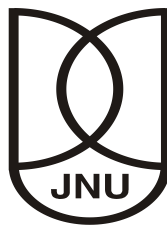# EXPLORING GEOPOLITICAL IMAGINATIONS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF IRAN, 1979-2013

*Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University*
*for award of the degree of*

## DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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New Delhi-110067

2017

21 July, 2017

## DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled **"Exploring Geopolitical Imaginations: A Critical Analysis of Iran, 1979-2013"** submitted by me for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The thesis has not been submitted for any other degree of this university or any other university.

**DEEPIKA SARASWAT**

## CERTIFICATE

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

**CSR MURTHY**
(Chairperson, CIPOD)

**DR. KRISHNENDRAMEENA**
(Supervisor)

## *Acknowledgements*

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATION

| | |
|---|---|
| AIOC | Anglo-Iranian Oil Company |
| AMAL | *Afwaz al-Mouqama al-Lubnaniya* |
| CENTO | the Central Treaty Organization |
| IRGC | Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps |
| IRI | Islamic Republic of Iran |
| NPT | Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons |
| PLO | Palestine Liberation Organization |
| SAVAK | *Sazeman-e-EttelatwaAminiyat-e-Keshvar* |
| CIA | Central Intelligence Agency |
| US | United States of America |
| HAMAS | *Harkat-ul-Muqawamah al-Islamiyya* |
| SCO | Shanghai Cooperation Organization |
| SCRI | Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iran |
| UN | United Nations Organization |
| WMD | Weapons of Mass Destruction |

# ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF
# IRAN

ARMENIA
AZERBAIJAN
TURKEY
TURKMENISTAN
AFGHANISTAN
PAKISTAN
IRAQ
KUWAIT
SAUDI ARABIA
BAHRAIN
QATAR
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
OMAN

*Van Gölü (Lake Van)*
CASPIAN SEA
PERSIAN GULF
GULF OF OMAN

Māku
Sal'jany
Krasnovodsk
Nebit-Dag
Ashkabad
Khvoy
*Arak̲s*
Van
Marand
Āstārā
Tedzhen
Mary
**ĀŽARBĀYJĀN-E KHĀVARĪ**
**ARDEBĪL**
Tabrīz
*Daryācheh-ye Orūmīyeh (Lake Urmia)*
Ardabīl
Gonbad-e Qābūs
Bojnūrd
Orūmīyeh
Marāgheh
**GĪLĀN**
Mīāneh
Rasht
Mosul
Mahābād
**ĀŽARBĀYJĀN-E GHARBĪ**
Miāndowab
Sakht Sar
Āmol
Sari
Gorgān
Shāhrūd
Sabzevār
Mashhad
Arbīl
Saqqez
*Qezel Owzan*
**ZANJĀN**
Zanjan
Rūdbār
**MĀZANDARĀN**
As Sulaymānīyah
**KORDESTĀN**
Qazvīn
Kāshmar
Torbat-e Heydarīyeh
Kirkūk
Sanandaj
**TEHRĀN**
**SEMNĀN**
Ţayyebāt
Tehrān
Semnān
**HAMADĀN**
Sāveh
Qasr-e Shīrīn
Kermānshāh
Hamadān
Qom
*Daryācheh-ye Namak*
*Dasht-e Kavīr (Salt Lake)*
Gonabad
*Kavīr-e Namak*
Herāt
**KERMĀNSHĀH**
Malāyer
**MARKAZĪ**
Kāshān
**KHORĀSĀN**
Borūjerd
Arāk
Kāshān
Najafābād
Bīrjand
**LORESTĀN**
Alīgūdarz
Baghdad
Ilām
Khorramābād
**ESFAHĀN**
**ĪLĀM**
Eşfahān
Karbalā'
Al Kūt
Al Hillah
Dezfūl
Shahr-e Kord
Ardakān
Zaranj
**I R A Q**
Al 'Amārah
Masjed-e Soleymān
**CHAHARMAHĀL VA-BAKHTĪYĀRĪ**
Qomsheh
Yazd
Zābol
**KHŪZESTĀN**
*Karkheh*
Ahvāz
Bāfq
As Samāwah
An Nāsirīyah
Bandar-e Māh-Shahr
**BOYERAHMAD VA-KOHGILUYEH**
Abādeh
Zarand
*Namakzār-e Shāhdād (salt waste)*
Al Başrah
Yāsūj
**YAZD**
Rafsanjān
Kermān
*Euphrates*
Khorramshahr
*Kārūn*
Marv Dasht
Zāhedān
**KUWAIT**
Ābādān
Shīrāz
*Hāmūn-e Jaz Mūrīān*
Sīrjān
**KERMĀN**
Kuwait
Borāzjān
**FĀRS**
Bam
**SĪSTĀN VA BALŪCHESTĀN**
Badar-e Būshehr
Fīrūzābād
Jīroft
Īrānshahr
**BŪSHEHR**
Jahrom
**HORMOZGĀN**
*Mand*
Lār
Bandar-e Abbās
*Hāmūn-e Jaz Mūrīān*
**SAUDI ARABIA**
Ad Dammām
**BAHRAIN**
Bandar-e Langeh
Mīnāb
Nīkshahr
Manama
*Strait of Hormuz*
Jāsk
Gwādar
Ra's al Khaymah
**OMAN**
Al Hufūf
**QATAR**
Doha
Dubayy
Bandar Beheshtī
**UNITED ARAB EMIRATES**
Abu Dhabi
**OMAN**

### Legend
- ⊛ National capital
- ⊙ Provincial capital
- ○ City, town
- ✈ Airport
- — · — International boundary
- — · — Provincial boundary
- —— Main road
- —— Secondary road
- —+— Railroad

*ISLAMIC REP. OF IRAN*

*The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.*

0  100  200  300 km
0  100  200 mi

# CHAPTER – 1
## INTRODUCTION: CONCEPTUALISING GEOPOLITICAL IMAGINATIONS IN MODERN IRAN

The notion of geopolitical imagination is rooted in conceptualizing geopolitics as discourse and practice; meaning that nation-states are conceptualised in terms of historic-geographical imaginaries, representing certain identities, institutions, and values, which in turn influence state's visions of the global political space. Geopolitical imaginations as cartographic as well as conceptual boundaries of the nation, that determine where the state fits into the global system, and its discourses of spatial identification and exclusion at various scales (Newman, 1998: 95). Geopolitical imaginations are geopolitics of identity and difference that characterise particular states (Campbell 1992; Sparke 2003; quoted in Toal 2007). By hyphenating image and nations, Gerhard Toal notes that "the geopolitical imagi-nations of a state are the self-images that characterise that state and define it in relations of equivalence or antagonism to other actors in world affairs" (Atkinson, 2000, Newman, 2000; quoted in Toal, 2007:68). Waleed Hazbun (2001) argues that the "political importance of geopolitical imaginaries is that they shape discourses and mobilise ideological power, rhetorical force, or political affect to promote certain notions of threat, geopolitical goals, and forms of authority over territory. In doing so they often shape the policies and behaviours of states" (Hazbun, 2001:3). David Campbell (1992) in his theory of politics of national identity starts with the post-structuralist idea that states do not have independent, objective existence and underlines the particular importance of national discourse of danger and threat in creation of national identity. Gertjan Dijkink (2002) building on Campbell's theory argues, that "national identity is constantly rewritten on the basis of external events; and foreign politics does not mechanically respond to real threats but constructed dangers" (Dijkink, 2002: 5). "Because nation-states encompass ambiguous portions of earth's space and population, they always lack sufficient substance and consequently need foreign policy to define what is 'us' and 'them'. Foreign policy in this view is boundary-producing phenomenon rather than an outcome of a well-defined state" (Dijkink, 2002: 5).

Religion was altogether ignored in classical geopolitics, which fashioned itself as a scientific discipline interested in exploring the influence of material environment rather than the hand of God in international politics. Gertjan Dijkink (2006) notes that the resurrection of Geopolitics in the shape of Critical Geopolitics also brought about an intrinsic interest in the world of mind and bringing fusion of religious and geopolitical notions to the fore of the scholarly enquiry. "In defining Geopolitics as an ideological way of constructing or scripting the world that is joined by popular sentiments, critical geopolitics should be responsive to religious visions of world order" (Dijkink, 2006:193). He emphasizes that "a main issue in critical geopolitics is the construction of the 'self' and 'the other,'" therefore critical geopolitics should explore the implications of religion for such geopolitical divisions (Dijkink, 2006:193). In critical geopolitics, the emphasis is on performances; therefore religion is explored in terms of *how* it performs geopolitics of difference (Strum, 2013: 135).

Iran has a civilizational history, cultural and territorial continuity spanning over millennia. Notwithstanding the loss of its traditional buffer zones in Transcaucasia, parts of Mesopotamia, Herat province and Bahrain in the period of imperialist rivalry following decline of the Safavid Empire, Iran has virtually maintained same borders since sixteenth century (Hourcade, 2015). Bernard Hourcade, a French Iranologist interviewed during the course of field work in Tehran, noted that the Iranian plateau, a closed basin formed by Alborz Mountain to the north and Zagros Mountains to the West has constituted the historical *sarzamin-e-Iran* or homeland of Iran (Hourcade, 2015). Iranian geopolitical imaginations have been shaped by Iran's fortress like topography surrounded by mountains and deserts which has given Iranians the capacity to protect their homeland and resist hostile forces from beyond these natural defensive bulwarks, but at the same time has hindered Iran's capacity to expand. Mahmood Sariolghalam, professor of International Relation at Shahid Baheshti University in Tehran also interviewed during field work argued that since Iran is an ancient county like Turkey and Egypt, therefore in comparison to other countries in the Persian Gulf region, it has a historical view of its geopolitics. "Vastness of the country gives a lot of psychological security, which also manifests into geopolitical security for the common populace" (Sariolghalam, 2015). "The defensive geography of Iranian heartland has underpinned a unique geopolitical imagination or myth that their country is always surrounded by hostile forces"

(Hourcade, 2015). This national myth was consolidated in modern Iran, when Qajar Empire was ensnared in Anglo-Russian 'Great-Game' geopolitics starting in late eighteen century. "The combination of unique geo-strategic location and energy resources has made Iran a focus for the great powers and competition among them, throughout the modern period. This fact has profoundly affected the way Iranians view the world and their perceptions of the historical processes and international relations" (Maleki, 2007). Iranian postcolonial geopolitical imaginations have been influenced by "Iran's glorious past; historical victimization by invaders; and (semi)-colonial/imperial encounters" (Moshirzadeh, 2007, quoted in Nia, 2011: 285).

Secondly, Shi'i Islam has been central to state-society relations and national identity for about last five centuries. Iran has been a Shi'i state since sixteenth century when majority of Iranian population was converted into Shi'i Islam by Safavids who were keen to maintain Iran's independence and identity vis-à-vis their powerful neighbour, the Ottoman Empire. Shi'i Islam belongs to the national identity of modern Iran, which has also been the only Shi'i state in the world (Hourcade, 2015). However, it was in the second half of the twentieth century that Islamism, as a modern religio-political ideology became dominant as a comprehensive solution for cultural revival and national independence in the context of deep cultural crisis rooted in Iran's long encounter with colonial secular modernity, especially under westernizing Pahlavi monarchy. Iranian Islamism was a result of imbrication of national imagination into a nationalised Shi'i Islam. However, for Shi'ite clerics, the religionized politics of Islamism was not just another ideology for legitimizing and organizing state, but was imagined as a theological and political imperative for Muslims to free themselves from their religious, cultural, political and military domination by 'the West,' also as a necessary condition for spiritual salvation. Islamist political theology as a thoroughly modern phenomenon emerged under the shadow of and also in context of the failure of modern secular state in achieving basic requirements for true nationhood: democratic polity, civil-society, citizenship, and above all a rooted national identity. Islamism as a defensive project was about establishing a divinely ordained political order, while secularism was seen as imposed and oppressive and as the Zionist conspiracy against Islam which was still part of lived social reality for majority of people. Islamist political theology in Iran and elsewhere therefore was as an expression of subaltern agency and postcolonial

cultural identity against secular authoritarian state and universalizing, imperialist western modernity. A monolithic and ideological construction of the West became definitive to the revolutionary Islamist geopolitical vision. In this respect, it should be noted that for many scholars of geopolitics, religion has come to be seen as a binary opposite to the perceived secular modernity (Strum, 2013: 135).

The success of the Islamic Revolution under charismatic leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini – an exiled cleric who mobilised people by interpreting Shi'i Islam into an ideology of popular social revolution against monarchy and secular political order backed by imperialist powers – led to the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The theocratic leadership imagined Iranian nation in the image of revolutionary Shi'ism as "righteous oppressed" and struggling against the "arrogant powers" of East and West and 'Zionist" Israel. The key function of the Islamic ideology has been to enable hegemonic control over society and to provide a worldview for state and society. Vali Reza Nasr (2001) notes that the "importance of ideological domination lies less in its facilitation of physical control than in its making such control unnecessary" (Nasr, 2001:8). The ideology when sufficiently lodged in culture "is an economising device by which individuals come to terms with their environment and are provided with a 'worldview' so that the decision making is economised" (North, 1981, quoted in Nasr, 2001:8).  A key proposition of the study is that it is within the discourse of revolutionary Shi'i Islam that the United States is imagined as the oppressive Other against which a revolutionary and Islamic identity for Iran is articulated and the contours of Iranian geopolitics defined.

Because the Islamic revolution threatened American geopolitical interest in the region and directly challenged America by taking hostage American embassy in Tehran, the US has pursued a policy of regime-change towards Iran and has sought to discipline the revolutionary regime by sanctions and isolating it internationally to force it to change its attitude by coercive policies (Mercille, 2009: 861). While for Iran, defying U.S. hegemony became the proof of its independence and revolutionary Islamic identity. As a postcolonial revolutionary state, Iran has a notion of exceptionalism defined by its refusal to accept the 'unjust' international order dominated by the West and pursues justice driven policies, which imply hostility towards US and Israel despite enormous economic and political costs. As a result Iran has been more invested in the Persian Gulf region and Levant, which is important not

only because of presence of oil, and also of hostile powers of United States and Israel. The aim of Iran's counter-hegemonic geopolitics framed in an Islamic discourse has been to create an independent sphere of influence and build strategic assets in this arena of conflict. The prolonged controversy over Iranian nuclear program also suggests that much of Iranian foreign policy and geopolitics is driven by Iran's assertion of what it perceives as its legitimate right and proper place on the global political scene. Iran's defiant position on nuclear program, defining it in terms of national right and framing Western opposition to the nuclear program as mark of their privilege and the overall attempt to garner support from the Third World, can be described as Iranian geopolitics of national dignity.

Mahmood Sariolghalam (2015) argued that in contemporary Iran there exist three different sources of identity and balancing these three sources remains an unsettled issue.

> In the first decade, religiosity as a source of identity became overpowering, but after the first decade, there have been shifts between nationalist and religiosity as source of identity and the balance between the two remains an unsettled issue. Religious state tries to constantly propagate the religious dimension of identity through the media and its own discourse, which also has a presence in our foreign policy and our social fabric. In Urban areas, especially among youth a global identity associated with globalisation, Europe and global trends is more dominant (Sariolghalam, 2015).

He argued that the "core elites of the Islamic Republic see Iran as a Middle Eastern country, or as a country that needs to focus on the Muslim world and that's where they find their external association at the level of identity" (Sariolghalam, 2015). In his prognosis, religion as tradition would continue to play a role, but with a youth dominated demography, nationalist and globalist identity are going to be more important. Islamism as a religio-political ideology and narrative of identity imagined the nation in terms of the 'moral community' of Islamic *umma* and recognised no territorial political borders. Iran would use its revolutionary pan-Islamism to expand its influence and in service of its geopolitical objectives in the region. As Iran sought to export its Islamic revolution to neighbouring Iraq and Lebanon and in Arabian peninsula, these countries politicised sectarian division to isolate the Shi'ite Iran. Subsequently, Iran was mired in an eight year long war, which it fought without any major allies. Even if geopolitical discourse of revolutionary Iran is expressed in the language of revolutionary Islam, especially in the discourse propagated by the Supreme Leader; Iran has pursued a complex geopolitics of resistance and

accommodation. In addition to Islamism, Iran utilises its traditional cultural linkages, prominence of Persian language and culture with its neighbours, especially in cultivating influence among Persian speaking population in Afghanistan and among Tajikistan. Historian Imanpour Mohamd Taghi, interviewed in the course of field work at Ferdowsi University in Mashhad argued that "even after Islamic conquest when Arabs brought Islam to Iran, Iran has more cultural commonalities with neighbours East of Iran, who were part of historical region of Greater Khorasan. Samarkand, Bokhara, Marv are part of Iranian cultural realm" (Imanpour, 2015). Furthermore, given its location at the edges of West Asia and Central, South Asia, Iran attempted to construct an Asian identity narrative at a time it was unable to engage constructively with the West over the nuclear issues and faced isolation from its Arab neighbours.

### 1.1 Modern Geopolitical Imagination and its Critique

Colin Flint (2011) argues that "we have been socialized to think of the state as a nation" (Flint, 2011:93). However, "nation must refer to a community of people with an *aspiration* to be politically self-determining, and state must refer to the set of political institutions that they may aspire to possess for themselves" (Miller 1997:19, quoted in Storey 2012:71). There are two strands of thoughts as far as the origin and nature of the nation states is concerned. The primordialist theories argue that nations are natural entities with historic or even primitive origin. The modernist theories on the other hand, claim that nation-states are not natural entities, instead they emerged in the wake of political-economic, and social changes defined under the rubric of 'modernity.' Most scholars agree that even if primordialist theories of state, which see "nations as natural entities whose origins go back to time immemorial" (Storey 2012), do not have much credence, the historical dimension is essential to the claims of being a nation. Certain modernist theories therefore, do not take the nation as natural, but as imagined social collectivities with a certain sense of their own history. David Storey (2012) argues that from the modernist perspective nationalism is a force, which can utilize pre-existing cultures or, in many instances, completely obliterate them. "Nationalism is not the awakening and assertion of these mythical, supposedly natural given units. It is on the contrary, crystallization of new units, suitable for conditions now prevailing, though admittedly using as their raw material the cultural, historical and other inheritances from the pre-nationalist world" (Gellner 1983:49, quoted in

Storey 2012:72). About the origin of nation states, David Delaney (2005) argues that "though there were antecedents, the modern territorial state system emerged in early modern Europe as a partial pragmatic solution to a number of local, historically contingent problems associated with long term transition from feudalism to capitalism" (Delaney, 2005: 36). The territorial state is essentially a modern innovation. The main elements of state expounded by Weber, "a *differentiated* set of institutions and personnel embodying *centrality*, in the sense political relations radiate outwards from a center to cover a *territorially demarcated area*, over which it exercises a monopoly of *authoritative binding rule-making*, backed up by a monopoly of the means of physical violence" (quoted in Mann, 1984) could only be fulfilled within a territory demarcated by linear boundaries. "Modern state required precise and lasting territorial delineation as a contiguous area in order to fulfil the functions defined by its distinguished characteristics... territory acquired new importance in nation states because it defined the bounds of legitimate power" (Penrose, 2001: 284). "Territoriality as a spatial expression of the idea of exclusive sovereignty was formalized in a number of treaties such as the treaty of Westphalia (1648) and the treaty of Utrecht (1703)" (Krasner, 2001; Tesche 2003, quoted in Delaney, 2008:36).

Toal (2007) notes that with the material transition from pre-modern state to modern state organised around the principles of state sovereignty, territorial integrity and national community emerged a particular ontology. "The vision of world political space as a unitary whole divided into territorial units of sovereign statehood is the geopolitical ontology that John Agnew terms 'the modern geopolitical imagination" (Agnew, 1997, quoted in Toal, 2007:66). This modern geopolitical imagination defined classical geopolitics which saw "politics as a territorial practice in which states and nations naturally vie for power over territory and resources quite similar to evolutionary struggles of biological organisms, served to justify interstate rivalry throughout the twentieth century" (Atkinson and Dodds, 2000; Agnew, 2003, quoted in Kuus, 2009:2). "Traditionally associated with modern state first and nation state later, territory has indeed been perceived mainly as a device to control and contain — that is as oppressive tool in the hands of the state" (Treasche, 2002; Sack, 1986; Taylor, 1994; quoted in Antonsich, 2009: 790). Delaney (2005) observes modern sovereignty is inextricable form modern territory, a principle which became global with the universalization of the nation-state during the gradual process of European

colonisation of much of the planet in nineteenth and twentieth century. "Part of how the world-historical processes of imperialism, colonialism, decolonization, and nationalist liberation can be understood is as the gradual and selective imposition of territorialized state structures onto non-European peoples and the resistance, accommodation, or selective acceptance of these by nationalized successors" (Delaney, 2005: 36). In course of historical emergence of modern nation-states, first "the pre-modern principle of hierarchical subordination" was replaced by "the modern principle of spatial exclusion," and it was only later in the wake of French Revolution that sovereignty came to be seen as something that rests with, and exercised by, 'the people.' "In nation states, nation became a *political* term because it defined the people who were members of, and who held sovereignty within, a state" (Anderson, 1996, quoted in Penrose 2001: 284). Subsequently states came to define community in territorial terms as a 'national phenomenon,' disregarding the differences and heterogeneity within the society and overemphasizing the differences vis-à-vis the 'outside.' As a result,

> the primary and continuing problem of any state is how to bind together more or less separate and diverse areas into an effective whole…to secure the supreme loyalty of the people in all its regions, in competition with any local or provincial loyalties, and in definite opposition to any outside state-unit (Hartshorne, 1950: 35, quoted in Delaney, 2005:41).

Territory was transformed from a geographical expression of cultural identity "into the fundamental basis for defining group and individual identity" (Penrose 2002:283). "Instead of expressing one dimension of who a person was, territory became the primary and overriding factor in defining the person" (Penrose 2002:283). This territorial understanding of nation-state takes boundaries of the state as the boundary of the nation as well.

The modern geopolitical imagination which characterised much of theories of International Relations and classical geopolitics was rooted in a statist conception of power characterised by three territorial assumptions: (1) "that states have exclusive sovereign power over their territories; (2) that 'domestic' and 'foreign' are separate and distinct realms; and (3) that the boundaries of state define the boundaries of 'society'" (Agnew, 2001, quoted in Toal, 2013:17). The relationship between modern nation-state and territory has now been unpacked in various disciplines of social science. "Human geographers notably questioned the assumptions that territorial space is commensurate with national space, and space and place are static containers

in which cultural traditions evolve" and argued that "this container concept of nation-state spawned a territorially trapped scientific and scholarly approach that conceived politics in antagonistic terms of inside and outside" (Agnew 1994; Bachmann-Medick, 2006, pp.295-297, quoted in Rembold and Carrier 2011: 363). Anssi Paasi (2008) defines "territories as social processes in which social space and social actions are inseparable. Territories are not frozen frameworks where social life occurs. Rather, they are made, given meaning, and destroyed in social and individual actions" (Paasi, 2008:110). This understanding of territory gives importance to *political/cultural* nature of territory instead of *territorial* or bounded aspect of territory. *"Territoriality* refers to territories *and some other social phenomena*. It draws attention to territorial aspects, conditions, or implications of something else" (Delaney, 2005: 15). As far as the state is concerned, territory is the critical condition for its functioning as a political entity; it allows the state to participate in international politics and provide security for its citizens, nation which is of historical pre-modern origin, might integrate historical aspirations or ideological worldviews into core objectives of the state (Fox and Sandler, 2004: 25). In relation to nations which have historical depth and situated in the world in terms of a cultural and political entity, territoriality is a much more useful concept.

Territoriality is "much more than a strategy for control of space. It is better understood as implicating and being implicated in ways of thinking, acting, and being in the world – ways of world-making informed by beliefs, desires, and culturally and historically contingent ways of knowing. It is as much a metaphysical phenomenon as a material one" (Delaney, 2005: 12). By using these insights of social theory, critical geopolitics deconstructs how state power and identity are discursively produced and popularly legitimised by invoking "binary understandings of power and spatiality" characteristic of geopolitical imaginations of states. It examines the discourses engaged in 'joining of state, territory, and culture' (Friedland, 2002: 387, quoted in Brubaker), and boundary-drawing practices and performances that characterise the life of states" (Tuathail and Dalby, 2002:3-4).

"Geography is 'dynamic' in that the meaning of space, distance, territory, and borders can change in perception of peoples and foreign-policy making elites" (Starr, 2013b:439, Agnew, 2003: 2-3, quoted in Svarin, 2016: 130). For instance, as a result of globalization in economic, political, and cultural spheres and especially as a result

of communication revolution and increasing international mobility of people, the isomorphism between people, territory, and sovereignty which the nation-state have traditionally attempted to consolidate has become increasingly difficult. This means "territory as the ground of loyalty and national affect […] is increasingly divorced from territory as the site of sovereignty and state control of civil society" (Appadurai, 1996: 47, quoted in Antonisch, 2009: 792). Appadurai calls it the crisis of hyphen in nation-state that is the weakening of structural relation between state and nation. In many nations in Europe which are experiencing an ongoing influx of people of different cultural backgrounds, new imaginations of nation compatible with hybridity and heterogeneity as opposed to or in addition to those based on cultural-groups of ethnic, linguistic, or religious nature, have emerged which are defined by multi-culturalism and de-ethinicisation. They seek to re-consolidate the hyphen by re-writing the identity of the nation in civic rather than cultural-ethnic terms (common values, shared interests and a set of common institutions). One of the key theorists in this regard is the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas, who makes distinction between the cultural (the nation) and the political (state) and "rejects the dominant discourse associated with the nation-state which demands the sharing of common culture or ethnicity as a necessary condition for democracy."

> Rather than an *ethnos*, made up of individuals who share the same 'we' feeling, Habermas speaks of *demos*, an ensemble of individuals bound by the same law, i.e. citizens. For him, the key factor on which a democracy relies is not the sharing of a pre-existent collective identity, but a liberal political culture which guarantees that decisions are adopted following a deliberative process based on rationality of actors involved (Habermas, 1992: 11; 1998: 159, quoted in Antonisch, 2009:794).

Additionally, critical geopolitics has challenged essentially territorial conceptions of spatiality of state power. It argues that spatiality is not confined to territoriality, either historically or today (Murphy, 1996, quoted in Kuus, 2009:7). By focussing on discourses, critical geopolitical contends that spatiality of the state is not territorially given, it is constructed in spatial representations and discursive practices of the statespersons. "In terms of the state, the key question to address is not about the 'real' sources, meanings or limits of state sovereignty in some general or universal sense, but, more specifically, *how* power is discursively and practically produced in territorial and non-territorial forms" (Kuus and Agnew, 2008; Painter, 2008, quoted in Kuus, 2009:7). Critical geopolitics shows that sovereign state is not pre-given basis for, but the effect of discourses of sovereignty, security, and identity (Kuus, 2009:8). Therefore, analysis does not merely take the state as its point of departure, by

focussing on "statecraft as a multitude of practices" can offer more flexible accounts of transformations of state power and transnational practices of our time (Coleman, 2007:609, quoted in Kuus, 2009 :8).

## 1.2 Geopolitical Imagination: The Discursive Construction of the Nation

Critical geopolitics which takes state-society relations as its unit of analysis, contends that states legitimise their foreign policies by presenting the public with "certain assumptions of other states and regions beyond their borders" (Agnew and Tuathail, 1992). "Assumptions about other states and regions emerge out of how the political elite of a society has defined its own state and its role in the world" (Rakel, 2008). "A geographical imagination can, thus, be defined as the way in which influential groups in the cultural life of a state define that state and nation within the world. It addresses the primary acts of identification and boundary-formation that population group within a state engages" (Toal, 2003: 84, quoted in Rakel, 2008:19). Noting that geopolitical assumptions and claims made in foreign policy practices are integral to state identity and interest formations, Marje Kuus (2009) argues that "whereas traditional geopolitics treats geography as a non-discursive terrain that pre-exists geopolitical claims, critical geopolitics approaches geographical knowledge as an essential part of modern discourse of power" (Kuus, 2009 :4). State identity, sovereignty, and popular legitimacy are produced in geopolitical discourses rooted in prevailing social and cultural imaginaries.

The present research adopts Martin Muller's (2008) conceptualization of discourse within a poststructuralist framework. Muller criticises the understanding of discourse in critical geopolitics as "text and image emanating from largely autonomous subject" and argues in favour of an understanding of discourse which is situated in particular historical contexts and rooted in every-day practices and social. He argues that geopolitical identities are constructed in and "through the interplay of representations and practices that partially fix the meaning by articulating them in the differential system of discourses" (Muller, 2008: 335). Laclau and Mouffe define discursive structure as "articulatory practice which constitutes and organises social relations" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 96, quoted in Sutherland 2010: 191). Articulation is defined as "any practice establishing a relation between elements such that their identity is modified as a result" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 105, quoted in Sutherland, 2010: 190). It is through hegemonic rearticulation of hegemonic

discourses that societies periodically reform themselves, a process which depends on their particular changing/evolving social context rather than universal guiding principles (Sutherland, 2005: 185). Sutherland (2005) argues that "discourse theory is valuable in describing how the ideological construction of the nation aims to achieve a hegemonic rearticulation of the national 'nodal point'" (Sutherland, 2005:185).

As far as the Foucauldian, poststructuralist understanding goes, "power relations are not imposed on already existing subjects: rather, it is within power relations that political subjects come into being" (Kuus, 2009:3). "It is not the individual that structures and manipulates discourse but vice-versa – discourses speak through the individual" (Muller, 2008: 326). The emphasis on practice is consistent with poststructuralist discourse theory as it "subordinates the attributes of the actor to the role it plays in constructing a discursive reality" (Sutherland, 2010: 190). Samuel Knafo (2010) argues that "while power may be structural in form (ontology), attempts to analyse it in structural terms (method) leads critical scholars to reify social reality" (Sewell, 1982, quoted in Knafo, 2010). An understanding of structures which emphasizes on their determining aspect vis-à-vis practices of agents, renders power "as a passive phenomenon embedded in structures…it has no agency, always serving to reproduce an already given structure. It also appears settled, as if it is no longer negotiated among social actors" (Knafo, 2010: 509). He argues that "one gets a richer picture of social dynamics when taking into account the people who exploit structures, rather than simply those who are constrained by them. The focus is then set on *what is being achieved* through these structures, rather than simply on the product that results from these actions" (Knafo, 2010: 505). Therefore, discourse defined as representation and practice are not permanent, they last to the extent they are continuously performed and able to mobilise popular imaginaries. Through the notion of performativity, Judith Butler (1993) conjoins practices, performances, texts, and images.

Butler suggests that "identificatory practices are neither structurally determined nor autonomously chosen but rather the articulation of a sedimented, naturalised discourse" (quoted in Muller, 2008: 330). "The performativity rather than fixity of identity at least allows the possibility of challenging and parodying these naturalized codes" (Nash, 2000: 654). "Foucault outlined in his various archaeologies of discursive change, there tends to be a selective updating of representations that

have existed for quite a long time" (Murphy et.al, 2004). It must be underlined that foreign policy continuously "reproduces and reformulates state identity in response to changed perceptions and realities in the global system" (Svarin, 2016: 130). Sami Moisio points out that

> inquiry into the geographical representations and practices that produce the spaces of today's world politics (Agnew, 1998) should explicitly focus on the state practices (projects, strategies and so on) and governmental interventions that are normally understood as belonging to the sphere of the domestic. In such a view, the concept of foreign policy refers to the practices whereby different actors articulate the link between the state and the 'world' (Moisio, 2013: 239).

### 1.3 Understanding Postcolonial Geopolitical Imaginations

"As simultaneously ideology and technology of state power, modern geopolitics arose as part of specific historical and geographical assemblage of modern nation-state making and the rise of capitalism" (Deborah and Smith, 2009). Geopolitics, therefore, was bound up with imperialism as well as colonialism, as it sought not only to annex territory—as older imperialisms had done—but to force the subordinated civilization to adjust or conform to the civilization of the dominant (Cuddy-Keane, 2003: 543). Hamid Dabashi (2012) points to the erasure of history, identity, and above all the epistemic violence inherent in the erasure of the multiple worlds into a singular colonial map of domination. Borrowing from Talal Asad, he argues that "it is not just 'old desires and way of life that were destroyed and new ones took their place.' The whole 'world' and consciousness of that 'world,' in which these desires and way of life were located, was erased from the face of the earth" (Dabashi, 2012: 51). The colonial geopolitical imagination was that of Orientalism, treating non-Europeans as objects of anthropological investigation and colonial domination at the same time (Cuddy-Keane, 2003: 545; Dabashi, 2012: 51). Both anthropologists and Orientalists did not describe or classify an already existing world, in intertwining workings of knowledge and power, they manufactured ethnographic others and "invented a world, by way of eradicating all that resisted the colonial map, that would, by virtue of that invention, yield and submit to that map" (Dabashi, 2012: 52). Therefore, the modern geopolitical imagination, itself a product of the constitution of *ethnos*, as the defining moment of nations, climes and culture, casting the world into oppositional ideologies which followed the disintegration of the religion-based image of universal order formerly dominant among its intellectuals and leaders, became universal in the wake of world-historical processes of imperialism,

colonialism, decolonization, and nationalist liberation (Dabashi, 2012: 52; Delaney, 2005: 36; Agnew, 2004:6).

It is increasingly understood that the "normative ideal of a nation-state (a state characterised by a homology between cultural identity and political institutions) was never an adequate representation of complexity of political organizations across the planet" and neither the modern geopolitical imagination is a "correspondence conceptualisation of world politics but a powerful Eurocentric discourse of power that seeks to interpret world politics within territorial, nation-state and strategic categories" (Newman, 2013: 18). Mohammed Ayoob (2002) notes that the new states in the international system attempt to "replicate the European trajectory of state making and nation building in a vastly different international setting where the postcolonial states are much more vulnerable to physical and normative intrusion from outside" (Ayoob, 2002: 33). In non-European context, under conditions of colonial modernity, nationalist elites borrowed European normative frames of reference to support their own state-building projects and to assert their own rights of self-determination. In many cases, these modernizing states which lacked social basis of power were displaced by popular movements rooted in nativist political and cultural identities that became foundations of postcolonial geopolitical imaginaries which in some cases not only delinked from but confronted the "imperial imaginary of the western world" which invents/constructs inferior others in order to dominate them (Mignolo, 2011).

Margaret Kohn and Keally Mcbride (2011) in their work on political theories of decolonization, note that "writing a narrative based on oppositional values became essential to the practice of self-determination," which in postcolonial context means "to determine one's world according to terms chosen by oneself, or by a people collectively" (Kohn and Mcbride, 2011: 16). For revolutionaries in the colonized world were motivated by their imagination of a utopia, "freedom to remake the world through imaginative capacity: freedom to make a world, a polity, not merely respond to the world as it is" (Kohn and Mcbride, 2011: 16). It was through this imagination of utopia in terms of a political ideology rooted in the faith of the masses that state would capitalise on the collective consciousness of the people to not only create legitimacy for itself but also to foster uniformity, unity of the nation. The ideology

performs an integrative function by joining the state and society in a shared worldview.

Asef Bayat (2008) argues that the contradiction between social and economic development and political underdevelopment is an overarching feature of Middle Eastern modernity, a condition which paved the way for democratic revolutions including Islamic revolution in Iran. Bayat's observation is central to understand why Islam as a postcolonial political formation is fixated with cultural purity as manifested in geopolitical imagination of Islam and the West as mutually exclusive and self-contained entities. He points out that modern economy, institutions, bureaucracy, work relations, education, city dwelling, and modern public sphere were accompanied by states which remained by and large authoritarian, autocratic, and even despotic, a condition which in most part had to do with their "control over oil revenue, an asset that gave them not only monopoly over economic resources, but also political support of foreign powers eager to have a share in oil" (Bayat, 2008: 98-99).

In Iran both Pahlavi Shahs were installed or restored to the throne by foreign imperial powers, namely Britain and the United States, whose political support they received in exchange for variety of economic concessions particularly oil and the strategic role Iran played in Cold War geopolitics in the region. Since Pahlavi regime had been a promoter of modernization, except in the domain of polity, and perpetuated itself through military-security apparatus it had built for itself with the help of its imperialist backers, the oppositional political formations were concerned with the question which had bothered nationalists for a long time since late nineteenth century that is how to bring modernization, without Western hegemony.

"Islamic theorists were engaged in a project that was going on throughout the postcolonial world, that of reimagining and recasting traditional sources as alternatives to institutions and practices imposed by colonial powers" (Kohn and Mcbride, 2011: 37). Against an *ancien regime* which owed its existence to imperialist support, oppositional nationalists saw self-governance and self-determination as synonymous with the rejection of external sources, and Islam became a potent signifier in the discourse of critique and resistance and eventually revolution against the regime. Islamists seek to achieve congruence between the polity and socio-cultural entity by imagining Islam (especially enforcing of Islamic law by the state) as the

basis of a collective identity and to emphasise distinctness and difference vis-à-vis the other, especially the hegemonic West.

In understanding the influence of Islam on political formations, the focus has to be not on Islam as such, but on historical Muslims, who define and redefine their religion, both ideas and practice, in diverse fashions, for it accounts for evolution of religio-political discourse in accordance with the changing socio-political conditions within which the Muslim define their being (Bayat, 2008: 105). Islamism as a modern phenomenon therefore emerged in context of economic, political and cultural domination by militarily and economically powerful and political better organized imperial states of the West. Mohammad Ayoob (2004) aptly observes that "modern Islamic political thinkers devised the term 'Islamic state' in order to reconcile their romanticised vision of the Islamic polity with the existence of sovereign states on the European model that were products of the twin process of colonization and decolonization" (Ayoob, 2004: 2). The external dimension of a sense of threat and siege was ineluctably tied to the imperative of internal revival or 'awakening,' a notion based on historical self-image of a powerful Islamic Empire and truly Islamic order.

In revolutionary Iran, state-making in terms of an 'Islamic Republic' and nation-building through state-led Islamization was associated with rejection and exclusion of the Western cultural and political influences. In this context, the notion of geopolitical imaginations draws attention to the 'bounding' practices and discourses mobilized by forms of identity politics which are produced in an 'oppositional context'(Newman 2003; 2006, quoted in Antonsich, 2009: 795).

Islamic Republic of Iran since its inception has had to constantly overcome the negative representations by the West and in contesting these dominant representations it pursues a subaltern geopolitics. Sidaway (2012) argues that "those regimes whose strategy is focused foremost on their own regime/systemic security, and whose geopolitical codes are defined by reference to such an understanding, sometimes blended with wider counter-hegemonic visions and populism" engage in subaltern geopolitics (Sidaway, 2012:297-98). Populism in these "contexts usually indicates a political situation in which savvy political leaders exploit the masses through the use of charisma, demagoguery, fiery language, and 'distribution of wealth' propaganda" (Mirtaheri, 2013). These subaltern states are characterised by conflicting discourses of

identity as they struggle to nationalise their identity while grappling with the universalizing normative frameworks supported by the more powerful West. Majid Sharifi (2013a) notes that unlike imperial states of United States, France, Britain, and Germany where official nationalisms are not at all or least contested, in "subaltern nation-states, official nationalisms are contested from within, and can at any moment become the subject of imperial contestation from without." Tracing "these failures to the imperial ordering of the world system of nation-states, in which imperial states have the productive power to nationalize their national identities on the one hand, and universalise their rational and normative interests in the other hand", he argues that

> In contrast, subaltern states are too weak to nationalize their identities, resulting in what we have been observing in the Islamic world—weak states, fragmented societies, contending and confrontational visions of secular and Islamic nationalisms, and in many cases, the political disengagement of a large body of masses who form into small social/private spaces where rumors and conspiracy theories replace political debates with fictional stories, drams, and theatrical tragedies (Sharifi, 2013a).

## 1.4 Religion and Geopolitical Imagination

Gerard Toal (2000) notes that the notion of a decisive break between medieval religious space and modern geopolitical space at Westphalia is questionable; rather the "already existing relationship between the secular and spiritual, the territorial and ecclesiastical was re-organized and re-conceptualised at Augsburg, Westphalia and numerous other historical moments since" and "medieval religious mythologies were recycled into the emergent mythology of a diversity of European states" (Toal, 2000:187-88). He argues that rather than geopolitical traditions and religious traditions being at odds, they are more often than not deeply interwoven and mutually constitutive. Though the modern geopolitical imagination and its organization of space as a horizontal set of competing territorial order had emerged in Europe, "historical development of modern state system in Europe and its violent imposition across the globe has led to multiple and complex (con)fusions of geopolitical and religious discourses" (Toal, 2000: 188). Scholars of critical geopolitics are increasingly looking at how religion is intertwined with state power and identity. This renewed interest in intertwining of religion and geopolitics has been propelled by "the historical circumstances of religious revival, postcolonial rediscoveries of identities, claims of redress of past grievance, secularist self-doubts, and a variety of ideas and practices are conditioning our understanding of world order and shaping alternative paths to the future" (Falk, 2014: 253).

On the conditions for emergence of a religeopolitical vision of the world that is how religion becomes ingratiated in geopolitical divisions, Dijkink (2006) argues that "only when a threat to the freedom of a group arises that involves infringement of the life-space by other human groups does religion appears capable of offering inspiration or narratives for describing the world in terms of a territorial struggle" (Dijkink, 2006:203). The term reli*geo*politics was proposed by Lari Nyroos in discussing two fundamentalist movements in the Middle East: Hamas and Kach. "Both movements appeal to religious predestination of the area that has traditionally been known as Palestine/Israel that in the eye of the (Kach) believer can assume a gigantic size even geographically extending to the river Euphrates. The pious Muslim (Hamas) or Jew (Kach) sees it as a religious assignment not to abandon this territory" (Dijkink, 2006:199).

Distinguishing between "geopolitics of religion" and "religious geopolitics," Strum (2015) argues, that geopolitics of religion "refers to religious actors who are concerned with theologically inspired representations of the borders of the world (or lack thereof in certain utopian proselytizing imaginaries), whether between religions or between the faithful and the secular." Religious geopolitics on the other hand refers to "secular geopolitical discourses and actions that nevertheless can be seen to employ political-theological vocabularies, symbols, and action" (Strum, 2015: 356). Tristan Strum (2015) observes there are at least four ways to study religious geopolitics and geopolitics of religion. First, he argues that religion might be able to *explain* something about geopolitics, which can take many forms depending on *what* is it about geopolitics that is being explained and what part of religion is being used as an explanation. Secondly, "religion can be seen as an *element* of geopolitical constructions…religion does not define a certain geopolitical imagination, but rather supplies myths that are central to geopolitical imaginations" (Strum 2015:356). "Thirdly, as an *analogous* construction, geopolitics and religion are both ways of seeing the world. Geopolitics is a perspective on the world, a way of seeing the world, not a thing in the world: A way of expressing interests, categorizing the world, and signifying events. Religion too, analogous to geopolitics, can serve these functions" (Strum, 2015:356). Lastly, as *typology* of geopolitics, religious geopolitics and geopolitics of religion are to be studied by focussing on religious discourse emerging from texts and sermons (Strum, 2015:356).

Geopolitical thinking and identities in the non-European world, as reflected in Islamism and anti-colonial nationalism emerged as reactions against exploitation and depredations of imperialism and colonialism. It was in the context of resistance to the imperial subordination that Islamism was constructed as a counter-hegemonic and monolithic ideology of resistance out of what had been a diverse religion in terms of practice, philosophy, and theology.

## 1.5 Literature Survey: Geopolitical Imaginations in Modern Iran

In Iran, the territorially defined modern sovereign state or what Richard Hartshorne (1950) calls the 'state idea' (*raison d'être*) emerged in the context of the twin problems of foreign imperialist domination and internal fragmentation of territory and sovereignty. Under the conditions of imperialist rivalry for territorial conquest and influence and an international system defined by wide asymmetries of power, nationalists elites were drawn towards the idea of a powerful centralised state which would defend the territory and independence of the country. The various conceptions of this 'state idea' as well as modern nation of Iran were shaped by a range of traditional, modern, religious and secular influences. Ali M. Ansari (2012) in his book "The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran' argues that

> "nationalism as understood in Iran has largely been driven by and defined against a normative frame of reference established by European intellectual and political culture…many of the myths which have permeated nationalist ideologies – decadence, decline, progress, feudalism, despotism, race, and the role of religion – have been appropriated from an idealised European model of development" (Ansari, 2012:3).

This idealised European model of development has variously played the 'referral point' from which nationalists found their ideological blueprints in forging a modern Iranian nation-state, or became the hegemonic center against which nationalist discovered their authentic self and constructed counter-hegemonic imaginations of nation. The states and nations who do not have ancient history and thought, possess little subjective predispositions inherited from the past and do not have to shoulder the burden from the past (Eslami, 2014). Iranian geopolitical imaginations should be analysed by "referring to the collection of collective subjective constructs inherited from Iranian, Islamic and modern heritage" (Ramazani, quoted in Eslami, 2014: 128).

> The Iranian heritage is rooted in ancient Iran embracing the retrieval of the lost territories and also autocratic monarchical patterns. The Islamic heritage is the collection of Islamic and Shia texts and traditions which have drawn along the elements of idealism and phenomenon of separation of state from the nation to the advantage of justice-seeking and end-of-history philosophy. The modern heritage has penetrated the political literature of Iran in the new era

and casted aside some traditional elements with its bureaucratic and democratic features (Eslami, 2014).

Nasser Hadian (2015), Professor of Political Science at the University of Tehran who was interviewed in the course of field work, also remarked on the failure of Iranian ruling elites in synthesizing the Islamic, Iranian and Western notions of identity in forging a sustainable state identity in modern Iran:

> Our identity has three layers, Pre-Islamic Iran, Islamic Iran, and the Western. The problem is that we've not been able to blend them well together, synthesize them and there is layer over layer, over another layer and depending upon the time, one has been dominant. Particularly with regarding the Islamic Iran, since Safavids, the Shiite identity is intertwined with the national narrative; called basically an Iranian Islam (Hadian, 2015).

### 1.5.1 Inter-imperialist Rivalry and the Emergence of Revolutionary Nationalism

Nikki Keddie (1995) observes the destabilizing potential of inter-imperial rivalry for control over economy and politics of a country, which retains its formal independence. She argues that, while the colonised country is more thoroughly controlled, such control is missing when multiple powers are vying for supremacy. The early effects of "destabilising potential of foreign rivalry in a country is indicated in Iran's tobacco movement, where the Russians actively backed the protesters against the British, and in the constitutional revolution, where the British helped the revolutionaries in the early stages of their revolt" (Keddie, 1995:62). Foreign domination and exploitation of Iran had begun in late eighteenth century, when Czarist Russia expanded southwards while British were keen to forestall Russian advances to safeguard their empire in India.

The Qajar dynasty, since 1796 had reunified Iran after decades of territorial chaos since the end of Safavid Empire, ruled Iran through a confederation of regional governorates headed by various tribal leaders. Pirouz Mojtahed-Zaden, an eminent Iranian political geographer observes that "the administration of Iran has historically been plagued with difficulties of exerting authority outside main areas of population and, therefore, in fixing its national frontiers" and exercising effective territorial power of the state (Mojtahed-Zadeh, 2007). In the early nineteenth century, imperialist Russia took advantage of inner strife in Iran and extended its influence in the Caucasus, a region of traditional Iranian influence and interests. "The connection between new territorial acquisitions in the Caucasus and recognition of the Qajar

dynasty in new and diminished borders by Russian Empire became the foundation for the treaty of Golestan (1813), which ended the first Russo-Iranian war" (Deutschmann, 2015:23). Iran lost the entire area north of Aras River in the Caucasus to Russia in another war in 1820s. In 1856, British prevented Iranian efforts to reassert its control over Heart, which had been part of Iran in Safavid times but had been under non-Iranian rule since the mid-eighteenth century (Shamin, 2000, quoted in Rashidvash, 2012: 248). "The border that splits Iranian and Pakistani Baluchistan was fixed in 1872, by a British colonial official, ceding territory to Iran's rulers in a bid to win Tehran's support against Czarist Russia" (UNPO).

Attempts at modernizing reforms in Iran, especially in military followed its defeat by Russia and were "initiated under the direct influence of reforms in Russia and especially the Ottoman Empire, but even compared to the latter, they were far less successful" (Shorabi, 1995:1392-93). The reforms failed to destroy the tribal levies, which were mobilized in times of need and replace them with standing army, the only exception being Russian-trained and controlled Cossack Brigade, introduced for the purpose of guarding and policing Tehran (Shorabi, 1995). Despite the sporadic reforms by Naser al-Din Shah Qajar (1848-1896), bureaucracy remained a patrimonial entity, with only few modernized officials, while institutions of civil society, most significantly that of religion were also left intact. The intellectuals, both secular and religious were increasingly critical of Qajar rulers deemed not only ineffective in governing but also being under the tutelage of Russia and Britain. Unable to raise revenue from taxes, Qajar rulers would borrow from Russia, Britain and other European countries, and grant them concessions in terms of exclusive rights over trading of certain goods, favourable custom arrangements etc. The wasteful expenditure of the rulers and concessions to foreign companies and excessive interference of Britain and Russia in domestic affairs, turned *bazaaris* and *ulama,* the two dominant urban class against the arbitrary rule of Qajar monarchy.

The nationalist intellectuals of reformist Nasseri era, such as the famous play writer from Azerbaijan Mirza Fatah Ali Akhundzadeh (1812-78) who used his plays as "vehicle to question traditional beliefs and customs and to challenge the power of entrenched elites," Abdulrahim Talibof, who criticized domestic despotism and foreign domination and demanded the establishment of a lawful government, and reform minded court officials, Mirza Malcom Khan and Jalal al-din Mirza Qajar, who

sought to popularize modern ideals of rule of law, freedom, homeland, and progress through newspapers published inside and outside Iran, were all critical of Qajar monarchy which was associated with 'decline' and 'decadence,' (Kia, 1998: 1, Sharifi, 2013: 29). These intellectuals promoted a sense of progressive nationalism. For instance, in 1877, *Akhtar*, a Persian newspaper printed in Istanbul, published a series of articles promoting "love of homeland" (*hub-i-vatan*).

> *Vatan*, the editors wrote, consisted of "a tract of land upon which a person is born and which is his place of existence," and love of homeland was tantamount to "love of oneself...Drawing on the Sufi rhetoric of Shi'i gnostics, the paper observed that vatan possessed both an "outer meaning" (*zahir*) and an "inner meaning" (*batin*) and that the two menifestations of homeland remained inseparable. Because in its initial Islamic usage *hub-e-vatan* referred partly to religious belief, people who were deficient in this love also lacked faith (Kashani-Sabet, 2000: 50).

Nader Shorabi (1995) notes, in non-western settings, constitutionalism was introduced and understood as European political system and ideology, but also presented as solution that was applicable in their own society. "In the Ottoman Empire and Iran, for instance, where economic, social, and institutional 'backwardness' were major concerns, the ideology of constitutionalism was introduced with major overtones of progress, that among other things meant economic advancement, a modern state, and a legal rational order" (Shorabi, 1995:1397). "Confronted with the two pillars of absolute traditional authority – the religious and the political – the Iranian national identity became the slogan of champions of constitutionalism, secularism, and equality, of those who aspired to modernize Iran and to rationalize its state apparatus" (Ashraf, 1993: 159).

About the historic revolutionary role of bazar-*ulama* alliance, Smith (2004) argues that collective action of bazar as a new phenomenon emerged in late nineteenth century "as a result of modernization of communication and transportation in Iran and the country's gradual integration into the European global economic systems" (Smith, 2004:188). Abrahamian points out that the penetration of formerly internally oriented economy by British and Russian commercial interests "induced the scattered regional commercial interests to coalesce into one cross-regional middle class that was conscious for the first time of its own common grievances" (Abrahamian, 1982:50, quoted in Smith, 2004: 190). The collective action of bazar was a direct result of conflict with a consistently encroaching state intent on penetrating domestic market.

*1.5.2 Constitutional Revolution: From Empire to Modern Nation State*

Nora Fisher Onar (2013) observes that early twentieth century revolutions in traditional geographically contiguous empires such as Iran, Ottoman Turkey, Russia and China led to a rupture with the immediate imperial past and accelerated the reconstitution of the state along Western lines for the paradoxical purpose of avoiding enduring, formal colonization by the West. The constitutional uprising of 1906 precipitated in an atmosphere of economic crisis caused by disruption of trade with Russia during Russo-Japanese war, was part of the contemporary revolutionary paradigm, in which "constitutionalism provided ideological framework for revolutionary action" as exemplified by Russian revolution in 1905 and Young Turk revolution of 1908 (Shorabi, 1995:1384). The defeat of Tsarist Russia by Japan was read by modern revolutionaries across the world in terms of the proof of the strength of constitutionalism. "The only Asian constitutional power had defeated the only major Western non-constitutional power strengthened the fight for constitutional government as the panacea for internal ills and 'secret' of Western strength" (Keddie 1980:14).

The nationalist movement leading up to the constitutional revolution was a dual movement against both internal misgovernment and foreign intervention, having the characters of both 'defensive' and 'oppositional' nationalism. The leadership of this counter-hegemonic movement was disparate, with different views on constitutionalism. There were 'positive secularists' who interpreted constitutionalism according to ideas of Western democracy, 'secularist compromisers' were those who coloured modern thought with Islamic law and traditions, and 'conservative religious reformers' who supported constitutional movement only if the constitution was to be Islamic and another category was 'religious reformers' who rose against the arbitrary rule of the Shah and were supported by liberal merchants, artisans and tradesman (Uyar, 2007: 10-11). Afshin Matin Asgari (2014) argues that from early on Iranian nationalists understood the importance of Islam and moral-political authority of Iran's Shi'i *ulama* for popular mobilisations in support of their nationalist agenda.

> The protonationalists thus developed a strategy for using Islam and clerical authority to advance secular agendas. During the 1880s, this strategy was developed by Jamal al-din Asdabadi (Afghani) in the Tobacco Protest movement, while Malcom Khan's newspaper

*Qanun* (Law) advocated a parliamentary system whereby the 'ulama would join political reformers, making laws in accordance with sharia (Asgari, 2014:52).

