, Mohammad Khatami served as the President of Iran from 1997 to 2005, and during his tenure, the country's foreign policy was defined by interaction with other nations and a desire to strengthen ties with the West. Iran sought to increase its regional influence and promote its interests on the global stage while also attempting to normalize its relations with the United States. The "Dialogue Among Civilizations" concept, one of Khatami's major foreign policy initiatives, aimed to promote better communication and cooperation between various cultures and civilizations (Hunter, 2003, p. 139; Adib-Moghaddam, 2009, p. 523; Ramazani, 2004, p. 558; 2013; Wastnidge, 2015, p. 368). He also worked to improve relations with neighbouring countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt, in order to bring Iranian society's reintegration into the contemporary international system (Ramazani, 2004, p. 558), and several bilateral contracts were signed with Italy, India, and Egypt (Wastnidge, 2015). He also sought to promote regional stability through the creation of the "Shanghai Cooperation Organization" with China, Russia, and several Central Asian states. He made efforts to engage with the European Union and improve Iran's relations with the West. In order to regain the lost regime’s legitimacy, he revoked the fatwa issued against Salman Rushdie in 1998 as well (Ramazani, 2004, p. 558; 2013). With his proposal, 2001 was named the year of the dialogue of civilizations in the United Nations (Ramazani, 2004; 2013; Wastnidge, 2015, p. 369).

Overall, in the 1990s, Iran tried to play a significant role in the stability of the region by becoming a member of international organizations. As a result, in the 1990s, Iran resumed its involvement with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in order to improve regional security and stability. And it participated in bilateral negotiations with Central Asian countries for various interactions, which will be discussed in the second section. However, Iran was a strong advocate for the United Nations' efforts via the OIC (the Organization of the Islamic Conference) to mediate a settlement during the Tajik conflict and was crucial in getting the United Tajik Opposition, which was led by Islamists, to accept a truce in 1994 and the eventual peace deal in 1997.

Iran tried to contribute to efforts for peace in the Karabagh war as well, but the OSCE's presence as a formal framework diminished Iran’s role in this issue. It also joined the Six Plus Two Group on Afghanistan, which comprised China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, along with the United States and Russia, in an effort to establish a diplomatic solution for the Afghanistan issue and then determine a government after the Taliban were defeated (Herzing, 2001, p. 190).

In fact, the Taliban, Saddam Hussein, and Al-Qaeda were the three issues that brought Iran and the United States together in terms of their strategic interests during Khatami's presidency (Posch, 2017). And the September 11 incident became the turning point of this relationship, and the Iranian regime expressed sympathy with the American people. It indirectly supported America in overthrowing the Taliban, and it played a key role in negotiations over the future of Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban and worked closely with the international community to promote peace and stability in the region. As a result, in the Bonn Conference, in support of Hamid Karzai’s government, Iran committed almost $500 million to the reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. Yet, due to the support of al-Qaeda, relations with the United States became strained again after President Bush called Iran an "axis of evil" (Hunter, 2003, p. 145; Ramazani, 2004; 2013). However, Iran declined to assist the Shia rebellion in Iraq in 1991 or to assist them militarily in Afghanistan in 1998, and it did not have a serious reaction to the 2011 Saudi invasion of Bahrain (Posch, 2017, p. 84). As a result, one may claim that the brilliant period of Iran’s diplomatic success was in the 1990s due to its efforts to promote peace and stability in the region. And it was appreciated by the international community for its role in the issues of Afghanistan and Tajikistan (Herzing, 2001, p. 190).

As it was mentioned in the previous section, the election of Ahmadinejad (2005–2013) paved the way for the role of Iran's Revolutionary Guards to become prominent in all political fields, and Iran's foreign policy was heavily influenced by its destabilizing policies. Ahmadinejad's administration was characterized by a combative foreign policy that was centred on advancing Iran's nuclear program and expanding its regional influence (Mousavian & Mousavian, 2018, p. 178). Ahmadinejad was well recognized for his vehement rhetoric against the West, and particularly Israel, and his administration received harsh criticism for its record on human rights (Borszik, 2014, p. 10; Wastnidge, 2015, p. 370). During his administration, Iran again distanced itself from its foreign policy and emphasized relations with Latin America and the region (Wastnidge, 2015, p. 372). Often referring to the United States and its allies as "global arrogance," Ahmadinejad criticized them for attempting to control the Middle East and undercut Iran's sovereignty. Additionally, despite international pressure to stop the programme, he persisted in Iran's pursuit of nuclear technology (Borszik, 2014, p. 8), further deteriorating relations between Iran and the West. Ahmadinejad also aimed to further Iran's interests in the Middle East and increase its sway there. Iran supported organizations like Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine in an effort to undermine the dominance of Western-backed administrations in the area. Iran also played a significant role in the Syrian Civil War, aiding Bashar al-Assad's regime in its fight against rebel forces and enhancing Iran's regional influence. Following the slogan "Look to the East", the tighter ties Ahmadinejad forged with China and Russia, both of which backed Iran's nuclear programme and opposed Western efforts to isolate Iran, were another characteristic of his foreign policy (Haji-Yousefi, 2010, p. 6).

Furthermore, Iran became an observer member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2005. At the time, Iran expressed interest in joining the organization as a full member and participated in various SCO meetings and events as an observer. But Iran's application for full membership was not accepted due to opposition from the United States and some of its allies, who were concerned about Iran's nuclear programme and alleged support for terrorism. Despite this, Iran continued to participate in SCO meetings as an observer, and the organization provided Iran with a platform to engage with other countries in the region and promote its interests (Akbarzadeh, 2014).

Hassan Rouhani (2013–2021): Rouhani's presidency was marked by a shift towards a more moderate and pragmatic foreign policy. Rouhani sought to improve Iran's relations with the West and end the country's isolation. He played a key role in negotiating the Iran nuclear deal in 2015, which lifted some of the international sanctions against Iran in exchange for restrictions on its nuclear program. However, the deal was later abandoned by the United States under the Trump administration. Hassan Rouhani served as the President of Iran from 2013 to 2021, and his administration pursued a foreign policy that was characterized by a desire for engagement with the international community and a more pragmatic approach towards Iran's relations with the West.

Under Rouhani's leadership, Iran sought to improve its relations with the United States and other Western countries and pursued a more moderate and conciliatory approach towards the West than his predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Rouhani was instrumental in negotiating the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with the "win-win slogan." The agreement, which lifted international sanctions on Iran in exchange for limits on its nuclear program, was seen as a major achievement for Rouhani's foreign policy and helped to improve Iran's relations with the international community (Barzegar & Divsallar, 2017, p. 40). Rouhani also sought to improve Iran's relations with its neighbours and promote regional stability (Golmohammadi, 2019, p. 98). Iran played a key role in negotiations over the conflict in Syria and provided support to the government of Bashar al-Assad against opposition forces (Shanahan, 2015; Wastnidge, 2020).

In addition to its regional efforts, Iran also sought to expand its economic and diplomatic ties with other countries around the world. Rouhani made several trips abroad to promote trade and investment opportunities for Iran, particularly in Europe and Asia. Iran also sought to improve its relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, and Rouhani made a historic trip to Oman in 2013, marking the first visit by an Iranian president to the country in over a decade (Observer, 1970; Weiri, 2022). On the other hand, in 2018, following the lifting of international sanctions on Iran, the country's application for full membership in the SCO was approved by the organization's members (Akbarzadeh, 2014). However, Raisi's presidency is associated with internal and external illegitimacy and has put Iran in a difficult historical situation that tries to grab any string to save itself from unprecedented

isolation. Surprisingly, as the most recent incident in the international community at the time of writing this thesis, participation in international organizations once again may aid the durability of the regime more while everyone and many human rights organizations are attempting to cast doubt on the external legitimacy of the IRI.

As the last example shows, not only in alternative institutions such as the SCO but also in democratic institutions, Iran can find a place itself, albeit with such atrocities. For instance, the Human Rights Council's president, Vaclav Balek, announced in a statement that he had selected Ali Bahraini, the Islamic Republic's permanent representative and ambassador to the UN, as head of the 2023 Social Forum for Human Rights after receiving a request from regional coordinators. This announcement was made shortly after Iran executed two individuals on May 8 for taking part in a discussion on social media titled "Critique of Superstition and Religion" (Smilk, 2023; Centre for Human Rights in Iran, 2023; Sinaee, 2023).

3.1.3 Nuclear Deal

In this part, we will evaluate the root of the disputes on this issue, the reason for the regime's insistence on having nuclear weapons, its role in Iran's external legitimacy, ways to bypass sanctions, and its impact on the regime's durability. For many years, nuclear energy has been a major component of Iranian foreign policy. Since the early 2000s, Iran's nuclear program has drawn attention from around the world.

The Iraq war and the chemical attack against Iran justified Khomeini's decision to start his ambitions in 1987 (Knepper, 2008, p. 453; Mousavian & Mousavian, 2018, p. 171; Eneyo, Talib, Attah, & Offiong, 2022, p. 206). Iran and Russia signed a contract in 1995 to complete Bushehr under IAEA supervision, but due to Iran's violation of the NPT, the United States asked Argentina, India, Spain, China, Germany, and France to halt their collaboration with Iran on the development of peaceful nuclear technologies, and finally, the US signed the Iran-Libya Sanctions in 1996 (Mousavian & Mousavian, 2018, p. 171). Concerns regarding Iran's nuclear program's potential military implications first surfaced in the early 2000s. A uranium enrichment plant in Natanz and a heavy-water manufacturing facility in Arak were both previously unknown nuclear facilities in Iran, according to the Iranian opposition group the

National Council of Resistance of Iran, which made the revelations in 2002 (Mousavian & Mousavian, 2018, p. 178; Eneyo et al., 2022, p. 203).

