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Shia Revival and *Welayat Al-Faqih* in the Making of Iranian Foreign Policy

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ABSTRACT   *The repercussions of the 1979 Iranian Revolution are too often attributed to the idea that the state's policy-making was based on a Khomeinist-charged ideology that sought to expand political Islam throughout the Middle East. Alternative interpretations of Iranian foreign policy have emphasized policymakers' pragmatic, as opposed to ideological, considerations of state preservation. This article examines these contested propositions regarding the motivations shaping Iranian foreign policy. It assesses three interrelated foreign policy drivers that have been particularly salient in framing the Iranian positions vis-à-vis the various changes in both the regional and international arenas: Shiism, Welayat Al-Faqih, and domestic policy struggles. Analysis of Iranian foreign policy reveals that it is constructed on Iran's various regional rapprochements that take into strong consideration domestic politics. The findings suggest that Iran's foreign policy – be it the country's nuclear program, its animosity towards Israel and the US, or its support of diverse proxy groups in the Middle East – cannot be rationalized solely on assumptions of the state's self-preservation. Alternatively, this paper concludes that Iranian foreign policy is strongly shaped by Shia revival and Welayat Al-Faqih ideological discourses.*

Introduction

Perhaps the most important repercussion of the 1979 revolution within the international arena was the abrupt shift in Iran's political stance from a servile US ally to one of its most resistant adversaries. This shift triggered a Shia revival which has historically been repressed by a predominantly Sunni rule over the Muslim world. The idea of an emerging 'Shia crescent', which extends from Iran through Iraq to Syria and Lebanon, threatened the long-established post-colonial order and Western influence in the region. This 'Shia threat' began to materialize following the 2003 US invasion of Iraq and the subsequent domination of political power by the pro-Iranian Iraqi Shia. The July 2006 Israeli war in Lebanon further contributed to the consolidation of Iranian military and political power by the Lebanese pro-Iranian Shia group Hezbollah.[1] The January 2009 Israeli war in Gaza against the Iranian-backed Islamic Hamas, with the latter emerging heroic among the Sunni Arab masses for resisting the Israeli assaults, further contributed to the spread of Iranian and anti-Western sentiment in the region. Since 1979, Syria's Alawite-Shia

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[1] I. Salamey, 'Failing Consociationalism in Lebanon and Integrative Options', *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 14:2 (2009), pp. 83–105.

dominated regime has continued to strengthen its strategic alliance with the Islamic Republic in defiance of both Israeli and US objections.

Why has Iran primarily concentrated on expanding its influence throughout the Middle East instead of focusing its efforts on its own state-building and international integration? From an offensive realist perspective, Iran's foreign policy is dictated by the fact that states, as rational actors, seek to maximize their share of power at the expense of their rivals. Mearsheimer explains that "the principal motive behind great power behavior is survival" in the anarchic international system.[2] At the same time, he considered survival to include autonomy of the domestic political order and territorial integrity as the primary tenets of the state. In his book *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Mearsheimer concedes that one of the major drawbacks of his theory, however, is that it disregards the role of individuals or ideologies in international affairs.[3] This theoretical contention between rationalism and ideological constructivism continues to challenge international relations in analyzing contemporary foreign policy formation in increasingly transnational and global politics.[4]

This paper examines the role of the individual, namely the Iranian Supreme Leader, as well as the impact of Shia ideology and that of Khomeinism (as embedded in *Welayat Al-Faqih*) in the making of Iran's foreign policy. It assesses the extent to which ideological considerations, as inspired by the Shias' past and collective memory, and the visionary role of the leader expand the scope of foreign policy objectives beyond the basic requirement of state survival rationalism.[5] This will become evident after reviewing the pivotal role of the Supreme Leader as a manifestation of an inspiring ideology and Shiism as a contemporary transnational anti-Western policy. Domestic struggles between the various political groups over foreign policy-making reflect the ongoing debate between ideological and pragmatic considerations. This article demonstrates how these drivers have come to shape Iranian foreign policy in Iraq and the Levant.

Revolutionary Revival of Shiism

Ideological and leadership roots of Shiism

Both Shia and Sunni views toward Islamic history and theology differ particularly in their interpretation of leadership succession. This can be traced back to the early days of Islam following the Prophet Mohammed's death in 632 CE Whilst the Sunnis came to support succession based on 'shawra,' election by a close circle of tribal leaders and elders, the Shia believed that the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, Ali Ibn Abi Talib, possessed the righteous qualities for leadership bestowed upon him by both God and the Prophet. When Ali was later chosen as the fourth caliph, his rein was plagued by mutinies and wars that further deepened the division in Islam between the followers of Ali (Shia) and those who sought and eventually established pre-Islamic tribal rulership based on Qurayshian lineages (Umayyad). However, the transition from the caliphate to a monarchy and the division of religious and political authorities under the Umayyads led the Shia to reject not only the legitimacy of the first three original caliphs but also the entire Ummayad

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[2]John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001).

[3]John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, op. cit.

[4]A.A. Rezaei, 'Foreign Policy Theories: Implications for the Foreign Policy Analysis of Iran' in Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Mahjoob Zweiri (eds) *Iran's Foreign Policy : From Khatami to Ahmadinejad* (Ithaca: Ithaca Press, 2008), p. 17−36.

[5]See examination of Iranian foreign policy's historic foundations by R.K. Ramazani, 'Iran's Foreign Policy: Independence, Freedom and the Islamic Republic' in Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Mahjoob Zweiri (eds) *Iran's Foreign Policy : From Khatami to Ahmadinejad*, op. cit.

caliphate and asserted the exclusive righteousness within the lineal heir of Ali (Ahl Al-Bayt), beginning with his eldest son Imam Hassan followed by his second eldest, Imam Hussain. Political subjugation of the Shia followed, placing them outside of the ruling establishment of the Umayyad dynasty and its succeeding Abbasid Empire as well as other Sunni ruler-ships, including those of the Ottomans and contemporary Sunni-dominated Arab states.[6]

Throughout history, Shia communities, in various degrees, have presented a serious challenge to the different empires that dominated the Islamic world. As a result, most Sunni monarchs have viewed the Shia with suspicion, brutally repressing their revolts with an iron fist. However, Shia leadership has survived and maintained itself, sustained by a lineal association largely believed to be derived from prophetic descent. The 12 Imams were recognized early on by most Shia as their infallible leaders (Twelvers Shiism). To followers of the Twelvers, Imam Ali and his 11 dissenting sons possessed holy qualifications that perfected their deliberations beyond the capacities of ordinary men. The last twelfth Imam, Al-Mahdi, who by the Shia is believed to have 'disappeared' without an heir, is also believed to have been living throughout the ages in 'hiding', awaiting resurrection for the restoration of worldly justice. Nevertheless, the Mahdi's disappearance left a serious dilemma among the Shia: qualification for leadership was substituted by an indirect lineal claim to the prophet by a class of Ayatollahs whose emulations became the duty of every Shia.