Ansari (2012) opines that despite clerical backlash against secular nationalism and constitutionalism, the instrumentalist approach to Islam and the Shi'i *'ulama* persisted among two more generations of secular reformers, including socialists and even communists.

"Following the defeat of revolutionaries in Russia, Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 divided Iran into a north zone under Russian control, south zone under British control and central zone under Iranian control. The weak Qajar state tactically welcomed this division and subsequently the parliamentary government was abolished" (Hafeznia, 2015). The Shah, with help from Russians fought revolutionaries until 1910. Nevertheless, the main achievement of the revolution was that the modern concept of nation as constituted by 'the people' and the notion of sovereignty were firmly established in Iran.

### 1.5.3 Pahlavi Monarchy and State-Building

Iran during the World War I faced the danger of territorial dismemberment as British and Russians divided it into three zones and militarily occupied it and a number of provincial movements emerged in the vacuum left behind by the absence of central government (Ansari 2012). Some of these movements were armed, such as the Jangali Movement of Mirza Kuchik Khan, who with support from Soviet revolutionaries declared Soviet Republic of Gilan in the north. Taking advantage of the Russian withdrawal from Iranian soil in 1921, Reza Khan, the commander of the Cossack Brigade was able to put down the revolt in Gilan, marking the clear beginning of the centralization process (Mojtahed-Zadeh, 2007:26). The bloodless coup of 1921 which toppled the last Qajar monarch Ahmad Shah and put "Reza Khan on the throne was orchestrated, among others, by Seyyed Zia al-Din Tabatabai, a pro-British journalist and, and the British General Ironside" (Behravesh, 2010). Given the threat of territorial fragmentation and disorder during the war and occupation, much of the nationalists and *ulama* rallied behind Sardar Sepah (Reza Khan), the commander of the only organized military force, therefore seen as the only person capable of enforcing order and security (Faghfoory, 1987).

The 'state idea' of the Reza Khan, a military man himself, was to raise a conscription based modern army and enforce centralized control over the rebellious

tribes in the periphery. The new army's primary duty, as reflected in the campaigns undertaken in the period 1921 to 1941, was "establishment of the power of the central government throughout the country, suppression of the alternative sources of authority such as local rulers and tribal chiefs, and disarmament and pacification of the civilian population and the maintenance, once established, of internal security" (Cronin, 2004: 177). During this period, Reza Shah's army pacified rebel forces in north-western provinces of Azerbaijan and Kurdestan, ousted Sheikh Khazal, the regional ruler of Arab tribes of Khuzestan, settled north-east province of Khorasan, subjugated southern tribes of Bakhtiari and Qashqai, annexed Western Balochestan, but army's ability to confront challenges from outside world remained limited (Mojtahed-Zadeh, 2007:26). Despite being put on the throne from top, he managed to co-opt the constitutional movement's state-building programs and gained a semblance of legitimacy for his project of building a "unified modern nation state founded upon secular nationalism, modern educational development, and state capitalism" (Shorabi, 2011).

Even as Pahlavi state took cue from ideological currents sweeping Europe and Turkey, his favoured identity narrative aimed at 're-inventing past' in terms of pre-Islamic imperial monarchy while also incorporating discourse of ethnic or racial superiority from 'New Europe' of Germany and Italy, as opposed to 'Old Europe' identified with imperialism. From its archaic inception, Iranian identity has been linked to kingship over Iranian lands, manifested in "sentimental sense of territorial romanticism" of *Iran-Shahr* or *Iranzamin* (the land of Iran), also named in *Shahnameh*, were essentially geographical definition of the imperial sovereignty dating back to Sassanid period (Sharifi, 2013: 2). The pre-Islamic Sassanian concept of *Iran-Shahr* or *Iranzamin* (the land of Iran) underlines a territorial conception of identity and also a spatial expression of the idea of exclusive sovereignty (Mojtahed-Zadeh, 2012:167). This territorial tradition was revived by Reza Khan to establish a modern territorial state ruled by a monarchy. The titles of *Shahanshah* (king of kings or emperor), signifying an imperial monarchical sovereignty of universal aspirations, was also appropriated by the Pahlavi dynasty (Mojtahed-Zadeh, 2007:22). Reza Shah Pahlavi insisted that foreign governments refer to Iran by its proper name Iran (the land of Aryans), rather than Persia. Noting that the term Iran has constituted the

official name of the country or state since the emergence of the Achaeminid federative state in 6 century BCE, Mojtahed-Zadeh (2012) writes,

> The term first appeared in pre-Achaemind antiquity as *Aryana*, meaning the land of the Aryan race. Later at the time of Achaeminids, this term was simplified to *Irana* and later still became *Iran Shahr* during the Sassanid period, meaning the country of Iran. The West came to know this country as *Persia* through the Greeks of the city-states, which in the 6th century BCE, were not as yet familiar with the concept of state-cum-country. They named Iran Persia in accordance with their on-going tradition of naming places after the name of dynasties or ethnicities ruling them, in much the same way that Iranians – and through them, the entire Muslim world, named Greece *Yunan* in their historiography of that entity, simply because in antiquity, the Iranians first came into contact with the *Ionian* ethnicity of Greece. Thus it is obvious why Greeks named Iran *Persia*, which originally was and still is but a province in Southern Iran where ancient Achaemind and Sassanid dynasties had emerged (Mojtahed-Zadeh, 212: 164).

Unsurprisingly, it is the term Iran, which has strongest connotations among Iranians, best captured in the wildly popular de-facto national anthem 'Ey Iran' written by Hossein Gol-e-Golab. Given the term has long history and popular appeal, Iran was made the official name of the country by the Pahlavi king. "Shah nurtured the idea of 'Iranianism' embedding the Iranian self in the romantic discourse about a superior 'Aryan' nation (*mellat-e-aryan*), married to Indo-European heritage because of linguistic roots and hence different from the 'Arab-Semitic other'" (Adib-Moghaddam, 2013:138). This racialised geopolitical imagination associated Iran with Europe, the bastion of progress and modernity, while distancing from its Arab neighbours, seen to as backward and culturally and racially inferior. In a similar vein, by naming his new dynasty Pahlavi, the name for pre-Islamic Persian language, Reza Khan, the first Pahlavi Shah sought to associate his state with pre-Islamic imperial monarchy.

Those who supported Reza Shah believed that for true progress to materialise, a strong central authority was indispensable, while progress was seen as something as imposed from above, through legislation and decree. Majid Sharifi (2013) notes, that there was no single or unified narrative of Iranian national-state identity (*huviat-e-melli)* binding the people (*mellat*) as a political community to the state (*hukumat*) (Sharifi, 2013:2). The secular intelligentsia endorsed the idea of modernizing the traditional authority of the Shah and glorifying the twenty five centuries of monarchy (Asharaf, 1993). For them the "extolment of the pre-Islamic past in particular meant overcoming the narrative of decline associated with Islamic era, especially the Qajar period" (Amanat, 2012: 21). The other groups of intelligentsia included those, "who were influenced by liberal national ideas, gave priority to the transformation of the

nation from the 'subjects of the Shah (*ra'iyat* or taba'a)' to free citizens. Still another group, who believed in historical ties between Iran and Islam, constructed modern national identity on the basis of Iranianness and Shi'ism" (Ashraf, 1993:160).

"During his reign Iran gained greater national unity and autonomy than ever before in modern times, yet still did not escape its destiny at the geopolitical interstices of great power rivalries" (Sckocpol, 1982). It was Reza Shah's proximity to Hitler's Germany that would lead to Soviet and British occupation of Iran during the World War II, and forced him into exile. Pirouz Mojtahed-Zadeh (2007) notes that during the Second World War Iran became the crucial land-bridge for logistic supply between Britain and Soviet Union. The Veresk Bridge connecting two mountains in the Abbasabad region of the northern province of Mazandaran was called *Pol-e-Piroozi* (bridge of victory), because of its logistical significance for Allies in providing link with the Caspian Sea region during German invasion of the Soviet Union. While British and American troops left after the war, the continued Soviet Union military occupation of Northern Iran was one of the reasons causing the beginning of the Cold War. "In December, 1946, an autonomous republic of Azerbaijan was declared in Tabriz, by Ja'far Pishevari, who had the backing of the USSR forces present in the region" (Mojtahed-Zadeh, 2007a: 31). Similarly, taking advantage of the lack of central authority and Soviet support, Kurds, who had been rebelling against forced conscription and disarmament, especially the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) cooperated with Mustafa Barzani, Kurdish nationalist from Iraqi Kurdestan, and declared the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad in 1946 in north-western Iran (Mojtahed-Zadeh, 2007a: 31). Hence, it was in order to secure its own territorial integrity and to avoid outright domination by its formidable northern neighbour USSR that Iran pursued a strategic policy of strengthening its relations with United States and in 1955 joined the U.S. and British endorsed anti-communist defense agreement, or the Baghdad pact alongside Iraq, Pakistan and Turkey.

*1.5.4 The Mossadeqh Era: Anti-imperialist Oil Nationalism*

After WW II, oil became the leading political issue for nationalists who demanded nationalization of oil industries in Iran, especially the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, which had near monopoly of the Iranian oil sector, therefore, had become the symbol of British imperialism. The National Front, an umbrella opposition group

included "a circle of prominent liberal politicians headed by Mossadegh, group of religious leaders, notably Ayatollah Kashani, predominantly the Bazaar middle class, and a variety of secular, nationalistic and social democratic parties" (Abrahmian, 1979:3). The Front articulated "mainly the interest of salaried middle class; it demanded honest elections, free press, end to martial law, and, most important, nationalisation of British-owned oil industries" (Abrahmian, 1979:3). During the oil nationalisation movement in run up to the parliament election in 1949, Mohammad Reza Shah's "government attempted to negotiate with the AIOC for a revision of the terms of the oil concession, but AIOC were slow to accept the fifty-fifty split of profits that had become the norm in oil agreement elsewhere in the world" (Axworthy, 2008:235). The U.S. and Britain saw Iranian oil as key to their post-war recovery; moreover, the US government concerned at the apparent involvement of communists in the oil nationalisation movement, did not want Iranian oil to fall under the control of Soviets.

> It was estimated that Iran was in real danger of falling behind the Iron Curtain; if that happened it would mean it would mean a victory for the Soviets in the Cold War and a major setback for the West in the Middle East. No remedial action other than the covert action plan set forth below could be found to improve the existing state of affairs" (CIA documents acknowledge its role in Iran's 1953 coup, 2013).

Frightened by massive demonstrations and general strike in oil industry organized by a re-emerged Tudeh, Shah appointed Mohammad Mossadegh to premiership, a tactical move aimed at providing 'safety valve' for the public discontent (Abrahmian, 1979:4). In 1951, Mossadegh nationalised AIOC. Converting romantic nationalism into political power, Mossadegh framed the nationalization of the Anglo Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) as a social movement against Britain and for achieving independence, democracy, development, and constitutional governance. The oil nationalization movement took the form of a popular assertion of national sovereignty and anti-imperialism. In early 1953, the CIA along with British SIS began to draft plans for overthrowing Mossadegh government. Subsequently CIA's Tehran Station launched a "grey propaganda" campaign of planting anti- Mossadegh stories in Tehrani and major American newspapers to discredit his government (The CIA in Iran: Britain Fights Oil Nationalism, 2000). General H. Norman Schwarzkopf persuaded the Shah to sign CIA drafted royal decree dismissing Mossadegh and making General Zehedi, the new Prime Minister.  After Mossadegh heard of coup plans, he called for a referendum to dissolve the parliament. Once CIA had

disseminated large quantity of the photographs of the royal decree dismissing Mossadegh government, a 'royalist uprising' began when police and soldiers shouting "Long Live the Shah" and "Death to Mossadegh and Communists" smashed into government buildings (The CIA in Iran: Key Events in 1953 Coup, 2000). In street fighting royalist troops attacked Tudeh members and burned the offices of pro-government and communist newspapers. Riots happened at the key government buildings, and about two hundred people died in a pitched tank and rifle battle at Mossadegh's heavily fortified home and eventually army established control (Love, 1953).

Interestingly, the Shah, who had fled to Baghdad and from there to Rome, called a press-meet after the fall of Mossadegh government, in which underlining his position about the dispute with Britain over nationalization of properties owned by the AIOC, he argued: "Our differences with the British remain. But any nation willing to recognise our supreme interests and our sovereignty, and willing to have decent relations with us based on mutual respect, would have no difficulty in getting on with our people" (Shah is Flying Home, 1953). It only points out that the legitimacy of Iranian government ultimately depended on whether it was able to project itself as capable of defending the national sovereignty and interests, not just as a self-styled imperialist monarchy exploiting the idioms of pre-Islamic empire.

Ruhollah Eslami (2014) notes that the Mossadegh era and the bitter experience of American and English interference in Iranian affairs led to the formation of an anti-western construct and negative bias against the U.S. as well as Britain within the Iranian collective subjectivity. The United States which had been considered non-colonial and a just third party, lost all its credibility as a force for freedom and became a symbol of the evil and a colonial power which deprived Iranians of their independence, national identity and internal-external aspirations (Eslami, 2014:145).

*1.5.5 Pahlavi State as the Surrogate of American Imperialism*

The Pahlavi monarchy was at once an *ancien regime* as well as a westernizing and secularizing modern state. As for the modern Iranian nation, it was defined in terms of a racialized ethnic group of Aryans; the King was bestowed the title of *Aryamehr* by Iranian parliament in 1967. After Mossadegh government was toppled, Shah forged unprecedented economic, political and military ties with the United

States and went about creating a dictatorship, increasingly resembling other military dictatorships of its time (Ramazani, 1989: 203). Shah's dreaded secret police SAVAK was established and trained by CIA and Israel's Mossad to round up outlawed Tudeh members in years following the 1953 coup. Pahlavi regime perceived Soviet Union, its northern neighbour as chief security threat, mainly because of its involvement in regional conflicts and interference in the internal affairs of Iran by extending support to Leftist underground groups such as Mojahedeen Khalgh and Fedayeen Khalgh, therefore, Shah remained in the Western camp during Cold War era. Shah granted the Jewish state *de facto* recognition in 1950 and began to deepen ties with it in early 1950s, when Israel had become more pro-Western given that Soviet Union supported Arab parties in Arab-Israeli conflict and was penetrating for influence in the Middle East. Shah played a key role in containing the rising tide of anti-imperialist Arab nationalism and Soviet influence by creating an effective Iranian-Israeli block (Bhagat, 2005). Shah admired Israel for its achievements in fields of military and agriculture, and had sought to make use of Israeli expertise in both fields employing a large number of Israeli expatriates living prosperous lives in pre-revolutionary Iran.

After British forces withdrew from the east of Suez and the Persian Gulf on the back of national liberation movements in the region, which culminated in creation of United Arab Emirates consisting of seven emirates earlier called Trucial states in July, 1971 and freedom of Bahrain and Qatar in August and September 1971, Iran tried to show a bold face in the area. It was following unprecedented oil revenue in the wake of 1973 oil embargo in response to American military support to Israel against invasion by Syria and Egypt, which coincided with détente between the two superpowers, Shah gained in confidence and began to pursue a strategy of offensive positive balance, based on the understanding that Iran has gained enough capabilities and equipment to enter the central structure of international system and play great games (Eslami, 2014:148). Starting with "seizure of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb and Smaller Tunb islands in November 1971 and the dispatch of Iranian troops to Oman in 1973 to assist Sultan Qaboos in his struggle against Popular Front of Liberation of Oman, a 'Pax Iranica' appeared to be descending on the Gulf" (Tulsiram, 1985:101). Shah had also supported Kurds in northern Iraq, as part of a deal with Iraqi Kurdish leader Mustafa Barzani, who was to suppress the activities of Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, hiding in Iraq. It was under the pressing need to suppress Kurdish

rebellion, which was also supported by Israel and the US and threatened the very viability of Iraqi state, that Saddam Hussein signed Algiers agreement in March, 1975, solving border dispute with Iran at a high territorial price (Karsh, 2009:6). The agreement settled the rival claims over Shatt al-Arab, a waterway jointly created by Tigris and Euphrates dividing border between Iraq and Iran before it flows into the Persian Gulf, and is Iraq's sole access to the Gulf. The agreement gave Iran sovereignty over half the waterway, Iraq renounced claim over Iranian oil rich province Khuzastan, called Arabistan by Arabs, and ceased active opposition to Iranian occupation of the three islands, while Iran was to refrain from interfering in Iraqi domestic affairs, including Iraqi Kurdestan (Karsh, 2009:6). Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi "dreamed of making Iran one of the five conventional military powers of the world, and Washington fuelled his ambitions to some extent by anointing his regime the policeman of the Persian Gulf" (Ramazani, 1989: 203). Interestingly, America and France did not accept Iran's new assertive independence seeking role and began to oblige the Shah to do political reforms, which emboldened nationalist forces inside Iran.

Pahlavi regime was widely seen as subservient to foreign interests, corrupt, and oppressive; in essence it came to symbolize the 'foreign.' "In the absence of colonial state, but given the perceived Western political and ideological influence on Pahlavi monarchical state –which had monopolized the discourse of modernity and nationalism in the decade preceding the 1979 revolution—it came to play the role of a *surrogate colonial state*, and in turn came to take on the political character of an external presence against which discursive and political forces came to position themselves" (Marashi, 2014: 18). Since Shah sought to legitimise his power in terms of pre-Islamic heritage of imperial-monarchy and Western modernity, while excluding Islamic, the counter-discourse of revolution was popularly framed in Islamic terms. In his long postponed coronation in 1967, Mohammad Reza Shah was conferred with the title of *Aryamehr* (Sun of the Aryans), by Majles of Iran (Arjomand, 1984:223). The assumption of this title was a vain attempt to strengthen the popular legitimacy and loyalty for the monarchy. In 1976, a loyal parliament voted for a new 'monarchy calendar, which altered the Islamic calendar based on the *hijra* year (introduced in Iran by Reza Shah) in favour of a system based on the coronation of Cyrus the Great 2,535 years ago (Lenczowski, 1979: 806). The move

was intended to link the present monarchy with the glorious empires of pre-Islamic Iran, but it faced massive backlash, especially from the religious class, which deemed it not only un-constitutional but also as hostile to Islam.

### *1.5.6 Islamism: Counter-hegemonic Discourse of State and Identity*

The "moral indignation against Westernization in Iran pre-dated the outburst of revolution in 1979 by a few decades, beginning as a series of nativistic protests that gradually cohered in the shape of an Islamic ideology" (Arjomand, 2002: 720). Lay intellectuals such as likes of Jalal- al-e-Ahmad and Shariati in giving vent to the popular resentment against cultural domination of the West and the occidental tendencies of the bourgeoisie and liberal nationalists; "adopted what was a western instrument of protest – namely, ideology – as a weapon for combating the pernicious cultural domination of the West" (Arjomand, 2002: 720). This ideology sought revival of nativist collective identity in terms of Islam as means of independence from the Western domination. Al-e-Ahmad, a prominent social critic in 1950s and 1960s likened the increasing dependence of Iran on Western modernity to a disease he termed *gharbzadegi* (Westoxication); if left untreated *gharbzadegi* would lead to the demise of Iran's cultural, political and economic fabric because of excessive penetration by the West. Said Amir Arjomand argues (2002) that "his 'Westoxification' proved definitive as the diagnosis of the age and constituted what sociologists call 'the definition of the situation' for a whole generation" (Arjomand, 2002:720).

Shi'i Islam, emerged as one of the most radical ideologies of resistance against Western cultural and political imperialism, partly because of its particular theological orientation as minority heterodox sect of Islam and also because of the fact that Shi'ites comprised the politically disempowered lot in Sunni monarchies supported by the West and other Arab states such as Iraq and Yemen, with the exception of Syria where Alavi Shi'ite minority dominated the secular Baathist state. Earlier there had been some attempts at political interpretation of Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq, the two bastions of Shi'ism in the Middle East. But it was only in the particular political and material circumstances of Iran in the second half of the twentieth century, that Shi'ism became the dominant counter-hegemonic ideology of protest against imperialist cultural and political domination by the West and drove a successful popular revolution against a secular, oppressive and corrupt monarchy. In one of the earliest

instances of politicising Shi'ism, Iraqi Shi'i had protested against establishment of mandate system by British in Iraq. Shi'i religious leaders had forbidden observant Shi'i from supporting the Sunni tribal family from Hejaz (Arabia), who was installed to power by the British (Gilbert, 2012). Muhammad Mahdi al-Khalisi, a Shi'i scholar of Iraqi origin, lived in Iran for three decades from 1923 onwards after he was deported from Iraq for his anti-British activities (Ghaemmaghami and Yazdani, 2016). While in Iran, he tried to present a more relevant discussion of Islam for the educated segment of Shi'i population and redefine judicial thought as an inclusive guide to Islamic behaviour. In 1951, he published *Ihya-al-Sharia* (Revival of the *Sharia*) (Machlis, 2009). In creating direct judicial discussion with laymen and introducing new genres of Shi'i thought such as political treatises and literacy criticism, Khalisi opened the door for an educated public to interpret Islamic texts, paving the way for new interpretations of Islam by lay intellectuals such as Shariati (Machlis, 2009: 200).

Furthermore with the dramatic rise in literacy and education in second half of the twentieth century, Islamic theology and the Quran were increasingly open to interpretation by intellectuals, who were not clerics or traditional Islamic scholars. These scholars, such as Shariati, were familiar with western intellectual and philosophical traditions, therefore challenged the hold of clerical leaders in defining the meaning and message of the Quran and came up with individualized and more gender-neutral readings of the Quran (Arjomand, 2002).

Ali Shariati, an influential Iranian thinker in the decades leading to the revolution formulated his ideas in conversation with Western modernity, especially in terms of its effect on the people of non-European and Islamic societies. He argued that for non-European societies 'modernized' means modernized in consumption' as Europeans made non-Europeans equate 'modernization' with 'civilization' to impose the new consumption pattern on them. He argued that modernity has been imposed on us, the non-European nations in the guise of civilization. For him modernity meant transforming Islam from a private moral and religious system to a revolutionary movement adapted to contemporary context. His "narrative of *bazgasht-be khistan* (return to the self) picked up al-e Ahmad's theme of accentuating cultural authenticity, and the wider anti-colonial struggle at the head of which Iran should position itself, not least in order to find a way back to the country's 'true' self which Shariati defined in socialist and Islamic terms" (Moghaddam, 2009). Ali Shariati

would argue that Islam is a multidimensional religion and, which cannot be confined to clerics. He accused "clerics of becoming a part of the ruling class, of institutionalizing revolutionary Shi'ism, and thereby transforming it into a highly conservative religion" (Abrahamian, 1982: 470). Shariati advocated a key role for enlightened intellectuals or *roshanfekr* in reforming the society with Shi'i Islam as their revolutionary ideology. His understanding of the role of intellectuals in bringing about revolution was within the Gramscian approach. Contrary to 'traditional intellectuals' represented by *ulama* or clerical class, which was the target of his criticism, *roshanfekr*, because of their key role in production of knowledge had the opportunity and responsibility to bring in change in society. The geographical and historical situatedness of the knowledge produced by them shaped the ideological worldview of the Islamic Revolution. "His lectures and writings had one clear message: Shia Islam is not a conservative, fatalistic, and apolitical creed but rather a revolutionary ideology that permeates all spheres of life and inspires true believers to fight against all forms of oppression, exploitation and social injustice" (Hassan, 1984). He argued that Shi'ism had emerged as the 'religion of revolution' and upholder of the egalitarian principles of Islam and 'represents the oppressed and justice seeking class in the Caliphate system, a system which had transformed Islam into a 'religion of legitimation' (Shariati, 1988). Shi'ism is an oppositional social and political movement "based upon the Traditions; not the Qoran and the traditions as proclaimed by the dynasties of the Omayyids, Abbasids, Ghaznavids, Seljuks, Mongols and Timurids, but the ones proclaimed by the family of Mohammad" (Shariati, 1988). In his 'Sociology of Religion' he identified revolutionary potential of Islam and its true practitioners.

> A revolutionary religion gives an individual, that is, an individual who believes in it, who is trained in the school of thought or maktab* of this religion, the ability to criticize life in all its material, spiritual and social aspects. It gives the mission and duty to destroy, to change and to eliminate that which one does not accept and believes to be invalid and replace it with that which one knows and recognizes as being the truth (Shariati, 1988:31).

While locating the basic factors of historical change in society, the role of enlightened intellectual was subordinated to the role of the people as the basic factor in human society's development and change. He argues that even the greatest of personalities that is Prophet Muhammad did not constitute the fundamental factor. "The mission and characteristics of the Prophet are clearly set forth in the Qur'an, and they consist of the conveying of a message... of showing them the path; he is not in

any way responsible for their decline or advancement, for it is the people themselves who are responsible" (Shariati, 1979 :48). His views influenced the ideological orientation of the lay dominated modern Islamic parties such as Liberation movement during the revolution, considered too radical by the conservative *ulama*.

### 1.6 Historical Overview of Relationship between Shi'ism and State in Iran

Since the times of Safavid Empire (1502-1736), Shi'ism has been central to Iranian national identity and state building (Thual 2002: 33, quoted in Rakel, 2008). "Shi'ism in the sixteenth century Iran served the function of Protestantism in Elizabeth England – as a state religion designed to distinguish monarch's realm from other states, in Iran's case from Ottoman Turkey" (Halliday, 1996:59). Shi'ism was able to play this political role, because fundamental to Shi'i Islam is what Fred Halliday calls a position of 'permanent dissidence' with respect to an enemy other. Shi'ism as a minority sect within Islam has a defensive orientation, which exists in relation of opposition vis-à-vis an 'other.' When Shah Ismail, the Safavid emperor made Shi'i Islam the official religion of the empire in 1501, converting the Shi'i or 'partisan' theology and jurisprudence into elements of the state, he laid the foundation of the nationalisation of Shi'i religion as a form of Iranian Islam. Safavid Shah's intention was to create a distinct religious-political subjectivity amongst its imperial subjects vis-à-vis the Ottoman adherents of Sunnah or 'trodden path,' who came to play the role of the 'enemy other.' During Safavid rule clergy was properly integrated in the state structure and it legitimized the contract between the monarchy and the people. For Safavid dynasty (1501-1722), preservation of a separate Shia identity was crucial to the survival, stability and security of the Iranian state and the Shia religious hierarchy. "The end of the Safavid rule in 1722, also spelled the end of financial patronage of Shi'i educational and juridical functions in Iran, as well as the centrality of Iran's seminaries to Shi'ism" (Moazami, 2011: 72).

"The development of Shia orthodoxy and hierarchy with immense social influence, with which we are familiar today was in large part a product of the political turmoil of the eighteenth century in the first instance and the consolidation of Shi'i doctrine which proceeded in the nineteenth century, a process which in many ways was catalysed and defined against the Babi Revolt" (Ansari 2012:26). Babi messianic revolt (1844-52) was a militant heretical movement which rejected the *ulama* as the guardians of religious truth and engaged in armed rebellion against the nascent Qajar

rule. Post Babi revolt, a period of stability and prosperity under Qajars made possible the development of a Shi'i Orthodoxy (Uyar, 2007; Moazami, 2011). Since in Qajar state, royal power unlike Safavids had deprived itself of the legitimacy provided by alleged descent from Imam, it led to evolution in Shi'i *fiqh* asserting the role of the *mujtahid* in directing the community even in ruling it as intermediaries between Imam and the society.

The organizational changes within Shi'i religious orthodoxy namely the theological victory of *Usulis* over *Akhbaris* in eighteenth century and the emergence of the *ulama* as an autonomous and powerful social group proved to be of decisive importance for the subsequent history of Iran and Shi'ism. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, traditionalists (*Akhbaris*) rejected the permissibility of *ijtihad* (application of independent reasoning in interpretation of legal or jurisprudence related issues) by arguing that only sacred texts were sufficient in resolving legal issues (Mavani, 2013:13). Similarly, they denied the necessity of *taqlid* (emulation of a Shi'i Islamic scholar) by laity, even after the occultation of the Imam had deprived the community of its living source of guidance; they held that entire Shi'i community should continue to submit exclusively to the guidance of Imam, however remote (Mavani, 2013:15). The *akhbari* School had dominated the '*atabat*, the shrine cities of Arab Iraq, but Agha Muhammad Baqir Bihbihani ultimately defeated them. His endorsement on the eve of the formation of the Qajar rule, of the function of *mujtahid* (Islamic scholar practicing *ijtihad*) as a source of emulation (*marja-e-taqlid*) for the community was of great importance (Algar, 1973:57). The *usulis* doctrine teaches that a Shi'ite must be the follower of a living *mujtahid*, who also claims the allegiance of lesser *mullahs* and *mujtahids*, and received the religious *zakat* tax, and also special tax in Shi'ism known as the *khums* (Glasse and Smith, 2003:71). Shahrough Akhavi (1980) note that Shi'i *ulama's* authority and historic autonomy from the state is due to its insistence upon *ijtihad* and *taqlid*. The *ulama*, since the victory of *usulis* came to position themselves as the general deputies (*al-wukala-al-amm*) of the Hidden twelfth Imam.

> The clergy evolved in its authoritative position in the community not on the basis of doctrinal legitimation by the *imams* but rather as a natural process of historical evolution in which the need for interpreters of law as applied to concrete matters of litigation could not be denied; and somehow '*ulama* came to act on their own as though *ex ante* appointment from the *Imam* in fact has occurred (Akhavi, 1980:11).

Behrooz Moazami (2011) notes that at a time when financial patronage of *ulama* and seminaries by state ended with Safavids, flourishing of Persian Gulf commerce to the Indian subcontinent in late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries provided new patronage for the spreading network of *ulama* and their students. The interdependence between rich merchant class (*bazzari*) and *ulama* would influence the future political course in the next two centuries. Cyrill Glasse and Huston Smith (1990) note the increasing hierarchisation of *ulama* since the early twentieth century when ever increasing number of *ulama* started to become *mujtahids.*

> In the early 19th century there were only three or Mujtahiduun; by the end of the century the numbers had grown considerably, and those who could claim large following adopted the title *Hujjat al-Islam* ("Proof of Islam) to mark their higher status. In this century, with the ranks of *mujtahids* now swollen to several hundred, in addition to a large number of *Hujjat –al Islam*, the rank was introduced of the *Ayatollah*, or "Divine Sign." But then, as the number of *Ayatollahs* grew apace, there came the need for a further distinguishing title, namely that of the Ayatollah al-Uzma ("the greatest sign of God") (Glasse and Smith, 2003:71).

Hamid Algar (1980) argues that the position of *marja-e-taqlid* emerged as the doctrinal foundation of clerical power.

> The ruler, like every other believer who had not attained the rank of *ijtihad*, was obliged to be *muqallid* to a certain *mujahid* and to execute his rulings and pronouncements. The state could ultimately have been no more than the executive branch of clerical power. In the actual tyranny of the period, such considerations counted for little, and the monarch, by not submitting to clerical direction, effectively alienated himself from the nation… since the state per se represented tyranny, any close relation with it came to be regarded as disqualification for the position of *marja-e-taqlid* (Algar, 1980: 23).

The autonomous existence of *ulama* as popular community leaders since nineteenth century and their dependence on resources of the same community made them "vulnerable to the interests of their constituency and to overall social, political, and economic conditions" (Moazami, 2011: 72). Their contact with the community was far stronger than the one between the state and the people. The state was mainly an instrument of levying taxes and raising armies, it increasingly failed in protecting the interests of people from encroaching imperialist powers. In an instance of political activism by clerics on traditional merchants or *bazari* behalf, in 1891 Mohammad Hassan Shirazi, one of the first clerics to be generally recognised as *marja-e-taqlid* issued a fatwa against consumption of and dealing in tobacco in response to the government's selling of a major tobacco concession to a British entrepreneur (Abrahamian, 1991:20).

Moazami (2011) argues that the centralization of the *ulama's* institutional power and empowerment of their organizational presence in Iran went along with the

centralization of state power and gradual secularization of political sphere in the wake of Constitutional Revolution. The royal proclamation of (*farman*) of 5 August, 1906 which set the tone of the constitutional process by confirming its goal as "the strengthening and consolidation of the foundations of the state" and acknowledging the need for a convention of an Assembly of delegates, also recognized the "*ulama* as one of the six classes that could send a representative to this consultative assembly" (Moazami, 2011: 73). National Assembly when it intended to end the clerical judicial functions and replace them entirely with secular state courts and secular law derived from the Belgian constitution, the move was opposed by "conservative clergy, who considered *shari'a* to be complete code of law interpretable by them alone" (Shorabi, 1995:1421). A compromise was reached between radically secular and statists versions of the Assembly on the one hand and totalising claims of the conservative clergy on the other. "Clergy was given the right to nominate twenty clerics for the councils from whom the deputies would elect at least five members to supervise legislations and to prevent the passage of any law that contradicted religious laws" (Shorabi, 1995:1421). As state began to consolidate its power and functions, it increasingly regulated and formalised *ulama* as a religious class, undermining their autonomy and appropriating most of their judicial and education related functions.

> The state's diverse policies—for example dress code for all including the *ulama*, the imposition of formal and state-controlled examination boards for seminarians, the issuance of official certificates, standardization of the seminaries' curriculum, formalization of the *ulama*'s participation in legal civil life through the establishment of a notary system, formation of the faculty of theology, introduction of a systematic curriculum and textbooks for teaching religion and theology throughout public education, and allocation of radio channel for broadcasting religious teaching—led to the formation of a homogenized, differentiated, strongly centralized teaching establishment with a vast and active network throughout Iran (Moazami, 2011:74).

The modernization of governmental structure, the changes in political and economic systems and functions, and the rise of new elites between 1921 and 1941 were instrumental in the transformation of the *ulama* and the decline of their political power and social status (Faghfoory, 1987: 413). Scholars argue that the opposition of the Shi'i *ulama* to Pahlavi Shah arose in the context of the power struggle set in motion by centralization of the state which swept power away from the clerical establishment. The Pahlavi state in its drive for administrative centralization and authoritarian modernization mounted one of the most frightful manifestations of fascist statism in modern history, eliminating all other centres of voluntary association (Dabashi 2008: 90). The resultant "social dislocation and normative disturbance"

forced some people to look for alternative "channels of societal reintegration" and search for "cultural authenticity" (Arjomand, 1986: 398). The rise of lay religious associations in Iran in the 1960s and especially in the 1970s and the Islamic activism in the university campuses was instrumental in the revolutionary political mobilization of the 1970s. The Shi'ite politics also adjusted itself to the trend of mass politics unleashed by rapid social change. Underlining the evolutionary nature of Shi'ite Islamist politics, Arjomand (1986) quotes Max Weber who had remarked that with the advent of modern mass politics, the condition of clerical denomination itself changes. "Hierocracy has no choice but to establish a party organization and to use demagogic means, just like all other parties" (Weber, 1966:1195, quoted in Arjomand, 1986: 400). Nikkie Keddie observes that it was only from 1962 onward that Shi'ism came to play a major role in Iranian oppositional movements for reasons that have to do with better organization of the *ulama*, as pointed out by Hamid Algar, in the preponderance of Qom-centered religious institutions in the 1950s by Ayatollah Borujerdi, and also in the growing need felt by the opposition to differentiate their ideology from that of the Westernizing Shah and his western masters (Keddie 1982:290).

Lay religious intellectuals (*Roshanfekran-e-Dini*) who had western education and were familiar with the Western political thought were instrumental in developing a modern Islamic political thought and popularising it with the urban and educated. These religious intellectuals in Hamid Dabashi's words were result of "Islam's colonial encounter with modernity" which mutated Islam into an Islamic ideology (Dabashi 2008:240).These native intellectuals resented European dominance of their countries as well as the traditionalist elites and invented a new religion in which independence, freedom and an identity in terms of a moral community was discovered for the masses of their country. Sharifi (2013) argues that the emergent worldview of Islamists by 1960s was both evolutionary and revolutionary. "It was 'evolutionary' because it incorporated all the basic signifiers previously constructed in both modern and traditional Iranian discourses. It was 'revolutionary' because it called for the overthrow of the regime as a symptom of Iranian self-hate, alienation, and Western domination" (Sharifi, 2013:240).

This Islamist ideology was a "modernizing vision of Islam that devalued Islamic or Sufi quietism, religious conservatism, and any other compromises with the

regime" (Sharifi, 2013:240). For instance, Ali Shariati, as discussed earlier criticised the traditional institutionalised traditional clergy, and interpreted "Islam as a modern, socialist, scientific, and revolutionary ideology that appealed to young, educated, and urban people" (Sharifi, 2013:241). Similarly, Mehdi Bazargan, who had left the National Front in early 1960s on account of increasing ideological polarity between secular activists and clerics, established the Movement for Liberation of Iran which "hoped to bring together Iranian Shi'ism and European socialism, and to create an ideology that will appeal to both religious minded and to the nationalistic intelligentsia" (Abrahamian, 1979: 5).

However, state's targeting of religious class especially in the wake of Shah's controversial *White Revolution*, a six-point social and economic reform programme including land reform and women's suffrage united traditionalist clergy behind dissenting cleric Ayatollah Khomeini. After Khomeini had asserted his leadership over the clergy and against the Shah, he argued for a very political role for *ulama* and exhorted them to participate in toppling the un-Islamic government of the Shah and establish a legitimate Islamic government, based on Gods' law that is *shari'a*. In March 1963, when Shah sent troops to attack and ransack the most important seminary in Qum (*Madrasa Fayziya*), where Ayatollah Khomeini had been making speeches critical of the Shah's government, a number of students were killed. On the occasion of the fortieth day after the assault on *Fayziya Madrasa*, Khomeini made a speech criticising the tyrannical regime of the Shah as un-Islamic and hostile to ordinances of Islam and constitution. Khomeini argued that the Shah has sold out independence of Iran as it cooperated with Israel. His speech made many references to cooperation between the Shah and Israel, and condemned the Shah for concluding a treaty which recognised Israel. He argued,

> I don't know whether all these uncivilised and criminal acts have been committed for the sake of oil in Qum, whether the religious teaching institution is to be sacrificed for the sake of oil. Or is all this being done for the sake of Israel, since we are considered an obstacle to the conclusion of a treaty with Israel directed against the Islamic states? (Khomeini, 1963, in Khomeini and Algar 2013: 175).

He criticized the Shah's declared goal of reducing the influence of religious leaders and exhorted them to play an active role in opposing the Shah and educate the people in ideas about Islamic government. Khomeini argued that the religious leaders are the only section of people who can hold the government to account and enlighten

people, "who in turn must raise their voices in protest to the *majlis* and the government... by curtailing the influence of the religious leaders from the affairs of the society, the government was suggesting that it wants the Messenger of God to play no role in our affairs, so Israel can do whatever it likes and America likewise" (Khomeini, 1981: 187).

It was Ayatollah Khomeini's speech against the granting of capitulatory rights to the U.S., which proved to be the immediate cause of his exile from Iran on November 4, 1964. Khomeini argued that the by granting capitulatory rights to the United States in return for a loan of 2004 million from America, the Shah had sold the national independence and reduced Iran to the level of a colony. While denouncing the Shah for his dependence on the United States and Israel and attacks on the religious class, he declared that monarchy was un-Islamic as it usurped God's sovereignty and propounded the vision of a legitimate Islamic government, based on Gods' law that is *shari'a*. In 1971, when Shah had organized the extravagant celebration of two-and-a-half millennia of monarchy in Iran, Khomeini denounced monarchy, and issued a declaration on the 'Incompatibility of Monarchy with Islam.' He argued that there was no place for monarchy in Islam:

> Tradition relates that the Prophet (upon whom be peace) said that the title of King of Kings, which is borne by the monarchs of Iran, is the most hated of all titles in the sight of God. Islam is fundamentally opposed to the whole notion of monarchy. Anyone who studies the manner in which the Prophet established the government of Islam will realize that Islam came in order to destroy these palaces of tyranny. Monarchy is one of the most shameful and disgraceful reactionary manifestations (Khomeini, 1981:202).

Living in exile in Najaf, one of the most important centres of Islamic learning, Khomeini developed his theory of *vilayet-e-fqih* or 'Islamic Government: Governance of Jurists.' His treatise was a critique of monarchy and consequences of imperialist penetration of Muslim world. He argued that the current problems of Muslim society are a result of disestablishment of Islam from state and society, and argued for revival of Islam in all aspects of society and state. The Islamist project is revolutionary and revivalist at the same time. It seeks to replace or overthrow the existing secular order, in order to re-establish the "Islamist 'utopia' (which) has already been realised as the Median Model under the Prophet Muhammad" Mozaffari, 2009:5). The theory of Islamic government seeks to re-invent the model of Islamic state and society established by the Prophet Muhammad and the first Shiite Caliph Ali.

> "The Most Noble Messenger (s) headed the executive and administrative institutions of Muslim society. In addition to conveying the revelation and expounding and interpreting

the articles of faith and ordinances and institutions of Islam, he undertook the implementation of law and the establishment of the ordinances of Islam, thereby bringing into being the Islamic state" (Khomeini, 2002: 19).

According to Khomeini, Islamic state will protect Islamic homeland from 'tyrannical self-seeking rulers and imperialists who have divided the Islamic homeland' and artificially created separate nations from the Islamic *umma.* Ayatollah Khomeini bemoans the division of the Ottoman Empire into separate nations by European imperialist powers. He exhorted people to overthrow these governments established by imperialists and replace them with Islamic governments.

His political theory was developed in the context of perceived effects of European and American imperialism in Muslim lands, therefore was permeated by an imagination of the West as the threatening/enemy 'other.' A key component of his political vision is the unity of Muslim peoples or nations against the imperialists. After the successful Islamic revolution in Iran, Iran entrusted upon itself the responsibility of spreading the Islamic revolution to overthrow tyrannical governments, monarchies allied with the United States and create an Islamist geopolitical order in which Iran would be a regional power.

### 1.7 Objectives of Thesis

The thesis explores how the Islamic and revolutionary identity of Iran is reflected and also reinforced in the geopolitical discourse of Iranian statespersons. An attempt is made to understand how Iranian geopolitical imaginations were redefined as a result of postcolonial transformation of Shi'i Islam into a religio-political ideology of oppressed nationalism and anti-imperialism as well as the organizing principle of Islamic Republic. The study focuses on discursive modalities of how United States is constructed as a geopolitical and ideological enemy in constructing a postcolonial state identity and an Iranian grand narrative providing broad orientation of the country's long term foreign policy. The study explores practical reasoning behind such discursive constructions. Arguing that the construction of an 'enemy' or 'threat' within a discourse infused with religious imageries veers towards demonization of the threatening 'other' and sacralisation of the object which is deemed threatened, the thesis explores the particular discourses of danger and threat constructed by the Islamic Republic since its foundation. Since the founding of the Islamic Republic, geopolitical conflicts have been represented in existential terms, while securitization has been a recurring tactic. The study examines how the

imagination of 'the West' or the United States as the 'enemy other' of the Islamic Republic has been discursively sustained, and to what purpose and effect. It analyses how geopolitical imaginations of a state are inflexed when its legitimating ideology is a universal religion such as Islam which "has being (humanity) as reference, which often implies that believer has been given an obligation to disseminate the words of God. Borders are no legitimate hindrance" (Laustsen and Waever, 2000: 721). The study explores how pan-Islamism shapes the kind of geopolitical strategies and discourses Iranian statesperson employ to construct and sustain the revolutionary and Islamic identity of state and to garner ideological and geopolitical influence. In short, it analyses Iranian geopolitical visions as they took shape in the course of Islamic Revolution, American Embassy hostage crisis and Iran-Iraq war and have evolved with changes in its geopolitical environment following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, post-war needs of reconstruction, and first Gulf War and then in the wake of renewed hostility over controversial nuclear program and American unilateralism characteristic of the global war on terror. Three main research questions addressed in three substantive chapters are:

1. How the Islamic Revolution in Iran transformed geopolitical imaginations of Iran?

2. What were the consequences of the end of the Cold War for geopolitical imaginations of the Islamic Republic of Iran?

3. How the US led Global War on Terror and its geopolitical representations such as the axis-of-evil have affected geopolitical imaginations of IRI?

**1.8 Hypotheses**

The Islamic revolution revolutionized an identity associated with religious and cultural affinities and in that it went beyond any nationalist agenda of regime change. Revolutionary Islamism in rejecting universalist claims of imperialist cultural and political systems and imagining Islam as a comprehensive solution to questions of identity, culture, polity and independence in the Islamic world was a novel political imagination. "Iranian revolution marked the beginning of a political movement with a strong appeal that is not just a direct repudiation of a particular colonial ruler but is an original political formation that responds to condition of continued European and American dominance after the era of formal colonization had ended" (Khohn and

Mcbridge, 2011:35). In postcolonial context such as in Iran, revolutionary politics and subaltern agency took the form of opposing the colonial centre and re-inventing tradition for constructing alternative imaginations for organizing state and society. For Islamists, Islam, in providing a basis of shared identity which transcended the experience of imperialist domination, a sense of pride in the past as well as foundation for a culture that would flower after the revolution, became central to the political vision, which triumphed over all other rival ideologies. Geopolitically, Islam was also to be the basis of unity amongst oppressed people of the world. Revolutionary Iran has shown a pan-Islamist and Third Worldist approach to international politics. Iranian leadership engages in constant securitization that is discursive construction of the West as a powerful extant threat in order to reproduce Islam and the West as mutually opposed and self-contained geopolitical binaries. Therefore, Iranian hostile discourse vis-à-vis the United States should be understood in term of its significance for the identity or ontological security of the Islamist regime of Iran. Furthermore, in Persian Gulf and Levant, Iran has been able to build bridges of influence while pursuing an Islamist revolutionary anti-imperialist geopolitics. The two hypotheses this study proposes and attempts to corroborate are as following:

1. The geopolitical imaginations of the revolutionary Iran are shaped by its opposition to the United States.

2. The republic of Iran has employed its identity as an Islamic nation to further its geopolitical goals.

**1.9 Method of Analysis**

The study in order to explore the geopolitical imaginations or the spatial framings of identity and difference, explores geopolitical discourses of the ruling elite for strategic representations of places, threat discourses and competing discourses engaged in joining of state, territory, and culture (Dalby, 2008). The study adopts the insights from discourse theory of post-structuralism and postmodernism. According to this understanding, discourses are "structures of signification which construct social realities," therefore, concepts such as nation, borders are then redefined as "socio-territorial constructs" (Houtam, 2005:674). Discourse can be hegemonic because in discourse, ideological assumptions are established as 'common sense' and consequently discourse has the ability to contribute to existing power relation because

discursive practices make it virtually impossible to think outside them (Holliday, 2010:4). Critical geopolitics "studies the very construction and social effects of geopolitical imaginations and geopolitical identities – the imaginary spatial positioning of people, regions, states and shifting boundaries that accompany this positioning" (Muller, 2008: 323). It is not actions that determine discourse; the critical issue is the power of discursive formations rooted in existing geographical and geopolitical imaginations to determine patterns of action. "Poststructuralist analysis highlights the processes and mechanisms of the construction and alteration of meaning rather than meaning itself, the heterogeneity and contingency of discourses and their instability" (Muller and Reuber, 2008: 465). The theoretical point of departure for the study is that the geopolitical imaginations of Iran, constructed and reproduced within a revolutionary ideological conception of Islam vis-à-vis the West are of thoroughly postcolonial nature.

The study explores how a hegemonic notion of 'Islamic Republic' has been discursively constructed, reinforced and contested since Islamic Revolution by exploring geopolitical practices, representations of Iranian statespersons. For the purpose of critical geopolitical analysis, in addition to academic literature, the speeches, statements of Iranian statesperson are utilized. The speeches of Supreme Leader, whose position ensures that he has overarching influence in articulation of the direction of the Islamic Republic, are given special attention in analysing the prevalent geopolitical imaginations of the Islamic Republic.

### 1.10 Structure of Thesis

The first chapter develops the conceptual framework of geopolitical imaginations as well as method of analysis using insights from critical geopolitics. It attempts a critique of modernist territorial conception of nation state and proposes that attention to discursive construction of geopolitical identities is useful in understanding the multi-faceted, dynamic and ongoing nature of national identity construction. It elaborates on the concept of geopolitical imaginations by using postrstructuralist theory of discourse increasingly adopted in critical geopolitics, and then it seeks to develop an understanding of geopolitical imaginations in postcolonial context and also how religion has been utilised in construction of geopolitical imaginations. An overview of the discourse of nationalism in modern Iran and then political Islam with particular attention to Iran is given by surveying the available literature. It starts with

an account of the context in which anti-imperialist nationalism and nationalist consciousness emerges from the late nineteenth century, especially in the wake of the constitutional revolution and concludes by tracing the rise of Islamism as the dominant counter-hegemonic ideology in the run up to the Islamic Revolution. It also gives a historical overview of the co-constitutive relation between state and Shi'ism in Iran and how Shi'i clerical hierarchy developed an autonomous institutional presence and in time played a key role in constructing an 'oppressed' or 'subaltern' nationalism in an Islamic framework which hegemonised all other oppositional and nationalist ideologies of its time.

The second chapter analyses the discourse of the revolution for its politicisation of Islam into an ideology of complete social revolution, anti-imperialism and also the legitimating ideology of Islamic republic of Iran. It examines the religio-political underpinnings of the regime, its conception of international order and Iran's place in it. It explores the ramifications of the 'Islamic revolution' for a counter-hegemonic geopolitics seen in the export of the revolution importance attached to the Palestinian issue. It also explores the importance of the American embassy hostage crisis and Iran-Iraq war for entrenching an anti-American construct in the revolutionary worldview and in shaping the geopolitical culture and strategic orientation of the Islamic republic.

The third chapter analyses the changes in Iranian geopolitical vision following the near simultaneous death of its charismatic founder Ayatollah Khomeini and the end of war with Iraq. It explores how the imperative of post-war economic reconstruction and changes in its geopolitical environment following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, first Gulf War and American presence in the Persian Gulf following its intervention to 'liberate' Kuwait shaped Iran's conception of regional geopolitical space. The chapter examines the conflicting visions of the 'Islamic Republic' constructed by pragmatic governments of Rafsanjani and reformist Khatami on the one hand and on the other, the exclusivist ideological geopolitical imaginations of the theocratic institutions concerned with strengthening and preserving the ideological foundations of the state power. It analyses how these contradictions were manifested in a rather Janus-faced discourse of detente and resistance. It also examines the strategies that the ruling elites devised in order to reconcile the border-erasing economic and especially cultural forces of globalization

with geopolitical imaginations of the Islamic Republic. President Khatami's thesis of 'dialogue among civilisations' and securitising discourses of 'cultural invasion' and 'soft-threat' pedalled by conservatives and hardliners are analysed for their construction of global geopolitical space and Iranian identity.

The fourth chapter analyses how the global war on terror with its moralistic imaginative geographies and militarised geopolitics influenced Iranian geopolitical visions. Renewed belligerent discourse from America failed the conciliatory policy of reformists and strengthened the militarists who dominated Ahmadinejad's presidency. The chapter explores the millenarian narrative that characterised Ahmadinejad presidency and was reflected in an extremist counter-hegemonic foreign policy of tightening alliance with Latin American Leftist regimes, support for militant Islamist movements of Hezbollah and Hamas and a defiant nationalist posture in asserting national right to a peaceful nuclear program. The politics around Iran's nuclear program is also discussed, especially the geopolitical logic behind Iranian defiance and the circumstances under which it was turned into a symbol of national prestige and resistance. Chapter also examines the alternative or rather anti-geopolitics of the 'Green Movement' which emerged following the controversial presidential reaction of year 2009 and the reactive discourse of 'soft war' constructed by the regime to delegitimise and suppress the movement. The chapter ends with an analysis of the geopolitical narrative of 'Islamic Awakening' within which Iran tried to expand its sphere of influence and accrue soft power during the Arab uprisings.

The last chapter summarises the findings and substantiates the hypotheses of the study.

In addition to introduce research questions, hypotheses of the study, this chapter has foregrounded the theoretical framework for the study by establishing the concept of geopolitical imagination from critical geopolitics perspective. The territorial conception of modern nation state has been critiqued to underline the significance of discourses and practices of state elites in constructing and reproducing particular images of nation. Since state elites have to legitimise and justify their policies and practices to the populace, these policies and practices entail representations and assumptions about self and other that are rooted in already existing myths, perceptions, and beliefs in the society. Particular attention has been given to geopolitical imaginations in postcolonial context, which are not only

oppositional but unstable, changing from within and without. They are articulated and stabilised in relations of opposition with external other and often risk interference from external hegemonic sources. Islamism is a postcolonial ideology par-excellence. The geopolitical divisions articulated by Islamists are not limited to territorial construct of nation-state; they seek to reconcile universalist geopolitical identity of *umma* with that of building and legitimising a postcolonial state.

The chapter has also traced the rise of modern nationalism in Iran as rooted in historical memory of pre-Islamic Empire, territorial continuity of millennia, Islam and in opposition to Iran's domination by imperialist powers of the West. Islamism emerged as a counter-hegemonic or subaltern ideology of popular revolution against authoritative, secuarlising Pahlavi monarchy. Islamism was both revivalist as well as utopian discourse rooted in religious narrative of perfect Islamist order established by Prophet Mohammad and Imam Ali; it conceived a spiritual notion of Iranian nation as politically and culturally independent vis-à-vis imperialist powers of the West and East.

The chapter has also analysed the historical trajectory of relationship between the state as *ulama* as autonomous political actors. The clergy even after it had been deprived of certain sources of income and functions as a result of state consolidation and secularisation by Pahlavi monarchy; it retained its autonomous institutional presence. Islamism emerged as the dominant language of opposition, and clergy as a significant political class, after secular liberal discourse was thoroughly delegitimised in the eyes of the masses by virtue of its association with the Shah and westernised elite. Ayatollah Khomeini, the exiled cleric who rejected the very legitimacy of the monarchy in uncompromising terms of Islam became the symbol of revolutionary opposition at a time when Islam became defined the oppositional political discourse.

