

FROM “AXIS OF RESISTANCE” TO “SHIA CRESCENT?”: EXAMINING THE  
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN’S TRANSNATIONAL FOREIGN POLICY  
FROM 1979 UNTIL 2015

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İSTANBUL ŞEHİR UNIVERSITY

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FROM 1979 UNTIL 2015

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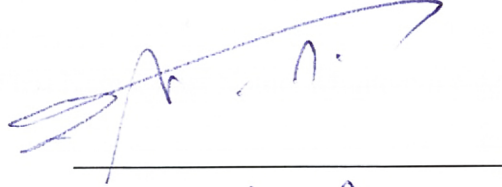
MUHTEREM NAZ ARSLAN

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
OF  
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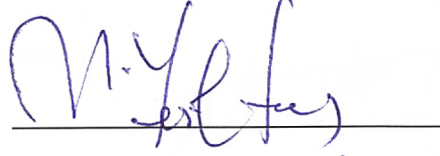
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This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Political Science and International Relations.

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This is to confirm that this thesis complies with all the standards set by the Graduate School of Social Sciences of İstanbul Şehir University.

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I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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## ABSTRACT

### FROM “AXIS OF RESISTANCE” TO “SHIA CRESCENT?”: EXAMINING THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN’S TRANSNATIONAL FOREIGN POLICY FROM 1979 UNTIL 2015

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One goal frequently professed in the research is examining the transformation of the transnational foreign policy of the Islamic Republic from “resistance axis” to “Shia crescent”. This study started in 1979 and lasted until 2015. In the first phase, the background of the Islamic Republic’s transnational foreign policy ambitions, which were established with the 1979 revolutionary ideologies, the transnational elements of the Islamic Republic’s constitution, and the idea of exporting the revolution and regional incidents are analyzed. In the second phase of my study, the period of progress is examined, which starts with the death of Khomeini in 1989 until 2010. In this era, the transnational foreign policy of the Islamic Republic pragmatized itself for the region’s realities. The American intervention into the region in the 2000s brought a huge security threat to the Islamic Republic and in order to prevent American presence in the region, the Islamic Republic pragmatically tried to strengthen its relations with brother states and non-state actors. In the third phase of my study, the Arab revolts and the Iranian reaction to the protests are examined starting from the 2010s until 2015. The regional turmoil created by the Arab uprisings expanded the elbowroom of the Islamic Republic. Conflicting and fragile states became the main theater of the Islamic Republic’s transnational activities. Consequently, The Islamic Republic created numerous proxies in order to project its power all across the region under the coverage of protecting brother regimes. The Arab uprising presented a conflicted Middle East, which erased the security fear for the Islamic Republic. As a result of all of these factors, the Islamic Republic plays a grand game in order to create a “Shia crescent” under the supreme authority of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

**Key words:** transnational politics, *velayat-e faqih*, Islamic Revolution, proxy, Arab uprisings

## ÖZ

### DİRENİŞ EKSENİNDE Şİİ HİLALİNE; İRAN İSLAM CUMHURİYETİNİN ULUSAŞIRI DIŞ POLİTİKASI, 1979-2015

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Bu çalışmanın amacı İran İslam Cumhuriyeti'nin uluslararası dış politikasının direniş ekseninden, Şii hilaline doğru 1979-2015 yılları arasındaki dönüşümünü analiz etmektir. İlk olarak, 1979-1989 yılları arasında, İran İslam Cumhuriyeti'nin uluslararası dış politikasını oluşturan temel parametreler incelendi. Bu parametreler, 1979 İran İslam Devrimi ve devrim ideolojisi, devrim ihracı politikası, ve İran'ı bölgede uluslararası politika üretmek için tetikleyen bölgesel gelişmelerdir. 1979-1989 yılları arasında İran İslam Cumhuriyeti bir oluşum içerisine girmiş ve bu oluşum sürecinde devletin temel amacı bölgedeki tek şii devleti olarak varlığını sürdürebilmek olmuştur. 1989 yılında ruhani lider Ruhullah Humeyni ölmüş ve yerine Ali Hamaney geçmiştir. Bu süreçte İran İslam Cumhuriyeti Dış Politikası faydacı bir çizgiye kaymış ve askeri misyonunu sınır ötesi operasyonlarda kullanmak üzere kurumsallaştırmıştır. Bunların yanında, 2000'lerde Amerika'nın Orta Doğu Bölgesi'ndeki askeri varlığı, İran İslam Cumhuriyeti'nde bir güvenlik sorunu yaratmıştır ve İran bölgedeki güvenlik problemini çözmek için 'kardeş' ülkeler ve devlet dışı aktörler ile ilişkilerini sağlamlaştırma yoluna gitmiştir. Araştırmanın son kısmı, 2010'ların sonunda Arap isyanları ile başlayan ve günümüze kadar devam eden süreci kapsamaktadır. Arap isyanlarının sebep olduğu bölgesel karışıklık İran'ın bölgedeki hareket alanı genişletmiş ve çatışmaların devam ettiği yıpranmış devletler, İran'ın uluslararası dış politikasını rahatça uygulayabildiği ülkeler olmuştur. Buna en açık örnek ise, günümüz Suriye'si ve Irak'ıdır. Sonuç olarak, bu çalışmada, İran'ın 1979'dan günümüze uluslararası dış politikasının nasıl evrildiği, sebep sonuç ilişkisi içerisinde anlaşılmasına çalışılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Uluslararası Politika, Velayat-e Faqih (Din alimleri vesayeti), İslam Devrimi, İran Destekli Hareketler, Arap İsyanları.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AAH	: Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq
AMAL	: Afuaj al Muqawama al Lubaniya
CIA	: Central Intelligence Agency
FIS	: Islamic Salvation Front
GCC	: Gulf Cooperation Council
GIA	: Algerian Islamic Group
HHN	: Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba
IRG	: Islamic Republican Party
IRGC	: Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
ISIS	: Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham
KDP	: Kurdistan Democratic Party
KSS	: Kataib Sayyid al Shuhada
LAIY	: Liwa Ammar ibn Yasir
MENA	: Middle East and North Africa
MOIS	: Ministry of Intelligence and Security
PIJ	: Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine
PKK	: Kurdistan Worker's Party
PRC	: People's Republic of China
PUK	: Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
SAIRI	: Supreme Assembly for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq
SCIRI	: Supreme Council of Iraq
UAE	: United Arab Emirates
UIA	: United Iraqi Alliance
UN	: United Nations

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Religion is one of the prominent features of Middle East countries, which has the puissance to control political authority, the governing system, and even daily life of the public unlike European or Western countries in today's world. In order to understand what is going on in a country in the Middle East region requires knowing how the state perceives and interprets religion. In other words, it does not mean there is one Islamic religion and each Muslim country applies it, of course there is one Islam, but each state interprets it differently, just as Judaism is interpreted differently by the state of Israel in the Middle East. To stand far from orientalism is important for the accuracy of work by researchers in the Middle East. For example, The Islamic Republic of Iran as a non-Arab origin in the "Arab Middle East" interprets Islam from its own point of view, Iran's aspect does not resemble any other Muslim country in the region. It has idiosyncratic state behavior patterns both in domestic and foreign affairs. Although, the Islamic Republic of Iran has a rooted past, the clergy does not like West-backed *Shah* (Muhammad Reza Pahlavi) and the Iran Islamic Revolution occurred in 1979 (Del Giudice 2008). The 1979 revolution brought a new vision, new understanding about religion and differentiation in both domestic and foreign politics.

The 1979 Iran Islamic Revolution sharpened the state foreign policy and brought a totally different governing elite, regime, and governing system, which is beyond comparison with other states in the region and even in the world. Khomeini was the leader and prime mover of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, who brought a system which is called *velayat-e faqih* (Guardianship of Islamic Jurists), based on Islamic law (*Sharia*) and absolute custodianships of the Supreme leader, Khomeini (Shevlin 1998, 365). The Iranian Constitution is another significant creation of the Islamic Revolution that institutionalizes the Islamic Republic's national ambitions and transnational claims of Khomeini, implicitly looked forward to a new Islamic world order, which included a mix of Shia Islam and being closer to the third world's oppressed countries without alignment with capitalist exploitation. Iran tried to position itself as "them" and "us" defined as oppressors (them) and oppressed (us), simply meaning the

Muslims were the oppressed and non-Muslims were the oppressors. The constitution of the Islamic Republic is very important to understand the impulse behind Iranian transnational ambitions, because of the Iranian constitution's emphasis on the revolutionary aspect of the state's ideology. For example, on the one hand, the constitution advocates from refraining interference in the domestic affairs of other states, and on the other hand, it declares Iran as a guardian of the "oppressed". Basically, Iran declared it has the duty to protect oppressed people regardless nation which means is opening a way intervening in other nation's affairs. Here, Iran also articulates its ideology is universal, it is valid for all, because the Islamic Republic's goal is to "make people happy in all of human society" (Posh 2013, 15). Alongside the Islamic Republic's constitution, Iran has had several military missions to consolidate its transnational power. Iran has several institutional armies, which have a duty to defend and project its ideology outside of its borders and functions to provide training for some groups in case of need (Berman 2005, 18).

In the light of this information, this study aims to analyze the transformation of the Islamic Republic of Iran's transnational foreign policy with the regional incidents especially "Arab Uprisings" beginning from the 1979 Iran Islamic Revolution until today. In other world, this research basically focuses on the Islamic Republic's transformation of transnational foreign politics from "resistance axis" to Shia crescent. For this purpose, Khomeini's revolutionary ideology, the *velayat-a faqih* governing style, the constitution of the Islamic Revolution, and idea of exporting the revolution are the main background information in order to deeply understand how Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy is designed with security concerns in the first years of the revolution. In order to know how transnational foreign policy transformation emerged, the regional developments should be profoundly investigated. To be a master of the topic, regional developments such as: Shia revival in the region, Iran Iraq war (1980-1988), Gulf War (1990-1991), September 11 attack and American intervention to the Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), claims about resistance axis or Shia crescent, and lastly and more importantly Arab revolts in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region are examined in-depth. Aforementioned, the main research question of this research is how the Islamic Republic's transnational policy transformed over years starting form 1979 until today.

## 1. 1. Reason for the Study

As one of the international community's popular states, there is a great deal of literature about Iran, especially the Islamic Republic of Iran. As a consequence of achieving the first and unique Islamic Revolution, there is an appreciable body of academic work on the Islamic Revolution, Khomeini, and the *velayat-e faqih* system. Also the Islamic Republic has been a significant country both in the Middle East and international system. The Islamic Republic has many discussion topics to offer to the international system because Iran has an idiosyncratic system and behavior pattern. In first place, it has different interpretation of Shia Islam, in other words, one may say the Islamic Republic nationalizes Shia Islam. In order to achieve national interest of the Republic such as the idea of exporting the revolution, they behave aggressively and offensively in foreign relations. Therefore, the international media, westerners, America, and the researchers who focus on Middle East, prefer to research the Islamic Republic of Iran.

There is much work about Modern Iran, the Islamic Revolution, Khomeini, the *velayat-e faqih*, nuclear enrichment, and the constitution of The Islamic Republic. There are also in-depth academic articles and books about the regional incidents such as the Iran-Iraq war, Gulf War, Shia Revival, September 11, and American intervention in the region, and the Arab revolts. The Islamic Republic has material to propel researchers to work in the field. There is detailed work about the transnational politics of the Islamic Republic. Through the help of regional development especially the Arab uprisings, push researchers to focus more on the transnational links of the Islamic Republic. There are significant works about transnational politics of Iran, but the two of them are in-depth and detailed-oriented ones. The first one is Vali Nasr's, *Shia Revival* book, which explains the transnational links of the Islamic Republic with the other Shia groups in the region such as, "Amal movement of Musa al-Sadr in Lebanon, al-Da'wa (the Islamic call) in Iraq, Hizb-e Wahdat (Party of Unity) in Afghanistan, Tahrik-e Jafaria (Shia Movement) in Pakistan, al-Wefaq (the Accord) in Bahrain, and the Saudi Hezbollah, and Islamic Reform Movement (al-Haraka al-Islahiya al-Islamiya) in Saudi Arabia" (Nasr 2007, 139). The second one is Laurence Louer's *Transnational Shia Politics* book, which sheds light on the transnational activities of the Islamic Republic in Iraq and the Gulf states.

The Arab uprisings are very important as regional incidents for this research, which changes the landscape of the Middle East, and causes change in the transnational foreign politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Therefore, academic articles about the topic were unavailable three years ago because the Arab revolts only occurred recently and quite unexpectedly. But, today there are many news stories about the Arab uprising, their regional effects, and the Iranian stance about Arab uprisings. I searched the news sources in order to analyze current issues. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy and International Journal of Middle East Studies are two important online journal sites, which I used to research current issues. The regional developments are recent, that is why there is lack of scholarly reports, but Oytun Orhan's report on *The Shiite Militias in Syria and Political Solution* and Phillip Smyth's report on *The Shiite Jihad in Syria and Its Regional Effects*, helped a great deal in my detailed understanding of the transformation of transnational foreign policy and rise of the number of transnational activities of the Islamic Republic of Iran after the Arab uprisings.

Although there are numerous academic articles books, journals, news stories, and reports about the Islamic Republic of Iran, there is no works, which analyze the Islamic Republic transnational foreign politics' evolution until today. In my research, I claim the Islamic Republic transnational foreign policy transformed in three periods the first one started from 1979 and ended with the death of Khomeini in 1989, the second one starting from the successor of Khamenei, until the Arab Revolts, and the third one is starting with 2011 Arab Uprising until today. I focused on the transformation of transnational policy in these three periods. Many research articles make academic research about Iran, but this study aims to fill a gap, which examines the transformation of transnational activities of the Islamic Republic into three periods and its transformation and make a contribution to the already rich literature about the Islamic Republic of Iran.

## **1. 2. Methodology of the Study**

Examining the methodology of the research is an important part of the work. However, formulation of a narrower research question is important step for research as well. After that, the literature on the Islamic Republic consisting of books, reports, research books, journals, presented papers at conferences, and news articles were reviewed to



evaluate the weaknesses and strengths of the existing literature. In light of this information, the research question was refined to study the subject more efficiently. The topic is an issue of the Political Science and International Relations field and the appropriate methodology is the Qualitative method. “Qualitative research provides detailed description and analysis of the quality or the substance of the human experience” (Bobbie 2010, 7). Therefore, I decided to use a Qualitative methodology, which will fit into my research and pave the way to analyze it in a detail-oriented fashion.

Using a theory in order to explain a fact is one of the prominent features of the research in the Social Sciences. Because theories offer a structured research for its audience and using a theory advantages the researcher, because it makes research easier. I reviewed the literature about the Islamic Republic of Iran and realized there are such works, which used theory in order to explain the Islamic Republic. Then I deeply focused on the theories and saw almost all of them examined the 1979 Islamic Revolution and nuclear enrichment with Conflict Resolution theories. However, there is no research about the transnational politics of the Islamic Republic analyzed through using such a theory. The Islamic Republic’s foreign policy and transnational links cannot be analyzed with a theory, if it happens, it may be limited research, which is trying to fit into a theory mold. I did not use a theory because I could not find an appropriate theory, which completely fit into my research and if I used one, it may have limited my research and any such theory cannot address my research.

After all, during the writing process of this study, regular meetings with my advisor helped me to finalize the research with its requirements. Due to the difficulty of writing in English without mistakes, the assistance of The Academic Writing Center at Istanbul Sehir University reviewed the grammar, meaning, and content of this study.

### **1. 3. Limitations of the Study**

The first obstacle of this research was language, so I tried to find English versions and translated versions because I do not know Persian. Moreover, the political situation that dominated the Middle East during my research period was another obstacle, which I needed to overcome. Serious Arab revolts continued and still continue. The Arab Uprising turned into a civil war in Syria, the latest events in Yemen, and the nuclear

negotiations between the Islamic Republic and the western powers. Ongoing incidents in Middle East, deeply affecting the Islamic Republic were on going during the long period of my research. The events still continue and my research includes current issues but I need to somehow finish. Therefore, this process profoundly influences my research period, but at the end I finalize it as far as I could. I did my best.

The final obstacle to this research is I have no chance and time to go and see the events in the Middle East for myself. Also it could be dangerous to go and conduct research on Iran-backed proxies in several strategically important countries. As I said before, Syria is grappling with civil war, it is impossible to go there and observe. As I result, I reviewed much literature about the issue and tried to produce useful, informative, and enlightening work.

#### **1. 4. Organization of the Study**

This study is organized in five chapters. In the introduction chapter, the main issues to be explained are the purpose and reason for the study and methodology and organization of the study. The second chapter gives a general outlook about the historical background of the Islamic Republic of Iran. After briefly referring to the last *Shah's* foreign policy in order to examine transnational tendencies of Iran before the Islamic Revolution, this chapter focuses on the 1979 Islamic Revolution and Khomeini's ideology. Khomeini is called the father of the revolution in Iran. In order to evaluate historical events, it is an undeniable truth that research of the politically dominated atmosphere is vital, so I focused on political and transnational Islam as well. The Islamic Revolution brought a new regime, administrative system, constitution, and idea of exporting revolution and a transnational foreign policy vision into the Islamic Republic. In order to research in a detail-oriented fashion, I conducted my research without overlooking anything. The third chapter, aims to examine the formation and progression of the Islamic Republic after the death of Khomeini. In this part, I mention about the characteristics of Khamenei, the successor of Khomeini, and I concentrate on the period's foreign policy under presidents such as Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in order to show transnational politics is constant although the president's change. After all, I focused on the new developments with the new political elites and most importantly focused on progress in the military mission of the Islamic Republic which functions outside the borders of Iran. In order to analyze this

issue accurately, I researched the regional developments, which occurred between 1989-2010 years such as, Iran Iraq war (1980-1988), Gulf War (1990-1991), creation of Resistance Axis, the September 11 attack, and the American intervention to Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003). In order to understand transformation of the Islamic Republic from “resistance axis” to “Shia crescent”, it is significant to understand regional developments, because although foreign policy of a state’s philosophy is created by the government, it takes shape from and transform itself through foreign actors’ activities. The fourth chapter is about the transformation of the transnational politics of the Islamic Republic with the Arab Uprisings. Therefore, I focused on the Arab uprisings and its reflections to the region and the Iranian Reaction to the protests. At the end, I made in-depth research on the state relations of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the creation of regional proxies as a case study, I handed the Islamic Republic backed proxies in Syria and Iraq. The fifth chapter is my conclusion chapter, which evaluates the transformation of the transnational foreign policy of the Islamic Republic from “resistance axis” to “Shia crescent” starting form 1979 until 2015. I proposed my findings about the transformation of foreign policy and give policy recommendations about the Islamic Republic of Iran.