Following America's policies in the Middle East and preventing another war, Europe and America showed flexibility towards Iran and started diplomatic relations. As a result, only the IAEA relied on a report in July 2003 stating that Iran has developed the ability to enrich its uranium in conformity with the NPT (Mousavian & Mousavian, 2018, p. 171) and asked Iran to implement the Additional Protocol to its safeguards agreement and to halt all associated activities for an indefinite period. This resolution allowed for the highest level of transparency controls ever put in place by the agency (Mousavian & Mousavian, 2018, p. 171; Eneyo et al., 2022, p. 209). The EU3 committed to recognizing Iran's legal right to develop peaceful nuclear technology, eliminating the Iranian nuclear issue from the IAEA board's agenda, and enhancing political and economic ties with Iran (Mousavian & Mousavian, 2018, p. 172). With Bush's withdrawal from this agreement and the election of Ahmadinejad as president in 2005, this era of normal foreign policy also disappeared. The IRGC considered the nuclear program the most important national capital and legitimate to defend against the threats of America and Israel, and with the development of nuclear energy, it tries to introduce itself as a regional power; therefore, it did not adhere to any agreement during this period (Knepper, 2008; Borszik, 2014, p. 11; Eneyo et al., 2022).

However, the IAEA reported that Iran resumed uranium enrichment in Isfahan in 2005 and Natanz in January 2006. Therefore, the report was transmitted to the Security Council, which led to the formation of the 5+1 group (Borszik, 2014, p. 8; Mousavian & Mousavian, 2018, p. 172; Eneyo et al., 2022, p. 210). Despite the request to stop enrichment, Ahmadinejad also mentioned the continuation of activities at the Arak site, and the regime did not accept any appeasement regarding cooperation (Eneyo et al., 2022, p. 210). As a result, the UNCS approved several resolutions and imposed several sanctions against the regime, demanding the complete cessation of its heavy water and uranium enrichment programs (Borszik, 2014, p. 8; Mousavian & Mousavian, 2018, p. 177; Eneyo et al., 2022, p. 210). On the other hand, the US signed the Iran Freedom Support Act (IFSA), which targeted secondary sanctions against third parties in order to restrict any linkage with Iran in terms of financial, commercial, or technical support provided to Iranian people and entities involved in proliferation-

sensitive nuclear activities. But it is not surprising that the regime considered the sanctions as a justification for its promotion of the nuclear program plan, and Khamenei proudly mentioned the achievements of the regime during the sanctions period and emphasized the continuation of its ambitions. During Obama's administration, the regime started its activities in Natanz in 2010, which resulted in banking restrictions and trade embargoes that had a bearing on Iran's sectors for energy, finance, defense, transportation, and insurance (Borszik, 2014, p. 11). Obama did permit Brazil and Turkey to mediate in order to settle the dispute with Iran, but the US and Europe refused to accept the transfer of 1200 kg of Iranian LEU to Turkey for that country to acquire the 20 percent enriched uranium fuel, and the UNSC imposed an arms embargo and more stringent regulations on financial and transportation companies (Mousavian & Mousavian, 2018, p. 173).

Iran was subject to an oil embargo, sanctions against its central bank, and the introduction of two UN resolutions denouncing Iran's human rights and terrorism records in the fall of 2011 (Borszik, 2014, p. 14; Mousavian & Mousavian, 2018, p. 173). However, the costly nuclear programme was halted from 2011 to 2013 as a result of financial and oil sanctions imposed by the US and the EU (Borszik, 2014, p. 8). Moreover, one may say that the hardest period for sanctions against Iran was restrictions on Iranian oil, the Central Bank, and SWIFT access in 2011–2012 (Borszik, 2014, p. 16; Mousavian & Mousavian, 2018, p. 177).

At the same time, China and Russia intervened. On the other hand, Russia tried to present an agreement between the parties in which Iran was asked to reduce the amount of enrichment and stop the construction of centrifuges, and it asked the American and European sides too, by lifting the sanctions, to recognize Iran's right to have nuclear weapons, although with Ahmadineja's speech at the United Nations and his insistence on the right to access 20%, this agreement was not implemented (Mousavian & Mousavian, 2018, p. 173). On the other hand, by opposing sanctions, China tried to support Iran financially and politically, and sanctions provided the best opportunity for its economic interactions with Iran (Borszik, 2014, p. 16), which we will discuss more in the following sections. However, due to the difficult economic and political conditions in Iran following the failure of the nuclear negotiations, Khamenei blamed the Ahmadinejad government (Borszik, 2014, p. 18), and it might be a green light to change Iran's diplomacy towards the West.

The Rouhani government, which gained power with the trump card of the nuclear negotiations, tried to re-enter the field of foreign policy (Borszik, 2014; Mousavian & Mousavian, 2018, p. 178). It is worth mentioning that some crucial elements caused the West and the United States to welcome the resumption of negotiations with Iran: one was that the political complexities prevented them from reaching an agreement with Ahmadinejad; another was Rouhani himself, as he had already had experience in nuclear negotiations and knew the diplomacy language; he was also willing to accept the highest level of transparency and any unbiased guarantees to show that Iran's nuclear program would not be used to develop weapons. The third one was the election of Javad Zarif as the foreign minister, which could be considered a return to "pragmatism" in Iranian foreign policy. But perhaps the most important reason was Iran's regional influence, terrorism, refugees, and failure to stabilize the region, which convinced them that stability cannot be achieved without negotiation with Iran. Thus, a nuclear agreement might pave the way for diplomatic relations with Iran and bring stability to the region. All these elements helped the Iranian nuclear situation to be addressed diplomatically (Mousavian & Mousavian, 2018, p. 179).

Finally, with the signing of the JCPOA in 2015, a historic moment was reached for Iran, which was able to enter the international political and economic arena. And following the reasons mentioned for negotiating with Iran, the regime was able to achieve international legitimacy by lifting the sanctions. For instance, the regime demonstrated its commitment to resolving the dispute over its nuclear program by showing a willingness to negotiate with the international community and addressing their concerns about its nuclear activities. Under the terms of the JCPOA, Iran agreed to allow inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to monitor its nuclear facilities and verify its compliance with the agreement. And the JCPOA provided Iran with the opportunity to contribute to the cooperation to reduce the risk of spreading nuclear weapons in the Middle East (Mousavian & Mousavian, 2018, p. 181).

The lifting of sanctions provided a significant boost to Iran's economy, which had been struggling under the weight of international sanctions. This helped to improve living standards for ordinary Iranians and increase support for the regime among the population. However, this golden age did not last long for Iran. With the

Trump administration taking office, he called the JCPOA a bad agreement and unilaterally withdrew from it. He also had the strictest policy towards the Iranian regime, which was criticized for destabilizing the region (Mousavian & Mousavian, 2018, p. 182). Despite the regime's happiness over Trump's change, Raisi and Joe Biden's foreign policy remains clouded in doubt, and no diplomatic negotiations between the parties have occurred as of the writing of this dissertation. Ultimately, the Iranian nuclear issue and the sanctions have drawn the regime closer to strategic allies and increased Iran's prominence in the region.

3.1.4 Strategic Alliances

3.1.4.1 China

The survival of the Iranian regime has been significantly aided by China. China and Iran have a complex connection that includes multiple spheres of economics, politics, and strategy (Khanmohammadi & Sun, 2022, p. 37). Although China's policy against Iran is based on economic cooperation as a strategy to compete with the U.S. (Harold & Nader, 2012, p. 15), and it will be examined in the following section, other fields are also crucial, and in this chapter, we concentrate on their politics and strategy. Following the Iranian Revolution, Iran sought allies and support in the international community. In solidarity with the Iranian regime, China, a fellow non-Western nation, formally recognized the new authority. Their first alliance was based on their mutual resistance to Western influence, anti-imperialism, and anti-American hegemony. China's first strategic support for Iran occurred during the Iran-Iraq war, and it became Iran's most significant ally (, 2016). In 1981, when the U.S. decided to supply advanced fighter aircraft to Taiwan, China supported Iran by providing military equipment in order to counter the American presence in the region and to support Iraq. China agreed to a weapon deal in 1986 to supply HY-2 Silkworm anti-ship missiles, giving Iran the ability to successfully attack oil tankers cruising the Persian Gulf, and it pledged to provide the regime with an arsenal for manufacturing M-9 SSMs, which have a range of 600–900 km and 500 kg warheads. In 1990, China supplied Iran with the latest version of anti-ship missiles (van Kemenade, 2009, p. 46).

It is significant to notice that China's support has not been without self-interest and has ignored its own interests. When Iran reacted to America's presence in the Persian Gulf and attacked its positions, China suspended its sale to Iran. When China

provided Iran’s tanks and artillery as a swap, Iran supplied China with modern US-made aircraft, including the F-4 Phantom fighter and air-refueling technology, as well as Soviet arms it had acquired from Iraq. Although the United Kingdom and France requested a mandatory arms embargo against Iran and any other nation to disregard the "cease-fire", China and Russia denied it, but when China felt threatened by a direct conflict with America due to Iran's attacks on its positions in 1988, it asked Iran to accept the ceasefire as soon as possible. Iran had to accept it because the European nations and the Arab League unanimously criticized Iran, and its lone remaining ally, China, said that there were significant restrictions on its capacity to support Iran during a conflict (van Kemenade, 2009, p. 46).