# CHAPTER –2

## RAMIFICATIONS OF THE REVOLUTION: GEOPOLITICAL IMAGINATIONS OF IRAN UNDER AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI

The Islamic Revolution overthrew the second and also the last Pahlavi monarch Mohammad Reza Shah, who dreamt of raising Iran "to the level of a great world power," re-invigorating the pre-Islamic Achaemenian Empire of Cyrus the Great (quoted in Cooper, 2011:163). It was in opposition to a repressive secular monarchy, its top down project of modernization, and secularisation resulting in widespread social deracination, that Islam had emerged into a forceful mobilizing ideology of political and social revolution. As Maxime Rodinson (1979) noted about the Islamic Revolution, "the humiliation of a situation of national dependence makes attractive the ancestral religious identity, a historic enemy of the current dominant forces. The fervent faith of the masses has been lessened only slightly: God is not dead; the machines have not killed him" (Rodinson, 1979: 244). Although, religion had been de-established from state institutions, it had institutional presence in the form of a vast semi-hierarchical network of clerics as well as in the form of mass religiosity.

Islamic Revolution in Iran overturned the classical revolutionary indictment of religion as associated with status-quo and reaction; Islamic ideology was similar to other supra-national revolutionary ideologies in its missionary spirit of spreading its ideology of revolution. As a revolutionary ideology rooted in religion, it closely resembled Catholic Theology of Liberation in its quest to liberate the whole human: body, soul, and mind, and gripped the revolutionary regime with a missionary zeal of spreading this revolutionary Islam.

Kai Bird of *The Nation* wrote on May 19, 1979 that "the Iranian revolution was, among other things, an anti-colonial revolt, a political coup against a despotic ruler universally perceived as an agent of the Americans." Eric Hobsbawm (1994) observed the novelty of Iranian revolution in terms of its religious ideology; he argued that it was "incomprehensible within a secularist frame of reference" dominant within the western political circle and academia alike. "Virtually all the phenomena commonly recognized as revolutionary up to that date had followed the tradition, ideology and, in general, the vocabulary of Western revolution since 1789; more

precisely: of some brand of secular Left, mainly socialist or communist" (Hobsbawm 1994:453).

The Islamic revolution thrusted Islam into the political discourse of the United States vis-à-vis the Middle-East, especially in the wake of the prolonged American Embassy hostage crisis in Tehran. The Western discourse casted Iran as a geopolitical threat seeking to overturn Western geopolitical order in the Middle-East by fomenting 'Islamic revolutions', a claim buttressed by Iran's hostility towards secular regimes, Gulf monarchies allied with the West and Israel. Rejecting western liberalism and communism, demanding an entirely new order which had sanction of God, revolution had raised the slogan of "*Na sharqi a gharbi, Jhomuri ye Islami*" (Neither East, nor West, but an Islamic republic). The Islamic Revolution made a clear break from the traditional Iranian monarchy revolutionaries, as well as from the Cold War imperialist order, rejecting the hegemony of both East and the West. Michael Foucault argued that "it is perhaps the first great insurrection against global systems, the form of revolt that is most modern and most insane" (Foucault, 1978, quoted in LeVine, 2011).

The revolutionary regime betrayed a distinct conception of territoriality at odds with modern territorial geopolitical imagination. Religion has the entire faith-community or humanity as its reference. For Khomeini, the primary identity was defined in terms of Islam as a cultural and religious identity, spanning the entire Muslim *umma*. Revolutionary Shi'i Islam constitutes the normative discourse within which Iranian foreign policy is formulated. Rejecting the legitimacy of colonially demarcated nation-states, Ayatollah Khomeini argued that it was Iran's responsibility to revive the militant religion of Islam towards creating an Islamic *umma* free of imperial domination. The pan-Islamist discourse of Ayatollah Khomeini went hand in hand with Iran's drive to claim the leadership of the Islamic world, by projecting itself as the vanguard revolutionary nation defending oppressed nations struggling against the imperialist West.

Since, critical geopolitics seeks to "investigate geopolitics as a social, cultural, and political practice, rather than as manifest and legible reality of world politics," any analysis of Iranian geopolitics after the revolution will have to account for geopolitical traditions as well as religious, doctrinal innovations and interpretations of Islam an ideology of social revolution and anti-imperial resistance, redefining the worldview of the Iranian state (Toal and Dalby, 1998: i). This chapter would trace the

nature and emergence of the counter-hegemonic discourse of Islamism and construction of Iranian geopolitical imagination in wake of Islamic Republic of Iran, by analysing the discourse of Islamic revolution, foundational principles of the Islamic Republic as articulated by the revolutionary leadership, especially Ayatollah Khomeini and formalised in the constitution. It also explores the implications of American hostage crisis and Iran-Iraq War in shaping Iranian worldview.

## 2.1 Contextualising the Emergence of Revolutionary Islamism in Iran

Martin Risebrodt argues that a phenomenon such as the one we call "fundamentalism" should be "placed in a larger context, [so that we may] attempt to compare its ideologies, adherents, or causes of mobilization with those of secular movements" (quoted in Ram, 2015). The privileging of religious character of the revolution at the expense of its political context is unhelpful in understanding the character of the regime established by the Islamic revolution. The approach should be to analyse the ideology of the Islamic Revolution, as that of hybrid and modern nature, emerging in a particular historical, political context by supplanting all other ideologies in defining a new political identity and model of government in Iran. This way one can avoid making generalised claims about the religion as a whole outside of geographical, political context and historical roots.

Jonathon Fox (2013) challenges the secularization thesis of inevitable decline of religion in public sphere or its significance as a resource for state and nation building. About the resurgence of religion as a political ideology, especially in the Third World, he argues that after secular ideologies failed to produce economic prosperity, social justice, "these ideologies, and the government founded upon them, were also perceived as foreign, illegitimate, corrupt, and perhaps the continuation of colonialism by proxy" (Fox, 2013: 23). It was in context of the crisis of legitimacy of secular liberal western paradigm after it had been associated with a repressive monarchy that religion was increasingly perceived as legitimate, uncorrupted, and indigenous. Religion in such cases became the source of utopian visions of state and society. In Third World countries, where "secularization has always been an elite-based process that never was fully accepted by masses," religion was easily intertwined with mass-based political movements and subaltern revolutionary projects (Fox, 2013:23). This section analyses the religionisation of politics leading up to the

Islamic revolution that is how political discourses about legitimacy, identity and state came to be articulated in religious terms.

It was in context of Pahlavi authoritarian modernization, - creation of a bureaucratic state, enlightened pro-monarchist elite and forced secularization from above, - without democratic freedoms or economic prosperity to the masses, that Western secular ideas which had earlier defined the bourgeoisie nationalism gave way to an oppressed nationalism, increasingly casted in the discourse of Shi'i Islam. Since the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, oppositional groups belonging to secular ideologies were forced underground by Shah's brutal secret police SAVAK. On the other hand, protected status of religion coupled with its pervasive influence on Iranian culture and open-ended nature of religious interpretation ensured that various secular revolutionary and socialist ideologies were discovered within Shi'ism, alongside a more theocratic Islam promoted by the clerics. Behrooz Moazami (2011) argues that religious institutions adapt to the changes in society. These institutions, by "producing and reproducing religious teachings and moral values and adopting them to the earthly needs of the period, become embedded in the territorial or national setting" (Moazami, 2011:71). Similarly, Fred Halliday (1996) points out that given the ideological ductility of Islam or the fact that "the doctrine does not enjoin a specific course of action but provides themes that can justify a variety of courses," religious leaders and interpreters of holy texts have followed a *demotic* (as opposed to *democratic*) line of interpretation (does not enjoin a specific). "Islam does not have a religious hierarchy and the position of its clergy depends to a considerable extent upon popular assent. At the same time some of the themes of Islam, as emphasis on the common concerns of the believers, opposition to tyrants and support for struggle, can serve as the cause of popular mobilization" (Halliday, 1996: 59). Furthermore, processes associated with modernization allowed both state as well as religious institutions to increase their sphere of influence, thus resulting in the clashes between the state and the religious institutions, which increasingly began to function as profane entities while still using a religious discourse (Fox and Sandler, 2004:12). Religious leaders became increasingly involved in political activities especially after the religious class was targeted by the Shah during so-called White Revolution, a six-point social and economic reform programme that included land reform and women's suffrage to referendum

(Katouzian and Shahidi, 2007:3). "The clergy were motivated to support Khomeini for reasons of peerage and class that directly had to do with preserving their integrity and independence as opposed to value-laden issues, such as conscription of women and their suffrage" (Kholdi, 2010). It was for the first time that Khomeini had asserted his leadership over the clergy and against the Shah. Subsequently, Ayatollah Khomeini articulated a very political role for *ulama* and exhorted them to participate in toppling the un-Islamic government of Shah and establish a legitimate Islamic government, based on Gods' law that is *shari'a*.

Pahlavi monarchy, which legitimized itself through a combination of pre-Islamic tradition of imperialist monarchy and secular western ideas of a modern nation, was in essence an *ancien regime*, therefore religious critique of the legitimacy of the monarchy veered towards defence of popular sovereignty under an overarching conception of divine sovereignty. Mishra (2017) notes that Khomeini belonged in the long line of revolutionary nationalists that began with Guiseppe Mazzinni, who laid the foundation for holy insurrection by the oppressed masses (Mishra, 2017: 153). It is important to note that pre-revolutionary Iran didn't see the rise of a pervasive Islamic movement; the revolution came about as a result of the discursive hegemony of the Islamic revolutionary ideology over all other ideological formations. Revolutionary Islamism not only emerged as a counter discourse to local variant of the hegemonic western modernity, its promise lay in transcending the cultural and broader ideological legacies and presence of imperialism (Sidaway, 2000: 594).

Completely steeped in discourse of Islam, this revolutionary ideology invoked popular Shi'i imaginaries and symbols which lay great stress on sufferings of Shi'ites at the hands of unjust rulers, and upon the cult of Shi'ite martyrs, Ali and his sons Hassan and Hussein. The use of a religious language by revolutionaries, belonging to both laity and clergy turned opposition against an oppressive monarch into a righteous cause or sacralised the politics of resistance. Hamid Dabashi (1993) notes, originally, it was the mobilizing power of "the Islamic ideology," an outcome of the translation of theological into political and ideological frames and its prominence over complex ideological formations of pre-revolutionary Iran that made a sustained mobilization of people possible.

> The century old exposure to secular ideas, liberal and radical, had left its mark on the Iranian political culture. These secular forces also offered and organized ideological alternatives to the established order. This much is perhaps inevitable and obvious. But there was also the equally

inevitable, however less obvious, outcome of ideological constructions of a hybrid nature. Here, certain religious ideologies began to develop that had latent secular twists; and, conversely, certain secular ideologies were propagated that concealed deep religious sentiments (Dabashi, 1993:10).

Richard Falk (1979) reporting from Tehran at the time of revolution, underlined the indigenous quality of the revolution. "For the first time in the modern world a national revolution owes nothing to Western sources. Its inspiration is quite independent of the legacy of the American, French or Russian Revolutions, and neither Marxism nor liberalism seems to have influenced its leaders to any degree" (Falk, 1979:136). Zohreh Bayatrizi (2015) notes that the Marxist and Marxist-Leninist ideology had limited but significant homology with the slogans of the 1979 revolution, namely its opposition to American imperialism, its suspicion of the capitalist class, and its global social justice gestures (Bayatrizi, 2015: 524). The revolution, for many Iranians was certainly a nationalist, anti-imperialist revolution against the dependence of Reza Khan (who had been restored to throne in 1953 by a coup engineered by CIA) on America. *Estiqlal* or independence in dealing with the world was a key goal of the revolutionaries.

Central to Ali Shariati as well as Khomeini's liberation theology and testimony to modern nature of their thought is "the idea of *the people* as a political force that can effect revolution and transformation; this concept of *the people* in terms of 'the nation' as a political force is distinctly modern" (Zubaida 1993:19, quoted in Aburaiya, 2009:62). The revolutionary discourse, especially the popular narrative of the 'battle of Karbala' constituted a "nation-people" from below and in that it represented, like other "popular-revolutionary nations" against the monarchy – such as those associated with American or French revolution – "a common interest against particular interests, common good against privilege" (Hobsbawm, 1990, quoted in Juergensmeyer, 2014:164). Constituted within the revolutionary ideology of Islam, ethnic group differences were secondary, as they had been to socialists. This revolutionary Islamism in its quest for rooted, collective unity in modern world of self-interested individualism and authentic cultural identity independent of imperialist Western influence was formed within a decolonizing mould. While, clerics, engaged in politicising the masses under the leadership of Khomeini, emerged as the purveyors of this postcolonial revolutionary Islam.

Khomeini exhorted *fuqaha* (Islamic law scholars) to promulgate religion and instruct people in creed, ordinances of Islam, in order to pave the way in society for implementation of Islamic laws and the establishment of Islamic institutions. "This duty is particularly important under the present circumstances, for the imperialists, the oppressive and treacherous rulers, the Jews, Christians, and materialists are all attempting to distort the truths of Islam and lead the Muslims away" (Khomeini, 2002: 114). "To the subjugated people of the Middle East, the West signified not only a geographic entity (Europe) but also a religious system, a history of geopolitical rivalry, and a set of values. To its detractors, the values of Western civilization were primarily negative: materialism, hedonism, secularism, and excessive individualism" (Kohn and Mcbride, 2011: 39). According to Khomeini, alternative interpretations of Islam, especially by imperialists, who were distorting and misrepresenting the truth of Islam through their massive propaganda, provided for conditions of for foreign domination as the unity provided by religion was undermined and in the absence of the government instituting the principles of Islam, the population's morals and constitutions had become naturally weaker, ripe for oppression (Kohn and Mcbride, 2011: 51).

Khomeini argued that the separation of politics and religion was a result of the propaganda of the imperialists and their agents and by aligning with imperialist power and forcing secularisation, the Shah was destroying Islam. "The imperialists know full well how active the religious scholars are, and what an activist and militant religion Islam is. So they drew up a plan to bring the religious scholars into disrepute, and for several centuries propagated the notion that religion must be separated from politics" (Khomeini, 1981:219). It is evident, that Khomeini's religious-political discourse, like religious fundamentalism elsewhere, was an organized criticism and rejection of western modernity, and political agenda of Islamic Republic has entailed resisting western influence and to de-Westernize the international interpretations of modernity (Fox and Sandler, 2004: 14-18). The term fundamentalism here is used to describe militant religious movement with a claim to authority and certitude (Beger, 2003: 340).

Islamists see political Islam not strictly in terms of revival of Islam; they believe secular state to be a western invention, and argue that in their own context Islam is more legitimate than secular Western ideas and values.

**2.2 Battle of Karbala as the Revolutionary Myth**

Georges Sorel, a retired French Civil Servant was one of the most influential thinkers of *fin de siècle* France, who criticised the centralisation of power in modern bureaucratic organisation of state and advocated for "the transformation of bourgeois society by spontaneous collective action of working men and women" (Augelli and Murphy, 1997:26) . He wrote in *Refection on Violence* (1908) of the importance of myth in mobilizing the people in revolutionary process. Sorel, convinced about a new myth of the 'general strike' for an industrial society, presented "early Christian story of redemption as the ultimate model" of a social myth that "produced many heroic acts, engendered a courageous propaganda, and was the cause of a considerable moral progress" (Sorel, 2012: 35).

The onset of revolutionary event in Iran can be traced to January, 1978 when *Ettela'at*, a Persian newspaper supported by the state, published an article attacking Ayatollah Khomeini as a foreign agent and a corrupt man, evoking a strong response from the seminary students as well as the portion of clergy disaffected by the royal court. "On 8 January, student from Qum's religious seminaries began to move in a body from the home of one Ayatollah to another, eliciting statements from religious leaders condemning the article and expressing support for Khomeini. The seminarians, joined by townspeople, continued their protest next day, when the bazaar, many shops and the seminaries were closed as a mark of protest" (Bakhash, 1984: 177). These protests had the effect of making Ayatollah Khomeini the charismatic image of the revolutionary opposition and popular counterpoint to the Shah. The chant of "Death to the Shah," was followed by "Long Live Khomeini" in the protests which began in seminary city of Qum and spread to rest of the country. Khomeini declared from Najaf – "Islam is fundamentally opposed to the whole notion of monarchy…Monarchy is one of the most shameful and disgraceful reactionary manifestations" (Khomeini, 2013:202). Subsequently, clerics emerged as the most important and radical figures of protest over secular liberals and socialists elements of the movement.

As a religion with its ideas about sovereignty of God or 'Imamate,' its veneration of the ideals of justice and martyrdom in struggle against oppressive

power, reflected in the centrality of the 'battle of Karbala' as the Shi'ite cosmological narrative, Shi'ism had an inherent potential for a revolutionary interpretation. It was a revolutionary reading of the battle of Karbala, which became the historical and doctrinal basis of the Islamic revolution, mobilising the masses in a sustained and uncompromising insurrection under Ayatollah Khomeini's leadership. The martyrdom of Hussain-bin-Ali, the third Shi'ite Imam and his small army of seventy two men in 'battle of Karbala' (680 A.D.), while fighting the powerful army of Ummayad dynast Yazid, who had succeeded his father Muawyiah as the Caliph is of deep emotional significance for Shi'ites. It has imbued them with a deep sense of "existential injustice," as well as cult of martyrdom (Motashari, 2005).

The writings of Ali Shariati, a Sorbonne graduate, had given a particularly "scientific" legitimacy to conceptualisation of what he termed as "red" or revolutionary Shi'ism as against "black" institutionalised religion which legitimised power. "In fact he brought the modern concepts of 'class,' 'class struggle' and 'revolution' into the Shi'ite Islamic discourse, popularising the battle of Karbala as the historical stage of a pre-modern revolution" (Bayat, 2008:104). Calling the battle of Karbala as the ultimate revolution of oppressed led by Imam Hussain, the 'doyen of martyrs,' Khomeini compared the Shah with Yazid, the ultimate evil in Shi'i imaginary. It was in powerful symbols of the battle of Karbala that 'injustice' was now perceived and defined and people's struggle assumed its revolutionary meaning. Dabashi (1993) argues that "perhaps single most important mobilizing rhetoric in 'Islamic ideology' was its insistence on the dichotomous battle between the 'justice,' on the side of revolutionaries and 'injustice,' on the part of the established leadership" (Dabashi, 1993:506). Khomeini argued that struggle of Imam Hussein was not just about leadership of *umma*, but defending Islam from being appropriated by an unjust monarchy. "The danger that Muawiyah and Yazid posed for Islam did not lie in their usurpation of the caliphate; this was a danger less than that of their attempting to turn Islam into the form of a monarchy…They wanted to render spiritualties into a tyrant form" (Khomeini, 1981:8). In this context religious subjectivity of the masses is fused into a political subjectivity about this-worldly concerns of toppling an unjust monarchy. The simplified popular religious imaginaries of the battle of Karbala turned Shi'i Islam into ethic of struggle in the face of powerful enemy, which worked as a de-facto modern ideology: a coherent set of ideas expressing conflicting interests.

Transforming Islam into a political ideology of liberation and self-determination, Khomeini argued that "Islam is the religion of militant individuals who are committed to truth and justice and those who desire freedom and independence. It is the school of those who struggle against imperialism" (Khomeini, 1981: 8). The regimes that did not implement the Islamic law were labelled by Khomeini as polytheistic, and their leaders as unjust usurpers or tyrannical ruler (*taghut*), who must be revolted against by the people. By arguing that true religion can be realised by individual in destroying the existing structures of domination, Khomeini spiritualised the politics of resistance.

> "My dear ones! Avoid all disagreement, for disagreement is the work of devil, continue your sacred movement in unison for the sake of the ultimate goal, which is the overthrow of the corrupt Pahlavi regime and liberation of the destiny and resources of our country from foreign control. Fear nothing in your pursuit of these Islamic goals, for no power can halt this great movement. You are in the right; the hand of God Almighty is with you, and it is His will that those who have been oppressed should assume leadership and become heirs to their own destiny and resources" (Khomeini, 1981, 240-41).

In the activist interpretation of Islam, Shiite teachings of passivity, messianic expectations and mourning the martyrs of battle of Karbala were discarded in favour of new interpretations valuing human agency and 'the people' as revolutionary force for change. In November, 1978, in the month of Muharram amidst ritual commemorations of *Ashura*, the martyrs of the revolution, that is people who died in clashes with security agencies, were also commemorated. It was in this month that the confrontation with the Shah was advanced to the point of no return as the people became unanimous in their demand of the overthrow of the Shah. In his address issued from France, Khomeini declared that Muharram is

> the month of epic heroism and self-sacrifice – the month of victory of blood over sword, the month in which truth condemned falsehood for all eternity and branded the mark of disgrace upon the forehead of all oppressors and satanic governments; the month that has taught successive generations throughout history the path of victory over bayonet; the month that proves the superpowers may be defeated by the word of truth; the month in which the leader of the Muslims taught us how to struggle against all the tyrants of history, showed us how the clenched fists of those who sought freedom, desire independence, and proclaim the truth may triumph over tanks, machine guns, and the armies of Satan, how the world of truth may obliterate falsehood (Khomeini, 1981:305).

In this Islamic ideology of revolution, the models of revolution were no less significant than the entire household of the first Shi'ite Imam Ali, which in Shi'ite imagination was defender of the truth of Islam, especially the traditional popular commemoration of the martyrdom of his son Imam Husain unleashed the religious passion of the masses in defying the monarch. In a declaration he made from France

forty days after the Tehran massacre of "Black Friday," Khomeini compared the martyrs of the revolution with those of battle of Karbala.

> It is as if blood of our martyrs were the continuation of the blood of the martyrs of Karbala, and as if the commemoration of our brothers were the echo of the commemoration of those brave ones who fell at Karbala. Just as their pure blood brought to end the tyrannical rule of Yazid, the blood of our martyrs has shattered the tyrannical monarchy of the Pahlavis (Khomeini, 1981: 249).

When so many revolutionaries died during the revolution, it further fed into the revolutionary zeal of the masses. The slogans such as "Either victory or martyrdom" marked the uncompromising posture of revolutionaries mobilised against a demonized monarchy. "Karbala paradigm" is a term used by Michael Fisher for the centrality of Karbala narrative in Shi'i culture and its contemporary use in giving acts of rebellion a systematic basis and shaping political culture of Iran (Husseini, 2010: 805).

## 2.3 American Hostage Crisis: Constructing an Ideological Other and a Geopolitical Foe

The American hostage crisis started on November 4, 1979 when a radical group of students called 'Muslim Students Following the Line of the Imam' seized the American embassy in Tehran and held more than sixty Americans hostage for 444 days (Jahanpour, 1992: 33). The takeover of the embassy happened on the back of a massive anti-American demonstrations in response to President Carter's decision to give the deposed Shah entry into United States which itself had followed a meeting between Iran's liberal Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan and US National Security Advisor, Zbiginew Brzezinski in Algiers, on the side-lines of National Day celebration of Algeria. Khomeini viewed these events with suspicion and forced the resignation of Bazargan's government, leading to purges of liberal and leftist figures of the leadership and gains for Ayatollah Khomeini and the fundamentalist clerics (Jahanpour, 1992: 34).

Islamic Revolution had not only overthrown the Pahlavi monarchy causing instability in the region, it also deprived America of a strong pillar of CENTO and geopolitical influence in the region. In early months, Khomeini and revolutionary leadership feared that CIA was co-ordinating with the Shah's secret service SAVAK in plotting against revolution and former agents of SAVAK were trying to provoke clashes between Islamic groups and left forces and unleash a civil war (Jahanpour,

1992). For the purpose of expressing sense of national unity Khomeini called on "Unity demonstration" in Tehran on July 21, 1979 (Tulsiram, 1981:89). More than a million people took part in the demonstration, chanting slogans like "*Khomeini Rehabare Ma Ast—America Dushman-e-Ma Ast"* (Khomeini is our leader and America is our enemy) and "*Rahe Imam Pirooz Ast—America! America! Risaye Har Fasad Ast"* (The path of Imam is path of victory and America is the root of all troubles) (Tulsiram, 1981: 90). Khomeini's decision to support anti-American forces was also emboldened by Carter administration's anti-revolutionary attitude underlined by "Secretary of Defence Harold Brown's visit to the region as revolutionaries captured power in Iran and his unprecedented statement that the US itself would defend its vital interest in Gulf oil supplies by military force 'if appropriate'" (Ramazani, 1989: 207). Other provocative factors included the US negotiations with Oman, Somalia, and Kenya for military facilities, and the dispatch of the *USS Constellation* and sending of several supporting warships to the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea, as well as strengthening of the small US naval force in the Gulf itself (Ramazani, 1989: 207).

Islamists supremacy over the Islamic Republic, declared on April 1, 1979 after a country wide referendum, sweeping victory of Khomeini supporters in elections for the Constituent assembly and Khomeini's declaration that the "New Constitution should be 100 per cent Islamic and everything must be Islamic in Iran" was enabled by the radicalised anti-imperialist atmosphere produced by the hostage crisis. In the hostile international atmosphere, Islamists projected themselves as the only forces capable of saving the revolution and republic from imperialism and Zionism. The Bazargan government was constantly criticised for being pro-West. With the takeover of the U.S. embassy, student supporters of IRP were able to buttress their revolutionary credibility by taking credit for their 'anti-imperial' and 'revolutionary' action, using secret documents at the embassy as a tool for discrediting the Western educated liberals in Bazargan's government as 'American agents' (Irfani, 1983: 191-92). Skocpol (1982) notes that "in the classic social revolutions, liberals and democratic socialists – people who wanted to limit or to decentralise state power – invariably lost out to political leadership able and willing to mobilise and channel mass support for the creation of centrally controlled agencies of coercion and administration" (Skocpol, 1982:276).

One major effect of the hostage crisis, was that it "fused the extremist dimension of the divergent worldviews remaining within the revolutionary coalition: radical anti-Westernism and vehemently Islamist self-identification" (Meloney, 2002 quoted in Hurd, 2004: 121). Bazargan had pursued a policy of non-alignment, based on historical principle of "negative equilibrium" that sought to maintain Iran's independence within the context of existing international system of nation-states. "The new idealistic revolutionary orientation in essence defied that system, its norms of diplomatic behaviour, and its international law (Ramazani, 1989: 206). This new orientation contending the previous one was based on a radical interpretation of Khomeini's transnational ideal of what Ramazani terms as "Islamic world order" (Ramazani, 1989: 206). The hostage crisis led to a major realignment in Iran's foreign policy by mobilising radical forces of secular and Islamic left in a new anti-imperialist front against the United States and the West in general, while helping the advocates of forming alliance with radical Third World states and the Soviet Union to gain an upper hand (Ashraf and Banuazizi, 2001:242). Within a week of hostage taking, on November 11, 1979, Iran became a member of Non-Aligned Movement and a month later it sever ties with Moroccan regime deemed as American affiliate.

Khomeini argued that America is the number one enemy of Iran, dubbed the 'Great Satan.' The intention behind the use of religious metaphor to portray an enemy is to construct a stable and lasting enemy not just for the state but at the level of the society. The demonization of the United States was not just geopolitical in terms of threat to the physical security of the regime, but in religious-ideological terms, American liberal secular political values were seen as threat to Islam. It was to rid Iran of American influence that Khomeini called the hostage crisis "Iran's second revolution, more important than the first one" (Khomeini, 1983: 301). The new constitution defined Islamic identity of Iran, in terms of "purging itself of foreign ideological influences, returning to authentic intellectual standpoints and world-view of Islam."

Thus, the anti-American discourse of the Islamist regime was deeply tied with the domestic project of enforcing the social-cultural project of Islamization of the society. The conservatives and hardliners perception of the West was shaped by pre-revolutionary past when Western influences were seen as *gharbzadegi* or 'Westoxification,' disease or contagion eating away at the body politic of Iran,

compromising its political autonomy and cultural identity. The Islamic revolution was therefore a total break with this past, changing the trajectory of country's future. As a result Western cultural and political influences are seen as threatening the revolution itself.

The revolutionaries appropriated reductive binaries of East and West, constructed to establish imperialist superiority and legitimise domination of the East, as discursive device for the paradoxical purpose of decolonization, for eliminating the Western influences and distancing from the West in order to defend its own independence.

> The norms and desires of "western life" came to mark the 'difference' or critical boundary for the Islamic identity. Claiming that the desires for Western culture were anathema to Islamic piety and purity, Islamic religious leaders and jurists in Iran premised much of their revolutionary discourse and religious and institutional policies on driving away the desirability and force of Western culture (Deylami, 2008:72).

The clerics used *fatva* (binding religious judgement) and encouraged vigilantism amongst Revolutionary Guards to stop private activities, considered un-Islamic by the clerical regime. Richard Cottam (1989) notes that in the authoritarian populist Islamic regime, primary source of coercion against the opposition is not governmental terror instruments like SAVAK, but decentralisation of terror by a section of population fully willing and able to defend it internally including brutalizing those who are in opposition. These politically and ideologically assertive loyalists in local committees, the Revolutionary Guards, and youths described as *hizballahi* were seen as fearsome enforcers (Cottam, 1989: 178).

Elizabeth Shakman Hurd notes "the revolution certainly threatened U.S. economic and geopolitical interests in the Middle East. Yet it even went far beyond this: It threatened the link between secularization, modernization, and democratization, and in doing so threatened the identity of the United States itself" (Hurd, 2004: 126). Part of US hostility towards revolutionary Iran can be understood as a result of the historical tendency of the United States to affirm its identity through "demonization of non-secular, non-U.S. others." In addition, the humiliation suffered during hostage crisis prompted it to adopt the "doctrine of 'regime change' towards Iran, to that end, the US relied on a combination of, among other things, supporting Iraq during perhaps the bloodiest Middle East war of the 20th century, subversion policies, draconian sanctions, covert operations and support of militant groups" (Shahidsaless, 2015).

4<sup>th</sup> of November, the day when American diplomats were taken hostage is commemorated as the Anti-Global Arrogance day, as a high historic point in Iran's struggle against imperialism and celebrating the revolutionary role of students.

## 2.4 Islamic Revolution and the Soviet Union

The triumph of a popular Islamic revolution toppling a pro-West monarchy, establishing an Islamist regime which quickly reversed the political-strategic orientation of the former regime, along with starting a process of de-westernization was publicly hailed by Soviet Union. Soviet leader Breznev expressed the hope that "good neighbourliness will fruitfully develop" and congratulated Khomeini on the occasion of the proclamation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Hiro, 1985: 283). It reflected Khomeini's awareness of geopolitical realities that "his first meeting with a foreign envoy was with the Soviet ambassador, Vladimir M. Vinogradov, on February 25, 1979" (Emery, 2013:111). Soviet officials repeatedly stated that "during the Iranian people's struggle against the monarchy the USSR resolutely sided with the Iranian revolution and did everything to prevent outside interference in Iran's affairs and to block plans for armed intervention against the revolution" (Pravda, 4, April 1979, quoted in Tarock, 1998: 33). Even if the revolution had removed many previous barriers for good relations between the Soviet Union and Iran such as the "operation of American intelligence on Iranian territory, Iran's role as the surrogate of the United States in the Persian Gulf, its alliance with the West, and Shah's suppression of the Communist party," the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan became an stumbling block in addition to the ideological anti-imperialism of revolutionary regime which precluded cooperation from hegemonic superpowers (Tarock, 1998: 33). Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was criticised by the regime from its first days in power.

Khomeini called on the people of Afghanistan to rise up against the puppet Communist government. Iran while did not become part of the Washington-Islamabad-Riyadh axis that supported jihad against Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, partly because it didn't want to appear overtly hostile Soviet Union, seen as a counterweight to the United States (Milani, 2010). But, concerned about the spread of Saudi Wahhabism and its despise for Shiʻi, Iran followed a Shiʻite centric policy of extending ideological and military support to Shiʻite *Hazaras* of central Afghanistan and housed about 1.5 million Afghan refugees on its territory (Milani, 2010).

However, staunch anti-Americanism of Islamist leadership, especially in the wake of the U.S. embassy hostage crisis worked in the favour of Soviet Union. When United States and its NATO allies tried to impose economic sanctions against Iran through the Security Council, it was vetoed by the Soviet Union in early January 1980 (Tulsiram, 1985: 90).

## 2.5 Ideological Nature of the 'Islamic Republic' and its Institutional Duality

The assertion of the collective self-determination of 'the people' in Islamic revolution redefined the Iranian 'nation' in terms of a new political imagination. The nation as political imagination steeped in a religio-political ideology had to be carefully constructed by mobilising the masses beyond the founding revolutionary moment. The making of an Islamic nation, therefore became an open ended process for the Iranian revolutionaries. Postcolonial revolutionaries preoccupied with decolonization "favoured the notion that reconstructing the people whom the state was to govern would be the only way to create genuine self-determination" (Kohn and Mcbride, 2011: 57). They didn't envision a state design that would be inherently democratic, institutionally providing a voice for postcolonial subjects; instead by establishing an ideological regime, they sought to make a decisive break from the past but also "creating a permanent form of decolonization" (see Kohn and Mcbride, 2011: 56). Proper institutionalisation of the revolutionary values was deemed necessary for defending the independence of the nation. In a speech he gave in *Bihisht-i-Zahra* on 2 February 1979 Khomeini declared, - "The government I intend to appoint is a government based on divine ordinance, and to oppose it is to deny God."

Hamid Dabashi (1993) observes that the doctrine of *vilayat-e-faqih* or "the authority of the jurist" was formulated by Khomeini as a quintessentially "religious" alternative to the status quo (Dabashi, 1993:11). It was a postcolonial political strategy to ensure independence and decolonization. Offering an explanation for the imperial subordination of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini argued that the disestablishment of Islam from state was a result of imperialism in Iran and all over the world. Tracing the effective separation of religion and politics in the wake of the constitutional revolution of 1906 in Iran, he criticized the constitutional rule based upon alien and borrowed laws, which thrust upon the people an un-Islamic constitution, an instrument of imperialists (British) interests.

"Khomeini's notion of state power as a tool to produce a utopian Islamic society was borrowed from Pakistani ideologue Abu Al-Ala Maududi, whose works he translated in Farsi in 1963" (Mishra, 2017: 153). Rejecting the idea of historical progress, Khomeini explicitly proposed a return to an earlier model of social and political practice and a rejection of many aspects of modernity (Halliday, 1995:44). Islamic Republican Party, which claimed to be loyal to Khomeini's vision, defined "Islamic society as one in which Islamic values, rules and laws govern all social relations, even if not all its members are practicing Muslims" (quoted in Chelabi, 2000: 53). "Given the manner in which Islam seeks to legislate for many areas of social activity, this religious imprint has involved an attempt to transform law, culture, polity and social practices in Iran in line with the model supposedly elaborated in the seventh century AD" (Halliday, 1996 : 44). Khomeini who saw it as state's responsibility to establish a perfect Islamic society that would serve as an example to the rest of the world and showed his vigorous contempt for "the religion of modern age – economic growth and material improvement" when he argued that Iran's revolution was not about the price of melons (Mishra, 2017: 152).

Said Amir Arjomand (1986) compares Iranian Islamic revolution with inter-war Fascist revolution and their militant cultural nationalism. He argues, "Fascism was a revolution, but one which thought of itself in cultural and not economic terms. The same is true of the Islamic Revolution, which emphatically saw itself in those terms—even when not explicitly so, as in the 'Islamic cultural revolution' against westernism and (Eastern) atheistic communism inaugurated with the closing of universities in April 1980 (Arjomand, 1986:403). As a result, Islamist discourse emerged as the only publicly allowed mode of nationalist expression.

The notion of political religion captures 'the sacralisation of political system founded on unchallengeable monopoly of power, ideological monism, and the obligatory nature of its code and commandments' (Gentile, 2006 quoted in Mozaffari, 2009a:13).  In case of Iran it was instead a politicised religion that came to become the foundational ideology of the Islamic Republic which resembled the totalitarian state of 'political religion' of secular totalitarian regimes based on Communism and Nazi Socialism. Islam was transformed not only into a persuasive ideology of social revolution but also into legitimizing narrative of  a government which had both divine therefore absolutist as well as a representational characters. However, "Islamism is

more than merely a 'religion' in the narrow sense of the theological belief, private prayer and ritual worship, for it also serves as a total ways of life with guidance for political, social and economic behaviour" (Shepard, quoted in Mozaffari, 2007:20). "While 'Islam' is general, elusive, and ambiguous phenomenon, 'Islamism' as an ideology represents coherent, specific, and identifiable construction" (Mozaffari, 2007: 22). In terms of its totalitarian character, Islamism has an added advantage which is unavailable to its counterparts in the so-called 'political religions.' "Islamism is already a *religious* phenomenon" and therefore "takes its legitimacy from *double* source: *ideology* and *religion*" (Mozaffari, 2007:22). Therefore, the Iranian leadership, in order to foster popular legitimacy for the state and its pursuit of policies of independence and resistance vis-à-vis imperialist powers has sought to politicise the religious faith of the masses.

Khomeini's theory of the guardianship of jurists or *vilayat-e-faqih* was based on the Shi'ite principle of *ghaibat* (occultation) of twelfth Imam and the premise that a state with *shar'i* legitimacy (*hokumat-e shar'i*) – that is a fully legitimate Islamic state – is conceivable even during the occultation of the Infallible Imam. According to the Shi'i political theology, the rightful ruler of Islamic *umma* is the absent 12th Imam. Historically, the role of *ulama* was to provide juridical guidance under the principle of general delegation (*niyabat-e-imam*) or vice-regency of the Hidden Imam. "The guidance of the community is in particular provided by the *mujtahids* (learned jurists) through their power to exercise their own judgement (*ijtihad*) … The obligation of the Twelver Shi'a to follow the direction of a *mujtahid* is based on the duty of obedience to the Hidden Imam" (Martin, 2003: 116). "Since Islamic government is a government of law, those acquainted with the law, or more precisely, with religion – i.e. *fuqaha* – must be leaders and rulers, implementing divine ordinances and establishing the institutions of Islam. It is they who supervise all executive and administrative affairs of the country, together with all planning" (Khomeini, 1981:79). Therefore, jurists mandate also stems from the advice they are able to give from their knowledge of the *shar'i*.

Following the principle of *vilayat-e faqih*, the article 5 of the Constitution vests in a just and pious jurist (*faqih-ye 'adl wa mutalaq*) the office of *Rahbar* (Supreme Leader or Guide), answerable only to God and Imams, essentially representing the sovereignty of God. The religious origin of the institution of *vilayat-*

*e-Faqih* ensured that the Supreme Leader (*Rahbar*) would command, at least theoretically, allegiance of all Muslims who believe in the notion of *imamah*. The essential qualification for the position of Supreme Leader is that a jurist "who is trusted by the people and familiar with divine decrees and fundamentals of Islam to the level of *ijtihad* (independent judgement in legal and theological questions)" can be appointed the Leader by the Assembly of Experts, which itself is elected by the people. The Supreme Leader, therefore, claims to represent the 'general will' though not a manner in which the people have an active and direct voice, and also God's will, which is the ultimate source of state power. In line with Khomeini's argument that "any sovereignty except the sovereignty of God is against the wellbeing of the people and in tyranny [jaur], and except for the laws of God, all laws are void and useless" (*Khomeini: The Revealing of Secrets)* and enforcing these divine ordinances is the responsibility of *fuqaha*, a Guardian Council composed of six *Faqih* (Islamic Jurisprudents) appointed by the Leader and six civil lawyers who are nominated by Supreme Judicial Council and appointed by the Assembly not only vets all the candidates running for Majles and office of President, it also exercises vast legislative control. It checks the legislation passed by the *majles* for compatibility with 'ordinances of Islam' or *shari'a* (article 69) it interprets the constitution, creating precedents for behaviour and fulfilling the role of *vilayat* (article 98) and supervises various elections and referenda (article 57). The supremacy of clerics in the powerful institutions of the *Rahbar* and the Guardian Council is built on their institutionalising of Shiite Islam and essentialising it in the form of a political worldview and eliminating rival discourses of Shi'ism.

The 'notion' of republic clearly implies a limited, political-territorial construct of nation (*mellat*) of Iran and means that sovereignty lies with people. Republic is a wholly western contribution; therefore, Islamic *republic* is uniquely Iranian synthesis. Since Iranian polity combines the two apparently contradictory political traditions, different factions have taken different view of the relation and balance between Islamic and Western traditions, contributing to incoherence and contention in Iranian political culture including its relation vis-à-vis the West. "Republic represents a link with the French revolution and all the revolutions of the twentieth century in the region and outside which have toppled a monarchy" (Zubaida, 1997:105).

Conforming to the republican notion of state, Iran has a written constitution, drafted after wide-ranging and heated debates by an elected Assembly of Experts. The office of the President which is directly elected by the people and the parliament called the Islamic Consultative Assembly represents the republican dimension of Iranian polity. Another constitutional body, Expediency council arbitrates dispute between the *Majles* and the Guardian Council. However, the 'Islamic' in 'Islamic Republic of Iran' means that the republic is headed by *vali-e-faqih* (Guardian Jurist). "Iranian constitution makes the *faqih* the central figure in the political order, enshrines the dominance of clerical constitutional over the institutions of the state, entrenches Islamic jurisprudence as the foundation for the country's laws and legal system and limits individual freedoms to what was considered permissible under the Shi'ite Islam" (Uyar 2007: 27-28).

The theological relation between the institution of *vilayat-e-faqih* and the notion of *imamah* ensured that the guardian jurist would command, at least theoretically, the allegiance of all Muslims who believe in the notion of *imamah*. As a result, in 'Islamic' Republic, the authority of highest state institution centres on the relationship between the *umma* and Imam, that is the body of the believers and the religious leadership of the community. Therefore, the religious authority of *vilayat-e-faqih* is promoted amongst worldwide Shi'ite community by measures such as sending representative of the Supreme Leader to countries with Shi'ite population and transnational organizations such as Imam Khomeini Memorial Trust.

## 2.6 Iranian Exceptionalism: Geopoliticisation of Revolutionary Islam

The uneasy balance between the Westernized intelligentsia and the clergy from 1979 to 1981 meant that "from an official standpoint the government is in command, but from an ideological and revolutionary standpoint Khomeini is in command" (Lake, 1982). Mehdi Bazargan, the first prime-minister of revolutionary Iran belonged to Iran Liberation Front and his foreign minister Sanjabi belonged to National Front; both organizations were secular, nationalist and democratic in nature, drawing their social support from the middle classes and the modern educated intellectuals (Ramazani, 1989: 205). Unlike Khomeini, who believed that prime unit of loyalty for Iranian polity should be Islam, Iran Liberation Front saw itself as a bridge between the secular National Front and Khomeini's religious movement. For them, "the prime unit of people's loyalty to polity was considered to be the Iranian

nation-state" (Ramazani, 1989: 205).  The difference in the place they gave to Islam was captured by Bazargan when he said, "I believe in the service of Iran by means of Islam" while Khomeini "believes in the service of Islam by means of Iran" (quoted in Ramazani, 1989: 205). His government pursued the policy of non-alignment, defending Iran's independence and rejecting both Eastern and Western domination. On the day it cancelled Iran-US defense agreement of March 5, 1959, it also abrogated article V and VI of 1921 Soviet-Iranian treaty, under which Soviet forces could "intervene in Iranian affairs in the interests of self-defence, if a third country threatened to attack the Soviet Union from Iranian territory or if Moscow considered its border threatened" (Rubinstein, 1981: 603; Ramazani, 1989: 205).

With the consolidation of power by conservative and hardliner clerics under the auspices of Khomeini, the debate that whether Iran's foreign policy is to be based on ideology (of Shi'i fundamentalism) or rational pragmatic cost-benefit analysis to protect and promote Iran's national interests was resolved in favour of the ideologues, at least for the time being. This debate was called the *Motekhases* (expert, specialist, competent) vs. *Maktabi* (ideologue, ideological) (Kazemzadeh, 2013: 449).

Any critical study of "geopolitics must be grounded in the particular cultural mythologies of the state;" it should confront and analyse the "geopolitical imagination of the state, its foundational myths and national exceptionalist lore" and "grand narrative providing the broad orientations of a country's long term foreign policy" (Agnew, 1983, quoted in Toal & Dalby, 1999:3; Mamadouh, 2006:3). "Ideologically, the Iranian regime is Islamist – based on the notion of the Islamic *umma (ummat-e-Islam)* as opposed to the Iranian Nation *(Mellat-e-Iran)*" (Mozaffari, 2009:11). "This was both evident both in the cultural shift that accompanied the revolution, which saw the rejection of many features of indigenous Iranian culture as well as values that were regarded as Western, and in the projection of Iran's revolution as the first episode by an insurgent Muslim world in the overthrow of its oppressors" (Halliday, 1996: 44). For instance in the "very early stages of revolution, there had even been attempts to wean Iranians off the celebration of *Nowruz* – short-lived, although the festival of fire (*chahar shanbe* suri) which preceded the new year has regularly if intermittently been condemned by the authorities" (Ansari, 2012 :218).

Ayatollah Khomeini's harshest criticism was reserved for secular nationalist dictators such as Sadat in Egypt, Begin, and Saddam. Khomeini's Islamist discourse

rejected territorial nation-state as a 'stratagem' of the West to divide and colonize Muslim lands. Khomeini argued that the "imperialists and the tyrannical self-seeking rulers have divided the Islamic homeland; they have separated the various segments of the Islamic *umma* from each other and artificially created separate nations" (Khomeini in Algar, 1981: 48). He bemoaned the division of the Ottoman Empire into separate nations by European imperialist powers. His calls for unity of Muslim peoples or nations against the imperialists found expression in imaginative geographies of Islam and the West. Islamist geopolitical vision was that of a besieged Muslim community, *umma,* while United States and Israel were perceived as enemies of Islam whose geopolitical aims were not limited to particular territories, but aimed at the entire Muslim community.

> All Muslims of the world, in particular, the Muslims of Iran, Lebanon and Palestine are facing strong opposition. They have a sensitive road ahead. Iran is confronted by conspirators related to the previous regime, deviates, and international Zionists. Lebanon and Palestine are confronted by the corrupt and devouring Israel, who is the enemy of Islam and Muslims. Our Muslim brothers in Lebanon and Palestine are confronted by the unhumaniatarian aggressions of Israel and if Israel succeeds, it will extend its line of aggression to other countries (Khomeini, 1979, July 26).

Arguing for Islamic unity, Khomeini was essentially rejecting the colonial geopolitical imagination of territorial nation-states imposed from above by the Western imperialist powers. This pan-Islamist imagination was enshrined in the new constitution. The Article 11 of the constitution mandates:

> in accordance with the Koranic verse *"This your community is a single community, and I am your Lord, so worship Me"* [21:92]), all Muslims are one nation and the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran have the duty of formulating its general policies with a view of cultivating the friendship and unity of all Muslim peoples, and it must constantly strive to bring about the political, economic, and cultural unity of the Islamic world (Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

The study argues that after the formation of Islamic Republic of Iran, revolutionary leadership geopoliticised the anti-imperialist, revolutionary, Shi'i Islam. By using revolutionary Shi'i Islam as ideological blueprint for its geopolitics, nascent Islamic Republic tries to create Islamic and revolutionary legitimacy in the Islamic world and also expand its ideological and geopolitical influence in the region, fostering Iranian drive of becoming a regional power. This geopoliticisation was made necessary by the particular theological orientation of Shi'ism.

The "key operative concept constitutional to Shi'ism is that of *mazlumiyyat,* or 'having been wronged' or having been subjected to grave injustice" (Dabashi, 2008:96). The paradigmatic expression of *mazlumiyyat* is Imam Hussein, bestowed

with honorific of *Hussein-e-mazlum* (Hussein, the mazlum/innocent) (Dabashi, 1993: 302). It is because of this key operative concept, Dabashi argues that "Shi'ism is a paradox. It dies at the moment of its success. It succeeds at the moment of its failure" (Dabashi, 2008:96). He argues that in order to retain its ideological power, Shi'ism must be on the side of the victim and oppressed, forever fighting against 'entrenched power' (Dabashi, 2008:96). However, in the process of its politicisation, Shi'ism was simultaneously transformed into a liberation theology as well as a theory of Islamic government headed by jurists.

The revolutionary Shi'ism following the establishment of Islamic republic in Iran was therefore geopoliticised in the sense that in Iran it forms the basis of an Islamic government legitimising state power, but in the external realm, revolutionary nature of Shi'ism is reproduced through discourse of exporting the revolution, support for popular Islamic movements, and opposing American hegemonic power in the region. It is by geopoliticising the Shi'ite ontology of oppressed and oppressor that a postcolonial as well as revolutionary identity of Iranian state is constructed. The revolutionary and ideological power of Shi'ism is therefore articulated by entrenching Iran in a relation of opposition vis-à-vis a hegemonic power, which for all purposes has been the United States.

In his declaration from Qum on April 1, 1979, 'the first day of God's government,' Khomeini stated:

> I offer my sincere congratulations to the great people of Iran, who were despised and oppressed by arrogant kings throughout the history of monarchy. God Almighty has granted us His favour and destroyed the regime of arrogance by His powerful hand, which has shown itself as the power of the oppressed. He has made our great people into leaders and exemplars for all the world's oppressed, and He has granted them their just heritage by the establishment of this Islamic Republic (Khomeini, Algar, 1981:265).

The word arrogance was used by Iranian leaders Khomeini and later appropriated by his successor Khamenei, to signify 'imperialism' within an Islamic parlance. With Islamic Revolution, Iran transformed itself from being oppressed and subjugated by imperialist powers to a beacon of the liberating power of revolutionary Islam to rest of the Islamic *umma*. Islamist leadership in Iran takes a wider conception of the nation of Islam, or 'world of Islam' towards which it has a responsibility, but Iran as the mother of Islamic revolution is considered exceptional and unique.

The revolution which brought real independence by overthrowing imperialist backed monarchy, has endowed Iran with a sense of revolutionary exceptionalism.

The revolutionary Iran saw itself as the elect nation, taking it upon itself to spread its social-revolutionary Islam in order to challenge the US dominated geopolitical order in the region. Khomeini addressed the Muslim people of the world, that "in order to attain the unity and freedom of the Muslim peoples, we must overthrow the oppressive governments installed by the imperialists and bring into existence an Islamic government of justice that will be in the service of the people" (Khomeini, 1970: 24). Sadegh Zibakalam (2009) argues that Iranian exceptionalist thinking "rests on two main pillars: the negation of the present world order and the belief in the inherent superiority of Iranian civilization." Iranian revolutionary exceptionalism translates into a prophetic orientation of championing the rights of 'oppressed' and 'ideological crusade' against the West dominated world order.

In discourse of revolutionary Islam, lines between sacred and political are blurred and resistance is seen as the hallmark of true faith. Geopolitical struggles have been defined in religious terms, allowing the state to justify its defiant positions and exploit the persuasive and emotive power of religion to mobilise the masses against putative diabolical enemies. Khomeini's decision to sign ceasefire with Iraq in 1988 after eight years of costly and fruitless war was evocative of exceptionalist self-imagination of Iran as an Islamic nation which never colludes with oppressive powers and is a lone principled nation in the world:

> O God! You are aware that we do not collude even for a moment with America, the Soviet Union and other global powers, and that we consider collusion with superpowers and other powers as turning our back on Islamic principles. O' God! We are alone in a world of polytheism, blasphemy, division, money, power, deceit and double dealing, and we seek your help (Khomeini, 1988, quoted in Mishal and Goldberg, 2014:47).

Iranian armed forces, according to its constitution are not only responsible for defence of the nation, but have to be organised on the basis of faith, ideology of the Islamic revolution and have a responsibility in "fulfilling the ideological mission of *jihad* in God's way, that is, extending the sovereignty of God's law throughout the world" (Islamic Republic of Iran, Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

### 2.7 Islamic Republic as a Subaltern Revolutionary Regime

Islamic Republic can be seen as a typical postcolonial state seeking to construct a nativist identity and independent state, based on complete exclusion of the political ideology and culture of the imperialist, hegemonic powers.

> In a post colonialist approach, the drawing of boundaries between own space and other space is regarded as the decisive moment of geopolitical discourse. Not dissimilar to the tenets of

structuralist thought, a post-colonial geopolitics will interrogate the binary oppositions and closures upon which geopolitical identities are built and seek to examine the disciplining and regulatory effects of these closures (Muller and Reuber, 2008: 466).

Joanne Sharp (2013) argues that "critical geopolitics remains a western way of knowing which has been much less attentive to other traditions of thinking through international politics and the role of the nation and citizen within these narratives." She refers to the "discourses and practices of Pan-Africanism which sought to forge alternative post-colonial worlds to the binary geopolitics of the Cold War and the geopolitical economy of neo-colonialism" as "subaltern geopolitics" (Sharp, 2013:20).

The image of Shi'ism as justice seeking religion and representing the downtrodden masses against unjust and oppressive power is at the core of the revolutionary Iran's worldview. The Islamic ideal of justice was the most significant in defining the religio-political vision of Islamic revolution. The revolution as a revolt of *mostazfin* or the 'barefoot' against the mighty oppressive power was driven by a notion of 'divine justice.' One wonders if Iran's justice seeking geopolitics of supporting popular Islamic movement against Israeli occupation in Palestine and Lebanon, its discourse of revolutionary pan-Islamism seeking to mobilise Muslim masses to overthrow governments established by imperialists and the calls of Islamic unity against enemies can be seen as subaltern geopolitics. Iranian revolutionaries found structural explanation of the causes of the backwardness and subservience of Muslims in their cultural and political domination by western imperialist powers. To the extent, revolutionary Islamism imagines an alternative political order in terms of an Islamic Republic at the level of state and globally in terms of Islamic unity against imperialist oppressive structures, it has a subaltern character, but given exclusionary geopolitical vision of the Islam and the West as self-contained and dichotomous categories, it deteriorates into another repressive structure. Furthermore, Islamic Republic's antagonistic geopolitical posturing vis-à-vis the West justified and cultural purification in terms of revolutionary ideology of Islam sabotages the democratic and civic aspirations of the Iranian people.

However, it must be noted that the totalitarian tendencies of the Islamic Republic and its rigid ideological view are not rooted in some inherently revolutionary disposition of Islam as a religion but rooted in a postcolonial geopolitical imagination within the Western dominated international order.