## CHAPTER 2

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT (1979-1989)

#### 2. 1. Dominated Political Circumstances in the late 1970's Iran and Middle East

The 1979 Iran Islamic revolution has thus far been the most important Islamic revolution in world history since the formation of modern nation states. It is unique in many ways, especially in its characteristics when it is compared to other revolutions, which have been experienced throughout history. The causes of the revolution in Iran were similar to those of other revolutions, which took place in the world; however, the difference is the consequence of the revolution. The revolution had many unique features regarding its outcomes. If one were to examine why the revolution happened he could attest that the revolution took place as a reaction to the *Shah's* policies; the policies of the *Shah* increased the discomfort of the population socially, politically, and economically in Iran, and these reasons were more or less the same with the reasons of other revolutions around the world. However, what makes the Iranian case unique is that the Iranian Revolution was embodied in many important religious values. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini who was characterized as the father of the revolution in 1979 transformed the revolution into an Islamic one in appearance. Although there were several ideologies during the revolution, the revolution was, in the end, Islamized. Khomeini was an important figure for the revolutionaries in Iran. The occupation of the American embassy is an important event, as it increased public support for Khomeini. A student group, who were followers of Ayatollah Khomeini, took fifty-two hostages for four hundred and forty-four days. At the time people disliked America because of the Western imperialist policies of the *Shah*. The Iranians perceived Khomeini's defiance to the American embassy, as an honorable action and he became a revolutionary public figure for people. There were Leftists, Rightists, Socialists, Republicans, Marxists, and other Islamic revolutionary ideologies, however Khomeini started the revolution, and transformed it into an Islamic one at the end of the day by using the discourse of political Islam and Messianic claims. Khomeini played an important role in organizing his successors, as Khomeini's followers already dominated the revolution, others were too late in creating a structural body for their

ideology. Khomeini turned the regime into an Islamic Republic and changed the name of the country as the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Khomeini created a system, which was called *velayat-e faqih* (Guardianship of Islamic Jurists), based on Shiite Islamic law (*Sharia*) and absolute custodianships of the Supreme leader, Khomeini, over the people (Shevlin 1998, 365). A group of religious men declared they were the “chosen ones by God” who would safeguard the interest of the people to consolidate justice in the material world until the arrival of the *Mahdi* (“the twelfth *Imam* is hidden in what is known as the ‘Great Occultation’ and he will return to save humanity” this is a highly accepted belief by the Shia doctrine). The *Mahdi* is the Hidden Imam in the Shia Imamate doctrine (Shia Islam doctrine of religious, spiritual and political leadership of the *ummah*) in which Shia Muslims believe the Twelfth Imam was hidden and he will come and save humanity from this unjust system. The legacy of the political system derives from religious and spiritual elements that are why, religion is the strong source of power in Iran. Khomeini ruled the country until his death. And he governed the country for ten years and died on June 3, 1989. This chapter will analyze the period starting in 1979 until the death of Khomeini in 1989. First, I will question what political Islam is, because the Islamic Revolution of Iran and political Islam interacted with each other. Then, I will pose the following questions: What is transnational Islam, what is the role of Political Islam for the Islamic Revolution in Iran, what is the position of the Islamic Revolution in the debates of political Islam? I will briefly discuss the Muhammad Reza *Shah* Pahlavi period by specifically focusing on foreign and transnational policy elements before the Revolution, and I will state that the similarities and differences between the *Shah* period and the Khomeini period, as well as the problems of the Shah’s domestic policies, which pushed people to search for revolution. I will look into the Iran Islamic Revolution and specifically focus on the roots of Khomeini’s revolutionary success although there were various ideologies other than that of Islamists. I will continue by explaining the new ruling system, which is “*Velayat-e faqih*”, and how it functions which is very important on examining transnational politics of the Islamic Republic. After that, I will examine the transnational vision of the Islamic Republic’s constitution and examine the Iran-Iraq war as well as the transnational activities of the Islamic Republic in the region. The main aim of this chapter is to examine the creation

of transnational foreign policy vision in order to serve national interests (security concerns) of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

### **2. 1. 1. Islamist Atmosphere: Islamism, Political Islam, and Transnational Islam**

Religion is expressed as a set of rules, regulations, and laws; these rules are sent by God himself to place a set of rules, which people need to obey. Islam is an option, and a choice of life style and side. Islam is directly related to life and politics; they both nest with one another since the birth of Islam. Islam is closely related to the complete life of Muslims. Religious authority is an important figure for political life as well. Islam offers a life style, which Muslims need to live by, by adhering to the law of God (*Sharia*). There are many stimuli to mobilize people within Islam itself. As an illustration, “Verily, God does not change the condition of people until they change it themselves” (Qur’an 13:11). This verse shows that people need to strive to live under the God given lifestyle, if they do not live by it, God will never change the situation of people. People need to desire and make effort to live under certain rules. Within this context, political Islam became a strong and effective phenomenon throughout the world. Although, Islam has been universally accepted as the faith of the Muslims, nevertheless as in any other religion or way of life, there are numerous understandings and interpretations. There is not one common legitimate understanding of the given set of rules; everyone may understand these written rules or recommendations from their own point of views. Religion has been understood and interpreted in myriad forms throughout history. Textual meaning is interpreted in different ways by different communities. This has caused the differentiation of individual faith, which has later divided people into separated communities according to beliefs. Communities formed their identities, and as a natural result of the developments, state systems were created, and religion played a preliminary role for the politics of the states. States are governed under the strong effect of religion; religion and particularly Islam shaped the politics of states throughout history.

Islam has increasingly become the main theme of political action, oppositional movements, and debates in the Middle East. The term “Political Islam” has been adopted by many academics in order to explain the integration of Islam as a religion into politics. Political Islam is not a new phenomenon, it has an old narrative and history. Islam has a say in how governments should function and how “just”

governments should be. Islam is a comprehensive religion, it covers almost everything about the life of human beings and it offers a philosophy to govern. From the inception of Islam, Islam and governing were never separated, they were implemented to act together since the revelation of the Qur'an to human beings. Islam has a political infrastructure within itself, the most important example of this claim is that most Prophets were political and religious leaders of their communities. They were the figures of a just authority and a religious way of life. Then, with the emergence of the empires, was copied the Prophetic tradition. In other words, empires tried to and succeeded in institutionalizing religion and authority at the same time as a united body. With the emergence of empires, the Ottoman Empire was the last empire to combine the "Sultanate" to the "Caliphate" tradition. The Ottomans combined the title "Sultan" and the function of the "Caliph" in the same person, and they institutionalized the subservience to religious establishments to authority by intermingling religious functionaries and imperial bureaucracy (Ayoob 2008, 12). A significant change that happened in the Islamic world was the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924, since then, there has been no religious authority that can claim to unite all Muslims under a single umbrella (Feldman 2008, 2). After the abolition of the Caliphate system, many Islamic movements emerged in an attempt to revive the Muslim *ummah* (Muslim community) and restore a "glorious" past and pure Islam for the well-being of the *ummah* (Khan 2014). There were new settlements of Islamic societies and movements in the 1950s, with the separation of Pakistan from India, and Pakistan became the first modern state to base itself on Muslim identity, in 1948. Afterwards, an Islamist political party was established by Mualana Abul A'la Maududi in Pakistan where Islamic thought became part of the idea of creation of an Islamic state in real politics for the first time. Moreover, an Egyptian teacher; Hasan al-Banna established a political movement called the Muslim Brotherhood and used the term "Islamic State" for the first time in the 1950s in Egypt., The movement expanded its transnational network to several states in the Middle East. With the help of these developments in the Islamic world, Islamic political movements emerged all over the Muslim world up until 1980. Each Islamic political movement was emanated from the frameworks of each nation state whose arguments became comparable to the political regime and atmosphere of each existing country. Although every Islamic movement's driving motive was Islam, they varied from state to state in terms of tools, arguments, justification and legitimation of the movements itself (Fuller 2005, 47).

The Western experience of modernization did not meet the expectations of the Muslim World and Eurocentric secularism did not become a challenge against the strength of the Islamic religion. According to Rostami-Povey, there were two factors, which determined the rise of Islam. First, the inability of secularism and nationalism as a challenge in the face of Islam, and the second was the dictatorial regimes and Zionism backed by the West, which weakened secular movements (Rostami-Povey 2012, 191). Secularism tried to push Islam into a private realm but on the contrary, Islam remained politically and culturally active for the Muslim communities although the states, which consisted of a Muslim majority, were secular and authoritarian. Under these circumstances the top-to-down removal of the religion “Islam was used to both legitimate states and rebel against them, to support localized tribalism and nationalisms as well as to condemn them” (Murden 2002, 185). Religion was used as a source of legitimization and rebellion by Khomeini in the late 1970s. Khomeini was one of the people who dreamed of building an Islamic Republic in the late 1970s. He had his own doctrine and philosophy to establish an Islamic State and made this a paradigm for other Muslim states that sought to establish an Islamic state. Khomeinism implicitly looked forward to a new Islamic world order, which included a mix of Shia Islam and being closer to the third world’s oppressed countries without alignment with capitalist exploitation. Iran tried to position itself as “them” and “us” defined as oppressors (them) and oppressed (us), simply meaning the Muslims were the oppressed and non-Muslims were the oppressors. Since the late 1970s, the Iranian Islamic Revolution, other ethnic-religious conflicts, events of 9/11, and lastly Arab revolutions have become significant challenges for the modernists who saw the Islamist movements as mediaeval and old-fashioned, and also for the secularists who tried to push Islam into a private realm in the international order. These events, which received their legitimacy from Islam, were strong manifestations against a Eurocentric vision of the world order. Gelvin states, “Political Islam is very much a product of the modern world” (Gelvin 2011, 309). Although political Islam has a long history, it is not a mediaeval concept. On the contrary, it is the modern manifestation of Muslims who have been rooted in Islamic history. Today’s developments show political Islam is not a mediaeval concept, it is quite a current phenomenon, which has been rooting since the 1950s. Today’s Muslims strive for democratic Islamic Republics. This does not mean religious and Islamic fundamentalism is a pre-modern phenomenon, but it is rather a



political, institutional, sociological, and scientific manifestation against modernism that has a long past, and a twentieth century vision and motivation within itself.

## **2. 1. 2. Ideological Elements and Background of the Islamic Revolution**

The Iranian Islamic revolution is a product of political Islam, it is the significant manifestation against a Eurocentric world order. Islam challenges the theory of nationalism with the concept of the *ummah*. Islam attempts to go beyond ethnicity because a major tenant in Islam is that establishing a good government or making successful politics cannot be achieved healthily via the idea of tribalism and blood ties. Islam has an institutional identity in the international arena, and it is beyond the policies and actions of individual states, leaders, and movements (Mandaville 2009, 184). Islam tries to go beyond ethnicity through the idea of universal equality of Muslims. This vision is called the conscience of the “*ummah*”. Thereby, the ideal of the *ummah* exceeds the ideal of the nation state, and spiritual unity is a fixed goal. The *ummah* is blessed by God but a national state is a human creation; it has no such kind of spiritual value. In today’s world, Islamists try to spread and enlarge the orbit of consciousness of the *ummah* through international communication channels and electronic networks (*virtual ummah*). With this consciousness in the Muslim world, Turks, Indonesians, and Malaysians began to contribute to this Islamic intellectual world as much as the Arabs. Although there are many similarities between nationalism and the idea of *ummah*, Islamists would reject to be compared to nationalism. This is why Islamists have reasons to reject these claims. First, Islamists have a spiritual dimension; they think their aims are lofty than the aims of nationalists. Second, nationalism is about power without just governing system, it has nothing to say about governing but Islamism rejects power without a good and “just” governing system. Third, Islamism found nationalism dangerous because it has a limited and narrow vision, which may serve to dismantle the awareness of the *ummah*. The reason for the weakness of the Muslim community and states is, poor governing system according to Islamist thinking. Islamic movements directly targeted corruption because they accept corruption to be an intrusion of the idea of “just” governing (Fuller 2005, 61-73). Islam has deep spirituality, which cannot be challenged by human creation theories; its legitimacy comes from God so it is something deep and unchallenged. This idea is the root of Islamic revolution in Iran as well; Iran used the idea of *ummah* and spiritual legitimacy as state ideology during and after the revolution.

Since 9/11, discussions regarding the idea of Political Islam have increased in Western circles. The debate is about the integration of politics and religion in Islam. It includes that political Islam is monolithic and, political Islam is inherently violent. However, there are different manifestations of political Islam, which change according to the local environment. According to Ayoob, “political Islam or Islamism-that is, Islam as a political ideology rather than religion or theology” (Ayoob 2008, 2). Political Islam is powerful because its legitimacy coming from God so its sphere of influence is very strong compared to mainstream ideologies. Therefore, one cannot think of Islam without politics because its philosophy is mainly about how Muslims should live. The idea of revolt against unjust governing shows that activism and politics are in Islam itself. Objection against corruption and injustice is a duty for all Muslims, and this ideas keeps anarchy alive in Muslim states for the sake of defending Islam. The Iranian Islamic revolution achieved the idea of revolt against unjust rulers, which shows that the Iranian revolution is a product of political Islam. The geographical and domestic factor has shaped each Islamist movement, and the political, sociological and geographical situation is important to understand the vision and the goal of the groups. One cannot say Islam is monolithic; this would be a mistake. This is an orientalist and holistic approach, which prevents people from understanding the aims of the Islamists. Moreover, defending Islam against a foreign economic and cultural domination is a part of Islam as well. As an example, the Islamic Republic of Iran uses the foreign domination discourse of Islam at every stage of political action. Anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist stances are a part of the Iranian Islamic Republic’s identity. As a result, there is no separation between the religion and politics in Islam.

Islamism is not a recent phenomenon since it dates back to the division of the Muslim world into colonially drafted political entities and then multiple sovereign states, in the second half of the nineteenth century (Ayoob 2008, 133). Transnational Islam has long history because it is a fraction of political Islam. So then, what distinguishes political Islam from transnational Islam? Actually they are not completely different terms, they are related and interactive concepts. Political Islam is used to describe general Islamic tendencies to shape a governing style of Muslim states, or one may say that it is a result in blending Islam and politics, which is called “political Islam”. Transnational Islam may be one of the sub-titles under political Islam and it is a result of political Islam as well. However, transnational Islam is described as radical and militant, because

Islamic movements intervene in the social life of Muslims beyond its borders (Rubin 2002, 170). The militants have a broad point of view about Political Islam, and they believe that Islam should spread outside of borders. The Iran Islamic Republic is one of the states, which has militants to serve its transnational aims across its borders.

The main argument of transnational Islamists is that Western domination should come at the end and Islamic values should take its place. Islamic movements are varied among themselves, they are divided into two; the first are radicals whose actions are generally violent such as al-Qaeda. Second, they are moderates whose movements impose on education, human rights, and gender equality, as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (Hefner 2005, 302-302). The first one is a political trend of transnational Islam that tries to find a way to re-create the Islamic Caliphate system, and some of them use the concept of jihad. The second one is transnational missionary activities called *dawa* (literally, “call”) whose goal is to make Muslims better Muslims in terms of moral behavior and Islamic activities. The main goal of the transnational Islamists is to defend and spread Islam at a global level and beyond boundaries so they could go beyond the local regimes to target the “distant enemy”. This is why transnational movements believe the best way to defend Islam locally is to be offensive globally. They have strong hatred towards the West especially the United States because of interventions on matters affecting the Muslim world. Al-Qaeda describes this strategy as an ongoing resistance to Western domination. The existing paradigm in Islamist strategies has changed with the transnational movements, because indiscriminate violence has become the instrument of political action rather than agitation and mobilization at the global level (Ayoob 2008, 132-135). Moreover, transnational Islamists give importance to networks, and they try to form domestic and global networks as much as possible to spread their ideology around the globe.

The concept of Political Islam was born before the Islamic Revolution of Iran but transnational Islamist movements emerged increasingly after the revolution. The Iranian Islamic Republic is one of the most important agents who succeed in realizing transnational cross border aims through creating proxies, and missionary activities. For example, Hezbollah is a creation of the Islamic Republic for transnational activities in Lebanon. Hezbollah has been created against the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and it flourished during the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon (Ayoob 2008, 19). Islamic activists in the Shia world, which is the world of Iran and Hezbollah, derive

from the Qur'an and *Sunna* (act and saying of Prophet) and the *faqih* (Iranian Spiritual Leader). The *faqih* is an effective instrument of Shia Iran in forming alliances with transnational groups. The aim of the movement is to protect and help the oppressed Shia community and stop the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon, but later it became involved in the Syrian war and has been perceived as a violent movement by many. The reason behind Hezbollah's changing face is very much related to the Iranian Islamic Republic's transnational ambitions. One can easily say the Iranian Revolution had a bomb effect for the region, mostly the other Shia communities in the Middle East, specifically in the Gulf States. Shia Muslims saw the Iranian Islamic Republic as protector of Shia Islam. The Shia majority states' have faced serious riots particularly in Bahrain and Kuwait, which are mostly designated by the Islamic Republic's national interests.