Most Shia revered their Ayatollahs not only for their piety and knowledge but also for their roles as *de facto* successors of the Twelfth Imam. The Ayatollahs therefore exercised considerable autonomous authority within their respective communities dispersed across the Islamic empire. They attended to the clerical, social and political needs of their com-munities. After the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Ayatollah Ruhallah Khomeini claimed himself to be the absolute source of emulation (supreme jurisdiction, or *Wilayat Al-Faqih)* because of his lineal associations with the sacred Imams. In his political dissertation *Islamic Government*, Khomeini explained that during the time of occultation (of al-Mahdi), a just *Faqih* acts in the place of the Twelfth Imam thereby assuming all the governmental duties pertaining to the infallible Imams.[7] Khomeini was subsequently referred to as the deputy to the Twelfth Imam.

Shia leadership has been consolidated throughout time by the distribution of funds to the needy. This practice was based on a system of community taxation collected by the most senior clerics (Ulama) and their representatives. They were entrusted to distribute the col-lected funds as they saw fit among the poor, seminaries, or institutions.[8] This has allowed the most senior clerics to establish a wide patronage network that has influenced Shia com-munities throughout the Islamic world. This financial autonomy of the Shia Ulama pro-vided them with relative independence from the Sunni states. It was an important factor which strengthened their leadership and provided their communities with a relatively autonomous welfare network, in sharp contrast to their Sunni counterparts who thrived off of domestic state welfare and support in return for their allegiance.[9]

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[6]M. Bazzi, 'Khomeini's Long Shadow: How A Quiet Revolution in Shiism Could Resolve the Crisis in Iran', *Foreign Affairs*, June (2010), http://www.foreignaffairs.com/article/66479/mohamed-bazzi/khomeinis-long-shadow?page=show.

[7]Ayatollah Ruhallah Khomeini, *Islamic Government: Governance of the Jurist* (Tehran: The Institute for Compi-lation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works, 2000, a collection of speeches delivered in 1970).

[8]Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam will shape the Future* (New York: Norton and Company, Inc, 2006), pp. 70–71.

[9]Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State: Khomeini and the making of a new Iran* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), p. 3.

Iranian Shiism

Since the early sixteenth century under the Safavids, Shia Islam had dominated state and society in Persia. During the early formations of Iran as a nation-state, and as early as the Qajar Dynasty (1795–1925), the Shia formed an absolute majority of the country.[10] The Shia religious establishment, particularly the Ayatollahs, played a pivotal role in the various rebellious movements during the last two centuries, including the tobacco protest movement of 1890–1891, the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1911, the oil nationalization crisis of 1951–1953, the uprising following the arrest of Khomeini in 1963, and eventually the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Ann Lambton, a historian who has written on the structure of the state and post-revolutionary Iran, attributed the anti-estab-lishment role of clergies to Shia thought rooted in the doctrine of the *Imamiyya*.[11] Lamb-ton's historical evaluation highlights the religious roots of Shiism and its political implications which have come to shape Iranian Revolutionary ideology and its resulting political system, particularly in the primary roles given to its clerical leaders or the *Fuqaha*.

The clerical anti-Western orientation in Iran began forming in the early 20th century when the Iranian monarchies were aligning themselves with Western colonial powers.[12] As the Shahs of the Qajar monarchy established strong economic and political ties with the Euro-pean powers, Ayatollahs intervened to assert national rights and interests. In 1892, after the Shah granted a tobacco monopoly to the British Imperial Tobacco Company, Iranian Aya-tollah Shirazi, then residing in Iraq, issued a fatwa banning tobacco use. The Popularity of the Ayatollah forced the Shah to cancel the concession. The Iranian Ulama took an active role in the constitutional movement of 1905-1906, along with social activists and liberal intellec-tuals, in order to limit the Shah's power and to vest more authority in the people, despite the fact that others such as Faizlollah Nuri were in favor of maintaining monarchical rule. The clergy also supported both the nationalization of Iran's oil industry in 1951 and the popular movement it generated. The nationalization resulted in a confrontation with the West, ending in 1953 by a CIA-orchestrated coup which saw the overthrow of the elected nationalist Premier Mohammad Mosaddeq and forcefully restored the Shah to power.

Thus Shiism in Iran, along with the clerical leadership, has come to establish a rejection-ist ideological discourse imprinted upon post-revolution Iranian state and society. Adib-Moghaddam attributed to the Shia struggle for emancipation a 'pool of shared knowledge that informed the foreign policy culture of the Iranian state after the Islamic revolution in 1979'.[13] This formulated the essence of public support for a foreign policy developed 'towards challenging the international status quo that was perceived as intrinsically unjust and overbearingly hierarchical'.[14]

Khomeinism and Islamic universalism

Khomeini attributed the ills of Iran and the Islamic world to the superpowers, particularly the US, as the source of world corruption. He contended that the power of Islam lies in its

[10]Central Intelligence Agency, *World Factbook* (Washington, DC: Office of Public Affairs, 2010).
[11]Ann K.S. Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).
[12]A.K. Ramazani attributed to the Iranian culture of resistance deep resentment against a history of colonial oppressions. See, 'Understanding Iranian Foreign Policy', in *The Middle East Viewpoints Special Edition: The Iranian Revolution at 30* (Washington DC: The Middle East Institute, 2009), http://www.mei.edu/Portals/o/Publications/Iran_Final.pdf.
[13]Arshin Adib-Mohaddam, *Iran in World Politics: The Question of the Islamic Republic* (London: HURST Publishers Ltd, 2007), pp. 77–78.
[14]Arshin Adib-Mohaddam, *Iran in World Politics: The Question of the Islamic Republic*, op. cit., p. 78.

ability to unite Muslims and to protect them from injustice. Thus, religious, political, and cultural unity of all Muslims can be regained only by submission to Islam as the sole source of moral and political authority. Khomeini set a simple model for the restoration of Islamic authenticity. His vision begins with the mobilization of the oppressed Muslims to expel superpowers, followed by the overthrow of Western agent regimes throughout the Muslim world. Colonially and artificially-separated states should then be replaced by a single unified Islamic government.[15]

Khomeini considered imperialism, particularly that of the US and Israel, to be the main enemy of Iran, the Muslim world, and the Third World. He believed that the interests of these hegemonic powers were based on politically, economically and culturally subjugating the underprivileged nations, plundering their resources and confiscating their territorial independence. He therefore labeled both the US and Israel as the primary foes of Islam, the Quran and the Prophet.[16] Consequently, he called for resistance and confrontation as a part of an Islamic duty. This compelled Iran to oppose and thwart the interests of both the US and Israel. Khomeini continuously reiterated the need to defeat the former and wipe out the latter in order for justice to prevail.