On the other hand, one may say that supporting Iran is to increase bargaining power and leverage against American policies (Garver, 2016, p. 1). By examining America's policies towards countries like Taiwan, we can understand how China was able to put pressure on America by strengthening or stopping its cooperation with Iran. For instance, after the United States signed the largest arms supply agreement with Taiwan in 1992, China linked the supply of arms to Iran with this agreement. Furthermore, China threatened the United States that it would boycott the Security Council request on arms supplies to the Middle East unless the U.S. stopped the F-16 agreement with Taiwan, and Iran and China signed a new agreement for several nuclear power plants. An agreement for numerous nuclear power facilities was inked by Iran and China as well to push pressure on the U.S. A contract was signed in August 1996 for the purchase of $4.5 billion worth of weaponry and military hardware. But the 1995–1996 Taiwan Straits missile crisis ended, under which a great deal happened between the US and China; China committed to restrict the nuclear and missile sales to Iran, and the US committed to human rights and Taiwan. As a result, in May 1996, aid to nuclear power plants without adequate security was halted, and in November 1996, a contract to provide Iran with a uranium hexafluoride reactor was cancelled. Under the "Zangger Committee," in November 1997, it stopped selling Iran C-801 and C-802 cruise missiles and pledged to suspend working on any nuclear projects. Yet, according to a report, it was determined that between 1997 and 2004, China exported eleven cases of missile systems and products of chemical tools and technology to Iran, and China was subject to penalties because of this matter (van Kemenade, 2009, p. 57).

However, from a security and strategic standpoint, China's presence in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean appeals to Iran, although China prefers to advance it in a balanced and satisfactory format between Iran and its other regional partners, and the Sino-Iranian accord seeks to harmonize China-Iran relations with the rest of the Middle East and China's international outreach initiatives (Khanmohammadi & Sun, 2022). Moreover, Iran is interested in Chinese military innovations, including anti-ship cruise missiles, long-range air-to-air missiles, and sea mines, which were manufactured to compete with American systems, and Iran is likewise subject to China's policy of restricting the US's presence on its coast (Garver, 2016, p. 5).

Another reason that brings Iran and China closer to each other strategically is that both countries consider arms control agreements as a means to maintain their power and supremacy. But the difference is in the way the policies are implemented. While Iran feels threatened by the two nuclear powers in the region, namely Israel and the United States, and has had harsh rhetoric towards them, China has a balanced position, avoids any risky confrontation with the United States, and has a very close relationship with Israel (van Kemenade, 2009, p. 45). In fact, Tehran sees China as a superpower that has the potential to counteract American influence in the Middle East. In addition, it appears that Iranian leaders think China and Iran have a strong "tied" relationship, but China has not concentrated on its strategic relations with Tehran. The lack of a strategic partner and geopolitical rivalry with Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council appear to be the reasons behind the Iranian regime's emphasis on a strong strategic engagement with China (Harold & Nader, 2012, p. 5).

Furthermore, the Iranian regime benefits Chinese policy towards domestic security and its intensive monitoring of social media and restrictions on the internet as well (Garver, 2016, p. 5). This matter was highlighted in the regime's brutal suppression of the 2009 protests, when China provided Iran with control and suppression technology (Harold & Nader, 2012, p. 6), and in the last protests, it has provided facial recognition equipment to the regime. Yet all such strategic support can be implemented within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Garver, 2016, p. 5). On the other hand, diplomatic support has played a crucial role in Iran's survival. Following the US attack on Iraq and the reduction of US influence in the region, as well as the interruption of Iraq's oil supply, China had the opportunity to increase its influence as a security partner in the region and develop closer ties with

Saudi Arabia and Iran. The circumstances were favorable for Iran to acquire a strong ally and end its political isolation (Wehrey, Kaye, Watkins, Martini, & Guffey, 2010, p. 56).

Perhaps it can be said that the evolving international order is a factor in the rising cooperation between China and Iran. China has established international organizations in response to those run by the West and other countries. Developing nations, including China, Russia, Turkey, Iran, and Indonesia, have been compelled to modernize their alliances as a result of the decreasing influence of the West and the emergence of the "rest," such as the Iran-China relationship (Khanmohammadi & Sun, 2022, p. 29). As a result, Iran is pleased to be a party to bilateral agreements such as the 25-Year Strategic Cooperation Agreement with China and organizations like SCO, as it has an effect on their relations. Although the West and the United States are not satisfied with the signing of the recent agreement because it creates the framework for greater Chinese influence in the region and Iranian freedom of action, because they are well aware that Iran's stance towards China is a component of the regime's strategy to influence the region (Khanmohammadi & Sun, 2022, p. 33).

On the other hand, one may say that the regime knows China's importance to its survival. But it is essential to examine the source of this understanding and the trust in their strategic collaboration. As it has been mentioned before, Iran needs China to get rid of its isolation. The regime has been driven towards China due to international military, economic, and diplomatic pressures, and Iran relies on it as the regime's top political defender against both internal and external threats. One reason might be that the regime benefits from China's policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations, and more importantly, China is a trustworthy ally in fending off Western accusations of Iranian human rights violations since it shares the same concerns over democracy (Harold & Nader, 2012, p. 13). Even China's presence in the Gulf has been mostly motivated by its position as a "stakeholder state" that supports regime stability, by which no nation is bound (Wehrey et al., 2010, p. 55). It has prevented the nations in the region from feeling threatened by the shift in their government. In other words, political alignment plays a significant role in Sino-Iranian relations, as both share some common interests and perspectives on regional and global issues. Moreover, the dictatorial nature of both governments has brought them closer to each other (Harold & Nader, 2012, p. 13).

Another reason for the regime's trust in China was gaining international recognition for Iran's "right" to enrich uranium, which could prove its increasingly strong presence in the region (Garver, 2016, p. 1). Indeed, China was able to use this matter to persuade Iran to sign the nuclear agreement. Therefore, along with the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Russia, China was one of the six nations taking part in the negotiations with Iran. As the representative of the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany), China played an active role in the negotiations (Garver, 2016, p. China served as a mediator and "bridge builder" during the negotiations between Iran and the Western nations. However, China's performance in creating an agreement between the parties is related to its policy to prevent instability in the region because it knows very well what the consequences of any kind of conflict in the region will be and how it will affect the Chinese economy. In addition, with the lifting of sanctions against Iran, it can have more freedom of action for economic and strategic relations with Iran (Garver, 2016, p. 1).

Nevertheless, another political support of China is the use of veto. China has constantly supported Iran diplomatically on the international stage. It has defended Iran against harsher penalties and sanctions by using its position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Iran has benefited from China's backing in maintaining some political cover and legitimacy, particularly during periods of heightened tension with Western nations (Wehrey et al., 2010, p. 71; Khanmohammadi & Sun, 2022, p. 33). For instance, U.S. efforts to introduce a UN resolution against Iran were thwarted in 2006 by China and Russia, and China emphasized a diplomatic settlement to the dispute (Wehrey et al., 2010, p. 60). Last but not least, China's policy towards Saudi Arabia and Iran has played a significant role in the stability of the regime because the close ties between these two countries are in favor of the stability of the region and China (Garver, 2016, p. 6). The significance of this matter can be seen in China's most recent initiative to forge ties between Tehran and Riyadh. While it was hoped that the regime would be overthrown due to unprecedented isolation, China took an unexpected action to provide the conditions for the reconciliation of the two long-time enemies (The Economist, 2023).

3.1.4.2 Russia

It may be argued that the relationship between Iran and Russia has never entered into strategic cooperation (Therme, 2018, p. 549), and Iran has never been able to trust Russia due to their bitter past. But each party only supports each other to balance their requirements (Asisian, 2013, p. 5), and this matter is more crucial for an isolated Iran. Even because of an imbalance in their relations, the cooperation has not developed into a strategic partnership, but it might be classified as a tactical agreement based on shared geopolitical and economic goals (Asisian, 2013, p. 3; Therme, 2018, p. 553).

However, since the Persian Gulf War in 1991 (Tarock, 1997) and the end of the Cold War (Therme, 2018, p. 553), their relationship has been a critical component of international relations (Asisian, 2013, p. 2). Since then, various events have brought their relationship closer, which, ironically, has played a significant role in the durability of the Iranian regime. According to Adam Tarock, the warming of Russian and Iranian relations in the middle of the 1990s opened a new chapter in their turbulent history (Tarock, 1997, p. 215; Therme, 2018, p. 551). The shared enemy has served as the foundation for the two dictatorships' alliance. In other words, such an agreement is rooted in overcoming American dominance. Yet Russia's support was "pragmatic rather than systematic" (Therme, 2018, p. 551).

Russian Eurasianism and Iran's "Policy of Looking East" share goals such as maintaining autonomy in a growing unilateral global political framework and eliminating Western presence in the Caucasus, Central Asia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Persian Gulf (Asisian, 2013, p. 5). America's policy in Central Asia to build a gas pipeline and transfer it to Europe to isolate Moscow and Tehran brought these two countries closer together (Milani, 2007). It can be said that although both are competitors in the energy industry, the geopolitical issue has forced them to cooperate (Asisian, 2013, p. 9; Therme, 2018, p. 554) with each other, and this collaboration brings benefits for each of them.