Islamism as much as is defined by its opposition to the Western imperialism and secular ideologies, Western hegemonic powers for their part have disregarded the Islamist voice, giving certain credibility to the subaltern claims of institutional political Islam. Islam has been singled out in the West as uniquely supportive of the mixing of religion and politics, because unlike other manifestations of politicised religion in Western societies and elsewhere such as Hindutva in India, "Islamists stubbornly refuse to accept the current distribution of power in the international system as either legitimate or permanent" (Ayoob, 2004:10). In the mutually hostile relations between popular Islamist movements and Western hegemonic powers, a subaltern logic is all too visible. "The subaltern cannot speak and those in the center will not or cannot listen. The center of the western discourse will also produce arguments that legitimate its disregard of the Islamist voice, For instance, Islamists will be labelled as undemocratic and therefore not worth negotiating with" (Thurfjell, 2008: 160).

In geopolitical imagination of United States, political Islam is defined from outside, or the Islamist voice is deauthorised in the sense there is no engagement with it as it is defined by its own proponents, but rather the insecurities or opposing characters of the values central to the secular order are projected on to the political Islam. Shakman Hurd (2004) argues that secularism also has "doctrinal qualities and while it defines itself by marginalizing the religious, due to its cosy historical relationship with Judeo-Christianity, it defines itself most stridently in opposition to Islam" (Hurd, 2004: 131). "There is a productive relation between secularism and the religious others it identifies and sometimes vilifies. In order to sustain its identity as democratic, secularism projects in own undemocratic, violent tendencies onto a religious other" (Hurd, 2004: 131). The securitization through claims that secular order or religious orders are threatened by each other precludes any dialogical interaction or a mutual acceptance of right to exist by the two, and perpetuates exclusivist geopolitical imaginations.

## 2.8 Exporting the Revolution: Religious Geopolitics or Geopolitics of Religion?

Anoushiravan Ehteshami (2002) argues that while the revolution did sap the energies of the state, the *preconditions* for a major Iranian presence in the region were never removed. "The reduction in vital state energy was compensated for by the

Islamic ideology of the revolutionary regime, a power source previously untapped by the imperial regime" (Ehteshami, 2002:160). As far as the export of the revolution was concerned, it was 'religious geopolitics,' in which an anti-imperialist geopolitics was expressed in the language of Shi'i Islam; it was 'geopolitics of religion' to the extent revolutionary leadership was also motivated by the revolutionary zeal of spreading the true Muhammadan Islam of the revolution in the Islamic *umma*.

Bassam Tibi (2014) points out that Islamism whether institutional or jihadist "is not merely a political religion, as earlier secular ideologies were. It claims to rest on the salvation of real religion." Khomeini believed in the universal validity of Islam and its export to the rest of the world. Khomeini called on the Iranians,

> We should try hard to export [its] revolution to the world, and should set aside the thought that we do not export our revolution, because Islam does not regard various Islamic countries differently and is the supporter of all the oppressed people of the world. If we remain in an enclosed environment we shall definitely face defeat. We should clearly settle our accounts with the powers and superpowers and should demonstrate to them that, despite all the great difficulties that we have; we shall confront the world with ideology (Khomeini: "We Shall Confront the World with Our Ideology," 1980).

However in the same speech he added that the way to export revolution is by setting an example of good behaviour, but idealists overlook the fact that the call to establish an Islamic world order is what Khomeini called an expression of hope (Ramazani, 1989: 209). Ayatollah Khomeini believed that the success of the Islamic revolution has shown that in Islam, Muslim people had a model of rising up against the imperialist installed governments and establish an Islamic model of government. In a speech in 1980, Ayatollah Khomeini urges the people to rediscover their 'true identity' and 'culture of Islam' and 'resist western imitation.'

> Muslims the world over who believe in the truth of Islam, arise and gather under the banner of *tauhid* and the teachings of Islam! Repel the treacherous superpowers from your countries and your abundant resources. Restore the glory of Islam, and abandon your selfish disputes and differences, for you possess everything! Rely on the culture of Islam, resist Western imitation, and stand on your own feet. Attack those intellectuals who are infatuated with the West and the East, and recover your true identity (Khomeini, 1981:304).

Laying the foundation of a religious geopolitics, Khomeini argued that it was the mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to revive the political ideology of Islam in the Muslim lands and help people resist the hegemony of the West and the East. Independence from and struggle against imperialist powers was defined as the primary purpose of triumphant political revolution of Islam. Khomeini regarded the Persian Gulf rulers as corrupt men who fostered what he called 'American Islam' or 'Golden Islam.' The 'American Islam' in Ayatollah Khomeini's view was an

antithesis of revolutionary Islam or 'pure Muhammadan Islam, which Islamic Republic stands for. In Khomeini's words "American Islam is the Islam of the arrogant and the indolent wealthy, the Islam of the hypocrites, and the Islam of the luxury mongers and opportunists" (Imam Khomeini, and the Idea of the Grand Islamic State and Free and Independent Republics, Part I). It is the depoliticised version of a true faith, devoid of revolutionary sentiment that guides the Islamic republic' (Tableu, 2015).

Once Islam was politicised into an unambiguous and persuasive ideology of anti-imperialism and social revolution to mobilise the masses and legitimised the revolutionary regime in Iran, the Islamic claims of regional monarchies which supported American hegemony in the region were effectively challenged, not only by Iran, but also from within. The operational strategy of Iranian revolutionary pan-Islamism distinguished between states, whose claims of Islamic legitimacy were publically challenged while the Muslim masses of these states were seen as potential allies, who can be mobilised through ideology of Islamic revolution.

For revolutionary Iran, universalistic religion of Islam marked the boundaries of proselytizing mission that export of revolution involved, but the immediate and most significant targets were dictated by geopolitical aim of creating an Islamist regional order replacing the one based on American hegemony. In other words, even if Iranian leaders saw export of revolution in terms of a religious cause, its attempts to spread revolutionary Islamism and other regional states effort to contain it played a pivotal role in defining the geopolitics in the region. The Islamists who see a role for Islamic Republic outside Iran in terms of revolutionary pan-Islamism are called *Khomeinist* or *Vilayatist* to be distinguished from Iranian Islamists who emphasize the republican and nationalist dimension of Islamic Revolution over its globalist mission. Soon after the revolution, Iran began using Islamic emissaries, acting on the behalf of its religious leadership and acting independently of its official embassies (Chicago Tribune, 1979: 22, quoted in Donovan, 2010: 88). Khomeini appointed Ayatollah Ali Montazeri in-charge of implementing the policy of 'export of the revolution.' Montazeri established a special mechanism operating through the Bureau of Liberation Movements, which was composed of the members of the newly founded Revolutionary Guards, the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Islamic Guidance (Shapira, 2013).

For Sunni kingdoms and authoritarian rulers, Khomeini's radical Islam was a bigger threat than the Shah's imperial ambitions ever were. In fact, "Iran under the Shah had its advantages for the Arab Shiekhdoms. To Kuwait, the Shah was the guarantor against any attack from Iraq, for Saudi Arabia, Iran was a fellow financial superpower which shared Riyadh's anti-communism and for Oman the Shah was an active ally against South Yemen" (Andrew, quoted in Tulsiram, 1985: 101). In the wake of Islamic revolution in Iran and its empowering effect on Shi'ites in in Kuwait, Bahrain and eastern provinces of Saudi Arabia made Sunni monarchical regimes see them as potential fifth columns susceptible to Iranian influence. The situation was particularly serious for Bahrain, where Shah's claim of sovereignty over Bahrain were now reinvented in terms of inciting Shi'i population against the Sunni ruling family. Ayatollah Sadeq Rouhani, a key Khomeini associate argued that Iranian parliament's 1970 decree surrendering its claim over Bahrain was null and void, since the parliament was illegal. Accusing the Emir of Bahrain of oppressing his own people, he argued that we hope that only two things will come to pass in Bahrain, either restoration of Islamic laws or annexation to the Islamic Republic of Iran (Tulsiram, 1985: 103). In December, 1981, Bahraini government claimed to have unearthed a plot to overthrow the government and accused Iran of involvement in the plot (Rizvi, 1982: 31). A charge which rang with other kingdoms, for Iran had established and harboured Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain and Islamic Revolution Organization of the Arabian Peninsula.

Around the same time, Saudi branch of the Shirazi movement, a transantional Shiite political organization formed by Iraqi-Iranian cleric Muhammad al-Shirazi with the intention of promoting Iranian revolution in Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula, organized a short-lived uprising in 1979 (Mouzahem, 2013). After uprising was crushed, more radical of Shirazi leaders exiled themselves to Iran and Syria (Matthiensen, 2016). The challenge of the trans-national Shi'ite movement under the influence of Islamic revolution and the revolutionary propaganda and demonstrations by Iranian pilgrims on *hajj* in Saudi Arabia hardened a sectarian attitude among Sunni government who united against Iran's Islamic radicalism. To deal with the challenge of internal subversion supported by Iran and existing danger of Soviet penetration of the region, Sunni kingdoms of Kuwait, UAE, Oman, Bahrain and Qatar and Saudi Arabia formed Gulf Cooperation Council in May, 1981 ( Rizvi, 1982:32).

Similarly, in Pakistan, Shi'ite minority was galvanised by the success of Iranian revolution. They successfully mobilised to defy General Zia-ul-Haq's drive of Islamisation along Hanafi fiqh. Sh'ites in Pakistan refused to give religious tax, *zakat* to the state, while demanded state "subsidies for pilgrimage to holy shrines, jobs for Shia clerics in Shariat courts and even guarantees for inviting Shia scholars from Iraq and Iran to visit Pakistan in the same way that visits of Saudi scholars were being sponsored" (Rajani, 2016). When state outrightly rejected, a huge gathering was mobilised near Lal Masjid in Islamabad, and later a twelve hour siege of the federal secretariat forcing government to accept their demands (Rajani, 2016).

The call for export of Islamic revolution created panic among most Sunni rulers, but Iraq, Khomeini's former home-in-exile and land of six Shia holy sites, became the prominent destination for the export of the revolution. During his sojourn there, Khomeini had become close to Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, head of the Islamic Call Society (*al-d'awa*), a movement which opposed Baathist secularisation of Iraqi society and advocated a political revolution of Islam (Abels 2016). After Khomeini was back in Iran, Sadr sent congratulations and praised his plans to implement a *faqih* regime. When Ayatollah Baqir-al-Sadr tried to take a congratulatory procession to Tehran, he was placed under house arrest by Saddam, who accused Iran of actively supporting Iraqi Shi'ite movement. Subsequently, Saddam banned the D'awa party and threatened its supporters with execution. Shi'i responded with mass demonstrations in several Iraqi cities. In March 1980, Saddam had scores of *al-d'awa* leaders executed for their alleged anti-state activities. In retaliation the following month Iraqi Shia Islamists made an attempt on the life of Tariq Aziz, Saddam's Christian deputy. Saddam responded by having Sadr executed in the same month. The attack on Tariq Aziz and its consequences signified a critical turning in Iraqi-Iranian relations. Saddam got increasingly insecure and vengeful towards Shiite Islamists who might have any ties with Iran, whereas Iran accused Saddam of expelling up to 40,000 Iranians from Iraq (Donovan, 2010: 90). Iran responded to expulsion of Iranian civilians and diplomats and the murder of Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al- Sadr by stepping up its anti-Baathist campaign and arming Iraqi Kurds. To top it all, Ayatollah Khomeini called on the Iraqi people to overthrow Hussein. The Iraqi invasion of Iran embroiled the two countries in an eight year long

war, turning Iraq the single most important theatre of geopolitics for revolutionary Iran.

In 1982, Iranian Revolutionary Guards helped in establishing a Shiite political party called the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution (SCIRI) in Shi'i dominated Southern Iraq. Headed by Ayatollah Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim, SCIRI was to lead a resistance movement with the aim of toppling the military rule of Saddam Hussein. Muhammad al- Hakim was son of the late Grand Ayatollah Mohsen al-Hakim, had been associated with Dawa party till 1960 and after that he was part of the broader Shiite political movement in Iraq and subjected to persecution at the hand of Saddam regime. "Hakim was forced to flee Iraq in 1980 and eventually settled in Iran, where he helped organise former Dawa insiders and other Shiite activists under a succession of opposition fronts that later metamorphosed into SCIRI in November" (Abedin, 2003). Under the tutelage of IRGC, SCRI established a military wing in1983, called the Badr brigade. This force quickly grew into a fully-fledged corps and joined regular IRGC forces on front lines during Iran-Iraq war.

The political success of Islam in the revolution transformed Shi'ism into a theory and praxis of struggle against imperialism. Iran's pan-Islamist anti-imperialist geopolitics has enabled it to expand its religious and geopolitical influence across the Muslim world. For instance, in Nigeria where Islamic movement emerged in context of colonialism and Christian evangelism, Ibrahim al-Zakzaky had been preaching Islam as an alternative model to socialism and capitalism. After he travelled to Iran in 1980, he adopted the symbolism and rhetoric of Ayatollah Khomeini on top of the ideology of the later Sunni Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood founder, Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb and went on to found the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (Zenn, 2013). The successful Islamic revolution was seen as a model by Zakzaky, who converted into Shi'ism when he was imprisoned in mid 1980s. Al-Zakzaky said,

> The Islamic Awakening started when Allah blessed this *Ummah* with people like Shaykh Hassan al-Banna, Maudidi, Sayyid Qutb and Imam Khomeini… but above all the last two made the greatest impact. Sayyid Qutb made his impact ideologically, for he was executed by tyrants before he could realize his theory. As for Imam Khomeini, he is unique personality in the history of mankind. This is partly because the Islamic revolution in Iran came at a time when all hopes were almost lost (Zakzaky, quoted in Zenn, 2013).

**2.9 Centrality of Palestinian Narrative to Pan-Islamist Geopolitics**

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Following defeat in 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the influence of pan-Arabism had faded in the region, especially after Egypt broke its ties with Soviet Union in favour of peace with Israel and a pro-Western geopolitical orientation. As Soviet influence over Arab nationalist governments waned, Shah had tilted towards Arab side in Arab-Israeli conflict and supported Arab-Israeli peace efforts in 1970s, with the intention that it would remove the possibility of another war and surge of pro-Soviet sympathies in the Arab world (Bhagat, 2006: 528). However, members of Iranian Leftists and Islamists opposed the move and headed to the camps of Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), where they received guerrilla-war training. Even at a time when "Shah accepted PLO as the sole and legitimate representative of Palestinian people and supported its participation in the peace process, he had refused requests by the PLO to establish offices in Tehran and other cities" (Bhagat, 2006: 529). After Islamic revolution, hostility to existence of Israel became centrepiece of Iranian anti-imperialist resistance and focal point of calls for Islamic unity by Ayatollah Khomeini. Khomeini was staunchly opposed to the establishment of Israel by dividing Palestinian nation. Khomeini argued that Israel was an outpost of the imperialist West in order to dominate the Muslim nations in the region:

> Israel was born out of the collusion and agreement of the imperialist states of East and West. It was created in order to suppress and exploit the Muslim peoples, and is being supported by all the imperialists. Britain and the U.S., by strengthening Israel militarily and politically and supplying it with lethal weapons , are encouraging Israel to undertake repeated aggressions against the Arabs and Muslims and to continue the occupation of Palestine and other Islamic lands (Khomeini, 1981:210).

Reversing Shah's policy, Khomeini embraced the anti-American grouping in the Arab world. Iran not only recognized PLO, but Yasir Arafat was invited to Iran within ten days of Islamic revolution, a move that signalled in the words of Israeli General Aharon Yariv that Iran has become the "member of the hostile Arab-Islamic coalition" (quoted in Tulsiram, 1985: 102). PLO office in Tehran was opened in the same building which had earlier housed Israeli embassy. Subsequently, Iran declared that it would break ties with every country that submitted to the Zionists and transferred its embassy to Jerusalem (Muhajeri, 1985: 129). Islamic Republic of Iran does not recognize Jewish state and regards it as an illegitimate entity that has to be eradicated. By describing Israel as the outpost of the imperialist West seeking to dominate the 'Islamic lands' and as the 'enemy of Islam and Muslims,' a regional political conflict was framed as a pan-Islamic issue, of concern to Muslims around the world. Iran attached importance and committed resources to the Palestinian struggle,

for this support was considered indispensable for it to be recognized as an Islamic state above sectarian lines in the wider world of Islam (Hourcade, 2015).

The oppositional attitude of Islamism to Israel is not just political or even cultural. Bassam Tibi (2007) argues that in Islamism the "stake is not just a political but *civilisational* challenge to the secular world order, one which legitimates itself as a way of combating an alleged 'Judeo-Christian conspiracy' believed to be directed against Islam itself" (Tibi, 2007:44). Tibi (2014) in his analysis of Islamism as totalitarian movement draws parallels with Hannah Arendt's comparative study of Nazi Socialism and Stalinism, wherein she identifies anti-Semitism as a crucial or even essential characteristic of totalitarianism.

> The need for total loyalty and obedience at the extreme level demands that a totalitarian movement construct an enemy with certain characteristics, the most basic of which is what Bernard Lewis described as "cosmic, satanic evil. The enemy must exist within the society, even if its loyalties are outside the society. The constructed enemy must be *absolutely* evil. The ideology of anti-Semitism fulfils this need (Tibi, 2014: 213).

Khomeini fostered Islamist anti-Semitism by arguing that Jews were the first to establish anti-Islamic propaganda and played a central role in imperialist conspiracy destroying Islam to penetrate Islamic lands.

> From the very beginning, the historical movement of Islam has had to contend with the Jews, for it was they who first established anti-Islamic propaganda and engaged in various stratagems, and as you can see, this activity continues down to present. Later they were joined by other groups, who were in certain respects more satanic than they. These new groups began their imperialist penetration of the Muslim countries about three hundred ago, and they regarded it as necessary to work for the extirpation of Islam in order to attain their ultimate goals (Khomeini, 1982:27).

Even in initial days of Islamists rule in Iran, the non-Arab and non-Sunni nature of Iran and the fact that Iran had never directly participated in wars against Israel, guided initial Israeli policies towards revolutionary Iran. When Saddam invasion of Iran in September 1980 exposed Iranian vulnerability in the wake of revolution, despite its vitriolic rhetoric against Israel, Iran turned to Israel for help. "Israeli arms sales to the Khomeini regime started in the early 1980s and culminated in Iran-Contra Affair of 1985-86, a development that highlighted the convergence of interests between Tehran, Washington and Jerusalem" (Bhagat, 2005:524). However, disclosures of such policies caused much embarrassment to Iranian leadership, which veered towards an increasingly hostile position towards Israel, especially in the wake of Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Notwithstanding revolutionary Iran's initial enthusiasm for PLO, it began to focus on cultivating independent strategic influence

over Shi'i in Lebanon with the intention of extending Iranian *Vilayat-e-Faqih* system there. As Israel became directly involved in Lebanon in early 1980s, Iran started to support Shi'i militant organizations in Lebanon.

## 2.10 Formation of Hezbollah in Lebanon

Lebanon, where some of the Iranian revolutionaries had undergone training, because of its large marginalized Shi'i population and strategic location close to Israel, was regarded an important front in Palestinian struggle against Israel. AMAL or hope (*Afwaj al-Muqawama al-Lubnaniyya* – Brigades of Lebanese Resistance) was the military wing of *Harkat al-Mahrumin* – The Movement of the Deprived, established in March, 1974, by Musa al-Sadr, an Iranian cleric who had migrated to Lebanon in 1950s and in 1960s and 1970s mobilised his community both politically and socially (Hussaini, 2010:804).

Iran in line with its larger geopolitical imagination "distinguished between the broad Palestinian population on the one hand and Arafat and his organization on the other and sought to develop ties with Palestinian groups outside the control of Fatah," which had good ties with AMAL (Bhagat, 2005:530). As relations deteriorated between PLO and Shi'i AMAL, as the later resented PLO's domination of Southern Lebanon and the high prices Lebanese Shi'i were paying for Israeli retaliatory attacks against the PLO, Iranian strategy became focussed on supporting Shi'ite groups in Lebanon, who would act according to Iranian strategic goals and carry forward the resistance against Israel. As a result, Lebanon, considered by Khomeini as "the forward strategic position located in a unique geographic region with access to Jerusalem" became the first successful target of the export of revolution. After Israel invaded Southern Lebanon to fight PLO and stayed on, Israeli presence had the effect of radicalising some members of Shi'i community and weakening the moderate AMAL. Montazeri also viewed Iranian ties with AMAL, which has defined its role limited to "promoting the political and social interests of Shi'i sect within the Lebanese state and to protect Lebanese sovereignty" as incompatible with Iranian goals of exporting the Islamic revolution and hindering Iran's relations with the Palestinian organizations in Lebanon, which AMAL was trying to restrain.

A full-blown Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 resulting in collapse of Lebanese government and political vacuum, paved the ground for emergence of

Hezbollah (Party of God), which combined goal of empowering the Lebanese Shi'ite community and resistance against Israel. "The temporal juxtaposition of Iran's victories on the Iraqi front in March 1982 after a series of military defeat in 1981, and Israel's incursion into Lebanon in June 1982, was interpreted by Tehran as an international U.S. backed move by Israel, designed to divert Iran's attention from war in Iraq and undermine its achievement in the Persian Gulf" (Shapira, 2013:145). In June 1982, just before the second Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Iranian legislature voted to dispatch IRGC personnel to fight against Israel in southern Lebanon. Subsequently, in the wake of Israeli invasion, Syria allowed Iranians to establish training camps in Western Biqa valley in Lebanon, near Syrian border, from where Iranian clerics and Guards engaged in military training as well in indoctrination in religio-political theories of Ayatollah Khomeini (Samii, 2008:35).

The Israeli invasion and occupation of Lebanon provided the rationale for strategic convergence between Iran and Syria in supporting Hezbollah. Hezbollah was joined by breakaway group of AMAL led by hardliner Husayn-al Musawi who had supported the realization of Iran's Islamic ideals in Lebanon and argued against joining the Council of National Salvation which included Christian Phalangist members (Shapira, 2013:147). Hezbollah formally announced itself in 1985 through an Open Letter, addressed 'to the Downtrodden in Lebanon and the World,' in which it declared that its goal was to "expel the Americans…and their allies definitely from Lebanon, putting an end to any colonialist entity on our land" (Hussaini, 2010:805).

With Hezbollah the "Karbala paradigm" translated into resistance against oppressor/occupier rather than revolt against a ruler (Hussaini, 2010:805). With its guerrilla war, suicide bombings or self-martyrdom operations against Israeli and Western targets, Hezbollah emerged as the model of Shi'i anti-imperial resistance. Hezbollah is the biggest achievement of Iranian pan-Islamism of social revolution. Despite Shi'i references, Hezbollah has maintained a cross-sectarian approach to pan-Islamism: "we are an [*ummah*] tied to the Muslims in every part of the world by a strong ideological-doctrinal and political bond, namely Islam…Hezbollah champions itself as moving to confront any challenge to global Islamic *umma*" (Hezbollah's Open Letter Addressed to the Oppressed in Lebanon and the World, quoted in Wimberly, 2015). Crucially, Hezbollah fought on Iranian side in Iran-Iraq war.

## 2.11 Influence of Iran-Iraq War on Iranian Geopolitical Culture

It was after months of sporadic border skirmishes, in September, 1980 Saddam Hussein abrogated Algiers Agreement over Shatt al-Arab and ordered that all ships sailing through waterway fly Iraqi flags and follow instructions. Other countries in the region, who were threatened by Khomeini's call for exporting the revolution, saw Iran-Iraq conflict as an opportunity to topple Khomeini.

The Iran- Iraq war became a struggle for dominance in the Persian Gulf. Saddam's bid for dominance was supported by regional countries as well as both superpowers, especially by United States keen to not only protect but control oil supplies from the region. American support for Saddam and later direct involvement in the so-called tanker war, betrayed a geopolitical logic of making clear to Iran that challenging American hegemony was not acceptable (Mercille, 2008: 581). Khomeini was aware of the geopolitical logic when he declared that, "it is Saddam Hussein who on behalf of America attacked us, and if we respond to him, it will never have anything to do with Iraqi nation which is our brother" (Taleblu, 2014).  Khomeini therefore projected Saddam's invasion as supported by the United States and invited the military and people of Iraq to rise up against their imperialist puppet ruler. But, Khomeini's Islamist discourse seeking to incite Iraqi Shi'i against Saddam didn't materialise and in fact became a distorting factor in Iranian geopolitical calculus.

### 2.11.1 Sacred Defence: Sacralisation of War and Martyrdom

From the perspective of the revolutionary Iran, it was no ordinary war over disputed territories. Ayatollah Khomeini saw the war as an 'imposed war,' by 'heretic' Saddam, in order to mobilise the nation in 'sacred defence.' Khomeini stated: "You all know this war is not between Iran and Iraq, it is a war between Islam and blasphemy, between the Holy Quran and atheism. And thus it behoves all of us to defend the treasured Islam and Holy Quran and send these criminals to hell" (quoted in Rouhi, 2013: 148). The framing of war and the mobilisation of the population within Shi'ite discourse of 'righteous oppressed' and *di'fa-e-muqaddas* (sacred defence) strengthened the ideological power of the clergy by prolonging the life span of ideological politics while diverting attention away from socio-economic concerns and interest. In clergy's hands the themes of revolution of Karbala, culture of Ashura commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, language of *jihad* became rhetorical tools to mobilise the population in the war effort and rally behind the clerical leadership. Khomeini's description of the war as an 'imposed' war led him to

mobilise Iranian masses in 'defensive *jihad*' equivalent to an obligatory religious duty. In Shiite thought only the Twelfth Imam, Mehdi can declare offensive *jihad*, but defensive *jihad* can be declared by the head of the state when enemy has invaded Muslim territory. Since Iraq was also a Muslim country, Ayatollah Khomeini went on to distinguish between Muslim people of Iraq and the Baathist regime of Saddam, which he characterised as the government of *kufr* and idolatry (*hookoomat-e Ishteraki*) (Rezamand, 2011: 92).

"Traditionally a *shahid* (martyr) was defined as someone who died for Hussein at Karbala; this concept was extended by Khomeini to someone who died in the revolutionary struggle, and later as someone who died in the war effort' (Rezamand, 2011: 92). The commemoration of martyrdom of Imam Hussein and his army of seventy two men on the day of Ashura in the month of Muharram was reinterpreted by Khomeini, in a "concept of active *shahadat*; meaning that it was no longer sufficient for the faithful to remember and mourn the death of Imam Hussein – the true believer was now required to emulate his seventy two companions at Karbala by seeking martyrdom in the war effort" (Rezamnd: 2011: 92). In a speech delivered during Muharram in 1982, he defined the responsibility for Iranian society in terms of sacrifice at the battlefield and propagation and preaching of the message of defiance by those who were providing backing for the frontlines.

> What is our duty on the eve of the month of Muharram al-Harām? What are the duties of the eminent theologians and the revered clergy? What are the duties of the rest of the strata of the nation in this month of Muharram? The Doyen of the Martyrs, his companions and household have taught the duties: sacrifice in the battlefield and propagation outside the battlefield. To the same extent that the sacrifice of His Holiness is valued in the presence of the Blessed and Almighty God; and has helped to move forward the movement of Husayn (*s*), the sermons of His Holiness Sajjād and Her Holiness Zaynab also have been effective to the same extent or almost to the same extent (Khomeini, 1982, quoted in Mishal and Goldberg, 2014: 47).

The Islamic republic "employed 'human wave' assault in which thousands of ill-trained and ill-equipped Iranian troops crossed the border to face martyrdom' at the hands of Iraqis" a tactic justified by religious fervour and sought to demonstrate to Iraq and its neighbours that Iran has "both the manpower and the will power to continue fighting indefinitely despite Iraq's vastly superior military arsenal" (Socilino, 1987). "Every land is Karbala, every month is Muharram, every day is Ashura" was the popular slogan of these youth who comorised Basij paramilitary. "The IRGC was effective in most operations in Khuzestan, as the numerically superior Iranians overcame technologically superior Iraqi forces at the cost of heavy

casualties that the zealous IRGC troops were willing to accept" (Dodds and Wilson, 2009). Gregory F. Giles notes that "Martyrdom shows Shia attitudes towards war which is less goal-oriented than western concepts. As evidenced by Khomeini's conduct of the 8-year war with Iraq, struggle and adversity are to be endured as a sign of commitment to the true faith" (Giles, 2003:147). The glorification of 'martyrdom' was of immense significance for success at battlefield, especially for zealous fighters of Basij and IRGC. This culture of martyrdom steeped in Shi'i symbolism was reflected in certain eerie acts such as construction of fountain filled with red water, symbolising blood, at the Martyr's Cemetery in Tehran, or enactment before troops on the battlefront of dramatic scenes associated with the messianic return of the hidden Imam. Since religious revolutionary fervour drove the leaders and the masses, they did not have limited political or strategic goals. "This was not an inter-state conflict fought for territorial adjustment or limited political objectives. At stake was a contest of ideologies and a competition for power" (Takeyh, 2010: 365). *Pasdaran* and *Basij* (what Khomeini called the "Army of Twenty Million" or People's Militia) mobilised a whole section of society and sent ideologically committed troops who fought bravely despite inadequate armour support.

It was in his belief in the sacred cause of protecting and spreading the Islamic revolution that Khomeini was indifferent to the human and material costs incurred in its pursuit. It was in pursuit of the revolutionary goals that Iran persisted in the war against Iraq. The emphasis on martyrdom, self-sacrifice and 'strength of faith' together with the defence of the *sarzamin-e-Iran* and the 'Islamic land' of the 'first government of God on earth' cultivated a religious nationalism (Hourcade, 2015). Mansour Farahang (1989) argues that "Khomeini tried to reduce the ideals of the Iranian revolution to a desire to fight the war." In the words of Mahmud Dowlatbadi, Iran's foremost novelist, "under Khomeini's guidance, the word 'war' became sanctified. The revolution, we were told, will flower in war." Since Khomeini died soon after the end of the war meant that, at least for some of his devotees, his charismatic leadership would be forever associated with revolution, war and struggle (Ansari, 2008). The attitudes promoted by the war, especially its ideological and messianic impulses were later carried into Iranian society and politics by war veterans, Revolutionary Guard members and their families, and various foundations

and social service agencies associated with the war, all of which constituted a political constituency that continue to identify with war fundamentalism.

Sacred Defence Week, starting on September 21$^{st}$, the day when Saddam Hussein invaded Iran is commemorated every year. During the sacred defence week, Iranian armed forces and IRGC stage nationwide military parades and showcase their military achievements and equipment.

### 2.11.2 Revolutionary Guards as the vanguards of Revolutionary Geopolitics

With the consolidation of revolutionary state, revolutionary committees, *komiteh* were institutionalised as Army Guardians of the Islamic Revolution' (IRGC) or *Sepah- e- Pasdaran- Enqhalab- Islami* within formal legal framework in the Iranian constitution, with article 150 tasking them with the "role of guarding the Revolution and its achievements" (Alfoneh, 2008). Formed to forestall the possibility of military coup and disarm non-Islamist forces in the wake of revolution, Revolutionary Guards played a crucial role in crushing the leftist *Tudeh* and *Fedayeen Khalq* in and outside Iran, particularly in Iraq. Reputation of IRGC increased manifold after it staged successful counter attacks, while Iran's conventional armed forces had failed in initial counter attacks near Susangerd. "It was during counter-offensive stage that IRGC gained in reputation and became the primary fighting arm of the Iranian forces. The IRGC developed its own tactics, a combination of guerrilla warfare and flamboyant frontal attacks with little regard for the conventional military or its doctrine" (Dodds & Wilson, 2009). The key role that the IRGC played as the war continued for another six years would later paved the way for IRGC as a major player in political and economic life of Islamic Republic. Ahmed Vahidi, who used to head the IRGC intelligent directorate *Sazeman-e Ettelat- Sepah* (Guards' Intelligence Organisation), became the first commander of Quds Force for extra –territorial operations, which since its formation it had played a decisive role in Iran's Middle East policy (Sahimi, 2012). IRGC was instrumental to the emergence of a host of liberation organizations, with both political and military capabilities in the region.

### 2.11.3 Resistance Orientation and Self-Reliance

When Iran retaliated to Iraqi attacks on its oil installations by attacking shipping of the Gulf emirates financially sustaining Saddam's war machine, this effectively internationalised the war as the US intervened on their side. "The so-called

'tanker war" was launched by Saddam in early 1984 with a view to shifting the war from stalemate of the battlefield to potentially more rewarding arena" (Karsh, 2009:48).

Fear of Soviet Union responding to Kuwaiti calls for defence of its oil carriers, revelation of Iran-Contra affair and the legitimacy crisis that the US faced with its Gulf allies, led the US to openly augment Saddam's war efforts and virtually ignore his use of chemical weapons of mass destruction against Iran and as well as Kurds in Halabja, Iraq. "Iran found itself isolated, without any major allies or arms suppliers, and facing international silence over Iraq' s aggression, targeting of civilians, and use of chemical weapons on massive scale" (Smith, 2015). These experiences only strengthened Iranian view that the West dominated international system and institutions as unjust.

It was during the war that the axis of resistance including Iran, Syria and their Lebanese proxy Hezbollah took shape. While the initial impetus for alliance between Syria and Iran came from the overthrow of conservative and pro-Western monarchy in February 1979, the "Iraqi invasion of Iran in September 1980 was the main catalyst in transforming Syrian-Iranian rapprochement into a formal alliance. Damascus condemned the Bagdad for initiating the conflict, calling it the wrong war against the wrong enemy at the wrong time'" (Goodarzi, 2013:41). Syria was the only source of diplomatic support for Iran, plus it thwarted the dreadful prospect of a United Front against Iran.

> On the diplomatic front, Syria thwarted the emergence of a united Arab front against Iran at the Amman summit in November 1980 hosted by Saddam Hussein's staunchest ally, King Hussein of Jordan. Syria massed 30,000 troops along its border with Jordan and persuaded half-a-dozen Arab League members to boycott the meeting. In military terms, it served as an important conduit of arm shipments to Iran, and provided various forms of military assistance, including facilitating Iranian air strike against Iraqi military airfields at H-3 (Al-Walid, in the Iraqi pan-handle, 50 miles east of the Jordanian-Iraqi border) in April, 1981, which resulted in the destruction of as much as 15-20% of Iraq's air force (Goodrazi, 2013:41).

After the war, Iran would develop strategic alliances based on anti-American militancy and resistance against Israel. Bayram Sinakya (2015) argues that "Iran's involvement in the regional conflicts is because of its strategic disposition, rather than sectarian. In Iran's opinion, West has been trying to either reverse the revolution or isolate Iran since the Islamic revolution." The experience of economic hardship and international isolation in the course of war led Iran to pursue self-sufficiency and build an indigenous base in high end military related technology. The "international

arms embargo on Iran by the United States resulted in a shift to a domestic emphasis on arms production, leading the Iranian state to develop many of its industries to support the war effort" (Smith, 2015). "To break the pattern of dependency vis-à-vis the Western powers, the government's goal was self-sufficiency (*khodkafa'i*)" (Selvik, 2012). The international isolation would also shape the economic policy of Islamic republic with emphasis on self-sufficiency and developing of domestic industrial base from consumer goods to a space program and would later form the bedrock of concept of 'resistance economy' by Ali Khamenei, to mitigate the effects of international sanctions.

The chapter has argued that the Islamic ideology of revolution and Islamic government were product of a modern interpretation of Islam as a counter-narrative of nationalism and anti-imperialism against a secular repressive monarchy backed by imperialist United States. The popular imaginaries of the battle of Karbala as and its martyrs were interpreted as the revolutionary myths mobilizing and uniting masses in a complete revolution not just against the monarchy but also against imperialist, western international order. The revolutionary ideology rooted in the Shi'ite ontology of world divided in oppressed and oppressor took shape of a religeopolitics of anti-imperial resistance. Given the anti-imperialist nature of the revolution, American hostage crisis and popular anti-imperialist sentiments which emerged in its wake were exploited by Khomeini supporters to delegitimise the pro-western Islamo-nationalist liberals dominant in Bazargan government and to Islamise the new regime and constitution.

A litany of crisis in shape of American embassy hostage crisis and Iran-Iraq war allowed Islamists to consolidate their power, as they were able to rally the most radical forces through their radical Islamic discourse and used the smokescreen of war to suppress and even physically exterminate the supporters of other political ideologies in the name of maintaining unity in the face of enemy. With highest religious and political authority concentrated in the institution of *vilayat-e-faqih*, Islamic Republic approximated theocratic model.

Since revolutionary ideology was defined in terms of a universal religion, a section of Islamist leadership believed that Islam was not simply an ideological alternative for Muslim societies and states. For them, exporting the revolution became both theological as well as political imperative for the new regime. The legitimacy of

the new regime was defined in terms of its revolutionary and Islamic character; thus, it was within an Islamic discourse that the revolutionary leadership constructed a religeopolitics of mobilising Islamic and anti-imperialist movements such as Hezbollah and Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq. This religeopoltical imagination was thoroughly within the paradigm of contemporary anti-colonial, Third Worldist ideologies, but given its Shi'ite underpinnings, it also became a vehicle for Iranian ideological and geopolitical influence in the Islamic world.

# CHAPTER – 3

# GEOPOLITICAL IMAGINATIONS OF IRAN AFTER AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI, 1989-2001

Revolutionary states have always been confronted by the problem of surviving in a hostile international system. Islamic Revolution survived through eight years of devastating war with Iraq, during which both superpowers and most of regional countries with the exception of Syrian and Libya had supported Saddam, hoping to topple the revolutionary regime. In years preceding Rafsanjani's election to the office of President, Iranian geopolitics can be understood primarily within the ideological framework of social revolutionary pan-Islamism, when nascent Islamic Republic sought to export its revolutionary Islamic ideology in the region, without much success. Geopolitical discourses are also means of readjusting geopolitical vision of the state in context of new changes in global affairs and geopolitical contingencies. Notwithstanding the on-going debate over the specifics of political order, the end of the Iran-Iraq war had the effect of moderating the influence of Islamic revolutionary ideology on Iranian geopolitical outlook, leading it to embark on a process of socialization within the existing international system.

In 1989, Hashemi Rafsanjani, a prominent member of the conservative right wing of JRM (Hezb-Ruhanniyat-e-Mobarez-e-Tehran) was elected President and by constitutional amendments in the same year, the office of the Prime Minister was eliminated and President was made the head of the executive. In post-war scenario, Rafsanjani, a founding members of the clerical Islamic Republican Party, who had supported war fundamentalism and export of the revolution, and later played a major role in ending the war as the Commander-in-Chief appointed by Khomeini, gave precedence to pragmatic national interests and strategic calculations over ideological concerns.

In the final months of Khomeini's death, "when it became clear to the ruling clerical elite that no possible successor could be found that could combine the extraordinary religious qualifications of a source of emulation (*marja-e-taqlid*) with the ability to lead the country politically", a constitutional amendment in 1989, no longer required *Rahbar* to be a *mujtahid* (Islamic scholar qualified to exercise *ijtihad* or independent reasoning in matters of Islamic law), instead he is supposed to be a

*faqih* (jurist) of political sagacity (Ashraf and Banuazizi, 2001: 246). The religious significance of the office of the *Rahbar* was thus dramatically reduced, pushing forth the idea of *fiqh-e-sunnati* or traditional Islamic jurisprudence, while political powers were enhanced to what they are now (Chatterjee, 2012: 16). "The assumption being, presumably, that religious authority of *Rahbar* being not subject to any restraint except for God and Imams, it had to be redefined within a narrower ambit; by contrast the political decisions of the *Rahbar* could be overturned as un-Islamic if found unsuitable, hence their scope could be broadened" (Chatterjee, 2012: 16). Given the conservative character of the Assembly of Expert, the constitutional body that elects the Supreme Leader, Rafsanjani who was the head of assembly convinced the assembly to elect Ali Khamenei, the incumbent president as the new Leader.

With the end of the war, serious economic decisions with long term consequences and political settlement or long-term way of doing government business – questions which had been deferred with the onset of the war – were raised to the fore of agenda of the Rafsanjani administration (Ansari, 2007: 12). Ehteshami (2002) argues that the post war setting and imperative of military re-construction and re-armament accelerated the reassertion of geopolitical factors in the republic's regional policies, a complex relationship which received a boost from Iraq's military defeat in 1991 and the disappearance of Soviet threat from Iran's northern borders (Ehteshami, 2002:160). However, the new process of socialization with the international system had to be carried out in accordance with the values embodied in the Iranian constitution.

> According to the IRI's constitution, Iranian foreign policy is crafted according to four fundamental principles: first, rejection of all forms of external domination; second, preservation of Iran's independence and territorial integrity; third, defence of the rights of all Muslims without allying with hegemonic powers; and fourth, the maintenance of peaceful relations with all non-belligerent states (Ehteshami, 2008:xiii).

Iranian geopolitics, even when it utilised Islamic ideological discourse was increasingly driven by pragmatic national interests responding to perceived threats to national sovereignty, both military and ideological. Mahmood Sariolghalam (2015) argues in an interview conducted during the course of field work that "religion provides an oratory basis for promoting the philosophical foundations of state, while national interest dictates how state policies are formed." "Iran with its focus on economy and its desire to open up to the world, solve the nuclear issue and the fact that seventy per cent of international trade of Iran is with the West prove that national

interest has been the main driver of Iranian foreign policy after the first decade of revolution" (Sariolghalam, 2015). Rafsanjani launched the *asr-e sazendagi* (era of reconstruction) which reversed the command economy of previous decades and put Iran on the path of economic liberalisation. "The emphasis lay in changing the role of the state from intervention and control to supervision, thereby allowing private capital and market to increase investment in infrastructure and industrial output" (Chatterjee, 2012: 18). The dismantling of the Islamic socialist agenda of the revolution was resented by hardliners or theocratic left whose agenda of redistributive justice and rigid anti-westernism and put them in opposition to the pragmatic Rafsanjani government.

Alex Callinicos (2008) notes that revolutionary states not only have to face the direct threat of counter-revolution imposed by or with strong support from one or more great powers, - as Iran had faced during its war with Iraq -  they also have to "deal with the more subtle danger that consists in adapting to meet this threat and thereby increasingly reproducing many of the characteristics of the socio-political order that the revolution was intended to destroy" (Callinicos, 2008: 156). Once Iran began to participate in the global processes of economic globalization and its society was exposed to cultural globalization, the revolutionary regime was hard pressed to maintain its Islamic revolutionary character. Critical geopolitics understands identities as not just shaped by state institutions but deeply embedded in social structures. In Iran, unequal distribution of power between republican and Islamist institutions, openness of Islam to diverse interpretations, presence of a youthful demography receptive to powerful western cultural-political influences expedited the emergence of a civil society. The civil society in demanding cultural liberalization and citizens' rights, has contested the Islamist binary worldview perpetuated by Islamist conservatives. Khatami, the reformist successor of Rafsanjani attempted to create a link between domestic issues of political and cultural liberalization and foreign policy when he sought to reformulate rigid Islamist geopolitical imaginations through his thesis of dialogue among civilizations and policies of détente and engagement vis-à-vis the West.

Reformist efforts at political and cultural liberalization were seen as detrimental to the power of the Supreme Leader and clerical institutions, who therefore sought to prop up their popular legitimacy as defender of Islamic system by

constructing discourses of 'cultural invasion' and 'soft threat.' These discourses of danger linking religious-ideological identity and security, seek to reproduce geopolitical visions of 'us' and 'them' in terms of Islam and the West.

### 3.1 Expediency in Foreign Policy

"The death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 and the election of his successor as well as intensification of President's power based on a new draft of Iranian constitution were two important events that significantly influenced the Iranian leaders" views on international relations. In fact, it was Iranian transition period, the start of a definite shift from revolutionary values to a kind of more rational thinking (Naji and Jayum, 2011). Under Ayatollah Khameini as the supreme leader and Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997) as President, "the country's foreign policy priorities changed from the ideological to pragmatic, with greater emphasis on national interests (Marschall, 2003, p. 100, quoted in Naji and Jayum 2011:96).

As a state founded on religion, the Islamic Republic engaged in the debate on how far precepts of Islam could act as constraint upon the actions of the government. Larbi Sadiki (2000) emphasizes the constructivist nature and 'open-endedness' of political Islam. "Islamists, peaceful and violent, anti-systematic or systematic, are forced by local and global dynamics to adjust thought and practice or risk extinction" (Sadiki, 2000:4). In a letter to the President Khamenei, who had apparently argued that the government could exercise power only within the bounds of the divine statutes, Khomeini disagreed with this position and stated that government was "a supreme vice-regency bestowed by God upon the Holy Prophet and it is among the most important of the divine laws and has priority over all peripheral divine orders" (quoted in Halliday, 1995: 69). In the final months of Khomeini, the 'discourse of expediency' (*Maslahat-e-Nizam*) emerged as one of the basic principles of Iran's foreign policy (Nia, 2012: 44). It means that in case of incompatibility, political consideration (survival of the Islamic Republic) takes precedence over religious consideration, and as such 'Islam' assumes a flexible meaning in the conduct of state-affairs. "The principle of expediency elevates the survival of the Islamic Republic to a supreme religious value" (Eisenstadt and Khalai, 2011: ix, quoted in Nia, 2012:44). Accommodating the commitment to the principles of the revolution with the needs of securing the revolution in the face of internal and external challenges, the "principle

of expediency seeks to combine accomplishment of the discourses of anti-arrogance campaign, anti-hegemonism and resistance with the prudence and cautious ways in Iran's foreign policy" (Nia, 2012: 44).

As a result of the emerging consensus around the belief that Islamic Revolution should be initially nurtured within Iran, the 'stronghold of Islam' the concept of the export of the revolution was substituted with the concept of Iranian exceptionalism. "Even Ayatollah Montazeri who was regarded as the main advocate of the export of revolution reached the notion that the best way of exporting revolution was to make Iran a successful country so that other oppressed countries pattern theirs on Iran" (Ramazani, 2001:71, quoted in Haji-Yousefi, 2010: 6).

### 3.2 Iranian Geopolitical Vision vis-à-vis the Soviet Union/Russia

Geopolitical visions focus on the identity formation of the state as political community and the relations between the internal and external aspect of the identity (Dijkink, 1996, in Mamadouh, 2006). As the Cold War drew to a close and prospects of a new world order dominated by the United States emerged, Iran redefined its geopolitical visions in such a way that it was able to maintain its revolutionary Islamic identity, while coming out of international political isolation deemed necessary for post-war military and economic reconstruction. The rapprochement between Russia and Iran in post-Cold war period was made possible by the removal of the major geostrategic constraint that had mitigated Iranian security for more than two centuries since the early 1720s when Peter the Great captured Persian territory for the first time. Soviet Union which shared 1,700-kilometers border with Iran was the principal security threat for Iran (Karsh, 1990:259). With the disappearance of this geopolitical threat, the United States with its presence in the Gulf and its policy of isolating Iran was identified as the sole 'global arrogance,' while Russia was seen as an economic partner and a potential strategic partner.

It was the rapprochement with the Soviet Union that marked the turn away from the ideology driven foreign policy of previous decade towards pragmatism. Iran's relations with the Soviet Union had begun to improve with the end of Iran-Iraq war and near simultaneous withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan. Khomeini had also called on foreign forces to withdraw from the Persian Gulf – a demand that Kremlin has been making since the summer of 1987. As part of the rapprochement

with Soviet Union, Iran gave up its ideologically driven policy of exporting Islamic revolution amongst Soviet Muslims and resolved to play a positive and stabilising role in Muslim dominated Central Asia and Caucasus. Similarly, Gorbachev's desire to show that the Soviet regime had shorn its ideological policy and easing of official hostility towards religion, especially Islam and the developments in Afghanistan set the stage for rapprochement between the two countries. A major reason why Iran sought to improve its relations with USSR was to in order to secure armaments. While on a visit to Soviet Union, in June 1989, when asked of the possibility of arms deal with the Soviets, Rafsanjani then the Speaker of Iranian parliament said that the experience of the Iran-Iraq war had left his nation to be self-reliant, while acknowledging that 'in some things we have technical needs, and we intend to satisfy these from different sources (Clines, 1989). Rafsanjani and Gorbachev declared in their joint communiqué that "relations between the two countries have entered a new stage" and signed a host of long term military and economic agreements worth US$15 billion and agreed on religious exchange (Clines, 1989; Herzig, 2004:504). These agreements permitted Iran to modernise its air force fleet and in following years Russia despite the U.S. sanctions against selling of arms to Iran and Libya, (Libya had been the most crucial supplier of arms to Iran during Iran-Iraq war) sold highly sophisticated military aircrafts MIG-29s and SU-24s and even submarines to keep the Russian economy afloat. Since, Russian economy was heavily dependent on arms and energy exports, Iran and Russia developed substantial interdependence in these two fields.

The other sector which became central to Russia-Iran economic relations is transfer of advanced technology including peaceful nuclear technology to Iran. "The new phase in the relations between the two countries developed when in May 1995, President Yeltsin refused President Clinton's request to abandon a $1 billion sale to Iran of a light water nuclear reactor, incidentally on the same site started by West Germany in the later 1970s" (Tarock, 1997: 210). Later Russia signed another contract to build two more nuclear power reactors in Iran raising the total value of deals to$2 billion (Tarock, 1997: 210).

Gorbachev repeatedly urged Rafsanjani to persuade the alliance of eight Shiite rebel groups based in Tehran to open direct talks with Najibullah regime supported by the Soviet Union. During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1979-88), the

revolutionary Iran had created an 'ideological sphere of influence' within Afghanistan by empowering its marginalised Shi'i population and unifying Dari/Persian speaking minorities and by 1990 the various Shi'i groups had united under the banner of Hezb-e-Whahadat (Party of Unity) (Milani, 2006). When Taliban emerged from the chaotic civil war fuelled by external powers and rampant warlordism, supported by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan it posed a challenge to Iran and Shi'ism. With the Taliban's takeover of Heart city in Western Afghanistan near Iran border in 1995, Tehran became increasingly convinced about pursuing a policy of direct engagement in Afghanistan, for not only did the Taliban's takeover threatened Iran's Afghan Shia clients in Tehran but the victory enabled the Taliban to provide a proximate sanctuary for Sunni ethnic minorities opposed to the Islamic regime. Following the assassination of Shi'ite Hizb-e-Wahahdat leader Abdul Ali Manzari in April 1995, Iran and Taliban became opposed to each other. By opposing Taliban, an especially extremist form of Islamism, Iran sought to project itself as a responsible player who did not support religious extremism as a tool of foreign policy. As Ahmad Rashid (2000) notes:

> Taliban's brand of Islamic fundamentalism was so extreme that it appeared to denigrate Islam's message of peace and tolerance and its capacity to live with other religious and ethnic groups. They were to inspire a new extremist form of fundamentalism across Pakistan and Central Asia, which refused to compromise with traditional Islamic values, social structures and existing state – systems (Rashid, 2000: 2).

Iran and Russia had a similar view of the implications of the rise of Taliban in Afghanistan for Islamist-jihadist movements in the Central Asia. Iran along with Turkey, India, Russia and four of the five Central Asian Republics – Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan – backed anti-Taliban alliance with money and arms, while Taliban government was recognized by only Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (Rashid, 2000:3).

Given Russian concerns about Islamist influence over Muslims in Russian provinces of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan as well as former soviet republics, and Iran's dependence on Russia in most important defence and energy sectors, "Iran has kept a relatively low Islamic profile in Azerbaijan and Central Asia, emphasizing cultural and economic ties rather than Islam as the centrepiece of relations" (Freedman, 2000: 69). In the civil war between the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan and the Russian backed Communist government, Iran played an important and difficult role. "Iran's mediatory role in reconciling the hostile groups in Tajikistan increased the country's overall significance and position in creating peace and

stability in the region" (Karami, 2009). Iran underscored its constructive, non-ideological approach towards Russia by maintaining that Chechen conflict was an 'internal affair' of Russia and that Iran respects the territorial integrity of Russia. In the span between first Chechen war in 1994 and second Chechen war which began in response to invasion of Dagestan by Chechen militants in 1999 – dubbed as an "anti-terrorist operation" by new Prime Minister Putin – the Chechen issue was increasingly framed as 'radical Islamism' and 'terrorism' to be dealt within a 'counter-terrorism' framework (Mirovalev, 2014). Chechen separatist movement, because of the presence of foreign fighters subscribing to puritanical Islamic ideology of Wahhabism, promoting radical Islamism in other provinces of North-Caucasus towards establishing a "Caucasus Emirate," raised Wahhabi threat to the fore of Russia's approach towards Islamic world, a development which brought it closer to Iran which shared its threat perception about Sunni extremism (Mirovalev, 2014).

### 3.3 United States in Post-Cold War Geopolitical Reasoning of Iran

Iranian leadership perceived the Post-Cold War world order in terms of a triumphalist America seeking economic and military domination of the entire globe, while forces of globalization were seen as instruments of spreading American values and as threats to the religious and cultural foundations of the Islamic Republic. Iran's vulnerability was increased by the US naval presence in the Persian Gulf following the Gulf War and the collapse of Soviet Union which had deprived Iran of main potential counterbalance to the threat posed by US global pre-eminence (Herzig, 2004: 505). Kamran Taremi sums up the post-Cold War Manichean worldview of the Islamic Republic in following words:

> In our time this struggle has led to the division of the world into two camps: the countries and peoples that possess power and use it to subjugate others and take advantage of them and those who lack power and are downtrodden of the earth. During the Cold War the first camp included both superpowers and their allies. Since the disintegration of the USSR in December 1991 it has comprised the US and other industrialised states allied to it. The second group includes all Third World countries" (Taremi, 2003:383).

U.S. pursued dual containment of Iran and Iraq, labelling Iran as a "'rogue state', sponsor of terrorism and undermining Middle East Peace Process. Iran, while it sought to improve its relation with regional countries, made anti-American militancy the cornerstone of its radical ideological geopolitics. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps "projects the United States and Iran as being on the two opposite fronts: good (*jebeh-e Hagh*) and evil (*jebeh Batel*) (Habibi, 2007, quoted in Golkar, 2014). Guards

see the confrontation with America as strategic not tactical. Mohsen Milani (2006) argues that given the colossal power differentials, particularly in military arena between Iran and the United States, considered an existential threat in Iran, "Iran has developed unconventional and asymmetric strategies both in military and foreign policy arenas" (Milani, 2006:236).