Most important to Khomeinism, however, is the call to consolidate Islamic leadership within the one supreme leader – *Al-Faqih* – with vested power to guide the Muslim world through its plight, and to achieve Islamic rule and expel the infidels. The Shia custom of religious and political emulation, which Khomeini established, needed to shift from traditional individual choice and preference towards an institutional Vatican-style 'Popeism' (*Welayat Al-Faqih*).[17] Under such a religious leadership structure, the Supreme Leader is to reconcile communities' political and spiritual divisions and achieve its emancipation. In *Islamic Government*, Khomeini specified the *Faqih*'s knowledge of Islamic law and justice as prerequisites for the latter to assume *Welaya* (leadership) and therefore establish a just universal Islamic government.[18]

Exporting the revolution

The revolutionary regime consolidated its power during the early 1980s. Acting on Khomeinist philosophy, the regime aimed to universalize its revolutionary appeal by exporting it to the rest of the Muslim world. Yet the call for Islamic upheaval made by the Supreme Leader, then Khomeini himself, did not resonate with the Arab world; rather, Iran's Shia ideology left the Sunni-dominated Arab world indifferent or even hostile to the ambitious Iranian quest. The 1,400-year old religious-political Sunni–Shia divide still overshadowed the Iranian version of Shiism. Also, the debilitating Iran–Iraq War undermined the newly-formed revolutionary state and weakened its appeal among the predominantly Sunni Arab masses. In the aftermath of the war, Iran turned its efforts to the exportation of the Islamic revolution exclusively to the Shia communities abroad. The appeal of Khomeini's revolution mustered popular support among the Shia in Lebanon, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and even Saudi Arabia. The Iranian regime made use of the

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[15]Daniel Brumberg & Marvin Zonis, *Khomeini, The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Arab World* (Cambridge MA: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University, 1987).

[16]Daniel Brumberg & Marvin Zonis, *Khomeini, The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Arab World*, op. cit.

[17]It should be noted that *Welayat Al-Faqih* presented a direct challenge to the previously held decentralized system of immolation (*marja'iyat*) by Shia and particularly Arab-Shia, who have historically immolated religious leadership in Iraq such as Khoui and Sustani. Thus, *Welayat Al-Faqih* led to division in immolation practices between followers of the Iranian Supreme Leader and other traditional religious centers (*marja'*).

[18]Ayatollah Ruhallah Khomeini, *Islamic Government: Governance of the Jurist*, op. cit. p. 49.

clerical relations that linked leading Shia Ayatollahs throughout the Arab world to one another and to their loyal adherents. At the center of these networks were clerics who studied with Khomeini in Najaf during the 1960s and 1970s while he was in exile. The most important of them were the Iraqi Dawa Party's founders Ayatollahs Muhsin al-Hakim and Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr as well as the Lebanese Hezbollah spiritual leader Al-Sayyed Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah.

Although the Iranian Revolution failed to replicate its success elsewhere in the Muslim world, it triggered an unprecedented Shia revival that significantly changed the political map of the Middle East. Brumberg and Zonis suggest that the impact on Shia communities in the Muslim World had a deep impact where "[Khomeinist] ideology and its perceived accomplishments had the ability to move people from a stage of quiet passivity into a sudden and explosive activism."[19]

Iranian Foreign Policy: Ideological and Pragmatic Considerations

The evolution of Iranian foreign policy

Iran's foreign policy has evolved from being Islamic, revolutionary and expansionist in nature to being centered on the revival of Shiism. This transition occurred during three political periods: The first characterized the revolutionary upheaval of the republic under Khomeini (1980-1988); the second, the post Iran-Iraq War period, witnessed a more realist and pragmatic foreign policy rapprochement under President Rafsanjani (1989-1997) then détente under President Khatami (1997-2005); and the third, the contemporary period, which encompasses an appeal of Shia populist revivalism fueled by anti-Western rhetoric under President Ahmadinejad (2005-present).[20]

It is important to note that Islamic Iran emerged amidst a deepening Cold War between its most detested foe, the US, and its next-door communist neighbor, the Soviet Union. Born out of Khomeini's vision of an Islamic state, Iran had to assert its position in world politics. Inspired by neither the East nor the West, the Islamic Republic evolved as an "anti-imperialist Muslim version of the French Republic".[21] Iran's Islamic 'Jacobianists' sought to export their revolution beyond the nation-state and unify Islam under Khomeini's leadership. Such attempts were moderated by already existing regional and sectarian divisions, and most of the revolutionary zeal was curtailed by the debilitating eight-year war with Iraq. The costly war forced the Iranian regime to realize the limits of its power.[22] With the collapse of the bipolar international system, and then the death of Khomeini – the uncompromising founder of Iran – 10 years later, Tehran had to re-evaluate its 'neither East nor West' approach in order to cope with the new world order formed by the demise of the Soviet Union and the supremacy of the US. It also had to secure its own strategic and political presence in the new international system. In this sense, Iran's foreign policy evolved into a series of pragmatic measures that tempered its revolutionary zeal, leading to domestic divisions between the pragmatists-reformists and the ideologists-radical guards. This pragmatic realism was reflected during Iran's presidency of the

[19]Daniel Brumberg & Marvin Zonis, *Khomeini, The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Arab World*, op. cit., p. 71.
[20]Babak Rahimi and Anoush Ehteshami make a similar characterization of post-revolution Iranian politics in 'Iran's International Relations: Pragmatism in a Revolutionary Bottle', in *The Middle East Institute Viewpoints: The Iranian Revolution at 30* (Washington DC: The Middle East Institute, 2009), http://www.mei.edu/Portals/o/Publications/Iran_Final.pdf.
[21]Babak Rahimi and Anoush Ehteshami make a similar characterization of post-revolution Iranian politics in 'Iran's International Relations: Pragmatism in a Revolutionary Bottle', op. cit., p. 127.
[22]Ray Takeyh, 'Time for Détente with Iran', *Foreign Affairs* 86:2 (March/April 2007), p. 2.