Yet, the most crucial factors for Russia are energy, geopolitical dominance, modernity (Milani, 2007, p. 328), energy (Milani, 2007; Asisian, 2013), and the special geographical situation of Iran (Asisian, 2013, p. 9). Russia and Iran are both significant players in the global natural gas industry. Russia is the world's top producer and exporter of natural gas, whereas Iran has substantial reserves. Both countries fight for market share in similar markets, particularly in Europe and Asia. The Caspian Sea is

also rich in oil and gas resources, and both have vested interests in their development. As the global energy strategy is a part of Russia's foreign policy, by maintaining a favorable relationship, it hopes to prevent Iran from becoming a serious competitor in the energy sector (Tarock, 1997, p. 212; Therme, 2018, p. 553). Thanks to Iran's special position between two important geopolitical and energy areas, the race to control these hubs has significant strategic merit for Russia (Asisian, 2013, p. 9). Even ideologically, access to Iran helps Russia prevent any anti-Russian action by radicalism forces in the region, and even in Iran, Moscow was confident about Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia, saying that the regime has no intention of promoting Islamism, which was against Russia's stances, especially when Iran proved this matter in the Chechnya crisis. Iran took no action on the problem of the Russian assault on Chechnya and did not deem it a difference between Christianity and Islam but rather an internal issue of Russia. Thus, Moscow strengthened its ties with the regime and appreciated its non-ideological approach to Central Asia (Tarock, 1997, p. 214).

On the other hand, Russia needed to regain its lost power in the region after the Cold War; as a result, since 1993, it has increased its relations with the countries in the region (Tarock, 1997, p. 219), and thanks to its traditionalist ideology with its anti-western and revisionist elements, its appeal in the regions has increased, where Moscow illustrates itself as the safeguard of nationality and stability (Therme, 2018, p. 559). Iran was also the most crucial part of its national interest, especially to maintain the security of its southern part. Thus, the relationship with Tehran can be considered to confront America and expand power in the region (Asisian, 2013, p. 11; Therme, 2018, p. 562).

Moreover, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's need for foreign currency prompted it to cooperate with Iran in nuclear power plant construction in Bushehr and arms sales (Tarock, 1997, p. 219), but with its increasing ability to supply energy and earn money, it has utilized Iran's nuclear program as an instrument of diplomacy with the West (Tarock, 1997, p. 210; Milani, 2007, p. 331; Therme, 2018) to illustrate that it is a tactful mediator in Middle Eastern political disputes. Yet, we should not forget that Russia always considers its own interests and is not willing to sacrifice itself to support Iran wherever it has deemed necessary (Therme, 2018, p. 553). For instance, it refused to continue cooperation at the Bushehr nuclear centre on the pretext of non-payment (Milani, 2007, p. 331).

It is worth mentioning that Russia's cooperation has played a significant role in the regime's durability. Firstly, Iran requires powerful countries in order to overcome its political isolation, particularly those that have a political understanding of it. By promoting Western democratization following the modernization of the world (Milani, 2007, p. 328), Russia and Iran are worried about regime change in their neighbourhood, and both are sensitive to the "colour revolutions" (Therme, 2018, p. 559). As a result, Iran is confident that Russia would oppose a regime transition. The model of "Russian democracy" makes it a perfect partner for Iran's totalitarian regime (Milani, 2007, p. 328). It is also crucial to know that Russia has been considered a key "black- knight," which supports authoritarian regimes in certain cases by using various means to bolster their governments. This support can include economic aid, diplomatic backing, military assistance, counterbalancing Western influence, and other forms of cooperation (Galtung, 1967; Levisky &Way, 2010). As a result, Iran benefits from such support for its resilience.

Secondly, the lack of a trusted, strong supporter vis-à-vis American pressures, developing nuclear ambitions, and accessing advanced weapons are other reasons that have pushed Iran towards Russia's arm (Tarock, 1997, p. 207; Therme, 2018, p. 560), and Russia is considered the largest supplier of weapons in Iran (Wehrey et al., 2010, p. 70). Thirdly, defense assistance allows Iran to be at ease in the face of any attack, particularly from Israel's old enemy (Tarock, 1997). Fourth, Russia has been an ally of Iran in the international arena. It has supported Iran on key issues, including its controversial nuclear program, and has used its veto power in the United Nations Security Council to block or water down resolutions targeting Iran. This matter helped Iran buy time to reach the enrichment stage, and the IAEA confirmed that the regime could pass the "point of no return" (Milani, 2007, p. 331). Furthermore, in 2015, Russia played a vital role in negotiating the JCPOA between Iran and the P5+1 countries. By supporting the deal, Russia helped mitigate the economic pressure on Iran and contributed to the regime's stability (Garver, 2016).

Last but not least, regional cooperation has played a crucial role in the regime's survival. And according to the regime, this collaboration hinders the influence of regional players like Turkey and Israel, as well as global players such as NATO, in Central Asia and the Caucasus (Asisian, 2013, p. 9), and by balancing off US dominance, Moscow can provide Iran's national security and substantial trade in the

region (Tarock, 1997, p. 217). Furthermore, Tehran's ambitions do not stop with the Middle East and Central Asia. Rather, it aims to expand its influence in Eurasia with the assistance of Moscow (Asisian, 2013, p. 9). However, the invasion of Iraq and the war in Syria brought the two countries closer together and paved the way for Iran to become a powerful regional actor (Wehrey et al., 2010, p. 71; Therme, 2018, p. 559). And this issue is consistent with Iran's goal to cooperate with Russia as a way to become a regional power (Therme, 2018, p. 555).

The presence in Syria is more vital for the Mullahs because of its proximity to Israel, and Russia's support for a larger presence in Syria has played a crucial role in the regime's survival. They supported the regime of Bashar al-Assad, and both have provided military assistance to Asad's government, helping it withstand rebel and extremist groups. This alliance has reinforced Iran's influence in the region and contributed to its regional stability. And even though cooperation between Iran and Russia is a war on terrorism, notably "Sunni jihadist groups", both claim that the West's support for terrorist groups is a permanent element of its regional policy (Therme, 2018, p. 557). With Russia's support, Iran has been able to establish its "Islamic hegemony" in the Middle East (Milani, 2007) under the guise of combating ISIS and other extremist groups and preventing the impact of America and the West, and the external assistance became more crucial for the regime when it lost its credibility among the Arabs due to supporting Assad (Therme, 2018, p. 555). One may say that the first military collaboration between the two countries occurred in 2015, when Russia launched missiles at Syria from the Caspian Sea. For about a year, Iran maintained the presence of Russian forces and jets at the "Nowzheh Air Base" in Hamadan. And the reward of this military support was receiving the S-300 missile (Therme, 2018, p. 556), which was part of the 2006 military contract worth 7 million dollars (Asisian, 2013, p. 14).

Overall, Russia has helped the Iranian regime survive by providing diplomatic support, economic cooperation, a nuclear deal, defense assistance, and regional cooperation. And it seems that while the regime perceives its relationship with Russia as strategic, Russia defines it as a tactical corporation based on mutual economic and geopolitical objectives (Asisian, 2013, p. 3; Therme, 2018, p. 549).

3.2 External Economic Performance

The external economic performance of Iran has been shaped by a combination of factors, including its abundant natural resources, its strategic location, its economic policies, including commercial cooperation and foreign investments, and external factors such as sanctions. Iran's economy required major rehabilitation following the war, and the regime began establishing economic links with the rest of the world in various ways in an effort to end political isolation. Despite facing significant economic challenges, Iran has been able to maintain a relatively stable external economic performance, although this has been subject to fluctuations over time, and one may say that it learned well that it could survive against the leverage of external pressure with the aid of international support through strategic and regional partners.

However, before examining its economic performance, it may be better to analyze its geopolitical situation. Iran occupies an excellent position in the global system as a result of its geographic location and abundant natural resources (Eneyo et al., 2022, p. 214). Iran's location as the sixth-largest country at the crossroads of the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia has also given it an important geo-strategic position concerning Eurasia. Eurasia is the largest continent and is home to several major powers, including China, Russia, and India. It is also home to several significant energy reserves, including oil and natural gas. Iran's location between these major powers and energy sources in the Caspian Sea has made it an important transit point for trade and energy flows between Europe and Asia. Since the Caspian Sea is the "largest lake on earth" and is positioned between four geopolitical zones (Iran in the south, Russia and Slovakia in the north, Central Asia in the east, and Caucasia in the west), access to it has become strategically significant. Furthermore, since this area is landlocked, the most logical way to transfer natural resources is to use pipelines; thus, controlling their path is crucial for superpowers, especially China and the US (Naji, 2011).

