NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, 1979-2010

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NONGMAITHEM KISHORCHAND SINGH

Center for West Asian Studies
School of International Studies
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
New Delhi 110067

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Centre for West Asian Studies
School of International Studies
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
New Delhi - 110067

Phone : +91-11-2670 4379
Mobile : +91 98 18 77 83 15
Email : cwas.jnu@gmail.com

DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled "**National Security Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979-2010**" submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University, is my original work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this university or any other university.
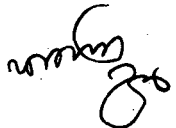
N. Kishorchand Singh

Nongmaithem Kishorchand Singh

CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

Prof. P.R. Kumaraswamy
Chairperson
CHAIRPERSON
Centre for West Asian Studies
School of International Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110 067, INDIA

Prof. A.K. Ramakrishnan
Supervisor
Centre for West Asian Studies
School of International Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110 067

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ABBREVIATIONS

AL	Arab League
AU	African Union
CENTO	Central Treaty Organisation
EU	European Union
FTA	Free Trade Agreements
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IAI	Iran Aircraft Industries
ICCO Organisation	Islamic Culture and Communications
IDF	Israeli Defence Forces
IEI	Iran Electronics Industries
IHI	Iran Helicopter Industries
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
IRI	Islamic Republic of Iran
ISCI	Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
LEF	Law Enforcement Forces
MIO	Military Industries Organisation
MISIRI	Ministry of Intelligence and National Security of the Islamic Republic of Iran

MKO	Mujahedin- e Kalaq Organisation
MOIS	Ministry of Intelligence and Security
MPRP	Muslim Peoples' Republican Party
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
PA	Palestinian Authority
PBO	Plan Budget Organisation
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation
PSP	Progressive Socialist Party
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
SCCAF Forces	Supreme Command Council of the Armed
SCIRI	Supreme Council of the Islamic Republic of Iraq
SNSC	Supreme National Security Council
SSM	Surface-to-Surface Missile
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNPKF	United Nations Peacekeeping Forces
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Since the Revolution in 1979, Iran has become a key player not only in the Gulf but also in the West Asian region at large. Perhaps, Iran is currently at the centre of a global push-and-pull game due to its geostrategic position and its interaction with regional and global players. The Article 152 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran states that "the foreign policy of the Islamic republic of Iran is based upon the rejection of all forms of domination, both the exertion of it and submission to it, the preservation of the independence of the country in all respects and its territorial integrity, the defense of the rights of all Muslims, nonalignment with respect to the hegemonic superpowers, and the maintenance of mutually peaceful relations with all non-belligerent states".[1] Thus the main motive behind Iran's foreign policy is to preserve its national security and project its presence and influence in and around the region. It also has a desire to keep the leadership role of the Muslim world away from the hands of Sunni-dominated states.

In the recent years, Iran has been expanding its regional and global influence. Iran's quest for promoting this agenda is derived from various regional and international developments, such as the end of the Iran-Iraq War (1988); the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991); the so-called 'war on terror' and the 'democratisation' agenda advanced by the US in West Asia (since 2001) and the fall of the Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq (2003). Moreover, its aspiration for a greater role in the region stems from its large territory and population, its geostrategic location, its central status within the Islamic-Shiite world, its glorious civilization and history as a

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[1] For an English translation of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran see http://www.servat.nibe.ch/law/icl/ir00t_.html.

regional empire, its natural resources and its military power and so on. Therefore, the basic drivers of Iran's security policy include a range of ideological, strategic, regional, international and domestic factors, all of which play into Iran's security decision-making. Such a policy shapes the particular agenda of various security institutions, particularly the intelligence service, the regular armed forces (the *Artesh*) the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) etc. Thus, the role of the Iranian armed forces and the security services is critical in understanding Iran's security policy. Another important pillar of Iran's security system and its national security strategy is its nuclear project, which Iran perceives would serve its aspirations to guarantee its security, economy as well as regional and international status.

In order to achieve its foreign policy ambitions, Iran has developed a strong national security strategy under the aegis of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) which is mandated by the Article 176 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Supreme National Security Council is an institution founded in 1989 in the course of the revision of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran with an aim to watch over the Islamic Revolution and safeguard Iran's national interest as well as its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Article 177 of the Iranian Constitution mentions the responsibilities of the Supreme National Security Council as: first, to determine the national defense/security policies within the framework of general policies laid down by the leader; second, to coordinate political, intelligence, social, economic and cultural activities in relation to general defense/security policies; and third, to exploit material and non-material resources of the country for facing internal and external threats.

The central objective of Iran's national security strategy is to maintain the security of its population and its territories, obtain international legitimacy for its regime and stop any attempts to topple it. Some of the primary national security concerns are predominantly 'domestic' relating to maintaining the internal security of the country. This includes, maintaining territorial integrity against long standing potential secessionist movements in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan; preventing the incursions of religious ethnic insurgents into Iran from its neighbouring states;

securing the country against opposition forces like Iraqi sponsored Mujahidin operating along Iran's border etc. Iran's territorial integrity is threatened by various ethnic minorities whose origins are beyond Iran's border. For example, Iran's Kurdish minority is located along Iran's border with Iraq. Thus, Iran's prime internal security concern is to prevent the rise of nationalistic uprising among its ethno-religious minorities. Therefore, assuring the territorial integrity of the country is an important dimension of Iran's national security strategy. Again, Iran enjoys an abundance of natural resources, mainly oil and gas, and to guarantee its control over the extraction of energy and natural resources is also a fundamental value in Iran's national security strategy.

The current Iranian leadership is also concerned with four fundamental factors which challenge its national security: (1) the current situation in Afghanistan; (2) the future of Iraq and its stability; (3) the Israeli threat and (4) the presence of US and NATO troops on its borders. In Afghanistan, Iran have tried to play a stabilising role, while controlling the borders with Afghanistan and funding groups that were opposed to the Taliban regime in Kabul. Iran perceives its key national interests in Afghanistan as exerting its traditional influence over western Afghanistan, which is bordered by Iran and was once part of the Persian empire, and to protect Afghanistan's Shiite minority. However, the active U.S and NATO military presence in Afghanistan have made Iran fear of a possible threat to its security interests. This fear is also similar to that emanating from the US military presence in Iraq. Since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, Iran has sought to shape and influence the post-Saddam political structure by helping pro-Iranian politicians. Nevertheless, Iran succeeded in that strategy during 2004-2007, when Iraq was highly unstable. Iran wants to secure its territorial integrity as it learned a lesson from the eight years war with Iraq (1980-1988) in which Iran suffered heavy losses. Subsequent to the end of the eight year long conflict that decimated Iran's military capability, Iran has been in a gradual armament and military infrastructure rebuilding process. Therefore, Iran wants to guarantee that its fate will not be similar to that of neighbours like Afghanistan and Iraq which were occupied and their regimes toppled by the US. This comes at a time when Iran is surrounded by American forces on all sides (the Persian Gulf, Iraq,

Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan). Iran also fears that US presence in Iraq and Afghanistan will aim to destabilise the Islamic Republic. Another major concern of Iran's national security is Israel which the current Iranian leadership perceives as a major competitor to Iran's military and strategic role in West Asia.

Another major component of Iran's national security is its quest for a greater regional role and its perception that it should be impossible to make regional decisions without Iranian consent. Iran seeks to influence its neighbouring states and the other parts of West Asia (Syria, Lebanon and Palestinian territories) on the basis of its interest and ideology. Tehran has consolidated its relationship with Syria and reached out to its Arab Gulf neighbours in both diplomatic and economic spheres. To achieve its aims, Iran has created, trained and financially supported Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Palestine and the Badr Brigade in Iraq. They act as trans-national groups that are flexible enough to implement Iran's objectives abroad (Nasr 2007). Iran also wields direct influence through its alliances with other countries, many of whom are hostile to US. These include Syria, Lebanon as well as Iraq's relatively pro-Iran government. Therefore, maintenance of a favourable regional environment is also a core objective of the national security policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Iran also aspires to receive recognition as a leading country in the region as well as the world. This aspiration is derived from Iran's history, its geostrategic location and size, its resources and military power. Thus Iran conducts a global foreign policy and weaves a network of alliances and agreements with China, Russia, India, North Korea, countries in Africa, Latin America and Europe and so on. Iran also wants to limit the power of the state of Israel. Iran feels that it is subject to constant challenges by the US and other regional states like Israel to undermine the stability of the Islamic regime. In recent times, the complexity and magnitude of these external threats as well as internal conflicts have greatly increased. Therefore, Iran's national security policy can be viewed as shaped by pressure from three distinct environment: (1) the national environment; (2) the regional environment; and (3) the global environment. However, the pressure from the two latter environments has

increased considerably since the 9/11 attack and the subsequent US-led invasions of Iran's two neighbours, Afghanistan and Iraq. This Iran perceives as a big threat to its national security. The events of 9/11 and the developments in the region that have followed have created new grounds for Iran's national security policy. Historically, the Islamic Republic of Iran has always felt threatened by Western powers especially US. In the wake of the recent events, new opportunities have entered Iran's security policy domain and it has focused on how to react to perceived external threats. Thus, the sources of Iran's security policy defy simple explanation. Religion, nationalism, ethnicity, economics, and geopolitics all are important factors explaining Iran's goal for national security. Therefore, a cogent national security policy is very much required to genuinely strengthen the state, thus reducing its vulnerability to internal threats and external intervention.

There is, however, a lack of academic work on national security issues especially in the Iranian context. This study will try to produce an understanding on Iranian national security by using various established theories of national security. The prevailing theories of realism and neo-realism could be useful tools for the research. Iranian national security policy has to be addressed through various factors. Some of the factors include geopolitical considerations, military ambitions to safeguard itself, economic calculations and great power interventions, cooperation in missile, nuclear, chemical and advance conventional weapons, Iranian nuclear issue in the Security Council, Israeli threat, US engagement in Iraq, Afghanistan and other states bordering Iran, etc.

Thus, the study of Iranian national security issues can begin with an appreciation of how the foreign policy has got securitised in the realm of global politics. To be able to understand the Iranian national security policy, the study identifies some theoretical aspects of national security.

National Security: Conceptual Aspects

The quest for national security is an unending effort and concerns for the security of the states are as old as the nation-states themselves. However, a serious

awareness of the security problems of the nations and academic interest in national security studies began only in the aftermath of the World War II. National security like national interest is a frequently used idea that is rarely explored in conceptual terms. Many definitions of national security have addressed the object or goal of national security by identifying certain core values. One needs to understand the concept of security in order to have a proper understanding of the national security problem.

Most of the literature which attempts at analysing 'security' are based on power in relation to state. Those who favour this approach through power derived their thinking from the traditional realist school pioneered by E.H Carr (1946) and Hans Morgenthau (1973). They tend to see 'security' as a derivative of power in the sense that an actor with enough power to reach a dominating position will acquire maximum security. This approach dominates thinking about the national security problems for the last several decades. However, this concept of national security has been criticized by several scholars as state-specific.

According to Waltz, in anarchy, security is the highest end (Waltz 1979: 126). And anarchical character of the international system is a condition which is the classic source of threat to the security of the states. Waltz also pointed out that "with many sovereign states, with no system of law enforceable among them, with each state judging its grievances and ambitions according to the dictates of its own reason or desire, conflict sometimes leading to war is bound to occur" (Waltz 1959:159). Thus, in neo-realist perspectives, the first concern of states is not to maximize power but to maintain their security in the system, that is, states seek security not maximum power. Here Waltz's use of the term 'security' implies not domination but rather the minimum power needed to assure the state's survival. Waltz also argues that the external threat of national security originates from the policies of the other states. It is these policies and actions that determine the character of the international environment in terms of the degree of conflict, tension and cooperation that may endanger the national security of other states. This view of the concept is similar to that of Barry Buzan, who defines security as "the ability of states and societies to

maintain their independent identity and their functional integrity" (Buzan 1983: 22). According to Buzan, "states seek to reduce their insecurity either by reducing their vulnerability or by preventing or lowering threats" (Buzan 1983: 67). Therefore, security is seen as the most basic of all state interests; the *sine qua non* for all other pursuits.

Likewise, some other studies on national security are state-specific and are usually explained from the perspective of the global power politics. Probably the best known conceptual piece on security is Arnold Wolfers' chapter on national security in his book *Discord and Collaboration*. Wolfer (1962) identifies 'national independence' and 'territorial integrity' as the minimum national core values. In parallel, Traeger and Simmonie also assert that "the ultimate purpose of national security is to protect or extend certain national values which are considered vital" (Trager and Simmonie1973:38). They define national security as a "part of government policy having as its objective the creation of national and international political conditions favourable to the protection or extension of vital national values against existing political adversaries" (Trager and Simmonie 1973:40).

One can also find few other conceptual discussions on national security. Berkowitz and Booke (1968) also define national security as "the ability of a nation to protect its internal values from external threat". Therefore, they assume that threat to a nation's security come from outside. In the same manner, Michael Louw also defined national security as "the condition of freedom from external physical threat" (Louw 1978: 10-11). According to Louw, "although moral and ideological threats should be included, it is really physical violence which is generally perceived as the ultimate leverage against the state and therefore, as a real and tangible danger to its survival" (ibid 1978: 10-11).

Several scholars also discuss about the dimensions of national security. To them, national security is inextricably linked with the threat perceptions of the states. One such dimensions of national security is what Hardel (1981) argue as the geostrategic dimension which is a key variable in the perception of security or insecurity of the states. Strategic location, physical configuration and strength or

weakness of national boundaries will influence perception of the vulnerability of the state to external and internal threats and condition its approach to national security. Another important dimension is the domestic dimension. Traeger and Simmonie (1973) explore the domestic dimensions (frequently labeled as *internal security*) of national security. They argue that internal challenges like struggle for political authority, separatism, etc. are really threat to the national security of the states, because internal conflicts invariably invite external interventions. Thus, certain scholars while defining national security emphasise the role of national governments to create an environment whereby the nation would be able to maintain and promote its cherished values.

Likewise, several efforts have been made to broaden the scope and definition of the core value of national security. For example, the definitions of national security advanced by Krasner (1983) and Brown (1983) included economic well being as a core value to be protected under the label of national security. Krasner, argues that "limiting the definitions of national security to the core objectives of maintaining the political and territorial integrity of the state ignores many other deeply rooted goals pursued by the states"(Krasner 1983: 320) For them, economic health is an inextricable part and prerequisite to the pursuit of national security. Therefore, in a broader sense national security can be defined to include not only the political and territorial objectives but also a number of other values such as economic well being.

Cable (1995) also asserts that economic security is concerned with 'the degree to which national security is threatened by dependence on external sources of technology, raw materials, food and fuel'. Seen in this perspective, traditional energy security concern is about the supply and demand for energy. According to Stares (2000) a state is said to be insecure if it has to rely on external sources of strategic materials which contribute to its 'war potential' or if the supply of the strategic material is under threat. In other words, these strategic materials become the life line without which the economy and subsequently the existence of states are threatened. It is clear that once oil and gas are defined as the strategic materials a whole host of security related issues will emerge. In essence, energy security is about the 'security

of the supply' and the 'stability of price' and the reliance on external sources become inevitable.

Lastly, one definition which seems more relevant to our times offered by Robert McNamara (1968) is that national security is not military hardware though it may include it; security is not military force though it may encompass it, and security is development and without development there is no security". In this manner Harold Brown also defines national security as "the ability to preserve the nation's physical integrity and territory; to maintain its economic relations with the rest of the world on reasonable terms; to protect its nature, institutions and governance from disruption from outside; and to control its borders"(Brown 1983: 14) Thus, national security is the requirement to maintain the survival of the nation-states through the use of economic, military and political power and the exercise of diplomacy.

Again, neo-realism holds that the international structure is defined by its anarchic ordering principle, the distribution of capabilities, and the number of great powers within the international system. The anarchic international structure is decentralised having no formal central authority and is composed of formally equal sovereign states who are rational actors. These states act according to the logic of self-help—states seek their own interest and will not subordinate their interest to another's. Mearsheimer writes, "it is the structure or architecture of the international system that forces states to pursue power, rather than the nature of human kind filtering up to shape state behaviour. In this system, states are unitary actors seeking out power as a means of survival, rather than as an end in itself, and the states themselves are the constituent units of that system" (Mearsheimer 2007: 153).

Though Iran's fear of regional powers is low, the United State's influence in the region continue to play a major role in Iran's national security. Because states can never be certain of other states' future intentions, there is a lack of trust between states which requires them to be on guard against relative losses of power.

The security dilemma arises from the state's uncertainty whether its adversary has far-reaching expansionist aims or, is interested only in the preservation of the

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status quo. It is used to denote the self-defeating aspects of the quest for security in an anarchic system. This driving force of survival is the primary factor influencing their behaviour and in turn ensures states develop offensive military capabilities. This study tries to argue that in the Post-Cold War international structure with the US emerging as the lone superpower in the system led Iran experiencing 'security dilemma'.

An enduring perception of an external threat to the regime has been an important element in Iran's defence thinking and the formulation of its foreign and security policies. The modernisation of the Iranian armed forces with strong assistance from Russia and China since the early 1990s indicates that external threat perception has significantly influenced the national security policy of the Islamic Republic (Berman 2005).

The structural distribution of capabilities limits cooperation among states through fears of relative gains made by other states, and the possibility of dependence on other states. The desire and relative abilities of each state to maximise relative power constrain each other, resulting in a 'balance of power', which shapes international relations. The neo-liberal institutionalist perspective in International Relations is critical of the relative gain notion in neo-realist theory. According to them, relative gains argument merely highlights the difficulties of cooperation when there is tough bilateral competition but it does not necessarily undermine the prospects for cooperation in general (Waltz 1979).

According to Waltz and other realists, self-help in the form of balancing against an actual or potential hegemony is the most prominent strategy used by states. There are two ways in which states balance power: internal balancing and external balancing. Internal balancing occurs as states grow their own capabilities by increasing economic growth and/or increasing military spending. External balancing occurs as states enter into alliances to check the power of more powerful states or alliances. Military modernisations in Iran have increased their offensive capability but it is relatively weak compared to their adversaries' like US and Israel.

Another interesting account which could throw some light on the threat perception and the resultant action in the formation of military alliance is given by Waltz. He argued that states balance against threats rather than simply against power (Waltz 1988). Therefore, alignment politics and the military balance play an important role in defining Iran's security paradigm. Thus, alliance makes Iran and its allies in West Asia easier to simultaneously pursue robust political and economic engagement with that great power's rivals.