> One such strategy "sphere of influence," buffer zones, as well as a web of both informal and formal, underground and open organizations around Iran's troubled neighbourhood, and beyond its borders. This strategy allows Iran to project its power and interests, support Islamic movements, create a defensive and sometime invisible wall outside its borders, and position its friendly forces and proxies beyond its borders against those who threaten its survival (Milani, 2006:236).

The geopolitical reasoning justifying concrete foreign policy actions is employed in formulating simplified geopolitical discourses which often draw on previous discursive analogies and images. Islamic Republic legitimised its policy of supporting radical Islamic movements to expand its sphere of influence, within its Islamic revolutionary discourse of championing the cause of the oppressed. A key rationale behind this religeopolitical discourse and support for radical Islamist movements was to produce ideological legitimacy for the Islamic Republic. Another scholar notes that "the proclamation of Iran's continuing role as the leader of the oppressed was important not just for external reasons, promoting the image and the prestige of Iran, but also internally as a means of sustaining the morale of the population, distracting from domestic economic crisis, preventing an emergence of 'liberalism', a spirit of compromise or accommodation with the outside world" (Halliday, 1995: 71).

After Khamenei became the new Commander-in-Chief, more ideologically motivated revolutionary guards, who were also suspicious of the motives of the 'moderates' sided with more radical elements. The new politics of factionalism in post Khomeini Iran was visible in two independent tracks in country's foreign relations. While the pragmatic faction of Rafsanjani supported pursuit of national interests and advocated economic ties with the West while remaining opposed to widening of political and cultural relations, the other track consisted of conservative radicals around Khamenei and revolutionary guards who supported "Islamic groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, took a 'rejectionist' stand on the Israeli- Palestinian conflict, and relentlessly demonised the United States as perpetrator of all evil in the world" and on occasions colluded in the assassination of prominent opponents of the

regime abroad (Ashraf and Banuazizi, 2001: 245). After the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, continuation on Khomeini's policies and ideals, especially anti-imperialism and support for Islamic and Liberation movements became the mainstay of radicals, who called themselves the 'followers of Imam's line' (Ashraf and Banuazizi, 2001: 241). Similarly, Ziba Moshaver (2003) argues that during this period emerged a "pattern in the working of the Iranian diplomacy indicating a tacit distribution of tasks – a pattern that had been established and practiced much earlier." "In this pattern, the government announces policies that are meant to show progress and moderation, while the non-elected religious-political elite, mainly in their Friday sermons, confirm the fundamental guidelines of the theocracy" (Moshaver, 2003: 295). The struggle for power between elected and un-elected institutions, especially during the reformist presidency of Khatami has manifested in divergent geopolitical visions in Islamist discourse of Khamenei and practical geopolitics of the statecraft.

The new Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, lacking independent support base, in order to silence his opponents and to prove his revolutionary credentials, adopted Khomeini's belligerent tone and decisively sided with radicals who wish to see a continuation of Khomeini's policies (Jahanpour, 1990). Ayatollah Khamenei declared America, the 'global arrogance,' a term underscoring the universalistic aspirations of liberal imperialists of United States and its post-Cold War geopolitics of military domination of the Middle East. Arrogance is a Quranic term, used to underline the hegemonic and interventionist policies of the United States and other European governments.

> Arrogance refers to a global power or a group of global power. When these powers look at themselves, they see that they have financial propaganda, and military facilities. Therefore they think they are entitled to interfere in the affairs of other countries as if they owned them. This is what arrogance means (Khamenei, 2009, Nov.).

Opposing these arrogant powers is the sine qua non of justice driven foreign policy. Khamenei (2001) in a meeting with Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro argued "Today, the world is mainly suffering from injustice. Some European countries that had waged devastating wars in the past are today chanting the slogan of peace, but they never raise the issue of justice, which mankind needs today" (Khamenei, 2001, May). In the same meeting, Khamenei articulates how religious beliefs of Islam have "practical effects" in terms of a justice driven foreign policy. The Supreme Leader Khamenei argues:

Some powers like the United States are opposed to our beliefs and call us fundamentalists! Their opposition is mostly due to the fact that such beliefs have some practical effects. In our religious concepts, there is a notion called arrogance. In reality, the U.S. government is the embodiment of arrogance. If we are rejecting unipolar world, it is due to our religious belief. We consider any struggle in the world against arrogance to be a just struggle, and we feel whoever is engaged in this struggle is in the same camp with us" (Khamenei, 2001, May).

Islam, the religious faith of the masses is constantly ideologised by the regime in order to construct popular legitimacy for the state and justify its counter-hegemonic policies. "The secret of the resistance of our revolution against the pressure exerted on us by the global arrogance is the strong belief of our people, who adhere to Islam and its principles and values" (Khamenei, 2001, December). Islamism as a postcolonial counter-hegemonic discourse enjoys the disciplinary effect or rather the virtual closure that a worldview defined in terms of a religion can achieve.

If policy makers can use their concept of religion to define the political universe for their population, this makes it nearly impossible to oppose them. That is, if a policy such as defining states' enemies, is cast in religious terms, opposing this policy is not merely disagreeing with a political strategy, it is opposing a religious precept. It is to defy what is moral and right (Fox and Sandler, 2004: 49).

Iranian leadership projected Iran as the new *Umm al*-Qura, variously translated as 'center of the Islamic world,' or 'mother of all cities,' a term used for the *Makkah*. The notion of Iran as *Umm al-Qura* is based on Ayatollah Khomeini's declaration that "Islamic Republic had supplanted Mohammad's *Makkah* and Imam Ali's caliphate," can be interpreted as an outcome of reconciling a territorial or state identity with a universal religion, by defining the nation in religious terms. The concept also underscore the continuing tradition of Iranian exceptionalism, in which critical aspects of Iranian nationalism including Iranism have survived and were complemented with Islam and Shi'ism (Akbarzadeh and Barry, 2016). Iran's self-image as the new *Umm al-Qura* shapes its threat perception as well as its national mission and leadership claims within an Islamic discourse.

According to this view, 'global arrogance' (U.S. imperialism) and international Zionism are out to destroy Islam. The only acceptable reading of Islam for the West is a reactionary and non-political Islam that would support the plundering of Muslim resources and wealth. From this perspective, Iran is seen as the *Umm Al-Qura* (center of the Islamic world), which provides leadership to the Islamic *Ummah* (nation), which the United States is trying to destroy. Defending the *Umm Al-Qura* against oppression and 'global arrogance' by whatever means and whatever cost is the primary obligation of every Muslim" (Hadian, 2015).

According to the Supreme Leader, "the Islamic Republic tries to follow "justice driven policies" which imply resisting US hegemony despite enormous economic and political costs. A crucial objective of Iranian political discourse at international level is to sensitise Muslim masses about the nature of imperialist

politics of the United States in the region, which is framed in a religio-political discourse. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in the Eighth Conference of Islamic Countries (Tehran 1997), argued that the Muslims including various sects of Shiites and Sunnites should consider Islamic unity quite seriously. The discourse of Islamic unity is centred on construction of the United States and Israel as common threat to the entire region.

> Today, the threat of the U.S. in the region is not focused on one or two countries but all. Today, the threat of Zionist capitalists behind the ruling system of the U.S. will not suffice to devouring a part of our region, they want to devour the entire region and they speak it explicitly this day. "The Big Middle Eastern Plan" does not make any sense other than that. From somewhat fifty years ago that the Zionist government usurper was constituted and from approximately hundred years ago that the thought was shaped in the Western and European conventions the intentions have been the same; to devour and take the region, they need it. The people of the region are not important, all cases are threats. And when all situations are threats the most rational thought that may cross any one's mind is to hold hands (Khamenei, 1997 : 23).

The issue of Israeli occupation of Palestine, especially of Jerusalem is not seen in pure geopolitical terms but as manifestation of Judeo-Christian conspiracy against Islam and as usurpation of "Islamic lands." The Iranian support for the Palestinian cause, framed within the language of Islam rather than as an Arab-Israeli conflict over territory is used to increase Iran's prestige in the Arab world and place Iran at the heart of a new anti-Israel and anti-US coalition (Ehteshami, 2008). By attaching paramount significance to the issue of the liberation of the holy city of Jerusalem which houses al-Aqsa mosque, occupied by Israel since the Arab defeat in 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Iran also seeks to transcend the sectarian difference and strengthen its leadership claims over the 'Islamic *Umma*,' imagined in terms of alliance of Islamic nations against common enemies. Iran has opposed Arab-Israeli peace process, and has maintained that "neither Arafat nor any other leader has the right to give away 'even an inch of the Islamic land of Palestine'" (Bhagat, 2005:530). However, Muhammad Khatami, the reformist president signalled changes when he "repeatedly stated that if the Palestinians do reach an agreement with Israel Iran would accept it and would not take any action to prevent it" (Bhagat, 2005:531).

### 3.4 Post-Cold War Geopolitical Vision of Region

During the first decade of its existence, Iran's efforts at exporting the revolution were met by politicisation of Shi'i-Sunni sectarian division by Sunni Arab regimes, and Iran was left isolated during Iran-Iraq war while Saddam was supported by GCC countries who feared that victory for revolutionary Iran would bring about an

Iran-centric Islamic order in the region. "The experience of invasion and existential struggle for survival made Iran's leadership more aware of conventional vital national interests – territorial integrity and national sovereignty – and of the ways in which international system and its rules could be used to secure these" (Herzig, 2004 : 504). In the light of geopolitical changes in the region following the disintegration of the Soviet Union and appearance of new countries, Iranian geopolitical vision of the region was shaped by needs of economic reconstruction, geo-economic objectives of capitalizing on its locational advantage by providing the transportation route for Caspian hydrocarbon recourses to markets in Europe and Asia, and the imperative of overcoming its containment by the United States. Kayhan Barzegar (2010) argues that Iran increasingly imagined its place as a major crossroad in the vast geographical expanse of the Middle East. "Iran is a connecting point between Central Asia and the Caucasus, which also links South Asia to the Persian Gulf and the Arab world. Each of these security subsystems faces Iran's foreign policy with a different set of political and security themes" (Barzegar, 2010).

As far as the Iranian geopolitical conception of region is concerned, it is the Persian Gulf coast line stretching across 2000 kilometres that makes Iran a major contender for regional hegemony. This "region is of highest importance for security and national interests as it is Iran's main connecting route to high seas, critical to the export of Iran's gas and oil and import of necessary commodities" (Barzegar, 2010). It is also the focal point of Iran's confrontation with the United States. With the lessons learned from the wartime experience, namely that it did not have the economic and military muscle to transform the Gulf region on its own, Islamic Republic avoided confrontations with its Gulf neighbours. With oil export being the major source of revenue for Iran's economic recovery, the need to work together to revive the falling oil prices, set Iran on a conciliatory path with regards to oil-producing Persian Gulf neighbours. "Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990 marked a major change in the relationship between Iran and the Gulf states. Instead of Iran, now Iraq was the immediate threat to the security and integrity of Persian Gulf countries" (Rakel, 2008:173). Iran declared its neutrality during the war and advocated regional security arrangement minus the external powers such as the United States. However, the Supreme Leader denounced Saudi Arabia and America for bringing American troops to the 'heartland' of Islam and in the Persian Gulf.

Khamenei argued the presence of American forces in Saudi Arabia was "in the interest of Zionism and arrogance, to the detriment of Islam and Moslems and against the Islamic revolution' and called it 'an insult to the Moslems of that country" (Janhanpour, 1990).

Iran's position that ensuring the security of Persian Gulf was the exclusive responsibility of littoral states to be achieved through their cooperation was an important change from its earlier hostility to the Gulf monarchies, and underlined Iran's hope to fulfil its 'proper' role in a reformed regional security arrangement (Herzig, 2004:506). But Tehran's interest in using regionalism to exclude the United States and assert its own leadership role proved unsuccessful as attempts at post-Gulf war regional security arrangement in region such as the short-lived Damascus Declaration between six GCC countries plus Egypt and Syria excluded Iran. Moreover, any possibility of Iran's involvement was thwarted by the outbreak of regional crisis over Iran's ownership claims and occupation of the three small but strategic islands overlooking the Strait of Hormuz, was contested by the United Arab Emirate. Furthermore, as a strategic setback for Iran, after liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi invasion, GCC became the key link in American strategic encirclement of Iran. "The US not only sold huge amounts of modern weapons to GCC countries, but also signed bilateral agreements between Persian Gulf countries that allowed the US to use their waters and carry out joint military training exercises" (Milani, 1996: 94, quoted in Rakel, 2008: 167). U.S. also supported an ambitious programme of militarisation of Saudi Arabia, transforming the Kingdom into a military power and a counterweight against both Iran and Iraq (Milani, 1994). The Gulf monarchies and Sheikdoms given their small populations prone to democratic and revolutionary mobilisations challenging states legitimacy and external challenges from their larger and militarily superior neighbours have formed a conservative strategic alliance with the United States which has become their main security guarantor against internal and external threats.

Iran despite economic openness and cooperation with a whole range of countries has not been inclined to be part of economic and security groupings with countries seen as being under American influence. The logic in this regard is "because security or political cooperation deals with issues of national sovereignty and sovereignty is a particularly sensitive cultural issue in Islamic teachings, it might run

into areas of 'value conflict'" (Sariolghalam, 2011:8). "One of the constant themes of Iranian statements on regionalism has been self-reliance among regional states and exclusion of extra-regional powers (meaning the United States)" (Maleki, 2007). In order to frustrate Washington's policy of containment, Iran pursued active engagement with and membership of "regional and international organizations that were not susceptible to western domination such as Non-aligned Movement, Organization of Islamic Conference, Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and Shanghai Cooperation Organization" founded in 2001 (Herzig, 2004 : 505).

Jannatkhan Eyvazov (2009) notes that with the demise of the Soviet Union, Iran was freed from a long standing geopolitical threat from the Soviet Union, as the newly created geopolitically autonomous zone of North Caucasus and Central Asia became buffer zone between the two, but another upshot of the removal of Soviet Union as the single major who controlled the region, the region became an arena of stiff rivalry among Iran's old contenders (Russia and Turkey) and its current opponents (the U.S. and its European allies) (Eyvazov, 2009:20). Moreover, the appearance of five littoral states of the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan in Caucasus, Russian in north, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan in Central Asia and Iran have forced Iran to have a wider view of the region.

In factors shaping Iranian perception of its neighbourhood, most important ones included the need of defending border with a Taliban controlled Afghanistan and trans-national trafficking of drugs from opium fields of Afghanistan into Iran and beyond, civil-war in Tajikistan, Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and dispute over the status and division of the Caspain Sea led Iran to adopt a multilateral approach in solving these shared threats and conflicts in the region. The presence of conflicts provided Iran with an opportunity to play an active role in its region. In the atmosphere of mistrust towards Iran, limited Iranian military capabilities and regional nature of problems Tehran "developed a wide concept of regional security that emphasizes taking positive steps in the economic, social and cultural spheres, rather than concentrating on military-security relations" (Alison and Johnson, 2004:189).

Iran projected itself as bridge between the Persian Gulf and Central Asia. "In December 1991, Kazakhstan and Iran signed an agreement providing for Central Asian republics to extend their railway networks to the Persian Gulf across Iran. Another agreement signed in June 1995 between Iran, Turkmenistan and Armenia

provides for the expansion of overland trade among the three countries. March 1996 saw the linking of the Central Asian railway network to that of Iran" (Mojtahed-Zadeh, 2001: 58). Chabahar port in Sistan and Baluchestan Province of Iran is India's crucial link to the landlocked Afghanistan and the key port of INSTC, the modern southern Silk Road of India. In 2002, following the removal of Taliban regime in Afghanistan, India began developing Chabahar port as a part of its strategy to check Pakistan from developing undue leverage over Afghanistan. Chabahar port is an open sea port located outside chokepoints of Strait of Hormuz and Persian Gulf in Arabian Sea. "In 2003, Afghanistan, India, and Iran signed an agreement to develop the Chabahar – Zaranj – Delaram route. Later that year, India began work on rebuilding the highway running from Zaranj to Delaram, connecting Southern Afghanistan, and Iran" (Swami, 2015).

From Iranian perspective, in Post-Cold War geopolitical setting, regionalism was increasingly seen as essential to an alternative conception of multi-polar world against the unipolar world order dominated by the United States. Regionalism was also seen as conduit for globalization facilitating Iran's interaction and interconnection with neighbours in a world increasingly seen as a set of interlinked and overlapping regions. Since, Iran was not able to reach any breakthrough with its Arab and Gulf neighbours, it renewed its focus on the pre-revolution three members Regional Cooperation for Development.

> In the past, the Shah had exploited the non-Arab states of Turkey and Pakistan to Iran's advantage, forging close economic and military ties with both states … the ECO continued to survive, and was increasingly seen as providing Iran with military and economic support, and potentially as body to resist, in geopolitical terms, the onslaught from Arab-based regional forums in the Persian Gulf region (Ehteshami, 2002:149).

ECO was founded in 1985, in Islamabad by Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan and expanded in 1992 to include five Central Asian countries and Azerbaijan. Iran's constitution commits it to fostering 'Islamic unity,' as a result ECO has projected itself as an Islamic grouping, a fact underlined when the group rejected Romania's application for membership on the grounds that it was not an Islamic country. Besides Islam, countries are linked by their common history, culture, and tradition and their desire for cooperation in trade, transportation, communication and energy. More importantly, the region holds one of the richest reserves of oil, gas, and mineral resources, which have spurred the desire for cooperation. Iran has pursued a regional policy of increasing energy interconnectivity and transport infrastructure within the

framework of Economic Cooperation Organization as well as through bilateral agreements. Iran's Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Vilayati (1980-1997) expressed the economic logic behind ECO:

> The Islamic Republic of Iran is convinced that regional cooperation is the only guarantor of regional peace, security, and stability. It is in this light that bi- and multilateral relations are being forged with the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus. The ECO pursues *inter alia*, objectives like trade among member states, and the encouragement of sustainable development and active participation in international trade (quoted in Alison and Johnson, 2004: 189).

"The emergence and reinforcement of these regions and their internal and mutual linkages is held to be part of a benign globalization process that will limit the capacity of any single power to dominate the system" (Maleki, 2007). Nevertheless, Iran's involvement in regionalism bore fruit in facilitating "economic globalization by promoting greater interaction of ECO economies with the world market and steady promotion of intra-regional trade," but using regional organizations to defy the US proved difficult, given that Iran's strategic predicament was not shared by any of its regional neighbours (Herzig, 2004: 507). Instead, Turkey and Iran have engaged in a post-Cold War mixed motive game of conflict and cooperation especially given that Turkey which is located on Europe's eastern periphery and Iran with its direct access to the Persian Gulf, and both have sought to play the geoeconomic role of *entrepot* in Central Asian and the Caucasus. The competition has also spilled in the religio-cultural sphere, as Iran has responded to Turkey's focus on ethno-linguistic affinities – which serves to legitimize and enhance its presence – by emphasizing shared religious beliefs, cast in Islamic universalism (Calabrese, 1998: 90).

Central Asian Republics for their part, were adamant about retaining their secular character remained suspicious of Iran's religious orientation; however, they were more concerned about political Islamic threat (Wahhabism) emanating from Arab countries and Taliban controlled Afghanistan. Iran regards spread of Salafism/ Wahhabism as ideological Arabisation harmful to the Middle Eastern balance (Peyrouse, 2014).

### 3.5 Emerging Geo-economics of Central Asia-Caucasus and Iran

When Iranian foreign minister Ali Akbar Vilayati declared at an international petroleum conference that "from a global perspective, a new order is gradually superseding in which economic considerations overshadow political priorities," he resonated the emerging geo-economic imaginary of a global economy and signalled a

shift from the confrontational ideological approach of the previous decade towards an interest based approach, of economic integration with the regional countries and cooperation with the West. However, Iran's effort at receiving western technology and capital investment as well as its geo-economic strategy of projecting itself as the node for various region-wide transportation and pipelines routes, especially those connecting Caspian energy resources to consumer market in Europe and Asia were constrained by United States which pursued containment of Iran.

Julien Mercille (2008) note that geographers have conceived of geo-economics as spatial and political dimension of economic strategies and resources in at least three ways:

> first as referring to the natural resources contained within a region and the politics of controlling and exploiting such resources (e.g. O Hara and Heffernan, 2006); second as discourse closely linked to the economic imperatives of global economy (Smith, 2002; Sparke, 2002: 217; 2007; Toal, 1997); and third, to point to the flows of trade, finance and capital over global space and across borders, taking into considerations the political aspects behind such movements (Mercille, 2008: 576).

In context of the Middle East, U.S. geoeconomic logic refers mostly to the "need felt by business and state officials to control Middle East oil as a key aspect of the U.S. regulation of hegemony over the world economy" while geopolitical logic is dedicated to legitimise and maintain the credibility of U.S. hegemony and the need to respond forcefully to Iranian challenge before it spreads elsewhere (Mercille and Jones, 2009: 858). Mercille argues that the geopolitical logic behind U.S. hostility or the policy of regime-change and sanctions towards Iran is "to discipline Iran," that is "to make it clear to Iran that challenging American hegemony is not acceptable" (Mercille, 2008: 582).

A critical component of the US global energy strategy is to control energy resources of Central Asia and make them available to Asian markets for if Asia's energy needs were not satisfied, it will put pressure on world markets, driving prices upwards everywhere. Croissant and Aras (1999) note that oil of Caspian Basin had never been exported and only transported to Russia until the collapse of Soviet Union, therefore following their independence, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, where most of Caspian energy resources are concentrated signed contracts with Western companies for developing their oil fields. Since these fields were massive and inaccessible to the open seas, laying of pipelines to transport their oil and gas to markets in Europe and Asia was considered economically viable as well as necessary.

Subsequently began competition between countries who offered prospective routes for these pipelines. Pape Escobar (2008) calls Iran the ultimate "Eurasian cross-road," given its location at "the key transit point of the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Indian sub-continent." In addition, its substantial energy resources in Caspian basin and Persian Gulf, place it an enviable position in Eurasian energy geopolitics. The landlocked countries of Central Asia and Caucasus looked to Iran for cheapest and shortest route to the open-seas and further to European and Asian markets. But these efforts were thwarted by the U.S. who sought to deprive Iran of geopolitical leverage it would have if it was to become the key transit route for trade and gas pipelines to Europe and Asia.

For transporting Caspian gas and oil to European and Asian markets, America has supported pipeline routes bypassing Iran and Russia, precipitating long-drawn pipeline geopolitics in the region. Turkey, member of the NATO alliance, received American backing for Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, which connects the Caspian Sea Basin to Eastern Mediterranean, via Georgia and Turkey, totally bypassing Russian territory. Azerbaijan, which has substantial share of Caspian energy resources, has been the key nation in the US strategy of isolating Iran in energy geopolitics of the region. Azerbaijan and Iran have had strained relations since former gained independence in 1991 and has shown irredentism towards Azeri minority of Iran residing in bordering Northern provinces.

The United States also backed the trans-Caspian Sea pipeline, which was to follow the Baku-Tbilisi pipeline transporting gas from Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan over to Turkey and Europe. However, the pipeline remained a pipedream given it faced a host of ecological and monetary issue. The pending question of the status of the water body as to whether it is a sea or lake and the sectoral division of its resources and sea/lake bed among littoral countries has been a major hurdle. Among the five littoral countries, for Iran, Russia and Turkmenistan Caspian is a lake which should be divided equally among the five states. To complicate the matter further, Russia has argued for national sectors only for seabed, leaving the waters for common use (Peuch, 2002). "If it is a sea, each country should receive territorial waters according to its coastline. In this case, Iran would not get 20 per cent, only 13 per cent. The official Iranian position is to battle for 20 per cent of seabed at all costs" (Escobar, 2002). At the Ashgabat Summit of 2002, countries failed to reach an

agreement. The lack of agreement on dividing the seabed, where the oil is located has prevented the exploitation of the sea's resources.

Similarly, though the most commercially viable route connecting Central Asia to Indian Ocean would be through Iran, but given US sanctions on the country, Western companies went as far as to Taliban controlled Afghanistan as the alternative land bridge. In American geopolitical vision, Afghanistan is the alternative Eurasian cross-road, for bringing Caspian energy resources, especially Turkmen gas to Asian markets. "Since late 1995, Washington has strongly backed the US company Unocal to build gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan across Taliban-controlled Afghanistan" (Rashid, 2000: 6). The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline was conceived as rival to Iran-Pakistan pipeline, which first discussed between Iran and Pakistan in 1994 and later included India in 1998. However, India opted out ten years later in 2008.

Constrained by Western geoeconomics, Iran's energy strategy has been limited to fulfilling the energy needs of its population, export of oil through Persian Gulf ports and mobilise foreign investment for developing its gas fields and upgrade its hydrocarbon infrastructure. It is important to note that most of Iranian oil and natural gas fields are concentrated at the Gulf coast and south-western province of Khuzestan, while the major population centres are in north-western parts of the country, therefore Iran has sought oil swap deals with some of its Central Asian and Caucasus neighbours who do not have access to open seas therefore were keen to export their oil to Asian markets through Persian Gulf ports of Iran. Under the oil swap arrangements, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan have each provided Iran with some crude oil over the years (Karimov, 2014). In 1990s Iran and Kazakhstan had negotiated an oil swap agreement under which Kazakh oil from its Caspian Sea field was to be transported to Neka, Iranian port at Caspian by tankers and then transported to Tabriz refinery by a pipeline where it would be refined and consumed locally. In exchange, Kazakhstan was to get similar volume of oil for export at one of the Iranian ports at the Persian Gulf. The agreement was reached in 1996 and Iran received first tanker of Kazakh oil in May, 1997, but given the difficulties related to refining the Kazakh oil which had high quantity of admixture at Iranian refineries, and also given the American pressure on Kazakhstan, the deal never took off (Croissant and Aras, 1999:200).

In order to modernize and expand its production facilities, Iran opened its oil and gas sector to foreign investment in 1994, following which a host of international companies showed interest in developing Iran's offshore fields in the Gulf. By early March 1995, Iran's National Iranian Oil Corporation, NIOC had concluded a US$ 600 million deal with US based company Conoco of Houston to develop Sirri A and E offshore fields, but subsequently US administration announced that President Clinton would shortly issue an executive order banning US companies from developing Iranian oilfields (EUR, 2000: 386). After, Conoco withdrew, French company Total was given the contract of developing the same fields in July 1995. Clinton Administration in its drive to overthrow hostile regimes of Iran and Iraq had pursued the policy of dual containment by imposing economic hardship through sanctions (Monshipouri and Assareh, 2009:29). President Clinton signed Iran-Libya Sanction Act in 1996 to punish regimes the two regimes for their alleged state-sponsored terrorism. ILSA required the president to impose sanctions on foreign or domestic company and "individuals found to be investing more than $20 billion in oil and gas development in Iran" (Dorraj and Currier, 2011).The Conoco agreement sparked unprecedented politico-economic confrontation between France and the US, as well as other EU members and the US. When the agreement was signed in September, 1997 between NIOC and Total, Gazprom of Russia and Petronas of Malaysia were included as members of consortium that would jointly extract 20 billion cubic meters of natural gas a year by 2001 (Tarock, 1999: 48).Under the ambit of 'constructive dialogue' during Khatami years, Iran renewed its efforts to secure much needed Western technology in its oil and gas sector. "In February 1999, NIOC awarded a $500 million contract for work on Iran's Doroud oil field to France's Elf Aquitane and Italy's ENI" (Iran Report, 1999). Even if the project was small in financial terms, its political impact was greater as it was another gain for companies seeking to bypass ILSA.

As ILSA hampered Iran's ability to modernize its war-torn and decrepit oil infrastructure, Iran turned to Asian giants, namely Japan, China and India. These countries, not participating in Western unilateral sanctions, were eager to partner with Iran for a chance to acquire the rights to a portion of its oil which would help them keep pace with high demand for oil, which was projected to grow quickly with population increase and as the desire to emulate first world consumption pattern

spreads throughout the middle class (Li and Molina, 2014: 23). The "Azadegan oil field, located in western Iran next to Iraqi border" was discovered in 1999 and proved to be the largest oil field to be discovered in past three decades (Li and Molina, 2014: 22). President Khatami gave the development rights over Azadegan field to Japanese firm Inpex, while China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) was given an $85 million contract to drill nineteen wells in existing natural-gas field in Southern Iran (Penn, 2006).

### 3.6 Contextualising the Reform Movement and its Alternative Geopolitical Imaginations

The end of the war and demise of Khomeini, the founder and dominant personality within the new regime resulted in the diffusion of social and political power into multiple centres, while economic and cultural liberalization led to the formation of new political sentiments and increasing awareness among the various social forces. These two changes, one at the level of the Islamic Republic, and other at the level of civil society, were crucial to the emergence of the reform movement. The reform movement emerged in early 1990s in the "intellectual and clerical circles seeking to transform the theocracy into a polity which was both politically representative and culturally sensitive; in late 1990s became popular with the youth and sections of urbanized population" (Takeyh and Gvosdev, 2004: 36). These intellectuals and political elements disagreed with "Rafsanjani and his conservative pragmatists who tended to argue that economic progress would yield political reform, and instead argued that both needed to be taken in tandem, since the Rafsanjani settlement itself, with its corruption and instances of repression, had shown precisely why reform needed to be undertaken as well as money-making" (Ansari, 2007: 17).

During the 1990s, when hardliners had begun to speak of a 'Western Cultural Onslaught' targeting Iranian youth, the reformist constituency didn't share in the imaginary threats of the West which was being used to sabotage policies of cultural and political liberalisation, instead in the same decade, a section of "Iranian intellectuals and students who had devoured theoretical treatises from the West, arguing for a synthesis of ideas that would legitimise Western thought within an Iranian framework" (Ansari, 2007: 19). The reformist movement emerged from within the Islamic Republic, especially from those who had been out of power, and had placed themselves in research organizations. Islamist Leftists who had suffered a

series of electoral losses had been given the control of Presidential Strategic Research Center, created by Hashemi Rafsanjani, who often sought to placate the intelligentsia did not want a complete marginalization of the left (Mehrjoo, 2013: 58, quoted in Bayatrizi, 2015: 525). It was at PSRC, led by the prominent leftist leader, Mousavi Khoeiniha, and aided by exposure to Western social thought and changing domestic circumstance that a number of young leftists including Said Hajjarian, Akbar Ganji, Hashem Aghajari and Alireza Alivitabar emerged as the most influential public intellectuals dedicated to the cause of political liberalization and reforms in late 1990s (Bayatrizi, 2015: 525). While conservatives had stressed the centrality of economic development, reformists argued that the war had distracted from the process of political reform which now needed to be taken further, and for that purpose they sought to develop democratic consciousness which would ensure the continuity of democratic political institutions. Hossein Bashiriyeh, the 'father of political sociology' in Iran introduced the concept of 'political development' as lasting solution to Iran's unresolved struggle for democracy going back to the late 1800s. Drawing from Weber's theory of authority, Bashiriyeh divided Iranian political history into three different re-incarnations of Weberian patrimonalism

> (1) traditional patrimonalism under the Qajar dynasty; (2) modernized patrimonialism under Pahlavi Dynast; and (3) ideological patrimonialism which characterizes the political stricture of post-revolutionary Iran (Bashiriyeh, 1999a: 256-8). The latter is a mixture of traditional patrimonialism and Islamic ideology and aims to produce a new kind of citizen who believes in the traditional and charismatic leaders. The essence of political behaviour in this discourse has been personal affection for leaders and their sanctioned values, and a relation between the leader and followers based on love and emotions (Bayatrizi, 2015: 527).

Bashiriyeh argued that the "discourse of 'ideological traditionalism' only supports "mass participation and leaves no room for individualism, active and autonomous participation, political competition in the form of political parties, and pluralism" (Bashiriyeh, 1990b: 5, quoted in Bayatrizi, 2015: 527). Bashiriyeh was a key influence on intellectuals who themselves became influential advocates of political development, pushing for civil-society based on Habermassian principles of reason and freedom as non-revolutionary and non-violent alternative to ideological patrimonialism of the regime. Saeed Hajjarian, the leading reformist strategist and a student of Bashiriyeh, devised, on the basis of an understanding of Iran's social and political structures, the strategy of "pressure from the bottom, negotiations at the top" meaning that by developing civil society the "reform movement can gain enough strength to not only resist the hardliners, but also push for the deep changes in the

system, which had been impossible in the decade of war" (Sahimi, 2009, Bayatrizi, 2015: 526).

These intellectuals also advocated that it was necessary to discard the confrontational attitude of the *Vilayatists* towards the West and cultural modernity in favour of an Islamic pluralism, which conforms to social realities and international conditions. The intellectuals at PSRC along with religious intellectuals played a key role in changing the oppositional ideological landscape from leftist, anti-imperialist to liberal and cosmopolitan (Bayatrizi, 2015: 526). Their de-radicalised worldview and attitude towards the hegemonic West is best captured by the notion of 'soft universality' coined by Ramin Jahanbegloo. *Soft universality* as opposed to hard universality is "not in search of uniformization and homogenization, because it does not prescribe cultural uniformity", therefore, "remains the only hope for promoting democracy in non-democratic cultures (Jahanbegloo, 2007: 21). "Soft universality remains an exciting possibility today for democratic thinking because it underpins ethical criticism and provides arguments for an account of justice and yet allows a large measure of cultural diversity may be acceptable" (Jahanbegloo, 2007: 21).

### 3.7 Religious Intellectuals: Challenging the ideologisation of Islam

The reform movement exposed the inherent contradictions of the Islamic Republic as a postcolonial revolutionary Islamic state and a latecomer to modernity. The contradictions were between the issues of collective unity against individual freedom, between nation building and independent civil society, between authentic Islamic revolutionary identity and emerging cosmopolitanism. They were all brought to the fore of political debate by reform movement and religious intellectuals who contested the fundamentalist interpretation of political Shi'ism.

Arjomand (2002) argues that the Islamic Revolution had the effect of traditionalization of a modernizing nation-state and modernization of the Shi'i tradition (Arjomand, 2002: 721). Once discursivized, religion ceases to be a set of static ideals but something that is always deeply intertwined with historical and political processes and bases itself on inductive analysis of conditions of people's lives (see Littwin, 1989). Similarly, using insights from functionalism school in sociology, Fox and Sandler (2004) view religion not as "a basic force in society but rather as a reflection of more basic social interests; it is social forces other than

religion that determine the basic direction of a society and use religion as a tool to enforce and facilitate that direction" (Fox and Sandler, 2004:49). The religious intellectuals who had played a crucial role during the revolution and assumed powerful positions in creation of a new Islamic order after the revolution developed differences with their clerical colleagues in arguing that structural reforms strengthening republican organs were necessary for the survival of the Islamic Republic. The emergence of civil society in Iran around demands of cultural-political liberalization also entailed the emergence of Islamic liberalism or reformism as a counter discourse to statist fundamentalism and monopolisation of religion in terms of an identity and binary worldview of Islam and the West.

The religious intellectuals emerged as the "architects of a critical theoretical framework for understanding the dialectic of tradition and modernity," while seeking to accommodate Islam to the modern world (Arjomand, 2009: 84). In their dialectical understanding "tradition has lost the rigid fixity attributed to it by classic 18th century enlightenment and is seen to have a dialectical relation with modernity" (Arjomand, 2009: 84). They aimed to consolidate the republican or democratic elements of Khomeini's constitutional heritage such as rule of law, democratic participation, and civil-society by reforming political Shi'ism, especially by rendering visible the constitutive Western Other, that shadowed political Shi'ism since revolution. In this, reform movement had a post-structural logic for it questioned the very epistemological foundations of political Shi'ism and binary worldview that has emerged in the wake of revolution and instead argued for a new religious thinking which was situated in contemporary condition and reflected the needs of the Iranian society. The emerging sentiment of synthesis between traditional thought, and the heritage of the modern world which characterized the philosophy of religious intellectuals was resonated by Khatami in a campaign speech in 2001, when he said that the future of Iran lay with the "new religious thinking," adding that "if we try to impose on a changing society issues which do not belong to our time, we will end up harming religion" (quoted in Arjomand, 2002).

Reformist thinkers such as Abdolkarim Soroush, Mohsen Kadivar and Mohammad Shabestari who criticised the theocratic regime from within, argued against the *fiqh* or law oriented interpretation of Islam by ruling clergy on the ground that it results in a single Islamic ideology which scuttles democratic space where

variants of Islamic ideology could co-exist. Following a pluralistic approach to religious epistemology, they contended that "interpretation of religious knowledge can change over time" (Sourush, 2003). Different generations of religious modernists have approached and interpreted Islam and its relation with politics differently in the light of prevailing socio-political conditions as well as in interaction with other non-Islamic modern ideological and political currents. "While the discourse of religious modernism before Islamic revolution was influenced by Marxism and existentialism and aimed to politicize Islam into an ideology of revolution, after the revolution religious modernists (most notably Abdulkarim Souroush and Mohammad Mojtahed-Shabestari) have based their intellectual works on liberal democracy, hermeneutics and analytic philosophy to depoliticize Islam" (Sobhani, 1386/2008; Kamarava, 2008: 40, quoted in Hashemi-Najafabadi, 2011). These scholars have challenged the statist transformation of Islam into an identity, a monopolistic worldview, by supporting pluralist approach to religion.

Abdolkarim Soroush, one of the most prominent figures of the reform movement was called the Erasmus of Islam, after he was awarded Europe's prestigious Erasmus prize in 2004. In 1992, he radically broke with Islamist ideology and went on to argue that "it is not possible in long-term to advocate a specific understanding of Islam as the ultimate one. The Islamic ideology would reduce the totality of religion to an unchanging ideological world-outlook" (Rakel, 2007). Soroush distinguishes Islam of identity and Islam of truth. "Islam of identity is a guise for cultural identity and a response to what is considered the 'crisis of identity.' The later refers to Islam as a repository of truths that point towards path of worldly and otherworldly salvation" (Soroush quoted in Madampat, 2016). In reaction to humiliation of identity, the religion becomes identity oriented and this 'identity-ism' and politicisation results in inflation and corpulence of religion at the cost of religion's truth (Soroush quoted in Madampat, 2016). He argues that Islam of truth can coexist with other truths but Islam of identity is by its very nature belligerent and bellicose.

> Different judgements apply to identities and truths. In the context of truths, we think in terms of truth or falsehood. When someone presents something to you as truth, you must investigate its truth or falsehood. In the context of identities, we think in terms of honour and servility. An identity is either great and noble or servile; it is either revered or reviled. Now, if one people humiliates another people and tramples its identity and honour, those who have been humiliated react in identity-based way. Hence, it's not just a question of reasoning and logic

here. If your identity is attacked, it's clear what your reaction will be and this is something that takes place in the modern world (Soroush, 2006).

Soroush characterised the ideological and combative Islam of the Iranian regime as "the fascist reading of religion similar to inter-war European Fascism as "the revolt against modernity and modernism" and argued that "a pluralistic society is a non-ideological society – that is, [a society] without an official interpretation and [official] interpreters – and founded on pluralist reason" (quoted in Arjomad, 2009a:79).

Similarly, Mojtahed Shabestari "rejected the state propaganda that the violation of government laws (backed by theologians) is tantamount to sinning against religion and the decisions of the Islamic government create religious obligations" (Rakel, 2007: 123). He argued that the official reading of religion originated in a phenomenon called "jurisprudential Islam (*Islam-i-fiqahati*)," "which justified totalitarian control of culture by theocratic government and gradually gained upper hand after the revolution" (Arjomand, 2002: 725). The "use of modern hermeneutics as a critical theoretical tool by the reformists has shaken the belief that there is only one correct interpretation of 'the book and the tradition' and consequently the "absolute theoretical authority" of the religious jurists that prevailed before the revolution and under Khomeini" (Mujtahid-Shabistari, 2000: 194, quoted in Arjomand, 2002: 725).

In a similar vein, Emadeddin Baghi (2006), a human rights activist argues that the "notions of individualistic humanism and human dignity, which are the judicial basis of modern political order and the concept of human right have parallels in philosophical and humanistic view of *Irfan* tradition of mysticism, particularly prevalent in Iran and Shi'ite Islam." Similar to Khatami who supported investigation of non-juristic elements in Muslim historical heritage to guide the transition to modernity, he argued that the "demise of the humanistic view which was deeply rooted in classical literature has resulted in the persistence of totalitarian systems in which human dignity has no place and in which everything is political and ideological" (Baghi, 2006). These religious intellectuals by criticising the state's instrumentalisation of religion in terms of identity and a single legitimising ideology and advocating reforming of political Islam following a pluralist and democratic logic constituted an anti-geopolitical challenge to the regime. The anti-geopolitical

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knowledge challenges the dominant geopolitical representations of state elites constructed and reproduced to legitimise their power.

### 3.8 The Anti-Geopolitics of Reform Movement

In early 1990s wartime socially repressive policies were substituted for liberal cultural policies by Hujjatulislam Sayyid Khatami, who was appointed the Minister for Culture and Islamic Guidance in 1992. Khatami initiated a more open cultural regime and began to carry out his "policy of emancipation of Iran's public space – cable and satellite television was permitted in Iran for the first time exposing Iran to western cultural influences; censorship was relaxed in both print and electronic media; while the number of newspapers and journals published increased from 102 in 1988 to 369 in 1992" (Chatterjee, 2016: 65). The limited liberalization of economy as well as cultural domain including TV, Radio and Press, brought in Western culture, lifestyle, stimulated agency and imagination amongst Iranian youth and educated middle class, fuelling action rather than dreams of escape (Powell and Steel, 2011: 76). The post-war demographic trends of a large young populace and rapidity of media globalization widened the gap between the young population and the state. Regime's troubles began as investment strapped public-sector dominated economy which had been under almost two decades of sanctions was unable to develop a private-sector able to accommodate the 'youth bulge.' High unemployment rates, especially among youth and women and continued restrictions on cultural freedom and civil liberties unravelled the 'reconstruction' that Rafsanjani had promised.

In opposing cultural liberalisation and tightening of control on civil society legitimised by securitizing discourse of 'cultural invasion' and project of top-down Islamization, conservatives in theocratic institutions sought to over-determine individual identities and lives within rigid Islamist political subjectivities. Therefore, it was in embodied practices and informal spaces that political/civic values and identities challenging the 'official' religio-political constructs were reproduced. Since, the Iranian state has sought to ideologically construct a national identity as well political subjectivity for Iranian people within the binary understanding of revolutionary Islam vis-à-vis the imperialist West, the dynamic of dissent and resistance created by this ideological project became visible in an emerging civil society that imagined itself as part of a universal civil society and liberal democratic Islam associated with reformists.

Fariba Adelkhah argues that the generation born after the revolution, which has a greater sense of personal autonomy is "creating and participating in a new 'religious public sphere' in which religion and politics are subtly intertwined, and not always in ways anticipated by Iran's established religious leaders" (in Eickelman, 2000: 121). The change in media infrastructure including satellite channels and internet has opened a public space beyond narrow confines that once were drawn by autocratic regimes (Jung, 2012: 161). It fostered a public sphere, a civil society seeking a social order based on rule of law, formal rules and norms which are established rationally as opposed to notions of religious public morality. Appadurai (1996), who "sees modernity as practice of imagining where you would like to be," proposes that due to relatively recent changes founded on technological changes, this "imagination has become part of everyday, ordinary life for ordinary people, instead of being the sole domain of the privileged and the powerful, leading to a 'plurality of imagined world'" (quoted in Powell and Steel, 2011: 76). Mojtahed-Zadeh (2001) notes that Iranian society is experiencing a clash of views and opinions as well as dialogue and those involved in dialogue can be categorised in two main groups that is traditionalists and reformists. He argues that the student demonstrations of 1999 and the closure of several newspapers in the spring of 2000 had the combined effect of deepening the dialogue.

> When the Sixth Majlis (elected in February 2000) was preparing to ease restrictions on the press, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei issued an edict in August, 2000 preventing any alteration to the press law. His edict had the unintended effect of bringing back into the heart of the national debate the issue of velayat-e-faqih (guardianship of the Islamic legal authority) – a pillar of Islam's system of rule. Iran has entered a new phase of political progress involving Iranians from all walks of life. This process is shaping a new political identity or a new nationalism, which is not the ideology of that state (Mojathed-Zadeh, 2001:55).

Civil society as a space of communicative political, social and intellectual engagement in Habermasaian sense has an open conception of the world and therefore connected with the global public sphere; as a result it poses an anti-geopolitical challenge to the ideological worldview of the regime. Anti-geopolitics is defined as "localized subversions of dominant territorial narratives" including "practices of individuals and institutions that resist the hegemonic narratives of geopolitics that originate within state bureaucracies" (Painter and Jeffrey, 2009: 214). Civil society, as part of modern social order associated with citizens' popular demands for, 'rule of law,' political reforms and democratic rights is different from political sphere where statesperson are preoccupied with access to, or the exercise of power, and therefore it

ends up challenging the rigid ideological worldview legitimising the power of the state. Paul Routledge (2006) defines anti-geopolitics as "an ambitious political and cultural force within civil society that articulates forms of counter-hegemonic struggle" (Routledge, 2006:234, quoted in Kuus, 2009:18).

> By civil society, Routledge means those institutions that are not part of either material production in the economy or the formal sphere of the state. By counter-hegemonic, he means the resistances that challenge the material and cultural power of dominant geopolitical interests or states and their elites (Routledge, 2006: 234, quoted in Kuus, 2009:18).

"Civil society is seen in action terms as the domain of struggles, public spaces, and political processes. It comprises the social realm in which the creation of norms, identities, and social relations of domination and resistance are located" (Cohen, 1985:700, quoted in Routledge, 1996:512). In context of Iran, civil society is understood as a society, where personal freedoms are respected and a democratic polity exists. The most contentious arena in state-society relationship in Iran has been the social status of women and the plethora of rules governing their appearance and conduct in public life, which are often courageously defied by women. Hammed Shaidian (2002) argue that Islamic state's support for patriarchy and its pre-made gender identities and roles legitimized within the Islamic law has made challenging dominant culture political (Shahidian, 2002: 162). Since Iranian regime started pursuing neo-liberal policies since early 1990s, enabling increasing participation of women in economic sector, women have become increasingly transnational in their framing of concerns as well as in collaboration and strategies of achieving gender justice. The granting of 2003 Nobel Peace Prize to Shirin Abadi, a female lawyer who "has fought Islamic penal code and other archaic laws while defending the rights of women and children," and government's immediate reaction to it as interference in Iran's internal affairs was only emblematic of the gender conundrum facing the regime (Monshipouri, 2016:79).

Another scholar notes that in a country where revolution became Islamic, people are moving away from the Islamic government, as "the Islamic ideology and religious leadership, in becoming part of the state institutions and politics, lost their sanctity and charisma" (Zubaida, 1997). In context of state-led Islamisation of society and use/abuse of religious doctrines by state, evolving processes of secularisation in terms of privatisation of religious belief and practice and differentiations of religious institutions from the state are evident in emergent distinction that apolitical people

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make between "official religion" (*din-e-dowlati*) and "our own religion" (*din-e-khodemoun*) (Ashraf and Banuazizi, 2001: 250). "Their rejection of the government imposed forms of religiosity affirms the traditional Shi'ite suspicion of temporal authority—in this case, an Islamic state—and a belief in maintaining one's religious independence from the state" (Ashraf and Banuazizi, 2001: 250).

Arjun Appadurai (1990) in "Differences and Disjuncture in the Global Cultural Economy" notes that in the new global cultural economy defined by globalised cultural flows, there is a "fundamental disjuncture between economy, culture, and politics. He argues that these globalised flows have contributed to a new social condition defined by ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, and ideoscpaes (with suffix-scape indicating permanent fluidity, and their dependence on perspective) in which imagined communities have been supplanted by imagined worlds.

> These landscapes are the building blocks of multiple imagined worlds of historically situated imaginations of persons and groups around the world. As people encounter the flows, they do so within their historical contexts. From their context and the flows, they construct a worldview. The scapes are deeply perspectival constructs. Therefore, the worldview that anyone of us constructs depends on who we are, where we are, and what scapes we see and how we interpret them, therefore there will be multiple ways of imagining the world, and so there will be multiple imagined world (Appadurai, 1996, quoted in Powel and Steel, 2011: 76).

In underlining that the multiple and fluid imaginations of world that self-conscious individuals form from their location in globalised flows of information, ideas, technology and capital and their particular historically situated ways of interpreting them run in the face of exclusivist and monolithic geopolitical imaginations of self and other that are constructed by the regime. In demanding rule of law, civil freedoms reformist civil society challenged state's colonization of the political in the form of an ideology and projected its own visions of state society which are shaped by their experience of globalising social reality facilitated by various global networks of communication. The reform movement was not only against the totalising discourses of the postcolonial ideological state it sought to reform through dialogue and persuasion, its attempt at forming a new social modernity by engaging with transnational public sphere went beyond the homogenising logic of globalization as Westernization. The ontological characterization of the West as a monolithic entity associated with hostility and fear which underpinned practical geopolitical reasoning in discourse of 'cultural invasion'

was discarded and resistance vis-à-vis the imperialist center of 'the West' was re-configured as a process of discursive negotiation and exchange, as seen in Khatami's dialogue among civilizations. Rooted in its local position of opposition to religio-political totalitarianism, yet seeking to integrate western liberal thought with Iranian-Islamic heritage, reform movement constituted a reengagement of faith and politics in negotiating a less ideological and more civic national identity, popular demands for democratic participation and rule of law, in effect reconstructing both Islam and the singular imperial modernity towards an Iranian multiple modernity (Eisenstadt, 2000). These Islamists and their epistemology enable the erosion of Eurocentrism and the 'global process of the provincilization of Europe' (Sayyid, 2006). Their premise is that "modernity and westernization are not identical; western pattern of modernity are not the only 'authentic' modernities, though they enjoy historical precedence and continue to be basic reference point for others" (Eisenstadt, 2000). In cultural terms, Iranian civil society accepts cultural modernity in considerable measure; for it seeks to develop a 'civic culture' and 'modern public domain' marked by mutual cooperation, security, and corporate identity, outside 'traditional' and 'safe' confines of family and kinship (Kamarava, 2001: 175). The new generation of Iranian intellectuals no longer consider other cultures (i.e. "the West" or non-Islamic others) as "enemy" (that needs to be terminated); rather, the very objective of this evolving cosmopolitan perspective promotes a full acknowledgement of the other subject (Jahanbegloo, 2012).

Khamenei's conservative camp sought to counter the ideological and political challenge of the reformist movement by arguing that by supporting reforms in Iran, enemies in the West were trying to bring the downfall of the Islamic Republic in a manner similar to the disintegration of Soviet Union by fast-paced reforms of Gorbachev. In conservative discourse Islam is considered the most important source of national unity that reform movement had contested, and which risked being exploited by enemies of the Islamic Republic. Khamenei argued that "unlike Soviet Union, Iran is an integrated country, and its integration is, first of all, due to the religion of Islam and, in second place due to its history, culture, customs and traditions. Besides, the religious and spiritual leadership also plays an important role in preserving this integration" (Khamenei, 2000, July). In the same speech Khamenei argued that reforms in all areas – political, economic, and social – should go forward

in equal pace and since economic reforms go on a slower pace, social and political reforms should also be calibrated accordingly and conducted within the framework of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic. The supremacy of the institution of the *vilayat-e-*faqih, especially in supervising over the process of reform was justified to ensure that reforms did not undermine the Islamic, revolutionary, and national principles that are enshrined in the constitution. The leader is extolled for uniting the nation under his spiritual leadership. "The main task of the leader is to safeguard the Islamic system and revolution. Administering the affairs of the country has been entrusted to government executives, but it is the responsibility of the leader to supervise the performance of different government organs and make sure that they function in line with Islamic tenets and principles of the revolution" (Khamenei, 2000, July).

### 3.9 Dialogue among Civilizations and Subaltern Geopolitics

Khatami's 'dialogue among civilizations' was an attempt to reformulate Iranian geopolitical imaginations by bringing Iranian nation out of the confrontational relation vis-à-vis the West, and create avenues for a foreign policy reflecting the preferences of the reformist constituency. David Newman (1998) argues that the "imagined national identities of the individuals will influence the way in which political elites view the role of the state in regional and global affairs" (Newman, 1998:304). "The geopolitical discourse of any country will vary over time as both the internal identities of the population and the global positioning of the state—the letter representing some form of aggregate collective identity—undergo change" (Newman, 1998:304). Khatami's emphasis on dialogue as the only peaceful means of change internally and internationally as well as the best means of reducing tension between powerful and powerless had a subaltern logic. Khatami and reformist intellectuals sought to connect Islamic political tradition with positive elements of the Western civilization, so as to reform the negative aspect of the tradition through deep dialogue, while retaining the anti-oppressive character of Islamist politics.

It is important to note that since Islamic revolution in Iran, Islam, like Catholic value system in Latin America, has taken heremeneutical form or the "basic structural form within which secular concepts find their transformation cues and their validity as a reference for acceptable practices (Littwin, 1989). Lawrence Littwin (1989) argues that "religion in this structural sense is a language. It has its own vocabulary,

grammar, and history. It is a language used to relate God, people, and society" (Littwin, 1989). Therefore, new innovations and debates amongst younger generations of scholars of Islam, in Iran like elsewhere in the Islamic world, have taken forms of attempts to synthesise Islamic and Western philosophies in forging of new social theories and policies. These developments also have the effect of distancing Islam from politics and government, in favour of a new Muslim humanism. Ansari (2007) notes probably the most intriguing intellectual development of the last decade of twentieth century in Iran was "the appropriation of Tocqueville's thesis of American democracy as the union of religion and democracy to the cause of Islamic democracy in Iran" (Ansari, 2007:19).