### **2. 1. 3. Early Transnational Foreign Policy Indications of Pre-Revolutionary Period: Muhammad Reza Shah**

The Muhammad Reza Shah period is important in understanding the causes of the revolution. After the defeat of Iran in the seventh century, Iran managed to rebuild the Safavid Dynasty based on the Shia belief in the sixteenth century. Iran has had strong Shia geopolitics since the sixteenth century (Taflioglu 2013, 602). The last *Shah* of the monarchical rule was Muhammad Reza who took the throne after the abdication of his father Reza *Shah*. Muhammad Reza continued the policy of authoritarian modernization while being pro-Western as his father. The last *Shah* had problems with his Prime Minister Mohammad Mossaddeq who was a very nationalist person and attempted to nationalize Iran's oil industry. Mossaddeq and general protests about the oil nationalization forced the *Shah* to leave the country and with the help of British and U.S. intelligence services, he overthrew the Mossadeq and the *shah* returned to power in 1953. The sudden increase on the oil revenue of Iran in 1974 paved the way for transformation, and the Iranian economy transformed from being an agricultural and commerce based economy to a one-product oil based one. Hence the rentier (deriving substantial portion of its national revenues from the oil rent) nature of the Iranian economy easily erased the bonds linking the state to civil society. The state viewed itself as independent so the demands of the public were undermined (Boroujerdi 2014, 481-482).

Muhammad Reza *Shah's* policies did not satisfy the people of Iran. There were promises but Reza *Shah* did not keep to his word. Political and economic decentralization failed. Despotism, corruption, imprisonment, terrorization and repression increased. Moreover, Iran's oil revenue increased because of the Arab-Israeli wars. Iran had a very good economy in 1975, and the *Shah* had the largest navy in the Persian Gulf, the largest air force in Western Asia, and one of the largest armies in the world. However, besides the economic well-being of the country, there was injustice and a large gap between the rich and poor. Government strategy was to give welfare to the elites who wanted to build companies, factories and businesses. Iran had one of the most unequal income distributions of the time. The wealth of the state may be best explained in that there was no public transportation service, but only private cars; there was no emphasis on public health and public goods in general. Injustice became the main issue for the public. One of other important issues was that there was possibility of interference of the United States of America into domestic affairs of Iran, and the possibility of American Intervention whenever there was a human rights abuse case in Iran. Additionally, American President Jimmy Carter's words were perceived as a threat by the Iranian public, and the opposition was partly encouraged regarding the president's rhetoric. The megalomania and insecurity of the *Shah* did not provide the required trust to the people. In 1979, people had distinctive ideologies, and they were not congregated under one solid ideology. There was "a complex combination of nationalism, political populism and religious radicalism and social tensions intensified political radicalism, not only among the middle class but also among the *Ayatollahs* and the traditional middle class" (Abrahamian 2008, 143). There were several guerrilla groups, which included Iranian students from both inside and outside of Iran. However, the *Shah* did not understand the strength of the people's unrest with the regime and he miscalculated the strength of the oppositional movement as well.

In the background of the revolution, there were problems of the *Ayatollahs* (clergy in Iran) with the *Shah*. The new regime of the *Shah* tried to replace the madrasah system of Qom with schools, which could be centrally directed from Tehran. Since *Shaykh 'Abd al-Karim Ha'iri's* death in 1936, a triumvirate of clergymen were conducting the affairs of the Qom seminaries. These *Ayatollahs* inevitably presided over a diminishing student enrollment after the death of Qom's doyen clergyman (Akhavi 1980, 62). The *Shah* sought for modernization and he wished to objectify religion for the government

so as not to be controlled by the clergymen but to be a controller of religious institutions and the clergy. The result of the aim of the *Shah* was decreasing the effect of the *Ayatollahs* as an independent power in the country. The *Shah* wanted to unite the government and religious institutions. Within this line, the land reform bill was issued and became a problem between the clergy and the state. The *Ayatollahs* and state had tactical alliances during the previous era, but they had fundamentally different perspectives and vested interests. The land reform bill problem caused a strategic difference, as Lambton notes, when the clergy opposition initially emerged: this disagreement of the religious classes to the state was not only the main problem, but the instinctive feelings, which show sever connections between the clergy and the state. The inclination of the *Ayatollah* was to acquiesce in the exercise of arbitrary power by the temporal government; very occasionally, they were provoked to make a fleeting protest (Lambton 1970, 543). This bill did not represent the only cause of the clergy opposition. However, this was clearly the first issue, which displayed general dissatisfaction over the course of events and dissatisfaction was publicly expressed. These developments were the underlying reasons for pushing the clergy to upheaval; the clergy were dissatisfied by the *Shah's* actions. The unrest of the clergy propelled them to a revolution of which the aims were to change the old fashion way of doing things with a new one. Kamrava describes the current intellectual atmosphere as nothing less than revolutionary, because the ideological incoherence of the regime had allowed for competition among the various politico-theological discourses in Iran (Kamrava 2008, 13). The discourse changed in Iran, people hoped a revolution would destroy the existing government order so there was no obstacle against the revolution.

Foreign policy during the *Shah's* period regarding Iran is important in order to analyze transnational politics in post-revolutionary Iran. The foreign policy of the *Shah's* period is significant to see the changing dynamics and similarities between the pre and post Iranian Islamic Revolution. There were several similarities with the *Shah's* foreign policy and post-revolutionary transnational politics, on which I will further focus. Although Iran had a highly American dependent economy, it tried to follow an independent foreign policy as much as possible. The *Shah* always viewed the Soviet Union as the “near enemy” so it tried to have good relations with America. Iran strengthened its ties with Israel, which shared same threat perception about Arab nationalism (Pollack 2004, 79). The *Shah* wanted to be a strongman in the Gulf region

so he tried to diminish its dependence on America. He increasingly sought to diversify arm expenditure, by buying items from Britain, France, and even Russia in order to become independent of America (Pollack 2004, 97). Spreading Arab Socialist nationalism with the leadership of Nasser was seen as a threat for the *Shah's* monarchy. Iran was irritated by any discourse against Iranian/Persian hegemony. The *Shah* aided monetarily the Lebanese Shia groups to be effective on Lebanese Shia community and to obstruct the expansion of the anti-Shia discourse among the Shia communities in the region. As a matter of fact, Iran offered aid to Maronites in Lebanon to keep them away from pro-Nasser Arab ideologies (Samii 2006, 69). As a result, although Iran was under the hegemony of America and partly Britain, the *Shah* continued his activities to protect country interests and it partly tried to spread the country's influence among the Shia communities in the region. It can be said that the Iranian transnational activities in Lebanon have continued since the Muhammad Reza Shah period. It is not something new for post-revolutionary Iran, the transnational activities of the Iranian Islamic Republic in Lebanon to have a history before the revolution. Nonetheless, it is the undeniable truth that the Islamic Republic diversified its transnational tools and forced a persistent transnational policy after the revolution compared to the *Shah* period. There were signs of first the steps for the transnational politics of Iran, which would organize and detail itself after the Islamic Revolution.

## **2. 2. The 1979 Iran Islamic Revolution: a New Paradigm**

Until the 1960's Khomeini never called for the overthrow of the monarchy or for the abolition of the constitution. However while in exile in Iraq Khomeini started to detail his new political doctrine. Khomeini published lectures that claimed until the return of the "hidden Imam (*Mahdi*)", the clergy should rule the country, the Imam had vested authority to the clergy so existing secular governments were all illegitimate. Khomeini argued that the reasons for the Imam's occultation are far beyond human understanding. Therefore, Muslims should establish an Islamic government even in his absence. With the help of the anti-*Shah* environment, Khomeini's political ideology was started to be seen as a victory by the public in Iran (Chehabi 1991, 73). Khomeini's legitimacy increased while the *Shah's* declining, he used underground networks to reach the society and some oppositional groups started to follow him. By 1978, the existing political institutions had lost its legitimacy for many; this was due to economic, social and political corruption, resulting in the increase of Khomeini's

popularity, which grew rapidly. During the autumn of 1978 Khomeini told a French newspaper “We are for a regime of total liberty. The future regime of Iran has to be one of liberty. Its only limits will be as in any other state, the general interests of society, but also considerations of dignity” (Chehabi 1991, 76). Khomeini’s words seemed to embrace the whole of society, and his speech included universal concepts such as liberty and equality. However, even universal concepts may differ according to the perception of each person. The beginning of Khomeini’s speech seemed an attractive political ideology for the public who searched for hope, and at the end, everything changed drastically to the opposite of what the non-Islamist people expected.

Khomeini’s pursuit made him a revolutionary, he was already an aging Grand *Ayatollah*. Shi’ism improved as an independent religious institution, which constituted one of the two influential powers in the state, and the other one was the monarchy under the *Shah*. State building, secularization and modernization greatly reduced the religious institutions, but did not decrease independence from the state, and were still independent and effective in the country. In 1979 Khomeini managed to mobilize the militant elements for revolution against the monarchy. Even the United States’ obsessions did not demotivate Khomeini and his revolutionary belief; he declared America as the “Great Satan”. He saw himself as a guardian of the Shia tradition because Khomeini was against Iran’s constitutional revolution, and his aim was to have a *Shari’a* (Islamic law) based constitutionalism. The constitution of Iran was a modern constitution system, which was made by the people. Khomeini saw the *Shah’s* constitutional revolution as a production of an unjust system but he wanted to create a constitution, which was based on Islamic law. According to Islamists, Islamic law would bring a just system for everyone, and justice is the priority in Islam, and it would have been beneficial for all. According to the *Ayatollahs*, the *Shah’s* constitutional revolution was only a game that was designed by foreign powers, because the foreign powers wanted to make distinction and separation between spiritual powers and the government. The *Ayatollahs* saw the Islamic revolution as the farsighted champion of Islam against the West. The Iranian clergy believed the Islamic Revolution was the strength of Iran and the weakness of others. State building, centralization and secularization are seen as attempts to diminish the power of hierocracy. However, this was not the sole cause that mobilized Khomeini; also there was an attack on Islam by



Islamic reforms from the clergy's point of view. Khomeini always criticized the modernists but praised the traditional Shi'ite hierocracy (Arjomand 2009, 16-18). All the factors prepared were the basis to mobilize the *Ayatollahs* for the revolution, when they saw Islam was under the threat of corruption; they took action for the sake of preventing Islam from corruption. Khomeini encouraged millennialism (Hidden Imam will return after the creation of the millennial kingdom of peace and righteousness, which prepares the way for the Second Coming. Throughout the Christian era, periods of social change or crisis have tended to lead to a resurgence in millennialism) and the return of the Hidden Imam with the rhetoric of revolution. He characterized the revolution as a preparation for the country for the Hidden Imam. These messianic claims were effective during the revolution, and messianic claims were products of political Islam in the country that would well serve the future national interests, security concerns and transnational activities of the Iran Islamic Republic.

Each group in Iran had different expectations from the revolution. Some expected that the revolution would culminate class struggle and it would result in a Marxists egalitarian society and liberate Iran from the American effect. Some others believed it would be a democratic transition and there were others who sought for an Islamic future without any Western cultural domination. There were the ideologies of socialism and communism in debates, nevertheless, the leftists could not move beyond their discourses (Gheissari and Nasr 2006, 80). There were two effective guerilla groups, one of them was called Feda'iyan who came from a Marxists background, and the other group was Mujahidin who came mostly from the religious wing. When the revolutionary activities began, there were two Mujahidin who were Marxists and Muslims and two Feda'iyan who are pro-Tudeh (Communist party in Iran) or activists. They both had weapons and underground publications (Keddie 2006, 233). Nevertheless, the left was never able to mobilize the masses to strengthen its power. They were disorganized and far from being a united movement. The Leftists were suffocated by their own ideology and conflicting concepts. At the same time, economic aid was limited for the left unlike the clergy because the clergy were supported by old and new foundations. Therefore, the left stayed in the shadows of Khomeini because Khomeini's successors already dominated the revolution. "Khomeini defined Islamic ideology in terms of demanding an Islamic state that would bring about social justice, empowering the poor, and freeing Iran from Western political and cultural influence"

(Gheissari and Nasr, 84). The sound of Khomeini's definition was as he was creating a new order, which would bring limitless justice and freedom and would consist of Marxists and socialist notions. He neither explained a systematic definition of an Islamic state, nor he explained the basic duties of an Islamic government, but he mainly focused on the idea of *velayat-e faqih*. The state would be based on Islamic law and the interpretations of the *Sharia* would be made by Islamic jurists. Khomeini never tried to justify the right of the *Ayatollah*, because *velayat-e faqih* would be the most justified state. Because it was accepted as God given authority and it was mandated by God.

*Velayat-e faqih* as a concept; works as Guardianship of Islamic Jurists, which is rooted in the *imamate* doctrine. The *imamate* doctrine is valid in Shia communities, the means of this doctrine is that until the Hidden Imam, the *Mahdi*, comes to the earth there should be *Ayatollahs* who will prevent Islam from corruption. Ayatollah Khomeini who was the leader of the Islamic Revolution Movement established this religious concept via the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The ideology of the revolution, which ended the monarchy, transformed the Iranian political landscape. It is a unique period in Iranian history, which destroyed the old state order rather than nation building (Cheissari and Nasr 2006, 77). The Islamic Revolution was succeeded by the *Ayatollahs* under the leadership of Khomeini. It had a spiritual ideology; people should not remain deprived of the Islamic government until *Mahdi* filled the world with justice. Ayatollah Khomeini wrote a recipe to express the necessity of the Islamic government, and he explained the form and program of the Islamic government when he was in exile in Paris. He stated the body of law alone is not sufficient, and there is need for an executive power and an executor. Therefore, the Messenger's successors had this duty for the implementation of God's commands. The Muslim community needed an executor to exercise the *Sharia* and establish Islamic institutions for society in order to attain happiness in this world. Legislation alone could not guarantee the well-being of human beings. Islam required establishing an executive power in order to bring laws into being. Without the formation of an Islamic government, chaos and anarchy would reign, and social, intellectual and moral corruption would increase. A form of government, which was going to implement order to all affairs of the country was vital to prevent the emergence of anarchy and chaos and the society from corruption.

The Revolution was one of the most important ideas, which justified the transnational activities of the Iranian Islamic Republic. Carrying out the Revolution was not only a tool for strategic arsenal but also for a fundamental part of the regime's identity. This ideology was supported by two vital tenets; the duty of every Muslim is to support *jihad* and the mission of the Islamic Republic is to "propagate Islam". "The concept of exporting the Islamic Revolution derives from a particular worldview that perceives Islamic revolution as the means whereby Muslims and non-Muslims can liberate themselves from the oppression of tyrants who serve the interests of international imperialism" (Metz 1987). Iran experienced the overthrow of the *Shah* and made the Revolution an example to oppressed nations to defeat imperialism. According to this perspective, by following Iran's example any country can free itself from imperialist domination. This is the main ideology of the Islamic Republic while they were exporting their revolution. The Islamic Republic found new instruments in order to realize the exporting idea and creation of proxies in several states were a part of the exportation, which tried to visualize the ideal of the Iranian Islamic Republic. Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Palestine Islamic Jihad were most effective proxies of the Islamic Republic during the years shortly after the Revolution. Main theatres of the Islamic Republic to "propagate Islam" were Iraq and Lebanon but also the Islamic Republic was active among Shias of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Radical Islamic Movements in central Asia and Africa. The Iranian Islamic Republic's *jihad* doctrine has its roots in traditional the Shia doctrine, and it distinguishes between the "initiated *jihad*" and "defensive *jihad*". The former is mainly related to Holy War and the spreading of Islam under the authority of the Hidden *Imam*. The latter refers to the defense of the lands, faith and the protection of the "oppressed" from infidels. This *jihad* is the duty of all Muslims when they face aggression (Bar 2009, 9). The defense *jihad* theory of the Iranian Islamic Republic was used in the Iran-Iraq war against Saddam Hussein. Khomeini declared it is a personal and religious duty to participate in war (Gieling 1999, 44-50). The Iranian style concept of *jihad* adopted by the Revolutionary Guard Corps of the Islamic Republic and the Hezbollah's members. Unlike Sunni Orthodox doctrine, the *Vali-e faqih* or the religious ruled has the capability and authority to weight all decisions and he is the final authority to waging *jihad* in Shia doctrine. Therefore, it is easy to gather millions under an ideology in Shia belief.

Khomeini added some questions in order to clarify and strengthen his claims about Islamic governance. Khomeini stated that more than a thousand years had passed since the greater occultation (Hidden by God) of our *Imam Mahdi*. More than thousands of years may pass until the *ummah's* goodness necessitates the return of the hidden *Imam*. Will the implementation of Islam stop for all the years to come? More clearly has God constrained the life of Islam by two hundred years (the time passed from the death of Prophet Mohammed to occultation of *Imam*)? It is not possible to claim Islam has lost everything after the lesser occultation (referring to the period when the Twelver Shia believe the Imam still maintained contact with his followers via deputies). And Khomeini added that accepting such a claim is worse than believing that Islam has lost its validity (Algar 2002, 18-28). When one considers Khomeini's words, it seems it is a compulsory situation; *velayat-e faqih* is a necessary system to protect the Shia Muslim identity. Without any proper comprehensive executive power, there is no way to execute God's commands according to Khomeini. Islam should be exercised until the *Mahdi* returns to earth and the *Mahdi* will come if the establishment of an Islamic institution is achieved in the country. There is no certain date where the *Mahdi will* return, and this means the *velayat-e faqih* is far beyond time and space. The continuation of Islamic activities is seen as duties and responsibilities of the *Ayatollahs* who serve the *ummah's* (Muslim community) goodness until the *Mahdi* returns. Khomeini's explanations about the Islamic Republic were highly important to understand the motivation behind the Islamic Republic's transnational activities. It is clearly seen that if the Islamic Republic could not prevent Islam from corruption, the Muslim community would live in an unjust and unequal system and the *Mahdi* would not return to earth. The Islamic Republic has the duty to arrange the world for the *Mahdi*, this is why Khomeini claimed that the revolution not only was for Iran, but also for all Muslims. As a result, Khomeini created an institutionalized ruling to achieve his claims. The Iranian ruling system which is the *velayat-e faqih*, as afore mentioned, which has elected and unelected bodies. The formal ruling system is detailed below; this schema shows elected and unelected institutions and the power of the supreme leader and clergy in the Islamic Republic's state system.