On the other hand, its situation in the Persian Gulf is exceptional; Iran controls 1375 km of the Persian Gulf's coastline, from Bandar-Abbas’s harbour to the Faw peninsula (Naji, 2011, p. 165; Yazdani & Yanzhe, 2022, p. 32), accounting for 45.3% of the total coastline. Iran also controls the largest islands in the Persian Gulf, and 30 of the 130 islands in the Persian Gulf are Iranian territory (Yazdani & Yanzhe, 2022, p. 32). While Khark is home to the most significant oil export hub, Hormuz has provided a significant position as one of the key routes for the export, import, and

transfer of energy resources from the East to the West. There is also a famous perspective in geopolitical studies that any state that controls three straits, namely the Bab-el-Mandeb, Hormuz, and Malacca, may dominate the world (Naji, 2011, p. 167; Yazdani & Yanzhe, 2022, p. 34). Even Hormuz is seen as the key to the Indian Ocean, and acquiring control of the Indian Ocean is dependent on winning control of the Hormuz Strait (Naji, 2011, p. 167). Iran, therefore, holds the sole position for the transfer of energy resources via access to the open seas from its north and south. "The Persian Gulf owns over 65% of the world's oil, and it has approximately 30% of the world's total natural gas reserves. Iran has the highest share, with 12.9%, while the other neighbouring nations produce only 3.5% of useful gas." (Naji, 2011, p. 167). And due to its enormous deposits of oil and gas, the Persian Gulf is seen as the "world's oil store" (Yazdani & Yanzhe, 2022, p. 32).

It is worth mentioning that Iran is the world's energy hub, with associated infrastructure for oil and gas pipelines (Naji, 2011, p. 162), and Iran is the best route for Central Asian energy exports. Through a swap agreement with Iran, Kazakh oil and Turkmen gas are transported to Northern Iran via pipeline (Hunter, 2003, p. 143; Begjanov, 2021, p. 71), and Iran's pipelines pairing the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf are the most direct, secure, and efficient ones and can provide Caspian Sea oil to worldwide markets, particularly Japan and the Far East with the largest demand for energy (Naji, 2011, p. 164). Apart from its strategic location and access to unique natural resources, Iran's economic policies involve commercial cooperation and foreign investment, with a primary focus on China, Turkey, and Central Asia. Although it has faced significant barriers due to sanctions, this policy has played a crucial role in bypassing the sanctions as well. China and Iran have a long-standing economic partnership that has grown in recent years due to mutual interests in energy, infrastructure, and trade. Iran's major trading partner is China, and energy is a key area of cooperation with this superpower, to which Iran exports crude oil and petrochemicals (Harold & Nader, 2012, p. 26; Khanmohammadi & Sun, 2022, p. 28), especially methanol, and receives low-quality consumer goods (Borszik, 2014, p. 16). Iran's economy's dependence on China is not constrained to the energy industry; Iran collaborates with China in other industries by signing numerous agreements, saving in the energy sector, including participation in exploration and extraction operations, developing Azadegan and Yadavaran natural resources, collaborating, and investing

in infrastructure development such as tunnels, dams, railroads, and bridges, like Tehran Metro and Mashhad Metro, and constructing the world's largest dam in Lorestan (Harold & Nader, 2012, p. 11).

Contracts such as the 25-year contract or being a part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) can also be mentioned to stress the two countries' strong relationship. The latter aims to expand infrastructural connections and increase trade across Asian, European, and African countries, and Iran remains a significant partner for BRI. The Chinese government's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known as One Belt, One Road (OBOR), is a large-scale infrastructure and investment project begun in 2013. The program intends to promote connectivity and economic cooperation among Asian, European, and African countries through infrastructure investments such as roads, railroads, ports, and energy initiatives. The BRI is divided into two parts: the land-based "Belt" route that connects China to Europe via Central Asia and the Middle East, and the marine "Road" route that connects China to Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. Iran is an important participant in the BRI due to its strategic location (Khanmohammadi & Sun, 2022, p. 28) at the crossroads of the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia. Moreover, the 25-year strategic cooperation plan is linked to BRI, under which China has pledged to invest $400 billion in Iran's energy and infrastructure industries over the next 25 years (Fassihi & Myers, 2021; Khanmohammadi & Sun, 2022, p. 30). The agreement also includes collaboration in the domains of trade and commerce, military, and defense, as well as strategic cooperation and mutual support in international and regional organizations, with the goal of creating a power arrangement (Khanmohammadi & Sun, 2022, p. 30). In return, Iran provides China with an incredible discount (Fassihi & Myers, 2021; Khanmohammadi & Sun, 2022, p. 35) and with the condition of each six-month payment (Khanmohammadi & Sun, 2022, p. 29). However, Iran is considered a safe supplier of energy for China (Harold & Nader, 2012, p. 18). On the other hand, in order to achieve economic rehabilitation and growth after the war, a crucial aspect of Iran's economic policy was to strengthen economic and trade ties with its neighbours, especially with Central Asian countries. Iran's geographic location and capacity to provide land, rail, and sea exits for the landlocked Central Asian countries are among its primary benefits and have assisted in its development of relations with the region as well (Hunter, 2003, p. 143).

Iran had the opportunity to engage in economic cooperation through the ECO and holds membership in the organization of the Caspian Sea littoral (Mesbahi, 2010, p. 125; Naji, 2011, p. 162), and we can divide its relationship with Central Asia into three sectors: transit linkages, investment, and energy (Mesbahi, 2010, p. 125). In terms of energy, Central Asian and Caucasus countries, including Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia, which are lacking in energy sources, benefit from Iran's energy supply (Hunter, 2003, p. 144). Turkmenistan and Iran have strong economic ties, particularly in the energy, pipeline, and strategic transportation sectors (Mesbahi, 2010; Naji, 2011, p. 160). Under a swap agreement, Turkmenistan sold oil to Iran's refineries through the Iranian port of Neka in exchange for Tehran exporting comparable amounts of its oil at Turkmenistan's request. This country exported oil to Iran using a range of transportation methods like railways, marine vessels, and pipelines, which operate between Neka and Rey (Begjanov, 2021, p. 73). There is a pipeline that has been set up to convey gas from Turkmenistan to the north of Iran (Hunter, 2003, p. 143).

A swap agreement with Iran allowed Kazakhstan's oil to be exported (Hunter, 2003, p. 143; Mesbahi, 2010, p. 124), and by agreeing on an oil-sharing agreement, Iran and Kazakhstan were able to enhance their bilateral ties. The construction of a pipeline spanning 400 kilometres from Neka to Tehran facilitated an increase in oil swaps, thus enabling Kazakhstan to boost its swap oil production from the Neka oil terminal. As part of its most substantial commercial relationship with Iran, Kazakhstan entered the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), which gives it access to the Mediterranean, Persian Gulf, and Oman maritime lanes (Kooalee, Ebrahimi, & Shirazi Mougouee, 2014, p. 97). It is worth mentioning that Tehran has invested unilaterally in the construction of oil terminals and pipelines as part of its swap strategy to get around the US's removal of Iran from the pipeline and energy transit corridors (Mesbahi, 2010, p. 124).

On the other hand, Iran made significant investments in the 1990s to extend its rail network to Central Asia's frontiers, such as the opening of the Mashad-Sarakhs-Tedzhen train or a weekly rail service between Almaty in Kazakhstan and Tehran in 2002 as a result of an agreement to resurrect the Silk Road within the context of the Economic Cooperation Organization. Iran is also a crucial component in the creation of a known north-south transit corridor that connects Russia to India. Furthermore,

Iran agreed to improve Uzbekistan's logistics network, enabling goods to be sent to China via the Persian Gulf and Iran by Uzbekistan (Hunter, 2003, p. 146). However, developing transit connections with Central Asia can be seen as an important aspect of Iran's multilateralism in the region. It happens through an expanded Caspian Sea shipping line and, more significantly, through the railroad with Turkmenistan, which means Sarakhs-Tezhen (Mesbahi, 2010, p. 125). It is not surprising if we know that after Khatami's comment during her visit to Kazakhstan regarding the warning of American presence in the region, America did not allow Iran to have more presence in Central Asia (Hunter, 2003, p. 146).

As an intelligence policy of Iran, it utilizes multilateralism such as ECO and triangulation mechanisms in the region including Iran-Turkmenistan-Armenia, Iran-Greece-Armenia, Iran-Turkmenistan-India, Iran-Georgia-Armenia, Iran-Ukraine-Turkmenistan, which serve a threefold purpose: firstly, they aim to establish a network of cross-border relations that can contribute to Iran's economic growth; secondly, they reinforce Iran's position as a valuable member of the international community; and thirdly, they resist attempts to isolate Iran, making it difficult for anti-Iranian security alliances to form and containment strategies to become impractical or unworkable, and Iran is seeking to balance potential regional challenges and factor them into its broader geopolitical calculations (Mesbahi, 2010, p.125). The turning point of Iran's economic policy in the region can be Turkey, which has played a significant role in Iran's international support.

The relationship between Turkey and Iran started a new phase after two decades of hostile diplomatic relations due to the rise of the AKP and its "zero-problems" stance towards its neighbours (Flanagan, 2013, p. 164; Akbarzadeh & Barry, 2017, p. 983), aimed as a vehicle for "inter-regional" economic collaboration and preserving security (Akbarzadeh & Barry, 2017, p. 983). Along with the geopolitical changes in the region, such as the Iraq invasion, the Kurdistan issue, and the war against terrorism on the shared borders, trade and investment have taken the lead in fostering better ties between the two nations. Furthermore, it may be argued that the main reason for Iran's economic relationship with Turkey is to get rid of the isolation caused by sanctions and Turkey's need for Iran's natural resources (Habibi, 2012, p. 4; Akbarzadeh & Barry, 2017, p. 983). But it is significant to notice that economic relations mostly began in the 1990s and sought to bring trade back to former

levels and only slightly increase it. During the Refah Party, Turkey and Iran concluded two important commercial agreements in 1996: one was a long-term natural gas supply agreement and gas pipeline building plan worth US$23 billion, and another was a commitment to grow bilateral commerce in goods to a value of US$2.5 billion annually (Calabrese, 1998, p. 83).