For classical realists, power is an end itself while for the structural realists, it is a means to an end and the ultimate end is survival. While the theory of neo-realism gives primacy to security of the state in the anarchic international system with power as the only means to survive in such a situation, the structural realists are divided over the question 'how much power is enough to remain secured?' Thus, two main strands of neo-realism give two different perspectives on Tehran's rise and its intentions. Defensive Realists like Kenneth Waltz (1979) maintains that it is unwise for state to try to maximise their share of world power, because the system will punish them if they attempt to gain too much power. On the other hand, offensive realists like John Mearsheimer (2007) take the view that it makes good strategic sense for states to gain as much power as possible and to pursue hegemony. Becoming a hegemon is the best way to ensure one's own survival, according to the offensive strand of neo-realism.

According to John Mearsheimer, power is based on the material capabilities that a state commands. In neo-realist perspective, the balance of power is mostly a function of the tangible military assets that state possesses. However, states also have latent power in terms of a state's wealth and the size of its overall population. Iran is perhaps a regional power with huge potential in terms of both offensive military assets and latent economic power in the West Asia region. The ultimate goal of the great power vis-a-vis regional power, according to offensive realism is to gain hegemony, because that is the best guarantee of survival. Iran will seek to maximise the power gap between itself and its neighbours especially in the Gulf. And, seemingly Iran will make an attempt to reach a level in military capability which could command respect from its immediate neighbours as well as other extra-regional

power in West Asia. Thus, an increasingly powerful Iran is also likely to pose a threat US military presence in the region.

Iran surely is aiming at maximising its power relative to the US and the other regional powers like Israel, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. It has expressed concern about the rising gap in military capability and technological advancement including nuclear power. Iran's foreign policy is driven by its desire to enhance its 'relative power both economic and military.

Iran's National Security

Traditionally, national security issues are seldom the subject of public discussion in Iran and therefore, public input into security policy making is almost nonexistent. However, in recent years certain changes have been accompanied by a fair amount of open discussion on the issues affecting Iran's national security both in the government and the academic realm as security is seen primarily in national terms by both policy-makers and strategists. Jean Bodin, the famous French political theorist said that a country's foreign policy is determined by its geographical location. This is the case of Islamic Republic of Iran as well. During the Cold War era, Iran became an important player in America's policy of containing the Soviet Union. During this time, under the Shah's rule, Iran became a major player in the Persian Gulf with US support and Iran benefited from extensive US financial and military support as a policeman of the Gulf. This was highlighted by Iran's active role in the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) created in the second half of 1950s. During the Cold War, Iran received technical and financial aid from US to develop its nuclear capabilities.

Bayman and others (2005) examine the fundamental sources of the security policy of Iran. They assert that Iran's security policy is often described as a blend of 'Islamic and nationalist' objective. Both factors, however, carried less weight in recent years than the more standard considerations. They assert that geopolitics, economics, ethnicity and other communal divisions also drive Iran's security policy particularly with regard to the countries on Iran's borders. Moreover, a myriad of

individuals, institutions and organizations play important political and military roles in Iran. These include the intelligence services, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the regular armed forces (Artesh), the Basij, Quds Forces, etc.

According to Emile Irani (2008), the demise of the Shah and the advent of the leadership of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeni in 1979 led to the total reshuffling of Iran's foreign and security policies with major allies turning into major enemies. The US became a major foe. The Iranian sense of vulnerability and threat perception increased following the American military presence in Afghanistan, on Iran's eastern border, and the U.S invasion of Iraq on its western border. Iran feared that US presence in Iraq will aim at destabilising the Islamic Republic. In addition, Iran also shares a border with Pakistan, a nuclear-armed nation since 1998. Another enemy of Iran (perceived or otherwise) is Israel. The Islamic Republic has emerged as a major competitor to Israeli military and strategic hegemony in the West Asia (Ketzman 2006).

In this background, several core initiatives were taken as part of the Iranian national security strategy. The Iranian nuclear program is one. Efraim Inbar (2006) points out that the Iranian nuclear program began during the reign of Shah, reflecting Iran's perception of itself as a great power and an ancient civilization with hegemonic aspirations in its region. The Islamic Republic of Iran has invested tremendous political capital and vast resources in going nuclear. According to Mayer (2004), Tehran's overall anti-American foreign policy has resulted in the inclusion of Iran by the President George W. Bush in 2002 on his "Axis of Evil" list. Thus Iran may have learned_the lesson that the nuclear weapons capability can serve as a good insurance against outside intervention. These factors provided Iran with an additional strong incentive for walking the nuclear path and accelerating its nuclear program seems the most appealing option for Iran. Mayer (2004) asserts that there are three main motivations behind Iran's nuclear program. First, at the systemic level, external threats drive Iran's perceived need for a nuclear deterrent. Second, at the individual level, well placed governmental elites propel the nuclear security myth to spur nationalistic support for nuclear weapons. Third, at the state level, institutional

bureaucracies, created to build Iran's nuclear infrastructure, now compete against other organization for their own self interest, which are closely associated with the continued development of nuclear weapons. Thus Iran's nuclear program was initiated with the intention to project its power in the region and to develop the ability to play the role of a significant power in world affairs. Nowadays, it also seems to be designed to provide a strategic response to American influence in the region.

Iran's Regional and Global Security

Regional security is an important dimension of Iran's national security since a fragile regional environment is the primary source of external threat to its national security (Ramazani 2004). National security and regional security cannot be neatly separated. National security requires the maintenance of a favourable regional environment to the extent that the regional conflicts invite extra-regional intervention (Buzan 1983). Thus Iran's security is prone to regional threats. The regional contestants may seek external aid in support of their respective causes on the basis of ethnic, religious or ideological affiliation, or strategic need. According to Alagappa (1987), "the neighbouring states especially which are weaker seeks to strengthen their position by soliciting external assistance in the form of moral and technical support for their cause, territorial sanctuary, training assistance, supply of arms and equipments, financial assistance, or even overt interventions on their behalf"(Alagappa 1987: 11) Thus, regional forces may influence to exploit domestic security.

According to Chubin (1989), the starting point for an assessment of Iran's security perceptions in the Cold War period must be the "geopolitical fatality" of proximity both to the Soviet Union and to the world's greatest concentration of petroleum deposits. He also classified Iran's security perceptions into two categories: those directly concerning relations between the superpowers, and those on the regional level, where her diplomacy is more active.

According to Maleki (2007), the combination of unique geo-strategic location and energy resources has made Iran a focus of great powers throughout the modern

period. This fact has profoundly affected the way Iranian view the world and their perceptions of their historical process and international relations. Meshkini (2000) also argues that Iranians have a strong sense of their identity and past and see themselves as the natural heirs of a leadership role in the region. Since the end of the war with Iraq (1988) and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini (1989), the Islamic Republic of Iran has accorded regional relations and coalition-building an increasingly important place in its security and foreign policy. Thus, regionalism began to assume prominence in Iranian foreign policy during the presidency of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989–97), which was a period of significant change in Iranian foreign policy goals and strategies.

According to Emile Irani (2008), the Islamic Republic of Iran is the greatest and most urgent threat to regional order in West Asia and a challenge to American hegemony in world affairs. And its nuclear ambitions are a challenge to the international non-proliferation regime (NPT). Within the international community, Israel seems to be most concerned about the prospects of a nuclear Iran. Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, justified his country's nuclear program on the basis of 'scientific advancement, self-sufficiency, and political independence', while the perception in the West, Israel and among Arab Gulf close to the US, is that Iran will not limit its nuclear activities to purely civilian use but that it is striving to build nuclear weapons. Strategically, Inbar (2006) also claims that if Iran becomes a nuclear state it would alter the balance of power in the region and constitute a challenge to Israel's nuclear supremacy. It would also lead to another arms race in the West Asia. Moreover, a nuclear Iran would pose a direct threat to the presence of American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan and neutralise US attempts to isolate Iran.

Rationale and the Scope of the Study

National security remains a widely discussed issue but a little understood problem. A preliminary survey of the available literature shows a clear knowledge gap which requires particular consideration on Iran's national security, since most of the literature on Iran are confined to history, foreign policy and nuclear program. Careful assessments of the meaning of national security and its role within the range

of broader issues are still lacking. A study on Iranian national security policy is extremely relevant because Iran plays an important role in one of the most important regions of the world – the energy rich Gulf.

Understanding the concept of national security needs a coherent approach and Iranian national security has to be addressed through various factors. Some of the factors include geopolitical considerations, military ambitions, economic calculations, and great power interventions. In the West, there are states which perceive the galloping rise of Iran as a threat to the international peace and security, which has an ambition to become the regional hegemon. Because of its geo-strategic location, political-cultural characteristics and energy resources, Iran is a pivotal state in shaping the politics of West Asia. Iran increasingly has its impact on issues such as regional crisis in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine etc. which are currently the most significant agenda items of international security.

The rationale behind choosing this topic is that historically, national security remains the prime concern of the Islamic Republic of Iran due to several domestic, regional and international factors. Security issues have been a primary concern in building political and military behaviour of Iran. In this backdrop, this study provides a wider picture of the overall security dynamics of the Islamic Republic of Iran as well as the security framework of the region.

Hypotheses

The proposed work aims at analyzing the dynamics of Iranian national security policy. This research work will test the following hypotheses:

1. Iran's national security policy involves a two-pronged approach consisting of addressing Iran's overall vulnerability and its willingness to maintain its power in the region.
2. A significant aspect of Iranian national security strategy can be seen as a counter move to protect its security interest against the military threat of other big powers especially USA in the West Asian region.

The objective of the research is to examine the dimensions of the national security policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It will also seek to present a systematic analysis of the Iranian national security policy and by mapping the tools which serve to realize Iran's national (domestic, regional as well as international) ambitions. It will also analyse the political and security related issues revolving around Iran's national security policy and present its strategic rationale. It will also examine the tensions among the components of Iran's national security strategy and its several institutions. This research work will also analyse the nature and the magnitude of the Iran's national security policy and its influence in West Asian security framework. Most importantly, this study looks into the recent developments in and around Iran's national security policy framework with regard to the changes in its foreign policy trajectory.

Research Methodology

The methodology of the study is qualitative and analytical in nature and it is based on explanation and interpretation of data. The study mainly relies on secondary sources such as books, articles available in various journals and newspapers on the subject matter. Electronic sources and the Internet are also consulted.

Scheme of the Chapters

This work consists of three main chapters apart from the introduction and the conclusion. This introductory chapter has been providing a broad structure of the study and was addressing several questions from the theoretical and conceptual understanding of national security.

Chapter II gives the historical background of the Islamic Republic's political system and power structure by dealing with various institutions of Islamic Republic of Iran that concern with national security. It highlights the role of various agencies and governmental wings that shape the country's security policy. Chapter III looks into the domestic dimensions of its national security which covers contemporary debates on the domestic political environment, its nuclear program, energy crisis and several other ethno-religious problems that have a bearing on its national security.

Chapter IV focuses on the regional and international dimensions of Iran's national security strategy where Iran's regional and international political and security orientations are discussed in detail. It also highlights Iran's regional and international role, the complex interplay of geopolitical factors, great power influences and the changing military and political behaviour in both regional and international realms.

Finally, the concluding chapter V summarises the principal finding and arguments in each chapters and also tests the two hypotheses by drawing conclusions from the chapters.

Limitations of the Work

The present work is limited to observing the trends in political and military strategy based on available literature. However, there is lack of transparency on Iranian government's political and security related issues and official data are sometimes not completely reliable to reach any good conclusions since most of the core policies and strategy are kept secret due to security concerns. And due to the lack of knowledge of Persian for the author of this dissertation, the primary and secondary sources used in the research work are those available in the English language only.

CHAPTER II

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF IRAN'S NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY

A gamut of individuals, institutions, and organisations play important roles in shaping the national security policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The focus of this chapter is to examine the functions and roles of these several individuals, institutions and organisations which are particularly important in carving out and implementing the national security policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It includes the intelligence services, the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the paramilitary militia known as the *Basij*, and the regular armed forces *Artesh,* etc.

One of the most crucial intellectual challenges facing Iran's national security in the post-revolutionary era is how it defines its "national interest" (*manafa-e melli*). Profound cultural, political, social and psychological challenges that beset Iran have bearing on how Iran will ultimately settle on a coherent conception and definition of its national interest (Ramazani 2001). In order to make sense of the Iranian national security, it is necessary to identify the character of its national interest.

Also, Iran must have the capabilities to thwart and confront any military threat that could emerge from both internal and external enemies. Iranian interests are thus based on deterrence to disrupt any potential attack, although the most important element is the creation of a strategic mechanism to ensure the country's security. In order to serve its national objectives, the national security policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based on the following six major foundations:

1. Recognition of the Islamic Revolution and the Iranian Regime

Iran feels that it is subject to constant challenges by the US and regional states like Israel and Iraq to undermine the stability of the Islamic Regime. Therefore, Iran's

central objective is to obtain international legitimacy for its regime and stop any attempts to topple it.

2. Military Guarantees for Iran's Territorial Integrity and Security.

Iran wants to secure its territorial integrity as it learned a lesson from the war with Iraq for eight years (1980-1988) in which Iran suffered heavy losses. Moreover, Iran also wants to guarantee that its fate will not be similar to that of neighbours like Afghanistan and Iraq which were occupied and their regimes toppled by the US. This comes at a time when Iran is surrounded by American forces on all sides (in the Persian Gulf, Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan). Again, Iran's territorial integrity is also threatened by various ethnic minorities whose origins are beyond Iran's border. For example, Iran's Kurdish minority is located along Iran's border with Iraq.

3. Energy and Extraction of Natural Resources

Iran enjoys an abundance of natural resources, mainly oil and gas. Therefore, its central objective is to guarantee its control over its natural resources and energy resources.

4. Regional Role

Iran seeks to influence its neighbouring states and wants to play a pivotal role in the heart of West Asia (the Gulf, Syria, Lebanon and Palestinian territories) on the basis of its interest and ideology. Iran also wants to limit the aggressive tendencies of the state of Israel.

5. Recognition of a Leading International Status

Iran aspires to receive recognition as a leading country in the region as well as the world. This aspiration is derived from Iran's history and its contributions to human culture, its geostrategic location and size, its resources and military power. Thus Iran conducts a global foreign policy and weaves a network of alliances and agreements with China, Russia, India, countries in Africa, Latin America and Europe.

6. Exporting the Islamic Revolution and Leading the Islamic Camp.

Exporting the Revolution was a basic tenet of the Iranian Revolution from its beginning (1979). Iran perceives herself as the patron of the Shiites in the world and aspires to lead the entire Islamic camp. This aspiration to lead the Islamic world is congruent with Iran's self perception as a regional power.

However, the decision making process in Iran's national security strategy can be, and often is bewildering in its complexity. As a result of the large number of institutions, the divergent roles of the nongovernment actors, overlapping institutional structures, the importance of personal ties, and lack of clear division of labor among security ministries often lead to conflicting policies and uncertain implementation on its policies (Mayer 2004).

With this multiple and antagonistic institutional arrangement, Iran's national security policy is a victim of the factional debates and disagreements that characterizes the Islamic Republic's political system. There are currently three main factions in Iranian political system- the traditionalist conservatives, the reformers and the radicals- each has its own approach and agenda in shaping the country's national security policy. To better understand the nature and consequences of policy debates in Iran on national security issues, it is worthwhile to know the institutional arrangements and the political system, whereby multiple and overlapping centers of power that often compete and coincide with one another for influence can be grasped.

This chapter intends to provide an overview of security decision-making in Iran, focusing on the role and limits played by Iran's various security institutions. It will also discuss the style and debates of security decision-making, the formal and informal mechanisms, and the roles the military play while projecting the country's security policy. It will also highlight the tensions among the components of Iran's national security strategy and its institutions. The main purpose of this chapter is to present a systematic analysis of the Iranian national security policy by mapping the tools which serve to realise Iran's ambitions to maintain its power in the region.

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An Overview of the Iranian Political System

The political system of the Islamic Republic of Iran is made up of a series of highly complex institutional arrangements, where institutions with similar or competing roles often check and balance each other's power. This highly intertwined institutional web is partly a product of deliberate constitutional engineering when the constitution was originally adopted in 1979 and when it was substantially revised in 1989. So whatever the actual cause, the Iranian state today comprises multiple centers with almost equal power and responsibility, presided over by the Supreme Leader. So far, the Expediency Council established in 1989, which was designed to mediate the deadlock between the *Majlis* (Parliament) and the Guardian Council (parliamentary upper house) have not significantly enhanced the state's institutional cohesion and solved the deliberate condition which continued to characterised the Islamic Republic's power structure till today (Kamrava 2004). Thus rather than serve as an autonomous regulator and arbiter in such rivalry, the state is the principal arena where the competition over power and influence takes place.

In most circumstances, the electorate and the populace at large play marginal role in the state's factional rivalry. Theoretically speaking, the supreme authority rests with the electorate, which chooses the President, the 290 members of the *Majlis*, the Municipal Council and the 83 member Assembly of Experts, which in turn elects the Leader. However, in reality the political power emanates from the *Faqih* or the Supreme Leader. He not only ratifies the electorate's choice of President but also directly appoints important figures of the key state institutions like the Army, the IRGC, SNSC, the Special Court for the Clergy, the Friday *Immams,* etc. In other words, the Leader is the ultimate authority in the Islamic Republic and most issues of vital political and military interest fall under his direct control- be it the appointment and supervision of military commanders and the directions of international negotiations over the country's domestic, regional and foreign policies.

The Structures of Power Relations in Iran

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 brought a fundamental change in the composition of the Iranian political system. The post-revolutionary Iranian political elite has introduced a semi-theocratic mode of rule based on the principle of the *velayat-e-faqih* which was instutionalised according to the constitution of 1979 (Rakel 2007). According to the theory of *velayat-e-faqih*, it is the Supreme Leader who ultimately decides on the important foreign and domestic affairs. Thus state power is in the hand of one person. In July 1989, after the death of Khomeini and the end of the war with Iraq, the Iranian Constitution was revised wherein the office of the Prime Minister was abolished and his task was taken over by the President, giving the President more decision-making powers. Since then, the President is the head of the government and have the capacity to appoints and dismiss ministers. He controls the Planning and Budget Organisation (PBO), appoints the head of the Central Bank, and chairs of the SNSC. Formally the President is the second most influential political office while the supreme decision making authority rests with the Leader. Thus the Iranian political and power structure is composed of connected but complex formal and informal power centers. The formal power centers represent the state institutions and their aligned institutions such as; the religious supervisory bodies[2], the republican institutions (executive, judiciary and the legislature) and the religious foundations. In addition to these formal power centers, there are several other informal power centers composed of different political factions with contradictory policy orientations. Cutting across these state and their aligned institutions, the informal power structure is composed of different political factions; the conservative faction, the pragmatic faction and the reformist faction. These political factions are not coherent but consist of different branches of political factions representing different ideas on politics, economics, socio-cultural issues, foreign relations etc. And rivalry among these different political factions has a great impact on the process of political decision making and to the formulation of the country's unified security policy.