## 2. 3. Domestic Infrastructures for Expansionist Policies

### 2. 3. 1. The Governing System of Iran

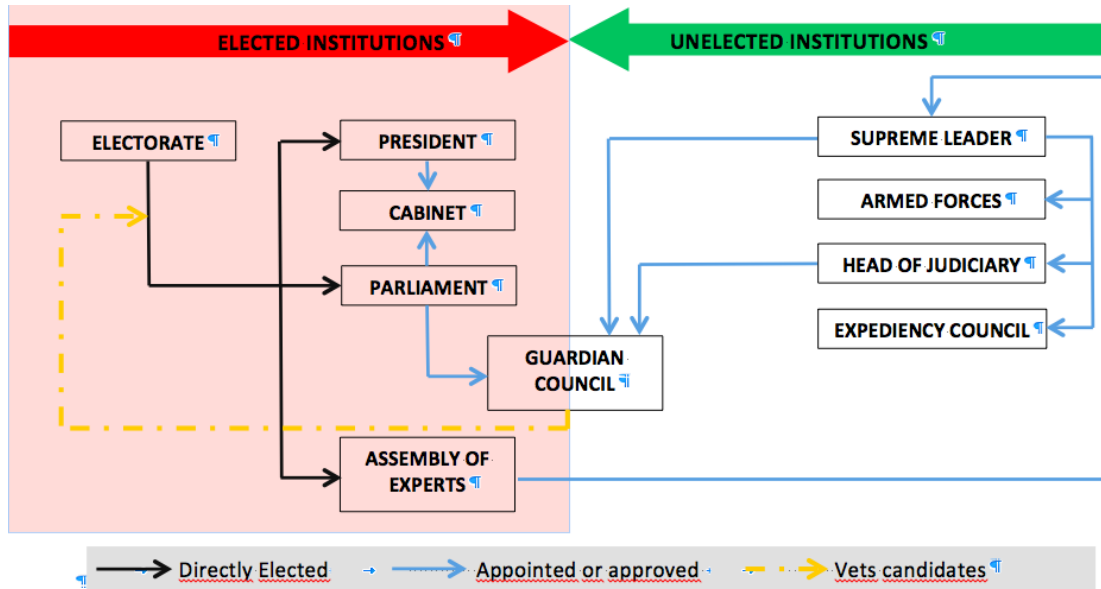


Figure 2.1 The Governing System of Iran

Source: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/8051750.stm#top](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8051750.stm#top)

*Velayat-e faqih* is a complex political system, which has supreme authority and is based on Islamic jurisprudence. The office is made up of nine different conceptions, four of which he categorizes in terms of their divine legitimacy and five of which he categorizes because of their mixture of divine and popular legitimacy (Marineau 2005). There are few details of the Iranian political system, and there are elected and unelected institutions. The president is the head of the executive branch of power and he is responsible for guaranteeing the implementation of the constitution. Presidential powers in practice are limited by clerics and conservatives in Iran's power structure. All presidential candidates are both chosen and eliminated by the Guardian Council, which banned hundreds of candidates from standing in the 2005 elections. In the parliament, 290 members are democratically elected by popular vote every four years. The parliament's duty is to introduce or pass laws as well as summon ministers or the president. One of the most important parts of the Iranian political system is the Assembly of Experts, which appoints the Supreme Leader by monitoring him, if he is incapable of managing his duty; the Assembly of Experts has the power to remove him. They hold two sessions a year. The body of assembly is situated in the city of

Qom but sessions are held in Tehran and Mashhad. Members are elected for eight years, only clerics can be the member of assembly and candidates are vetted by the Guardian Council. The Guardian Council is the most effective body in Iran, which is currently controlled by conservatives. It includes six theologians who appointed by the Supreme Leader and some of the six theologians are presented as a candidate by the judiciary and it is accepted by parliament. Members are elected for six years progressively, so half of the members change every three years. The council can veto or approve all bills passed by the parliament. They are more powerful than the parliament. If they think that the bills are contradictory with the constitution or Islamic law, they could veto them. They also control the candidates for presidency with the Assembly of Experts. The most influential body is the Supreme Leader, which is based on the ideas of Ayatollah Khomeini who brought the leader to the top of the political power structure. The Supreme leader appoints the head of the judiciary, and six of the members of the Guardian Council, commanders of the all armed forces, Friday prayer leaders of cities and the head of the radio and television. He also ratifies the president's election. It is clearly seen that the Supreme Leader has the overall authority above all-state officials. It is the most interesting part of the Iranian system I would argue, the first ratification of the president belongs to the Supreme Leader and he possesses the strategic parts of the state. It is simply seen that the Supreme Leader's authority is extreme above everyone else in the state and is unquestioned. There is also the head of judiciary, who has never been independent of political effects. He was controlled by the clergy, but it is secularized. This ensures that Islamic law is enforced and defines legal policies. He also presents the six members as candidates for the Guardian Council. The armed forces is another body, all leading army and Revolutionary Guard commanders are nominated by the Supreme Leader and they have to account for only the Supreme Leader. And finally, the expediency council is an advisory body for the Leader; they are responsible to solve conflicts over legislation between the parliament and the Guardian Council (BBC 2009). The whole system intermingles with one another and the president is not the powerful person of the state because *velayat-e faqih* councils possess the legislation, executive, judiciary in their hands. There is no power sharing in Iran, all power is at the hand of the *Ayatollahs*, and the system is far from being theocratic, it is more close to being autocratic.

When one looks at the theory of *velayat-e faqih*, the Supreme Leader has the supreme authority, because it is accepted that the Supreme Leader is the deputy of the Hidden *Imam*. It is simply seen that the Iranian system is despotic, even the president does not have more power than the Supreme authority. As mentioned, there is no power sharing, all state institutions are dominated by Islamists, and the clergy is the authority for almost all state affairs. The Islamic Republic's concern is the well-being of all Muslim civilizations, which necessitates transnational activities to consolidate the Islamic Republic in the Muslim states. The security interests of the Islamic Republic required the transnational activities as well because it is hard to sustain a regime who accepts to protect all Muslims as a duty. The system markets itself close to the public and public movements rather than the states of the West and East, because west-hatred is the main theme of the transnational politics of Iran. Iran is run by *Shari'a*, and the president is an instrument to be used in the international political platform. Every decision of the president can be questioned by religious authority. Religion and the state system are interlocked and cannot be separated from one another. This is why Iranian motivation is strong for cross border activities. *Velayat-e faqih* became the most effective body of the country that received legitimation from God. Thus, it has unquestionable power over the state. God mandates the system so the *faqih* (*Jurist*), which is the absolute and unquestionable controller of Iran. It is a system that positions itself on the top of country without any doubt because it erases all questions since it is not human creation, but a God given system. It legitimizes itself with messianic claims, which cannot be questioned by objective scientific tools. Moreover, Khomeini achieved the establishment of Islamic apparatus into the state structure through elections after the revolution. Apart from this, he tried to consolidate his power and secure his authority. All claims were legitimized with the verses of Qur'an and *Sunnah* of the Prophet. All non-Islamic governing systems were accepted *askufr* (rejection of divine guidance). Therefore, eradicating *kufur* (disbelief or denial) from the life of the Muslim society is the duty of the *ummah* (Algar 2002, 23). This claim is very important for the transnational politics of Iran, and the idea of exporting revolution emerged as a duty of the Islamic Republic. Khomeini created a system, which saw all governments as illegitimate; hence overthrew "illegitimate governments" as a God given task for the Islamic Republic. As a result, the idea of exporting revolution is a production of the Islamic Republic of Iran and it is accepted as the duty of every individual. They

needed to bring justice and a just government for the Muslim society everywhere, which is highly strongly legitimizes the transnational activities of the Islamic Republic.

### **2. 3. 2. Domestic Structure of Khomeini's period as Supreme Leader**

“Revolution overthrew the *Shah* and led to the establishment of a republic, it replaced the secular law with Islamic codes law, and set up a new political and military elite” (Cleveland 2004, 423). The elections of 1979 and 1981 strengthened the position of Khomeini, besides the religious domination of the state, Khomeini created military missions in order to restore order, solve the security problems and defend the main tenants of the revolution inside and outside the country (Pollack 2004, 151). There were eight military missions created by Khomeini. The first was the *Pasdaran* (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps), it was used to suppress oppositions at the borders and had some parts, which crossed boundary operations in achieving the national interests via transnational activities. The second was the Ministry of Intelligence and security (MOIS), it is the Iranian intelligence agency, but it was used for operations both inside and outside under the authority of the Supreme Leader. Third, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which achieves the Iranian terrorists. Forth, Ministry of Culture and Guidance is good at infiltration of *Pasdaran* into target countries' cultural settings. The fifth one is *Basij*, which is used for domestic affairs, and is a tool for creating domestic activities against the opponents of the regime. The sixth one, *Guruh-i Fishar*, is a pressure group under the patronage of Iranian officials. The seventh one is *Bonyads*, of which the missions provide financial aid to oppositional crossing borders of Shia communities. The last one is *Proxies*, which is a sophisticated way of interfering in others' domestic affairs, and it can be said that Hezbollah is the first proxy of Iran created under the leadership of Khomeini. I will discuss further the military missions in the second part of this thesis because the military mission institutionalized and best serve for national interests of the Islamic Republic in the Khomeini term.

Khomeini appointed Mehdi Bazargan as prime minister who was non-clerical so it seemed that the clergy would not rule directly. He built a secular government under the Bazargan but he also built religious figures and institutions. Khomeini firstly appointed Friday prayer leaders to each city who would follow Khomeini's path. At the beginning of the revolution, Khomeini did not interfere directly regarding government affairs. He built a parallel government in the Council of Islamic Republic



under the control of his close followers (Keddie 2006, 241). Therefore, Khomeini's legacy would never be forgotten because during every Friday prayer, a religious leader would remind that the legacy of Khomeini comes from the Hidden Imam to the Iranian public. Khomeini created an Islamic Republican Party (IRP) in mid-1979 to assist the Iranian revolution and increase the power and authority of the clerics. The President, Abolhasan Banisadr was a modernist Islamist who faced a hostile IRP domination in the parliament. The clergy saw Banisadr as an opposition in the system, as the parliamentary system never performed as a modern type parliamentary system because of domination of clergy. In this revolutionary era, industries, banks, and some other businesses were nationalized and they built clerically controlled foundations (Keddie 2006, 256). At first Khomeini did not interfere in the struggle for power, he led the institutions to share power. However, Banisadr was eager to have good relations with America, in a very short time, he was accused for giving harm to the Islamic Revolution's main tenets. Khomeini removed the president, Banisadr (Iran's first elected president in 1981) with the IRP in the spring of 1981 (Keddie 2006, 253). The clergy had total power and control through the disregard of the constitution.

An educational reform of April 1980, and the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* became a compulsory subject in schools and this was called a cultural reform. Legal reforms were made as well to Islamize the society and regime to try to make God's law a moral code of society. There was great dispute between jurists about the divine law (*Sharia*), and the state appointed judges that applied customary law and religious law. The *Sharia* should be codified for the purpose of a modern nation state. The parliament passed laws, but the Guardian Council rejected or modified them with a more conservative perspective. By the end of 1987 there was a deadlock between the parliament and the Council of Guardians, and government decision-making became quite slow (Chehabi 1991, 79-80). Khomeini took two initiatives to overcome the problem of the system. First he gave unconditional authority to the Islamic Republic for making decisions regarding the affairs of the country. Second, he dismissed the idea of State that should take actions according to Sacred Law (*Sharia*), so the Islamic Republic may perform without the bounds of the *Sharia* when state affairs matter. The government was a God-given absolute mandate "most important of the divine commandments and has priority over all derivative divine commandments... even over prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage to Mecca" (Arjomand 1988, 182). Iran moved

away from being a theocratic state because Khomeini undermined the God-given commandments. He degraded the divine commands and sanctified his words. The Iranian regime gradually moved away from its doctrine as Iran made pragmatic politics rather than ideologically driven politics. Although Khomeini was known as the father of the dogmatic Shia Islamic theology, his ideas were not close to mainstream Shia Islam, which sees all governments as illegitimate until the return of the *Mahdi*. This is the creation of a narrative for the involvement of the clergy in politics. Therefore, it can be said that Khomeini's ideas were not related to the mainstream Shia doctrine, he created his own.

There were religious and secular oppositions that did not find Khomeini's actions Islamic. There were always debates between secular and radical Islamists, on the one hand, secularists claimed that religion and politics should be separated from one another, and on the other hand, radical Islamists thought the idea of separating religion and politics was a Western invented concept to weaken Muslim societies. Some religious oppositions strongly disagreed with many concepts, which were created by Khomeini. Such critics were against the *velayat-e faqih* doctrine, the monopoly of judicial and theological decision-making, personalization of power, the right to rule in the absence of the twelfth Imam, and arbitrary actions such as expropriating the rich. Most secular Iranians criticized the system; they found the system anachronistic, paternalistic and undemocratic (Daniel and Mahdi 2006, 51). Khomeini never tolerated the opposition after he consolidated his power. He eliminated Marxists intellectuals, liberal nationalists, and the Mujahidin. He executed a number of officers of the *Shah's* government. The Westernized middle class was compelled to exile. Religious minorities were under the repression (Lapidus 2002, 485). Khomeini thought that he has God-given authority, so everyone must obey his rules. He punished opponents such as exile, imprisonment or death sentences. He was an idealistic person, and his dream was to create a community whose freedom belongs to the Islamic Republic, because the Islamic Republic's sovereignty belongs to God. In my perspective, Khomeini was not crazy for power or absolute control, but he only had utopic and imaginary wishes about the Shia community and the Islamic Republic. As a result, theocratic components of the Islamic Republic did not embrace the clergy or the others, but only part of it. Contrary to the expectation of the radical Islamists,

politics and religion did not merge. Instead Politics was dominated by religion and religion became politicized.

## **2. 4. Transnational Elements of the Islamic Republic of Iran**

### **2. 4. 1. The Islamic Republic's Constitution**

The Islamic Republic constitution's limits, goals, and rules regarding foreign politics are important before thinking critically of its transnational security oriented politics and its reproduction and transformation over the years. The constitution of the Islamic Republic is very important to understand the impulse behind the Iranian transnational ambitions, because of the Iranian constitution's emphasis on the revolutionary aspect of the state's ideology. For example, on the one hand, it advocates from refraining interference in the domestic affairs of other states, on the other hand, it declares itself as a guardian of the "oppressed". Basically, Iran declares that it has the duty to protect oppressed people regardless nation, which means intervening other nations. Here, Iran also articulates that its ideology is universal, it is valid for all because the Islamic Republic's goal is to "make people happy in all of human society" (Posh 2013, 15). Iran has idealistic promises and a universal role in the world including the universal validity of its own ideology, which was specified in the constitution. Therefore, the constitution is the main text to analyze the basic concepts and the starting point of the Iranian foreign policy and transnational activities. The first constitution of the Islamic Republic was declared in 1979 and it was amended in 1989 before the death of Khomeini. The constitution of Iran clearly states that the regime of the Iranian Republic has been established on the belief "the one God's exclusive sovereignty and right to legislate" and "divine revelation and its fundamental role in setting forth laws" (Article 2). "All law in the country must obey the Islamic criteria" (Article 4), and "ultimate political power lies in the hands of the *faqih*" (Article 5 and 110) (Tezcur 2010, 92). Originally, the *faqih* was an ultimate guide that would take care of the *ummah* during the absence of the Hidden *Imam*. The Iranian constitution is based on the supremacy of the clergy. The constitution has strong legitimacy, and it is unique and the strongest text ever to be established by God's sovereignty. These articles, I choose to write in this part further explains the strong position of transnational politics of the Iranian Islamic Republic. The idea of "exporting revolution" may best achieved by articles 8, 11, and 154. Iran sees itself as the best agent that spread the revolutionary

ideology throughout the region and Muslims will make their own Islamic Revolution. However, the important point is that the Iranian Supreme Leader will be the Leader of the Islamic Republics, because it is the superior one which constituted a paradigm for the whole Muslim community. Now, I will look at some chapters in the Iranian constitution, which include transnational aspects.

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, *al-‘amr bilma’ruf wa al-nahy ‘an al-munkar* is a universal and reciprocal duty that must be fulfilled by the people, and for the people to respect one another, by the government with respect to the people, and by the people with respect to the government. The conditions, limits and nature of this duty will be specified by law. (This is in accordance with the Qur’anic verse; “the believers men and women, are guardian of one another; they enjoin the good and forbid the evil” [9:71]). (Iranian constitution 28 July 1989, Ch. 1, Article 8).

The meaning of the sentence “*al-‘amr bilma’ruf wa al-nahy ‘an al-munkar*” is “commanding good and forbidding evil”. This concept was made for the whole Muslim *ummah* by God. Therefore, it is accepted as a universal and global duty of the Muslim community. It functions both for the state and individual. “Commanding good and forbidding evil” is the duty of each Muslim and it is a task of the Islamic Republic as well. One can infer that it is a basic text for transnational claims and actions of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The whole Muslim community is under the responsibility of the Islamic Republic of Iran and it is a given task by God. This is significant for a strong legitimization for transnational aims of the Islamic Republic. In article 8, Iran has blessed grounds for activities, which are beyond the Iranian nation. Moreover, in a similar manner article 11 in chapter 1 is on the transnational aspect of the Islamic Republic.

In accordance with the sacred verse of the Qur’an “*This community is a single community, and I am your Lord, so worship Me*” [21:92], all Muslims form a single nation and the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran have the duty of its general policies with a view to cultivating the friendship and unity of all Muslim peoples, and it must constantly strive to bring about the political, economic, and cultural unity of Islamic world. (Iranian constitution 28 July 1989, Ch. 1, Article 11).

The revolutionary aims were to ensure the continuation of the revolution “at home and abroad” (Moghaddam 2008, 57). Being a single unified entity was the duty of all Muslims and Iran would consult and formulate all the Islamic governments as a task of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran had the potential and energy to undertake the role of a supreme leader for the Muslim *ummah*. Iran would have the supremacy on all newly established Islamic states for the sake of formulating general Islamic policies. The Islamic Republic saw itself as state that must fulfill the holy goals for the sake of Islam and has the best Islamic features among the Muslim world. Iran basically was trying to create a world based on advisory and supremacy of the Islamic Republic. It also was trying to create a Muslim federation and to hold all the power in hand. Although Iranian legitimacy is very strong, it attempted transnational politics in a very pragmatic manner in the world after Khomeini.