Organization of Islamic States (OIS) from 1997-2000 when it promoted alliance with Russia, close ties with Christian Armenia and accepted the legitimacy of other Islamic member states.[23]

The main reason for this political realism was the country's post-Soviet geopolitical environment which presented multiple sources of uncertainty for the Islamic Republic. Along Iran's western border, Iraq was torn by sectarian and ethnic strife. Along its eastern border, Afghanistan and Pakistan were overrun by chaos and Wahabist religious fanaticism. Along its northern borders, the states of Central Asia and the Caucasus were burdened with weak social, political and economic systems. To the south, Iran faced hostile pro-American Sunni regimes ready to back efforts towards its demise.[24] As a result, Iran was pre-occupied with devising strategies to contain surrounding threats and instabilities. [25] Iran's foreign policy gravitated to incorporate some hybrid elements of ideological considerations (to appeal to the domestic scene) and pragmatic considerations (in order to better secure its prospects for survival in the context of a turbulent neighborhood). While pragmatic considerations did in fact trump the ideological, the latter emanated nonetheless in some important policy formulations. The domination of the Supreme Leader and the conservative religious groups over Iranian politics and society preserved the main tenets of Khomeinism in policy considerations. After all, Khomeinism "serve[d] the aim of preserving Iran's national and security interests" within the framework of its theocratic order.[26]

Pragmatic realism, however, received its first major setback following the events of 9/11 with the Bush administration declaring global war against terrorism and placing Iran on its 'Axis of Evil' list.[27] The country's hardliners used the US position as a pretext to attack Khatami's conciliatory foreign policy position, ultimately paving the way for Ahmadinejad's election victory. Following Ahmadinejad's surge to power in 2005, Iranian hardliners revived a foreign policy agenda based on ideological revolutionary universalist strategies that emphasized 'the spiritual dimension of Iran's security principles', including faith, popular mobilization and the spread of revolution outside of Iran's borders.[28]

In this sense, the anti-Iranian approach by the Bush administration was among other regional factors that contributed to the domestic triumph of radicalism and the resurgence of an anti-Western foreign policy stance.[29] Following US setbacks in both Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the emergence of strong world criticisms against the US invasion of Iraq, the Iranian regional position was strengthened.[30] The rise to power of pro-Iranian Iraqi Shia in the 2005 election represented a strong urge for sectarian ideologues in Iran to re-assert their power positions and to seek, through Shia revivalism, regional dominance.

Today the basic principles of Iran's military doctrine are codified in accordance with the regulations of the Iranian Armed Forces. These principles represent Iran's national security

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[23]Naveed S. Sheikh, *The New Politics of Islam: Pan-Islamic Foreign Policy in a World of States* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), p. 77.

[24]Kayhan Barzegar, 'The Geopolitical Factor in Iran's Foreign Policy', in *The Middle East Institute Viewpoints: The Iranian Revolution at 30* (Washington DC: The Middle East Institute, 2009), http://www.mei.edu/Portals/o/Publications/Iran_Final.pdf.

[25]Naveed S. Sheikh, *The New Politics of Islam: Pan-Islamic Foreign Policy in a World of States*, op. cit., p. 97.

[26]Naveed S. Sheikh, *The New Politics of Islam: Pan-Islamic Foreign Policy in a World of States*, op. cit.

[27]Daniel Heradstveit and G. Matthew Bonham, 'What the Axis of Evil Metaphor Did to Iran', *The Middle East Journal* 61:3 (2007), pp. 421–441.

[28]Steven Ward, 'The Continuing Evolution of Iran's Military Doctrine', *Middle East Journal* 59:4 (October 2005), pp. 559–576.

[29]Daniel Heradstveit and G. Matthew Bonham, 'What the Axis of Evil Metaphor Did to Iran', op. cit.

[30]Imad Salamey, 'Middle Eastern Exceptionalism: Globalization and the Balance of Power', *Democracy and Security*, 4:3 (September 2009), pp. 249–260.

strategy which comprises the protection of national independence, territorial integrity, regional interests, the theocracy, and other Muslim and 'oppressed' nations.[31] According to Ward, "These principles stress Islamic ideology as a basic precept for organizing and equipping the Armed Forces. They also demand loyalty to the Supreme Leader, seek self-sufficiency, and hold defense-deterrence and ultimately punishing an aggressor against Iran or oppressed nations as the Armed Forces' primary orientation."[32] The regulations correlate the principle of unity of command to allegiance within the context of *Welayat Al-Faqih*.[33] This ideological doctrine was implemented by the positioning of mostly radical hardliners loyal to the Supreme Leader as top military commanders. It is important to note that these principles reflected Khomeini's tenets of the Islamic State. "The residual strength in the early 1990s of the legacy of Ayatollah Khomeini ensured that ideology would be a keystone for Iran's conception of war and military doctrine."[34] In fact, one of the major disagreements among domestic Iranian groups revolves around the country's foreign policy rapprochement towards the West and the US. The reformists challenged the existing norms in the Iranian leadership by questioning the role of the Supreme Leader himself.[35] Domestic debate has deepened the disagreement as to whether Iran's foreign policy should be oriented towards the notions of ideological and sectarian expansionism or restrained by pragmatic realist considerations.[36]

The influence of domestic actors on Iranian foreign policy

At least four major domestic actors are central to Iran's domestic and foreign policymaking: ideological radicals, 'conservatives', 'reformists', and the Supreme Leader himself. The first of these prominent actors, the ideological radicals, were indoctrinated by Khomeini's perception of the US as 'The Great Satan'. This group views the US as the source of Iran's ills, stemming from the 1953 CIA-backed coup, its support of Iraq during the Iran–Iraq War, and most importantly its support of Israel against the Palestinians and Lebanese.[37] Accordingly, the radicals consider the acquisition of nuclear weapons as pivotal for the survival of the Islamic Republic. With their deep religious convictions, they are convinced that Iran's nuclear program is a 'great divine task' and a 'necessary preparation for the next phase on the future battlefield', a veiled reference to the coming resurrection of Imam Al-Mahdi and the end of the world.[38] They include important individuals in the Council of Guardians, the Revolutionary Guard Corps, and the judiciary, along with President Ahmadinejad. Most importantly, they draw considerable strength from Iran's most powerful security apparatuses: the Revolutionary Guard Corps, the intelligence services, and the Basij paramilitary force.[39]

A second prominent political group in Iran consists of 'conservatives' who emphasize the importance of a pragmatic and negotiable nuclear policy and the support of Islamic nationalism over transnationalism and sectarian expansionism. Among this group is Ali Larijani,

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[31]Steven Ward, 'The Continuing Evolution of Iran's Military Doctrine', *Middle East Journal*, 59:4 (October 2005), pp. 559–576.
[32]Steven Ward, 'The Continuing Evolution of Iran's Military Doctrine', op. cit., p. 561.
[33]Steven Ward, 'The Continuing Evolution of Iran's Military Doctrine', op. cit.
[34]Steven Ward, 'The Continuing Evolution of Iran's Military Doctrine', op. cit., p. 560.
[35]Arguably, reformists' opposition to Khamenei's siding with President Ahmadinejad has cost former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani his chairmanship of the Assembly of Experts in March 2011.
[36]Ray Takeyh, 'Time for Détente with Iran', *Foreign Affairs*, 86:2 (March/April 2007), p. 4.
[37]Ray Takeyh, 'Time for Détente with Iran', op. cit.
[38]Ray Takeyh, 'Time for Détente with Iran', op. cit.
[39]Ray Takeyh, 'Time for Détente with Iran', op. cit.