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[2] The Religious advisory bodies can be discerned as the Council of Guardians (*Shora-ye-maslahat-e nezam*), the Assembly of Experts (*majlis-e khobregan*), and the Expediency Council (*majma-e tashkhis-e maslahat-e nezam*) and institutions that are considered to be the arms of the Supreme Leader such as Association of Friday Prayer Leaders and Special Court of the Clergy.

Again the main offices that are responsible for the formulation of the country's security policy are the Supreme Leader[3], the President[4], the Council of the Guardians[5], the Foreign Minister, the SNSC, *Artesh* and the *Majlis*. The decision making procedures goes from foreign ministry to President to the SNSC and finally to the Supreme Leader who possess the authority to ratify all the bills. Another important source for developing the country's security policy is the information gathered from the Iranian embassies across the world, various security agents, media, libraries, think tanks, scholars, the Islamic Culture and Communications Organisation (ICCO)[6] and so on.

Although, the planning for Iran's national security is the constitutional task of the *Artesh* and the mandate of Iran's other security organizations, Iran does not have a single national security approach, or policy/program of action. Most of the policies and outcomes are usually the products of compromises reached by these state's security institutions and its political elites.

Among the various national security issues in the Iranian policy-making, there are six issues which tend to be more vital than the others. They include the war in Iraq, Iran's regional role, the presence of US and its goals and agenda in relation to the West Asian politics in general and Iran in particular, Iran's relations with Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine and most importantly, the country's nuclear program. But because of the various differences in style and approach towards these issues and large number of institutional and non-institutional actors, family ties, personal relationships, overlapping institutional arrangements and mixture of religion

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[3] It is the Supreme Leader who has the final say about foreign policy decision-making. He approves and disapproves foreign policy initiatives.

[4] Since 1989, the President's office has been the IRI's main foreign policy-making organ. However, the foreign policy decision must always be made in accordance with other power centers. The fact that the Supreme Leader is involved in foreign policy decision-making protects the President against criticism by his own administration.

[5] The Council of Guardians makes recommendations and develops guidelines for foreign policy. This ensures that the government's foreign policy initiatives do not contradicts with the Constitution of IRI.

[6] ICCO is an independent body within the government.

and politics all contrive to make it difficult to identify a clear and unified security policy.

The Supreme National Security Council (SNSC)

As far as Iranian national security issues are concerned, the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) is the prime institution to deal with them. As a part of Islamic Republic's national ambitions, Iran has developed a strong national security strategy under the aegis of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) which is mandated by the Article 176 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Supreme National Security Council is an institution founded in 1989 in the course of the revision of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic. It is presided over by the President, with an aim to watch over the Islamic Revolution and safeguard Iran's national interest as well as its sovereignty and territorial integrity. All the major national security issues are decided in the SNSC. It consists of the President, the Defence and Foreign Ministers, the Commander of the Revolutionary Guards, and several appointees or representatives of the Supreme Leader. This Council is broadly the reflective of the ruling elite.

The Article 177 of the Iranian Constitution mentions the responsibilities of the Supreme National Security Council as follows:

1. To determine the national defence/security policies within the framework of general policies laid down by the Leader.
2. To co-ordinate political, intelligence, social, cultural and economic activities in relation to general defence/security policies.
3. To exploit material and non-material resources of the country for facing internal and external threats.

To ensure these above responsibilities, the Supreme National Security Council has established sub-committees such as 'defence sub-committee' and 'national security sub-committee'. The sub-committees are headed by the President or one of the members of the Supreme National Security Council appointed by the President.

The functions and limits of the authorities of the sub-committees are laid down by law, and their organisational structures are approved by the SNSC. Approvals of the SNSC shall be enforceable after ratification by the Supreme Leader. The members of the SNSC consist of:

1. Heads of the three powers (Executive, Legislature and Judiciary)

2. Chief of the Supreme Command Council of the Armed Forces (SCCAF)

3. The official in charge of the Plan Budget Organisation (PBO)

4. Two representatives nominated by the Leader

5. Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of the Interior, and Minister of Information and security (MOIS).

6. A minister concerned with the subject, and the highest authorities of the Army and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC).

Another important function of the SNSC is that it formulates the country's nuclear policy and the Secretary of the Council also acts as the chief nuclear negotiator of Iran. Today, the SNSC chaired by the President is the key national defence and security assessment body. Representatives of the *Artesh*, the IRGC, other security agencies and the *faqih* sit on the Council. The SNSC discusses and calculates the threats to national security and formulates policies to meet those challenges.

National Defence Industrial Base

Iran's modern defence industrial base was developed during the period of the Shah by an import substitution strategy, in which Iran learned to produce, assemble, repair and maintain military equipments. At that time, the United States and the UK were the principal suppliers of aircraft, armour, and small arms. Beginning in the mid-1970s, Iran signed a co-production agreement for licensed manufacture of aircraft, helicopters, surface-to-air missiles, and the computer and the electro-optic equipment (Forecast International Intelligence Report, May 1993). Four state-owned organisations constitute the main elements of the defence industrial base. It includes,

the Military Industries Organisation (MIO), which is the main control centre and which also produce small arms, rockets, mortars and artillery; the Iran Aircraft Industries (IAI) which focus on fighters; the Iran Helicopter Industries (IHI) on helicopters; and the Iran Electronics Industry (IEI) which focuses on defence electronics.

After the Revolution of 1979, the Western arms embargo and the outbreak of hostilities with Iraq motivated both the expansion of Iran's defence industries and the short-term acquisition of arms from the clandestine market. In 1981, military production facilities were consolidated under a new Defence Industries Organisation of the Ministry of Defence. In 1983, the establishment of other military industries under the control of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) was also authorised as a part of its security strategy (Hiro 1984).

In the meantime, the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) provided the principal motivation for the expansion of the defence industrial base. The creation of a modern indigenous arms industry became an Iranian national goal during the time. For the war, large quantities of weaponry were needed, and there was a very high consumption of ammunition and logistics supplies. The international arms embargo coupled with the rising costs of purchasing advanced equipment from the international market forced the Iranian defence industry to focus on cheaper and less complex armaments. Surface-to-surface missiles emerged as a primary focus and in 1985 Iran decided to create a comprehensive missile production capability and associated technological base as a strategic national goal.

The defence industrial base was also distributed throughout the country, which helped local economies to develop. In addition to its traditional areas, the MIO expanded to missiles and missile technology, and the IAI expanded to the repair of aircraft and aircraft engines, and the production of radar and air defense systems (Fars News Agency 2007). Iran also began to concentrate on the development of increased naval production capabilities. In all of these developments, direct and indirect technical help from many countries made Iran possible to rapidly expand the technical capabilities of her defence industrial base. These countries included China, North

Korea, Pakistan, Argentina, Brazil, West Germany, East Germany, Taiwan, and the USSR (Ehteshami 1990).

Overall, Iran's defence industrial base includes industries that provide aircraft services and manufacture, and the production of mini-submarines, missiles, vehicles, mortars, artillery, small arms, mines, multiple rocket launchers, ammunition, etc. However, Iran lacks strong technical expertise, and the absence of a well-developed industrial and research infrastructure has inhibited Iran from indigenously developing and manufacturing advanced armaments (IRAN Market Overview 1993). This weakness has given impetus to strengthen Iran's nuclear program as a main pillar of the future defence and security strategy.

Military Requirements

Since military is one of the most important component of the country's security strategy, the mission of the Iran's armed forces is to assure the security of the country. Subsequent to the end of the eight year long Iran-Iraq War that decimated Iran's military capability, Iran has been in a gradual armament and military infrastructure rebuilding process. Given the political isolation Iran faces and the multitude of its threats from the US presence in the region, a hostile Iraq to the west and uncertain ethnic tensions within the states to its north and east, Iran has embarked on a substantial rearmament program. The immediacy of Iran's concerns for its security posed by threats on all its flanks would preoccupy its military to concentrate on diminishing the likelihood that the instability inherent in those regions does not spread to Iran. Accordingly, Iran has concentrated its military strategies on two primary goals:

- Maintain the internal security of Iran to prevent the rise of nationalistic uprisings among its ethno-religious minorities. The potential for these uprisings is fueled by conflicts in countries to the north of Iran as well as in Afghanistan to the east.
- Confine the access of the United States to the Gulf. Iran's deployment of anti-ship missiles such as Chinese Silkworm system at the Strait of Hormuz and

the purchase of submarines with the mine-laying capabilities support objective.

The Iranian ground forces remain incapable of modern combine arms combat. This situation would remain so until the modernisation of Iran's aircraft occurs, the numbers of such aircraft increase and the training of its pilots and depth of its repair parts inventory improve. Despite serious problems that are currently being addressed through foreign arms acquisitions and the indigenous development and production of Azarakhsh and Tandar military trainer aircraft. Though Iran's air force has a modest offensive capability, it remains vulnerable to attack from the air due to the poor state of its air defences (Chubin 1989).

The navy is Iran's another important military institution. The Gulf must remain open for Iranian commerce since the Gulf is the primary route for all of Iran's oil exports and most of its trading activities. However, Iran's current navy structure is outdated and there is need for a substantial modernisation, an effort that Iran is gradually attempting to accomplish. The present, Iranian naval capacity remains limited and barely supports its status as a coastal defence force. (Chubin 1989) But, Iran's dependence on the free and uninterrupted use of the Persian Gulf for its commercial shipping activities combined with its past lessons in confrontations with the United States Navy during 1987-88 have reinforced Iran's determination to rebuild its naval forces.

As a result of its vulnerability to air attack due to the significant deficiencies in its strategic air defence system, Iran is building up its strategic missile forces as a cost effective way of countering the stronger air forces of its neighbours and compensating for its weakness in this area (Cordesman 2005). Therefore, Iran's strategic weapons development program is its top security priority. Iran's effort continue to be focused on building the infrastructure needed to produce nuclear weapons, the production of biological weapons and the acquisition or production of missiles and strike aircraft to deliver them. As a part of this effort the Islamic Republic of Iran established several institution and security mechanisms. Let's pick some of the institutions.

The Intelligence Services

Iran's intelligence services play an active role in its security policy-making, particularly with regard to suppress Iranian dissidents and to support its allies abroad. The Ministry of Intelligence and National Security of the Islamic Republic of Iran (MISIRI), acts as the secret police and primary intelligence agency of the Islamic Republic. It is also known as the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS). The ministry was founded on August 18, 1984 with an objective to defend the regime and ensuring the strength of the government, and to protect Iran's interests abroad. Under the Constitution, the MOIS gathers and assesses information and more importantly, acts against conspiracies endangering the Islamic Republic. Although, open information on Iran's leading intelligence organization MOIS is extremely limited, the role of MOIS in Iran's security policy-making is immense. It remains an important part of Iranian government's security apparatus.

Iran's Armed Forces

Iran's military forces are the heart of Iran's security institutions. The Islamic Republic began its life with two, but often competing military forces. According to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, the Supreme Leader is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, which today consists of three main components: 1) *Artesh*, the regular military, 2) the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) with its paramilitary *Basij* militia; and 3) the Law Enforcement Forces (LEF). The regular army and IRGC are subordinate to the Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics (MOFDAL) and are responsible for defending Iran's borders and providing internal security, while the LEF are formally subordinate to the Ministry of Interior and played a key internal and frontier security role (Cordesman and Khalid 2006).

This division of Iran's military forces between the regular army (*Artesh*) and the IRGC dates back to the 1979 Islamic Revolution, when the IRGC was formed in order to maintain internal security, safeguard the ideological purity of the revolution and counterbalance the regular military. However, the new regime distrusted the regular army because of its association with the Shah and saw it as a counter-

revolutionary force (Entessar 1988). For this reason the relations between the regular military *Artesh* and the IRGC have been characterised by ambivalence, mistrust and at times outright hostility. And such parallel structures are important characteristics of the Islamic Republic, where the authority of the conventional military institutions are checked by the revolutionary Islamic institutions. This arrangement has been a source of both instability and tensions within the Islamic Republic and has sometimes undermined the unity of command and posed major obstacles in creating a modern, unified and effective security policy.

Iran's regular military, the *Artesh*, stood aside during the revolutionary turmoil that overwhelmed the Shah. Iran's new political leaders set about changing many of the organisational structures of the regular armed forces. The regime implemented a massive campaign for "Islamisation" of the armed forces, conducted through the newly established ideological-political directorate (Frick 2008). Although this did not instill revolutionary ardour into the *Artesh*, it did stamp out any potential counter-revolutionary sentiments and ensured that the armed forces remained responsible to the political leadership. Despite having cowed the *Artesh*, the newly formed clerical regime felt the need to create its own armed forces to ensure internal stability, and over time acts as a major force in the war with Iraq. The result was two militaries, the regular military *Artesh* and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) or *Sepah-e Pasdaran*.

After the end of the eight years war with Iraq, and particularly after the election victory of President Rafsanjani in 1989, a major overhaul of the Iranian security establishment began. Rafsanjani took steps to rationalise the regular armed forces. At the same time, the process of professionalisation and intutionalisation of the IRGC began. Between August and September 1988, the IRGC's ground forces were reorganized into 21 infantry divisions, 15 independent infantry brigades, 21 air defence brigades, three engineering divisions, and 42 armored, artillery, and chemical defence brigades. The IRGC was given new uniforms, and in September 1991, 21 new military ranks were created, from private to general (Ehteshami 1995).

Another step in the reform process was the establishment in 1989 of an overhauled defence-related structure, to be known as the Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics (MODAFL). The new ministry, headed by Akbar Torkan, a civilian and a former head of the defence industries establishment, effectively curtailed the institutional autonomy of the IRGC and brought it under the overall defence umbrella. With this act, the IRGC Ministry was scrapped, and its command structures were brought within the new ministry MODAFL. Insofar as the new structure placed restrictions on the operational autonomy of the IRGC, it was a victory for not only the pragmatists over the revolutionaries, but also the *Artesh*.

The next big step was the expansion of the joint staff office, which was hastily created in 1989, into a more enduring structure. The new single office of the joint Chief-of-Staff, the General Command of the Armed Forces Joint Staffs, was set up in early 1992, headed by Hassan Firouzabadi, a prominent IRGC figure. These structural reforms, accompanied by major new arms procurements for the *Artesh*, also signaled the post-Khomeini leadership's interest in allowing the power pendulum to swing back toward the regular armed forces.

The *Artesh's* power further grew in 1998 in response to the crisis in Afghanistan. Khamenei created the position of Supreme Commander for the regular military, a position that the IRGC had but the *Artesh* did not. Its services are reported separately rather than a unified one. This increased both the efficiency and the bureaucratic clout of the regular armed forces (Kamrava 2007:88).

Since these reforms were enacted, the defence establishment has demonstrated the growing integration of its various elements through regular military exercises on land and offshore as well. Units from the IRGC and the *Artesh* have been working quite closely in these exercises, sharing command and systems. The Navies of the two institutions are better integrated than are their land and air forces. Nevertheless, considerable problems remain. The two militaries do not have coherent way of dividing its armaments which Iran procures from abroad or develops at home. Thus friction is extremely acute in the ground and air forces, and integration in these services is rare.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)

Foremost among the Iran's security institutions is the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) or *Sepah-e Pasdaran*, which is today one of the main security pillars of the Islamic Republic and the source of the regime's power both domestically and internationally. The IRGC emerged from the war with Iraq (1980-1988) as a premier military institution. It began as a modest force of about 10,000 founded by a decree from Ayatollah Khomeini shortly after the victory of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, dedicated to maintain internal security, returning order to the country, dampening counter-revolutionary trends among the regular armed forces, and countering the growing influence of largely leftist revolutionary armed groups such as the *Fedayeen*, *Mujahedin-e Khalq* Organization (MKO), *Peykar*, *Komleh*, Kurdish *Peshmerga*, and so on. Thus, the Iraqi invasion of Iran in September 1980 forced Iran's political and military leadership to face up to the command and structural problems of having two very different armed forces existing in parallel. The eight years war brought a complete restructuring of the Iranian armed forces and other state's coercive machinery on the national security agenda. One important consequence was the war forced the regime to reorganise the IRGC into proper military units, and the rapid expansion of the IRGC from 10,000 troops in 1980 to around 50,000 by the beginning of 1982. And during the course of the war, the force as a whole experienced dramatic expansion, from 150,000 in 1983, to 250,000 in 1985, and to 450,000 in 1987 (Cordesman 2005).

Therefore, the IRGC at the time of inception was not a dominant military force. Many of its initial activities had more to do with guarding key personals of the new regime and keeping public law and order rather than fighting to defend the new order. Gradually, its scope, size, power, and influence steadily expanded as the regime tried to consolidate its power. Today, IRGC functions as an expansive socio-political-economic conglomerate whose influence extends into virtually every corner of the Iranian political realm.

Another structural change introduced in the early 1980s was the creation of an Operational Area Command in 1982 and a joint Command Council, which brought

the commanders of the IRGC in direct and regular contact with their counterparts in the regular armed forces. By now, the IRGC also enjoyed representation and an influential voice in the highest military decision-making body, the Supreme Defence Council.

While the regular armed forces had suffered numerous purges and forced retirements in the 1980s, the IRGC flourished under a group of commanders who not only had very close links with the clerical establishment but were also closely allied with one another. For example, the relationships among these key individuals— Mohsen Rafiqdoust, Mohsen Rezai, Yahya Rahim Safavi, Ali Shamkhani, and Alireza Afshar—were reinforced by a low circulation of senior personnel in the IRGC in the 1980s, ensuring that the IRGC could pursue its interests coherently and systematically (Zabih 1988). These individuals have continued their relationships as they have gone on to other important security and political positions in the Islamic Republic. Such continuity in leadership also allowed the IRGC's main strategists to be permanently present at the highest levels in both governmental and clerical circles, giving the IRGC the capacity to carve a niche for itself as not just the defender of the revolutionary order but also a guardian of the Islamic state's borders and territory.