The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based upon the rejection of all forms of domination, both the exertion of it and submission to it, the preservation of the independence of the country in all respects and its territorial integrity, the defence of the rights of all Muslims, non-alignment with respect to the hegemonist superpowers, and the maintenance of mutually peaceful relations with all non-belligerent states. (Iranian constitution 28 July 1989, Ch. 10, Article 152).

Iran claimed it had the right to defend the rights of every Muslim on a global level. It positioned itself in an anti-imperialist, anti-American and anti-Zionist worldview and claimed to terminate the Western domination in the Muslim world. “The Islamic Republic is one of the few countries that still considers Zionism as a specific racism directed against Palestinian Arabs” (Hooglund 2012, 198). Iran tried to establish Muslim values and change the Western dominated international order. The rhetoric of Khomeini’s ideal state was very much related to a creation of an alternative model in order to change this Eurocentric world order. It behaved as if the Islamic Republic had a role in protecting the rights and freedom of all the Muslims in the world, because it was a God given task from the Ayatollah’s point of view in Iran.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has as its ideal human felicity throughout human society, and considers the attainment of independence, freedom and rule of justice and truth to be right of all people of the world. Accordingly, while scrupulously refraining from all forms of interference in the internal affairs of the other nations, it supports the just struggles of the *mustad'afun* against the *mustakbirun* in every corner of the globe. (Iranian constitution 28 July 1989, Ch. 10, Article 154).

Justice, freedom, and the independence of all people of the world were important for Iran. While they refrained from interfering in the internal affairs of the states, they circumscribed interference, in the affairs of other states. They proclaimed that they would support the struggle of the Muslim community against unjust systems and they would be against inhumanity. Iran would protect the “oppressed” and punish the “oppressor” in the name of defending the Muslim community. However, this explanation is very problematic, because it is an unclear explanation and can be interpreted differently by different presidents. There can be free-riding very easily, when national interests necessitate intervening in domestic affairs of a country, and this article easily may be applied. Basically, one may infer from these articles in the Iranian constitution that Iran sees itself in a distorted mirror. There is no common understanding about the “unjust ruling”, “oppressed”, or “oppressor” so this is an unclear explanation to support oppressed people under unjust governments. For example, the Syrian leader, Bashar Assad was seen as a just ruler for some and he was an unjust ruler for others. Therefore, this article was designed in order to legitimize a future footprints. The Islamic Republic legitimized its transnational claims in the constitution; Iran assumed that it had a role to shape the Muslim world. They believed they would be advisers for the establishment of just, equal and free Muslim states, as well they believed they had formed the superior Islamic Republic in the Muslim world. Additionally, Iran left a place open for intervention in the domestic affairs of others by writing unclear explanations in the constitution. This is a kind of strategy, which is created to make room to maneuver so that different interpretations can be applied.

#### **2. 4. 2. The Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), Israeli Invasion (1982) of Lebanon and Transnational Projection of the Islamic Republic**

One year after the revolution, the war between Iran and Iraq broke out. The global and regional powers thought the war between the two neighbors would harm Iran and the

Islamic Republic would not last long. However, they were wrong, Iran managed its economy and was not defeated. Additionally, the Iran-Iraq war had background before the revolution, there were several problems between *Ayatollah* Khomeini and Saddam Hussein at a personal level and state level. While Khomeini was in exile for fourteen years in Najaf, he believed that Iraq's oppressed Shi'a majority should overthrow Saddam Hussein's (Sunni) regime. Khomeini openly declared hostility towards the Baath regime and when Khomeini achieved the revolution, he still had considerable networks in Iraq. Khomeini often referred to Saddam as a "puppet of Satan" and "mentally ill" (Pollack 2004, 183). Moreover, the complexity was that there was an ethnic element to the animosity and rivalry between Saddam and Khomeini based on an Arab and Persian ethno struggle, they were struggling for regional dominance. Moreover, water rights on rivers, oil and border disputes were part of the conflict (Swearingen 1988, 411-15). The war dragged on for a total of eight years. At the end, there were numerous casualties from both sides. Saddam planned to overthrow Khomeini but this was a wrong assumption because the war provided a national cause for Iranians, they united and supported Khomeini's Islamic Regime (Sterner 1984, 130). Khomeini increased his power and loyalty to the government played a significant role during the war. Although, the war created national cause, people were tired of hardship and oppression. The 1980's were of great disappointment for Iranians. Hopes, future expectations, revolutionary pleasures were wasted drastically. Revolutionary excitement and energy were lost (Pollack 2004, 217). After the end of the Iran-Iraq war, reconstruction took place. There was a great deal to be done in Iran. Khomeini noticed there was competition between independent powers, there was no power sharing between Islamic institutions. Everyone wished to maximize power but Khomeini saw the problem, and he began to solve it. Khomeini was the hard liner but he needed to act according to political conjuncture. He repealed the ban of some Western music, and chess. Additionally he decided to press relations with the United States (Pollack 2004, 238). The conservative news *Jomhuri Islami* published an editorial stating "We have nothing to lose by establishing proper relations with the superpowers of the West based on justified rights of the Islamic Republic." (Katzman 1993, 99-100). This shows how the Islamic Republic politics changed because of the Iran-Iraq war but Khomeini's peace with America did not last long. Khomeini continued where he left off because the Islamic Revolution basically relied on the anti-position against the West.

One of Khomeini's most significant aims was "exporting the revolution". There were several acts on behalf of exporting the revolution in Khomeini's executive years. At the very beginning of the revolution, Khomeini advocated not only to overthrow the Iraqi regime but also form the establishment of the Islamic Republic for the Shia in Iraq (Swearingen 1988, 412). He admitted himself as a guardian of the Shia community, so he saw himself as having the right to guide Shias both inside and outside of Iran. Later on Khomeini tried to pressure the Gulf States to stop supporting Iraq by using the doctrine and discourse about doing God's work on earth. The Islamic Republic Foreign policy's most basic element was the idea of "exporting the revolution", this tactic was used to increase the sphere of influence in Tehran in the region or parts of the world. Iran's obsessive hatred toward the United States and West was fed from the idea of the "exporting revolution". Revolution was marketed, as it was Iran's strength and other's weaknesses. Thus, shortly after the revolution, Iran began to provide some support such as money, information, and weapons to radical Shia groups in Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq with the idea of toppling the illegitimate regime and building a legitimate Islamic Republic. The Islamic Republic have security threat since its creation, Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia are the strong enemies of the Islamic Republic in the region therefore, having good transnational links with the radical Shia groups gave a partly confidence in security issues (Pollack 2004, 198-201). In 1979 Iran supported the riots among the Shia majority who lives in Saudi Arabia's eastern province of al-Hasa and close to the Saudi oil fields. The Islamic Republic established the Supreme Council of Islamic Revolution in some parts of the world and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps created an office of Liberation Movements in several areas. Shortly after that there was a coup involvement in Bahrain, 159 Shia belonged to the Islamic front movement for the Liberation of Bahrain which was based in Tehran. Moreover, Khomeini called people to an "Islamic upheaval" during the *hajj* in Saudi Arabia (this is one of the responsibilities of Muslims: to go Mecca for pilgrimage at least once). Iran also played the role of protector of Lebanese during the Israel invasion of Lebanon. On June 6, 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon. This attracted Khomeini's attention and the leader of the army and the IRP, Revolutionary Guards of Iran helped drive Israelis out of the country because it is a great security threat for the Islamic Republic. A Shia militia, AMAL (Afwaj al-Muqawama al-Lubnaniya, or "Battalions of the Lebanese Resistance"), was created to protect Shia territory and the interests of Shia groups. Iranians started to give support



for the group such as training, money, weapons and others so the group began to establish a social service, which provides service for the poor Lebanese Shias. This group created a Lebanese “Hezbollah” to supervise Shia activities and create a united organization that would coordinate and finance radical Shia groups in the region. Hezbollah and Iran have always been on the same ideological path. Hezbollah not only accepts the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* but also takes the Iranian Islamic Republic as a role model for itself (Pollack 2004, 198-201). The Islamic Republic began to market itself as a new model of ruling system in the Islamic world.

## **2. 5. Transnational Activities of the Islamic Republic (1979-89)**

The Iranian Islamic Republic’s main discourse is “exporting the revolution” which justifies the transnational activities of Iran. Iran tried to take actions against security concerns in the region so, the Islamic Republic tried to strengthen its religious authority for the whole Shias in the region through transnational networks. The Islamic Republic of Iran enhanced the position of Qom as major Shia learning center across the entire Shia world. It established a bipolarization of the Shia community between Najaf and Qom. The Islamic Republic’s attempt to make Qom the center of religious learning is one of the strategic aims of the states. The creation of the Shia Islamic movements was another important strategic action of the Islamic Republic. The 1970s *al-Da’wa* and Shiraziyyin created local Shia actors in the Gulf monarchies. These Shia activists tried to form a transnational network with the Islamic Republic through the *Marja’iyya*, which means the “religious reference” and the “source of imitation/follow”. The transnational networks not only carry the political agendas but also the general world view (Louer 2008, 130). With the advent of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, the center of the Shia learning predominantly changed. The Islamic Republic suppressed the religious seminaries, which took place in Iraqi cities, and as a result of this suppression, gave weight to the religious seminaries in Qum. Qom became the prominent center of Shia learning. The worldwide known *marja’* was namely Abu al-Qasem al-Khu’i and his successors ‘Ali al-Sistani was foremost religious authority in Najaf as well. Moreover, Khomeini tried to extend his influence area through elaborating the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* (Arjomand 1988, 180). He went further and stated the Islamic Republic of Iran should be assumed by one single *marja’* (Calder 1982, 16). Khomeini stated a *marja’* does not need to be *mujtahid* but *marja’* need to have political achievements such as forming the Islamic Government.

Khomeini clearly described himself as the only *marja'* who should be followed by others. After the Qur'an and the Prophets and Imams, *marja'* is the highest authority in religious law in the *usuli* (method) Shia Islam. Khomeini also denied that it is not the Iranian revolution, it is the Islamic revolution, which was achieved in Iran (Louer 2008, 152). This understanding of Khomeini goes far beyond the Iranian borders, he prefigured a future for the entire Muslim world. It is seen that, Lebanon, Afghanistan and the Gulf monarchies would become the main theatre of Khomeini's doctrine of Shia Islam.

The ideal of the Islamic Republic presents itself in the Islamist Shia groups in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Lebanon. The Islamic Republic had a relationship with *Al-Da'wa* and the Shirazyin movements in Bahrain. The regime in Bahrain severely suppressed the Shia activists, Sh. Mohammed al-'Akri was one of the suppressed Shia activists who was a politically active Shia scholar but he was not member of any particular organization. Because of this unjust behavior of the Bahraini regime, Hadi al-Mudarsisi friend of al-'Akri organized a demonstration to demand his release. Bahrain deprived Hadi al-Mudarsisi from his citizenship and he went to Tehran and publicly announced the establishment of the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain (Louer 2008, 159). It can be easily seen that Iran was very active in the domestic politics of the Gulf States, the Islamic Republic aspired its transnational ambitious. There were existing linkage among Bahrain, Shirazi Iraqi leaders and the Saudi Islamist activists and they were all based in Iran as well. Members of the Organization for the Islamic Revolution in the Arabian Peninsula (OIR) created by the Shirazi leader and they were inspired from the revolutionaries in Iran (Louer 2008, 164). As in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, revolutionary Iran had great effect on the Kuwaiti Shia population. The Supreme Assembly for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SAIRI) was created under the Iranian authority in 1982 (Louer 2008, 174). The Iranian Islamic Republic wasted no time to create a sphere of influence for "holy" goals, which is "exporting revolution.

*Pasdaran* became a critical instrument of the Islamic Republic in order to protect Iran from its enemies (Katzman 1993, 95). This role of the *Pasdaran* was covered in 1981 with the creation of the Office of the Liberation Movements. Additionally, the Jerusalem army was created for cross border operations but they were a sub-army under the *Pasdaran*. The main targets of the *Pasdaran* (Jerusalem army) were Iraq,

Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Afghanistan; it provided training and material support for the Shia movements. One of the most important achievements of *Pasdaran* was to create Hezbollah in Lebanon in 1982 (Louer 2008, 180). Iran used its tools highly efficiently when its national interests and transnational ambitions were the subject. Hezbollah created by the *al-Da'wa* activists, designated hard liners in general, it was used as a structural violence group and assassinations (Rubin 2001, 45-87). Hezbollah was known as a pro-Iranian militia in Lebanon, and Bahrain, and an organization in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Hezbollah had structural existence in Saudi Arabia and its official name is Hijazi Hezbollah. Additionally, Kuwaiti Hezbollah named itself as an Islamic National Alliance, which had been created in aftermath of the Gulf War (Louer 2008, 205-209). As a result, it is obvious that the Iranian Islamic Republic had proxies. The Islamic Republic benefited from its proxies when it felt itself under threat. The main aim behind the creating proxies was security problems of the Islamic Republic and formulating the Shia world through its own understanding. The Islamic Republic did not endanger its formal diplomatic relations with the neighbors because proxies were always plan B for the Iran Islamic Republic and this was the most secure way to act properly in the region.

Additionally, “the annual hajj in Saudi Arabia was the scene of constant political agitation, leading to violent demonstrations in Mecca, especially the hajj of 1987 in which hundreds were killed by the Saudi regime” (Murden 2002, 192). The Iranian Revolution influence spread in the region, which mostly manifested itself in a violent manner. The freelance Islamic revolutionaries, especially the most radical ones all around the Middle East were brought under control of the Islamic Republic. Saudi Arabia was one of the main theatres for these Iranian controlled freelance revolutionaries. Afterwards, “Iranian activities abroad were instrumentalized: they became less about general revolution and more about the interests of the Iranian state”. After the death of Khomeini, the Iranian state produced a new vision, which is distant from Khomeini’s conventional state. Basically, the politics of “exporting revolution” came to an end but it still continues with a new appearance. A new era opened, Iranian politics transformed and reproduced in a pragmatic way. Presidents Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami did not defend the main tenet of the general revolution and restored the relations of some states that were previously condemned as “evil” by the Iranian Islamic Republic. It largely stopped the violence abroad, but it

always defended Muslim rights around the world (Murden 2002, 193-194). In this period, it seems the Iranian government was looking forward to integrating itself to Western hegemony, particularly to capitalism and the global market. Because of the Iran-Iraq war, Iran had economic problems, which pushed Iran to be more integrated with the regional powers and the world order. The Islamic Republic did not use violence as openly as it did in the past, across its borders. The other important development in this period was that Iran positioned itself in an integrated state with the global market and capitalism. Anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism and Western domination were the bases of revolutionary ideology but Iran began to adopt interest based pragmatic politics. The Iranian Islamic Republic's main discourse was to reformulate the world system and create a "just" world order but it became completely status quo oriented power. However, it should not be forgotten, the Islamic Republic have sustainable politics which means that the Islamic Republic never abandon to serve its national interests and transnational claims. However, it may change its foreign policy instruments and adopts a new foreign policy that follows the same national ambitions. In the next chapter, I will concentrate more on the transnational politics of the Iranian Islamic Republic after the death of Khomeini.

## CHAPTER 3

### PROGRESSION OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC AFTER KHOMEINI

#### 3. 1. The Institutionalization and Pragmatization of the Idea “Exporting the Revolution”

From the Revolution of 1979 until the death of Khomeini, Iran faced a host of challenges as a consequence of the Revolution and the changes in the politics of the region. Ali Khamenei was the successor of Khomeini and he was chosen as a second Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic but he was under the shadow of Khomeini for the first years of his leadership. Later on, he played an active role in the affairs of the Islamic Republic. From 1989 onwards there was a sort of combination of the regime before the American intervention in the region in the 2000s as counter strike against the 9/11 attacks. The transnational politics of Iran was more or less the continuation of the revolutionary politics of Khomeini until the 2000s. Although reformist presidents such as Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami tried to open the country to liberal economy and democratization, the conservative wing used checks and balances to limit reformist activities. Nevertheless, during the following years after the death of Khomeini, there were significant events that changed the fate of the region. International and regional changes strongly shaped Iranian politics specifically in the beginning of the 2000s. The September 11 attacks of 2001 were key milestones regarding regional developments. Subsequently, the occupation of Afghanistan in 2001 and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003 by the United States were two significant issues, which shaped the politics of the countries in the Middle East and which directly affected Iran. These developments in the Islamic world brought upon debates on transnational Islam back to the center of the political conjuncture. In this chapter, my core argument will be on the transformation of the Iranian transnational political vision due to American intervention in the region and the idea of “exporting revolution” that was reproduced and transformed with the effect of new global and regional dynamics. The main aim of this chapter is, examining the Islamic Republic of Iran’s transformation of transnational foreign policy as a new synthesis of ideology and pragmatization of politics. This paper will start with brief

explanation on the Second Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic, Ali Hossain Khamenei. I will continue with more institutionalized military missions of the Islamic Republic after the Khomeini period. In order to make oppositions between the conservative and reformist wing clear, I will briefly talk about the presidents, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami. Then I will look at the changes in Iranian politics regarding the transnational vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Shia Revival in the region. Additionally, I will go into detail about the Gulf war because it has had impact on the Islamic Republic's transnational vision. Then, I will cover the debates about the "Resistance Axis" and "Shia Crescent". Lastly, I will focus on the September 11 attacks, and the occupation of Afghanistan and the overthrowing of the Saddam Hussein regime in order to concentrate on the effects of the American led intervention on the Iranian transnational political vision. In conclusion, I will establish how Iranian transnational politics transformed over the years with the effect of regional and international developments.