the head of parliament and also former commander of Iran's navy.[40] By the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, this group withdrew into research centers to re-evaluate Iran's international status. They concluded, from both the collapse of the bipolar system and their country's geographic position, that Iran is a natural regional power whose progress has been hindered by the state's ideological zeal and its hostility towards the West. Therefore, they argue that Iran should act more wisely to realize its potential; this entails accepting certain international standards and negotiating compromise agreements with its opponents.[41]

A third and very powerful group has been established by 'reformists' who have been forthcoming in questioning the entire concept of Iran being in conflict with the West and demand a limit to religious authorities' interference in political affairs. This group represents the continuation of Rafsanjani and Khatami's pragmatic political discourse in domestic and foreign affairs and includes two 2009 presidential candidates: former Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Mousavi and the former parliamentary speaker Mehdi Karroubi. From the radicals' points of view, the period of the reformist government (1997–2005) represented the sharpest deviation from the original path of the revolution.[42] The reformist group emerged strong following the 2009 presidential elections which drew millions of voters, mostly youth groups, in favor of its candidates. In fact, the movement has raised unprecedented doubts over Khamenei's leadership and foreign policy.[43] They have openly criticized Ahmadinejad's campaign against détente with the West.[44] When the election result was disputed, Khamenei readily sided with Ahmadinejad, calling the election, widely believed to have been rigged, 'a political earthquake for enemies and a historical celebration for friends of Iran and the revolution'.[45] In reference to reformists' mass protests against the election results, Khamenei accused the West and the Zionists of being behind the unrest with an aim to spark a 'velvet revolution' in Iran and shake national trust. He defiantly declared his determination to stand up against all mutineers.

The fourth and most important actor in Iranian politics is the Supreme Leader. In fact, the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei assumes his constitutional responsibility as the final arbiter in all domestic and foreign policy issues. The significant role of the Supreme Leader in directing Iranian foreign policy has been reinforced by an organizational network abroad holding direct allegiance to him. His office has established an elaborate and centralized capacity to control the clerical financial affairs through the Center for the Management of Qom. The Islamic Propagation Organization is another establishment founded by Khomeini in 1981 with aim to provide the Supreme Leader with extended ideological and cultural influence over transnational followers. The Hajj and Welfare Organization, Society for Reconciliation amongst Islamic Sects, and appointed representatives throughout the Shi'ite communities serve to maintain close political and religious adherence to the Supreme Leader.[46]

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[40]Ray Takeyh, 'Time for Détente with Iran', op. cit.

[41]Ray Takeyh, 'Time for Détente with Iran', op. cit.

[42]Hossein Bashiriyeh, 'The Islamic Revolution Derailed' in (eds) *The Middle East Institute Viewpoints: The Iranian Revolution at 30* (Washington DC: The Middle East Institute, 2009), pp. 35–38.

[43]Mehdi Khalaji, 'Khamenei's Coup', *The Washington Post*, 15 June 2009.

[44]Mehdi Khalaji, Patrick Clawson, Michael Singh, and Mohsen Sazegara, 'Iran's 'Election': What Happened? What Does It Mean?' *Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Watch #1537: Special Policy Forum Report*, 18 June 2009.

[45]See 'Khamenei's Speech on the Iranian Elections, June 2009', www.cfr.org/iran/Khameneis-speech-iranian-elections-june-2009-summary/p19680.

[46]See also Mehdi Khalaji, 'The Iranian Clergy's Silence', *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, 10 (July 12, 2010), pp. 42–55.

Throughout post-Khomeini Iran, the Supreme Leader has played a pivotal role as a 'balancer',[47] increasingly tilting toward the radicals. He has managed to balance Iran's various political groups as the foreign and domestic conditions entailed. During the 2001 and 2003 US encroachments on Iran's frontiers, Khamenei adopted a rather pragmatic stance. He sided with the pragmatists and agreed in October 2003 to sign the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty's (NPT) additional Protocol, including provisions for a fairly intrusive inspection regime. This was despite calls by the radicals to reject the NPT.[48] Furthermore, in November 2004, he agreed to postpone the uranium-enrichment projects and to give up completion of the nuclear fuel cycle.[49] Only in August 2005, following the declaration of election victory of Ahmadinejad, did Khamenei reverse his position, backing President Ahmadinejad's policy of reactivating Iran's uranium enrichment program.

In his March 2009 speech, partly a reply to President Obama's call for dialogue between both states, Khamenei asserted that there needs to be drastic changes in US foreign policy before the two countries can establish new relations. Khamenei, however, showed signs of support for conditional talks with the US over issues of mutual concern, namely on Iraq and Afghanistan. Nonetheless, and in line with the radicals, he expressed that there would be no compromise over fundamental issues that included Iran's nuclear activities, Iran's stance towards Israel and Iran's demands for lifting US-sponsored economic and diplomatic sanctions imposed by the UN on Iran. Khamenei declared unconditional support for Iran's nuclear program, regardless of international regulations or UN Security Council resolutions, and threatened retaliation against any military attack on Iran by Israel or the US

Since the 2009 presidential election, Khamenei has taken a decisive stand in favor of the radicals and of Ahmadinejad's policy. He has signaled no opposition to the deployment of the paramilitary Basij and the Revolutionary Guards against the reformists, nor has he taken steps towards investigating the largely believed violent repressions and abductions of Iran's reformist leaders. Ahmadinejad's return to power was directly owed to the support of both the radicals and the Supreme Leader.

This strong and sustained show of Iranian radicals, backed by the Supreme Leader since 2005, has been inspired by an ideologically-driven united front against the US and Israel. In fact, the radicals have asserted their foreign policy vision through the various 'successes' achieved by their Shia allies throughout the Islamic world, particularly in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Levant. Yet it must be noted that Iran's anti-US and anti-Israeli stands have served as a pretext to consolidate its regional alliances and to undermine Arab Sunni powers, particularly in Iraq, Lebanon and Syria. In this context, Iran has portrayed its defiant foreign policy as a commitment to true Islam in sharp contrast to a perceived Western-subservient role played out by Arab Sunni states such as Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.