In the early 1980s, elements from the new leadership of the *Artesh* pushed for the professionalisation of the IRGC and for closer command structures with this force. Senior officers, such as the then colonel Ali Shirazi (who later became Ayatollah Khomeini's representative on the Supreme Defence Council) and Qasemali Zahirnejad (later became Chief of Staff), were among those arguing in favor of the mechanisation of the IRGC and closer integration of logistic and support systems of the two forces (Zabih 1988).

These moves to revolutionise the military structures and command systems continued throughout the 1980s, partly as a response to the growing importance of the IRGC in the war and partly due to the regular armed forces' desire to transform the IRGC into a more professional fighting unit. In the early days of the fighting, the *Artesh* assumed the lion's share of the burden for the war. Over time, the IRGC's role in the new order became so significant that it was given the whole new administrative

machinery to its own ministry in 1982, with Mohsen Rafiqdoust as its first Minister. This IRGC Ministry mirrored the Defence Ministry, and the IRGC by virtue of having a ministry acquired a powerful voice at the cabinet table and in other central governmental agencies. This evolution of the IRGC into a full fledge fighting machine was completed fewer than three years later in 1985. On a direct order from Ayatollah Khomeini, the IRGC was given the task of setting up its own army, navy, and air force units. It was also given control over Iran's surface-to-surface missile (SSM) force and right of first refusal on Iran's increasingly scarce military hardware which includes Iraqi armour now being acquired at the front (Chubin 1988). The IRGC also forged its own military-to-military ties to a number of Iran's allies including Syria, Pakistan, and Sudan. Another important task of the IRGC is the control of the Islamic Republic's missile program, including the development and procurement of the ballistic missile system, and under the Revolutionary Guard's leadership Iran has evolves the capability to manufacture domestically produce missiles (Fars News Agency 2007).

The Quds Forces

Another important development of the IRGC was the establishment of the Quds Forces. Since its inception the IRGC has developed into a powerful organisation whose activities served as partial evidence to justify President Bush's inclusion of Iran as among the three countries of the "Exis of Evil"[7] list. Several elements of the Revolutionary Guard enable it to carry out its assigned mission and maintain the ideological fervor that sparked its creation during the Islamic Revolution. The first is an elite branch of the IRGC, the Quds Forces which dedicates to the principles that defined the Islamic Revolution. The responsibility of the Quds Forces is primarily 'exporting the Revolution' and therefore the nature of their mission dictates that they work almost completely outside Iran (Cordesman 2005). The Al-Quds continue to give support through training, money and weapons to the Palestinian groups such as Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, and the Popular

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[7] A term initially used by the U.S President George W Bush in his State of the Union Address on January 29, 2002. He labeled Iran, Iraq and North Korea as the Axis of Evil.

Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Badr Organisation of the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, Hezbollah in Lebanon etc. (Katzman 2006).

The Quds Force also runs a wide array of training camps for unconventional warfare and operations in various countries. Major training facilities are located at the Imam Ali University at the Sa'dabad Palace in Tehran (where ideological indoctrination were made), Manzariyah Training Centre on Qom, Tabriz, Mashhad, etc. Thus, the Quds Forces maintain closed sections in many embassies across the world. However, it is also not known that to what extent the ambassadors of these embassies are aware of the activities of the al-Quds stationed in their respective countries, but it is believe that at least some of the Quds Forces operations are conducted in collaboration with the elements of the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (*Vezarat-e Ettela'at va Amniat-e Keshvar*) (Frick 2008).

The Basij

If the Quds Force represents the elite, foreign-based, ideological arm of the IRGC, then the second enabling element of the post-revolutionary Iranian security establishment is the *Basij Mustazafin*, the large and initially highly motivated groups of volunteers who were trained by the IRGC and who made the first wave of Iranian offensives against Iraq. It was initially organised in response to the large number of casualties incurred during the Iran-Iraq war when the leaders of the Islamic Republic feared for the very existence of the fledgling revolution. The *Basij* continues to be comprised of volunteers from every part of the Iranian society. In essence, the *Basij* had two functions: first, to fight the domestic enemies of the revolution troops and second, to provide the large pool of reservists for front-line operations against Iraq.

In the 1980s, the *Basij* was required to fulfill both these functions simultaneously. During the war with Iraq, the *Basij's* numbers fluctuated between 100,000 and 500,000, depending on the regime's war needs, but its role and presence in military campaigns were never questioned. Today, the *Basij's* numbers stand at around 100,000, but the *Basij* reserve force is estimated to be around 1 million—most

of whom have received some military training or served at the war fronts in the 1980s (Cordsman 2005).

The end of the war and the demobilisation of hundreds of thousands of young men, many of whom were *Basij*, caused an immediate headache for the government. One policy was to use the *Basij* for non-military national reconstruction work, particularly relevant during the Rafsanjani's first five-year development plan when most state investment concentrated on capital projects, the improvement of the country's infrastructure, and the rebuilding of the war-damaged regions.

The second policy initiated to direct *Basij* intervention in the society. The youth who had gathered around the *Basij* in the 1980s were mobilised in the 1990s as the principal force responsible for upholding 'Islamic norms' in society. Some *Basij* were enrolled in the *Ansar-e Velayat*, a paramilitary group that helps the regime's control over major urban areas. This was rather a convenient solution to a serious problem facing the Islamic state.

The *Basij* is now rarely seen as the third military pillar, as it was during the Iran-Iraq war. The *Artesh* in particular has little time for the *Basij*. Even the IRGC, which once relied heavily on the *Basij*, no longer views it as important, largely because it does not meet the IRGC's level of professionalism. However, the IRGC still encourages the *Basij* to participate in maneuvers and other limited forms of cooperation. Today, the Basij is primarily responsible for the control of riots and internal security as well as policing the populace for infractions of the Islamic Republic's myriad moral laws, such as male-female fraternization and women's dress codes etc. (ibid.)

Yet the *Basij* still seeks some external security role. The *Basij* leaders derive a great deal of prestige and legitimacy from their role as a military factor and clearly do not want to lose this status. Most *Basij* leaders do not want to lose their revolutionary edge and are committed to following the IRGC's instructions on training and other operational procedures. However, for *Basij* leaders, official positions are much more important than military training. The relationship between the IRGC and the *Basij*

leadership is a close one, driven as it is by family ties, political association, and war experience.

Security Structure of Iran

Iran's military and security services are composed of a number of distinct organisations that report independently to the leadership and function in competition with each other. External military and security operations, including efforts to export the Islamic Revolution, are divided among the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the Qods Force (nominally a wing of the IRGC but independent of it), the conventional armed forces (the *Artesh*), and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security. Internal security is handled by the Law Enforcement Forces (under the Interior Ministry), the IRGC, and the *basij*. Clerical representatives of the Supreme Leader (including Friday prayer leaders in large and small towns) also play a role in the internal security function, reporting separately from any other group to the Supreme Leader's office and working through the local *basijs* to maintain Islamic law and public order in many villages.

Thus, Iran's security forces developed organically in the course of the Revolution, and even more during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988). Ayatollah Khomeini encouraged the growth of multiple competing military organizations during the Revolution. In particular, he ordered the formation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in May 1979 primarily for the purpose of securing the Revolution from internal challenges, but also with the aim of exporting the Revolution beyond Iran's borders.

The IRGC played an important role in cementing Khomeini's hold on power, but it was not immediately apparent what its post-revolutionary role would be, particularly following Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran in September 1980. Pragmatists among the early post-revolutionary leadership argued for the restoration of the preeminence of the traditional armed forces (the *Artesh*) because of their military proficiency in the face of the existential military threat posed by Saddam

Hussein's invasion. But radicals argued that the revolutionary zeal of the IRGC was as important as the professionalism of the traditional military.

The IRGC fought the Iran-Iraq War, like a step-child: priority for the best arms, equipment, and supplies went to the *Artesh*, and the IRGC had to beg for tanks and modern weapons of any variety. But the IRGC played a key role in the war by commanding and supervising the hordes of young men recruited into the mobilisation forces (*basij*), formed in November 1979 to protect the Revolution from internal threats. But by the end of the war, the IRGC had persuaded the government to provide more modern equipments.

The end of the war coincided closely with Khomeini's death. The new regime of Supreme Leader Khamenei and President Rafsanjani sought to rationalise Iran's governing structures and military forces. It appears that Rafsanjani sought among other things, to centralise more power in the presidency. The IRGC had already ceded much of its internal intelligence-gathering role formally to the Ministry for Intelligence and Security (MOIS) which was formed in August 1984. In 1989, the parliament approved a measure merging the IRGC and the regular armed forces under a single ministry and headquarters. But, the *basij*, MOIS, and LEF continued to exist independent of this ministry.

The balance changed slightly under reformist President Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), who appointed a much more moderate MOIS minister, removing that agency to some degree from internal intelligence gathering and active export of the Revolution. The IRGC stepped back in to fill both the gaps. The most dramatic change in the power balance occurred in September 2007 under President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad since 2005, when the *basij* was formally subordinated to the IRGC.

The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the subsequent conflict led the Iranian leadership to assist the formation of Lebanese Hezbollah to fight directly against Israel, one of the regime's arch enemies. More than one thousand IRGC personnel went to Lebanon in support of this task, and they were known as the

"Quds" or Jerusalem Force. The Quds Force and the IRGC have remained heavily intertwined with Lebanese Hezbollah since its foundation.

Today, five security organs report either directly or indirectly to the Supreme Leader: the IRGC, the Quds Force, the Law Enforcement Forces, the MOIS, and the regular military forces. The *basij* reports to the IRGC commander, and the IRGC and the Quds Force maintain close personnel links with Lebanese Hezbollah. The IRGC and the MOIS reportedly maintain their own posts in Iranian embassies and their own bases in Syria and Lebanon. This security architecture is designed to ensure that no force can pose a threat to the regime and that no one can take unilateral control of the task of exporting the Revolution. So far, it has succeeded in both objectives.

Comparing the Security Institutions

Iran's security institutions overlap tremendously, both on paper and in reality. Relations between the regular military *Artesh* and the IRGC have been characterised by ambivalence, mistrust and at times outright hostility. As stated earlier, this distrust was also a major factor behind the large scale purges of the military after the Revolution and the formation of a political-ideological directorate which ensures clerical oversight of the military by placing personal representatives of the Supreme Leader in all major commands. These activities are all part and parcel of the regimes efforts to 'Islamise' the armed forces (Eisenstadt 2001). The intelligence services and the IRGC are far more focused on the defense of the Revolution from its internal enemies than the *Artesh*. The IRGC also focuses on less traditional defense duties particularly those that involve unusual missions or capabilities. These duties range from stopping smuggling and controlling Iran's WMD (weapons of mass destruction) and missile forces to preparing for closing the Straits of Hormuz. In contrast, the *Artesh* focuses its efforts on more traditional threats, such as an Iraqi attack.

The dichotomy between the regular military and the IRGC initially reflected divergent approaches to modern warfare. The regular military embraced a traditional approach to war with a balance emphasis on hardware technology and human element. By contrast, the IRGC elevated the human factor above all others in the

belief that faith, ideological commitment and morale would be sufficient to bring victory (Chubin 1989).

These different missions affect the institutional ethos of the various security institutions. The *Artesh* is contented with a strategy of damage limitation and risk minimisation. The IRGC and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), in contrast, are more proactive and interested in actively defending the Republic's interests and developing their own niches. The institutions' respective role rise and fall according to their match with Iran's overall ambitions. When exporting the Revolution or countering internal enemies such as the MKO is deemed vital, the MOIS's and IRGC's profiles rise and when economics, ethnicity, and geopolitics dominate, the *Artesh*'s views become more important.

Both the *Artesh* and the IRGC support the domestic arms industries by ordering main battle tanks, munitions, and other arms from the state-owned firms affiliated with the logistics wing of the Ministry of Defence. The IRGC is particularly focused on supporting the domestic arms industry. The IRGC usually takes the initiative, but it frequently draws on the *Artesh* to provide expertise. Iran's commitment to enhanced military professionalism and better military coordination appears secure. Instability along Iran's borders and the formal U.S. military and political presence in the Persian Gulf have increased the premium on Iran while maintaining a modern, well-equipped, and efficient army (Bayman 2005).

Iran's security policies in the 1990s reflected these concerns. Iran's rearmament drive requires investment in all the services and the import of new military hardware. More important still, in order to realise its objectives, the regime had to upgrade its relations with the regular armed forces, giving them due recognition and a greater public presence. Military parades have again become commonplace, and senior members of Iran's clerical elite seem to make a habit of attending military rallies and of being seen with military officers. Both the IRGC and the *Artesh* have increased their emphasis on professionalism. They have increased the technical training offered to soldiers and basing promotion criteria more on education and expertise.

Thus, debates within all of Iran's national security have been vigorous. Factionalism is a common explanation for the seemingly contradictory policies of the Iranian national security strategy. The large number of institutions and the overlapping institutional arrangement and lack of clear division of responsibilities lead to conflicting policies which posed a big challenge in projecting and implementing a unified national security policy for the Islamic Republic.

CHAPTER III

NATIONAL SECURITY: DOMESTIC DIMENSIONS

The Iranian domestic political environment has always been a primary national security issue because of the factional divisions between the various individuals, institutions and organisations. This chapter highlights various domestic dimensions and issues of Iran's national security. It will be carried out in the light of contemporary debates within the Iranian domestic political environment, Iranian nuclear program and ethno-religious conflicts.

The fall of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1979 and the emergence of a new Islamic regime in Tehran mark the beginning of a new political history in Iran. The end of the close US-Iran relationship of the Shah's regime was followed by the installation of the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini after his return from exile in France. Complicating further, the seizure of the US embassy in Tehran on November 4, 1979 pushed the US-Iran relationship to the lowest ebb. The situation worsened with Iraq's invasion of Iran on September 22, 1980 and the subsequent war that lasted for eight years with Iran blaming the US for the invasion (Yonah & Hoenig 2008: 5).

Abulhassan Banisadr became the first elected President of Iran with Khomeini's support in January 1980. The new Constitution allowed *de facto* power held by the Ayatollahs and the Council of Guardians to accommodate an elected President. The control exercised by the religious groups in Iran is a major challenge to political reform. This caused the impeachment of president Banisadr paving the way for Sayyed Ali Khamenei to succeed him (Yonah & Hoenig 2008: 7). During the 1980s, the Ayatollah Khomeini's reign in Iran was consumed largely by the Iran-Iraq war and Islamic consolidation. Following his demise, Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Khamenei, the former President was named the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic.

Hashemi Rafsanjani, a great champion of economic reforms became the next President of Iran. His goals were largely focused on rebuilding a paralysed Iranian economy devastated by the Iran-Iraq war. However, the reform movement was stalled by those Islamic clerics who feared privatisation of the Iranian economy. Rafsanjani's term ended in 1997 and was succeeded by Sayyed Mohammad Khatami on May 23, 1997.

Khatami called for a rapprochement with Western powers without sacrificing Iran's national interests (Yonah & Hoenig 2008: 8). However, his reform efforts were opposed by Khamenei and other conservative sections serving on the Guardian Council. The series of protest in Iran against the conservatives marked the political tussles, with Khamenei tightening his hold on the reformist agenda. After President George W. Bush labeled Iran as part of an "Axis of Evil" in his 2002 State of the Union Address, President Khatami also abandoned his efforts at improving ties with the US (Yonah & Hoenig 2008: 9).

Domestic Political Environment and the Question of Legitimacy

A major security concern is the complex nature of the Iranian power distribution structure within the state system. According to Khomeini's interpretation of theocratic rule, the Supreme Leader is intended as the highest religious and political authority in the state based on his mastery of religious law and practice. According to the Constitution, the Supreme Leader is responsible for general policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which include all aspects of domestic and foreign policies. The Supreme Leader is under consistent review by the Assembly of Experts, a group composed of the clerical establishment. Since the Revolution, there have been only two Supreme Leaders of the Islamic Republic namely Ayatollah Khomeini and his successor, Ali Khamenei. The Supreme Leader is also the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces and he controls the Islamic Republic's intelligence and security operations thus can declare war or peace.

In the decades following the 1979 Revolution, nothing has destroyed the legitimacy of the regime as much as its failure to deliver the economic goods. Today

the greatest security threats in Iran stems from a lack of domestic unity or political legitimacy. Domestic political legitimacy is the precondition for stability, development and security. The Iranian Supreme Leader was invested with the power to abrogate election results and to select the heads of the armed forces, the Judiciary and the Revolutionary Guards. The dominance of the clerical section over national affairs was further strengthened by the creation of the Council of Guardians which is largely made up of clerics responsive to the dictates of the Supreme Leader and empowered to screen all candidates for public office and to scrutinise parliamentary legislation for conformity to religious structures (Ray Takeyh 2002: 44).

Foreign policy and military decisions are made by the Supreme National Security Council. Within this context, President's power is limited by the leverage of other members in the political and religious hierarchies. Shortly after Ahmadinejad's election in 2005, the Supreme Leader Khamenei granted Expediency Council, led by former President Ali Rafsanjani supervisory power over the Iranian government. This jockeying for influence between competing factions within the political and religious establishments is further complicated by a number of restraints placed on the national military of Iran. Ali M. Ansari (2007) however, is of the view that powerful ideological conviction will not be sufficient to overcome the very real institutional and economic weaknesses of the Islamic Republic.

During the 'era of reconstruction', Rafsanjani pushed for a 'political settlement' with the demise of Ayatollah Khomeini by concentrating the executive power in his hands following the abolition of the Prime Minister's post (Ansari 2007: 12). An era of reconstruction was started under his leadership in the wake of the war, making Iran to hit the international market with oil for consumer goods. His policy of strong relationship with the mercantile elites brought an end to the wartime austerity era in the economy (Ansari 2007: 13-14).

But the major concern to Rafsanjani and his allies was the dissension that emerged from the early 1990s onwards among the political elites. His hardline opponents were rallying for an authoritarian Islamic State under the guardianship of the Supreme Leader following a constitutional amendment in 1989, thus sidelining his

idea of liberalisation in Iran. Rafsanjani's second term as President (1993-97) was a period under siege with both the left and right criticising his policies. He however, recognised that an authoritarian retrenchment would not facilitate the sort of economic reconstruction he still envisaged for the country (Ansari 2007: 16).