### **3. 1. 1. New Synthesis of Ideology and Pragmatization; Successor of Khomeini: Ali Hossain Khamenei**

Changes of spiritual and political authority is significant to understand the political transformation of the Islamic Republic, so I will briefly talk about Khamenei and the changing dynamics in the Islamic Republic's political framework. Ali Hossain Khamenei is the second and current spiritual leader of the Islamic Republic. He became the supreme authority of the country shortly after the death of Khomeini. He was chosen by the Assembly of Experts on 4 June 1989. Since Khamenei was not a *marja'* at the time, which the Iranian constitution required, he was named as the temporary Supreme Leader. Later, the constitution was amended and the Assembly of Experts reconvened on 6 August 1989, to reconfirm Khamenei with 60 votes out of 64. Khamenei was not a powerful image as much as Khomeini in the minds of people. Neither was he a source of imitation nor a popular clergy as Khomeini. Khamenei lacked Khomeini's charisma and religious background and his interests were not about theology, but about managing government affairs. He was well known in the bureaucratic circles (Gheissari and Nasr 2006, 110). He faced several problems within domestic structures, so he focused on strengthening the bureaucratic and economic power within the state. He emphasized consolidating his power with institutions because he did not have the religious background to be the strong spiritual leader of

the Islamic Republic. “It would be true to the spirit of Islamic ideology, but its leaders would be more political than religious” (Gheissari and Nasr 2006, 108). He was good at bureaucracy rather than theology so he made some changes in the military and economy to handle the power. However, when one considers whether or not there was any hesitation in the transnational activities of the Islamic Republic, it can be seen that there was not much change, the Iranian Islamic Republic continued its activities like before. The important change was in the Khamenei period where the ideology of exporting the Revolution changed and national interest and pragmatic politics replaced the place of an ideology driven mechanism. The Islamic Republic continued to make ideology driven transnational politics in the following years of the Revolution but one can say that Khamenei is more pragmatic than Khomeini so he transformed Islamic Republic’s international politics in a pragmatic way over the years. Additionally, Khomeini’s period of the Islamic Republic was the years of establishment but Khamenei’s period was more bureaucratized and institutionalized. *Pasdaran* and its sub-army army of *Kudus*, which makes activities beyond the borders, adopted a more institutionalized and systematic way in its transnational politics. I will present further the Islamic Republic’s cross border activities in the following pages. Nothing changed in the Islamic Republic transnational activities, they continued, however the ideology behind politics changed, as they became more pragmatic rather than ideological. In order to show institutionalize structure of military missions of Islamic Republic, I am going into details of military missions of the Islamic Republic’s in the following pages.

### **3. 1. 2. Progress in the expansionist Military Missions of the Islamic Republic of Iran**

Alongside the Islamic Republic’s constitution, Iran has had several military missions to consolidate its transnational power. Iran has several institutional armies, which have a duty to defend the country outside and functions to provide training for some groups in case of necessity. Some of the armies are used under the authorization of the ministries so they are used under the coverage of diplomacy. The Islamic Republic has proxies in some countries as well, Iran refrained to intervene in the domestic affairs of other states as an Islamic Republic, but it indirectly intervenes in the domestic affairs of other countries through its proxies. These institutional military structures best serve the transnational ambitions of the Islamic Republic, as if the ideology behind the creation of constitution is more or less the same with the idea behind the establishment

of the military mission of the country. The permanence of Iranian transnational politics may not be understood without knowing the military missions of the Islamic Republic. To illustrate, I have placed a table presenting the quantity, quality and functions of military missions of the Islamic Republic.

Table 3.1 Iranian Military Power

<p><b><i>Pasdaran</i></b> <b>(Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps)</b></p>	<p>A clerical analogue to the country’s standing armed forces, and the Islamic Republic’s principal ideological weapon. The <i>Pasdaran</i> serves as the guardian of the regime’s ballistic missile and weapons of mass destruction programs, and shock troops of the Islamic Revolution abroad. It carries out training of terrorist organizations and assists radical groups throughout the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and Asia via specialized paramilitary units, the most notorious of which is the feared Qods Force.</p>
<p><b>Ministry of Intelligence and security (MOIS)</b></p>	<p>Iran’s main intelligence agency, controlled directly by supreme leader Ali Khamenei. The MOIS is used domestically by Iran’s ruling clergy to quash opposition and carry out espionage against suspect member of the Iranian government. It also plays a key role in planning, supporting, and carrying out terrorist operations on foreign soil, using Iranian embassies and diplomatic missions as cover.</p>
<p><b>Ministry of Foreign Affairs</b></p>	<p>One of the main enablers of the Iranian regime’s in international terrorist presence. Agents of the <i>Pasdaran</i> and MOIS often operates out of Iranian mission abroad, where they are stained under diplomatic cover, complete with blanket diplomatic immunity. These agents –and through them Iranian foreign proxies –use the Ministry’s auspices to untraceably obtain financing, weapons, and intelligence from Tehran.</p>
<p><b>Ministry of Culture and Guidance</b></p>	<p>Facilities <i>Pasdaran</i> infiltration of – and terrorist recruitment within – local Muslim populations in foreign nations via diplomatic missions and free-standing cultural centers. The ministry is particularly influential in majority Muslim Countries, including many if the former Soviet Republic. Between 1982 and</p>



Table 3.1 - Continued

	1992, the official in charge of the Ministry – and of its role in support Iranian terror abroad – was Mohammed Khatami, Iran’s future “reformist” president.
<b><i>Basij</i></b>	The Iranian regime’s premier tool of domestic terror. The <i>Basij</i> is used by the ayatollah to quell domestic anti-regime protests and eradicate “un-Islamic” behavior. The <i>Basij</i> also plays an important supporting role in Iran’s state sponsorship of terror, training militants from groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas for guerrilla warfare.
<b><i>Guruh-i Fishar</i></b>	Internal vigilante or “pressure” group harnessed by Iranian government. Though officially independent, these domestic paramilitaries actually operate under the patronage of government officials, the <i>Pasdaran</i> or the MOIS, targeting internal opposition to the clerical regime.
<b><i>Bonyads</i></b>	Massive cartels overseen by Iran’s Supreme Leader. The <i>Bonyads</i> serve as financial conduits for the Islamic Republic’s terrorist cause of choice. The sums controlled by these organs are enormous, accounting for between 10 and 20 percent of Iranian national GDP. While many of their functions are legitimate, they are also used by Iran’s ayatollahs to funnel money to their pet causes, from funding domestic repression to arming terrorists abroad.
<b><i>Proxies</i></b>	As Iran’s role in international terrorism has grown more sophisticated, it has increasingly relied on terrorists proxies to promote its radical agenda. The Islamic Republic today helps to sustain an array of militant surrogates, ranging in ideology from the radical Islamist to the secular nationalist.

Source: Berman, Ilan. 2005. *Tehran Rising*. 18

Table 3.1 shows, the Iranian military missions inside and outside the country. There are eight military missions in Iran. The first one is *Pasdaran* (Islamic Revolutionary Corps), it is an ideological weapon of the Islamic Republic, and it has several duties. First, the *Pasdaran* is responsible for protecting the regime’s ballistic missiles and

weapons. Second, *Pasdaran* is the army that basically serves the transnational purposes. Third, it is used for the training of terrorist organizations, and it assists radical groups throughout the Middle East, Europe and Asia. It is as a proxy training machine to maintain the expansionist activities of the country as well. It was designated to intervene in issues, which take place outside the Islamic Republic and it is one of the best functional armies of the Islamic Republic to achieve its cross border agenda. The second is the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), it generally works with *Pasdaran*, and it carries out terrorist operations outside the country. But the difference is that MOIS uses diplomatic missions as cover for its activities. It also makes deals with the intelligences of other countries; in other words, it may be an intelligence provider for any other state with the permission of the Islamic Republic. The third is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It covers the act of *Pasdaran* and MOIS in a diplomatic manner, and it provides weapons, intelligence, and money to the Iranian missions abroad. Basically, it is part of the Iranian institution, which feeds the transnational cells with monetary and logistic aid under the coverage of diplomacy. The fourth is the Ministry of Culture and Guidance, it has strategic functions, and it finds cultural settings to the infiltration of *Pasdaran* into Islamic groups outside of the Islamic Republic. It has several centers where the local Muslims especially Shia population lives. Then, it creates an environment to establish networks for the *Pasdaran*. It can be perceived as a soft power when the Islamic Republic needs a network where it creates a situation for the settlement of *Pasdaran* into a local settings. *Basij* is the fifth, it is used against anti-regime protests, and its mission is to eradicate the “un-Islamic” behavior in the country. It specifically focuses on the domestic affairs of the state. *Guruh-i Fishar* is the sixth, it is a pressure group and it intervenes in domestic affairs. It functions more or less in the same manner with the *Basij*. Moreover, the *Pasdaran* never consumes its energy with domestic affairs, but uses its energy for the transnational purposes of the Islamic Republic. *Bonyads* is the seventh military mission. It is used to finance of the armed Islamic cross border groups. The Proxies are the last ones, and the Iranian radical agenda excessively relies on radical Islamist groups abroad. When the Islamic Republic refrains from intervening in domestic affairs of a state as the Islamic Republic, it uses its proxies to intervene and implement its policy. Hezbollah is one of the proxy movements, which Iran used to promote its radical agenda especially in Lebanon. Hezbollah is responsible for propaganda, assassinations, and threats of individuals for the sake of the Islamic

Republic, it began with the “demonstration effect” of opposition among the Shia populations in Kuwait, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia. Iran continues its actions with the idea of overthrowing the *status quo* power in the Gulf States and conducted a proxy war in Lebanon (Maloney 2002, 104). As a result, all of these missions of the Islamic Republic serve almost for the same purpose, only two of them are used in domestic affairs but six of them are used outside the country. The main purpose to establish military missions is to achieve security threats through transnational activities; Iran tries to expand its networks through its military missions as much as it can.

### **3. 2. The Power of Hard-Liners and The Reformist Presidents Limited “Reforms”**

#### **3. 2. 1. The President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani Period**

When Ali Hossain Khamenei became the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic after the death of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani filled the president’s seat, which was left by Khamenei. During the Iran–Iraq War, Rafsanjani was the commander of the Iranian military. He was elected chairman of the Iranian parliament in 1980 until 1989. Lastly, Hashemi Rafsanjani became the president on August 3 1989 until 1997. Although he was very active in revolutionary Iran and he was one of the successors of Khomeini, he did not put emphasis on religious values, he gave importance more on economy during his presidency. With the termination of the Iran-Iraq war, Iran’s economy boomed. The eight-year conflict damaged the Islamic Republic’s economy as a result, there was need for focusing more on the economic and domestic problems rather than the idea of exporting the revolution. After the war, Iran transformed its politics into a more economically integrated state and less isolated. It was one of the most significant periods for state building in post-revolutionary Iran. Hashemi Rafsanjani created his first cabinet; “the cabinet of reconstruction” and the members mostly were technocrats who had studied in the West. His second cabinet in 1993 was composed of nine engineers and eight Ph.Ds. Hashemi Rafsanjani’s main aim was to have a better economy so he reopened Tehran’s stock market in 1989 and worked on the legal framework for privatization in the First-Five-Year Development (Arjomand 2009, 56-57). Nevertheless, these developments could not protect him, Hashemi Rafsanjani lacked majority support because the many thought he drifted from the revolutionary ideology of the Islamic Republic and considered the economy his first priority. The radicals were the majority in the *Majlis*

(Parliament), and they pushed Rafsanjani into a conservative camp. Rafsanjani was forced to rely on his alliance with Khamenei. Although he tried to be at the center, the hardliner of the Islamic Republic did not permit him to be at the middle, they forced and pushed him towards the conservative side, which was what they wanted.

The goal of the Rafsanjani regime's development was tied to state building, and the developments sought to address socio-economic demands, but also reproduced the aim of the revolution and its promise: it would achieve "true" process rather than the Islamization of the society. Economic reforms strengthened the private sector and the middle class and expanded their sphere for them to grow. Therefore, this process was the period in which fundamental changes were experienced in the character of the Iranian society (Gheissari and Nasr 2006, 106). Between 1989 and 1997, the regime tried to resolve structural problems because the state had a dual system; there were pre-existing state structures and revolutionary institutions that created conflict for the Islamic Republic. "Motto of the government in the 1980s was 'we want the ideologically committed, not specialists,' in the 1990s it was "we want specialists who are also ideologically committed." (Gheissari and Nasr 2006, 114). Many academics that had been expelled from universities, returned to conduct research, planning and policymaking thanks to Rafsanjani's regime. Rafsanjani's regime strengthened the higher education to increase the quality of education, which began deemphasizing ideological fervor on campuses. The "Cultural Revolution" which was started by Khomeini was formally over. Rafsanjani took initiatives and he contemplated the pragmatic foreign policy. He opened the Islamic Republic to the world. The most important legacy of Rafsanjani's regime was the growth of the private sector and its implications on the country's economy. This brief explanation about Rafsanjani's term shows there was clear distinction between pragmatic politics and ideology driven politics. Rafsanjani seemed more a realist rather than ideologically blind. However, Islamic Republic had already structured itself within the system of the *velayat-e faqih* and its constitution, so presidents can only maneuver in the permitted range. Khomeini had already shaped the Islamic Republic under his doctrine, and neither the president nor prime ministers could make any difference in the politics; they may only change few things as did Hashemi Rafsanjani, which constitutionally permitted.

### **3. 2. 2. The President Mohammad Khatami Period**

Mohammad Khatami served as the fifth President of Iran from 2 August 1997 to 3 August 2005. He took the presidential position after Rafsanjani. He belonged to the revolutionary elites and he was a reformist leader. The Khatami period has two divergent trends: one centered at the president who promised the democratization and promotion for civil society, and the second centered at the Supreme Leader who sought to consolidate authoritarianism (Arjomand 2009, 91). Khatami won the elections with 70% of votes, which showed people's enthusiasm for reform. It is clearly seen Rafsanjani's term brought fundamental social changes through economic developments, which later became an impulse for choosing a reformist leader in the country (Gheissari and Nasr 2006, 128-129). Khatami was a moderate cleric who sought to create a base for reformists inside the regime, civil society institutions and institutions in private sector. Khatami's campaign was structured to create a bridge between reformists inside the regime, and his ideal was creating the "Islamic civil society". After Khatami's election, the Islamic Republic improved its relations with the European Union and Saudi Arabia. Foreign investments returned to Iran and some European companies came as foreign investors. In interviews with the international media, Khatami gave the message of "dialogue among civilizations" by advocating relations and cultural exchanges with the United States (Gheissari and Nasr 2006, 132-134). At the time, the media was enjoying the freedom of press, people were enjoying the freedom of expression and social life was relatively relaxed. However, this did not last long because the conservatives saw this as a break from Islamic principles of the Islamic Republic.

Mohammad Khatami gave more importance to civil society and rule of law, which were seen contradictory to the Islamic government by radical conservatives. Khatami showed determination in promoting civil society, the basic aspects of the rule of law and democracy. He insisted on having arrested some officials in the Ministry of Information for the murders of writers and liberal politicians, however, he faced the opposition of some conservative Ayatollahs who later issued fatwas (injunctions) and justified the killings (Arjomand 2009, 93-94). While Khatami tried to achieve the promotion of the rule of law, civil society and democratization, Ayatollah Khamenei's decided to suppress the reform movements and block any other restructuring of the Khatami's regime. The Guardian Council assumed political control is necessary for

the maintenance of the system so President Khatami and his supporters could not find the courage to continue efforts (Arjomand 2009, 101-102). There were contradictions between two heterogeneous principles of the Constitution of 1979, namely, the theocratic government and participatory representative government. The Iranian Islamic Republic's system is very complicated to understand and there are always contradictions among institutions and confrontation between the leader, or clerical monarch, and the president (Arjomand 2009, 110). As a result of Khatami's democratization efforts, the conservative leaders quickly took action to protect the traditional power from reformist influence. The conservatives also worked to strengthen the ideological underpinnings of the Islamic Republic against the reform initiatives (Gheissari and Nasr 2006, 137). The final popular defeat of the reformist movement came in the presidential election on June 2005, finally, a hardliner; Mahmud Ahmadinejad became the new president of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

### **3. 3. The Effect of Regional Developments to Transnational Vision of the Islamic Republic**

#### **3. 3. 1. Shia Revival in the Region**

The Islamic Republic wished to achieve transnational aims through using kinship. "The marriage between Imam Hussein and the daughter of the last Sassanid king-who was also, of course, the mother of the fourth Shia *Imam*-symbolizes the marriage between Iran and Shi'ism" (Nasr 2007, 63). Iran both sees itself as a guardian of Islam and as father of Shia Islam. Khomeini used the emotional and imaginary powers of the Shia, he made Islamic fundamentalism a political force in order to change Muslim politics from Morocco to Malaysia. (Nasr 2007, 121). For Example, the Akhbaris (Shia origin community) in Bahrain were dissatisfied by the weak position of the *ulama and the ulama* became stronger with the effect of Islamic Revolution in Iran (Nasr 2007, 69). The Akhbaris are a denomination under the Twelver Shia who reject *marja'* (source of imitation). Nevertheless, the Iranian Revolution attracted the attention of Bahraini Akhbaris, which would later have a relationship with the Islamic Republic. During decades after the Islamic Revolution, Shia politics and Shia communities got into motion in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Iraq, and Lebanon. Shias began not to support Arab nationalism and leftist ideologies, and they became politicized and became part of the Shia political action. The Iranian Islamic Republic supported them in order to achieve the Islamic Republic's specific agenda

for the region's Shias. For example, "Amal movement of Musa al-Sadr in Lebanon, al-Da'wa (the Islamic call) in Iraq, Hizb-e Wahdat (Party of Unity) in Afghanistan, Tahrik-e Jafaria (Shia Movement) in Pakistan, al-Wefaq (the Accord) in Bahrain, and the Saudi Hezbollah and Islamic Reform Movement (al-Haraka al-Islahiya al-Islamiya) in Saudi Arabia" (Nasr 2007, 139). First, the Amal movement was a Lebanese political party associated with Lebanon's Shia community by Musa al-Sadr in 1974. It is marked the beginning of the rising militant Shia Islam in Lebanon, which has close ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran (Deeb 1988, 683). Second, the Al Dawa began as a revivalist Shiite movement in Najaf, Iraq, in 1957, founded by Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr. The early goal of the movement was opposing the rise of secularism in Iraq, but later the main aim of the movement evolved in the 1970s and became building an Islamic Republic in Iraq (Tristram 2014). Third, the Hizb-e Wahdat, the Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan is an important political and military player since it was founded in 1988. Hizb-e Wahdat is rooted in the period of the anti-Soviet resistance movements in Afghanistan in the 1980s and it is composed of Hazara nationalists who are from a Persian speaking community, mainly living in central Afghanistan (Emadi 2007, 378). Tehrik-e-Jafria, the Movement of Followers of Shia was founded in 1979. Allama Arif Hussain al-Hussaini who was the leader of the movement and a student of Ayatollah Khomeini (BBC, 2002). Al-Wefaq is a Shia political community in Bahrain, is still very active in Bahrain politics today (Dunne 2010). Saudi Hezbollah is a Shi'a organization founded in 1987 in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province. It undertakes assassinations and bombings in Saudi Arabia who backed by the Islamic Republic (Jones 2009, 6). The Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia (MIRA) was established in 1996 and it continued to claim it would overthrow the monarchy by using force (U.S. Department of State, 2006).