Moreover, Iran's investment in Turkey and travel are two main sectors of economic connections. In 2011, Iran was Turkey's major crude oil supplier, and Iran is Turkey's second-largest natural gas supplier behind Russia (Habibi, 2012, p. 4; Flanagan, 2013, p. 170). The value of Turkey's imports from Iran between 2004 and 2011 was almost six times greater (Habibi, 2012), and the volume of bilateral trade expanded significantly between 2000 and 2011 (Flanagan, 2013, p. 170). With the increasing economic ties between Iran and the UAE, which surged in 2008, and following the pressure of the United States on this country to sever ties with Iran, Iran's investment and trade flowed to China and Turkey. Therefore, numerous private and legal individuals aspired to invest in real estate and launch businesses in Turkey; thus, they were able to utilize their presence in Turkey to conduct trade and gain access to the global markets, particularly those in Europe. Türkiye invested in Iran as well, especially in the real estate sector, among which we can mention the projects of "Ozal Investment Group" (Habibi, 2012, p. 7). On the other hand, the tourism industry of Turkey has grown significantly with the increase in the number of Iranian tourists to this country, especially with the introduction of "visa-free travel" following April 2011 (Flanagan, 2013, p. 170), and only in 2010 did 2.7 million Iranians travel to Turkey (Habibi, 2012, p. 4).

However, thanks to the common border, their economic relations have increased significantly even during the sanctions. To improve trade with the nearby Van province in Turkey, Iran removed its customs restrictions in East Azerbaijan province in 2009. In order to handle the expanding flow of people and commodities between the two nations, a third border crossing (the Razi-Kapi Koy crossing) was opened in 2010. The two nations also decided to create a joint industrial zone in Iran near Makou the same year. Furthermore, many Turkish businesses are present in Tabriz, where they are able to benefit from the cheaper production costs there. By March 2012, Turkish companies made up half of all foreign investors in Tabriz's

Foreign Investment Zone between April 2009 and March 2010, as well as by March 2012 (Habibi, 2012, p. 7).

Although the pattern of direct foreign investment in Iran from 1993 to 2002 showed that the country had success in luring capital, what is important is that due to the sanctions, the unwillingness of the regime to invest in Iran, and its reliance on oil, the regime has lost exceptional opportunities to attract this important industry (Flanagan, 2013, p. 170; Firouzabadi, 2009, p. 121). Nevertheless, oil and gas resources contribute significantly to Iran's economy and have historically been critical to the country's economic performance. As a result, the West and the US have always imposed the most severe oil sanctions as a lever of pressure on the regime, but it has undertaken numerous attempts to bypass the economic sanctions with foreign support (Habibi, 2012, p. 5).

3.2.1 International Support for Bypassing Sanctions

International support for bypassing sanctions involves countries or entities that are willing to trade with Iran in violation of the sanctions imposed by the international community. If we look at China as Iran's biggest shield against sanctions, we may notice the regime's strong dependence on it. During the sanctions, China acted as a "sanctions buster" with an economic incentive (Borszik, 2014, p. 16). And of course, China also enjoys its influence in Iran and access to huge natural resources. This country has economic cooperation with Iran through various agreements, which have already been mentioned, and even facilitates the conditions for banks that do business with Iran. Although fewer banks can now serve Iran due to American pressure in recent years, In terms of fuel importing, China supported the Iranian regime by expanding fuel shipments via entities like Zhuhai Zhenrong and by assisting Iran in growing its refining abilities, which has made a significant contribution to reducing the regime’s dependence on fuel imports (Harold & Nader, 2012, p. 11). And due to sanctions, Iran is unable to access the developed technology required to liquefy natural gas, which has limited its ability to sell gas. But China provided Iran's energy sector with crucial foreign funding. Even while other suppliers were forced to suspend their services, China continued to supply gasoline to Iran (Downs & Maloney, 2011, p. 16). Furthermore, since few countries have been willing to buy Iranian oil, China is

considered the most reliable customer of Iran and provides its oil at the lowest price (Harod & Nader, 2012, p. 21; Borszik, 2014, p. 16).

One may say that investing in the energy sector by Chinese companies such as "China National Petroleum Corporation, Sinopec, and China National Off-Shore Oil Corpora", can be seen as betting on a reliable oil supply for the future. Investing in transportation as a non-energy investment is another way in which China supports the regime. Iran's rail system is being expanded by China as well, which is assisting Iran's reintegration into regional markets. A train connecting the western Chinese province of Xinjiang to Iran via Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Afghanistan is the negotiation that Iran and China discussed (Harold & Nader, 2012, p. 11).

The Sino-Iranian connection goes beyond energy and investment. China is already one of Iran's top commercial partners because of its active marketplaces for consumer items including electronics, auto parts, toys, and even Islamic head scarves; mining; transportation; and power generation (Downs & Maloney, 2011, p. 18). One of the support methods has been replacing the yuan payment system with the dollar, which was implemented in 2012 for importing oil (Mousavian & Mousavian, 2018), which is considered completely detrimental to Iran from an economic point of view. For example, for Yuan deposits caused by the export of oil cheaper than the world price, Iranian banks had to pay interest to the Chinese state bank, and these deposits could only be utilized to pay higher than typical costs for "third-class" Chinese goods (Borszik, 2014, p.16).

Moreover, by establishing a system of barter to exchange Iranian oil for products and services, China is assisting Iran in maintaining its economy in the interim and enabling Tehran to evade U.S. sanctions. China likewise seems to be benefiting from the EU's embargo against Iran by purchasing Iranian oil at substantial discounts (Harold & Nader, 2012, p. 12). In any case, China is not the only country that has helped the government reduce the economic pressures caused by sanctions; Turkey has played a complex and dynamic role in this matter. Despite occasionally having differences and experiencing tensions over matters like Iran's nuclear program and its backing of militant groups in the region, Turkey and Iran have historically maintained diplomatic and economic connections (Habibi, 2012, p. 2; Flanagan, 2013, p. 171). Turkey's interest in continuing some level of collaboration with Iran has also been influenced by the country's proximity and shared border with it (Habibi, 2012, p. 3).

On the one hand, Turkey has also been a significant ally of the US and other Western nations, and it has attempted to strike a balance between its interests in these conflicting forces and its needs. This country has expressed support for the international community's attempts to handle Iran's backing for extremist organizations in the region as well as efforts to address Iran's nuclear program through diplomatic negotiations (Akbarzadeh & Barry, 2017, p. 983). But in the meantime, it utilizes economic cooperation as a way to avoid tension with Iran (Flanagan, 2013, p. 169). Yet, Turkish politics at home have also had an impact on the country's stance on Iran. With a foreign policy strategy that emphasizes Turkey's Islamic identity and independence from Western powers, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) has worked to establish Turkey as a regional force. This has occasionally resulted in conflicts with the US and other Western nations over matters like Syria and Turkey's human rights record. But we should not forget that even with such disputes, Turkey does not risk its position with America for some reasons, such as its membership in NATO, through which Turkey can enjoy American military technology, receiving a variety of financial support from the US during its economic recessions, and receiving security support through US nuclear technology (Habibi, 2012, p. 6).

On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, Ankara's need for natural resources and Tehran's need to escape the isolation caused by sanctions encouraged both countries to establish an economic relationship (Akbarzadeh & Barry, 2017, p. 983). Turkey kept importing oil from Iran. As a result, Iran has been able to continue to make money from oil exports, albeit at a lower level compared to before the sanctions were imposed. Interestingly, trade cooperation grew significantly during the sanctions, especially in Ahmadinejad’s administration (Akbarzadeh & Barry, 2017, p. 982). And one may claim that preserving the stability of Turkish-Iranian relations is crucial for the peace and prosperity of the Middle East (Calabrese, 1998, p. 75). Perhaps for this reason, despite the two nations' economic interactions, America and the West occasionally disregard these supports.

Thanks to the common borders, the Iranian regime benefits from smuggling cargo, particularly machinery and parts, which are crucial for its industry but are not able to be imported legally due to the sanctions (Habibi, 2012, p. 5). In addition, because the Iranian central bank served as a "clearing house for oil sales", sanctions against it in 2011 had a significant negative impact on the economy (Harold & Nader,

2012, p. 9). When other European banks shut off their business with Iran, only the Turkish bank stood by the government. Halkbank, a Turkish state-owned bank, has been connected to a plan to assist Iran in evading US sanctions. On behalf of Iran, the bank is said to have enabled transactions totaling billions of dollars, including payments for gold purchases and Iranian oil export payments (Habibi, 2012, p. 6). US prosecutors claim that Halkbank played a central role in a scheme to help Iran escape US sanctions by receiving Iranian oil payments through the bank and masking the deals as humanitarian trade. According to the allegations, the plan used front firms and fictitious paperwork to make it seem like the transactions were legal (United States Attorney's Office, 2023).

Furthermore, Iranians registering firms in Turkey is one of the ways that Iran and Turkey have commercial ties, as was noted in the previous section, because Turkey provides them access to the global market (Habibi, 2012, p.5). It is worth mentioning that the pressure from the international community has increased the risks involved in conducting business with Iran and made it more challenging for Turkish businesses and banks to do so. And Turkey's capacity and willingness to assist Iran in circumventing the sanctions seem to be constrained, particularly as it attempts to strike a balance between its own interests and those of the international community (Habibi, 2012).