But, Khatami's liberal policies were a far more serious threat to the aspirations of the hardline conservatives than Rafsanjani had ever done. In Iran, 'reformism' emerged during the 1990s out of dissatisfaction with the Rafsanjani government and its apparent inability to deal with the problems facing the country (Ansari 2007:17). These difficulties were both economic and political, and while Rafsanjani and his pragmatists tended to argue that economic progress would itself yield political reform, their critics argued that both needed to be undertaken simultaneously. Both Rafsanjani and his reformist critics differ from the hardline conservatives, who argue that the Khomeini era had been the 'golden age of revolution' (Ahmad and Ali 2001: 243).

Foreign investors did not find Iran an attractive option because of the absence of transparency and accountability thereby threatening Iran long-term economic and political instability in the face of rising inflation. The solution to these economic difficulties, according to the reformists, was to begin the process of democratisation in earnest, concentrating in particular on the development of aspects of civil society, and to initiate a wholesale restructuring of the economy. The reform movement seized the *Majlis* (the Parliament) in the 2000 elections. In 1999, Khatami had introduced nation-wide municipal elections as part of his drive towards the development of civil society and an electoral culture (Ansari 2007: 27). The conservatives' opposition to political and economic reforms is seen by the reformists and the moderates as a major cause of Iran's political woes.

In addition to ideological divide, the multiple centres of political power in Iranian political system leave a room for factionalism and political adventurism. The election of Ahmedinejad in 2005 is seen as the turning point in Iranian domestic politics. For him, the enemy abroad is a crucial tool for reshaping domestic politics to serve his purposes. "By resisting the foreign oppressor which is central to Iranian nationalist thinking with broad appeal, Ahmadinejad has been able to use it to project

himself as the saviour of Iran. The foreign relations crisis has thus facilitated the tightening of authoritarian rule at home, thus making the country's worsening economic condition put under the veil of projected foreign threat. The government has enjoyed advantages that could have enabled it to reliably strengthen its domestic position without needing to rely nearly as heavily as it has on the perception of a foreign threat for popular support" (Ansari 2007: 45). This is one way of consolidating internal political chaos in the face of decreasing popularity and division among the powerful institutions of state.

Ahamadenijad entered office in 2005 with oil at around US$ 60 per barrel. This was far in excess of the price under his two predessors. Indeed, when Khatami has entered office in 1997, oil was nearer US$ 10 per barrel. Both Rafsanjani and Khatami administration had admittedly with the patchy success, tried to wear Iran off its dependence on oil revenue and move towards diversifying the manufacturing base (Kaveh 2002). Under Khatami the emphasis shifted to developing the industrial base through using a constructive international relations to attract foreign investment. But neither Rafshanjani nor Khatami's route to modernisation appealed to the principalists, as economic integration imply dependency (Ansari 2007).

Some of the domestic vulnerabilities of Iran include ideological divide, multiple power centres, economic stagnation, political instabilities and ethnic conflict demanding autonomy or secession. Therefore, as mention in the preceding chapters the basic drivers of Iran's security policy include a range of ideological, strategic, regional, international and domestic factors, which all are primacy to Iran's decision-making. Another important pillar of Iran's security system and its national security strategy is its nuclear project. Iran perceives that the completion of nuclear capability will serve its aspirations to guarantee its security, economy as well as regional and international status.

Ethno-Religious Minorities and Domestic Threat Perceptions

Like every other country the central objective of Iran's national security strategy is to maintain the security of its population and territories, gaining legitimacy

for the regime and ensuring political stability. The primary national security concerns which have domestic dimensions are maintaining internal security, safeguarding territorial integrity, prevention of religious ethnic insurgency, and securing the country against externally sponsored Mujahidin operating along Iran's border. Iran's territorial integrity is threatened by various ethnic minorities whose origins are beyond Iran's border. Thus, Iran's prime internal security concern is to prevent the rise of nationalistic uprising among its ethno-religious minorities. Thus, assuring the territorial integrity of the country is an important dimension of Iran's national security strategy. Again, guaranteeing its control over the extraction of natural resources in some of the volatile ethnic-minority dominated provinces is also fundamental to Iran's security strategy.

Tehran's complicated relationship with its ethnic groups has always been a major security concern with cross border ethnic linkages increasing the likelihood of inter-state conflicts. All the five major Iranian ethnic groups—Azeris, Kurds, Arabs, Baluchis and Turkmen straddle the borders of several neighbouring states which are dispersed throughout one or more neighbouring countries and have a history of separatist movement. Though Iran faces external threats of varying degrees, the existential threat to its security is domestic in dimension marked by the presence of ethno-religious minorities representing different political aspirations. The disillusionment of ethnic minorities coincides with economic deficiency, an ideological gap between the citizenry and the state and isolation from the international community. "This security problem is threatening Iran's national unity and social cohesion, and is causing a growing crisis in terms of the legitimacy of the state" (Alam 2011: 2).

Tension between Tehran and its ethnic groups are further marred by the centralisation of power, assimilation policy and suppressive measures against their demands for power decentralisation and right to self-determination. These repressive policies have been strengthened since the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925. In the light of this fact, "some ethnic minorities played a significant role in the 1979 Revolution, hoping for greater political rights under the new establishment"

(Shaffer 2002: 77). Tehran's policy toward its minority groups, however, remained unchanged in the aftermath of the Revolution as the result of the Revolution was the creation of an Islamic Shiia state.

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic was ratified in November 1979, which was a major setback for human rights, generally for the rights of women and religious minorities in particular (CSR Report 2007). Under the new Constitution, certain religious minorities such as Zoroastrians, Christians, Jews, and Sunni Muslims are given recognition. The new Constitution constituted after the Revolution does not include major safeguards to address the grievances of the minorities. In the immediate aftermath of the Revolution the regime's failure to meet the ethnic minority demands led to unrest in several provinces such as Khuzestan, Golestan and Baluchistan (Alam 2011: 3). Article 19 of the constitution which states that all people of Iran, whatever the ethnic group or tribe to which they belong, enjoy equal rights is violated by the state's imposition of Persian language (Article 15) and other restrictions put on minority languages and culture. The Expediency Council approved an additional policy stating that 'Islam and Iranian civilisation' are the key sources of national identity, however it nevertheless maintained that the Persian language and script are key factors of national unity and solidarity. Minorities have been demanding an adequate implementation of those parts of the Constitution which have thus far been neglected in order to achieve justice and equality with the Persians (Alam 2011: 4).

When the reformists led by Khatami came to power in 1997 the ethnic groups were granted limited recognition leading to greater ethnic identity politics. In the meantime, the failure of the reformist government to fulfill its promise to deliver civil rights for all Iranians produced disappointment among Iranians in general and in the ethnic groups in particular. The reformist President Muhammad Khatami got the highest votes from border provinces populated by ethnic and religious minorities and therefore, extended limited recognition of the multiethnic composition of Iran lifting restrictions that were imposed on publishing non-Persian minority newspapers and journals. Even some minority leaders were given high posts in the government leading to greater expectations from the minorities and demand for greater freedom.

The reformists' policies to address the minorities' grievances were strongly resisted by the conservatives who control the key domestic and foreign policy decision-making institutions, including the Supreme Leader, the judicial institutions, the security forces, the Revolutionary Guards and the Council of Guardians (Alam 2011: 7). They considered the reformist policies to be a threat to the state's security and to their ideology. The conservatives therefore attempted to employ all possible tactics so as to block and quell social and political reforms. It is widely accepted that the regime's security discourse in relation to the ethnic minorities has been assimilationist which is against political decentralisation and greater political participation.

Ethno-religious politics in Iran are increasingly affected by globalisation, geopolitical developments in the region since the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Tehran's policy of centralisation that has widened the socio-economic gap between the Persian and the ethnic minority regions. The wide socio-economic gap between the centre and the peripheries caused by uneven distribution of power is fuelling long-standing economic and cultural grievances against Tehran. Ethnic groups constantly complain of inequality in terms of power sharing and access to economic resources, and speak of their deprivation in terms of social and cultural circumstances. President Ahmadinejad has appointed provincial officials close to the Revolutioanry Guards with strong military backgrounds which indicates that Tehran may be tightening its strategy in the sphere of the rights of minorities.

The dominant Persian majority has little control over Iran's periphery which is inhabited primarily by the ethnic minorities who control the strategic border areas and hence are potentially disruptive of Iran's relations with adjacent states (CSR Report 2007). The Kurds have been one of the most troublesome affecting Iran's relations with Iraq, Turkey and Syria (Hakki and Behruz 2008). The Azerbaijanis are split almost evenly between Iran and the Azerbaijan Republic and have been the centre of several controversies between the two states. Turkmen are also split between Iran and Turkey. Baluchis, again, have historically been a restive force in Iranian politics with their presence in Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Arab population is concentrated

in the province of Khuzistan bordering Iraq which is a vital oil-producing province of Iran with potential threat to Iran's economic security.

The Kurds are the first to press their national demands on the revolutionary regime by taking up arms which is part of the long demand for a unified Kurdish homeland embracing the Kurdish populations of Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey and ex-Soviet republics (Kaveh 2002). Their strong historical traditions, distinct language, culture and religion were at odds with the Iranian practice, which forcibly discourages the observance of cultural traditions that are not Persian, which require the teaching of the Persian language and Persian history in school, and which accepts Shia Islam.

The Baluchis and the Turkmen who have similar grievances against Iranian authority were rapidly infected by the Kurdish activities and move to oppose the reconsolidation of an imperial Iranian state. The Iranian Arabs who seek to stem the flow of Persian to Khuzistan- a migration that has relegated the Arab to a minority in what they consider to be their own national region is another manifestation of minority grievances in Iran. Thus began an epidemic of minority protests which has culminated in the armed rebellion of the state's largest minority, the Azerbaijans (Atabaki 2005).

The ethnic Azeris are Shia Muslims and have for many centuries accepted Persian culture as their own, even though ethnically they are Turkic and speak a dialect of Turkish. Arabs and other minorities face socio-economic deprivation besides threat to demography through large scale migration of the Persians in the ethnic-dominated provinces (Shaffer 2002). As noted earlier, most of the minorities supported Khomeini's Islamic Revolution with some hope of realising their socio-economic and cultural advancement under the new establishment. But Khomeini's brand of Islam or his concept of Islamic state concentrating power in the hands of a few religious figures has aggravated their situation.

There were revolts in Kurdistan and Turkmensahra in early 1979 followed by political unrest in Khuzistan and Baluchistan in the mid 1979. In late 1979 to early 1980, there were uproars in Azerbaijan with a predominant Shi'ite population which

contributed to the revolutionary Islamic leadership. On 25 February 1979, only days after the seizure of power by the new revolutionary regime, the Muslim People's Republican Party (MPRP) was set up with its declared objectives including the establishment of an Islamic multi-party democracy and maintaining Iran's territorial integrity. The plebiscite organised by the government for April 1979, was to determine the nature of Iran's political system only without any other choices. The outbreak of the war with Iraq in 1980 which lasted for eight years had far reaching consequences on the ethno-religious and cultural harmony in Iran as for the Iranian establishment, the dominant ideology of war was Shi'ite Iran against Sunni Iraq (Atabaki 2005). The Azerbaijani Shi'tes, therefore, turned into forerunners of the war.

Another development which had direct impact on ethnic politics in Iran was the formation a new Republic of Azerbaijan with the disintegration of the Soviet Union leading to some campaign advocating the establishment of a greater Azerbaijan. The call for the province of Iranian Azerbaijan to secede and unite with the Republic of Azerbaijan was followed soon by calls for repealing the Turkmenchay Treaty of 1828 that had set the Araxes River as the new border between Iran and Tsarist Russia, splitting the northern and southern parts of the province of Azerbaijan from each other.

The Southwestern Khuzistan province, with its huge resources of oil, gas, and water, is the nerve centre of Iran's economy which provides Tehran with about 80 percent of its crude oil production revenue. Unrest among ethnic Arabs in Khuzistan, which borders southern Iraq and is home to many of Iran's two million Arabs, presents Tehran with an especially serious domestic security threat. Although ethnic rioting in Iran has not been uncommon in the past, incidents of ethnic unrest seem to have risen steadily since President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad took office in 2005. This has something to do with Ahmadinejad's policy against the ethnic minorities and the widespread economic stagnation in these minority-dominated areas despite strong resources being exploited to meet the country's revenue. Ahmadinejad, however, uses ethnic unrests to exploit nationalist fears about the disintegration of the country. Iran has always been sensitive about the territorial integrity of the Iranian state and the

dangers posed by separatist movements. Khuzistan with its Arab population was subject in the 1920s to a policy of radical 'Persianisation' by Tehran in response to the concern that the British would encourage the formation of an Arab emirate there (Ansari 2007: 62).

The Economic Security Dimension

Economic security has been a major cause of concern in Iran with ethnic unrests in resource-rich provinces affecting the economy. However, the international sanctions are the major reasons behind its economic security problems with implications as far reaching as the legitimacy of the regime. Iran has been put under multilateral sanctions as part of the diplomatic strategy against its nuclear programme since the approval of the Resolution 1737 (Jentleson 2007: 3). Another Resolution 1696 was also passed in the face of Iran's renewed uranium enrichment programme.

The sanctions imposed on trade and investment by the US and others have been a major obstacle to Iran's economic development besides the faulty policies initiated by the conservative parties. Sanctions are major obstacles to Iran's effort to increase its oil production and foreign investment has been hard hit. The UN Security Council Resolution 1929 adopted on June 9th 2010 has given Iran more pressure with the multilateral sanctions affecting its infrastructural, banking and insurance sectors of the economy (Gal & Minzili 2011).

The 1979 Islamic Revolution changed Iran's modern political and economic history. Ayatollah Khomeini and his supporters transformed Iran into an Islamic state with a public-sector dominated economy that was increasingly internationally isolated. With the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), Iran faced negative rates of real economic growth, declines in oil production and revenue, and high levels of inflation. The economic security concerns continue to remain a major domestic security threat with inflation as the cause of political unrests and other ethnic minority conflicts. Iran's post-revolutionary economic crisis was further aggravated by disputes among proponents of various interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence, the Iran-Iraq war and oil market fluctuation (Behdad 1996: 97). In the early 1980s, the oil revenue

accounted for 95 per cent of Iran's foreign exchange earnings (Behdad 1996: 109). Thus oil continues to be the main resource base for Tehran in the face of international sanctions and isolation.

Iran has been engaged in a series of five-year economic plans in order to shift its state-dominated economy into an economy that is market-oriented and economically diversified. Under Khatami, the emphasis shifted to developing the industrial base through using constructive international relations to attract foreign investment. But neither Rafsanjani nor Khatami's route to modernisation appealed to the conservatives, as economic integration implied dependency (Ansari 2007: 69). Significant strides toward trade liberalisation, economic diversification, and privatisation took place under the Khatami's administration (1997-2005) by introducing some structural reforms such as tax policy changes and adoption of new foreign investment laws to promote Iran's global market integration and attract investment. However, reform efforts experienced resistance from various elements of Iran's political establishment especially the conservative section of the society.

Iran began a gradual liberalisation of the foreign-exchange market in 1990 followed by privatisation of many enterprises in 1991 (Behdad 1996: 120). During the 1990s, Iran made efforts to rebuild the war-torn economy, attract international investment, enhance foreign relations, liberalise trade and more recently, redistributed wealth under a series of a five year economic plans. Post-war economic growth included recovery in oil output, but the country faced a severe economic downturn by the end of the decade due to a drop in international oil prices.

Since the 1979 US embassy hostage crisis in Tehran, Iran has been subjected to various US economic sanctions. More recently, sanctions have been imposed in order to change the Iranian government's policies with respect to its nuclear program. To that end, the US has imposed sanctions to curtail the development of Iran's petroleum sector and constrain Iran's financial resources in a way that motivates policy change in Iran. This is the backdrop of this foreign relations crisis that the economic security of Iran has to be understood.

The US has pushed for stronger international sanctions against Iran in the United Nations. In March 2008, the UNSC passed a third round of sanctions against Iran through resolution 1803, calling for the inspection of suspicious international shipping to and from Iran that are suspected of carrying prohibited goods. It encourages greater monitoring of Iranian financial institutions, travel bans for named Iranians, and freezing of additional assets related to Iran's nuclear program. In June 2008, the five permanent members of the UNSC and Germany offered to suspend further sanctions against Iran if Iran agreed to halt its uranium enrichment program and to begin negotiations on constraints of its nuclear activity.

Since 2000, Iran has enjoyed broad-based economic growth; however, the same was hindered by strong economic performance with high levels of inflation and unemployment and low levels of foreign investment. Some contend that President Ahmadinejad's expansionary monetary and fiscal policies have worsened unemployment, inflation, and poverty in Iran. Iran has been subject to US economic sanctions and more recently to, UN sanctions, over uranium program and purported support for terror activities (Ilias 2010).

President Ahmadinejad has taken a more populist approach with economic policies promising of 'bringing the oil money to people's tables' when he took office in 2005. In line with Ahmadinejad's populist agenda, fiscal policy has been expansionary. The government provides extensive public subsidies on gasoline, food, and housing. Energy subsidies alone represent about 12 percent of Iran's GDP. Some observers estimate total subsidies to reach over 25 percent of GDP. In January 2010, the parliament passed a massive overhaul of Iran's system of state subsidies. Monetary policy also has been expansionary under Ahmadinejad. The government has provided low-interest loans for agriculture, tourism, and industry and has instituted loan forgiveness policies. Despite such attempts, the Iranian economy continues to face uncertain market fluctuation in the oil market with little diversification of the national economic base.

Iran's economy is highly dependent on the production and export of crude oil to finance government spending, and consequently, is vulnerable to fluctuations in

international oil prices. Although Iran has vast petroleum reserves, it lacks adequate refining capacity and imports gasoline to meet domestic energy needs. The ethnic turmoil, economic sanctions, low foreign investment and mismanagement of the economy are potential threats to Iranian economic security.

The Iranian Nuclear Programme

One of the major factors that drives Iran's nuclear programme is its domestic politics. Iran's nuclear programme has domestic implications which include strengthening energy security, economic diversification, and most importantly the internal cohesion needed for domestic stability. The foreign policy of confrontation against the Western powers over Iran's nuclear programme is used as a rallying cause for regime support. These concerns and other international issues will determine the direction and plan of action of the Iranian nuclear policy. Rafsanjani denied that Iran was attempting to acquire or construct nuclear weapons and accused the US of trying to block peaceful nuclear programmes vital to Iranian economic expansion. During President Khatami's rule, Iran made efforts to normalise its relations with the US without sacrificing Iran's national interests. The US's attack during Khatami's rule terming Iran as part of the 'axis of evil' has been the main target of Ahmadinejad's government against Khatami's reformist policy with the objective of strengthening ties with the West.