Khatami's discourse transformed embattled revolutionary Islam to progressive Islam compatible with pluralism and hybridity, the emerging cultural logics of globalization. At the same time, it sought to reconstitute Iranian geopolitical imagination in a subaltern mould, that is not overtly oppositional vis-à-vis the West but rather 'somewhere in-between' the achievements of Islamic and Western civilisations. Islamic Republic from its very inception had operated in the context of war, sanctions, and external pressure; as a result it had developed a sense of embattlement. The hostile geopolitical environment has allowed hardliners to securitise the situation and depict themselves as the only "true guardians of Iranian security" and identify those calling for reforms as weak on security (Katouzian and Shahidi, 2008: 22, quoted in Saleh and Worral, 2014: 14). Reformists discourse of Islamic modernism and progressive Islam sought to overcome this embattled identity and complete the socialisation of revolutionary Iran with the international system. For instance, Khatami argued for a dialogical world culture as against domination of all other cultures, by globalising one culture.

> What we ought to consider, in earnest today, is the emergence of a world culture. World culture cannot and ought not to ignore characteristics and peculiarities of any particular local culture with the aim of imposing its own upon them. Cultures and civilizations that have naturally evolved among various nations, in the course of history, are constituted from elements that have gradually adapted to collective souls and to the historical and traditional characteristics. As such these elements merge with each other and consolidate within an appropriate network of relationships. In spite of plurality and diversity, a unique form can be abstracted. In order for the world culture to assume a unified identity, in form and substance, and avoid the chaos caused by various cultural discords, it must engage all the concerned parties in dialogues aimed at exchanging knowledge, experience and raising understanding in diverse areas of culture and civilization (Khatami, 2000, Sept.).

This geopolitical imagination as reflected in the argument for a unified 'world culture' was shaped by what they saw was an interdependent and interactive world.

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Through his 'dialogue among civilizations,' especially through comparison of the ideals that drove Islamic Revolution with that of American War of Independence, namely liberty and religion, Khatami projected a 'progressive' and even liberal reading of Islam – in support for individual liberty and civil-society. This understanding of Islam was compatible with civic culture of pluralism, as against the ideological reading of fundamentalists, and had a logic of inter-cultural exchange with those excluded as cultural Others. In the discourse of the reformist intellectuals including president Khatami, one sees a self-confident Iran willing for a genuine dialogue with other cultures, where difference is not source of paranoia or xenophobia. He argues that Iranian spirit to integrate through "reflexive contemplation of the methods and achievements of various cultures and civilizations" has come from "Iran's exceptional geographical location. It connects Far East, Middle East, Central Asia, and Indian Sub-continent and many other Asian cultures and civilizations to Europe. This remarkable situation has placed Iran on the path of political hurricanes as well as that of pleasant breezes of cultural exchanges and also avenues for international trade" (Khatami, 2000, Sept.). By referring to place-bound identity and arguing that Islamic-Iranian civilization has developed in this exceptional geographical location at junction of multiple regions, Khatami, while acknowledging the interactive relations between different civilizations, refutes the notion of a universal civilization, as proponents of Westernization claim and instead argues for plurality of civilizations and horizontal dialogue between them.

Fabio Petito (2004) argues that the "originality of Khatami's idea of dialogue among civilizations and cultures lies in its implicit International Political Theory that envisages a normative structure for a peaceful (multicultural and globalized) international society. His teleological vision of humanity heading towards liberty and emancipation is articulated in contrast with the end of Cold War millenarian discourse of 'end of history' and worldwide triumph of liberalism. In his address at the United Nations General Assembly in 1998, he called the "fantasy of a unipolar world ruled by a single super-power an illusion" and saw the collapse of bipolar world as signalling a "swift march of the world towards diversity coupled with renewed assertion of identity in the international arena by nations demanding equality" (Khatami, 1998). Civilizational identity, espoused by Khatami seeks to rehabilitate pre-modern civilizational identity vis-à-vis that of nation-states which are regarded as

of modern and European provenance imposed world-wide through practice of imperialism and colonialism. It also seeks to circumscribe the universalist claim of Western civilization in order to establish plurality of civilizations. But in contrast to Huntington's 'clashes of civilizations,' Khatami argues that differences between Islam and the West or Iran and the United States to be rooted in relations of domination along imperialist/colonized axis rather than resulting from irreconcilable differences between civilizations or religions. "The paradigm of dialogue among civilizations requires that we abandon the will to power and instead pursue compassion, understanding and love. The ultimate goal of dialogue among civilizations is not dialogue in and of itself, but attaining empathy and compassion" (Khatami, 2000, Sept.). However this Iranian paradigm for dialogue among civilizations comes from Khatami's perception of the global system assembled by contemporary globalization as being under the hegemony of what he calls the 'Western civilization.' Khatami's critique of contemporary globalization is similar to Alexander Dugin's alternative model of globalization called "potential globalization" which "is not about assertion of one universal model of values but about the dialogue of various subjects – states, ethnic groups and confessions" (Istok and Jakabova, 2011:115).

> But what do I mean by 'today's world?' Briefly, I mean Western civilization, which dominates the world. This means that our economic, political, and social life is strongly influenced by the West; without its legacy and achievements, life is impossible for us Muslims... today world is western in its orientation, techniques and thoughts, such that if one lives outside the geographic boundaries of the West, one must incorporate the West into one's values and life (Khatami, 2004).

Khatami regarded Western civilization as intellectually, ethically, technologically, and politically challenging and "since the West's current dominance and entrenchment could not be ignored, Iran had to study it, judge it objectively, and learn from its achievements while rejecting its defects" (Amuzegar, 2014:67). Evidently, Khatami's analysis of contemporary world dominated by the Western civilization is similar to what Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano (1992, 1998, 2000) calls the "coloniality of power" which allows us to understand the continuity of "colonial forms of domination produced by colonial cultures and structures in the modern/colonial-capitalist world system, well after the end of colonial administrations" (Grosfoguel, 2008). Similarly, Dugin (2014) also argues that "civilization is not one but many. Western civilization's pretension to universalism is will to domination and an authoritarian discourse" (Dugin in Millerman, 2014:5). The point in comparison with other non-western philosophers is to underline the fact that

reformist thinking in Iran was part of a broader philosophical thinking emerging against the background of Western globalism and claims of unipolar world, elsewhere in the Global South, which has a decolonizing and postmodern orientation.

In a speech on a visit to France in 1999, Khatami compared globalization to colonialism, a destructive force threatening dialogue among cultures based on "respect for equality." He said that the new world order that "certain powers" were trying to "make us accept," "in which the culture of the entire world is ignored, looks like a kind of neocolonialism." He added: "this imperialism threatens mutual understanding between nations, and communication and dialogue among cultures" (quoted in 'Iranian, in Paris Speech, Aims a Barb at U.S., Oct. 29, 1999). Notwithstanding the critique of globalization and its homogenising tendencies, the 'dialogue of civilizations' thesis followed in the tradition of Islamic modernism, seeking to transcend the seeming "choice" between "two polar opposites: a traditional religious past and a modern secular future" (Shariati, 2015:i). Manifesting a dialogic approach, it sought to bridge the perceived polarity and confrontation of civilizational identity politics, implicit in both Huntington's thesis and conservative Islamist worldview of self-contained and opposing civilizational entities of Islam and the West. Reformists "primary concern relate to the force of Western cultural onslaught that may lead to combining the positive elements of Western liberalism and liberal democracy with those of Islam" (Behravesh, 2014: 264). Instead of complete rejection or uncritical emulation, reformist project contests and re-negotiates Western modernity within an Islamic framework. Their premise is that "modernity and westernization are not identical; western pattern of modernity are not the only 'authentic' modernities, though they enjoy historical precedence and continue to be basic reference point for others" (Eisenstadt, 2000).

One can argue that Khatami's 'dialogue of civilization' thesis in establishing of an intellectual affinity with the principles of American revolution, while making visible the neo-imperial forms of domination, had a decolonizing and subaltern logic, which means "not completely rejecting the Western categories but beginning a new and autonomous relation with them" (Das, 1989, quoted in Mignolo, 2000: 172). Reformist show a pluralist approach to modernity and tradition in matters of politics and culture, analogous to what Enrique Dussel calls "transmodernity" and "liberation philosophy," which comes from the critical thinkers of each culture in dialogue with

other cultures, a decolonizing in terms of "creative response of local subaltern epistemology" to a "single modernity centered in Europe and imposed as a global design to the rest of the world" (quoted in Grosfoguel, 2008). "Unlike anti-geopolitics, subaltern geopolitics does not position its subject outside of state and associated institutions," instead "it shares the 'utopian' instincts of progressive geopolitics" (Kearns, 2008, 2009) but at the same time have a manifest "desire to keep open a range of voices of what such utopias might be" (Sharp, 2013:22).

Khatami's vision of socio-political order in Iran was completely within the discourse of Islam, yet it was not monolithic or trans-historical. Especially, the fact that Khatami's argument for incorporation with Western liberal values goes hand in hand with emphasizing the religious roots of western liberalism and democracy, proves that his philosophical thinking remains firmly within the discursive boundaries of religion, borrowing philosophical content of secular concepts but eschewing secular language. Khatami while brings Islam out of its confrontational and narrow ideological mould, his political vision is defined against the intellectual of revolutionary Shi'ism. In his message to the people of America in a CNN interview in January 1998, he described them as "religious people," "followers of Jesus Christ," basically refuting its liberal-secular self-image, and underlining the significance of religion in its present and past. Even more significantly, he traces the ideals of American Revolution, democracy and republicanism to Puritanism, a relation that was pointed out by French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville. "The American civilization is founded upon the vision, thinking, and manners of the Puritans... the Puritans constituted a religious sect whose vision and characteristics, in addition to worshipping God, was in harmony with republicanism, democracy, and freedom" (Khatami, 1998, Jan.). "In his view, the significance of this civilization is the fact that liberty found religion as a cradle for its growth, and religion found protection of liberty as its divine calling" (Khatami, 1998, Jan.). As Khatami point to the religious aspects of the presumably liberal secular western/American identity, it was intended as a defence of religion and to underline the interface of religion and politics at the very basis of American civilization. As Khatami attempted to de-hyphenate secular-modernity, he offered an "alternative, specifically *religious*, understanding of modernity and place of Islam within it" (Foody, 2016:194).

By tracing the values of Islamic revolution, which couples religiosity with liberty and justice to the beginning of American civilization four centuries ago, Khatami established a relation of equivalence between the foundation of the United States of America and Islamic Republic of Iran of the twenty first century and in effect constituted subaltern geopolitical representations. This positioning recognizes the "possibility that identities can be established through geographical representations that are neither fully 'inside' nor 'outside'" (hooks, 1990, quoted in Sharp, 2013) constructs dialogic space. Joanne Sharp (2011) notes that in a convergence of postcolonial and political geography, subaltern geopolitics "refers to spaces of geopolitical knowledge production which are *neither* dominant *nor* resistant," and in that it moves beyond studying dominant structures and those who oppose them, for it "can have the effect of reifying this binary geopolitical structure rather than challenging it" (Sharp, 2011:271).

> Drawing strength from the concept of subaltern that is distinctively tied to postcolonial notion of power relations" (Spivak, 1988; Chakrabarty, 2000), there is not only an insistence on giving attention to the marginalized but it is also premised upon an unambiguous position of marginality that refuses to be seen as the 'Other', as alternative, as enacting resistance (Woon, 2011, quoted in Sharp, 2011: 272).

Khatami's dialogue of civilization sought to overturn the discursive foundations of geopolitical imaginations of the self as threatened by a demonized other by bringing them to the realm of dialogue based on acceptance of diversity, difference and mutual respect. It underlined that religion as a discursive practice can be used in constructing both exclusive and inclusive geopolitical imagination. In a subaltern vein, Khatami draws parallel between American War of Independence and Iran's Islamic Revolution and celebrates achievements of American nation and civilization, though he critiques the American "policy of domination" since World War II, as "incompatible with the American civilization, which is founded on democracy, freedom, and human dignity." Khatami attempted to deconstruct the monolithic vision of 'political Islam' in the West. As he argued that American hostility towards Islam and Iran results from the Cold War mentality and the intent of "certain circles to portray Iran as the new enemy," he lamented that "they are targeting progressive Islam rather than certain regressive interpretations of Islam." "They attack an Islam which seeks democracy, progress and development; an Islam which calls for utilization of achievement of human civilization including that of the West" (Khatami, 1998, Jan.). Calling for a "sober revision of the mentality of the cold

war," he argued that a "culture of peace" should be the template for dialogue among world's civilizations. "The advancement and promotion of culture of peace is contingent upon the recognition of the constructive role of nations coupled with avoidance of domination, unilateralism, confrontation, and exclusion" (Khatami, 1998). "It is clear that his critique of modernity is not an essentialist, fundamentalist, anti-European critique. It is a perspective that is critical of both Eurocentric and Third World fundamentalism, colonialism and nationalism" (Grosfoguel, 2008). Khatami's discourse challenged the conservatives at home who perceive conflict between the United States/West and Islamic Iran as perennial, inevitable and in terms of irreconcilable ideological difference.

It was a major diplomatic coup for Khatami and Iran, when United Nations accepted his suggestion and declared year 2001, the year of "Dialogue among Civilizations." The positive response that Khatami received from Europe, known as 'constructive engagement' was in contrast to the U.S. policy of isolating Iran, and it strengthened Khatami's hand in domestic politics to the extent that he and his foreign minister Kamal Kharazi were able to push vigorously for a revision of many of the cardinal postulates of Tehran's policy towards the US (Chatterjee, 2012: 44). President Khatami took an initiative to improve Iran's relations with the United States, advocating "civilisational dialogue" and boldly calling for scholarly exchanges and other non – diplomatic contacts with the country.

Any tangible change in foreign policy remains a function of the internal politics of theocratic regime, which was made difficult given Islamic Republic's multiple and parallel centres of power. The powerful un-elected clerical institutions, especially Supreme Leader, the Guardian Council and the judiciary controlled by conservative clerics blocked bills which sought to reform the system by curtailing their powers. In some cases Expediency Council chaired by Rafsanjani since its creation in 1987 proved pivotal in resolution of deadlocks between the *Majlis* and the Guardians, but during the tenure of sixth parliament (2000-2004), Expediency Council invariably sided with the Guardians against the reformist camp (Chatterjee, 2012: 43). The conservative joined by a new entrant in the form of Basij-dominated Islamic populist *E'telaf-e Abadgaran-e Iran-e Islami* criticised reformists conciliatory foreign policy especially regarding the Nuclear program, when Khatami was over-ruled by the Supreme Leader after he indicated he was willing to allow greater access

to IAEA inspectors (Moshaver, 2003:300). They interpret reformists' pacific attitude as an evidence of weak commitment to the Islamic revolution and the republic.

### 3.10 From Critical Engagement to Constructive Engagement with Europe

As Rafsanjani was determined to implement his economic reconstruction plans, he had to come to terms with the fact that global economy and most international monetary institutions were dominated by Western countries. The pursuit of détente with the West was a manifestation of pragmatic faction's flexible approach to foreign policy. Pragmatists make decisions based on available evidences, consider the advantages and disadvantages of alternative policies, and are quick to reverse themselves if those policies prove unsuccessful (Hook, 2013, quoted in Niakooee and Ejazee, 2014). However, instead of a quick embrace of the West, Iran pursued an exogenous strategy of economic development through market liberalization and export promotion based on multilateralism while avoiding risks posed by both isolationism and unconditional acceptance of the existing international order.

With the election of Rafsanjani government, Europeans, especially Germans argued that by keeping open a 'critical dialogue' with Iranians they were in a better position to influence Iranian leadership. For instance, through dialogue French were able to free their nationals held by pro-Iranians group in Beirut, and similarly British hostages were released from Lebanese captives after Iran's mediation. They also argued that American policy of containment had produced little result in changing Iranian behaviour; therefore, by pursuing a policy of engagement and trade, they hoped to encourage Iran to moderate its radicalism. For many of the EU countries engagement with Iran was also driven by the prospects of tapping Iranian market of 62 million people and the interest in Iran's energy resources given that transporting Caspian energy resources to Europe remained a work in progress. "By 1995, the EU had become Iran's largest trading partner with over 40 percent of total Iranian imports" (Moshaver, 2003: 295). However, the failure to resolve Rushdie affair and the verdict in 1996 after four years of trial on assassination of four Iranian Kurdish leaders at a German restaurant called Mykonos judged several high level Iranians including Rafsanjani to be involved in the case caused the suspension of critical dialogue and withdrawal of all EU ambassadors (Moshaver, 2003: 295).

In Europe Khatami's election was seen as victory for the forces of reform and modernization of theocracy, validating its previous policy of critical dialogue and in light of Khatami's emphasis on dialogue and détente as underlying principles of his diplomacy and a conciliatory foreign policy Europe adopted a more positive attitude towards Iran. After Rushdie affair was resolved with Europeans finally accepting what Rafsanjani government had offered before, that is the Iranian government would not seek or encourage Rushdie's killing, while not officially rescinding the fatwa, it paved the way for the return of the EU ambassadors to Iran by November 1997, followed by the EU decision in 1998 to engage in a Comprehensive Dialogue and Constructive Engagement with Iran (Hunter, 2010: 86). Iran's international isolation began to ease when Italian Prime Minister Romano Produ visited Tehran in 1997. In 1999 Khatami was able to end Iran's pariah status when he travelled to Rome and Vatican, the first state visit to the West by an Iranian leader since Islamic revolution, twenty years ago. Subsequently, he visited Germany, France and other European countries integrating Iran with the international community of nations and seeking trading and investment opportunities. The underlying logic of 'constructive engagement' was that the "EU would assist the reformist agenda by tilting the balance of interest and encourage moderate policies" and human rights in the country (Kaussler, 2008: 280). Through Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), signed in February, 2001, the EU wanted to use incentives in economic cooperation and trade while demanding economic and human rights reform, as well as assurances from Tehran to stay within the framework of NPT, while tying Iran with Europe both economically and politically (Kaussler, 2008: 272). By 2001, European policy of engagement with Iran was defined by its overall policy of promoting human rights and democratic reforms. In 2001, the Commission stated that "respect for human rights and democracy should be an integral or mainstream consideration in all EU external policies." In this regard while high priority was given to positive and constructive engagement with governments, "the 'suspension clause' foresees that if a state lacks a genuine commitment to pursue change through dialogue and consultation and if all avenues for progress have been explored the EU will resort to negative measures such as sanctions" (Kaussler, 2008: 271). The 'comprehensive dialogue' replacing earlier 'critical dialogue' allowed discussions on a wide range of issues, including: "Areas of cooperation, trade and investment, energy, drug, refugees;

International issues, terrorism, human rights and proliferation; Regional issues, Iraq, Gulf, Central Asia, the Middle East Peace Process" (Moshaver, 2003: 296).

## 3.11 'Cultural Invasion': Reproducing Binary Geopolitical Visions

The time-space compression as a result of technological revolution in information and communication technology and global flows of investment and trade under western neoliberal economic ideology ushered in post-Cold War era of global integration into one global economic system. In this highly interdependent and interconnected world, the constructions of cultural boundaries demarcating inside from outside, separating domestic from the foreign became increasingly unsustainable. Mahmood Sariolghalam (2011) notes that "it is only in 'Western sphere' where there is a contiguity between the cultural, political and economic entities as they have evolved, reinforced and cultivated one another simultaneously over a long span of time" (Sariolghalam, 2011:8). In ideologically defined states such as Iran, "economic globalization per se is not seen as a direct threat, as long as capitalist economic system and its "instrumental rationality" can be reconciled and harmonized with what is called the "philosophical rationality" predominant in that culture" (Sariolghalam, 2011).

Iran since 1990 has combined semi-governmental capitalism with neoliberal market oriented policies of privatization, trade liberalisation and seeking foreign capital and technology. However, Islamists since the revolution have pursued policies which aim at cultural and moral transformation of the society and therefore opted for highly regulated cultural regime. Therefore, while borders have become porous in economic sphere, they are being securitized vis-à-vis the onslaught of western globalism and its supposedly universal values such as liberal democracy, market economy and the rule of law, as state through its geopolitical practices and discourse seeks to reproduce cultural borders and legitimize its tight cultural regime (Parland, 2004:94). Border is understood as "being a peripheral line or zone of separation between states in the form of a socially constructed phenomenon in order to distinguish between the internal society – people of a given territoriality – and those outside its borders, eventually culminating in the concept of separation, that is, the notion of 'us' (our society) separate from 'them' (their society)" (Mojtahedzadeh, 2012: 159).

In Iran defence of these cultural and civilizational borders has been associated with national desire for independence. "Because ideas about national identity collide with power structures in the world and with other geopolitical constraints, geopolitical visions are developed in order to cope up with such threats" (Guney and Gokcan, 2010: 24). Rejecting separation of national interests from national identity, Ayatollah Khamenei argued that "interests become national only when they are not in conflict with national identity…national interest should be harmonised with national identity, not vice versa. It is not national identity which should follow national interest. If the latter happens, such interests are surely 'imaginary interests'" (Khamenei, 2017, June). Defining the identity which emerged with the victory of the Islamic revolution and has given self-confidence to the people, Khamenei argues that "Our Muslim nature, our historical depth and our revolutionary quality are three main elements that constitute the identity of the people" (Khamenei, 2017, June). As revolutionary Iran embarked on the path of socialisation with the West dominated international system, the identity debate in the background of western globalism impelled by information and communication revolution shaped up in two opposite forms, one being democratic turn of the reform movement and dialogue among civilizations advocated by religious intellectuals and reformists, the other being the culturally paranoid discourse hrof 'cultural invasion' and 'soft war' constructed by conservatives and hardliners who were engaged in factional struggle for power with reformists. Reform movement had decentred the ideologically defined and stabilized binary geopolitical reasoning of the Islam and the hostile West, causing anxiety in the conservative establishment, who then sought to control the geopolitical discourse about the West.

With Islam taken as the principal value system for Muslim societies and state, all other ideologies and culture have been seen by conservatives in terms of a mortal, existential challenge to the survival of the regime. In security discourse of the Islamic Republic, Andalusiaisation – de-Islamisation or gradual pushing out of Islam from social and political identity in southern Spain when it was still under Muslim rule – has become a critical concept along with cultural invasion (Shahi and Saleh, 2015:500). Defining the strategic intent behind cultural invasion, Ayatollah Khamenei argued that the imperialist powers of the West want to "divest the Islamic Revolution from its original content, Islamic values, and revolutionary spirit. This is one of the vital points that require public vigilance" (Khamenei, 2009, Feb.). Cultural invasion

"targets the collective consciousness of the people in order to weaken their faith both in Islam and the Islamic state. Andalusiaisation is a multidimensional and multifaceted cultural force, which can pave the way for the ideological decline of the Islamic state. It is not only counter-revolutionary but also, more specifically, counter-theocratic" (Shahi and Saleh, 2015:500). The discourse of 'cultural invasion' emerged in parallel with cultural liberalization in early 1990s. In this period there was a contestation over how to square the needs of economic liberalization with the need to maintain the cultural and political identity of the state and society and what were to be the strategies to grapple with global cultural flows threatening to corrupt local cultures. Even when the reformists in republican institutions were inclined to conform to the aspirations of their constituents, the conservatives in Guardian council and revolutionary institutions mainly Basij harassed the civil society in a bid to maintain the hegemony of their favoured Islamist cultural-political identity.

In early 1990s, the "battle for skies," a prolonged debate over the liberalisation of cultural regime, especially foreign satellite TV involved Khatami, the Minister for Culture and Ali Larijani, who replaced him after Khatami was forced to resign by conservative majority of Majlis. The discourse of the so-called "battle for skies" was heavily Islamic and precipitated a struggle over the meaning of revolution, in which conservatives, given their institutional strength finally won the day. The contestation over foundational narrative of revolution is important, for "foundational accounts create a coherent lens for interpreting the past, present and future of a regime or collective" (Kohn and Mcbride, 2011:15). "Conservatives in the Majlis and the Guardians—clerics as much as the lay members of Mo'talefeh—considered such policies to be *taquti* ('Satanic', a term associated with secularization under the Shah), and condemned the laxity encouraged by the government" (Chatterjee, 2016:66). Khatami responded by "warning that restrictive and exclusionary attitudes with different ideas to that of the regime would ultimately lead to a dictatorship, and maintained that "freedom of thought and respect for intellectual honour are among the primary goals of the revolution" (Chatterjee, 2016:66). "Arguing against Larijani's cautioning against *azad-andeshi* (free-thinking) and *ikhtilaf* (disagreement) as a potential source of *fitna* (trouble), Khatami emphasized that *ikhtilaf* results in *chand-arzaeshi* (pluralism), which had sanction in the Qur'an" (Chatterjee, 2016:66).

In year 1991 when a conservative controlled *majlis* was mounting an attack on the liberal cultural policies of Khatami, Rafsanjani's minister of culture, Leader Khamenei warned that "cultural invasion is a stark reality. We cannot eradicate the basics of cultural invasion by denying it."

> In my opinion what is more threatening inside the borders, is cultural strategies...one of the most basic issues in cultural affairs of the society, we are beginning to become numb, or we already have been...the way I feel considering what is going on today, an all-round attack has been devised... it appears that in the movies, the press and broadcasting (that belongs to the state), an organ or an agent of that system is present (Khamenei, quoted in Panahi, 2015:3453).

"In *cultural invasion* a political or economic system tries to weaken cultural foundations of a nation to make it dependent and consequently achieve its goals and through this attempt they import a new different set of values to replace the national values and culture of the nation" (Culture Document of Islamic Revolution INST, quoted in Panahi, 2015:3451). Ali Larijani who replaced Khatami after later was forced to resign by *majlis* no-confidence vote in July, 1992, "made public his ministry's intention to bankroll mosques into becoming the primary cultural headquarters. In April, 1993, mosque trusteeships were authorized to issue permits for printing and publishing houses and video clubs. In September, 1993, forty cultural centres were promised in various Tehran mosques to counter blitz of the West" (Chatterjee, 2016: 67).

Just as Islamic revolution was seen as total and on-going process, Islamic identity was conceived as "not a 'product' but a process constantly under threat by hostile forces from within and outside" (Chaturvedi, 2002: 224). "The Supreme Leader has linked the threat of Andalusiaisation of Iranian society to external enemies, namely Israel, the West, and the United States. For him the emerging non-conformist social and cultural trends that contradict the very ethos of the Islamic state is the manifestation of Islamic conspiracy" (Shahi and Saleh, 2015: 501). "Conquering nations through imposing and injecting foreign culture is not a new thing. It existed in the past as well. The only difference is that it is organized and formulated similar to other plans and programs carried out by the Western governments" (Khamenei, 2008, Oct.). Since in Islamic Republic, identity is constructed in terms of religion, any threat to the same is seen in existential terms. Laustsen and Waever (2000) note that the act of referring to sacred objects as threatened typically means securitizing an issue. "Any challenge or threat is

existential because the absolute and foundational character of the question of being makes compromise and concessions unimaginable. Religion easily becomes high politics" (Laustsen and Waever, 2000: 719).

The notion of cultural invasion, framed as a systematic and all-round attack waged by cultural strategies and planed assaults inside borders is a defensive discourse which securitizes the Iranian-Islamic socio-cultural sphere, while the more powerful and persuasive Western culture which defined an emergent global culture propelled by communication revolution was represented in terms of military vocabulary of offense, dealing with which requires a systematic response. At the peak of the reform movement, Ayatollah Khamenei (2000) while drawing parallel with the "US plan" of supporting Gorbachev to bring down the Soviet Union and the Western support for Khatami –dubbed the 'Gorbachev of Iran' in western media –argued that "this US plan was not of a military nature. It mainly relied on the media and means of mass communication such as radio, television, films, publication, and other publicity means. Indeed, the media and cultural tools were effective to some fifty or sixty percent in bringing about this downfall" (Khamenei, 2000, July).

The discourse of 'cultural invasion' by representing the West as a threat seeking to undercut the religious and cultural foundations of the Islamic Republic, securitized the Islamic ideological foundations of the state and reinforced the binary geopolitical visions of Islam and the West. The geographic rhetoric of places that identify them in terms of danger or safety, instability or stability not only structure security discourses, but construct geopolitical identities as well. "What is usually rendered secure by these political practices is a particular geopolitical identity, an understanding of the 'we' who are threatened are; one usually defined at least in part in contradistinction from the external 'other'" (Dalby, 1996:61). The imagery of threat constructed by those warning of cultural imperialism was that "the integrity of a cultural and geographical space – 'our space' – was being eroded by the opening of the frontier lands of the sky" to western dominated transnational satellite TV (Ang, 2000:2). As a result of the moral, ideological, and identity insecurity caused by border-eroding communication and media technologies bringing in the foreign cultural influence, the issue was seen in terms of a security issue.

It was postcolonial concerns with independence and autonomy (both political and cultural) in relation with the more powerful West that underlay the discourse of

the cultural invasion. In revolutionary geopolitical imagination, Islam and West were rigidly polarised, and any blurring or communication between them is seen as threatening the very foundation of the regime. Ang (2000) notes that the "discourse of cultural imperialism is a discourse of protest or complaint, a discourse signalling the political or moral unacceptability of what the enunciator sees as the cultural domination exerted by a powerful Other" " (Ang, 2007: 4). It is a "*defensive* discourse aimed at warding off cultural intrusion by foreign powers, a discourse of the powerless to protect their cultural 'autonomy'" (Ang, 2007: 4). Given the postcolonial ideological nature of the Iranian regime, 'the West,' was imagined as the imperial center now mounting cultural invasion on Islamic-Iranian culture by deliberate means, an imagery which acquires depth in popular imaginary given Iran's experience of eight year war in previous decade when western governments supported and sided with the invading country. The discourse of the cultural invasion imagines the West, especially United States as the neo-imperial enemy.

Underlying the discourse of 'cultural invasion' is a particular conception of 'independence' stretching back to the Islamic revolution, when many of the "Islamist leaders came to see 'independence' as providing immunity against 'external' interferences and influences, and thus as a critical political shield to secure regime's social control" (Bayat, 2009). Therefore liberal ideological and political influences amongst Iranian populace, detrimental to the long term survival of the clerical regime were portrayed as part of the Western designs of regime-change. The Islamic Republic "has persistently adopted stricter policies that have securitized and restricted social freedoms under the pretext of combating 'cultural invasion'" (Saleh, 2013:165).

The discourse of 'cultural invasion' underlines what Bassam Tibi (2014) calls Islamist's spirit of self-victimization and their "exclusionary and purist mindset." He argues that "unlike the Muslim rationalists of past, today's Islamists engage in a politics that generates ever-increasing cultural tensions emanating from the Islamist purification agenda based on fault lines between the self and the cultural other" (Tibi, 2014: 192). The perpetuation of Islamist purificatory imagination of the West as the threatening other had become increasingly difficult by border erasing forces of cultural globalization and reform movement's bridging of ideological spaces between Islam and the West. In order to secure a particular identity of state which is discursively produced in relation to an 'other,' one has to control the discourse in

which the 'other' is invented. Therefore conservative Islamist purificatory imaginary projected negative characters and one's own insecurities, arising from the secularisation among its own population and popular preference for cultural liberalization, on to the enemy other. While pre-revolution scholars had compared the western influences on Iranian society to disease or contagion as reflected in Ahmad Fardid and Al-e-Ahmad's term *gharbzadegi* or 'westoxification,' now in the context of a political system based on Islamic principles, western cultural and political influences were framed as 'threat' and 'attack' on the Islamic nation, necessitating that the state acts in defence.

### 3.12 'Soft Security' and Political Involvement of IRGC

"When an issue is securitized, this has implications both 'internally' (for instance by inhibiting debate and democracy and 'externally' by often stimulating conflict, security dilemmas, and escalation" (Waever, 2003:18). This securitization of cultural and social sphere allowed IRGC and Basij to intrude into cultural and political spheres as flag bearers of Islamic revolution. The notion of 'soft security' propagated by the conservative elite to contain secular and liberal tendencies in post-war Iran was appropriated by IRGC leaders whose paranoid worldview was shaped by the experience of the Iran-Iraq war, when all major powers and regional countries had united against Iran. Furthermore, the discourse of cultural invasion legitimized the increasing involvement of the elements from *Sepah* and *Basij* (a volunteer paramilitary organization operating under the IRGC), resulting in militarization of social life. Ayatollah Muhammad Yazdi, the head of the Islamic judiciary, furnished the right wing with religious justification: noting that the new cultural regime with its 'unfettered press' was diluting the *vilayat-e-faqih*, he declared that Islam called upon the faithful to stand firm against such subversion of faith" (Chatterjee, 2012: 38). In the Islamist discourse of conservatives, *vilayat-e-faqih* raised to the status of the object of supreme religious value. *Basijis* who became highly active in upholding 'moral values,' attacking university students and less-than-austere youth on streets, were used as the 'physical arm' of conservatives in intimidating, threatening, and even eliminating the reformists (Chatterjee, 2012: 38).

Bayram Sinkaya (2015) observes that one of the most important entanglements of the IRGC in post-war period is related to the cultural sphere and involves safeguarding of the 'soft-security' (*amniyat-e-narmafzarei*) of the country,

which had dragged it into cultural and political scene. During the 1998 student protests in reaction to closure of reformist newspapers and Khatami's restraint in dealing with the protests, "some hard-line elements of IRGC warned Khatami that his reforms were endangering the revolutionary order and that the "IRGC could not stand by and watch as the fruits of the revolution were destroyed." In a letter to Khatami 24 IRGC commanders stated that "they would take the law in their own hands unless the president cracked down on demonstrators" (RFE/RL, August 05, 2005). Given its constitutional responsibility for 'guarding the revolution and its achievements,' IRGC has assumed the role of enforcing 'revolutionary purity' as the purveyor of the ideology of Islamic Revolution. Yahya Rahim Safavi, IRGC commander from 1997 to 2007, warned at the height of reform movement in 1998, "if we see that the foundations of our system of government and our revolution are threatened...we got involved." He argued that "there was a political current, which he labelled as the 'third current,' sponsored by foreigners, intending to destroy the foundations of the Islamic Republic, by hatching cultural plots, creating social unrest and pitting revolutionary forces with each other" (Sinkaya, 2015).

Following the student protests of 1999, when Basij militia, under the supervision of Pasdaran and the paramilitary Ansar-e Hezbollah were instrumental in quashing protests, IRGC's role shifted towards maintaining internal order, increasing insecurity in the regime meant that the core national security items were placed under their exclusive purview. "The 'Vilayat Project,' under which thousands of pupils are exposed to Islamic principles and studies, is part of the effort to create a 20-million-strong army in Iran and constitutes another opportunity for IRGC to expand its role" (Hassan-Yari, 2005). "The bifurcated political structure of Iran with both theocratic (*vilayat-e faqih)* and democratic (elected governments) prevented the civil-military clash, allowing for a triangular relationship instead. In this context, a symbiotic relationship blossomed between the theocratic element and the Guards, exchanging legitimacy for material force" (Hen-Tov and Gonzalez, 2011).

Partha Chatterjee (1997) observes the difference in the reach of the state apparatus and the modernist civil society restricted to the elite in post-colonial countries, which eventually allows the state to marginalise the civil society through its coercive and ideological organs.

whereas legal-bureaucratic apparatus of the state has been able by the late colonial and certainly in postcolonial period, to reach as the target of many of its activities virtually all of the population that inhabits its territory, the domain of civil-society institutions as conceived above is still restricted to a fairly small section of 'citizens'. This hiatus is extremely significant because it is the mark of non-western modernity as an always incomplete project of 'modernisation' and of the role of an enlightened elite engaged in a pedagogical mission in relation to the rest of society (Chatterjee, 1997:31)

The reformists who argued for cultural freedoms and civil society were not able to match the institutional strength of conservatives and hardliners who controlled the ideological state apparatus and coercive organs of the state. However, Reformists themselves representing civil society's "incomplete project of non-western modernity" remain powerful and an ever present challenge to traditionalist who then had to resort to securitization tactics to construct this political and cultural movement as existential threat to the ideological foundations and identity of the state.

The chapter has traced how the imperative of breaking out its international isolation, reconstructing war-torn economy, and removal of the geopolitical threat of the Soviet Union from its northern border became major drivers behind changes in the geopolitical vision of the revolutionary regime from an ideologically determined adventurist foreign policy to a pragmatic, national interest driven one. While Russia was no longer seen as a geopolitical or ideological enemy and increasingly a partner, United States because of its interventionist policies and presence of military bases in the region and its containment of Iran, was dubbed the 'global arrogance' by Leader Ayatollah Khamenei. The U.S. became the single most important strategic as well as ideological enemy of the regime. America also flexed its muscle in resource rich, new geopolitical region of Central Asia where it sought to control the exploitation and transportation of oil and gas to European and Asian markets. American strategy of marginalising Russia and Iran, two other significant players in geoeconomic competition in developing pipeline infrastructure precipitated a complex pipeline geopolitics in the region.

While Iran pursued a policy of détente and dialogue with the European Union and developed economic relations with major European countries, Rafsanjani and Khatami's guarded overtures towards America were opposed by conservatives and hardliners on ideological grounds. The conservatives controlling powerful unelected clerical institutions constructed a new threat discourse of 'cultural invasion' to oppose policies of cultural and political liberalisation by Rafsanjani. The incoherence of Iranian geopolitical imaginations came to fore during the presidency of Khatami, who

discarded ideological policy of demonising the enemy in favour of a foreign policy based on mutual respect and interests. The reformist movement contested conservatives or principalists monopoly over discourse of Islamic Revolution, by mobilising popular support for strengthening of republican and civic institutions.

The 'Dialogue among civilization' thesis of reformist president Khatami sought to provide an alternative meta-narrative for post-Cold War international society. However as the popular demands for civic freedoms and rights became powerful, especially during the student protests in the year 1998, Revolutionary Guards were drawn into politics under the pretext of defending the Islamic revolution. The regime coped up with the reformist movement's challenge to the legitimacy of Islamic institutions, namely the Guardian Jurist and the Guardian Council, by leaning on the threat discourse of 'cultural invasion' and 'soft-threat,' justifying state control over cultural and political spheres.

# CHAPTER – 4

# GEOPOLITICAL IMAGINATIONS OF IRAN IN THE AFTERMATH OF 9/11

In Islamic Republic of Iran, where state identity and legitimacy is defined in terms of an ideologized religion – a revolutionary interpretation of Shi'i Islam - and not a mere political ideology, certain aspects of geopolitics, especially those central to geopolitical imaginations of self and other remain firmly within a religeopolitical discourse. The moderates and reformists attempted to change the discourse of the Islamic revolution by bridging the ideological gap between the Islamic Republic and values of Western civilization and pursued a policy of détente and engagement with the West combined with political liberalization at home. However, their pacific discourse was countered by hardliners, who revived geopolitical imaginaries of anti-imperial resistance in the wake of America's renewed belligerence towards Iran following the September 11 terror attacks on American territory. The hardliners or neo-conservatives were defined by a "heady mix of radical Islam, nationalism and, where necessary, socialism (or egalitarianism, which was very much part of Islamic ethos) had emerged by appropriating the populist discourse of the reformists which had mobilised the youth of the country and combined it with revolutionary radicalism or the *basiji* mentality" (Ansari, 2007:21).

With the election of Ahmadinejad to the office of President, a non-cleric and former *basij* member, there was increasing involvement of Revolutionary Guards in politics and government. "The prominent elevation of intelligence and security figures under Ahmadinejad was a product of their increased role, during the Khatami years, in silencing and intimidating reformist sympathizers" (Hen-Tov and Gonzalez, 2011). Subjected to negative forms of strategic representations by the United States - its continued policy regime change policy vis-à-vis Iran, threats of military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities, and endeavours to isolate them internationally through its subordinating negative representations such as 'axis-of-evil' and sanctions - Ahmadinejad administration pursued a counter-hegemonic geopolitics suffused with Islamic revolutionary ideals of justice and resistance. Iran's global approach to counter-hegemonic geopolitics was reflected in a tightening of alliance with the Latin American leftist regimes. In order to legitimise its defiant assertion of right to

enrichment and peaceful nuclear program to the people and efforts to circumvent the effects of economic sanctions imposed on Iran, the Supreme Leader coined the concept of *resistance economy*, as Iran pursued a balanced policy of part accommodation and diplomacy and part populist anti-imperialist discourse. Even as Iran engaged in dialogue and diplomacy with the US and five other world powers, its approach was guided by its self-image as an anti-imperialist and independence-seeking entity unwilling to succumb to hegemonic pressures. In order to engage the United States on equal terms and to strengthen its claim to regional power status, Iran cultivated an independent sphere of influence, especially in theatres of geopolitics involving the U.S. and Israel. Analysing these "counter-hegemonic" or subaltern imaginations demands consideration of how Iranian "sovereignty and foreign policy encode and express local power and agency, reworking and responding to Western images" of Iran (Sidaway, 2012:297).

Despite his political rhetoric manifesting an "Islamic philosophical worldview of anti-imperialist and anti-West view," Ahmadinejad's administration followed a pragmatic approach in deepening bilateral and regional relations with Asian countries. In order to counter the U.S. - led policy of containment, sanctions, and oil embargo, the Ahmadinejad administration sought to re-imagine Iran as an Asian country, overcoming the limited Middle Eastern identity, and pursued a 'Look to the East' policy, which involved building economic and strategic ties with Russia, China and India and mobilizing their support to counterbalance the Western pressures on the Nuclear program in international bodies. Sariolghalam argued in the interview he gave during the field work that "those with economic orientation, and look at the country in terms of its national economic development argue that Iran should be defined as an Asian country because that's where our interest lie. While Middle East is represented as a region that is full of problems and crises, and states that are not run efficiently" (Sariolghalam, 2015). Therefore, at a time when the West became the geopolitical space of anti-hegemonic resistance, Asia or the East was imagined as the geopolitical space where strategies of cooperation and integration were pursued. Iran, leveraging its favourable geographical location of the long Persian Gulf coastline connecting with high seas, has sought to position itself as gateway to the landlocked Central Asia, a factor that has shaped other countries' (for instance India) geopolitical perception of Iran.

The narratives of the West mounting 'cultural invasion' and 'soft war' were deployed by the regime in the wake of popular protests following the disputed re-election of Ahmadinejad in 2009. These narratives securitised the Islamic political order while reproducing the hegemonic geopolitical binaries *Islam* and the *West*. Similarly, attention to the discursive practices of the Islamic Republic during pro-democracy Arab-uprisings shows that Iran constructed a geopolitical narrative of 'Islamic Awakening', defining uprisings toppling pro-West secularist dictators as inspired by Iran's own Islamic Revolution and supported Shi'ite political revival in the region. The Iranian leadership tried to re-formulate its immediate geographical region in order to pursue an active role in the wider region which now included North Africa along with West Asia. Pro-West Sunni Arab regimes devised a counter-revolutionary strategy of sectarianized geopolitics of fear, that is blaming Iran for manipulating Shi'ite religious sentiments to destabilise Sunni Arab governments. The result was deepening of a sectarian geopolitics in the region.

### 4.1 Imaginative Geographies of Global War on Terror and Iran

The catastrophic terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 generated a strong moral and religious geopolitical discourse in United States which declared a long-drawn war between virtuous civilized states rallying behind the United States and barbarian networks of global terrorists and those that harbour them. The geopolitical discourse of the Bush administration was consistent with the American tradition of using 'moralistic abstractions' in geopolitical discourse branding non-democratic, authoritarian governments as 'evil' which needs to be eliminated (Morgenthau, 1950). "The moralistic and Manichean tendency has long been apparent in the seeming need of the US to cast its foreign policy in terms of crusades, ranging from extermination of fascism in Second World War, through Reagan's rhetoric about Soviet Union as an 'evil empire', to Bush's 'war on terrorism'" (Buzan, 2004: 158). Gertjan Dijkink (2006) observes that in America "a new political impetus to embrace religion occurred only when America for the first time was really threatened by a single strong global antagonist (or at least perceived such a threat) during the Cold War" meaning that it is in response to a perceived threat to a reference object (state, political ideals or way of life) that geopolitical enemies are designated in diabolical terms (Dijkink, 2006: 204). If the Cold War designation of the Soviet Union as 'evil empire' reinforced the American self-image as a holy land and its revolutionary

exceptionalism, September 11 attacks, when American mainland was attacked for the first time by a shadowy network for the first time in history, evoked a kind of millenarian thinking in the White House. Bush's warning - "either you are with us or you're with the terrorists" - was the decisive moment for casting of a new geopolitical vision of the global war on terror. "It warns those failing to adopt US values (principally liberal 'representative' democracy and market capitalism), that they will be excluded from an American centric world" (Bialasiewicz et al, 2006). For instance, within months of the attack, Islamic Republic of Iran, was labelled "the Shi'i counterpart of Sunni extremists and al-Qaida" by President Bush and later as part of the imagined threat defined in terms of an "axis-of-evil". It was through these moralistic and imaginary threats that the United States sought to legitimize its unilateral sanctions, isolation of and military threats against Iran. The following section analyses the discourse within which Iran was represented as a 'terrorist' threat by the Bush administration.

Buzan (2004) notes that the "belief that liberal values are universal, and that the moral and practical superiority of liberal values gives them right to claim the future of mankind" underlies the missionary element in the U.S. foreign policy and at the same time makes it difficult for the U.S. to have normal relations with nations who reject this supposed universality of American values (Buzan, 2004: 156). It is also seen in the way the U.S. defends its use of military power in the name of defending universal principles of 'freedom' and 'human dignity,' and in its moralistic discourse in representing geopolitical and ideological enemies. Such imaginations were visible in President Bush's declaration: "Our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil" (Bush, 2002). In this discourse suffused with religious imaginaries, a self-righteous policy of using force becomes legitimate, for once the enemy has been designated as 'evil,' possibilities of negotiations or compromise are foreclosed and war is accepted as a sort of religious or moral assignment. The 'global war on terror' put the American military at the helm of American geopolitics.

In State of Union address in January 2002, when the US military dislodged the Taliban government in Afghanistan, President Bush argued "we need to replace ageing aircraft and make our military more agile, to put our troops anywhere in the world quickly and safely" (Bush, 2002). The new American militarist geopolitical

vision was global in scope, but the President geographically materialized the enemies in the *global war on terror* in terms of the geopolitical metaphor "axis-of-evil." This 'axis-of-evil' comprised Iran, Iraq, and North Korea, countries that were 'pursuing' or 'plotting' to develop weapons of mass destruction and sponsored terror. The geopolitical vision displayed in 'axis-of-evil' was underpinned by what Pain (2009) describes as the "globalized fear" generated by terrorist attacks. The American policies aimed at regime-change through pre-emptive military interventions and otherwise unjustifiable sanctions were now rationalized by deliberate construction of a 'threat' discourse that certain undemocratic regimes possessed weapons of mass destruction which they could hand over to their terrorist allies.

"The use of the phrase axis-of-evil was a restructuring of the American understanding of the 'War on Terror,' in which the focus shifted from Osama Bin Laden and al-Qa'ida, with their allies and bases in Afghanistan, to a series of other states, whose involvement in the operation ranged from minimal to non-existent" (Heradstveit and Bonhma, 2007:423). Through the phrase "axis-of-evil", already exiting geopolitical enemies of the United States - Iran, Iraq and North Korea - were redefined within the "emotional geopolitics of fear that uses conscientization as a conceptual, epistemological and political tool" (Pain, 2009:167). It was within this emotional geopolitics of fear and moralistic imaginaries of evil, that President Bush defined the putative enemies of the global war on terror.

> The last time I spoke here, I expressed the hope that life would return to normal. In some ways, it has. In others, it never will. Those of us who have lived through these challenging times have been changed by them. We've come to know truths that we will never question: evil is real and it must be stopped (Bush, 2002, Jan.).

Evil' is perceived, according to Silverstone, as the manifestation of absence of God, referring to actions beyond justification and beyond reach (Silverstone, 2007, quoted in Torfeh, 2017). Furthermore, this apocalyptic vision which sees the world in terms of having changed in an irreversibly bad direction and in terms of moralistic binaries of 'evil' and 'good,' advocates and justifies a militarist approach not just as the only solution, but as a religious assignment (see Agnew, 2011: 185; Dijkink, 2008: 193). A geopolitics articulated in religious terminology leaves no room for doubts about its own veracity and the course of action it advocates.

Drawing parallels between the Axis powers of the WW II, David Frum (2003), one among the speechwriters who were instrumental in scripting "axis of evil"

explains that "as much as they quarrelled with each other, Iraq, Iran, Hezbollah, and al-Qaeda shared beliefs that harked back to European fascism: disdain for free enquiry and rational thought, a celebration of death and murder, and obsessive anti-Semitism. They all resented the power of West, and they all despised the humane values of democracy." Despite the fact that Khatami administration had supported the U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan and continued to assist anti-Taliban Northern Alliance Bush chose to label Iran as part of the so-called 'axis of evil.' He declared that "Iran aggressively pursues these (WMDs) weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom."

The Bush administration not only defined 'Islamic radicalism' as the enemy in its global war on terror, but also defined the geopolitical challenge of Iran in terms of a sectarianized discourse of threat. In his 'remarks on war on terror' in late 2006, distinguishing between "different strains of violent Islamic radicalism" President Bush argued that Sunni extremists want to establish Caliphate, "a unified totalitarian Islamic state that can confront and eventually destroy the free world" while calling Iranian regime the Shi'i counterpart of Sunni extremists and al-Qaida". "Like Al Qaida and Sunni extremists, the Iranian regime has clear aims. They want to drive America out of the region, to destroy Israel, and to dominate the broader Middle East" (Bush, 2006, quoted in Trancinski, 2006).

Waleed Hazbun (2001) points out that in the wake of September 11, 2001 attacks, many in American administration came to view the rise of security threats emanating from the Middle East as a product of the region's failure to embrace globalization (Hazbun, 2001: 5). Similarly, Matthew Sparke (2007) argues that "groundless geopolitical fears about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and al-Qaeda ties were combined with equally groundless geo-economic hopes about making the Middle East into a bastion of peace and freedom through free-market reforms" (Sparke, 2007:338). Through 'freedom agenda' and 'democracy promotion', the Bush administration sought to legitimize its regime-change, militaristic, and interventionist attempts at casting the Middle East in the image of neoliberal market democracy.

At a speech in National Endowment for Democracy, an organization founded by President Reagan in 1983 for the purpose of promotion of democracy, Bush defined Middle East in exceptionalist terms, as a space disconnected from globalization or processes of "economic liberalization, global market integration and

democratization which have more closely integrated the West with other regions of the world and associated this disconnection with danger and terrorism" (Hazbun, 2001: 1). He declared that "as long as the Middle East remains a place where freedom does not flourish, it will remain a place of stagnation, resentment, and violence ready for export. And with weapons that can bring catastrophic harm to our country and our friends, it would be reckless to accept status quo" (Bush, Oct. 2003, quoted in Daalder, 2003). Such exceptionalist description of the region within the hegemonic geopolitical imaginary of a flattened world of global markets, free trade, economic flows and a universal neoliberal democratic future was an attempt to legitimize American interventionist policy in the region. President Bush declared the Middle East, "where in many countries of great strategic importance, democracy has not yet taken root will be the focus of American policy for decades to come." President Bush reasoned that Iraq would be the springboard from which democracy would be launched in the region. "Establishment of a free Iraq at the heart of Middle East will be a watershed event in the global democratic revolution" (Bush, Oct. 2003, quoted in Daalder, 2003). In the same speech he warned that the "regime in Tehran must heed the democratic demands of the people, or lose its last claim to legitimacy." Countries identified as authoritarian and lacking 'freedom' within the imperialist geopolitical imaginaries of democracy advocates, therefore became contested sites of sovereignty and imperialist interventions.

In 2004, the Greater Middle East Initiative was formulated to address "freedom deficit," (a phrase taken from a UN Arab Human Development Report) in the Arab world and other Muslim countries such as Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan (The Greater Middle East Initiative, 2004). The Bush administration vowed to increase funding for National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which promotes practices and institutions that directly or indirectly support democracy such as "development of free elections, free markets, free press, and free labour unions in the Middle East" (The Greater Middle East Initiative, 2004). The democratizing paradigm of the West defined by its emphasis primarily on secularism, the role of religion, social justice, and economic rights in a liberal sense is a framework that actively contributes to locating the Middle East in exceptionalist and antagonistic terms vis-à-vis a normative West. "It does so by helping to reproduce a specific Western-centric moral, political, and analytical hierarchy, which paradoxically reinforces the production of

antagonistic Islamist subjectivities" (Teti, 2012: 95). Unsurprisingly the democratizing initiatives were developed without engaging with the local state interlocutors and served the strategic and geo-economic objectives of Washington. This gave rise to fears that the United States was trying to foment velvet revolution to install market democracies in the Muslim countries. In Iran knowledge of such initiatives gave certain credibility to the discourse of 'soft war' and 'cultural invasion,' themes which are discussed later in the chapter. In the wake of renewed hostile policies of the United States, the conservatives in Iran gained politically by delegitimising the conciliatory reformist policy and reverting to the revolutionary discourse of anti-imperialism.

The 'axis-of-evil' speech once again pushed the dominant narrative of the United States in Iran to that of an imperial power inherently opposed to the Islamic revolution, seeking control over oil resources of the region, and had the effect of politically empowering hardliners or militarists in Iran. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei named the Persian year 1381(2002) after third Shia Imam Hussain ibn Ali, the leader of the "revolutionary uprising" of the battle of Karbala. The oppositional religio-political imaginary of the Karbala narrative was now extended to the United States. Leader Khamenei argued that "royal system, a sample of which was Yazid's regime, has always been in contradiction to Islamic rulership…the oppressing and tyrant regimes throughout the history of mankind, no matter what name they chose for their systems, are monarchies, and the current U.S. administration is one of them" (Khamenei, March 29, 2002). When the United States is seen as manifestation of *Yazid*, resistance against it then is religiously justified and Islamic Republic is conceived in the image of Imam Hussain.

When the U.S. invaded Iraq on March 20th, 2003, the day of *Nowruz* or Persian New Year, leader Khamenei explained Iran's position: "the Islamic Republic of Iran, while calling for immediate halt to the war, does not defend the dictatorial Baath regime; it only defends the Iraqi nation and believes that the future of Iraq must be decided only by Iraqi nation." The invasion of Iraq, even as it removed the hostile regime of Saddam Hussein, heightened the insecurity felt by the Iranian regime. Articulating the threat that the United States presented to Iran, Khamenei argued that "we may have no military war, we will definitely have a political and economic, especially a cultural war" (Khamenei, 2003).