Iran's Transnational Foreign Policy in Iraq and the Levant

Iranian strategy in Iraq

Iraq has been one of Iran's major foreign policy challenges even prior to the 1979 Islamic revolution. The Iraq–Iran rivalry arose from sharing a long border with mutual geopolitical significance and disputed territorial claims over both in Shatt al Arab and Khuzestan. Most relevant, however, was Iraq's predominantly Shia population who shared with Iran centuries of deep-rooted cultural, historic, and religious ties predating the formation of the

[47]Bashiriyeh, 'The Islamic Revolution Derailed', op. cit.
[48]Kenneth Pollack & Ray Takeyh, 'Taking on Tehran', *Foreign Affairs*, 84:2 (March/April 2005), pp. 20–34.
[49]Kenneth Pollack & Ray Takeyh, 'Taking on Tehran', op. cit.

contemporary nation-state. It was therefore only natural for the Iranian Revolution, if it was to be expanded or exported, to find in Iraq a host group to support its ideological zeal. The Dawa Party proved influential in fomenting this ideological zeal within Iraqi borders. Additionally, tensions between the two governments came to a head with disputes over the legal statuses of Khuzestan and the Shatt al Arab reaching an impasse. Sensing the threat, and under the leadership of the Sunni Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, Iraq invaded Iran in 1980. Both countries slipped into a bloody and costly war that claimed over half a million lives and billions of dollars in economic debts. By the end of the war, Iranian Revolutionary aspirations were significantly shattered, with the revolution hardly expanding beyond the country's border. Another setback to the Iranian radicals appeared after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the US as a dominant power. However, Iranian foreign policy towards Iraq necessitated a critical doctrine of neutrality towards the US, with regards to the first Gulf War against Saddam Hussein.

Yet the coming eradication of the Hussein regime following the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq meant that Pro-Iranian Iraqi Shia who fled to Iran in the 1980s, like the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and the Dawa Party, were greatly empowered, inspiring Shia revival and boosting the aspirations of Iranian radicals. It appeared that the entire fate of the US efforts to stabilize Iraq and secure peaceful transition to power rested on Iranian intentions.[50] In fact, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's early campaigns against US military presence in Iraq across the border and through Iraqi Shia allies presented the greatest challenge against US troops in Iraq. Based on classified US intelligence documents, and in anticipation of the US invasion, Supreme Leader Khamenei summoned the Supreme Council for National Security in Tehran in 2002 and acknowledged the need to "adopt an active policy in order to prevent long-term and short-term dangers to Iran."[51] Iranian policy activism implicated the support of various proxy Shia groups within Iraq, whether political allies like the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIR) or militants like Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army. Since the invasion, the Supreme Leader, in coordination with Iranian radicals, has managed to adopt a double-edged policy manifested by a violent undermining of the US military occupation, on the one hand, and promoting the political victory of their Shia allies, on the other.

Acting on this policy, various paramilitary Iranian groups prepared the grounds for destabilizing the US forces in Iraq. By August 2005, an extensive Iranian-backed network of Iraqi insurgents was fully developed with the sole aim of attacking the US and coalition forces, thereby creating a new warzone within Iraq.[52] In fact, the coalition forces reported that, by mid-2007, the Iranian-instigated attacks on their troops constituted roughly half of all attacks, compared to previous years in which the majority of attacks were waged by Sunni-Arab and al-Qaeda insurgents.[53]

On the political front, Iranian political and financial support to Iraqi allies began to materialize after the SCIR, the Mahdi Army and the Dawa Party became the leading Iraqi government parties in the aftermath of the 2005 Iraqi election.[54] The US was forced to negotiate and collaborate with pro-Iranian Iraqi political groups that emerged

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[50]Ray Takeyh, 'Iran's New Iraq', *The Middle East Journal*, 62:1 (2008) pp. 13–31.

[51]Frederick Kagan, Kimberly Kagan & Danielle Pletka, *Iranian Influence in the Levant, Iraq and Afghanistan* (Washington DC: American Enterprise Institute For Public Policy Research, 19 February 2008), p. 18.

[52]Frederick Kagan, Kimberly Kagan, & Danielle Pletka, *Iranian Influence in the Levant, Iraq and Afghanistan*, op. cit.

[53]Frederick Kagan, Kimberly Kagan, & Danielle Pletka, *Iranian Influence in the Levant, Iraq and Afghanistan*, op. cit., p. 17.

[54]Joseph Felter & Brian Fishman, 'Iranian Strategy in Iraq: Politics and Other Means', *Occasional Papers Series*, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 13 October 2008.

strong after the election. Thus among the major consequences of the US dismantlement of Saddam Hussein's Sunni-dominated government was the clear triumph of Shia transnationalism under the leadership of Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei, asserting an ideological regional Shia revivalism over state realism.

Iran has managed the struggle against the US in Iraq by supporting the political process favoring its local allies while instigating violence against stationed US troops. As a result, Iran has succeeded in asserting itself as both a local mediator and a major transnational player in the region. Whenever violence jeopardized a favorable political process, it intervened to negotiate solutions.[55] Iran mediated a settlement to the 2004 Najaf crisis so as to pave the way for the 2005 national elections that brought to victory its Iraqi allies. During the 2008 Basra fighting, it mediated an end to domestic disputes in preparation for Iraq's provincial elections and the signing of Iraq's Strategic Framework Agreement/Status of Forces Agreement (SFA/SOFA), negotiated and signed with the US. The SFA/SOFA agreements assured the withdrawal of US troops from Iraqi cities and stipulated full withdrawal from Iraq by 2011. This 'dual-strategy' entailed the collaboration of the SCIR and the Dawa Party with the US while the Sadrists staunchly opposed any continuity of American presence in Iraq.

The 2005 and 2009 victories of President Ahmadinejad and the radicals bolstered the expansionist nature of Iran's transnational foreign policy, ushering forth the greatest historic Shia revival in the region. Obama's strategy in Iraq has dwindled to the lesser goal of maintaining security while Iran's strategy has broadened to ensure an absolute US retreat.[56] Indeed, following the 2010 Iraqi election, Iranian radicals were able to claim a prominent role in determining the fate of Iraq and its political transition. Iraqi political parties were converging on Tehran to mediate the formation of a new Iraqi government.

Iranian strategy in the Levant

The second reservoir of Shia communities is concentrated in the extremely strategic yet equally volatile area on the northern Israeli borders; in both Syria and Lebanon, Shia have long experienced denial and subjugation by Ottoman, Sunni and Christian rules. The Islamic revolution in Iran brought to the Shia a shining and inspiring model, and Iran became the long awaited backer for strengthening the Shia minority presence vis-à-vis other national groups. Thus from the early days of the revolution, Lebanese Shia and the predominantly Shia-Alawi Syrian regime expressed their unconditional affiliation with the Iranian Revolution. Iran responded by establishing strong political, economic and military ties with the Syrian government and the Lebanese Shia community.