Beginning of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's term of office on August 3, 2005 marked the acceleration of Iran's nuclear programme. His conservative agenda of steadfast support to Iran's nuclear enrichment programme and refusal to comply with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspection team has put Iran isolated from the international community. His rhetorical speeches have found problems with the crucial actors in the region such as Iraq, Israel and the US thereby endangering Iran's security interests. There has been a growing pressure from within against Ahmadinejad's strong stand against the West and its impact on Iran's economic and foreign policy concerns. The hard-liners who are willing to risk international sanctions and even the threat of a US led military strike in a quest to become a nuclear power is challenged more or less by pragmatists who might think of accepting limited

nuclear programme to maintain healthy relations with the Western powers. Ahmadinejad's political life and popularity in Iran can be a matter of great concern which can lead to destabilising political events in the Islamic country in case of a stand-off with the West. However, Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei are largely for an assertive Iran vis-a-vis the Jewish state and the US.

The nuclear issue is a high priority with unequivocal support from the ruling conservative parties. Any threat or use of force will set off a rallying effect around both the regime and a nuclear programme thereby threatening the security situation. Economic sanctions and diplomatic pressures have brought some visible changes in the domestic political realm which is desirable for the US. The reformist and conservative parties along with Khomeini are showing signs of change that can have a major say in deciding the fate of Ahmadinejad's regime stability. Therefore, the question of political security in terms of domestic political stability and ethnic harmony has its connections with the foreign policy path taken by the regime in power. The internal political issues marked by the complex relationship between Khameini and Ahmadinejad will continue to breed contradiction and inconsistency in the domestic political realm thereby influencing its international relations.

Iran's desire for some form of nuclear development is rooted in its tumultuous history. Most Iranians perceive their nation as a great civilisation that has been deprived of its rightful status as a regional superpower by foreign intervention. Accordingly, developing an indigenous nuclear capability would go a long way in restoring a sense of pride, respect, and regional leadership. This has been a strong nationalistic appeal to the people with major push towards internal consolidation of the country. Therefore, the nationalistic appeal is one of the most important factors for securing regime legitimacy behind Iran's nuclear ambition in addition to its energy requirements. In this context, establishing stable domestic political environment is one of the most important elements of the national security policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

CHAPTER IV

NATIONAL SECURITY: REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS

Iran's relation with the regional and international environment is one of the most important aspect of its national security. The main aspiration of the current leadership in Tehran is to preserve Iran's privileged situation within the changing international environment. The present chapter tries to assesses and analyse the security policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 by focusing on its regional and international dimensions. It also looks at the current Iranian security strategy as determined by the ideological map drawn by the current Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. This chapter will also categorically examine the current Iranian policies towards Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, the GCC countries and the US.

Over the past 30 years, the Islamic Republic of Iran has become a major player in West Asia particularly in the Gulf region which has historically been engulfed in turmoil and instability with global ramifications of power for the last several decades. The region has also been the scene of the most dramatic shifts in the Cold War and the post-Cold War alliances. However, the turmoil in the region has shown that major power rivalry has not been the sole source of the region's miseries. The source of the problems is not extremism either which the general mindset perceive, it has been the symptom and not the causes. The problem lies in the prevailing political paradigm, founded on the need for an enemy- real, perceived, imaginary or artificially manufactured, as a convenient tool for governance and global interactions as well as the double standard short-sighted policies, political and military domination and imposition continued to nurture conflicts, insecurity, arms race, dictatorship and extremism in the region. Thus Iran's engagement with the regional and international environment is key to understand its national security policy.

Regional and Global Context of Iran's National Security Policy

Iran has suffered tremendously from the enemy paradigm. Though Iran had never been a formal colony of any western power, its history is replete with various attempts at domination by external powers (Ramakrishnan 2008: 61). The Iranians became the victim of the war, launched by Saddam Hussien on September 22, 1980 which was miserably dealt with by the international community. In the course of the war, the United States joined the Soviet Union and France in providing Iraq with military hardware and intelligence, and even the material for chemical and biological weapons by German and other Western companies (Tyler 2002). Furthermore, the massive diplomatic, financial and military support for Iraq from every corner of the world added insult to injury.

Since then, the regional security landscape and Tehran's security outlook have dramatically changed. A few weeks after the 11 September attacks on the United States, an American led international coaliation invaded Afghanistan and overthrew the Taliban regime. And less than two years later, in March 2003, another US led international coaliation toppled Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq. The removal of these regimes and the deployment of American troops in both the countries were perceived in Tehran as a "mixed threat". Iranian officials became concerned that their country would be America's next target for "regime change" in West Asia (Kaveh and Abbas 2003). However the international coalition's failure to establish a stable government in Afghanistan and Iraq has altered the regional security dynamics. This strategic environment posed a big threat to Iranian national security.

Further, the end of the Iran-Iraq War has neither increased Iran's security nor improved its international standing. Viewed from the Iranian perspectives, the new regional and international environment is a hostile one; where the United States has emerged as the primary actor, unchecked, unbalanced and unopposed. The two wars in the Persian Gulf and political instabilities have consolidated US presence in the region. This dilutes Tehran's regional ambitions and now feels more vulnerable to US might. The United States remains a hostile adversary, seeking to undo the regime and contain its Islamic Revolutionary massage. In this view, the United States is seeking

hegemony over the entire West Asia through its client states like Israel, the GCC, and Saudi Arabia, which the Iran terms as professing "American Islam". This US intention in the region is highlighted by the Secretary of State James Baker on his first visit to the in February 1992 where he admitted that the prime motivation behind US policy was the need to counter Iran and to set up a regional security arrangement that excludes any Iranian role in regional politics. Iran in turn sees no room for the United States in the region and seeks to weaken its allies.

Iran has also been directly affected by turmoil in the neighbourhood like the US invasion and subsequent toppling of Saddam Hussien's regimes from Iraq and Taliban in Afghanistan. And the turmoil, insecurity and extremism present since the aftermath of invasion and foreign occupation have had a detrimental impact on Iran's security strategy. The humanitarian crisis in the Iranian neighbourhood since the invasion also takes catastrophic dimensions. The threat of disintegration, political instability and increasingly bloody sectarian clash is now threatening the entire region (Singh 1980). All these factors have made a big impact on the Iranian national security strategy.

Apart from these turbulent experiences, the more classical geopolitical determinants have also greatly influenced Iran's national security doctrine. From a geopolitical perspective, unlike other countries in the region that have felt suffocated and have the experience of colonisation. Iran has never been colonised. And as the most powerful country in its immediate neighbourhood, Iran has always found it necessary to engage in a confidence-building strategy with its neighbouring states to address their concerns and also in order to offset extra-regional agitations. Thus, after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini put his stamp on the country's internal and foreign policies inspired by his famous slogan "neither East nor West, only the Islamic Republic". Iran has historically considered stability in the region to be vital to its own security and development. Even during the height of the Iran-Iraq War, Iran proposed the establishment of a security and cooperation arrangement in the Gulf to ensure stability and prevent the widening of the Iran-Iraq War. Recognizing this reality, Iran plays an important role in its efforts to stabilise in the region

particularly in Afghanistan and Iraq. Thus, the linchpin of Iran's regional and foreign policy is to preserve its national security and project its presence and influence in regional and international affairs. Iranian foreign policy is thus dictated by the need to maintain the country's sovereignty and independence in the light of past intervention by regional and global powers.

Iranian Foreign Policy since the Islamic Revolution

Being the world's second largest exporter of oil, and having by far the largest population and population density in the geographical West Asia, Iran simply cannot be ignored, either regionally and internationally. Iran's geopolitical position at the crossroads of the West Asia, the Gulf, the Caucasus and Central Asia has made the country a key actor historically and in modern times. Foreign policy and security policy cannot be dealt with separately. There is close interconnection between the two.

During the reign of the Shah, Iran was a close ally of the US and it aspired to play a prominent role in West Asia especially in the Persian Gulf region. Iran acted as the policeman of the Gulf. But the historic Islamic Revolution of 1979 provided a total break of these Shah's policies. After the Islamic Revolution, it was apparently the dream of exporting the new ruling ideology at any cost which governed the Khomeini's confrontational foreign policy (Rasmussen 2009).

Generally speaking, the post-Revolutionary Iran's foreign policy approach can be summarized as follows: in the first ten years after the Revolution, when Khomeini was the Supreme Leader, it was dominated by the two main ideological principles: (1) Neither East nor West but the Islamic Republic and (2) Export of the Revolution in order to free Muslims countries and non-Muslim countries from their oppressive and corrupt rulers. Regarding Iran's relations with the superpowers, Khomeini said that "we must settle our account with great and superpowers, and show them that we can take on the whole world ideologically, despite all the painful problems that face us" (Ramazani 2004).

Thus, the foreign policy orientation during the first ten years after the Revolution was mainly ideological, inspired by a certain interpretation of the Shi'ia ideological doctrine. During the Presidency of Rafsanjani (1989-1997) a more pragmatic approach prevailed focusing on post Iran-Iraq war economic reconstruction and the country's integration into the international economy. Rafsanjani's foreign policy also intended to improve relations with the Persian Gulf countries especially Saudi Arabia and also with the newly independent states of Central Eurasia (CEA) and Russia. Later on Khatami's Presidency (1997-2005) also aimed at continuing Rafsanjani's foreign policy towards its neighbours and improve its relations with the European Union (EU).

It was highlighted in Chapter II that, in the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy orientation, three main groups of Iranian political elite can be distinguished. The first is represented mainly by the conservative factions of the Iranian political elite which emphasises the identity and return to the ideas of the Islamic Revolution. To reach these goals, the IRI has to (a) keep the Muslim masses as faithful allies and (b) maintain a good partnership with the Muslim countries. The second group is mainly represented by the pragmatist and reformist factions which see Iran as a state that has to play a key role in international relations. This group is convinced that international trade and political ties are major tools in safeguarding Iranian national interests. In other words, the conservatives are more ideologically driven in its foreign policy outlook, while the pragmatists and reformists have less doctrinal approaches to foreign policy. And the third radical anti-Western strand that began with the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005, there was a major shift in the foreign policy orientation; a shift away from the pragmatic approaches under President Rafsanjani and Khatami to a more hostile attitude towards the West especially US and Israel. Iran's policy undoubtedly seems to be more hostile and less welcoming towards the West under Ahmadinejad.

By adopting geographical polarisation of Iran's foreign policy according to the Constitution, the Ahmadinejad administration put improvement and development of relations with the regional states as its first foreign policy priority. Iran's foreign

policy has been based on active interaction with the neighbouring Islamic and Third World countries. The main priority in this policy was improving relations with the Islamic countries since Ahmadinejad believes that the Islamic Republic of Iran has "Islamic nature, function and responsibility" and regards "Islam as the first and main element and source of Iranian national identity" (Yousefi 2010: 10). Second, Ahmadinejad announced the need of wiping Israel off from the world map and issued statements denying the Holocaust. Thus, the Iranian security policy has acquired a radical, mainly confrontational-assertive approach since President Ahmadinejad took power in 2005.

Iran's Regional and Global Security Policy and the Presence of US in the Region

Jean Bodin, the famous French political theorist wrote centuries ago that a country's foreign policy is determined by its geographical location. This is also true in the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran, a relatively large country with a surface area of 81,648,000 square kilometers. In the north it is surrounded by the Caspian Sea and the republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkeministan; on the east by Afghanistan and Pakistan; on the south by the Arabian/Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman; and on the west by Turkey and Iraq. Thus, by looking at a map one can see that, Iran is surrounded by both friendly and unfriendly neighbours which make security policy its primary concern.

During the Cold War between the US and the former USSR, Iran became an important player in America's policy of containing the Soviet Union. In the early 1950s the nationalist and elected Iranian government of Mohammad Mossadeq was overthrown by a coup engineered by the US and replaced by the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who ruled Iran from 1941 until he was ousted in 1979 (Ramazani 1986). Under the Shah's rule Iran became a major player in the Persian Gulf with US support and Iran benefited from extensive US financial and military aid as the "policeman of the Gulf". This was highlighted by Iran's active role in the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) created in the second half of the 1950s to contain the Soviet Union. In addition to Iran, CENTO included Pakistan, Turkey, Iraq and the UK, with the US as an associate member. Following the withdrawal of British troops

in 1970, Iran replaced the UK as the "guardian of the Gulf" and occupied three small islands in the Gulf of Hormuz.[8]

However, the Shah's removal and the advent of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1979 brought a major shifts to Iran's foreign and security policies, with major allies turning into major enemies. Now, Iran's two major foes are the US and Israel. Since it came to office, the Bush Administration has been establishing a set of military initiatives to contain Teheran's rising influence in the region. Another enemy for Iran –perceived or otherwise– is Israel. The Islamic Republic has emerged as a major competitor to Israeli military and strategic hegemony in West Asia and it has made the conflict between Arabs and Israelis a major arena to confront the latter.

Another important issue facing Iran today is the status and future of its nuclear programme. Iran's quest for a technologically and scientifically self-sufficient nuclear program is of paramount importance. By developing and enhancing its nuclear capabilities Iran will be able to be a major player at the regional level and assert its deterrent capabilities against potential enemies in the region, such as Israel. Tehran is also critical of the US and Israel because of their staunch opposition to Iran's nuclear ambitions. Tehran accuses them of being opposed to the progress and development of the Iranian nation. They do not want an Islamic and independent country to achieve scientific progress and possess advanced military technology in the West Asian region, a region which has been the hot-bed of conflicts. They want Iran's energy to be always dependent on oil, since oil is vulnerable to the policies of world powers. (Sadjadpour 2008).

In 2001, following the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, US troops invaded Afghanistan, and in 2003 it occupied Iraq, which led Iran's eastern and western borders being encircled by US troops. This put immense pressure on Iran's national security. The Iranian leadership closely monitors the evolution of the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan in order not to allow these two countries to become bases for US troops to launch attacks against Iran. For this purpose, Iran has devised a

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[8] The Island includes, Abu Musa, Greater and Smaller Tunb.

political and a security strategy in order to thwart potential external threats. The strategy includes helping and participating in the reconstruction process in Afghanistan.

This prolonged presence of US and its allies in the region makes the security dimension the most important element of Iran's strategic thinking. Iran's policy is thus based on deterrence to disrupt any potential attack from its enemies particularly, U.S and Israel (Bhagat 2009). Perhaps, the most important element is the creation of a strategic equilibrium between the political and security dimensions and ensure the country's readiness in the event of an attack. Following the US military intervention in Iraq (2003) some Arab regimes have accused Iran of facilitating the demise of Iraq's dictator and Iran's bitter foe, Saddam Hussein. To these accusations, Iranian reply was that unlike some Arab countries that have facilitated the deployment of US troops against Iraq, Iran and to a lesser extent Turkey have refused to help and condemned the use of force against a member of the United Nations (Kayhan 2010).

For the current Iranian regime under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, an important concern is to maintain the unity of Iraq as a territory and people. A divided Iraq is not in Iran's interest as it would lead to instability and have dangerous consequences not only for Iraq but for Iran and its neighbours. He also asserts that Iraq should not become a launching pad for US troops to threaten Iran's national security. Moreover, the Iraqi leadership ought to avoid legitimising plans that would expand US hegemony in the region. Last but not least, Iran would like to see the immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops from Iraq. This, the Iranian regime proclaims, will have a positive impact and will open new horizons for economic development and cooperation between the countries of the region (Rakel 2007).

To sum up, the current Iranian leadership is concerned by three fundamental factors: (1) the current situation in Afghanistan; (2) the future of Iraq and its stability; and (3) the presence of US and NATO troops on Iran's borders. In Afghanistan, the Iranians have tried to play a stabilising role, while controlling the borders with Afghanistan and funding groups that were opposed to the Taliban regime in Kabul. Nevertheless, the active U.S and NATO military and humanitarian presence in

Afghanistan has done nothing to dispel Iranian fears of a possible countering of its security interests. This fear is also linked to the US military presence in Iraq.

However, some critics said that the US military intervention in Iraq was a relief for the Iranians. On the one hand, it eliminated one of their bloodiest foes, Saddam Hussein. On the other, the presence of American troops is a reminder of the deep mistrust and fear Iranians have of US intentions. Since 2003, Iran has taken advantage of US military and political challenges to pacify Iraq (Bhagat 2009). Teheran has expanded its presence by supporting the Shia-dominated government in Baghdad and provided economic and logistic support to the Shia population of Iraq particularly in the southern parts. Iran is against the partition of Iraq as it would impact on its fundamental vision to stabilise its neighbourhood. The search for stability and security in the Gulf and Afghanistan has led Iran to play its nuclear card as a potential deterrent even if the Islamic Republic is still years away from developing nuclear weapons.

As mentioned above, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, justified his country's nuclear programme on the basis of 'scientific advancement, self-sufficiency, and political independence' (Sadjadpour 2008). The perception in the West especially U.S, Israel and among Arab Gulf countries close to the US, is that Iran will not limit its nuclear activities to purely civilian uses but that it is striving to build nuclear weapons. Strategically, if Iran's becomes a nuclear power this would alter the balance of power in the region and constitute a challenge to Israel's nuclear supremacy. It would also lead to another arms race in West Asia, with countries trying to obtain nuclear weapons at any cost (Ilan 2005). Moreover, a nuclear Iran would pose a direct threat to the presence of American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan and neutralize US attempts to isolate Iran.

Thus, the current Iranian leadership believes that it is being targeted by the US and Israel. And Iran also believes that the era when Washington could dictate its policy —as it did under the Shah— is long gone (Bhagat 2007). Lastly, Iranian leaders believe that if their country succeeds in building its own nuclear arsenal it will play a

major role in resolving the pending conflicts in the region, especially between Israel and the Palestinians and the wider Arab-Israeli conflict.

Iran and Israel

Admittedly, Iran has never officially recognized Israel. Under the Shah's regime, the two non-Arab states worked together to contain a common enemy, the radical "Arab nationalism". Consequently, they established close economic, technological and military cooperation. However, the 1979 Islamic Revolution brought a dramatic end to this discreet cooperation. The new Iranian leaders sought to "Islamise" the Arab-Israel conflict. For a short time, in the mid-1980s Israel sold Iran some US made weapons and spare parts in what came to be known as the "Iran-Contra Affair" (Bhagat 2007). However, this affair did not change the animosity between the two states and they continued to perceive one another as the sworn enemy.