There were demonstrations, riots and violent clashes by Shias in the Middle East. The Shias were politicized and Shia involvement in politics decreased extremely after the Islamic Revolution in Iran. E.g. there was a failed coup attempt in Bahrain in 1981, terrorists plotted in Kuwait in 1983 and 1984 (Nasr 2007, 139). Hezbollah's success in Lebanon brought Iran's influence to the country, and this created a basis for an alliance, which includes Syria and Hezbollah. Iran emerged as a prevailing regional power, and it formed close ties with the other pillars of Shia revival. Iran had and still has economic and political ties with the political forces in Lebanon, Iraq and the

influential Shia communities in the Persian Gulf whose members are Iranian in origin (Nasr 2007, 212). The cultural dynamism of the countries can be defined as Shia revival, and in many regards Iran presents itself as the modern face of Islam. Additionally, Saudi Arabia worried about the rise of Shia Islam as a Sunni state. After the Iran-Iraq war, Saudi Arabia stood behind and financed Saddam Hussein in order to eliminate Iran's ideological movements and status in the region. Saudi Arabia presents itself as a representative of Sunni Islam in the Middle East so the unhindered reign of the Islamic Republic in the region is perceived as a threat by Saudi Arabia.

The revival of Shi'ism began in the 1960s, it is a variant of political Islam as a whole. Shias were a suppressed minority in the region, but they suddenly saw the era of emancipation through support from the strong Shia authorities, which were supported by the Islamic Republic. Shias were the overwhelming majority in the Gulf States in addition to Iraq and Iran. "In Bahrain, they formed 60 to 70 per cent of the population, and elsewhere sizeable minorities: 42 per cent in Yemen, 35 per cent in Kuwait, 15 per cent in the United Arab Emirates and 11 per cent in Saudi Arabia" (Pelham 2008, 204). The Shias had an undeniable population in the Gulf; therefore, their voice could be stronger in comparison to other minorities in the region. Unlike Sunni Islam, Shia Islam had a strong component of clerical leadership since the beginning, which was the prominent role, played by *ulama* in guiding the community. Political marginalization, government restraints on religious freedom, erosion of the autonomy, financial dependence of religious institutions and etc. are the reasons, which rooted the Shia revival in the region. Additionally, the legitimacy of activism is sourced on the Qur'an and sayings of the Prophet and Imams that encouraged the Shias to revolt against unjust and ungodly rulers (Fuller and Francke 1999, 27). The Iranian Revolution did not reveal a Shia revival, but it backed and provided a focus point for Shia identity, which was already in formation. The Shia identity is a political experience, social isolation, cultural heritage and communal grievance against injustice and political and religious marginalization (Fuller and Francke 1999, 31). E.g. in Bahrain, the regime to some extent succeeded to isolate the Shias but the Shia community hoped to convince the Sunnis that reform is in the interest of both communities. In Saudi Arabia, there is opposition but because of the policies of the House of al-Saud, the opposition could not become a popular movement. In Kuwait, Shias have equal standards as much as Sunnis to a major extent so Kuwait is the only



country where Shias have fully integrated the system of the state (Fuller and Francke 1999, 65). The Islamic Republic of Iran as a Shia majority state tried to have connections with Arab Shias in the region. Iran had established ties with several Shi'ite groups especially those who accepted Iran's ideological vision. The Islamic Republic provided refuge for thousands of Iraqi Shias, and it gave support to Shia groups especially to the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution and the al-Da'wa party in Iraq. If anyone wished to get religious education, s/he would go to Iran, which is almost a must for Shias. This is why, Iran made effort to make the Qum a prior religious educational authority for Shias. Thousands of students go to Iran especially to Qom to get religious education, Shia students from Bahrain, Lebanon, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia spend several years at the theology schools in Iran. These students not only receive theological education but also an entire political outlook. Educational activities of the Islamic Republic best serve transnational aims, if Qum is accepted as a religious authority among the Shia communities; Iran becomes the prominent and unrivalled leader country for Shia learning.

The Iranian diplomatic mission has a communication network with the Shia communities abroad and each Ayatollahs has its own representative (Fuller and Francke 1999, 80-81). It can be easily seen that Iran tried to have networks within the Shia community all over the region. The impulse behind the Iranian transnational politics is creating political unification of the *ummah* under the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Islamic Republic used educational channels to feed its ultimate aim, it gives not only a theological education, and it indoctrinates Shias who come to Qom for religious education as well. According to Barzegar, Iranian transnational politics is about the geopolitical dynamics rather than ideology and Iran follows a defensive policy for its national security rather than ideology (Barzegar 2008, 95-97). Iranian transnational activities as a security strengthening effect, it is the undeniable truth to say that the geopolitical dynamics play a significant role in the Islamic Republic's achievement. The Islamic Republic's prior concern is security, and it tries to have a secure environment as well as to create new alliances. Besides this, the Islamic Republic of Iran improves its networks permanently for future footprints. The Islamic Republic's politics can be perceived as defensive in the short term but it is clearly seen that the Iranian Islamic Republic has strategic calculations in every step

of its political actions to reach the ultimate purpose of the Islamic Republic, which is starting from “resistance axis” to “Shia crescent”.

### **3. 3. 2. The Gulf War (1990-91) and The Islamic Republic’s Transnational Vision**

The Gulf War was one of the most significant events in the Middle East, which changed the order of the region. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was a great mistake for Iraq, it brought upon the American intervention into the war. The Islamic Republic’s officials neither stood against the American military establishment in Iraq, nor supported the Saddam regime, they preferred to keep quiet. Islamic Republic officials did not say anything about the UN military coalition efforts against Iraq (Gause 2010, 107). America enacted a series of military bases in the Arabian Peninsula and these changes were very important for the regional role of the Islamic Republic in the 1990s. Interesting changes in the world oil market affected Iran’s regional power as well. The Gulf War was seen as an opportunity for the Islamic Republic in order to fulfill its transnational goals in the Gulf. “The Iranian backed Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq quickly sent its forces and sympathizers across the border into Basra and other Iraqi cities, bearing portraits of Ayatollah Khomeini and the SCIRI, Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim” (Gause 2010, 115). The Islamic Republic of Iran first began to intervene in Iraqi issues through networks, which were already established after the Islamic Revolution. In Najaf, Ayatollah al-Qasim al-Khoei who was a Shia leader in Iraq, built up a committee to govern the city (Gause 2010, 115). The Islamic Republic carried out quite successful politics during the upheaval among the Gulf especially among the Shia. The Islamic Republic professionally increased its sphere of influence and continued to expansion in the region. The American Secretary of State James Baker wrote in his memoirs, “Just as fears of Iranian expansionism helped shape US pre-war policy toward Iraq, this same phobia was a significant factor in our post-war decision-making” (Gause 2010, 118). The Islamic Republic’s transnational politics shaped American policy in the region as well. The Islamic Republic’s influence in the region created a phobia for the America, Iran and its transnational vision was seen as threat not only for the United States of America but also for the regional powers in the Middle East. “The American military build-up in the Gulf was as much about countering Iran as it was about containing Saddam’s Iraq” (Gause 2010, 129). The Islamic Republic tried to integrate itself into Iraqi structures

to affect the Iraqi Shias. Washington's unwitting assistance to Iranian ambition provided a great sphere of influence for the Islamic Republic in the region. It benefited much from the defeat of Saddam during the Gulf War compared to other regional powers. Iraq was weakened, and as a result, the Islamic Republic emerged as the most powerful state in the region. However, the Islamic Republic played its role in a cautious manner because it still was covering losses from the Iran-Iraq War. It did not emphasize the imperative of spreading the revolution in its relationship with monarchical neighbors but this does not mean the Islamic Republic abandoned its missionary activities. Iran continued to support Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine and the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. It continued to preserve its anti-Israeli stance as well. The Islamic Republic's overall position during the Gulf War is very different from that of the 1980s, it tried to be a normal player in the power game rather than a revolutionary challenger of the *status quo* (Gause 2010, 130). The Islamic Republic became a *status quo* oriented power in order to protect its national interests and avoid security threat in the changing regional dynamics.

The Islamic Republic improved its relations with the Gulf monarchies, such as, Kuwait, which viewed the Islamic Republic as a counterbalance to Iraq. Moreover, the Islamic Republic restored its relations with Saudi Arabia and it reproached the relations with America. Khatami's election victory in May 1997 was seen as a real breakdown for Iranian revolutionary politics because the Islamic conference organization in Tehran in December 1997 was the first time a Saudi ruler came to the Iranian capital and Khatami made some positive comments about the Americans where he said "the great American people" for the first time after the Revolution (Gause 2010, 130). This may seem as irrelevant detail but on the contrary it is vital and momentous regarding the Islamic Republic. These developments both show Iran performed different politics compared to its revolutionary past, but of course it performs a sustainable politics to protect national interests. The important nuance is that the Islamic Republic used different tools to secure itself first and fulfill its goals. When the Islamic Republic obtained the regional power, it not only expanded its power in the region but also it extended its relations with other states. Besides this, Iran was deeply embroiled in the Balkans, it presented itself as a major power in the region. It expanded its assistance beyond simple arms supplies to the training of Bosnian Muslims. It placed its intelligence operatives and agents of the *Pasdaran* into the

region in 1991 (Berman 2005, 13-14). In 1997 the Islamic Republic not only mounted extensive operations in Bosnia but also infiltrated the American program to train the Bosnian army (Mike 1997, 1). Moreover, in Latin America, the Islamic Republic supported Hezbollah. And through the help of Iran, the Lebanese militia established networks with Shia Muslim communities in Venezuela and Columbia in the 1990s. Additionally in March 1992, Hezbollah carried out a bomb attack to Israel's embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina and two years later Argentina and Israel's mutual association was bombed. This attack was denied by the Islamic Republic, but it was later proven that it was the actor behind the incident (Timmerman 2003, 28). North Africa was another important place for Iranian transnational networks, with the help of Saddam's defeat, the Islamic Republic tightened its military and political ties with Sudan. In 1991, there was a meeting with Rafsanjani and Sudanese counterpart, Hasan al-Bashir, where Rafsanjani committed the *Pasdaran* to hosting violent Islamic groups, located in the North African State. In the following years, Sudan became one of the main Iranian training bases and the Islamic Republic linked terrorist outfits including the Abu Nidal Organization, and the Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA) (Berman 2005, 15). A similar effort was made in Algeria, the Islamic Republic provided financial support for the Islamic Salvation front (FIS) which took power in parliamentary election in 1991, Algeria (Berman 2005, 15). The Islamic Republic expanded its relations with the countries out of the region and it expanded its sphere of influence as well.

The Islamic Republic of Iran had relationships with two oppositional Sunni Islamic groups in Egypt, the Islamic *Jihad* and *Gama'a Islamiyya*. The Egyptian Islamic Jihad group has been active since the late 1970s. The organization's original primary goal was to overthrow the Egyptian Government and replace it with an Islamic state. Later it broadened its aims to include attacking the United States and Israeli interests in Egypt and abroad. *Gama'a Islamiyya* in Egypt shares much in common with groups that have ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, and both movements have followed a similar trajectory. It is Pakistani based and one of the most influential Sunni movements (Mandaville 2010, 5). At the same time, the Islamic Republic tried to expand its influence further south. In 1994, Rafsanjani met with the Tanzanian premier John Malecela, and he committed the Islamic Republic to help the eradication of colonialism in Africa. During the fall of 1996, he made a six-country diplomatic tour

as well, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Sudan, Uganda, and Kenya. They made cooperation pacts and *Pasdaran* wasted no time in organizing training and mobilization for the region's Islamic movements. The Islamic Republic of Iran accommodated the situation for Hamas and Hezbollah and they broadened their local influence (Berman 2005, 16). Hezbollah remained the Islamic Republic's principal proxy far more than two decades. American officials estimated that the Islamic Republic provided approximately \$100 million annually for Hezbollah in order to continue the relationship and coordinate the Islamic Republic's contact with Shia militia in Lebanon (Risen 2001).

The Islamic Republic was very active in the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, and it supported Hamas in Palestine and its assistance played an important role in establishing a coalition. Since mid-2001, Hamas, Hezbollah, the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine (PIJ), the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, and other *Fatah* factions coordinated, shared weapons, intelligence and carried out joint operations despite their different political agendas (Levitt 2002, 64-66). The Islamic Republic moved towards Armenia as a principal ally in Caucasus on an array of issues ranging from counterterrorism to military exchanges. The Islamic Republic's effort was to derail the close relations between Armenia and the America (Berman 2005, 89). The Islamic Republic was very active in the following years of the death of Khomeini. It has numerous networks in the Balkans, Asia, Middle East, and Africa, the underlying reason of the Islamic Republic efforts is to protect itself from security threat. The ultimate aim is to establish the Islamic Republic where Muslim lives and create a single community under the control and advisory of the Iranian Islamic Republic.

### **3. 3. 3. The September 11 Incident and the American Intervention into the Region**

Al-Qaeda attacked the twin towers in New York, United States of America, and the incident was called the 9/11 attack. Events in 2001 changed the existing regional order since the break out of the Gulf War. The immediate response of the American administration against the September 11 attacks was attacking Afghanistan. United States of America attacked Afghanistan because Al-Qaeda's leader; Osama Bin Laden, lived in Afghanistan and Bin Laden had good relationship with the Taliban regime. The Taliban regime was an ally of Saudi Arabia and al-Qaeda. However, while the United States was fighting in Afghanistan, United States focused on Iraq as well

because of the strategic interest in the region. Shortly after the invasion of Afghanistan, America invaded Iraq on March 20, 2003. The coalition's mission was "to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, to end Saddam Hussein's support for terrorism, and to free the Iraqi people" (Bush 2003). The American war in Iraq was a success if one considers it as the overthrowing of Saddam Hussein's regime. However, this campaign did not secure the country and the United State of America unconsciously helped the Islamic Republic of Iran's reign in the region once again. One of the Shia Ayatollah's; Muqtada al-Sadr whose father was killed by the Saddam regime, operated deeply in underground networks. After the American intervention, he emerged as a major figure in Shia politics (Gause 2010, 161). After the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime the oppressed groups such as the Kurds and Shias came together. The feelings of "common hatred" and a "common enemy" were the main impulses behind the formation of common goals. The major Shia groups such as SCIRI, the Sadrists, the Da'wa Party (the oldest opposition Shia group) ran as the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA). Kurds such as Masoud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) ignored their rivalry and established a single Kurdish alliance. During the Iraqi election, the Shia took 51% of the popular vote and 140 of the 275 seats in the Constituent Assembly (Gause 2010, 162). Post 9/11, the Taliban and Saddam were down which freed Iran to expand its regional influence. The Taliban was an ally of Saudi Arabia and Saddam was the rival of the Islamic Republic in the region. The removal of these two powerful rivals of the Iranian Islamic Republic was an opportunity to move freely in the region.

Post war turmoil in Afghanistan encouraged the Islamic Republic to spread its radical message and anti-American propaganda via new radio broad casting and media outlets both in the former Soviet Republic in Tajikistan and along the Iranian-Afghan border (Berman 2005, 65). The Islamic Republic did not spend much time and looked forward to establish new networks in the region. It formed a relationship with Ismail Khan who was governor of the western Herat province in Afghanistan. The Islamic Republic provided clothing and equipment for Khan Militias and *Pasdaran* reinforcement started in 2001 (Samii 2002). The Islamic Republic not only gave military and monetary aid to Afghanistan, but it also designed "social programs" to win Afghan hearts and minds (Berman 2005, 66). The Islamic Republic extended its relations with Russia, and this relationship was clearly seen by the fact that Russian officials left the

America alone on its “global war on terror” and they rejected Bush’s view that the Islamic Republic of Iran is an “axis of evil”. Afterwards, the Islamic Republic and Russia formalized a new agreement on an atomic cooperation (Berman 2005, 68). Similarly, China reformed its relations with the Islamic Republic. Khatami visited Beijing in June 2002 and these two countries expanded a “strategic partnership”. In addition to this strategic partnership, the Islamic Republic guaranteed a deeper missile relationship with the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The Islamic Republic developed its relations with North Korea as well; it advanced stages of negotiations regarding North Korean intercontinental missiles’ export to the Islamic Republic of Iran (Berman 2005, 69).

The new regional order and Shia revival in the region affected the Islamic Republic’s regional dreams positively. The Islamic Republic first aim was to secure its regime and sovereignty. The second aim was becoming a “great power” since the Revolution, and it redesigned its politics according to regional dynamic. A quasi-independent region order in Iraq was seen as a step towards the partition of Iraq, and the creation of a Shia state under the supervision of the Islamic Republic (Gause 2010, 172). This in return caught up with the nuclear ambitions of the Islamic Republic, which aimed to protect the regional and international role of the Islamic Republic. Nuclear power was very important for the Islamic Republic, even if it may help the balance of power to its own advantage. Nuclear power was an instrument for the Islamic Republic to achieve post-2001 strategic plans in the region; the Iranian nuclear power would mean security of the state and Shia power in the region. It would help in the long run as well through protecting Iran’s larger footprints (Nasr 2007, 223). The Islamic Republic’s nuclear power capability may be a challenge against Israel interests in the region, this was one of the main impulses behind the nuclear ambitions of the Islamic Republic as well. Additionally, the reason behind America’s sanctions on Iran regarding nuclear proliferations was because it oversees the growing the Islamic Republic’s power and sphere of influence in the region as a considerable threat.