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The portrayal of Iran as a terrorist state and a dictatorship, and Bush's emerging doctrine of pre-emptive war threatening Iran discredited the notion that reformists were better suited to improve relations with the West, and at the same time reinforced the hardliners position that America is the number one enemy of the Islamic Republic. First, the 2004 parliamentary elections, in which a good number of Revolutionary Guard members and war-veterans ran under the banner of Basij-dominated Islamic Populist Alliance of Builders of Islamic Iran, (usually referred to as the *Abdagaran* which joined the conservative *Mo'talefeh*-JRM alliance against reformist), and later the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the populist Tehran mayor, again facilitated by active mobilization of voters by Basij paramilitary, the commands of the Islamic Republic came in the hand of hardliners or militarists (Chatterjee, 2012:32).

Bernard Hourcade (2009) notes that *Pasadaran* or the Revolutionary Guards which had participated in combat during Iran-Iraq war have remained faithful to the Supreme Leader for religious reasons and have a hostile attitude vis-à-vis clerics who grabbed power while they were mobilized to protect the fatherland. "This rivalry explains why Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, an unknown without a turban, could in the elections of 2005 crush A. Hashemi Rafsanjani, the most powerful cleric in Iran. This election marked the veteran's arrival on the national political scene" (Hourcade, 2009). Furthermore, hardliners' calls for returning to the fundamentals of Islamic revolutions, especially promises of social justice for dispossessed and underprivileged who had not benefitted from the policies of privatization and free-market pursued under Rafsanjani and Khatami, proved successful. Ahmadinejad's victory on a platform of economic justice and fairness, after a decade of reform movement and Khatami in which the globalized middle class had been politically dominant, illustrated that there were enormous economic as well as cultural gaps in Iranian society. It was by reviving Islamic revolutionary geopolitical discourse that Ahmadinejad administration sought to counter American propaganda against Iran and rehabilitate Iran's image, by projecting Iran as the mode of resistance and champion of oppressed.

### 4.2 Ahmadinejad's Revolutionary *Mahdavism* and Populist Geopolitics

Ahmadinejad had contested the presidential election of 2005 in an atmosphere of diplomatic and economic sanctions over nuclear program and public disenchantment

with the perceived failure of the revolution to bring economic improvement and end corruption in the government. His campaign combined Khomeinist populism with an exceedingly anti-Western rhetoric. Earlier, Ahmadinejad had won the election for the mayor of Tehran in 2003 in part by declaring that he has a '*basij* militia mentality.' Their *basiji* or *mujahid* mentality is defined by an uncompromising and pious commitment to the values of Islamic revolution, especially those of justice and resistance.

Ahmadinejad and hardliners sough to counter the popularity of reformists among the youth by their own populism based on revolutionary idealism, and anti-status quo discourse at both domestic and international levels. Kasra Naji (2007) notes that as a presidential candidate Ahmadinejad did not have support from any major political party; therefore he freely criticized the management of the country under Rafsanjani and Khatami presidency, the corruption and subordination of social justice to economic development, and projected himself as the voice of the people. The notion of 'Third Revolution', a centrepiece of his election campaign was about ridding the country of liberal and secular influences and establishing a truly Islamic government. He argued during his campaign:

> Today we have managers in the country who do not believe in the ability of Islam to administer society, mangers who believe in progress only in the framework of individualistic, material and secular initiatives, managers who lack confidence in their own Islamic culture when confronting the cultural onslaught of the West. These managers are weak when confronting the enemies and look down upon their own people (quoted in Naji, 2007:212).

While the Rafsanjani and Khatami presidency had prioritized the post-war economic reconstruction and development and had used it to justify a political and economic opening with the West, Ahmadinejad revived revolutionary rhetoric, especially its anti-American component. More significantly, the atmosphere of an impending attack and insecurity gave rise to a millenarian discourse in Iran.

Shi'ite eschatological beliefs in the return of the lord of the age or Mahdi, a world revolution and the establishment of a global government of justice called Mahdaviat, have often existed in mass revolutionary movements led by a charismatic leader. During the revolution Khomeini did acquire a charismatic sanctity fed by Messianic expectations among the Iranian masses; "Khomeini's title of 'Imam' was stretched to 'Imamul Zaman,' the awaited Messiah" (Zubaida, 2000: 60). However, with the success of the revolution, millenarian beliefs were discouraged as the Islamic Republic, through *Vilayat-e-Faqih,* embodied divine sovereignty and enforced divine

law and as such constituted a legitimate Islamic order in the absence of the Hidden Imam. In other words, it became a substitute for eschatological expectations that had earlier inspired millenarian movements causing political and social upheavals. However, "Mahdist narrative has remained strongly immanent in both constitutional provisions and other aspects of the political and social system" in Iran (Rosulek, 2015).

Internally, the doctrine of Mahadaviat is used for stricter implementation of Islamic laws and values and stifles dissent, especially reformist voices. In foreign policy it translated into an assertion of Iran's independence in matters such as its right to nuclear technology and battling 'the global arrogance' of the United States across the world. President Ahmadinejad, who had the support of the political elite of military roots, "sought new legitimacy not tied to *Vilayat-e-Faqih*, but rather directly oriented to the twelfth Imam" (Rosulek, 2015).

Mahadaviat commits Iran to a militant foreign policy, thought to be one of the ways to prepare the ground for the return of Mahdi. This policy of confrontation translated into an alliance with those struggling against American neo-imperialism in Latin America and increased emphasis on cooperation with Third World countries. Ahmadinejad responded to American propaganda against Iran and its attempt at containing Iran by deepening common ideological and political position between the Latin American left and Iran. From 2007 to 2012, Ahmadinejad toured Latin America five times – as often as US presidents over the same period, and visiting more countries then them (Fernandez, 2012). Ahmadinejad sought support from left wing leaders in Venezuela, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Bolivia and Cuba who shared his opposition to United States' international policies. Iran's objective was to garner support for Iran's controversial nuclear program which had reached the United Nations Security Council and to overcome U.S. led international isolation of Iran, especially in the wake UNSC and unilateral sanctions by the West. The lead Bolivarian Revolution nations of Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela were most receptive to Ahmadinejad's anti-American ideology and "used Iran as a political symbol to represent their desire to become legitimate global actors" (Fleischman, 2013, quoted in Brandon and Gray, 2015:20). In Venezuela's Chavez, Ahmadinejad found the most important supporter. Chavez and Ahmadinejad became 'ideological brothers' as revolutionary Shi'ism and radical socialism converged in challenging

American hegemony. "Ahmadinejad's worldview greatly resembled Chavez's revolutionary vision, thus contributing to the establishment of a strategic alliance between the two countries. This alliance was based on mutual interest as well as revolutionary fervor" (Mishal and Goldberg, 2014:75). Tehran and Caracas, fourth and fifth largest oil exporters, also harboured the ambition to price oil in euros instead of dollars to weaken the influence of the United States in the international oil market (Romero, 2007).

His eschatological beliefs are also reflected in a religioinised worldview. In Ahmadinejad's imagination the global community is a spiritual community which should seek solutions to its problems and establish a sustainable order through two pillars of justice and spirituality. In his first speech at the United Nations General Assembly in 2005, he presented Islamic Republic of Iran as a model embodying the principles he advocated for a sustainable international order. He argued in front of the General Assembly: "The Islamic Republic of Iran is the manifestation of true democracy in the region. The discourse of the Iranian nation is focused on respect for the rights of human beings and a quest for tranquillity, peace, justice, and development for all through monotheism" (Ahmadinejad, 2005). From announcing "the end of the era of 'agnostic philosophy' of the West in 2005", to claims that "'American Empire' and 'Zionist entity' (the word used for Israel) are nearing collapse", to pronouncing the "end of the era of 'capitalist thinking' and era of 'setting-up empires'" in 2009, Ahmadinejad's political discourse was suffused with end-of-time thinking. Scott Peterson (2005) argues that the "presidential obsession with Mahdaviat (belief in the second coming) yields a certitude that leaves little room for compromise" (Peterson, 2005). The millenarian belief is seen in the inevitability of conflict between forces of justice and fairness on one side and that of oppression and corruption on the other. In his apocalyptic religious-geopolitical imagination, Ahmadinejad perceived the Israel-Palestinian conflict as the "locus of the final war" between Muslims and the West (Rakel, 2008:189). In his 2005 address at the UN General Assembly, he criticized the American 'war on terrorism' and the so-called 'defence of human rights' in scathing terms and condemned Western governments for supporting the 'Zionist regime' as he argued that these western governments were perpetrators of state terrorism against the people of 'occupied Palestine'.

> "People around the world are fully aware of what is happening in the occupied Palestine. Women and children are being murdered and adolescents taken prisoner. Houses are being

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demolished and farms burnt down. Yet, when the people of Palestine resist these conditions, they are accused of terrorism. At the same time, the occupier, which does not abide by any principles and terror is part of its pronounced and routine policy enjoys the support of previously mentioned governments. Let me be blunter. State terrorism is being supported by those who claim to fight terrorism "(Ahmadinejad, 2005).

Shi'ite millenarian beliefs of divine justice and perseverance in the face of overbearing power have been invoked to justify a resistance attitude to the Iranian people. In Shi'ite understanding 'struggle and adversity are to be endured as a sign of commitment to the true faith,' a belief that led Khomeini to justify the eight year long war with Iraq; the millenarian beliefs about certainty of the victory of justice help people endure long struggles. For instance, Sayyed Safiddine, a leader of Lebanese Hezbollah noted in an interview that during the 2006 war with Israel, "Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei reassured that victory will be on our side and his words had a great impact on us all and on the souls of the Mujahedeen (resistance fighters)" (english.khamenei.ir, May 25, 2016).

"Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) combined several themes – anti-imperialism (especially anti-Zionism) and anti-capitalism with Shi'i eschatology and feeling of national exceptionalism – thereby co-opting various overlapping forms of Iranian-ness" (Akbarzadeh and Barry, 2016). Iranianism rooted in the pride of being a great civilization complements revolutionary Islamism in cultivating an Iranian exceptionalism that sets Iran apart from other Muslim nations. "The idea that Western civilization is disintegrating and that Islamic Iran offers a viable and far superior sociopolitical as well as economic alternative has become a far more serious undertaking under the leaders of Islamic Republic", which along with presumed superiority of Iranian-Islamic model and Islamic revolution underpins Iranian exceptionalism (Zibakalam, 2009).

**4.3 Soft Power and the Geopolitical Discourse of Islamist Populism**

Iranian regime, because it came to power through a popular Islamic revolution, has a religious populist nature; its political discourse couched in language of Islam is addressed to the Muslim masses at both domestic and international level. Ervand Abrahamian (1993) puts Khomeini's revolution in the category of a populist movement. He points out that "populist movements inevitably emphasize the importance, not of economic-social revolution, but of cultural, national, and political reconstruction" (Abrhamian, 1993:17). "In mobilizing 'common people', populist movements use charismatic figures, symbols, imagery, and language that have potent

value in the mass culture" (Abrhamian, 1993:17). Ahmadinejad through his valorising of Basiji culture, millenarian rhetoric of anti-imperialism and justice-driven foreign policy sought to revive Khomeinist populism both in national and international politics. In context of geopolitical insecurity created by repeated threats of military strike by America and Israel over its nuclear facilities, Iranian leadership intensified its anti-imperialist revolutionary rhetoric and support for popular Islamist movements, such as Hezbollah and Hamas in their wars with Israel. It sought to create moral authority to rally the support of Muslim masses in its favour, making it difficult for their governments to support American hostile policies against Iran. Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett (2013) argue that at a time when masses are politicised, Iran is trying hard to maximise its ideological influence in the region, seeking mobilisation of public opinion in its support. The purpose of Iran's revolutionary narrative and independent foreign policy has been a political awakening of the people to the very nature of power politics in the region (Leverett and Leverett, 2013). Avoiding politicizing of sectarian divide, Iran has fashioned itself as the champion of 'popular forces' in the region and is constantly criticized by countries such as Saudi Arabia who wants to restrict Iranian presence and influence in the region. In other words, Iran's militant religio-political discourse is an instrument of soft power in the region. "The resources that produce soft power for a country include its culture (where it is attractive to others); its values (where they are attractive and not undercut by inconsistent practices) and its policies (where they are seen as inclusive and legitimate in the eyes of others)" (Nye, 2009). Iranian leaders, whose legitimacy is not limited to the nation, but draws upon religion as a powerful source of legitimacy, use religious ideological discourse as a powerful tool of persuasion, especially in drawing region-wide popular support for its anti-American policies. The target audience of their rhetoric has been not just the governments but the entire Muslim masses of the region. Through their Islamist revolutionary discourse they have sought to project Iran as the model of "religious democracy," beacon of independence, and anti-imperial resistance. Fox and Sandler (2004) argue that "religion can be used on a variety of populations that those who make foreign policy may want to convince...these include other policy makers in their own state, policy makers of other states, their own states population, and the population of other states" (Fox and Sandler, 2004:44). Religion as a culture-specific tool can have appeal with broader population of co-religionists beyond national boundaries. Hence, Iranian critique of American policies is usually

framed in a discourse suffused with religious symbols, such as 'Great Satan' and 'Global Arrogance.' American policies are criticized as harmful and hostile to not just Iran, but to the entire region and Muslim nations are exhorted to unite against the hegemonic powers. Iran's fixation with the Israel-Palestinian issue should be seen in terms of its utility in fostering popular legitimacy of the regime not just among Iranian masses, but to promote Iran's prestige and a favourable image in the entire region.

**4.4 Regional Geopolitics of Resistance or the Shi'i Crescent**

As an unintended outcome of American military adventurism in the region, two of Iran's enemies, Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam in Iraq were overthrown in 2001 and 2003 respectively. But the presence of the U.S. forces in these neighbouring countries and the military threats it posed to Iran, especially in context of Iran's nuclear program, led Iran to pursue a sophisticated policy of building strategic coalitions across the region. Given that the mutual hostility between Iran and the United States is of strategic as well as ideological nature, Iran's campaign against the presence of outside military forces, mainly the United States, has utilized Islamic symbols and revolutionary ideology. Its counter-hegemonic geopolitics has aimed to build strategic coalitions with Shi'i/Islamist factions in the region, in which a religious-ideological discourse is placed in service of geopolitical interests.

The dismantling of Saddam's Baath regime in Iraq and Shi'ites rise to power in first free elections in the country changed the sectarian balance of power in Iraq with major geopolitical impact across the Arab world. An Iranian scholar noted that with the formation of Shi'ite government in Iraq, an Arab country, a fundamental change has occurred in regional geopolitics; Shi'i "who were suppressed by the Ottoman Empire, the Great Britain and pro-West dictatorships of the region in past, are now becoming a new, powerful political force through an entirely democratic process demanded by the people" (Dadandish, 2007). Kayhan Barzegar (2010) argues that the influence of the Shia ideology on Iranian foreign policy has been consistent and was used as a tool to increase Iran's role and political influence in the region, but its use received an additional impetus after Shi'ites rise to power in Iraq. Barzegar argues, "Iran's main strategy is to build close relations with moderate Shi'i factions who believe in establishing close relations with Iran. This is a policy by which Iran will be able to redefine the traditional characterization of Iraq's function as a

counterweight to Iran and shift the region's traditional balance of power into a new policy based on balance of interest" (Barzegar, 2008).

Therefore, in Iraq, one "aspect of establishing strategic coalition is the installation of a new generation of friendly elites at the level of state" (Barzegar, 2009). Towards this goal, Iran prodded its Iraqi Shi'ite allies in Iraq, Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and Islamic D'awa Party into supporting the American-led Coalitional Provisional authority. The purpose was also to show intentions of cooperation with the United States. But since U.S. troop presence in Iraq seemed open-ended and given U.S. ambitions of regime-change in Iran itself, Iran along with Syria supported anti-American insurgency in Iraq, including Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army, a Shi'ite militia fighting against the American occupation. The IRGC and its expeditionary branch Al-Quds Force see Iraq through ideological lens, in terms of an arena of conflict with the United States and to a lesser extent Saudi Arabia and Gulf states. It carried out on-the-ground-influence-building operations in Iraq and later played a crucial role in supporting the Assad regime along with Hezbollah.

In addition to Iraq, Iran has been heavily involved in 'Islamic resistance' in Levant, supporting Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Hamas in Gaza and later Basar-al-Assad's government since the beginning of Syrian civil war in year 2011. Mahmood Sariolghalam (2015) argued in an interview during the field-work that Iran has been more invested in the Levant region than in Central Asia for in this region Iran has been successful in identifying and developing bridges of influence. "Countries try to influence where there are more vulnerabilities. Iran has much better opportunity to influence politics in the Levant area than in Central Asia" (Sariolghalam, 2015). Bahram Navazeni, another Iranian scholar interviewed during the field work argued that "because we have constructed Israel as an enemy, we pursue strategic depth in this region. Therefore, Iranian geopolitics is oriented towards Iran's Western region" (Navazeni, 2015)

Hezbollah, after it led a successful campaign of resistance including guerrilla war against Israel's occupation of Southern Lebanon forcing its withdrawal in year 2000, emerged as a popular model of resistance exposing the limits of Israel's military power. Given the ideological and strategic ties between Islamic Republic and Hezbollah, it was an achievement for Iran as well. Furthermore, the cleric leadership

of Hezbollah, by developing a well-functioning social service network catering to disenfranchised Shi'i and Palestinian refugees in Southern Lebanon and Bekka valley embedded itself deeply into Lebanese society and gained popularity throughout the Arab world (Shatz, 2004). In September 2004, following a joint French-US initiative, UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1559, calling on "foreign forces (namely Syria) to leave Lebanon and cease their interference in the country's affairs, while also called for disarmament of militias" (namely Hezbollah). Rafiq Hariri, Lebanese Prime Minister, opposed to the extension of the term of pro-Syrian President Emile Lahud, was forced to resign and then murdered. In the aftermath of the murder of Hariri, who was backed by Saudi Arabia, the so-called "Cedar Revolution" led by anti-Syria Lebanese opposition within Lebanon and supported by the West mounted domestic and international pressure on Syria to withdraw its forces from Lebanon (Husseini, 2010). After Syria was forced to withdraw its forces from inside Lebanon in April 2005, Iran prodded Hezbollah to continue resistance against Israel based on anomalous status of Shebaa Farms on Lebanese-Israeli border and to focus on Israeli-Palestinian theatre (Husseini, 2010). Furthermore, Iran played a key role in fostering unity between Hamas and Hezbollah; the two groups adopted a broad posture of resistance in reference to Israeli expansionism and American hegemony in the Middle East. "The relationship between Hezbollah and Hamas – which strikingly bridges the Shi'i/Sunni divide – is one of broad ideological affinity and of emulation on part of Hamas" (Husseini, 2010).

Iranian support for Islamic resistance, especially in the Israeli-Palestinian theatre, became the hallmark of Ahmadinejad foreign policy of revolutionary anti-imperialist resistance. In addition, Israel's repeated threats of military strike on its nuclear facilities provided Iran with an important strategic rationale for cooperation with Palestinian rejectionist faction Hamas, especially after it had formed government in Gaza, whose strategic location enables striking capacity against Israel. After the election of Hamas government in Gaza in January 2006 and the 33-days long war between Hezbollah and Israel later the same year, the Palestinian cause was raised to the fore of Ahmadinejad's foreign policy, inviting designations such as Palestinianization of Iran's foreign policy (Amuzegar, 2007). When Western governments stopped economic aid to Palestinian authority, now led by Hamas, Iran took lead in mobilising international assistance for the Palestinian government. Iran

organized Support for Palestinian Intifada Conference in Tehran in April 2006 after a gap of three years. "Hassan Nasrallah and other Hezbollah officials attended this event, as did representatives of Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front of the Liberation of Palestine General-Command" (Samii, 2008: 45).

Sunni Arab countries have responded to the expanding Iranian sphere of influence in Arab world by invoking a sectarianized geopolitics of fear which seeks to isolate Iran and unite Sunni governments and mainstream non-state actors in order to contain Iranian influence. It was in the light of increasing Iranian influence over Kurdish and Shi'ite political factions dominating post-Saddam state in Iraq, and Iran's influence in Levant region, that King Malek Abdullah II of Jordan during his visit to the United States in late 2004, argued that a "Shi'i crescent ran from Damascus to Tehran, passing through Baghdad, dictating a sectarian brand of politics that was radiating outwards from Iraq across the whole region" (Black, 2007). 'Shi'i crescent', a geopolitical metaphor for Shi'ite political ascendency in the region marked the rise of a sectarian 'threat' discourse propagated by conservative Sunni Arab regimes who sought to obstruct Shi'ite political revival and portrayed Iran, widely perceived to be harbouring nuclear ambitions, as the major source of instability in the region. They blamed Iran for Shi'ite militancy in Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen. In a similar vein, then Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak said in an interview with Al-Arabiya in 2006, "there are Shias in all these countries (of the region), significant percentages, and Shia are mostly always loyal to Iran and not the countries where they live … naturally Iran has influence over Shia who make up 65 per cent of Iraq's population." By participating in a sectarian threat discourse, Sunni states sought not only to isolate Iran in the region but by representing Iran as a destabilising force active on the region they sought to diffuse internal and external pressures for political reforms.

Iranian leaders have rejected sectarian discourse themselves and argued that the rumours of Shi'i crescent was a strategic discourse being promoted by pro-West autocratic regimes and United States itself in order to frighten Sunni community by portraying Iran as hostile to their faith and country. The Supreme Leader described sectarian propaganda against Iran as "war of nerves" or propaganda war aimed at causing disunity within Iran and Muslim nations in the region.

> They spread rumour about Iran's role in propagating Shi'ism and encouraging the so-called Shia Crescent. One of the measures adopted in their war of nerves is to first create discord between the people of Iran and second create discord between the Iranian nation and other

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Muslim nations. The U.S. has always followed the policy of portraying the Islamic Republic of Iran as a frightening country for its neighbours (Khamenei, 2007, March).

Iran has been consistent in arguing that the "Persian Gulf states should have a mutual defence treaty and they should fully cooperate with each other. (We) should not let the U.S., England and other foreign countries enter this strategic region under the pretext of defending it" (Khamenei, 2007, March). In 2008, amid increasing threats of Israeli or US military strike on Iranian nuclear facilities, Iran repeatedly warned that it would close the Strait of Hormuz, at the mouth of Persian Gulf. In the atmosphere of increased tensions, "the responsibility to defend the Persian Gulf was delegated to Revolutionary Guard's navy, while the regular navy was to operate in the Oman Sea, outside the Gulf and the land-locked Caspian Sea" (Revolutionary Guards to 'defend Gulf', 2008).

### 4.5 Look to the East Policy

The changes in the international geopolitical environment following the September 11 attacks, especially the "emphasis upon unilateralism by the United States, which has become the last remaining superpower, and has had military oriented preventive and pre-emptive policies" and the impasse in negotiations over Iran's nuclear program with the EU-3 (France, Germany and Great Britain) necessitated a change in the direction of Iranian foreign policy (Sagafi-Ameri, 2006). Traditionally, Iran has had a bipolar view of the world. "The special economic, cultural, and geographical position of Iran has always led the ruling elite to follow equilibrium logic in the international policy game in order to preserve interests related to the West and East; this logic encouraged it to develop cooperation with one side hoping to avoid the greedy act of the other side in a given time" (Arghvani Pirsalami, 2013: 117). Rafsanjani in his foreign policy dedicated to post-war reconstruction had initiated building economic and commercial ties with Russia and China, but Ahmadinejad, faced with the U.S. strategy of isolating Iran, complemented his belligerent posture towards the West – the foundation of his populist foreign policy – with renewed emphasis on cementing relations with non-West and anti-west nations. 'Look to the East' (*negahe be shargh*) was a subset of this larger policy. Furthermore, Iran's identity and political isolation by Sunni and Arab region, where most of the countries are allies of the United States, further drove it towards convergence with Asia. The "new Foreign Minister of Iran Manouchehr Mottaki stated that Iran's

foreign policy orientation is towards the 'Asian identity,' underlining Iran's intention to see itself as an Asian country rather than a Middle Eastern country" (Maleki, 2007).

The need to counter the hostile policies of America of putting political pressure, sanctions over Iranian nuclear program was another motivation behind 'Look to the East' adopted in early days of Ahmadinejad presidency. Ali Larijani, immediately after he was named Iran's top nuclear negotiator in August 2005, launched the 'Look to the East' policy. Seyed Hossein Mousavian (2012), a member of the negotiating team writes in his memoir on the Iranian nuclear crisis that Larijani was an advocate of Iran focusing on the Eastern bloc in resolving the nuclear crisis.

> The 'Eastern Bloc Approach' was based on the assumptions that the Non-Aligned Movement and countries such as China and Russia would be able to reach a consensus on supporting Tehran's nuclear activities, and that Eastern bloc, specially Russia and China, would be willing to resist heavy U.S. pressures in siding with Iran (Mousavian, 2012: 84).

In December 2006, after Iran did not heed the UN Security Council's threat of sanctions if Iran did not suspend its Uranium enrichment program, UN sanctions were imposed against Iran, making it necessary for Iran to reach out to Eastern Asian powers. Kaveh Afrasiabi (2008) notes that during President Ahmadinejad's presidency "Iran's Look East policy was steered by a Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, who compared to his Western-educated predecessors, received his education in (Bangalore) India." He observes:

> Ahmadinejad's "Look East" strategy, taking a page or two from India's own eastern strategy of the 1970s through the 1990s, pins its hopes on building win-win bilateral and multilateral relations and cooperation in the economic, political and cultural spheres with the non-Western world. This is basically a subset of an ambitious global strategy that prioritizes ties with various countries, for example in Asia, Africa, Central and Latin America that are visibly anti-America, such as Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela (Afrasiabi, 2008).

The Chinese protection of Iran over its nuclear issue, supporting its right to enrichment and advocacy of diplomacy and dialogue against use of force underlined that Chinese partnership with Iran was viewed in China as a strategic relationship based on energy security (Dorraj and Currier, 2008). China and Russia have both opposed unilateral and bilateral sanctions outside the framework of the United Nations, arguing that such additional sanctions are outside international law and only obstruct constructive dialogue with Tehran and deepen the crisis further. They have consistently called on Iran to "refrain from developing nuclear weapons and make its nuclear work more transparent"; yet they have "defended the right of Iran and other countries to pursue nuclear activities for peaceful purposes" (Weitz, 2011). They have

supported dialogue and negotiations to resolve Iranian nuclear issue against the use of force.

With regard to the economic component of the policy, Iran seeks to capitalise on the economic rise of Asian giants by making energy and transit sector the main pillars of its 'Look to the East Policy.' In 2002, when Hu Jintao became the general secretary of the Communist Party, to fulfil the crucial objective of securing long-term energy supply, he encouraged their three main national oil companies to look for opportunities in overseas exploration and production projects in what was called a "going out" policy (Dorraj and Currier, 2008). As part of this "going out" strategy of procuring energy assets, China devised a geoeconomic strategy of "turning historical routes into modern grids of pipelines, roads, and railways for its energy supply" (Lin, 2014:9). This strategy was guided by its own 'Malacca dilemma', namely the "fears of a U.S. blockade on maritime supplies in the event of hostilities over Taiwan" (Lin, 2014:9). "China's energy-driven penetration of the Middle East also provides an alternative foreign-policy and trading partner for states such as Iran and Syria, whom U.S. policy actively seeks to isolate and punish" (Dorraj and Currier, 2008). In 2009, Iran invited Chinese Sinopec to develop the northern sector of Azadegan oil field, after Japanese company INPEX pulled out under relentless pressure from the US (Dorraj and Currier, 2008). "Beijing for its part views Iran as a means of counter-balancing U.S.-supported Arab states, believing that U.S. navy would be incapable of completely closing the Gulf so long as China-allied Iran controls the Eastern flank" (Lin, 2014: 10). In 2007, China replaced European Union as Iran's largest trading partner and the relation is set to expand further as Tehran is also a key node in China's overland and maritime 'Silk Road' (Lin, 2014). "By maintaining strong ties with Beijing, the Islamic Republic is able to evade Western sanctions and prevent its national currency from falling, two events that could deal crippling blows to the Iranian economy" (Dicky and Ighani, 2014).

Both China and Russia have benefitted from Iran-West confrontation by expanding their economic relations and furthering strategic cooperation with Iran. Russia is constructing a nuclear reactor at Bushehr and Russian Gazprom has claimed exploration rights in the huge Azadegan-North field in Iran. Significantly, Iran has become the third largest importer of Russian weapons after China and India, including anti-missile Tor M-1 which defends Iran's nuclear installations (Escobar, 2009). Iran

has been lobbying for full membership in Shanghai Cooperation Organization, ever since it was given observer status in July 2005, along with India and Pakistan. But the fact that it has been under UNSC imposed sanction, voted by both Russia and China, who co-lead the organization, Iran's membership to SCO was effectively postponed, for the organization does not include countries as full member if they are under UN sanctions (Fulton, 2017).

Iran finds common cause with both SCO and BRICS, organizations demanding more power for developing nations and striving to build a new world order less dependent on the United States and the West. BRICS nations, at its 2009 summit, called for "reform of international financial institutions, sweeping changes in the United Nations to give a bigger role to Brazil and India," and supported diversifying international monetary system for a 'stable and predictable' currency system, which resonated well with Iran (Faulconbridge, 2009). Iran has been trading with China and India through currency swap deals after United States and its allies imposed unilateral financial and monetary sanctions against Iran (Saghafi-Ameri, 2013).

In 2007, upon its request, Iran was awarded observer status in South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, SAARC alongside United States, China, Japan, South Korea, and European Union. The SAARC members unanimously voted in support of giving observer status to Iran at a time when United States was actively isolating Iran and putting pressure on countries who continued to engage Iran economically and politically. Sharing borders between two member countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan, Iran argued that its membership in the organization would promote East-West connectivity. At the New Delhi SAARC summit of 2007, connectivity was the dominant theme – especially since India faces considerable difficulty in establishing direct connectivity with Afghanistan and Central Asia with Pakistan denying transit to India, whereas Iran had been "helpful in reducing some of these difficulties by allowing Indian goods and services to reach these two regions" – provided additional rationale for granting of observer status to Iran (Muni, 2007). Iran is the crucial land bridge connecting Caspian-Central Asia to the Indian Ocean. "The North-South Corridor agreement linking the Indian sub-continent with Russia and Northern Europe was signed by Iran, Russia, and India in September, 2000;" later eleven other countries joined the project (Financial Express, 2017). Iran remains a

crucial player in the Asian geo-economics owed to its vast energy resources as well as its geographical location connecting vast energy resources of Central Asia with Europe and also with Asia and rest of the world through the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman (Saghafi-Ameri, 2006).

In 2012, when Iran was facing increasing isolation and military threats over its nuclear program, it hosted the Non-Aligned Movement summit and successfully garnered support for its enrichment program, while denouncing the United States from the international forum. Ayatollah Khamenei declared "Our motto is nuclear energy for all and nuclear weapons for none". He argued that the U.S. had helped "the usurping Zionist regime with nuclear weapons and created a major threat for the sensitive region", as he called for nuclear weapons-free zone in West Asia (Cherian, 2012). Lamenting the hypocritical nature of the western countries, he argued "it is most unfortunate to see that countries possessing the largest nuclear arsenals have no serious and genuine intention of removing these deadly weapons from their military doctrines" (quoted in Dikshit, 2012). In his speech Khamenei also attacked the UN Security Council as an "unjust" and "defunct relic" used by the U.S. "to impose its bullying manner on the world" (Dehghan, 2012). Iran achieved a major diplomatic victory, when all NAM-member countries supported Iran's right to harness peaceful nuclear energy. The Tehran Declaration acknowledged Iran's right to ownership of a full fuel cycle, which meant the right to uranium enrichment.

### 4.6 Nuclear Issue and Geopolitics of National Dignity

Gareth Porter (2009) points out that the strategic mind-set of Islamic Republic of Iran has been shaped by its experience of being at the receiving end of US hostility since its very inception. He argues that Iran's influence in Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq and even its stockpile of enriched uranium are valued bargaining chips in the ultimate negotiations or grand bargain with United States. "The demands for an end to official US enmity towards Iran and a seat at the table in future regional security discussions have continued to be the ultimate aims behind Iranian efforts to manoeuvre the United States into serious negotiations" (Porter, 2009). The Iranian leadership has attached tremendous significance to the nuclear issue, which is seen not just as a proof of its scientific prowess, but is framed "in terms of claiming Iran's right to peaceful energy, to gain international legitimacy as a nation-state" and to "generate national unity and purpose inside Iran on the basis of upholding Iranian prestige and national honour

(*ezzat e milli*)" (Bakhtiari, 2010: 19). Iran has portrayed Western opposition to Iranian nuclear program as mark of their privilege and hostility towards legitimate rights of Islamic Republic in particular, and the Third World in general (Bakhtiari, 2010). In a speech to nuclear scientists, Leader Khamenei argued that their achievement, by challenging the hegemony of western nations, had instilled a sense of national dignity in the Iranian nation, and it is for this reason that arrogant powers have been opposed to Iran's nuclear program.

> These countries have built their global hegemony on their monopoly on science and technology. Some of the uproar they cause is because they do not want this monopoly to be broken. If the people manage to make progress in nuclear technology, in aerospace, in electronic areas and in different industrial, technological and scientific areas, there will no longer remain a way for them to maintain their bullying and coercive hegemony (Khamenei, 2012, Feb.).

The 'geopolitics of national dignity' means that in the worldview of Iranian leadership, defying Western hegemony is mark of their independence and American hostility only vindicates that Iran is on the righteous path of justice. This is evident in this statement of Leader Khamenei, made in the same speech to nuclear scientists: "Why were they imposing sanctions on us when the nuclear issue didn't exist? It is just a matter of fighting a nation that has decided to become independent, a nation that has decided to resist oppression, a nation that has decided to expose oppression, a nation that is determined to convey this message to the entire world" (Khamenei, 2012, Feb). Similarly, the following comment President Ahmadinejad made in an interview with Egyptian daily, *al-Ahram* resonates the same discourse of national dignity and national desire for international legitimacy and recognition.

> [The world] wants Iran to go back to what it was in the past, but they won't succeed. They assume that we will give in to pressure, but such thoughts are misguided. We're already an industrial and nuclear country…we must ensure development and growth and bring them to pass, and the world must acknowledge our progress (Ahmadinejad, February, 2013 (quoted in Khoury, 2013).

It is evident that by asserting its right to peaceful energy, Iran wants to be recognized as a legitimate state by the West, and it for that reason it complemented a defiant uncompromising position of not forgoing its right to enrichment with a pragmatic approach of 'confidence building,' beginning with the EU-3 process involving Germany, U.K., and France in October 2003. The Iranian delegation was led by Hassan Rouhani, National Security Advisor to the Supreme Leader. When EU-3 argued for suspension of all enrichment related activities, Iran stated its "legal right to peaceful nuclear technology" under NPT. But to advance a diplomatic process that

would have trade embargo on Iran lifted and help face the threat of American military action, Iran agreed to IAEA verification of Iran's nuclear program and signed Additional Protocol on Nuclear Safeguards.

Mercille and Jones (2009) note that "one of the most important issue illuminating the dynamics of crisis is the failure of the United States and European Union (EU) to engage Iran constructively" (Mercille and Jones, 2009: 859). When the Department of State, led by Colin Powell and his deputy Richard Armitage, favoured talks with Iran on the issue of Afghanistan they were allowed on the condition that it wasn't used to 'broaden relationship' with Iran. The hawks in the Department of Defense such as John Bolton actively stymied the EU-3 process by refusing to offer Iran any concessions, such as offering spare parts and new aircrafts that the ageing Iranian Airline fleet badly needed, or the possibility of international nuclear companies to cooperate with Iranians on civil nuclear power, that Iran had expected in return for compromises on its nuclear program (Iran and the West 3/3: Nuclear Confrontation, 2011). The U.S. position , that Iran suspend all its enrichment activities, continued and threatened to 'report' Iranian nuclear program to the UN Security Council. Under the Paris agreement reached with the EU-3 in November, 2004, Iran agreed to full suspension of its enrichment program under IAEA watchdogs for the period of ongoing "negotiations on long-term agreement" and in return EU-3 agreed to "recognize Iran's rights under the NPT". Notwithstanding the Paris Agreement, EU-3 in its 2005 package, reneged on its pledge to provide Tehran with "firm guarantees on nuclear, technological, and economic cooperation and firm commitments on security issues," as they had failed to persuade the United States to take the military option "off the table" (Mercille and Jones, 2009: 859).

In September 2005, IAEA Board of Governors passed a resolution finding Iran in non-compliance with its safeguards obligations under the NPT and expressing "the absence of confidence that Iran's nuclear program is entirely for peaceful purposes". Meanwhile, it also set a date for referral of the issue to the Security Council (Reuters, 2008). India's IAEA vote against Iran was hailed by U.S. undersecretary Nicholas Burns as "a blow to Iran's attempt to turn this (nuclear issue) into a developed world vs. developing world debate" (quoted in Varadarajan, 2005).

In the Supreme Leader's opinion Iran had no incentive for dialogue over its nuclear program since the European Union continued to insist that the only 'objective

guarantee' Iran could give that its nuclear program was peaceful was to continue suspending enrichment for an indefinite period, a position unacceptable to Iran. Subsequently, the Guardian Council disqualified reformist candidates including some eighty incumbent deputies in 2004 parliamentary elections. With no agreement in place and given the West's refusal to acknowledge Iran's right to enrichment, even low-enrichment of Uranium, Iran resumed enrichment activities in August 2005 at Esfahan plant and then at the Natanz research facility in January, 2006 (Timeline of Iran's Nuclear Program, 2013). "Ahmadinejad accused the West of stockpiling nuclear and chemical weapons while at the same time threatening action on Iran" (Ahmadinejad says Iran will not back down on its Nuke Rights, 2005). Ahmadinejad sought to turn the nuclear issue into a nationwide campaign (Mohammad Nia, 2012:48). Given Iran's history of popular nationalism and dislike for foreign interference, the leadership was able to connect the quest for nuclear technology with desires for independent modernization, self-reliance, and national pride. In February 2006 Ahmadinejad declared that "Iran will never abandon its right" for the peaceful use of nuclear energy. The popular slogan became "Nuclear power is our absolute right" and a national consensus was created (quoted in Peterson, 2010: 332).

> Strategically, he has appealed to the rank-and-file's injured sense of nationalism and historic pride, portrayed the West as a privileged club opposed to the Muslim world's scientific progress and political independence and questioned the current global power structure (e.g. UN Security Council's composition and the legitimacy of its sanctions). Tactically, he has changed Iran's position from that of a defendant to that of a prosecutor. That is instead of defending the regime's socio-political policies against western accusations, Iranian diplomats are now required to highlight the West's own shortcomings, present Iran's grievances against the superpowers, and counter Washington's "arrogance and hegemony" (Amuzegar, 2007:47).

Much of the media, especially television, portrayed the defence of Iran's "right to nuclear technology as a part of wider national and popular aspiration, and one that is denied by the West and especially the United States" (Smyth, 2006: 10). When in May 2006, Condoleezza Rice offered to join European partners in direct talks with Iran on the condition that "Iran fully and verifiably suspends its enrichment and reprocessing activities" and without removing the option of using military force against Iran, Ahmadinejad reiterated Iranian position that Iran as a sovereign country would not abandon its right by voluntarily suspending nuclear activities. "We are after negotiations, but fair and just negotiations. They must be without any conditions" (Ahmadinejad, quoted in Spolar, 2006). In July 2006, the Security Council demanded that Iran "suspend all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities, including research and development," giving it one month to do so, "failing which, Iran would

face the possibility of economic and diplomatic sanctions" (UN Security Council Calls on Iran to suspend its Enrichment-Related Activities, 2006). The Council's demand of suspension of all enrichment related and reprocessing activities was opposed by a broad national consensus on the country's right to enrich its own Uranium as part of an indigenous nuclear energy program.

In November 2008, Obama offered unconditional dialogue over the nuclear program and Ahmadinejad welcomed the offer of talks with the United States as long as they were based on 'mutual respect.' After breakdown of Geneva talks between Iran and P5+1 in fall 2009 precipitated by Iran's refusal to send seventy five per cent of its Low Enriched Uranium stockpile for enrichment outside the country, "Tehran decided to increase its enrichment capability from below 4 per cent to around 20 per cent, enabling it to produce fuel for the research reactor in Tehran" (Warren, 2013: 126). It is important to note that the nuclear issue was turned into an issue of national pride and therefore subjected to intense debates frustrating possibilities of consensus for reasons that also have to do with Iran's intra-elite battle and Ahmadinejad's crisis of legitimacy after his disputed re-election in 2009. Opposition leader Mirhossein Mousavi criticized the outcome of Iran's talks with world powers, and proposal to send enriched uranium abroad as giving up Iran's national interests and assets, while Iran's parliament speaker and former top nuclear negotiator Ali Larijani suggested that "France and Russia could not be trusted, and might simply hold back Iranian uranium once they had laid their hands on it" (Perthes, 2010: 102). In February 2010, "Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization in Iran, proposed that Iran would keep its enrichment activities below five per cent in return for West providing fuel rods for the Tehran reactor" (Muller, 2016 : 36). After the West rejected this offer including the one offered by Brazil and Turkey to swap Iranian stockpile of LEU for research reactor fuel, Iran started to enrich Uranium at Fordo to purities of 20 per cent, and same was confirmed by IAEA in January 2012. Subsequently, European Union announced a ban on Iranian oil, along with sanctions on Iran's central bank. It was clear that the West had failed to engage Iran constructively, forcing Iran into a further obstinate position, a point also raised by Russian and Chinese diplomats.

United States' approach towards Iran in general and its nuclear issue in particular is driven by a geopolitical logic, namely its "need to maintain their state's

credibility internationally" in the face of Iranian defiance of the U.S. hegemony in the Middle East (Mercille and Jones, 2009: 859). It is "a symbolic process whereby U.S. officials of statecraft signal to others that any challenge to U.S. hegemony will be resisted. "Failing to respond decisively even to isolated instances of defiance, could embolden challenges elsewhere" (Mercille and Jones, 2009: 858). Iran for its part refused to act under pressure, and pursued a balanced policy of cooperation and confrontation. While it was consistent in upholding its right to enrichment as a signatory of NPT, it showed willingness for constructive dialogue with its enemies and opponents in the West.

### 4.7 Anti-Geopolitics of the Green Movement

In discursive practices of conservatives and hardliners, Islamic as well as civilizational identity of Iran is articulated vis-à-vis a monolithic image of the West. The Islamic revolution as an anti-imperialist 'revolt against the West,' translated into a geopolitical imagination of self-contained and mutually opposed binaries of Islam and the West, pitting an Islamic order against western secular political order, seen in terms of a "Judeo-Christian conspiracy" against Islam. In the post-Cold-War era of globalization, Islamic Republic which derives its legitimacy from a politicised religion perceives secularization and westernization amongst its population as a mounting existential threat which is to be addressed in terms of security policies. As discussed in the previous chapter, the threat discourse of cultural onslaught or invasion was promoted in early 1990s in order to counter cultural and political liberalization by moderate Rafsanjani administration acting under the imperatives post-war reconstruction and economic liberalisation. However, in the wake of disputed presidential election of the year 2009, polarisation over the powerful theocratic institutions of the regime reached dangerous heights and societal demands for civic freedoms, democratic participation, and civil society took the shape of a popular movement challenging the very ideological foundations of the regime.

The post-presidential election protests began essentially as people's response to the perceived failure of electoral democracy at the hand of the clerical establishment, and therefore targeted the legitimacy institution of the Supreme Leader and cleric dominated Guardian Council. Ahmadinejad's re-election was challenged by his co-contenders Mirhossein Mousavi and Mahdi Karroubi and their supporters. The initial slogan of the movement was 'where is my vote?' The regime responded to the

legitimacy crisis by representing the protests as being manipulated by the Western countries, the United States and Britain. After the state responded with force and cracked down on protests, they escalated it into a wider movement. The fact that Russia and China were among the first states to congratulate Ahmadinejad after his victory, led opposition to raise new slogans of 'Death to China' and 'Death to Russia,' clearly demonstrating the neo-liberal economic platform of the reformists" and the hatred for authoritarian political system of the Asian giants (Ommani, 2009). This alternative narrative of protesters condemning Russia and China for giving practical and diplomatic support for the military coup against true winner Mir-Hossein Mousavi in exchange for energy and security concessions from Iran, was counterpoised against the regime's narrative of 'velvet revolution' financed by and directed from the West (Monshipouri and Assareh, 2009:37).

The political discourse of the Green Movement represented Iran's long quest for democracy and citizen's rights, which had been gathering momentum in the domestic context of authoritarian institutions and international context of major structural changes in social relations of production in line with transnational liberalism. Ramin Jahanbegloo (2006) notes that the struggle between divine sovereignty in terms of an authoritarian version of political theology enforced by theocracy, and popular sovereignty which has found its due place in social networks and political actions of Iranian civil society reached its zenith in shape of the Green Movement. While political theology was founded on the exclusionary geopolitical imagination of Islam and the West, the democratic consciousness of the Green Movement and its vision of an open society had emerged in dynamic dialogue with Western liberal political philosophy, both classic and contemporary. Ramin Jahanbegloo (2006) observes that in Iran,

> Today in Iran philosophy represents a window on the Western culture, on an open society and on idea of democracy. This is the reason why Habermas, Rorty, Ricoeur, Berlin and many others are relevant in Iran. Most of the intellectuals in Iran today are struggling against different forms of fundamentalism, fanaticism and orthodoxy. Habermas is considered the inheritor of the Frankfurt School's intellectual tradition that from the very beginning questioned all orthodoxies and authoritarianisms (Jahanbegloo, 2006).

It can be argued that the Green Movement as a cultural-political movement was a continuation and acceleration of the earlier Reform Movement and was situated in what Appadurai defines as the new form of 'global cultural process,' "an organized field of social practices, a form of work…and a form of negotiation between sites of

agency (individuals) and globally defined field of possibility" (Appadurai, 1996:31, quoted in Cuddy-Keane, 2003:544). Globalization, "does not exclude identity conceived in terms of geopolitical boundaries, but situates those constructs within a multidirectional, global space" (Cuddy-Keane, 2003:544). Given the tight monopoly of state over means of mass communications, the mobilizing networks of the Green Movement included informal social networks, the virtual space of online social-networks and digital communication. Connecting with diasporic public spheres transcended the boundaries of the nation-state and formed a social space in which an inter-subjective collective identity was formed and alternative narratives upsetting the dominant codes founding the social relations were circulated (Chatterjee, 1997:30; Reisinezhad, 2025:198). The collective identity of the Green Movement was, at once rooted in the context of nation-state within which "'rights' assume their concrete meaning and around which dissent, mobilization, and actions make sense" (Bayat, 2013:255). At the same time it was connected with the globalized 'network society,' defined by its focus on human rights, individual autonomy and unfettered freedom has the effect of weakening the nation state.

With its horizontal organizational methods, absence of charismatic authority, civic non-ideological goals, and transnational linkages, the Green Movement was a postmodern uprising (Mahdavi, 2011). Hamid Dabashi (2013) noted that the "Green Movement is not a revolution in the classic sense of the term – it is not violent, it is not targeted to dismantle the ruling regime. It has neither the ideological nor the militant wherewithal for such aims". As a civil rights movement demanding civil liberties and opposing the ideological totalitarianism and its attendant resistance agenda of supporting Islamist movements, it was a continuation of the reformist movement seeking to reform theocracy to make it more democratic and less ideological. Its method and objectives were defined by "insistence on dialogue, on the cultivation of public reason, on cleansing the system" (Dabashi, 2013).

An examination of the slogans raised during the movement, underscores its nationalist and republican character, its rejection of the hegemony of theocratic institutions, and Islamist political agenda. Two of the most popular slogans *'Allahhu Akabar'* (God is Great) and '*Marg ba dictator'* (Down with the Dictator) challenged the institutional supremacy of the *vilayat-e-faqih* and re-claimed Shi'ism as an ideology of protest against autocratic rulers. Green Movement, as a popular uprising,

took the form of a discursive struggle between "Islam of power, represented by Iran's ruling regime, and an Islam of freedom, represented by many Muslims who oppose it" (Delkhasteh, 2010). Delkhasteh argues that this freedom-based model of Islam, wherein belief in *tawhid* or oneness of God, captured by the slogan *'Allahhu Akabar'* (God is Great), is used to liberate human beings from relationships that limit and confine, especially the rule of the authoritarian state that had emerged during the revolution of 1979, was now used to challenge Islamic authoritarianism. Other slogans such as *'Ya Hossein, Mir Hossein'* sought to convert a popular religious chant *'Ya Hossein'* into a political one, in support of opposition leader Mir Hossein Mousavi. Another slogan, *"Na Gaza, na Lebnaa, Jaanam fedaaye Iran"* (Neither Gaza, nor Lebanon, my life is sacrificed for Iran) underlined the nationalist aspiration and rejection of the Islamist agenda of resistance. It was a rejection of the ideologically militant foreign policy and voiced citizens' preference for a policy that wasn't ideologically antagonistic towards the West.

Thus, the movement questioned the pan-Islamist narrative of resistance exploited by the regime to produce legitimacy at the expense of national citizenry. Asef Bayat (2008) has argued that as a result of the changes in the internal workings of the Islamist movements as well as dynamics of society, coupled with the influence of global-transnational economic and political processes, the disposition of Islamism is moving away from the revolutionary path towards what he calls 'post-Islamisation.' Putting the reformist and the Green Movement of Iran in the category of post-Islamist movements, he argues that it refers to "project and movements that want to transcend Islamism as an exclusivist and totalising ideology, seeking instead inclusion, pluralism, and ambiguity. It is nationalist in project (as opposed to being pan-Islamist), and consciously post-revolutionary, post-idea-of-revolution, that is. It represents primarily a political project" (Bayat, 2008: 109-10).

### 4.8 Threat Discourse of 'Soft War'

Notwithstanding the forces of globalization, which are leading to erasure of boundaries – both physical and cultural – causing a crisis of sovereignty and identity, the causes of the crisis of the wake of Green Movement were seen by the Iranian regime in terms of external manipulations by Western government seeking regime-change by creating internal strife, discord or *fitna*. An increasingly militaristic

language was adopted by the leadership, especially armed forces in referring to the opposition movement and to justify their violent suppression.

Ervand Abrahmian (1993) in an article titled *"The Paranoid Style in Iranian Politics"* notes that the "conspiracy by external powers in the domestic political affairs of Iran" has been a consistent attribute of the geopolitical imaginaries of Iranian state as well the public. He argues that this paranoid style, which can be "explained by history, especially Iran's experience of imperialist domination by foreign powers—first Russia and Britain, later the United States during the Cold War period—have in fact, determined the principal formations in the country's political landscape over the last two hundred years" (Abrahamian, 1993:116). Earlier the conservatives in the regime had derailed the post-war policies, cultural and political liberalization by raising fears of cultural onslaught from the West. It sought to delegitimise the Green Movement, by portraying it as a handiwork of the West, especially the United States which openly supported regime-change in the region through policies such as *The New Middle East Initiative* etc.

Any hegemonic discourse is political in the sense that it acknowledges only one meaning, excluding all others; the alternative imaginations of the Other against which the Self is defined are seen as dangerous and destabilising. Therefore statespersons, by constructing discourses of threat reflected in notions such as 'cultural invasion' and 'soft war', seek to reinforce their own hegemonic binaries of Islam and the West as mutually opposed and self-contained entities. Given the movement's apparent liberal political discourse focussing on rights and freedom and challenging the legitimacy of *vilayat-e-faqih*, its ideological source was traced to the external enemy powers that is the West, and movement was portrayed as *fitna*, requiring the state to use all means in its power to redress the critical situation of *fitna.* The word '*fitna'* is often used to refer to sedition within the Islamic Umma, and it was repeatedly used by the government and religious officials to label and condemn political opponents within the regime (Friedman, 2011). By using the religiously charged term *fitna*, the regime identified the protesting opposition as internal enemy and at the same time justifed the authoritarian version of Islam in which conservative Islamists, controlling the institutions of *vilayat-e-faqih,* and the Guardian Council justified their power by projecting themselves as custodians of Islamic and revolutionary principles and the independence of the Islamic-Iranian nation. Leader

Khamenei argued that "those people who confront the Islamic Republic and the Revolution and who turn their backs on the principles of the revolution are considered to be enemies" (Khamenei, 2009, September). In another speech Khamenei argued: "In the modern world, creating *fitnas* is the main technique that is used by the enemies of the truth. In such a scenario, the proponents of the truth should provide the people with as much insight and clear guidance as they can so they do not get confused" (Khamenei, 2009, December 13). By using the word 'fitna' for political divide, the officials portrayed the leadership of the movement as deviant and manipulated by forces opposed to the Islamic Revolution, namely United States. As Hamid Dabashi notes, "the ruling regime itself termed it a *fetneh* or 'calamity' instigated by the triumvirate of the US, Israel, and the UK, and their local lackeys, thus in effect accusing its own founding figures - Mousavi was prime minister under the founder of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomenei, for eight years during the critical years of the Iran-Iraq war - to be instruments of foreign designs" (Dabashi, 2013). Khamenei condemned the former reformist leaders for confusing the people and for ignoring the fact that their activities were being supported by imperialists and their domestic proxies who have since the early 1980s opposed the Islamic essence of the Republic (Afshari, 2011:343). In a speech to seminarians and clergy on December 13, 2009, Leader Khamenei emphasized the importance of promoting Islam, the need to maintain unity between universities and Islamic seminaries and the urgency of promoting Islam in the current situation of *fitna (*meaning confusion or internal strife).

> What I am trying to say that religious publicity should give rise to a discourse. When something becomes a discourse, it becomes public knowledge in a particular era and a particular society. It is not possible to achieve this goal through isolated and spontaneous measures. Creating a discourse requires active planning and measures... religious publicity lead to appropriate knowledge and cultural norms, and in some cases it acts like a warning (Khamenei, 2009, Dec.).