Under the Ahmadinejad's Presidency, Iranian leadership has intensified its rhetoric against the Jewish state. The Iranian leadership sees the Palestinian issue as an Islamic issue rather than an Arab one and it provides a point of entry for Iran into the politics of wider West Asia. Thus Iran supported Hamas (the Islamic Resistance Organisation), and the Islamic Jihad (Holy War). The Iranian President also expresses his desire to "wipe Israel off from the map" and even denied the Holocaust. Meanwhile, Tehran has also strengthened its ties with the Palestinian organisations such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad. However, other factions within the Iranian political class have been more conciliatory about the Arab-Israel conflict. Former President Mohammad Khatami, for example stated that Iran would accept a "Palestinian state" that is ready to live alongside Israel if the elected Hamas government freely adopted such an outcome.

Again the Iran-Israel relation faces another challenge created by Iran's nuclear issue and the associated uncertainty of Israel's response. The Israeli government believes that a nuclear Iran is an existential threat to the Jewish state. Similarly, some analysts argue that Israel cannot co-exist with a nuclear Iran. Bernard Lewis for

example, suggests that there is a radical difference between Iran and other governments with nuclear weapons. This difference is expressed in what can only be describes as the apocalyptic worldview of Iran's present rulers. The mutually assured destruction balance that prevented a nuclear confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War will not in all likelihood work between Israel and the nuclear Iran (Lewis 2006). Thus, this emerging strategic configuration may well lead to a greater possibility of confrontation between Tehran and Tel Aviv.

Iran and the Muslim World

Since the advent of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, regional politics in West Asia have changed dramatically. The Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini wanted to export his brand of Islam through the Muslim world. Lebanon, with a relatively large Shi'a population became the prime target for Tehran. Following the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the Iranian regime took advantage of the mistakes committed by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) to consolidate its influence.

The US invasion in Iraq in 2003 also consolidated Iran as the major player in the region. The Shi'ite arc of influence is now extended all the way from Tehran to Beirut. The Iranian regime took the advantage of the fragmentation of Iraq to extend its influence and presence especially in Southern Iraq where the Kurdish self-determination was prevalent.

Revolutionary Stances and Solidarity

Another major objective of the Islamic Republic is the preservation and promotion of Islamic unity and it would like to take the leadership role of the Muslim world. In order to achieve these objectives Teheran has consolidated its relationship with Syria and Iraq. It has also become a major player in the Gulf, mainly by reaching out to its Arab Gulf neighbours in both diplomatic and economic spheres. As a part of this strategy, Iran has created, trained and financially supported what the experts call its indirect 'strategic tentacles', i.e, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Palestine and the Badr Brigade in Iraq. They act as trans-national groups to

implement Teheran's objectives (Nasr 2007). Behind these moves there is a clear message that Teheran is sending to the US and its regional allies that the Islamic Republic of Iran is far more important than America's Arab allies and friends.

Iranian foreign policy is also dictated by the need to maintain the country's sovereignty and independence in light of past interventions and interferences by regional and global powers. Another dimension which is unique from any other Constitution is the insertion of the religious dimension emphasised by Iran's advocacy and protection of Muslims around the world. Iran is keen to maintain sound relations with countries that are not perceived to constitute a threat to the Islamic Republic. While Iran played a constructive role regarding various issues affecting the region, Iranian decision-makers also recognise that advancing Iran's national security policy necessitates a more structural paradigm shifts from regional rivalries and mistrust caused by exclusion and bloc-formations to regional cooperation through inclusion and participations.

Thus, since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iranian foreign policy was and still is guided by the following principles: (1) support for the oppressed peoples of the world and their struggle for justice; (2) solidarity with Islamic groups and support (both financial and military) for movements fighting for self-determination, such as the Palestinian Hamas, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Badr Brigade and Mahdi Army in Iraq and the Army of Muhammad (Sipah-I Muhammad) in Pakistan and (3) total opposition to the US (which Iran describes as the Great Satan') and Israel.

Further, Ayatollah Khomeini's successor, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has preserved the regional pattern in his foreign policy and Khomeini's vision regarding Iranian influence in the Islamic world. Regarding Israel, Khamenei has consistently expressed his opposition to the 'Zionist entity' and to peace talks between Arabs and Israelis. In a speech in June 2005 Khamenei said his country's aim was not the destruction of Israel but the defeat of Zionism and the dissolution of the Jewish state. The solution he proposed was to hold a referendum with the participation of all native Palestinians, including Muslims, Jews and Christians, and Palestinians who live both inside and outside the occupied territories. Any government that takes power as a

result of this referendum and based on the Palestinian people's vote, whether it is Muslim, Christian or Jewish government or a coalition government, will be an acceptable government, and it will resolve the issue of Palestine. Without this, Khamenei said the Palestinian issue will not be settled (Sadjadpour 2008).

Khamenei's solution does not totally coincide with either the policies followed by the Palestinian Authority (PA) or with those of the Israeli government. Iran's major concern in this context is that a possible peace treaty between Israelis and Palestinians and between Syria and Israel would undermine Iranian influence. This explains and correlates with Iran's current policy of tightening its supports and control over the proxy groups, especially Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Khamenei is also keen on maintaining Khomeini's vision on Iranian influence in the Islamic world. In all the major conflicts now affecting West Asia and other Muslim countries (like in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, security issues in the Persian Gulf and the Arab-Israeli peace process), Iran is keen to assert its influence through its support and establishment of locally-raised militias and the teachings of Shi'a religious leaders in the region.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has now attained such a high status that its role in regional equations is quite decisive. This is something that is admitted by the world's major powers, who are acknowledging that the important issues of the West Asian region cannot be solved without Iran's cooperation and contribution, and that the Iranian views on those issues should be heard and taken into consideration' (Sadjadpour 2008).

Iran and Syria

In the last few years, together with Syria and Iraq, Iran has initiated a joint project to build an oil and natural gas pipeline linking Iran with Iraq and Syria. Iran and Syria are also involved in a joint project to enlarge and expand the railways system linking the two countries which will be like the ancient Silk Road linking Eastern and Western countries. Damascus and Teheran see eye-to-eye on many issues, including their strong support for anti-Western and anti-Israeli groups such as

Hamas and Hezbollah and their opposition to America's policies in the region. The Syrian President's visit to Paris in summer of 2008 has brought his country out of isolation and Syria is now criticising the results of the failures of US policies in West Asia.

The Syrian and Iranian leaders also expressed their unflagging support for Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon. In a joint statement the two sides expressed their satisfaction with the situation in Lebanon since the signing of the Doha Agreement[9] and reiterated their support for the right of the Lebanese people to resist constant Israeli violations of Lebanese sovereignty. Ahmadinejad and al-Assad called for reconciliation between Palestinian factions and for the need to establish national reconciliation in Iraq and the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Iraq to guarantee the unity of its land and people.

The early August 2008 visit of the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to Teheran was another major demonstration that the strategic alliance between the two countries is firm. Almost 29 years have gone by since the previous Syrian President, Hafez al-Assad, decided to support Iran's war against Iraq and the US military intervention in Kuwait. This was the third visit by President Bashar al-Assad to Iran since the election of the former Teheran Mayor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, as president of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2005 (Barzegar 2005). Several issues were discussed in Teheran between the Syrian and Iranian leaders. The agenda included items such as bilateral relations, the current indirect negotiations between Syria and Israel, Iran's nuclear programme and the situation in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine.

Regarding Iran's nuclear programme and the ongoing negotiations with the West, Syrian President Assad wanted to make sure that he was not playing the role of mediator. During his trip to Paris, Assad was asked by his French host, Nicolas Sarkozy, to explore possible solutions to narrow the differences between the West and

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[9] Doha Agreement was an agreement reached by rival Lebanese factions on Wednesday, May 21, 2008 in Doha, Qatar. The Agreement marked the end of an 18 month long political Crisis in Lebanon.

Iran. "First of all, Syria's objective is to understand Iran's perspective, then determine the role we might play", al-Assad said.[10]

The Syrian President's recent visit to Iran in October 2010 has also put an end to all the speculation that Damascus was ready to shed its close alliance with Teheran as the price for a possible peace treaty with Israel. In the final communiqué, Iran also expressed 'its support to the right of the Syrian people to regain control of its occupied territories in the Golan" (Barzegar 2005: 77). Thus, Syria and Iran are major players in the West Asia and a cordial bi-lateral relationship will be an important factor in any attempt for lasting stability in the region.

Iran and Hezbollah

In order to understand Iran's relations with Hezbollah it is important to provide a brief overview of the creation of the Lebanese Shia militia-cum-political party. In the early 1960s, Lebanon witnessed the beginning of a new clerical movement that served to reinvigorate Islam's key principles in both clerical and political terms. During the early years of Hezbollah (the 'Party of God'), the name of Sayyed Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah was closely associated with the Party. He was a symbol of many ideological concepts within the Party, guiding Hezbollah through a mature vision of Islam and of the Islamic movement and supported Ayatollah Khomeini, the Islamic Revolution's leader in Iran.

The Iranian Revolution led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini triumphed in 1979, in tandem with a rising and insistent need for political revitalisation in Lebanon. Soon Ayatollah Khomeini was being considered the leading religious authority within the Shiite community and the concern for a need to build a united Islamic organisation emerged.

Thus, a number of representatives of the main Islamic groups began discussing about their perceptions of Islamic activities in Lebanon. The results of these discussions were summarised in a final document called the 'Manifesto of the Nine',

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[10] Reports on President Assad's visit to Paris are available at
http://www.sana.sy/eng/183/index.htm.

which declared the following three objectives: (1) that Islam is the comprehensive, complete and appropriate programme for a better life; (2) resistance against Israeli occupation through the *jihad* (holy war); and (3) the legitimate leadership of the Jurist-Theologian (*velayat-e-faqih*), who is considered the successor to the Prophet and the Imams. This document was presented to Ayatollah Khomeini, who granted his approval, thereby bestowing upon himself custodianship as the Jurist-Theologian. Various Islamic groups then adopted the manifesto, dissolving themselves and setting up a new group which later came to be known as "Hezbollah". All of these developments took place at a time of Iranian solidarity with Lebanon and Syria. Syria agreed to the passage of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (*Pasdaran*) into Lebanon, and training camps were set up in the Western Bekaa Valley district.

Akhtari, who is also known as the 'Operational Father' of Hezbollah, detailed the origins and evolution of the Lebanese Shi'ite militia-cum-political party. The idea to create Hezbollah initially came from Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, Iran's Ambassador to Syria between 1982 and 1985. During the Iran-Iraq war, elements from Hezbollah, trained by the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), fought with Iranian troops against Iraq. At that time, Ayatollah Khomeini decided to dispatch to Lebanon a large contingent of Revolutionary Guards to help in the creation of Hezbollah.

Later, following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Khomeini decided to stop sending Iranian contingents to Lebanon. The main obstacle was related to logistic reasons given the unsafe lines of supply. On their way to Lebanon, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards were supposed to go through Iraq and Turkey. However, the former was at war with Iran and the latter was a member of NATO. Therefore best option was to train young Hezbollah fighters in Lebanese soil itself. As a part of this Iranian strategy more than 100,000 young members of Hezbollah were trained by the Revolutionary Guards. In the meantime, through the embassies in Damascus and Beirut, Iran has played a crucial role in supporting Hezbollah as an anti-Israel political and military Islamist group in Lebanon. During the 2006 war between Israel and the Hezbollah, Teheran dispatched several high-level diplomats to assess the possibility

of a ceasefire and determine the level of aid needed by the Shia population in Beirut and South Lebanon (Rakel 2007).

Thus, Iran has been a major source of financial support for Hezbollah. In the aftermath of the 2006 war, and with Iranian support, Hezbollah has disbursed more than US$0.5 billion for the reconstruction of destroyed homes and infrastructures in the southern suburbs of Beirut and south Lebanon (Irani 2008). With Iranian funding, Hezbollah also provides support for the families of its fighters who have died in the war. This gives the Iranian-supported group the wherewithal to be a state within a state in Lebanon.

Following the 2006 war, Sayyad Hasan Nasrallah emerged as a major player on the Lebanese and regional scene. Strengthened by his 'victory' against the Israeli army, Hezbollah began to assert its power on the Lebanese political scene. This led to confrontations in May 2007 between the Iranian-supported militia and other Lebanese groups, mainly the Sunni-dominated 'Future Movement' and the Druze-dominated militias of the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) (Yossi 2008).

Iran feared that a possible sectarian Shia-Sunni conflict was in the offing and did its utmost to rein in Hezbollah's fighters. Iran does not want Lebanon to enter into another civil war that would severely damage the Shia community both in Lebanon and the region. Since then, Iran has been very actively playing a direct role in monitoring Hezbollah's activities and urging it to follow a more moderate and conciliatory tone with other political groups in Lebanon.

Iran and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

The Persian Gulf and the countries in and around it have historically been a prime security concern for the Islamic Republic of Iran since the early days due to its geo-strategic location. The relationship between the Islamic Republic and its Arab Gulf neighbours can be described as being a 'mixture of fear and pragmatism'. This fear is perhaps due to the Iranian leadership's vision of exporting the Islamic Revolution to neighbouring countries on the one hand and the US influence on the other.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was established in May 1981 and it includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. These six Gulf States decided to coordinate foreign policy, defense, security planning and economic cooperation under the auspicious of the GCC. In May of 2003, President Bush announced an initiative to help promote trade and investment by West Asia with the United States and the world. Under this initiative, the U.S negotiated a free trade agreement (FTA) with Bahrain and Oman. In addition to the two FTAs, the United States has engaged in other agreements with the GCC countries in an effort to promote greater economic activities and security ties. The US and the GCC have had a relatively strong relationship over the years built on security concern within the West Asian region.

In 1984, the GCC began dealing with security matters by establishing the "Peninsula Shield Force", a rapid-deployment unit of 22,000 troops. The GCC became active in mediating various territorial disputes between its member states, for example, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Bahrain. The United States has become a major security and military ally for the GCC nations. In 2002, Bahrain was designated a "major non-NATO ally" to the United States. Later, Qatar, the UAE and Kuwait are also announced a major non-NATO allies of the United States. Being designated a major non-NATO ally highlights a close strategic partnership with NATO and enables arms purchases by these countries to face less review from the U.S Congress (Hessling 2010). The six countries also decided to coordinate their foreign policies, defense and security planning under the auspices of the GCC. The regional security threats arising from the Iran-Iraq war were a main catalyst for the group's formation. This political and military role initiated by the GCC in collaboration with the US became a primary security threat to Iran. It is therefore important to pay close attention to the regional security outlook of the GCC states, as they have a vital stake in the security orientations of the Gulf, and their reactions could have significant repercussions for the security of the Islamic Republic.

Relations between Iran and its GCC neighbours are affected by the following sources of tension: the Iranian nuclear programme, the prolonged US presence in the

region and its involvement in Iraq, Afghanistan and others like Lebanon, the adversarial relationship between Iran and the US, border conflicts and the sharing of oil and natural gas resources, bilateral relations, the issue of minorities, and, last but not least, security in the Gulf.

Until the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the relations between the two sides were more cordial, as monarchist regimes were one of the common factors on both the Arab and Persian sides of the Gulf. Moreover, the Saudis were glad to be under the US-supported Iranian umbrella to help maintain stability in the Gulf. With the fall of the Shah and the advent of Ayatollah Khomeini things have changed. The Iran-Iraq war highlighted the ambiguous relationship between Arab Gulf states and Iran. Most Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, helped Saddam Hussein financially in his war effort against Iran. When the war ended with the survival of the Iranian regime, the Gulf Arab states shifted to a policy of enhanced economic and trade relations while being wary of the messages coming out of Teheran, especially since the advent of the conservatives headed by President Ahmadinejad.

Other major sources of tension include the ongoing occupation of the islands of Abu Musa and the Great and Little Tunb islands –that belong to the United Arab Emirates, Iranian attempts allegedly at overthrowing the regime in Bahrain and fomenting dissent and revolt among the Shias living there and in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Last but not least, there is the current situation in Iraq where Iran is taking advantage of American mistakes, which has consolidated its grip and influence in Shia-dominated Iraq.

The Arab Gulf states, because of their close subservience and links with the US, were considered 'mini-Satans' by Ayatollah Khomeini. In January 2007, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei tried to calm down the fears of Arab leaders who had expressed their fear of a growing Shiite crescent going all the way from Teheran to Beirut. King Abdullah of Jordan had warned about the ascendant Shia crescent while President Mubarak of Egypt was quoted as saying that Shiites living in Arab countries have a primary allegiance to Iran rather than to their respective

countries. Khamenei assured Arab leaders that Iran had no intention of extending *Pax Iranica* throughout the region (Sadjadpour 2008).

The Gulf Arab countries have maintained cultural, religious, commercial and security ties with Iran for centuries. These relations have not always been amicable; however, the Arab states bordering the Persian Gulf have always been suspicious of the intentions and capabilities of their larger neighbours. This suspicion is more about Iran's size and its potential and less about the nature of any regime in Tehran. During the first decade of the Islamic Revolution (1979-89), relations between Iran and the GCC reached one of the lowest points ever. Iran was enthusiastic about exporting its revolution whereas the GCC countries sought to contain such threat by supporting Iraq. Relations gradually improved in the early 1990s, and the Presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005) marked a dramatic improvement in relations between the two. However, since 2005, Ahmadinejad's foreign policy rhetoric, among other things, has caused a cooling off in Iran's relations with its Arab neighbours.

Since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, the GCC has been anxiously watching Iran's ambitions towards regional supremacy. In their eyes, Iran is emerging as the real beneficiary of the war in Iraq. A major concern is how the rise of Iran's influence, and the growing power in Iraq's Shia majority might affect the delicate sectarian balance within the GCC. Another major concern is how the GCC might accommodate Iran while simultaneously maintaining close relations with the United States.

According to R.K. Ramazani (2004), the main reasons behind the creation of the GCC included the threat of the Iranian Revolution particularly the threat of subversion, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the superpower competition, including unilateral American military intervention, and the threat of spillover from the Iran-Iraq war. Today, the GCC is mostly concerned with the situation in Iraq, Iran's growing intervention in internal Arab affairs (Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon) and threats from various Islamist groups. The response of individual GCC states to the Iranian challenge has been a mixture of continued reliance on the security umbrella provided by the US, and cautious and so far lackluster diplomatic engagement with

Iran (Hesseling 2010). And there is a consensus within the GCC that Iranian influence has grown since the US invasion of Iraq, and the Islamic Republic is destined to play a predominant role in regional affairs. This is a strategic reality that the GCC states need to learn and Iran has to deal with. Another important dimension of security is the growing tension between Iran and the international community over its nuclear programme that has sparked a flurry of diplomatic activity by several GCC states. Despite their proximity to Iran, it seems that the GCC states do not regard a direct Iranian attack as the greatest threat to their security, but rather the possibility of a US strike on Iran and the impact of the resultant Iranian retaliation.