3.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, international cooperation has played a significant role in the survival of the Iranian regime, providing it with various forms of support and legitimacy. The regime has been able to leverage international legitimacy through its participation in international organizations, such as the United Nations, and its engagement in diplomatic efforts, such as the nuclear deal. These avenues have allowed the regime to present itself as a responsible actor on the global stage, thereby bolstering its domestic legitimacy and maintaining its grip on power. Soft power has also played a crucial role in the regime's survival. Through cultural diplomacy, Iran has sought to project its influence and shape international narratives in its favor. This has been done through avenues such as the promotion of Persian literature, cinema, and cultural exchanges. By cultivating positive perceptions and fostering cultural ties

with other nations, Iran has sought to counterbalance negative portrayals and challenge the isolation imposed by sanctions.

Strategic allies, particularly China and Russia, have provided the Iranian regime with political and economic support. These alliances have granted Iran access to critical resources, technology, and markets, allowing it to mitigate the impact of economic sanctions and maintain its resilience. Moreover, the strategic partnerships with China and Russia have provided Iran with diplomatic backing, shielding it from international isolation and potential intervention.

The nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), played a crucial role in providing the Iranian regime with economic relief and international recognition. Under the agreement, Iran agreed to limit its nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief and increased economic engagement with the international community. By adhering to the terms of the deal, the regime was able to regain access to frozen assets and resume oil exports, which significantly boosted its economic performance and stability.

External economic performance and international support for bypassing sanctions have also contributed to the regime's resilience. Despite facing stringent economic sanctions imposed by the United States and other countries, Iran has sought alternative trade routes and financial mechanisms with supportive nations. This has allowed the regime to sustain its economy, provide for its population, and maintain a degree of stability amidst external pressures. Overall, international cooperation, encompassing elements of international legitimacy, strategic alliances, participation in international organizations, the nuclear deal, and economic support, has been instrumental in the survival of the Iranian regime. By leveraging these avenues, Iran has managed to navigate the challenges posed by sanctions and external pressure, ensuring its continued resilience and ability to sustain its grip on power.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study of authoritarianism is highly valued in the modern world. Examining the causes, signs, and consequences of authoritarianism can help researchers, politicians, and activists struggle to defend democracy and develop strategies to address the issues caused by authoritarian governments. The evaluation of this phenomenon matters for several reasons. The first is the development of authoritarianism globally. There has been a noticeable increase in the number of nations where authoritarianism is on the rise. In many regions of the world, leaders with authoritarian tendencies have come to power, challenging democratic norms and institutions. The urgency to comprehend and examine the origins, traits, and effects of authoritarian governments has been increased by this pattern. The second one is seen as a threat to democracy: authoritarianism is an extreme danger to democratic institutions and values, according to the list of risks to democracy. The democratic government can be threatened by the deterioration of civil freedoms, repression of the opposition, control of the media, and concentration of power in the hands of a select few. Identification of these dangers and the development of potential countermeasures are both aided by research on authoritarianism. The analysis of authoritarianism aids in recognizing these dangers and offers suggestions for possible defenses for democratic institutions. Matters for human rights are the third. Authoritarian governments frequently infringe on these rights, which results in the repression, surveillance, censorship, and persecution of individuals or marginalized groups. Researchers and human rights activists can better comprehend these breaches by studying authoritarianism, which enables them to spread awareness, push for change, and aid impacted people. Impact on Global Stability: Authoritarian countries' actions and policies can have a significant impact outside of their borders. They have the power to sabotage international pacts, pursue aggressive foreign policies, or threaten local stability. In order to advance peace, cooperation, and stability on a global scale, analysts can better foresee and address these difficulties by analyzing authoritarianism. Consequences for international stability can be seen as the fourth reason: Authoritarian regimes can have a significant impact outside of their own borders through their acts and policies. They may sabotage global alliances, pursue aggressive foreign policies, or threaten local stability. Analysts who research authoritarianism are better able to foresee and address these issues, fostering global stability, coexistence, and peace. And

finally, technological developments: the way authoritarian regimes maintain control and repress dissent has changed as a result of technology. Authoritarian leaders are using surveillance technologies, internet restrictions, and social media abuse more and more frequently. To tackle these new issues and create solutions to safeguard people's freedoms and privacy, it is important to comprehend how technology and authoritarianism interact.

But what mechanisms non-democratic regimes utilize to advance their objectives and how these instruments help them persist is very important to study this phenomenon. These regimes employ a range of domestic tactics, such as legitimacy, co-optation, and repression, to maintain power. Legitimacy, which can be derived from factors such as revolutionary ideology, cultural identity, or economic performance, provides a veneer of popular support for non-democratic regimes and is often used to justify repression and other forms of political control. And institutions are crucial in this scenario under which elections can be held. One may say that elections play a complicated function and are often linked to democratic systems, but authoritarian regimes frequently utilize them to legitimize their authority and keep up the appearance of popular support.

In these situations, the ruling authority frequently influences and regulates elections to achieve predetermined results. The media is censored, voters are intimidated, opposition candidates are restricted, and other tactics are used to rig the election in the existing regime's favor. The fundamental tenets of free and fair elections are undercut by this manipulation since it restricts or suppresses real political competition and meaningful options. Despite these frauds, dictatorships frequently assert their legitimacy through the simple fact that elections exist. Even though the reality may be far from actual democratic processes, they offer these controlled elections as proof of public engagement and a sign of their dedication to democratic norms. Authoritarian leaders use this in an effort to feign popular support and legitimize their rule on a national and worldwide level. The legitimacy granted by fraudulent elections is only temporary and does not truly allow voters to freely express their preferences, nor do they guarantee accountability or the respect of human rights.

Co-optation as another mechanism is essential for non-democratic regimes to sustain their existence and increase their level of control. Authoritarians actively stifle any resistance by selectively incorporating individuals or groups into the established

power structure. This strengthens their dominance. Co-optation can be accomplished via a variety of tactics, including financial incentives, positions of power or privilege, and the extension of patronage networks. These strategies try to enlist people who could oppose the regime through their resources, influence, or social support. By enticing them with benefits or incorporating them into the ruling elite, non-democratic regimes create a sense of vested interest and dependence among those co-opted. Through co-optation, authoritarian regimes effectively undermine internal dissent and fracture opposition coalitions.

In order to suppress dissent and uphold social control, repression—possibly the most obvious and coercive mechanism—involves the use of force, censorship, monitoring, and control over institutions. Authoritarian governments use methods to silence dissent and keep an atmosphere of fear alive, including arbitrary detentions, media manipulation, speech restrictions, and intimidation. These internal mechanisms, however, come at a cost to human rights, democracy, and social cohesion. Even though they may enable authoritarian regimes to survive in the short term, consistent use of repression combined with a lack of open communication and responsibility can eventually result in social unrest, instability, and long-term difficulties for the regime.

International cooperation is important for the survival of non-democratic regimes and the establishment of linkages among them. While promoting human rights and democratic values is often connected with international collaboration, it can also unintentionally help authoritarian regimes survive and last for a long time. International collaboration is frequently sought after by non-democratic governments to increase their legitimacy, garner financial backing, or forge political ties. They try to show a front of acceptance and give the impression that they are well-recognized abroad by interacting with other nations and international organizations. As a result, they may be protected from outside pressure and criticism, furthering the legitimacy of their authority.

Moreover, international cooperation can inadvertently provide tools, resources, or expertise that improve the ability of non-democratic governments to maintain power. Trade pacts, business alliances, and foreign investment can help the dictatorship maintain economic stability while strengthening its hold on power. Additionally, the regime's capacity to stifle dissent and crush opposition may be improved through the exchange of security-related intelligence or military support.

The role of linkage among non-democratic regimes is also noteworthy. Authoritarian states can support one another, gain legitimacy, and be protected from outside threats by working together and forming alliances. Political allegiances, business collaborations, or common intellectual frameworks can all lead to linkages. These regimes can withstand outside opposition and perpetuate their rule by uniting behind a stronger collective voice.

Nevertheless, it's mandatory to recognize that international cooperation can also act as a spark for responsibility and change. International actors can put pressure on non-democratic regimes to uphold fundamental rights and values by supporting civil society organizations, promoting democratic norms, and advancing human rights standards. International cooperation can be used to facilitate democratic reforms and advance transparency through dialogue, diplomatic negotiations, and conditional aid. The effect of international collaboration on the survival of non-democratic regimes is a complicated and dynamic issue. gives chances for international actors to exercise influence and strive for constructive change, even while it may unintentionally strengthen authoritarian regimes. The challenge involves balancing engagement and accountability, making sure that cooperation upholds democratic principles and human rights rather than strengthening authoritarianism.

Overall, the resilience of non-democratic regimes depends on a complex interplay of domestic and international factors. While some regimes may be able to weather external pressures through alliances and partnerships, others may be more vulnerable to international isolation and pressure. The long-term stability of non-democratic regimes remains uncertain and will depend on a range of factors, including the resilience of opposition movements, the evolution of global power dynamics, and the ability of regimes to adapt to changing circumstances.