Iran as a state where a politicized religion, the primary marker of identity and legitimating ideology of the state, is defined in relation of opposition vis-à-vis the hegemonic Western secular political order, has a defensive, besieged worldview, and a belligerent geopolitical discourse targeted at imagined enemies. In the same speech to seminarians, Khamenei argues:

> Understanding the truth is possible through fearing God. And when it is time to publicly declare the truth, we are advised not to "fear anyone but Allah". Why? Because the truth has its own enemies. It is not easy to declare truth. Material powers and different kinds of global taghut [authority not sanctioned by God] are the enemies of the truth. This has been the case throughout the history, and this state of affairs will not change until the Imam of age establishes his righteous government."

The regime saw the massive protests of the Green Movement, widely supported in the Western media in terms of 'soft war,' a term with starker military dimension underlining urgency of defence. Addressing the "heads of the arrogant governments," meddling and interfering in Islamic Republic's affairs, Khamenei argued,

> You should not think that when you support a political movement, it will be attracted towards you. That is a dream. We have thirty years of experience. Our nation has been recording your enmity in its memory for thirty years. The Iranian nation understands what you are doing. They mention the names of some individuals to suggest that they support them. They are lying. They do not support any one. Their goal is to foment discord. Their goal is to create suspicion among the Iranian people and elites (Khamenei, 2009, July).

In conservative Islamist geopolitical imagination, the West has supported military aggression and sought to create internal discord with the intention of destroying the Islamic Republic, while the Iranian nation as a result of this historical memory of collectively resisting this aggression is imagined as a united Islamic nation under the spiritual leadership of *vilayat-e-faqih*. In their postcolonial or subaltern geopolitical imagination framed within the discourse of Shi'i Islam and Islamic revolution, reproduction of imaginary and real enemies, and threats to independence of the Islamic-Iranian nation becomes indispensable for not only creating the Islamic-Iranian nation but also in creating raison d'etre for the supremacy of Islamist intuitions and their control of social and cultural spheres. Delineating the aspects of 'soft war,' Khamenei stated: "In a soft war, the enemy tries to make use of advanced communication and cultural tools, spread lies and rumours and take advantage of certain opportunities to create suspicion and discord among people" (Khamenei, 2009). Scholars suggest that the terminology of 'soft-war' is an adaptation of the concept of 'soft power' which exploits the "attractiveness of a country's culture and political ideals, (which) constitute the 'currency' of soft power." The same modern mass communication and information technology and the increasing permeability of borders which facilitate the pursuit of 'soft power' can be exploited to wage a 'soft war' targeting the culture and identity – the very underpinnings of another nation-state.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in an address to volunteer Basij Islamic militia, which had played a key role in clamping down of protests during the reformist presidency of Khatami, Khamenei argued that,

> After the failure of the camp of arrogance in its fierce opposition against the Islamic Republic in the first decade of the Islamic Revolution, the enemies have now focused their attention on

a soft war against the Islamic Republic. And countering this soft-war is our main priority today (Khamenei, 2009, November 25).

By drawing a parallel with the Iran –Iraq war in which Basij militia played a major role at battlefront, the notion of 'soft-war' (*jang-e-naram*) aimed to mobilise Basij, a massive paramilitary which blends ideology with security, and also prepare the larger military-security apparatus in a counter strategy of dealing with the ideological challenge of the Green Movement. Khamenei argued that as guardian of the revolution, IRGC has to self-define the meaning of revolution and threats to it and what constitute the 'deviant political orientations' which need to be countered.

> What is important is that the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps is the Guardian of the Islamic Revolution. I do not want to say that this guardianship means the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps should protect the Islamic Revolution in all arenas including scientific, intellectual, economic and cultural areas. This is not what I mean. What I want to say is that as a living organism, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps should know what it wants to protect and what this revolution is. It is not necessary for the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps to engage in the protection of the Islamic Revolution in political arenas. Some people mix certain issues together. This should be clarified. It is not possible to describe certain organization as the arm and the guardian of the Revolution, but make it ignore and close its eyes to different political orientations – while some of these orientations behave in a deviant way and become dependent on such and such a group and some of them do not (Khamenei, 2013, Sept.).

The Movement was considered by Mohammad Ali (Aziz) Jafari, commander of Islamic Revolutionary Guards, to be "a threat way more dangerous than the eight-year war" with Iraq (Shahidsaless, 2015). Hossein Hamadani, appointed deputy Commander of IRGC in 2005, along with Chief Commander Ali Jafari (himself appointed in 2007) planned how to deal with any attempted 'Velvet Revolution' in Iran. He headed IRGC's Rassoulollah Corps, in charge of the Greater Tehran from 2009 to 2014 and was instrumental in suppressing the protests.

The duty of countering 'soft threats' is entrusted to the *basij* forces, which operate in the cultural domain and plays a crucial role in organizing the youth. Ali Jaffari, the commander of IRGC argued in 2013: "Today, the most important and main mission of Basij is confronting the soft threats and cultural invasion which is stealthily targeting the (Iranian) youth" (Commander: Enemy engaged in cultural war against Iran). Revolutionary Guards and *basij* have been at the forefront of disseminating the discourse of 'soft war' and 'cultural invasion.' The 'soft war,' "represents the latest ideological framework employed by the regime to analyse the threats and opportunities it faces with respect to a variety of issues, which has not remained solely at the level of discourse and political jargon" (Mohseni, 2013). A number of new bodies such as "Defence Propaganda Staff (*setad-e tablighat-e defai*),

Soft War Base (*gharargah-e-jang-e-naram*)," were formed comprising a number of elements of the armed forces and other state organizations (Mohseni, 2013, Iran launches Soft War Base:Cmdr).

In terms of a systemic understanding of the Green Movement and its future, Asef Bayat (2009) is correct in his prognosis of "deep political and social divide – between a doctrinal regime which regards people as dutiful subjects, and a large segment of population who see themselves as rightful citizens." He argues that "the root cause of the crisis lies in a historic twist: that Iran experience an "Islamic Revolution" without developing a pervasive 'Islamist movement' – one that could 'socialise,' and connect the expectations of the people to the visions of the Islamist leadership" (Bayat, 2009). The current Islamist regime in Iran has arrogated for itself the role of supervision of mass-culture and correction of so-called 'cultural deviations.' Of course, such government activities blur the lines between public and private and are therefore resented by the people, who then challenge the ideological worldview of the state. In an address to the members of Council of Cultural Revolution, Khamenei pointed to the schism in society and the cultural role of the state:

> Of course, we witness that in their newspapers, writings, and speeches, some people want to limit and eliminate the supervision of the government by attaching labels such as "government-based-religion" and "government-based-culture" to the government. They want to attach these labels to the government. These people say that the government wants to make religion and culture pivot around the government. What does it mean? A religious government is not different from a government-based religion. Officials are part of the people. Government-based religion means popular religion. The government practices the same religion that the people do. The government is responsible for promoting religion in a stronger way (Khamenei, 2013, December).

Such a government, where the nation is defined in terms of an ideologised religion, the state seeks to mobilise the masses around its ideology and control the cultural, social sphere, lest alternative interpretations of political religion jeopardise the legitimacy of the statist religio-political ideology. Islamic Republic, as far as the conservative Islamist leadership is concerned, is a hegemonic regime, where there is no distinction made between the state and society. People are not considered as sovereign citizens free to engage in civil society and political activities outside the fold of state, but masses who are ideologically indoctrinated and mobilised by the state. The state uses religious ideology to bestow itself with not only popular legitimacy, but by politicising the faith of the masses in terms of a monolithic ideology and state-led Islamisation, the state's Islamism vies to become a hegemonic

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political discourse colonising the entire political space by marginalising, if not eliminating, rival discourses. The State does this by emphasizing on community and unity defined in terms of common religion of Islam and against putative internal and external enemies and threats, rather than on democaratisation, equality, or liberty. The threat discourses such as those of 'cultural invasion' and 'soft war,' seek to construct threats to the society as a whole as opposed to threat to the state alone. Similarly, the discourse of resistance aginst the 'global arrogance' performs the important function of ideologically mobilising the entire society behind the state leadership. The Shi'ite notions of justice and resistance have been used to legitimise not only a defiant anti-imperialist posture but to perpetuate a discourse of victimisation and imagine Iranian nation in the image of Shi'ism as the 'righteous oppressed'.

Shahir Shahidsaless (2014) argues that the clashes of Green movement were manifestation of the revival of a struggle within a fragmented society. He notes that the fact that the backbone of the movement was formed by middle and upper middle class, explains why the movement was focussed on civil rights and never raised any economic demands. Given that state ideology, which permeates "institutions of government, the public sphere, and educational and other formative systems as the primary definer of identity and shaper of moral and ethical conduct is a real religion embraced by the vast majority of the people," the regime will survive as long as it's variant of Islamic ideology has support among a section of religious masses (Bishara, 2009). It can be concluded that the regime maintains its Islamic revolutionary identity by constantly affirming and producing geopolitical binaries of Islam and the West, while portraying any opposition which questions the basic foundations of the regime and borrows from liberal discourse of freedom and rights as a counter-revolution compromising Islamic identity and independence of Iran which therefore has to be exterminated by all means. Furthermore, the crisis of legitimacy generated by the Green Movement was ameliorated, as the hybrid nature of the regime allows it to tread a middle ground of part confrontation and part balancing and relieve pressure by co-opting the demands of the population within the framework of popular yet controlled elections. Hassan Rouhani, a reformist candidate with a political agenda underlying respect for democracy and the individual freedom was elected to the office of the President, placating the discontented masses who had participated in the Green Movement.

## 4.9 Resistance Economy

A key characteristic of the geopolitical discourse of Islamic Republic of Iran is its securitization of cultural, political, and even economic domain. Through these security moves, which are constructed in the language of revolutionary Islam, the source of crisis is projected on to the Western powers seeking to undermine Islamic Republic, and the crisis itself is framed as a security problem. Framed within the popular language of the revolution and Islam and the context of hostility from the United States towards the revolutionary regime, securitization is widely accepted and shields the regime from popular criticism. Using the tactic of securitization, the regime formulates extraordinary steps and strategies within the Islamic revolutionary paradigm of resistance and self-sufficiency, thereby strengthening its legitimacy claims.

In order to justify Iran's defiant position on the nuclear issue to a population reeling under crippling sanctions, Iranian leaders argued for resilience, resistance, and self-reliance in the economy. Leader Khamenei asserted Iran will not acquiesce to Western diktats in the course of nuclear negotiations in exchange for relief from economic sanctions. Presenting 'resistance-economy' as Iran's preferred solution to economic difficulties resulting from sanctions, Supreme Leader Khamenei argued that the "arena of economy, because of America's hostile policies, is an arena of struggle, arena of war, war of a specific kind" (Khamenei's 1394 Nowruz Speech in Mashhad: Preparing Iranians for a Nuclear Agreement?). In a speech in October, 2012, the commander of the IRGC, Mohammad Ali Jafari, invoked Ayatollah Khamenei when he declared, "the secret to success and victory against enemy which is using all its power against Islamic Iran in an economic war and which has doubled its pressure, is to 'stand firm, resist, and be steadfast" (quoted in Farahabadi, 2012).

On *Nowruz*, the beginning of Persian New Year on March 20, the Supreme leader sets the political agenda by naming the upcoming year. Khamenei declared 2011/2012 to be the year of economic jihad and later described Iran's response to the sanctions in terms of the elevation of "the economy of resistance". "Economy of resistance does not mean putting a fence around ourselves and taking defensive measures…Economy of resistance means an economy that can guarantee the growth

and development of the country under pressure, sanctions and severe hostilities" (Khamenei, 2012, quoted in Maloney, 2015:355). The economy of resistance seeks to cultivate economic autarchy outside the international economic system, in order to make Iranian economy less vulnerable to US-led international sanctions. The key features of the 'resistance economy' include "changing the banking structure to facilitate domestic investment, creation of a knowledge based economy, support for small business, and encouraging Iranians to purchase domestic products" (Khamenei, 2015, quoted in Iranpolitik: A Blog on Iranian Politics, 2015). At the state level, economic security refers to economic independence and productivity, therefore the economy of resistance "doctrine is intended to make Iranian economy resistant to all external economic shocks in the long term, including sanctions and global financial crises" by utilizing the domestic capabilities. Resistance economy, to a large extent, is synonymous with 'import substitution', i.e. promoting and developing local capacities over imports (Toumai, 2014). The year 1392, (beginning March 20, 2013) was named the year of 'economic and political epic', signalling that Iran has to work on reforming structural flaws of its economy, especially the dependence for revenue on export of oil, in order to fight off the western sanctions against Iran.

The economy of resistance is a discourse supported by conservatives as well as hardliners, since Pasadaran was able to maximise its economic role, especially in large national projects. The resistance economy also meant that while Iran would reduce imports in general to promote domestic industrial base, it would also develop strategic partnership with Russia, China, India, and Latin American countries that are keen to construct a financial infrastructure independent of the West.

## 4.10 Islamic Awakening: Iranian Geopolitical Narrative of Arab Uprisings

Since an ideologised revolutionary version of a world religion forms the legitimating ideology of Iranian regime, the dialectical relation between national and universal is exploited by the state to produce religio-political legitimacy and soft power while supporting ideological revival of Islam in the region. The ideological power and legitimacy of Iranian regime is performed in countering the hegemonic power of the United States and Israel in the region, which also forms the pivot of Iranian geopolitics. Therefore, when popular uprisings overthrew entrenched despotic regimes in the Arab world, Iran having itself witnessed a civil rights Green

movement, sought to interpret these uprisings as "Islamic liberation movements" and "Islamic awakening" following in the footsteps of Islamic Revolution in Iran and spelling an "irreparable defeat" for the United States (Khamenei hails 'Islamic' uprisings, 2011). The Iranian regime saw the events through its postcolonial, anti-imperialist, Islamist prism.

*Islamic Awakening* is a much used term in recent history of the Muslim countries in the region. In simple words it means blending of political activism and local religious ideas in the context of state-building or by political opposition to secular despotic states and colonial domination. It is however increasingly used to describe popular Islamic revival in response to the neo-imperial cultural and political challenge of the West and Islamophobia in the Western world. The very notion of Islamic Awakening is based on an idealized image of the Islamic past; as a result the reasoning goes that the present state of decline in the Muslim world can be corrected by bringing Islam back in the social, cultural, and political domain. The term Islamic Awakening has been used by the Iranian leadership for the contemporary popular resurgence of Islamic identity and ideology in the Muslim world against the wave of Western Islamophobia, seen in mass protests surrounding offensive cartoon of Prophet Muhammad in a Danish newspaper, French government's ban on full-face veils, Arab uprisings, and the September 2012 worldwide demonstrations against the anti-Islamic film "*Innocence of Muslim*s." While the increasing vitality of Islam has been firmly rooted in the process of social change and changes in the international geopolitical environment and has taken varied forms in different countries, the geopolitical discourse of the theocratic leadership of Iran seeks to revive "genuine Islam" characteristic of Islamic revolution in cultural and institutional forms against the Western hegemony in the region and beyond.

"The function of a geopolitical narrative is to set out in a clear, quasi-visual manner arguments that will stimulate at least the mobilisation of the nation and, if possible, the greater part of the international community. That is why it is an issue of power and rivalry" (Postel-Vinay, 2004). The geopolitical narrative of Islamic Awakening described the popular mobilization and toppling of pro-West autocracies in the Arab world from the preferred position of Iran as the vanguard of the Islamic revolution and to display its own revolutionary credentials (Mohseni, 2013). On the thirty-second anniversary of the Iranian revolution in February 2011, when uprisings

were spreading in the region, Leader Khamenei declared: "today's events in North Africa, the country of Egypt, the country of Tunisia, and other countries have another meaning, for the Iranian nation. This is what has always been called Islamic Awakening…today it is showing itself". Through the narrative of Islamic awakening, Iran tried situating these movements within a particular post-colonial geopolitical imagination of Islam and the West as mutually opposed and self-contained and thus shaped the outcome of these uprisings towards a new Islamic order as against the previous American dominated one. Projecting Iran as the model for revolutionaries, Ayatollah Khamenei argued in June 2012, on the 23rd anniversary of the demise of Imam Khomeini, "The Iranian nation has successfully displayed how a nation may advance free from dominance of global hegemonies." By representing the downfall of pro-American regimes in the region as analogous to its own Islamic revolution, the regime also sought to foreclose any attempt by the Green Movement leadership to draw parallels between these democratic uprisings and their own pro-democracy movement of 2009. More importantly, by explaining the unfolding popular revolutions in the Arab world as Islamic Awakening, Iran tried to augment the Islamist leadership and anti-American disposition over the movement and keep them from being manipulated by extra-regional, especially Western influences. Iran maintained its traditional position against any intervention of intrusive forces. In an address to the International Conference on Islamic Awakening, in Tehran in 2012, Khamenei argued:

> One of the most important goals of the Islamic Awakening is getting rid of global arrogance. We should announce this openly because it is wrong to think that global arrogance – headed by America – may get along with Islamic movements. Wherever Islam and support of Islam prevail, America does its best to destroy them while putting on a friendly smile. Regional revolutions have no other choice than distancing themselves from global arrogance (Khamenei, 2012).

Ayatollah Khamenei identified "North Africa and West Asia" as Iran's immediate region and "heart of the world" where the fall of pro-Western autocratic regimes by popular revolutions is seen as the key trait of a transnational Islamic awakening, where Iran must play a role. In order to project Iran as the ideological fountainhead of current uprisings, Iran established the *World Assembly for the Islamic Awakening*, under the chairmanship of Ali Akbar Vilayati, an influential former foreign minister and Leader's special advisor on foreign affairs. Underlying the importance of diplomacy in fostering the Islamist aspect of the popular movement, the Leader argued,

The Islamic Republic has new ideas. These ideas are about people and divine values. These two things should combine and form movements and societies. Spiritual and divine values should be accompanied by the will of people, not imposed on people, not imposed on people. This is the new idea that the Islamic Republic is presenting. This can be seen in the world Islamic. We are both republican and Islamic (Khamenei, 2011, Dec.)

At the First International Conference on Islamic Awakening in Tehran in September 2011, attended by more than 700 delegates from more than 84 countries, Khamenei noted that "state-building is your pivotal and main task; a complex and challenging affair," but one that can be "achieved through different methods and forms depending on the particular conditions that exist across the diversity of countries" (quoted in Mohseni, 2013). Even as he recognized that an institutional model and make-up of Islamic state had to reflect the local conditions, he insisted that "the ultimate goal must be a unified Islamic *umma* (nation) and establishment of an Islamic civilization based on religion, rationalism, science, and modernity." Moreover, the Leader firmly warned foreign delegates to "not allow secular or western liberal or extremist nationalist or leftist Marxist models to be imposed on you" (quoted in Mohseni, 2013). The spread of the ideology of Islamic revolution remains an important objective of the theocratic leadership, and received an impetus in the wake of uprisings. Leader Khamenei argued,

> The spread of revolution does not entail the generation of discord in other countries, deploying military forces and, spreading terrorism. Rather, by setting a model, the Islamic Republic attempts to promote Islamic teachings and resistance for the sake of revolutionary ideals, especially defending the oppressed. And by Allah's favor, Imam Khomeini's goal has been realized in this regard (Khamenei, 2008).

The Leader has consistently used the word 'awakening' to describe Iran's role in other Islamic countries. Refuting the American allegations of Iranian interference in Iraq, Lebanon and Afghanistan, he stated:

> The Americans say that the Islamic Republic of Iran is the main reason behind their failures, but their failure are due to awakening of peoples of the world and their appropriate policies...the influence and power of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the region and among peoples of the world is spiritual in nature. This is because the Islamic Republic awakens people (Khamenei, January 9, 2011).

The self-image of Iran as the champion and defender of the rights of oppressed and ideological fountainhead of revolutionary Islamism is reinforced in supporting the masses rebelling against pro-West monarchies and states. The discourse of Islamic Awakening was countered by pro-West countries by constructing a sectarian geopolitical discourse of fear and threat, portraying Iran as interfering in their internal affairs and seeking to destabilise the region.

Saudi Arabia and Gulf Kingdoms reeling under a crisis of legitimacy in the face of the wave of popular uprising in the region were alarmed by Iran's support for the uprisings. When in March 2011 Bahrain's Shi'ite majority staged weeks of protests against the Sunni monarchy, Bahrain King invited Gulf Cooperation Council to quash the protests. Saudi Arabia, afraid of instability spreading to its own Shi'i population in the oil rich Eastern province, promptly complied with the request and sent about 2000 troops including 1,200 from Saudi Arabia and 800 from the United Arab Emirates – in the first ever collective military action of GCC to help suppress a popular revolt (Bronner and Slackman, 2011). GCC members were united in denouncing Iran's meddling in the internal affairs of GCC countries and formulated strategies of survival and counter-revolution. The leading counter-revolutionary strategy was to portray protests in the Gulf as being manipulated by region's non-Arab and Shi'ite Iran, which they argued was exploiting the sentiments of Shi'ite population to destabilize Sunni kingdoms.

Iran for its part was quick to criticize Saudi involvement in Bahrain, while forcefully objecting to the sectarian colouring given to Iranian support for protesting Shi'ites in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. On *Nowruz* speech on March 21, 2011 Leader Khamenei argued: "We don't distinguish between Gaza, Palestine, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Bahrain, and Yemen. We have supported Palestine for 32 years, and they are not Shiites. It is not an issue of Shiites and Sunnis... it is a protest of nation against oppression." Iran's religio-political discourse of hostility against Israel and support for Palestinian resistance was significant to counter the allegations of a sectarian approach to popular Islamist movements in the region and also to question the leadership claims of Saudi Arabia, which has a rather moderate approach towards the issue.

> Thanks to Islamic Awakening, today the issue of Palestine has become the main issue of the world of Islam once again. You should not let this distinction and this advantage disappear and be concealed under the machinations and plots of the enemies of Muslims and the Islamic Ummah. The issue of Palestine is one of the main issues. Over time, the people evaluate their governments with their position on the issue of Palestine (Khamenei, 2016, January).

Once protests started in Syria, the Syrian opposition was supported by the West and Saudi Arabia with the intention to capitalise on the opportunity to remove Iran's major ally. Turkey, France, and Qatar were active in uniting and organising the Syrian opposition, while Saudi Arabia called on Western powers to 'provide the opposition with necessary means' to uproot Assad. American and British intelligence

facilitated arming of Syrian rebels by transferring weapons from Libyan stockpiles in 2012 but did not intervene to enforce a no-fly zones that Saudi Arabia had wanted (Milne, 2015). Iran was at this time siding with the Assad–led state and against the popular protests seen in terms of the Western manipulation given the anti-imperialist posture of the Assad regime. Iran legitimized its support for Assad as necessary for the survival of the 'resistance front' since Syria was the vital link between Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah, as well as the Palestinian cause. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei praises Syria for its 'resistance' against Israel and the United States and the same discourse of resistance is echoed by the leadership of Hezbollah to legitimise its involvement in support of Assad. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, secretary general of Hezbollah argued that "if Syria falls in the hands of *takfiris* (a term used for Sunni extremists who consider Shi'ites apostate) and the United States, the resistance will be trapped and Israel will enter Lebanon. If Syria falls, the Palestinian cause will be lost" (Hashem, 2015). On the lines of Shi'i militias of Iraq, Iran has mobilised Shi'ite fighters from Afghanistan and Pakistan to fight in the name of defending the shrine of Sayyida Zeinab from falling under the control of the Sunni extremists. The shrine is located in the suburb of Damascus, a strategically significant location facing Lebanon, Israel and Jordan. Shi'i Afghans comprising mostly of the foreign legion named 'Fatemiyoun Brigade' were drawn by financial rewards or promises of Iranian citizenship or to "escape off prison sentences on charges including drug trafficking, which often end in death penalty in Iran" (Moslih, 2016). When martyred, most of these foreign fighters are buried in Iran in large public funerals. Iranian media refers to them as 'defenders of the Sayeda Zeyanb shrine.' Largely because Iran and Saudi Arabia perceived internal conflict in Syria through a zero-sum prism, by backing the regime and the opposition respectively, the conflict became deeply entrenched directly involving all main regional powers supporting one of the warring sides (Berti and Guzansky, 2011).

The geopolitical discourse of Iran while politicising Shi'ites has avoided an overtly sectarian approach, arguing that sectarianism in conflict situations is the handiwork of imperialist powers. "The Iranian regime has repeatedly argued that any conflict between the two groups stems from foreign plots that seek to sow discord and division within the Islamic world" (Mohseni, 2013). In an address to the participants

of International Islamic Unity Conference in February 2011, Leader Khamenei argued that America was the greatest problem:

> The presence of arrogant powers and colonialists in the world of Islam has always been the biggest blow to Muslim nations' Islamic and national identity. From the east of the world of Islam, from Indonesia, Malaysia and India to Africa – colonialists have been present in the every part of the world of Islam. Their presence has weakened Muslim nations, shed their blood and undermined their determination. Today America is the main arrogant and colonial power: the rest are on the margin. The presence of America is the greatest problem.

The Iranian geopolitical imagination defined in terms of a Shi'ite/Islamic ontology of oppressed nations and arrogant imperial powers has eschewed sectarianism. Instead its geopolitical discourse and practice seeks to revive Islam as not only the true identity for the Muslim world but also seeks to cultivate Islamic unity in order to counter globalization and domination by arrogant imperialist powers and secure independence and sovereignty in true sense.

The chapter has discussed how geopolitical security in the wake of renewed threats of regime-change, military strike from United States and Israel, and US-led international isolation over its controversial nuclear program, led Iran to support anti-American militancy/resistance and construct a counter-hegemonic alliance at the global level. Iranian support for militant Islamic movements is informed more by strategic imperatives of survival in a hostile regional environment, rather than purely an ideologically motivated war against West. Iran's support for militias inspired by Islamic ideology of resistance has allowed it to develop strategic assets in confrontation with the United States and Israel. Therefore, with the onset of popular uprisings in the region in early 2011, the ruling conservatives and hardliners were excited at the prospect of finding new allies among the region-wide popular uprisings.

The legitimacy crisis in the wake of the Green Movement, crippling sanctions, and spectre of 'regime change' through a velvet revolution engineered by the West, led the regime to engage in securitization by constructing the West as existential threat in cultural, geopolitical, and economic spheres. The securitization of cultural, political and even economic space of the Islamic Republic became definitive to Iranian geopolitical discourse; internally it had the effect of increased state control and intervention in cultural and political spheres and externally it complemented the pursuit of counter-hegemonic geopolitics. This securitization was framed within a heavily Islamic discourse, such as representing the Green movement as manipulated by the West and in terms of *fitna*, and the imagery of the West as an arrogant power in

terms of global 'arrogance' (*jahan-e-Istaqbari*), against which a religiously charged discourse of resistance was articulated. It is through repeated securitization and in fighting off these constructed threats that the Islamic Republic performs its Islamic and revolutionary identity.

Iranian geopolitical narrative of 'Islamic awakening' sought to project Iran's leadership claim as the ideological fountainhead of Islamic revolution and cultivate strategic influence over popular movements, which was used by counter-revolutionary club of Saudi Arabia and GCC to portray Iran as a sectarian Shi'ite threat to Sunni governments in the region.

# Chaper-5

# Conclusion


The most important aspect of Iranian geopolitical imagination which emerges from the study is that Iranian leadership since the Islamic revolution sees the international system being under the hegemony of the Western secular and liberal political order. While in its own religeopolitical imagination, Shi'ite principles of justice, sacrifice and resistance define and legitimise a counter-hegemonic geopolitics. Islamic ideology in Iran was an outcome of politicisation of Shi'i Islam into a liberation theology to mobilise the masses against structures of colonial domination. It emerged as an alternative utopian vision of political and social order, similar to other ideologies of anti-colonial modernity, such as Third Word socialism and anti-colonial nationalism. Embedded in a counter-hegemonic position vis-à-vis the 'arrogant' (read imperialist) secular West and rooted in a universalistic religion, the emancipatory vision of Islamist ideology was not reducible to nationalist agenda of regime change; it was aimed at the entire world of Islam, thus had had geopolitical dimensions.

For postcolonial revolutionaries prime concerns were to construct an independent national community and state. This meant that primordial or traditional identities such as ethnicity and religion were politicised for the purpose of dissociating from the values and legacies of imperialist powers. Anti-imperialist nationalisms tend to be predicated upon "the project of consolidation following an act of *separation* from [an imperialist power] or else to be oriented toward that goal" (Lazarus, 1999:74). Theirs is "the task of reclaiming community from within boundaries defined by the very power whose presence denied community" (Lazarus, 1999:74). It is the preoccupation with reclaiming the community in nativist terms that the universal principles of democracy and popular are not accepted in the forms predominant in the West. In the postcolonial context of Iran, revolutionary politics and subaltern agency was preoccupied with questions of justice and power. For revolutionary ideologues such as Shariati and Khomeini, defence of religion was knitted with the cause of anti-imperial struggle and national liberation. Shi'i Islam was therefore transformed into an unambiguous ideology of anti-imperial resistance and social revolution. Khomeini famously argued "Islam is the religion of militant

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individuals who are committed to truth and justice and those who desire freedom and independence. It is the school of those who struggle against imperialism" (Khomeini, 1981: 08). Islamists consolidated power while mobilising the anti-imperialist sentiment of the people. The Iranian nation was defined in opposition to the imperialism of the West and East. In constructing a national social-political space as separate from the cultural-political system under the hegemony of imperialist powers, Islam was intertwined with an exclusionary anti-imperial imagination. The centrality of revolutionary ideology and state's drive to remake the population meant that it was necessary to mobilize the masses beyond the founding revolutionary moment. Within the religo-political system of Islamic Republic, the leader arrogated the role of spiritual guide leading the masses down the 'enlightened path of Islam,' therefore justifying state supervision of cultural and social sphere through revolutionary organs such as *basij* and IRGC (Khamenei, 2012, November). The leader constantly defines the faith of the masses in terms of a statist political religion in various public addresses and sermons. Shi'ism as a potent religio-political discourse is defined by its valorisation of ideals of sacrifice, martyrdom and struggle in the way of justice, values which can be fulfilled only with respect to a putative enemy. Revolutionary Shi'ism therefore has been crucial in rationalising the counter-hegemonic geopolitics pursued by the revolutionary regime. Since the legitimating ideology of the state is the religious faith of the masses, the state by rationalising its policies within an ideologised Shi'ism presupposes popular consent. Political currents supporting liberal reading of Shi'i Islam and revolution favouring enlargement of democratic freedom while eschewing the ideological discourse of resistance vis-à-vis the United States have been characterised as deviant. The state is constantly engaged in ideologisation of Islam, conflating religious belief of the people with complete obedience to the theocratic regime. The leadership has sought to make the people submit to a statist religion. For instance, in a speech to families of martyrs and war veterans, leader Khamenei argued, "If I was asked to summarise the issue of martyrdom and its importance in one single sentence, I would say that believing in martyrdom and greatness of martyrs shows the spiritual depth of the identity of a nation" (Khamenei, 2010, Oct.). In another more recent speech, he argued that "the Islamic system wants to inculcate in the youth the spirit of the revolution, love of the nation, commitment to the ideals of the system, and self-sufficiency; on the contrary imperialist front seeks to change these all and undo what the Islamic system have done" (Khamenei, 2016.

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April). The leadership has exploited elements of the religious faith of masses to make them submit to the policies and actions of the government which are rationalised by referring to key religious principles of sacrifice, martyrdom, and justice. It is to underline this exploitation of religion by the government that labels such as 'government-based religion' have emerged distinguishing the statist political religion from the lived religion of the people.

By virtue of becoming the legitimating ideology of the state, Shi'i Islam was turned into a monolithic and even repressive religio-political ideology which justifies itself by its self-positioning vis-à-vis an equally mythical image of the enemy other. It is primarily in relation to the hostile states such as the United States and ideological opponent such as Saudi Arabia, that Iranian regional geopolitics is framed in a religeopolitical discourse, otherwise non-ideological and pragmatic concerns define its relations with other countries. Khomeini called United States the *Great Satan*, while his successor and current supreme leader Ali Khamenei frequently uses a *Quranic* term, the global 'arrogance' (*Istekbar-e-Jahani*) for American behaviour. The anti-American geopolitical imaginations popularly manifested in the Islamic revolution were shaped in the context of the US support for the corrupt and repressive Shah after he was restored to the peacock throne by a CIA engineered coup against a popular premier Mosaddegh. Later, fears of American supported counter-revolution made Khomeini throw his support behind students who had sieged the American embassy and use it to mobilise anti-imperialist sentiments of the masses in support of the nascent Islamic Republic. Revolutionary Iran has articulated its national identity as well as pan-Islamist discourse against the United States.

The issue of relation between a modern nation state which legitimises itself in terms the universalist religion of Islam and the wider Muslim world was resolved by geopoliticisation of revolutionary Shi'i Islam. The Shi'ite ontology of oppressed and oppressor was fused into the anti-imperialist postcolonial geopolitical imagination. Ayatollah Khomeini imagined the geopolitical space of the world of Islam or *umma* as being under the hegemony and oppression of arrogant powers of the West namely, the United States. Islamic Republic therefore took upon itself to awaken the Muslim masses to the nature of imperialist domination afflicting them. Not only national identity, but even national purpose is articulated in relation to the imperialist interlocutor of the West. Islamic Republic of Iran believes in a revolutionary concept

of exceptionalism that is it imagines itself as the ideological fountainhead of a universal Islamic awakening. It has a self-appointed responsibility of supporting the oppressed nations and foster Islamic unity against imperialist powers. As a revolutionary state, it makes distinction between states and their Muslim masses, amongst whom it sought to export its revolution and promotes Islamic awakening. Iran in its revolutionary pan-Islamism has sought to maintain a non-sectarian approach; it has supported radical Islamic movements wherever they were in line with Iranian strategic goals. Iran's support for Islamist groups fighting against Israeli occupation and expansionism and rejectionist Palestinian faction Hamas is central to its own image as a subaltern revolutionary Islamic nation championing the rights of the oppressed Muslims in what is perceived as an unjust world system. Therefore Palestinian issue is placed at the heart of a pan-Islamist discourse of resistance, seeking to rally Muslim masses behind Iranian positions.

Iranian revolutionary regime as much as it was defined by its opposition secular ideologies of liberal democracy and Communism, Western representations of the revolution focussed on its religious aspect, representing the regime as fundamentalist and terrorist, especially in the wake of the hostage crisis. Given the negative representations and hostility that that Iranian regime has been subjected to and the fact that its own legitimating ideology is of counter-hegemonic nature, Islamic Republic is an example of a subaltern regime. For United States, Islamic revolution meant a setback to its Cold War geopolitical strategy of containing Soviet Union, loss of a reliable supplier of hydrocarbon resources and an extravagant buyer of latest military hardware. Following the revolution and hostage crisis, United States imposed sanctions on Iran and has supported Gulf monarchies and Saudi Arabia as counter-weight against Iran. Iran's pursuit of anti-status-quo geopolitics and export of revolution led Saudi Arabia and Persian Gulf regimes to politicize the sectarian difference in a conservative geopolitics, in which they were backed by the United States, which had become their security guarantor in the wake of Islamic revolution. For Shiʻites in the region, who were denied religious freedom and political rights by their Sunni rulers, Islamic revolution and establishment of Shiʻite government in Iran was an especially empowering event. Iranian politicization of Islam into an ideology of revolution and the status quo geopolitics led to an entire spectrum of countries in the region viz. the Saudi monarchy, Gulf Sheikhdoms and above all - a Baathist

dictator in Saddam Hussein to unite in containing Iran. During the eight year long war with Iraq (1980-88), when Iran stretched the war in pursuit of maximalist goals of overthrowing the Saddam regime and exporting the revolution, most regional countries and both Cold War superpowers supported Saddam. The isolated Iranian leadership exploited Shi'ite imaginaries of virtuous struggle as well as death by martyrdom to construct the revolutionary nation as 'righteous-oppressed' and 'martyr-nurturing' nation mobilising the masses in a sacred defence against what they called an imposed war. The narrative of this sacred defence of the Iranian nation and their faith was steeped in Shi'ite religious spirit of martyrdom, and resistance against oppressive powers. This played a crucial role in maintaining unity of the Islamic nation and enabling Islamist consolidation of power. The experiences of isolation during the war also shaped Iranian strategic disposition towards developing its own independent ideological and strategic sphere of influence. Iranian geopolitics in the immediate region has not only sought to cultivate strategic assets but also affirm Iran's Islamic and revolutionary identity by re-producing geopolitical binaries of Islam and the West. Iran's geopolitics of supporting popular resistance movements such as Hezbollah, Hamas and Syrian regime has been rationalised and legitimised within Shi'i Islamic discourse of resistance (*Muqawamat*) and justice (*Edalat*). In addition to extending ideological and material support to Shi'ite movements, Iran has tried to develop trans-sectarian solidarity by making the struggle for the liberation of the occupied Palestine the focal point of larger discourse of pan-Islamic resistance. By framing Iranian support for Palestinian struggle within the pan-Islamic discourse of "resistance" and "Islamic Awakening," Iran has been able to extricate the Palestinian issue from the metanarrative of Arab-Israeli conflict, and to some extent transcend sectarian-ethnic difference in expanding Iran's leadership role in the Sunni Arab world, further causing the Sunni monarchies to pursue a sectarian geopolitics of isolating Iran. The geopoliticisation of Shi'i Islam in terms of an anti-imperialist geopolitics goes on to validate one of the hypotheses - that Republic of Iran has employed its identity as an Islamic nation to further its geopolitical goals

It was during the devastating experience of Iran-Iraq war, which cost Iran its two million citizens, destroyed its infrastructure and left it completely isolated to the extent that the world watched silently as Saddam's forces used chemical weapons on Iranian soldiers, that revolutionary leadership learned the important lesson that Iran

not only needed to cultivate self-reliance and an independent strategic sphere of influence to have leverage over its enemies, but that it would have to pursue a pragmatic interest-based policy with its neighbours for it didn't have the wherewithal to match the strength of the regional bloc which supported Saddam in war against Iran. Subsequently, in order to improve relations with neighbouring countries, Iran gave up its radical religeopolitics of exporting the revolution. Rafsanjani, who became the President in the wake of near simultaneous end of the Iran-Iraq war and Cold War, set Iran on the path of socialization with the international community of nations. However his overtures of reconciliation with the United States proved unsuccessful given the hostility from conservatives at home and the fact that U.S. itself continued to pursue the policy of regime change through economic sanctions and encirclement of Iran in close strategic alliances with Persian Gulf Sheikhdoms and Saudi monarchy. Since Arab Middle East was seen as being under the hegemony of the United States, and Levant as an arena of anti-imperialist geopolitics, Iran pursued a pragmatic approach in Central Asia and the Caucasus, where it downplayed Islamic ideological discourse, and instead pursued a policy based on economic cooperation and regionalism. In Central Asia, United States supported Iran's regional rival Turkey to outbid Iran in what has come to known as pipeline geopolitics of Central Asian and the Caucasus. After the Clinton administration pursued dual containment and enacted Iran Libya Sanction Act making it difficult for Iran to receive investment and technology from the West - Iran took to fostering relations with Asian countries of China, Japan and South Korea. Iran increasingly viwed this later group of countries as alternative sources of investment and technology to help reconstruct its war-torn oil and export infrastructure as well as finding a lucrative export market for its hydrocarbon resources. Iran also became a cause of division between United States and its European partners with latter defying ILSA and other unilateral punitive measures against Iran but instead favouring diplomacy and dialogue in changing Iranian behaviour. Iran reciprocated and positively engaged with European Union's dialogue initiatives.

By the second decade since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, it was clear that as a result of the inherent duality of Iranian revolutionary state comprising of theocratic and republican institutions, the diverse ideological factions that had emerged in Post-Khomeini era were becoming frail. Also, owing to the new social

conditions which emerged as result of changes in the nature of global economic systems- especially in terms of technological revolutions in information and communication fronts, the ideological geopolitical imaginations of Islamic Republic were becoming increasingly unsustainable.

Geopolitical reasoning justifying concrete foreign policy actions is employed in formulating simplified geopolitical discourses which often draw on previous discursive analogies and images. It was the historical memory of American engineered coup against a democratically elected President Mossadegh after his nationalisation of oil and American support for the repressive Pahlavi regime and Saddam Hussein during Iran-Iraq war that had shaped a popular anti-American construct for the generation that participated in the Islamic Revolution and war. However, generations born after the revolution do not partake in the religiously defined anti-imperialist radical worldview propagated by the theocratic institutions of the regime. Cultural and societal transformations driven by technological changes such as the spread of internet have made it difficult for authoritarian (semi-authoritarian even more so) regimes to maintain their exclusivist geopolitical imaginaries underpinning and legitimizing the state power. While the state has embraced the U.S led economic liberalization and market-integration partly to satisfy popular aspirations for economic betterment and also elite rent-seeking by exporting hydrocarbon resources and monopolies over imports, popular demands for cultural and political liberalisation and freedom comparable to western democracy have been seen as threat to the survival of the regime, therefore suppressed by constructing threat discourses of 'cultural imperialism,' 'cultural invasion,' and 'soft war.'

A state which seeks to purify culture of western influences, propagates a religio-political ideology and enforces public morality invariably militates against deepening of modern democratic values, civic freedoms and rights. At once rooted in Iran's historical quest for freedom and the on-going processes of social change itself influenced by forces of cultural globalisation feeding unfettered demands for freedom, the reform movement since late 1990s constructed alternative postmodern geopolitical imagination reflecting the preferences of citizens and opposed to the rigid ideological worldview of the state. Instead of complete rejection or uncritical emulation, reformist project re-negotiates Western modernity within an Islamic framework. For instance, reformist President Khatami's 'dialogue of civilization' thesis in establishing

intellectual affinity with the principles of American revolution, while criticising neo-imperial forms of domination, had a decolonizing and subaltern logic which means "not completely rejecting the Western categories but beginning a new and autonomous relation with them" (Das, 1989, quoted in Mignolo, 1994). The popularity of the reform movement exposed the weakening ideological underpinnings of the regime. As a result, the construction of an extant threat (cultural, military or geopolitical) became central to conservatives' attempt to discredit pacifist reformists and justify their supremacy over reformist elected institutions. The theocratic leadership of Iran conceives their nation as a cultural system defined in terms of an ideologised Islam; therefore it maintains opposition to Western culture as well as liberal political ideologies, which mark the conceptual boundaries of Islamic nation. The Iranian-Islamic culture promoted by the theocratic leadership is community centric, focussed on constructing a purificatory Islamic identity vis-à-vis the West ensuring survival of Islamist political system, and therefore incompatible with the notion of civil-society and cosmopolitanism. It is in response to increasing cultural globalization fuelled by ICT revolution, and intensive transmission of ideas and values through globalized mass media that has led conservatives to construct a threat discourse that western liberal, consumerist culture was mounting a serious onslaught on other cultural systems. In Iran, liberal democratic values were finding favour with Iran's youth dominated demography, particularly a substantial population of educated women who formed the reformist constituency, raising alarm bells of a liberal western culture overtaking the Islamic culture promoted since the revolution.

Reformists pushing for deepening of democratisation and civic rights imagined an interdependent and interactive world, supporting synthesis of Western thought within the overall framework of Islamic revolution. The movement, while it remained within the discursive perimeter of Islamic revolution – as it was within Islamic tradition and text that demands for political pluralism and democracy were framed – it rejected politicisation of Islam in terms of a single ideology. True to its non-ideological nature, the movement maintained a dialogical approach towards western cultural modernity and the West dominated international system. The movement challenged the dominant geopolitical codes of the regime, especially the 'dialogue among civilization' of Khatami in establishing relations of equivalence and mutual respect between Islamic and Western civilizations as well between the values

and principles underlying Islamic and American revolutions virtually destabilised the theocratic religeopolitical imagination of Islam and the West as self-contained and mutually exclusive entities.

Khatami's Islamist-Iranian discourse of national identity in terms of civilization was non-ideological in nature, though it was still articulated in relation to the hegemonic Western civilization. It can be argued that even if Khatami and reformists eschewed ideological worldview of Islamists, but articulation of national identity in terms of an Islamic-Iranian civilization remains thoroughly within the postcolonial paradigm. However, reformist mobilisation of a section of urban, educated population, especially youth and women exposed the internal divide in Iranian body politic.

Islamist conservatives and hardliners sought to justify state control of cultural and ideological space by deliberately constructing the spectre of cultural onslaught emanating from the West. In arguing that the West, after it had failed to topple the revolutionary regime by supporting military invasion against Iran, is waging a sophisticated cultural war by targeting Iranian youth and distracting them from Islamic and revolutionary values through its massive cultural and informational propaganda, Islamists seek to justify state control over cultural and political domains. In order to marginalise the Reform Movement seeking civic rights, challenging tight cultural regime and ideological worldview, theocratic elements become more offensive and attempt to securitize political and cultural domains. Furthermore, when the regime in question is revolutionary and legitimises itself in terms of a religion, its geopolitical discourse is not merely shaped by normative principles of the religion and culture but also by the imperative of reproducing the religeopolitical collective identity in terms of mutually exclusive categories of self and other. The threat discourse of 'cultural invasion' recreates the cultural borders increasingly blurred by globalization and reinforces the binary geopolitical imagination of Islam and the West that structures Iran's overall security discourse and practices.

Iranian revolutionary regime's disciplining of its own citizens' perceptions of the West by representing it as a monolithic entity and associating it with fear and hostility – inhibiting the ongoing cultural interactions towards what Dabashi (2007) describes as "cosmopolitan worldliness" – can be understood as Reverse Orientalism. Orientalism is a wide-ranging network of texts, images and perceptions, all of which

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seek to designate the Eastern other as "a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (Hiddleston, 2012: 85). Hence, the 'orient' does not exist on its own but it is discursively materialized by the 'West' or the 'occident' as an inferior other to reinforce the position of the West as the site of power. Geopolitical identities are assembled within relations of power, and therefore associated with hegemony and resistance. In other words, the primary function of the discursive positioning of the United States as the 'Great Satan,' or 'arrogant power' opposed to the Islamic revolution and Islam has been to articulate a revolutionary Islamic identity and projecting Islamist regime as necessary for upholding the independence and sovereignty of Iran in a West dominated international order. As a postcolonial revolutionary state, the articulations of its revolutionary and Islamic identity are always intertwined with the construction of threatening hegemonic power, and entrenching itself in counter-hegemonic power relationships, as was also seen during the prolonged nuclear crisis, when Iran asserted its right to enrichment against crippling international sanctions and American and Israeli threats of military strikes on its nuclear facilities. The study therefore positively verifies the hypotheses that the religious-political discourse of animosity vis-à-vis the United States is deemed necessary for maintaining the Islamic revolutionary identity of Iran, which by necessity, finds an eternal presence in Iranian geopolitical discourse.

The reformist pacifist approach vis-à-vis the West was delegitimised by conservative and hardliners who resorted to a strident revolutionary discourse in the wake of renewed hostility from the United States in the aftermath of representation of Iran as part of the 'axis-of-evil' and military threats over Iran's controversial nuclear program. The populist Ahmadinejad government sought to define popular discourse and mobilise the masses in a nationalist posture by adopting a defiant stance on the nuclear issue and anti-imperialist discourse in international forums. Ahmadinejad complemented his belligerent discourse vis-à-vis the United States with a Look East policy of strengthening relations with Asian countries and constructing a Third World based counter hegemonic alliance with regimes overtly hostile towards the United States. Through counter-hegemonic alliances with leftist, populist regimes of Latin America, Iran sought to overcome the negative hegemonic representation by the United States, and instead project Iran as beacon of revolutionary resistance.

In order to overcome identity isolation amongst pro-West Sunni authoritative Arab regimes in West Asia, Iran increasingly focussed on fostering wide-ranging relations with countries of Central Asia, Russia and China, seen in Iran's eagerness to be part of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as well as in mutually beneficial interest based relations with India and other South Asian countries,- reflected in Iran being given an observer status in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Iran also saw it as important to strengthen its relations with these non-Western countries in order to mobilise support for its right to peaceful nuclear program, which it framed in terms of an inalienable right of a country party to NPT, undermined by privileged Western nations, and also to overcome the debilitating effects of unilateral sanctions led by the United States.

The Green Movement as a cultural-political movement which was in many ways continuation and acceleration of the earlier Reform Movement posed the biggest challenge to the legitimacy and survival of the regime. The post-presidential election protests of 2009, which later spiralled into what was called the 'Green Movement' raising the possibilities of internal collapse of the regime, began essentially as people's response to the perceived failure of electoral democracy at the hand of the clerical establishment.

As a movement for democracy and civic-rights, it was at once rooted in Iran's historical quest for freedom as well as the contemporary cosmopolitan ethic of civil society, contesting the despotic ideological power of state. As a result, the regime tried to delegitimise the movement by using the ideological power of religion. The movement was represented as a threat bigger than the Iran-Iraq war - for it contended the cultural and ideological power of the state, its pan-Islamic discourse of anti-imperial resistance - by projecting a liberal and nationalist vision of political order, of a state governed by rule of law, right-based civil society and an interest based, rather than an ideologically confrontational foreign policy. The use of religious metaphor of *fitna*, variously translated as sedition or internal strife to represent the massive opposition of Green Movement as manipulated by the West.

With Arab uprisings and the collapse of secular Arab authoritarian regimes originally brought to power by Arab nationalism in early 1960s, Iran defined the popular uprisings as 'Islamic Awakening,' drawing parallels with its own Islamic revolution. The geopolitical narrative of Islamic Awakening sought to mobilise and

legitimise the Islamist forces in the popular uprising over and above secular liberal forces. The narrative also sought to expand Iran's ideological as well as geopolitical influence in the region of Middle East and North Africa. By extending ideological legitimacy as well as material assistance to forces fighting against regime, as in Bahrain and later in Yemen, Iran projected itself as the defender and champion of the rights of oppressed while rationalised its siding with the Syrian dictator Bassar al-Assad as necessary for viability of resistance axis of Iran-Syria-Hezbollah against Israeli occupation. The geopolitical imaginations that the discourse of Iranian leadership evoked during the prolonged controversy over Iranian nuclear program and then during the popular revolts in the Arab world, framed as Islamic Awakening-metaphorically saw the Islamic Republic of Iran versus imperialist arrogant powers of the West showing "interference in the affairs of other countries, transgressing the rights of nations and jeopardizing the interest of peoples" (Khamenei, 2011, Dec.). Iran is projected as a spiritual system, model of Hussein and *Ashura* embodying the values of self-sacrifice, pride and resistance against oppression and therefore a role model for other Muslim nations.

Geopolitical imaginations which construct cultural and territorial boundaries demarcating the self from the other can be contrasted with what Melba Cuddy-Keane (2003) calls 'global imagination' and the transformative possibilities which arise when the self is resituated out in the world of global flows. She argues that geopolitical and global will always coexist; furthermore within the global, there will always be both imperializing and liberating tendencies at play (Cuddy-Keane, 2003:544). One of the main problems facing the Islamic Republic is that of constructing a unified Islamic nation given the legacy of western secular modernity in its own body politic as well as the problem of communicating and acting in an international system and normative environment determined by European-American values and interests.

Islamic Republic rules a polarised society, divided between a loyal support base ready to make sacrifices in the way of a righteous politics of national pride and resistance against oppressive powers within the framework of revolutionary Shi'ism and a rather liberal section opposed to an absolutist state which imposes Islamization from above, smothers the civil society and pursues an identity based pan-Islamic agenda of resistance which precludes normalising of its relations with the Western

community of nations, and especially the United States. It can be concluded that in Iran, there is considerable friction between the geopolitical imagination of Islam and the West as constructed and performed by the theocratic institutions and revolutionary security organs in discourses of 'cultural invasion' and 'soft war'. All this within a framework of global imagination in which citizens are making sense of themselves as social and political beings within a non-dichotomous and cosmopolitan framework shaped by material and cultural forces of globalization. These latter imaginations were reflected in the discourse of reformists and in the Green Movement of 2009.

The dual nature of Iranian political system in terms of Islamic guardianship over republican organs is sometimes reflected in two divergent understanding of objectives and means of foreign policy. However, geopolitical contingency and hostile international environment enables convergence of the differing views and masses are mobilised within a Shi'ite religio-political discourse of national pride and resistance. That is one reason why Islamists in Iran have been preoccupied by construction and perpetuation of threat discourses. The study concludes that the conservatives and hardliners belligerent geopolitical discourse towards the United States is a postcolonial rhetorical strategy of utilising the persuasive and ideological power of revolutionary Islam and oppressed nationalism to construct a coherent and unified Islamic nation and also outmanoeuvre reformists and moderates in factional struggles for supremacy.

The conception of Iran as an Islamic and revolutionary nation is dependent on perpetuating the ideological representation of the United States as an imperial power threatening Iranian independence, culture, and religion and mobilising Iranian people in a nationalist and revolutionary posture vis-à-vis a hostile United States. It is within binary discourses of domination and danger such as 'cultural invasion,' 'soft-war,' as well as those of sovereignty and resistance, such as 'resistance-economy,' 'nuclear nationalism,' and 'Islamic awakening' that the theocratic state finds its raison d'etre in and as a revolutionary Islamic state.

Crucially, theses discourses produce the spaces of contemporary world politics in terms of geopolitical and ideological divisions of imperialist oppressive powers and oppressed resisting powers, in which the Islamic Republic is imagined as a revolutionary Islamic state confronting and resisting the domineering imperialist powers, while supporting the oppressed of the world. The conclusion that Iranian

geopolitical discourse has constantly represented the West as a hegemonic Other undermining independence and identity and projected itself as the model of resistance. Furthermore, as an Islamic state, the political discourse of Iranian leadership is addressed to the entire Muslim world, wherein Islamic Iran of Iran is imagined as the ultimate Islamic revolutionary state, which has brought real independence to its people, does not succumb to imperialist pressures, and supports popular Islamic movements resisting imperialist and autocratic powers. In other worlds, in an international system represented as unjust and being under the hegemony of the United States, militarily, politically and culturally, the legitimacy of the revolutionary regime is produced by projecting Islamic Republic of Iran as a truly independent nation, a model of progress, Islamic-democracy and anti-imperialist resistance.

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