Thus the dilemma in which the GCC states find themselves is that they feel their survival can only be guaranteed by internationalising regional security including hosting a foreign military presence to protect them. Taking this advantage, US retain an important military presence in several GCC countries. However, Iran has repeatedly denounced the US military presence in the region, and the GCC states are fearful of potential military strikes on the territories in the event of war. For this reason, the GCC is strongly opposed to any military action against Iran (Javeed 2007).

In the meantime, the US is also playing a balancing policy in the region which requires a sustained military presence in the region. The US is working on establishing a new regional security system, which would provide a wider multilateral security initiatives and assurances to her allies (Hesselling 2009). Iran seeks to organise a regional security arrangement without outside powers and maintaining close relations with the key states in the Persian Gulf.

Iran and Iraq

The history of relationship between Iran and Iraq is that of two Shia-dominated countries, one of which is Arab and other the Persian. The two states are traditionally been stronger than the other six Gulf monarchies that share this oil-rich region. The removal of the Saddam Hussein in 2003 and the failure to restore political and military stability in Iraq has opened the door for Iran to intensively pursue its claim for regional leadership.

Arab resentment of the Persians goes as far back as the early days of the spread of Islam. One of the main causes of this resentment is the Arab view that the Iranians succeeded in creating a cohesive empire and then a nation state without the heavy involvement of outside powers (Barzegar 2005). Arabs countries on the other hand, were carved up by the colonial powers and were under foreign domination-mostly British and French. Under the Shah, the relations between Iran and Iraq were peaceful despite tensions due to the Kurdish question and other border issues. With the advent of the Islamic Republic and its prime architect Ayatollah Khomeini, Iraq's relation with Tehran worsened and ended in a eight years long (1980-88) deadly war between the two countries that caused death of more than one million people on both sides (Ehteshami 2003).

There are currently six major issues that need attention in order to consolidate and normalise the relations between Tehran and Baghdad (Irani 2008). First, there is the border dispute over Shatt al-Arab (*Arvandrud* in Persian), a narrow waterway that forms the southern border between Iraq and Iran. This was one of the main flashpoints during the war between the two countries. Saddam Hussein had abrogated the 1975 Algiers Agreement which demarcated the *thalweg* (middle) line along Shatt al-Arab as the border between the two states (Karsh 1990). The Algiers Agreement also called on the Shah to halt his support for Iraq's Kurdish opposition groups, such as the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), in return for which Iran would obtain land and sea rights in Shatt al-Arab (Barzegar 2006). The border dispute was again raised in 2007 when Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, stated that his country did not recognise the Algiers Agreement. Later he backtracked but the Shatt al-Arab issue is still the major disputes between the two countries.

Second, there is the issue of compensation to Iran for the first Gulf War. UN Resolution 598 had placed the blame on Iraq for initiating the war and asked Baghdad to compensate the Iranians. Teheran is asking for US$1 trillion while UN estimates speak of US$169 billion (Karsh 1990). The Iraqi government worked very hard to evade its debt, while the US is attempting to convince several countries to condone Iraqi debt. Nevertheless, it is still a pending issue between the two countries. The

third issue between Iran and Iraq is the fate of prisoners of war in both countries. Iraq claims that there are more than 20,000 Iraqis in Iranian jails, while Iran claims that more than 5,000 Iranian prisoners of war are still in Iraqi detention centres (Barzegar 2006). The fourth issue relates to the presence of the Iranian opposition group *Mujahidin e-Khalq* that is still operating inside Iraq and waging 'terror' attacks inside Iran. Iraqi President Talabani has promised to look into this question but so far no concrete action has been taken by the government in Baghdad to get rid of the Iranian group. The fifth issue is related to the Iraqi planes that were sent to Iran on the eve of the Second Gulf War in 1991. Despite the fact that the planes are outmoded and inoperable Baghdad would still like to get them back. The last issue is related to the kidnapping of Iranian diplomats within Iraq and the arrest of Iranian representatives by US troops. This is still unresolved despite bilateral efforts to reach a resolution.

There were several causes for the Iraq-Iran War. According to R.K. Ramazani (1986) there were four motives and conditions that sparked the conflict:

> First, the Iraq-Iran war was not an inevitable result of the Iranian Revolution. Had the second revolution, against Bazargan not occurred, there is every reason to believe that the two revolutionary regimes wound have been able to settle their differences peacefully. Second, Iraq's own socio-political conditions made the Khomeini regime's ideological crusade appear even more ominous (Ramazani 1986:68).

The third cause of the Iraq-Iran war can be attributed, according to Ramazani, to Saddam Hussein's ambitions to play a prominent role in Arab and Third World politics. The fourth and related motivation was "Saddam Hussein's desire to contain the Iranian Revolution and project Iraq's power into the Gulf region and the Arab world" (Ramazani, 1986). With the fall of Saddam Hussein and the US military intervention in Iraq in 2003, Iran saw an opportunity to extend its influence in Iraq, relying mostly on the Shiite religious and political leaderships. Moreover, the end of the Sunni-dominated Taliban-Pakistan-Saudi axis on Iran's eastern flank has been a golden opportunity for Shia Iran to extend its influence in the region. Thus, Iran's

fundamental objective in Iraq is to ensure that Ba'athism and Arab nationalism do not return to power (Nasr 2008: 223)

Throughout the Ba'athist rule in Iraq, Iran had been very active in politically and financially supporting Shia-based religious and political organisations such as the Badr Brigade, an Iraqi military organisation, that was created during the Iraq-Iran War to act as a counterweight to the the *Mujahedin-e Khalq*, an Iranian opposition group based in Iraq that carried out attacks against Iran (Katzman 2009).

The Islamic Republic was also instrumental in promoting and strengthening the power of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI, *Al-Majlis al-Áala li al-Thawra al-Islamiyya fi-l-Iraq*). The SCIRI's leadership emerged from one of the most prominent families in Iraq's Najaf –the Hakims– and is currently headed by the Shiites' highest religious authority, the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. In 2007, the SCIRI dropped the word "revolution" from its official name.[11]

Iran also established strong ties with another prominent Shiite religious leader, Ayatollah Muhammad Sadeq al-Sadr, who became the head of the 'Sadrist movement'. Following his assassination in 1999 by Saddam Hussein's regime, his son Muqtada took over the movement's leadership and created the *Mahdi* Army which is very strong in the poorer Shiite areas of Baghdad (Barzegar 2006). Since the US occupation of Iraq, the Najaf-based Badr Organisation and the Baghdad-based *Mahdi* militia have battled each other both politically and militarily for the control of the Shia community in Iraq.

As a result of the January 2005 elections, the SCIRI rose to power and became a major player in Iraqi politics together with the Kurds. The two main Kurdish formations, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), joined efforts with the SCIRI to form the two successive governments in Iraq in 2005 and 2006. Relations between President Jalal Talabani's PUK and Mustafa Barzani's KDP and the Shia-dominated Badr Brigades (the SCIRI's military wing) go as far back as the Iran-Iraq war. Both Shia and Kurdish

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[11] Today, its official name is Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI).

groups enjoyed the backing and military support of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards in their fight against Saddam Hussein. A senior SCIRI official described the relationship between Shia and Kurds as follows: Racism prevented the Kurds from joining the political system where sectarianism prevented the Shiites, while tyranny repressed Kurds and Shiites alike (CSR Report 2007).

On his official visit to Teheran in June 2008 –his third visit to Iran since becoming Iraq's Prime Minister– Nuri al-Maliki tried to consolidate the relationship between the two countries and tried to dispel Iranian fears regarding his country's intentions. The visit occurred amidst Iraqi and US accusations that Iran was supplying weapons to certain anti-government groups in Iraq. Moreover, al-Maliki wanted to give assurances to his Iranian counterparts that the security treaty being currently negotiated with the US will clearly state that Iraqi territory will not be used to launch attacks against neighbouring states, particularly, Iran. Thus, it seems that, Al-Maliki was walking on a tightrope trying to satisfy his two masters, Iran and the US.

Hence, the picture that emerged from the overall assessment of Iranian regional and foreign policy is that the Islamic Republic has emerged as a major player in the region. However, several factors like the sectarian crisis in the region, political instability and most importantly, the presence of the US and its dominating role in and around the region have been continuously posing a security threat to the Islamic Republic's national security. Therefore, in order to protect and preserve its national security, Iran has to wisely project its regional and foreign policy.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, Iran's national security has been its primary concern which has been influenced by several internal and external factors. From the beginning, the Iranian national security policy has extended from two concurrent sources, a perpetually turbulent regional environment on the one hand and the exigencies of a friction-ridden political system and complex decision-making institutions on the other. After all, the national security policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran has evolved through the two Gulf wars, the seismic effect of the collapse of the Soviet Union, diplomatic alienation, the prolonged presence and influence of the United States and the subsequent overthrow of the regimes in neighbouring countries of Afghanistan and Iraq. Thus, like any other states, Iran's threat perception is generally derived from its geographical location, domestic and international security environment, regional and global power influences and its historical experience particularly after the Revolution. The wars at home and in the neighbourhood had immense impact on the national security policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. For example, the waves of refugees coming from neighbouring Iraq and Afghanistan have made Iran the largest refugee recipient in the world. Therefore the economic, social and political instability in the region have direct security impact on the Islamic Republic.

The foregoing discussion suggests that Iran's national security strategy stems from a complicated mix of strategic, domestic and institutional sources. Perhaps there are rules to Iran's decision-making on major security issues but these rules are in constant flux which makes the Iranian security decision-making chaotic and renders it difficult to codify a unified security policy. In fact the political system of the Islamic Republic is made up of highly complex institutional arrangements where intuitions with similar or competing roles often perform overlapping functions. Therefore, Iran's national security policy is a victim of factional debates. As highlighted in the above

chapters, there are currently three main factions among Iranian political elites- the conservatives, the reformers and the radicals. And competition between these factions has been a primary factor of differing opinions on decision-making in Iranian politics.

During the Cold War period, Iranian security strategy was shaped by the rivalry between two power blocs. The nascent revolutionary regime shifted Iran's orientation from a previous pro-American one to an ideologically oriented one. As a part of its revolutionary foreign policy based on Islamic ideas, Iran followed the dual-track policy in order to maintain its power by importing arms from both the blocs. The end of Cold War and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 brought immense political changes with strong regional and international implications. With the establishment of GCC and the renewed American engagement in name of promoting democracy and human rights diplomacy in the post-Cold War world and the US-led interventionism in the neighbourhood posed security threats to the Islamic Republic.

The non-traditional security threats are also the major problem areas concerning Iran's national security policy. Iran has erected several mechanisms to meet and control these threats. For example, SNSC was established to work out its policies concerning security. The non-traditional security threats such as refugee problems, insurgency, ethno-religious issues, illegal cross-border migration etc. continue to hamper the Iranian national security since its inception. Therefore, Iran is moving towards a cooperative security arrangement as a measure of peace, stability and security along the border. Thus Iran tries to establish cordial relationships with the neighbouring countries and extends its influence to bilateral and multilateral forums on economic and political issues of both domestic and international importance while safeguarding its national sovereignty and opposing US hegemony and power politics in the region. Iran has strongly defended against any kind of military and political intervention in the internal affairs of itself or any other state. This is clearly defined in the foreign policy strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Internal political stability of Iran is the much sought after policy of the Islamic Republic to safeguard its strategic and economic interests in the region. The multiple

and overlapping centres of power in the Iranian political system created ample scope for factionalism and political adventurism. The distrust between the several state institutions and individuals has always been the hindrances in framing a unified national security policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The stability of the regime is another prime concern of Iran's national security. Therefore, an important conclusion of this study is that the development of domestic political consensus is crucial to the long-term security and stability of the Islamic Republic. And it is vital that Iran develop a system that provides a meaningful dialogue and participation of all the groups and institutions that has been crucial to Iran's national security decision-making. Another important aspect of Iran's domestic security is the rise of nationalist uprising from its ethno-religious minorities that has been posing a big challenge to the territorial integrity of the country. Roughly one half of Iran's 70 million people are ethnic Persians, the rest being Azerbaijanis, Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen, Baluchis and Lors. Therefore, in the eyes of many observers, this unusual diversity makes Iran not so much a nation –state as a multinational state dominated by the Persians. Iran's ethnic minorities share a widespread sense of discrimination and deprivation towards the central Tehran government.

Some of the minority ethnic groups are Azeris, Kurds, Arabs, Baluchis, Turkmen etc. which have been dispersed throughout the country. And the policies of Tehran dealing with these minority groups led to big struggle between the government and the minority groups. Tehran's highly centralised development strategy has resulted in a wide socio-economic gap between the centre and the peripheries, where there is an uneven distribution of power, socio-economic resources and socio-cultural status. Fueled by these long-standing economic and cultural grievances against the government, unrest among the country's large groups of ethnic minorities is increasing which has been a viable threat to Iran's national security.

Iran's security policy can be viewed as shaped by pressure from three distinct environments that often pull and push against one another: (1) the domestic environment; (2) the regional environment; and (3) the global environment. However, since the last two decades, pressure from the latter two environments has increased

considerably after the 9/11 incident and the subsequent US-led invasion of Iran's two neighbours, Afghanistan and Iraq. During the Presidency of George W. Bush, three questions have been central to Iranian national security: (1) the role of Iran in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; (2) the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; and (3) Iran's nuclear programme.

Since September 11, 2001 and especially after the launch of the "Axis of Evil" paradigm in 2003, Iran and the United States have been engaged in a high voltage verbal confrontation with the security issues at its core on both sides. The United States has been the active leader of a Western policy towards Iran that combines economic sanctions and threats of military intervention in an attempt to influence Iran's national security. These strategic policies against Iran have served to further isolate and radicalise the new leadership of the Islamic Republic. But, as long as Iran remains isolated, it is difficult to imagine a more homogeneous and long-term "Western minded" foreign and security policy from the leadership in Tehran. The combination of harsh economic sanctions and threats of military intervention against Iran have not only marred relation between Iran and the West, but also the prospects of peace and stability in West Asia.

Iran pursues active policies to check the United States' influence in the region. And the ever increasing competition among regional actors for access to Persian Gulf's natural resources has allowed Iran to counterbalance the US by strengthening political and economic cooperation with other countries like Russia, China, India, and several other countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Meanwhile, Iran has also pursued several policies of regional security integration and promoted multilateral cooperation with other neighbouring countries to enhance its military and economic capabilities. Therefore, Iran follows both internal and external balancing acts against US influence in the region which is very much needed to prevent any US design to establish its satellite states in the region.

Iran is always concerned about its international image as a responsible player in international affairs. Iran's position on West Asia has attracted widespread international criticism since the inception of the Islamic Republic thereby putting

Tehran at a volatile position. Iran is thus fearful of a strategic re-alignment on the part of US and at the same time concerned about "entrapment" in its traditional relations with other Muslim countries. It wants to be an important player strategically in the Persian Gulf and the wider West Asian region.

Another important factor defining Iran's national security is the geo-strategic importance of Iran which has military-security implications on Iran's long-term policy in the region. As a peaceful environment was crucial for political stability and economic recovery, Iran's diplomacy is oriented itself towards building friendly relations with neighbouring countries. Iran's relations with the neighbouring countries help Tehran establish stability on its periphery so that it can focus on internal economic development and other foreign policy priorities. The nature of Iran's security policy has become important in the wake of international community's inability to engage Iran directly. Trade and economic assistance, close military cooperation and political support extended by Iran have made the Islamic regime to survive even in the face of strong domestic and international pressure and sanctions.

Despite, strong international criticism for its nuclear program and its role in the so-called international terrorism, Iran has committed to supply arms and ammunition to several Islamic organisations. Under this policy, Iran provided ideological and technical support to the anti-Western Islamic movements such as Hamas in Palestine, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Badr Brigade in Iraq and so on while maintaining state-to-state relations. However, the presence of US in the region remains as a major hindrance to the development of closer relations with its neighbouring countries. The relations between the Islamic Republic and its neighbours got established firmly with the transformation of revolutionary foreign policy to a more pragmatic policy by supporting the national wars of liberation across the Islamic world. With this, Iran's policy in political, economic and military relations has been developing steadily, based on Islamic ideas and principles.

Thus, Iran has been sticking to the "Islamic" state norms with political independence and sovereignty of the state as the prominent foreign policy priority. Iran continues to be suspicious of Western interference over the issues of the Gulf,

and the larger West Asian affairs which threaten its national security. On the other hand, Iran has its internal political problems marred by ethnic and religious insurgency seeking for more autonomy or secession which threatens the survival of the state. This is further worsened by the strong backing by foreign powers. Iran is suspicious of US strategic intentions in the region. It fears that the United States might use the GCC as a bargaining chip in its relationship with the West Asian countries. As one of US's strategically important allies, Israel plays a strategic role in its pursuit of regional economic, political and military hegemony in the region.

Therefore, a successful Iranian national security paradigm has to acknowledge its growing power and design a framework for incorporating it in a multilateral system that encompasses all countries in the region, along with the United States. Thus Iran's security policy need to reflect the strong preference for self-reliance rooted in national attributes, and the necessity of dependence rooted in the structure of the regional and international system.

Both the hypotheses of the study are validated in the course of the research. One can find out from the study that since the revolution of 1979, the main strategy of Iran's national security policy has been deterrence which is related to the nature of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its international threats. Although some would like to portray Iran's security policy as 'hegemonism', it is more or less 'confrontational'- a strategy to protect its security interest against the military threats posed by the big powers especially through the presence of United States in the region. The Iranian policy-makers are seeking a policy in order to preserve their power for its survival and security. In sum, we can say that Iranian national security policy is a pragmatic and realistic policy to deter its enemies and guarantee its security, survival and well-being of the nation. To realise that goal, Iran has exploited all instruments at its disposal such as "Islamism", Shiism, Third-worldism, nationalism, geopolitics and so on. Iran as an important player in the region needs to act as politically responsible, and any incorrect political and unwise military strategy would possibly impact the national security of the Islamic Republic with implications not just at the domestic level but also at the international level.

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