Syria under Hafez al-Assad considered its alliance with post-revolutionary Iran to be the counterbalance to the new power structure that emerged after Egypt's withdrawal in 1979 from the Arab-Israeli struggle following the Camp David Accords. Similarly, Islamic Iran considered Syria a strategic and favorable ally. After all, Syria was the first state in the region to side with the Islamic Republic during the Iran-Iraq war and has since collaborated with Iran in formulating a complementary international and regional foreign policy. In the 1990s, the Syrian-Iranian alliance helped Syria to strengthen its position in the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations and also helped Iran to withstand US efforts to isolate it.[57] By 2000, the

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[55]Joseph Felter & Brian Fishman, 'Iranian Strategy in Iraq: Politics and Other Means', op. cit.

[56]Joseph Felter & Brian Fishman, 'Iranian Strategy in Iraq: Politics and Other Means', op. cit., p. 37.

[57]Raymond Hinnebusch, 'The Syrian-Iranian Alliance', in *The Middle East Institute Viewpoints: The Iranian Revolution at 30* (Washington DC: The Middle East Institute, 2009), http://www.mei.edu/Portals/o/Publications/Iran_Final.pdf.

Iranian-Syrian alliance emerged triumphant following its successful campaign in backing the Lebanese Hezbollah in expelling Israeli troops from Lebanon. In 2003, Syria joined Iran to undermine the US presence in Iraq. As the US increased its political pressure and economic sanctions against Syria over the alleged Syrian involvement in the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, both Hezbollah and Iran devised strategies to rebuff pressure against the Syrian regime.[58] Syria, in return, has provided critical armament support to Hezbollah and promoted Iran's right for the pursuit of civil nuclear program.[59] Iran and Syria continue to establish strong military, political, and economic cooperation in defiance of Western and Sunni Arab governments' efforts to break the Iranian-Syrian alliance.[60]

The Lebanese south brought about the most significant change in Iran's post-Islamic history: the adoption of Shiism by the Iranian state and society back in the sixteenth century through Shia clerics emigrating from southern Lebanon. The Shia bond that brought the two states together started to topple the political balance in Lebanon prior to 1979. The Iranian cleric Imam Musa Sadr, whose distinguished clerical ancestry can be traced back to the Lebanese south, arrived to Lebanon in the late 1950s based on the request of the Lebanese Shia ulama to the highest clerical authority in Qom for Sadr to lead them. This invitation was a result of Sadr's successful role in the Islamic resurgence in Iran under the Shah. Sadr's charismatic leadership of the Lebanese Shia from 1959 through 1978 set the basis for the Shia emergence as a major player in Lebanese politics. H.E. Chehabi explains that the invitation of the Lebanese Shia for an Iranian to lead them long before the Iranian Revolution reveals much about the transnational hierarchical structure of the Shia clerical establishment.[61] The efforts made by Musa Sadr in consolidating the concept of military resistance vis-à-vis Israel amongst the Lebanese Shia prepared the grounds for the ascendance of Hezbollah.

Iranian radicals and their Revolutionary Guards were instrumental in the formation of Hezbollah in 1985. One of its founders is the former Iranian Interior Minister Mohtashemi who declared that "Hezbollah is part of the Iranian rulership; Hezbollah is a central component of the Iranian military and security establishment; the ties between Iran and Hezbollah are far greater than those between a revolutionary regime with a revolutionary party outside its borders."[62] Acknowledging that Hezbollah's source of authority is *Welayat Al-Faqih*, the Iran-Hezbollah alliance is deeply tied to ideologies that serve the mutual interests of both parties. At the political level, the fundamental ideological bond between Hezbollah and Iran is in their religious views of Israel as an illegitimate entity which is destined to extinction. Iranian financial and military support to Hezbollah has increased significantly over time; the latter has become a complex political-military-social system, a major player in Lebanese and regional politics, and a trainer for regional militants, namely the Palestinians and Iraqis.[63] In fact, the successes of Hezbollah in its 2006 war against Israel and

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[58]Imad Salamey & Frederic Pearson, 'Hezbollah: A Proletarian Party with an Islamic Manifesto - A Sociopolitical Analysis of Islamist Populism in Lebanon and the Middle East', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 18:3 (2007), pp. 416–438.

[59]A. W. Samii, 'A Stable Structure on Shifting Sands: Assessing the Hizbullah-Iran-Syria Relationship', *The Middle East Journal*, 62:1 (2008), pp. 32–54.

[60]Hinnebusch 'The Syrian-Iranian Alliance', op. cit..

[61]H.E. Chehabim, *Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years* (Oxford: The Center for Lebanese Studies, 2006).

[62]Frederick Kagan, Kimberly Kagan, & Danielle Pletka, *Iranian Influence in the Levant, Iraq and Afghanistan*, op.cit., p. 9.

[63]Frederick Kagan, Kimberly Kagan, & Danielle Pletka, *Iranian Influence in the Levant, Iraq and Afghanistan*, op.cit., p. 6. See also Imad Salamey, 'Failing Consociationalism in Lebanon and Integrative Options', op. cit., and Imad Salamey & Frederic Pearson 'Hezbollah: A Proletarian Party with an Islamic Manifesto - A Sociopolitical Analysis of Islamist Populism in Lebanon and the Middle East', op. cit.

in its May 2008 victory over the Saudi-backed Lebanese allies demonstrated the value of Hezbollah as a pivotal strategic power for both Iran and Syria.[64]

Furthermore, Iran, through Hezbollah, has come to fill the power vacuum left by the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005. There have been many reports on Iranian strategies of reproducing the 'Hezbollah proxy model' in the region. The model calls for the empowerment of a political group with a military wing that also provides social services to its population. Iraq's Sadrists and Hamas have followed this model with great success.[65] Such a strategy has charged Iranian claims of being in the forefront of the struggle against Zionism and American imperialism.[66]

The Palestinian cause has also been central to post-revolution Iranian foreign policy which Tehran has attempted to exploit by boosting the Palestinian cause so as to draw sympathy and public support throughout the Islamic world, including those regions of Sunni Islam. The need for Iran to confront the threats of Israel and its undeclared nuclear arsenal has motivated Iran not only to draw sympathy and support for the Palestinian cause but also to support it directly. Thus, it has provided financial and military backing for the various Palestinian groups, including, until very recently, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and also Fatah. Since Hamas' electoral victory in January 2006, Iran has reportedly bolstered the Hamas leadership with hundreds of millions of dollars to sustain the Palestinian social and economic infrastructure amidst the growing Israeli siege, thereby establishing itself as an indispensable ally to the Sunni militants in Palestine.[67] In early 2007, the head of the Israeli Shin Bet declared that Iran has become Hamas' basic supplier of weapons and military training. He added that training by both the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Hezbollah experts takes place in Gaza, the Lebanese Bekaa Valley, and in Iran itself.[68] Thus, in the last few years, Iran has become the primary sponsor of three major interconnected regional actors in the Levant: the Syrian government, the Lebanese Hezbollah, and the Palestinian Hamas. All of these actors are situated in locations which confine Israel's northern and southern flanks, thereby maximizing Iran's military reach beyond its own geographical borders.