The Iranian regime was studied as the most complex non-democratic country in order to understand how it used domestic and international mechanisms for its durability. The establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran opened a key chapter in the history of the nation and had a considerable influence on regional dynamics and international affairs. The former monarchy was toppled and a new one was founded on Islamic ideas after the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Iran underwent a transformation that resulted in the creation of a unique political system that combines elements of theocracy, republicanism, and

authoritarianism. The Iranian regime's ascent brought major shifts to domestic governance, foreign policy, and the nation's standing among the Muslim world. Understanding the complexity of Iran's political environment and its place within the international community is crucial for comprehending the creation of the Iranian regime.

To guarantee its survival and consolidate its power, the Iranian regime has employed a variety of domestic mechanisms, such as legitimacy, co-optation, and repression. These methods have been strategically used by the regime to keep society under control, neutralize opposition, and provide an appearance of stability and widespread support. For the regime, which derives its power from a religious ideology rooted in the concept of Velayat-e Faqih, legitimacy is crucial. The Iranian regime is the rightful representative of Islamic principles and the protector of the interests of the Iranians in order to justify its authority. The regime endeavors to promote a sense of moral and divine legitimacy through religious narratives and ideological indoctrination.

Another key strategy used by the Mullahs is co-optation. They seek to ensure loyalty, preserve a network of support, and eliminate any opposition by selectively integrating people and groups into the political and economic power structure. By providing financial incentives, granting positions of authority, and expanding patronage networks, this co-optation takes place. The regime employs these strategies to forge vested interests among individuals it has coopted and win their support. The Iranian leadership has relied heavily on repression as a means of stifling opposition and keeping its hold on power. Numerous measures have been put in place by the dictatorship, including censorship, monitoring, arbitrary detentions, and control over important organizations like the judiciary and security services. The dictatorship seeks to eliminate threats to its authority and discourage attempts to overthrow it by stifling dissenting opinions, limiting freedom of expression, and intimidating opposition figures. However, we should not disregard the participation of the Iranian Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) in co-optation. The IRGC, which was founded in the wake of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, has grown into a formidable military and paramilitary force that is firmly rooted in Iran's political, economic, and social spheres. Its importance extends beyond traditional defense functions because it significantly contributes to keeping the regime in power through co-optation strategies.

The IRGC's co-optation strategies encompass incorporating both individuals and entities into its extensive network, which covers industries like commerce, politics, and the media. This enables the IRGC to broaden its influence, boost support for the Mullahs, and alleviate any oppositional forces. Co-optation by the IRGC provides access to employment prospects, leadership roles, and security, which instills a sense of dependence and loyalty in individuals who are taken under its wing.

The IRGC has significant financial resources thanks to its vast economic empire, which spans a variety of industries like energy, telecommunications, and construction. As a result, the IRGC can co-opt entrepreneurs and elites, providing them with valuable contracts, special treatment, and protection from competitors. In exchange, the regime expects these people to align their interests with those of the regime and support its objectives. Furthermore, the IRGC's influence over security and intelligence agencies enhances its capacity to coopt and stifle opposition. The IRGC can monitor and control political activity through its influence over important institutions, which limits the room for resistance and promotes adherence to the regime's objectives. Understanding the IRGC's function in co-optation sheds light on the survival tactics of the Iranian regime. Observers obtain a better grasp of the methods employed to uphold the regime's stability and control by examining how the IRGC expands its power, creates networks of influence, and incorporates other players in society into its structure.

However, the resilience of the Iranian regime is not solely the result of its domestic tactics. The regime has also been able to leverage international cooperation to mitigate the impact of economic sanctions and other external pressures. Through its alliances with Russia and China, as well as its strategic partnerships with other countries, Iran has been able to access vital resources and technology and has received diplomatic and political support in the face of international criticism. However, the resilience of the Iranian regime is not solely the result of its domestic tactics. The regime has also been able to leverage international cooperation to mitigate the impact of economic sanctions, get rid of its isolation, and deal with other external pressures.

International cooperation has been significant in the survival of the Iranian regime, bolstering its legitimacy, utilizing soft power, providing strategic alliances, participation in international organizations, the nuclear deal, and providing economic support. These factors have contributed to the regime's ability to navigate regional and

global dynamics, maintain stability, and withstand external pressures. By employing various tools of cultural influence, propaganda, and information dissemination, this regime has tried to shape international perceptions and enhance its legitimacy. In order to portray a favorable image and promote a sense of national identity, it has successfully used cultural diplomacy by presenting its rich history, literature, arts, and traditions. This cultural soft power promotes foreign interest in and appreciation for Iranian heritage, enhancing the legitimacy of the regime and opening doors for cross-cultural interactions.

Additionally, it utilizes state-controlled broadcasting and media institutions to disseminate its narratives and ideology. The regime spreads its viewpoint, silences critics, and promotes unity among its adherents through news agencies, television networks, and online platforms. This control over information allows it to shape public opinion and have a firm hold on domestic narratives. Yet, it is essential to recognize that the regime's use of soft power is not without controversy. Critics contend that the regime's control over cultural diplomacy and media outlets reinforces a limited and biased narrative, stifles criticism, and pays no attention to human rights issues. The regime's soft power strategies may win over some audiences, but they are also met with suspicion and close examination by those who doubt its motives and conduct.

The Iranian regime has also taken advantage of its status as a regional power, participating actively in geopolitics and using its support for various militant and political groups in the Middle East to exert influence. By supporting these proxies, the dictatorship has expanded its influence and power projection beyond its own borders, strengthening its position in the region and boosting its soft power appeal. Furthermore, strategic alliances, notably with countries like China and Russia, have given the regime political support, economic partnerships, and protection against international isolation. Through these relationships and thanks to its special position and rich natural resources, the regime has been able to diversify its geopolitical alliances, pursue shared interests, and gain leverage in regional and global affairs.

While both China and Russia have contributed to the Iranian regime's survival, it's important to note that their motivations may differ. China's support is primarily driven by economic and strategic interests, including access to energy resources and regional influence. Russia's support is more multifaceted, encompassing diplomatic, military, and regional cooperation, driven by a mix of geopolitical considerations,

counterbalancing Western influence, and shared interests in regional stability. It's essential to keep in mind that the dynamics of international relations can evolve over time, and the roles of China and Russia in supporting the Iranian regime may continue to evolve as well.

Participation in international organizations such as the United Nations and SCO has allowed Mullahs to engage in diplomatic procedures, influence international discourse, and offer their viewpoints on global issues. This participation has provided a platform for the regime to advance its interests, defend its actions, and build collaboration with other member states.

The nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), offered the regime relief from international sanctions in exchange for limitations on its nuclear program. Through this deal, Iran gained access to international markets, gained economic advantages, and improved its reputation internationally. The JCPOA had problems and uncertainty, but it temporarily alleviated constraints on the regime, bolstering its position both at home and abroad.

On the other hand, external economic performance and international support for bypassing sanctions have also contributed to the regime's resilience. Despite economic sanctions, it has managed to secure trade partnerships, foreign investment, and access to technology, particularly from states willing to bypass or circumvent international restrictions. These economic relationships have given the regime access to vital resources and avenues for economic stability.

The regime has leveraged its strategic location in the Middle East, with access to key waterways and proximity to energy-rich regions, to assert influence in the global energy market. Its substantial reserves of oil and gas have provided a critical source of income, ensuring a steady stream of revenue to fund domestic programs and maintain social stability. Trade relations with neighboring states, regional powers, and global economic players have facilitated the exchange of goods, services, and investments, supporting Iran's economic stability. Additionally, foreign investments in sectors such as energy, infrastructure, and manufacturing have not only provided financial resources but also contributed to technological advancements. However, it is important to acknowledge that economic challenges, geopolitical tensions, and international sanctions have posed significant obstacles for the regime. The Iranian regime's ability

to effectively manage its economic performance in the face of these complexities will continue to be crucial for its survival and stability. Understanding how external economic issues affect the regime's authority and interaction with the international community will help us better understand its resilience and decision-making procedures.

Moreover, it is important to note that international cooperation has not been without challenges and complexities. Its engagement with the international community has also subjected it to scrutiny, demands for accountability, and expectations for improved human rights practices. This regime has frequently had to strike a careful balance between upholding its interests and caving into external demands in order to survive through international cooperation. This issue became more obvious when, after years of tension with Saudi Arabia, at a time when it was experiencing the harshest possible pressures from both internal and external pressures, it was obliged to resume its relations with Riyadh through China.

However, with all the internal and external challenges that the Islamic regime has faced, it continues to pursue its ambitions, and it seems that as long as its survival benefits the superpowers, despite all the brutal repression, disregard for human rights, and the threat and instability of regional countries, they will continue to support the mullahs.

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TURNITIN REPORT

FATEMEH LESANI

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RESUME

Full Name: Fatemeh Lesani

Educational Status:

Degree	**Major**	**University**	**Year**
Undergraduate Degree	Movie Translation	University of Applied Science and Technology	2007-2009
Undergraduate Degree	English Translation	University of Mazandaran	200-2011

Work Experience:

Workplace	**Position**	**Year**
Rishali Company	Secretary	2002-2004
SHADAN Official Translation Bureau	Translator	2004-2010
B.S.J Int'l Inspection Co.	Operation Manager in Marine Department	2011-2013
Self Employed	Freelance Translation for Students	2013-2014
Eyepak Company	Customer Service Manager	2014
Bir Daneh Company	Commercial Expert	2014-2015
Iran Insurance Co.	Branch Representative	2015-2017
Irsa Marine Shipping Company	Operation Manager	2017-2019
Shariar Bearing Company	Business Correspondent	2017-2021

Foreign Languages: English

Date: 20.06.2023