Iranian radicals have succeeded in engineering a strategic 'transnational-Islamist' alliance that includes Syria, Hezbollah, various Shia groups in Iraq and Afghanistan, and, lately, Hamas. Though Shia in essence, Iran has reached out to Sunni groups as necessitated by mutual goals. The unity of this alliance has grown fundamental to the very survival of its partners; the 'growing economic interdependence along with the flow of military aid to the Levant, Iraq and Afghanistan [have] place[d] Iran at the center of a dependency network that makes survival away from the powerful patron almost impossible'.[69]

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[64]Hinnebusch, 'The Syrian–Iranian Alliance', op. cit., p. 151. See also Imad Salamey 'Failing Consociationalism in Lebanon and Integrative Options', op. cit., and Imad Salamey & Frederic Pearson 'Hezbollah: A Proletarian Party with an Islamic Manifesto - A Sociopolitical Analysis of Islamist Populism in Lebanon and the Middle East', op. cit.
[65]Frederick Kagan, Kimberly Kagan, & Danielle Pletka, *Iranian Influence in the Levant, Iraq and Afghanistan*, op. cit., p. 64. See also Imad Salamey & Frederic Pearson 'Hezbollah: A Proletarian Party with an Islamic Manifesto - A Sociopolitical Analysis of Islamist Populism in Lebanon and the Middle East', op. cit.
[66]H. E. Chehabi, 'Iran and Lebanon in the Revolutionary Decade' in H.E. Chehabi (ed), *Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years*, op. cit., pp. 201–230.
[67]Frederick Kagan, Kimberly Kagan, & Danielle Pletka, *Iranian Influence in the Levant, Iraq and Afghanistan*, op. cit., p. 11.
[68]Frederick Kagan, Kimberly Kagan, & Danielle Pletka, *Iranian Influence in the Levant, Iraq and Afghanistan*, op. cit., p. 10.
[69]Frederick Kagan, Kimberly Kagan, & Danielle Pletka, *Iranian Influence in the Levant, Iraq and Afghanistan*, op. cit.

Concluding Remarks

A number of events have paved the way for the resurgence of a radical Shia Iranian foreign policy. The 2001 US-sponsored 'war on terror' removed two major foes of Iran: the Sunni fundamentalist regime of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein's Sunni-dominated regime in Iraq. The consequential power vacuum established in the region has consequentially drawn Iran toward an active transnational role. The ideological context of Shia revivalism has provided the Supreme Leader and the radicals with the pretext to rationalize an expansionist Iranian foreign policy agenda. The so-called 'war on terror' has, in effect, not only removed key obstacles from the path of the expansionist Iranian foreign policy agenda, but has also provided the ideological Shia revival basis of the agenda with a rational pretext to justify it.

   Based on the above, a close view of Iranian strategy in the Middle Eastern regional hotspots demonstrated shifts toward a more offensive realist foreign policy. The presence of an anarchic international system and the prevalence of mistrust among states may very well dictate a rationalism of survival based on offensive militarism.[70] John Herz's prescription that "the best defense is a good offense"[71] constitutes the essence of this proposition. A strong rising transnational Shia ideological orientation inspired by the Supreme Leader has come to complement offensive realism. Offensive realism recognizes that states might pursue non-security goals such as economic prosperity and the promotion of particular ideologies such as pan-Islamic unity to enhance the state's power. Iranian radicals have exploited this under the guidance of the Supreme leader to stretch Iran's power beyond its borders. Iran's state-centric pragmatism, which may seek international normalization and state-building, has often been curtailed by ambitious radical visions and a leadership role beyond the mere survival of the state. Thus, any analysis of Iranian foreign policy must necessarily take into account the regional orientation of Shia revival and its link with that of *Welayat Al-Faqih*.

   Despite the views predicting the ultimate retreat to a pragmatic post-revolutionary state foreign policy,[72] Iran appears to have been experiencing a 'double movement'. On the one hand, as the regime matures, pragmatic considerations will become increasingly essential for the state's survival.[73] These considerations may include economic co-operation with other states to ensure domestic growth or may imply regional cooperation to divert common security threats. This explains why Iran, for instance, cooperated with the US in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Such considerations have taken precedence over ideological preferences. On the other hand, however, ideological considerations have complemented political calculations, particularly when the surrounding environment has triggered domestic divisions and awakened long-standing suspicions. Under such circumstances, the regime has reverted back to revolutionary strategies and rhetoric, moving beyond the state's domestic interests.[74] The relative decline of the state system in the Middle East, amid globalization and economic liberalization, may provide sectarian populist ideologies with a renewed vigor to claim safeguarding of groups against perceived subjugation by global powers. With many small states' declining abilities to provide security and economic prosperity for their own citizens, sectarianism is emerging as an alternative paradigm.

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[70]John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001).

[71]John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, op. cit. p. 36.

[72]See Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution*, 1938 (New York: Vintage, 1965).

[73]Nasser Saghafi-Ameri 'Iranian Foreign Policy: Concurrence of Ideology and Pragmatism', in *The Middle East Institute Viewpoints: The Iranian Revolution at 30* (Washington DC: The Middle East Institute, 2009), http://www.mei.edu/Portals/0/Publications/Iran_Final.pdf.

[74]Arshin Adib-Mohaddam, *Iran in World Politics: The Question of the Islamic Republic*, op. cit.

Among the outcomes is the spread of sectarian schisms and clashes across the Middle East, deeply implicating divided countries such as Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, Sudan, and Yemen. Other countries with divided sectarian constituencies, such as Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, have also been experiencing growing sectarian polarizations. Iran's own ethno-sectarian polarizations in the form of Sunni and Kurdish minorities have also continuously generated internal challenges for the Islamic Republic. This reality is helping the revival of sectarian ideologies and leaderships that address interrelated regional and sectarian politics. Competing regional powers such as Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia are destined to devise foreign policies that are sectarian-charged and regionally-oriented within the context of offensive realism. The revival of Shiism, embedded in *Welayat Al-Faqih* and expressed in Iran's foreign policy under Iran's President Ahmadinajad, can ultimately be explained through this lens.

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