The Islamic Republic focused on taking advantage of the political vacuum that emerged after Saddam Husain was overthrown in late 2003. The Shias in Iraq were aware of the main strategy of the Ba’athist regime, retaining power for the Sunni elites by undermining the national credentials of the Shia majority (Nakash 2006, 92). The Islamic Republic’s intelligence agents and *Pasdaran* operatives were infiltrated into

post-war Iraq. Following, the Islamic Republic supported the Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr's al-Mahdi army. The Iranian Islamic Republic provided financial support for semi-autonomous armed militia of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (SCIRI) as well. The Islamic Republic not only provided support for the Islamic groups in Iraq, but it also financed the Iraqi media patrons to win Iraqi's hearts and minds. There were almost forty Iranian-supported or directed broadcast media outlets in Iraq. The Islamic Republic gave guerrilla warfare, explosives, and military devices to hundreds of young Iraqi radicals in the training camp, who were deployed to the Iran-Iraq border. Hezbollah and Hamas established an extensive presence on the Iraqi territory, even Hezbollah was infiltrated successfully in the Shiite militia. Hezbollah and Hamas mobilized the terrorist surrogates to take benefit from the political vacuum. The Islamic Republic used a sectarian discourse to promote sectarian differences in Iraq, especially it supported Iraq's Turkoman Shias in their struggle against the country's powerful Kurdish minority (Berman 2005, 75-78). "The Iranian presidential election of 2005 also brought to power a leadership that is more keenly aware of the Shia-Sunni divide" (Nasr 2007, 225).

The Islamic Republic's sectarian politics began after Khomeini and continued with Ahmadinejad. It provided military training and intelligence, and tried to pose sectarian differences to benefit from the conflict in Iraq. Moreover, the Islamic Republic used its soft power in post-Saddam Iraq. Some of the senior denizen of the Qom and teachers returned to Iraq to rebuild the Islamic Republic's presence. The Iraqi Shia exiles that escaped from the repression of Saddam in the 1980s and 1990s returned to Iraqi political life with great Iranian influence on them. The Islamic Republic channeled its spending on schools, clinics and social works via Iraqi exiles. These people represented the Islamic Republic's influence and strengthened ties between the two countries (Nasr 2007, 224). The Islamic Republic intensively used its soft power in Iraq as well; it tried to affect the Shia community in Iraq through social services, spending on schools, clinics and charity organizations. As a result, Iraq was described as an Iranian satellite (Louer 2008, 244). Iraq is a very important case in understanding that the Islamic Republic saw a political vacuum, and it did not waste time and immediately used its military mission to consolidate its presence. The Islamic Republic made effort to create conflict when it served its interests. The Iranian government portrayed themselves as followers of the "Khomeini's line" but they were quite



ignorant about the Khomeini led movement because Khomeini always advocated revolutionary change in his life time, he never advocated the reification of the *status quo* (Moghaddam 2008, 159). Iran performed as a pragmatist power, which was integrated itself completely to the existing *status quo* to secure the country and achieve the transnational ambitions of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

### **3. 4. The “Resistance Axis” or “Shia Crescent?”**

The Islamic Republic of Iran began to support the status quo and integrated itself with the Arab neighbors. In the 1990s although, Iran seemed to follow sectarian politics, it had a strong relationship with some Sunni movements as well. Iran actively supported such Sunni Islamic groups, the FIS in Algeria, the National Islamic Movement in Sudan, Hamas and Islamic *Jihad* in Palestine, the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, the Al-Nahda Party in Tunisia, and the *Jihadi* group in Egypt. Support was given as well to the Islamic Moro movement in the Philippines in 1980 by the Iranian Islamic Republic. The Islamic Republic backed to Bosnian Muslims in the 1990s, which were a part of the Islamic Republic’s strategic political action (Ehteshami and Hinnebusch 1997, 30). Basically, the Islamic Republic tried to portray itself as a supporter of all dominations of Islamic movements. The Islamic Republic both tried to have economic integration and security networks throughout the region. It transmuted its politics into a pragmatist manner, and it used its networks in several regions as a double edged sword, in other words the Islamic Republic used its networks both for regional security and a future transnational footprints. The post-revolutionary era was the outbreak of radical politics for the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khamenei (*Faqih*) and Rafsanjani (President) managed to work together to ensure integrative politics rather than marginal and radical political elements (Ehteshami and Hinnebusch 1997, 30). Changes in the geopolitical environment and world system in post-1990 revealed the importance of the economy since the end of the cold war. Therefore, the Iranian leaders needed to calculate more than one point before deciding on the strategic ambitions of the Islamic Republic. This affected also the idea behind the transnational activities, it started an ideology driven manner and continued in a pragmatic framework.

The new world order requires peripheralization (Ehteshami and Hinnebusch 1997, 37). The Iranian Islamic Republic tried to strengthen its power by developing relationships

with the central governments; Iran could emerge as a strong regional power due to strategic competition between Washington and Moscow. However, the Islamic Republic needed to create a new regional alliance in order to hold the balance of power in the region. Furthermore, as Amirahmadi notes, “As long as Iran and the Islamic movements [in the Muslim world] espouse the same ideals and radical ideology, this congruity of purpose will enhance the visibility of Iran and its strength in international politics” (Amirahmadi 1994, 118). The impulse behind the Islamic Republic is something never touched upon or questioned, it is truly spiritual, so the Islamic Republic should be visible in the international arena and the Iranian Islamic Republic’s main aims serve to maximize power and security within the region and outside. Iranian moderated activities were still radical, they were aggressive when the issue is about transnational ambitions of the state. “Iran moderated do not differ profoundly from its radicals with respect to foreign policy” (Clawson 1993, 46). Especially in the 2000s the Islamic Republic’s policy dramatically changed, which focused on expansion as much as possible. Although Iranian politics had transformed since the Revolution, its main transnational goals never changed. Iran changed its politics to strengthen its power because sustaining security is vital for the survival of the Islamic Republic. Foreign policy initiatives of the Islamic Republic are at best compromises between competing perspectives and interests. Becoming a regional power and sustaining security is not an ultimate aim of the Islamic Republic, it is a requirement to succeed in transnational goals.

The need for finding a regional ally pushed Iran to have allies, even if its objectives were quite different from those of the Islamic Republic. At the international level, it can be said that the Syrian-Iranian alliance might be rooted in a shared interest, which was to deflect the American hegemony over the region and the Syrian-Iranian alliance could be formed as a reaction to balancing the pro-Western axis including Saudi Arabia and Egypt in the Middle East at the regional level (Ehteshami and Hinnebusch 1997, 87). There are multiple and overlapping shared interests, which were the reasons behind the Syrian-Iranian alliance. During the period of the Mohammad Reza *Shah*, Israel was an ally of Iran but after the Revolution Iran adopted an anti-Zionist position. Iran saw Israel as contradictory to basic principles of the Islamic Republic. The vital strategic interests of the Syrian-Iranian alliance were “common opposition to Iraq, Israel and Western hegemony in the region, but also the elite ideology and the general

utility of the alliance in the regional power balance are additional factors broadly supportive of it” (Ehteshami and Hinnebusch 1997, 88). There were three significant headings behind the Syrian Iranian alignment in the region, anti-imperialism, and antipathy of Iraq, and need for power balancing in the region. However, the most important underlying aspect of the Syrian-Iranian alliance was the common lack of sense of security of these two states. This is a defensive alliance between Iran and Syria. Iran took a stand against the pro-Western regimes and Syria was the country, which confronted Israel and the West.

The transnational claims required the breakdown of Persian-Arab barriers so the Syrian alliance would serve this purpose. By the early 1980s, the “imperialist” forces had shared threats for both the Islamic Republic and Syria, which brought these two together. These two countries had antipathy towards the support of the United States’ Israeli forces during the Lebanon invasion in 1982, “The dramatic effectiveness of the Iranian-sponsored Islamic resistance in Lebanon... ..proved to Assad the strategic value of the Iranian alliance” (Seale 1988, 397). An element of rivalry between Iran and Syria overshadowed the alliance in Lebanon, but Syria still found the Iranian alliance important to maintain pressure on the “security zone” in the South of Lebanon (Ehteshami and Hinnebusch 1997, 90). It is simply seen that the Iranian-Syrian alliance is about the states’ security interests. There was nothing ideological but pragmatic. These two had opposing ideologies but the perception of common threat made the alliance durable. The Iran-Iraq war was another issue, which pushed the Syrian-Iranian alliance into reality and uncovered the shared animosity to Iraq. “Assad’s pro-Iranian policy grew partly out of strategic calculations regarding the balance of power with Israel, not just a personal animosity against Saddam” (Ehteshami and Hinnebusch 1997, 95). The Syrian-Iranian alliance was reciprocally based on shared interests. Each party tried to protect the national interests of states both at the regional and international level. The relations of the two countries were largely confined to the elite level and the power balancing issue was another significant issue regarding the Syrian-Iranian alignment. The advancing regional hegemony of Israel, pro-Western monarchs, and the pan-Arab order pushed Iran to find a regional alliance for the sake of the balance of power in the region. Syria was the most ideal candidate with which to align. Iran was obliged to quit its revolutionary idea of spreading the revolution in the 1990s because it needed to have allies in the region to secure itself. In short, the

Islamic Republic followed pragmatic politics through underestimating and overstating the revolutionary myth of the state until the 2000s. Additionally, there was a change in regional dynamics with the American intervention in the region, the outcome of which was the transformation of the Iranian Islamic Republic's transnational policy

American and the Islamic Republic's relations were very problematic in the 2000s. The American intervention in the Middle East created Iranian hatred towards America and American activities were perceived as threats by the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran was very cautious about each step of America in the region. Therefore, the Islamic Republic faced a great security problem although it had many networks both inside and outside the region. The Islamic Republic tried to strengthen its relations further with its neighbors. "Iran is motivated both with offensive and defensive considerations, but its aims correspond more to its ambitions than to its power" (Chubin 2006, 113). In February 2004, Iran's foreign minister, Kamal Kharrazi positioned the Islamic Republic as an alternative to the United States of America in the Persian Gulf. He added that this new regional design was to preclude Western domination in the region (Berman 2005, 71). In early 2004, the Iranian Defense Minister, Ali Shamkhani, visited Syria, and signed a "memorandum of understanding", which was a deeper defense-industrial cooperation between the two countries. The countries codified Iranian commitment to protect the Ba'athist state against a possible American and Israeli invasion. In turn, the defense minister of the Islamic Republic went to Beirut, where these two government's commitment to closer military cooperation with Beirut and Iran guaranteed the active Iranian role in Lebanon's nascent military modernization (Berman 2005, 71). This was the Islamic Republic's plan for creating a "security zone", in other words a "Tehran, Damascus and Beirut Axis". This resistance axis was established to preserve the region's old balance of power in the face of American encroachment. There were debates from the Arab and the Western world about the creation of the "Shia Crescent". In 2004 King Abdullah of Jordan issued a warning about the emergence of an ideological "Shia Crescent" from Beirut to the Persian Gulf (Barzegar 2008, 87). However, the Islamic Republic and Syria connection was seen as limited and problematic because to certain extent they were different. The core of the alliance was common security problems of these two states against Israel (Ma'oz 2007, 18). There could be nothing ideological, and there were no common grounds for an ideological purpose between the Islamic

Republic and Syria. In other words, if Syria would have found stronger and better ally other than the Iranian Islamic Republic, it may have terminated its resistance axis with Iran. It seems that the Iranian-Syrian alliance was a very sensitive case. The two countries had a durable alliance in terms of common security threats so it is clearly a “resistance axis”. But later on, the resistance axis turned a Shia crescent through the regional developments. At the beginning the Islamic Republic transnational foreign policy run by security threats but after the 2010s with regional developments, the Islamic Republic put bigger target for itself in the region. The transformation of transnational politics of the Islamic Republic from resistance axis to Shia crescent will be deeply analyzed in the next chapter.

### **3. 5. The Shift of the Islamic Republic Politics**

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was very clear about the fact that the Islamic Revolution does not only belong to Iran, he declared, “Islam [was] revealed for mankind and the Muslims...” (Moghaddam 2008, 32). According to him, an Islamic movement could not limit itself for a particular group or area, because it was “revealed for mankind”, from this point of view, Islam is for all, so limiting it for a nation or community is contradictory with the nature of Islam. Khomeini transmuted Iran into a new identity, which has its core arguments. What are the revolutionary ideologies? To be against any type of Western domination, resistance against interference on domestic affairs by America, and struggle against Zionism, these points were the basic claims of revolutionary ideologies. “The Iranian state and the Iranians themselves have a nostalgic self-perception about the role of their country in world affairs” (Moghaddam 2008, 35). One can infer the Islamic Republic believes it has a special duty in world affairs; it is “the chosen one” that has the capability to lead the world. The Islamic Revolution brought not only revolutionary domestic change but also transformation to the identity of Iran from a monarchic-nationalist *status quo* power to a revolutionary-universal people’s movement (Moghaddam 2008, 35). It positioned itself as a vanguard of the struggle for a new equitable-just world order. Although, revolutionary ideology about exporting the Islamic Revolution is not prior claim of the Post-Khomeini period of the Islamic Republic, hubristic self- perception is central in the foreign policy culture of today’s the Islamic Republic of Iran.

At the beginning, the Islamic Republic equipped itself with the transnational mandate in order to export the Revolution in the region and covert backing for “liberation movements” in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Latin America, Africa, and Palestine. The Islamic Republic was perceived as an achievement in the struggle between people and the superpowers, so the Iranian government saw itself as leader of an “oppressed nation”. Because of this perception of the Islamic Republic, the Iran-Iraq war was perceived as a battle, which was against absolute evil, it was a war for Islam, the country and honor (Moghaddam 2008, 58-65). The Iranian people defended their country in the war with Iraq with the idea of the “liberated part of the country of Islam” (Richard 1989, 33). Foreign and transnational policy propaganda is very important for the Islamic Republic because the new paradigm was established by religious values for achieving the transnational goals of the Iranian Islamic Republic. There are at least seven institutions which have the right to speak for Iranian foreign policy: “the office of the Leader, the Foreign Ministry of the office of the President, the Head of the Expediency Council, the Supreme National Security Council, the Parliament and the Strategic Council for Foreign Relations” (Moghaddam 2008, 71). Each institution has different agenda, but there is a consensus regarding the foreign policy of the country and the role of the country in the international arena. Democratization, securitization and the positioning of the Islamic Republic as a main player in the international arena is a prior aim of these seven institutions. Although, according to Rafsanjani, policies are mainly about reform at home and abroad while protecting the post-revolutionary Islamic gesture of the Islamic Republic and the projection of Iranian power both regionally and globally, in reality the politics of Iran after the death of Khomeini is far from the reformist point of view, it is basically a *status quo* and security oriented and pragmatic one.

The transformation of Iranian politics after the death of Khomeini may be basically explained with the transition from revolutionary ideas to pragmatic politics. Identity became the most important element in Iranian politics, it was even more important than religion. “The case of post-revolutionary Iran demonstrates the powerful, but paradoxical, instrumentality of identity in foreign affairs” (Maloney 2002, 90). State interests and identity became the top priority of the Iranian state with partly ignorance of religion. The Islamic Revolution was a product of a mass movement and messianic leadership to the nation’s value and norms, which were reconfigured. In turn, norms

and values impose a different role in the international order. “Iran is ‘blessed’ by ‘a strong sense of identity, notable culture and ancient civilization from which it takes inspiration’ ” (Chubin 2000, 15). This strong sense of identity defeats religion in a way and Iran began to have security and identity based politics using religion as a mere instrument. Unifying a religio-political myth strengthens the Islamic Republic both in domestic affairs and transnational politics. On the one hand, the Islamic Republic’s Islamic identity has a transnational appeal; on the other, it is constrained by its culture when it uses vocabulary about its imaginary Shi’ism and Persian ethnicity. State identity is shaped by state interests especially in a revisionist state as that of Iran (Raymond Hinnebusch 2009, 168). However, universalism cannot be explained by the nationalism in the modern era, the concept of *ummah* and the transnational relationships with Muslims reduce the effect of being a nation state. There is dramatic contradiction between the concept of universalism and the identity politics of the Islamic Republic. Iran has a binary system, which is between Persian nationalism and Shia Islam, it is a kind of *ummah* consciousness in a sectarian manner. Rejection of foreign domination is the third component of the Islamic Republic’s policy, which manifests itself as a pursuit of “true” sovereignty and authenticity (Maloney 2002, 100). It is a kind of “Grand Theory” that integrates religion, nationalism and anti-West stance into one structure and creates a conscious of the Shia *ummah*. The Islamic Republic has always had a historic self-perception of itself as a great power in the Persian Gulf. Therefore, one cannot understand the impulse behind the transnational policy of the Islamic Republic’s without considering political factors and the conditioning force of it. Supra-state identity works in regional politics of the Islamic Republic in order to sustain security. Although, there is a gap between the foreign policy behaviors of the Islamic Republic before and after Khomeini, the security oriented transnational activities are similar only the discourses and instruments of government are different.

## CHAPTER 4

### TRANSFORMATION OF THE TRANSNATIONAL POLITICS OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC AFTER REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

This chapter focuses on the regional dynamics starting from 2010 until 2015 and its effect on the Islamic Republic foreign policy. The upheavals, which were called, the “Arab Uprisings” started in the end of 2010’s in Tunisia. Public protests triggered the other states of the Middle East after a little while. These public protests created a big turmoil in the region, which opened the way to the Islamic Republic to act freely in the political vacuum of the Middle East. In the formations years of the Islamic Republic, which was, started 1979 until 1989, the Islamic Republic of Iran mainly concentrated in its security problems as a Shia state in a predominantly Sunni region. The Islamic Republic focused on transnational cells in order to secure regime survival in the first years of the Islamic Revolution. Over the years with a new Supreme leader Khamenei, the Islamic Republic institutionalized its newly founded system and created more durable transnational cells and finally created resistance axis with allies in the region. However, with the starting Arab upheavals in the late 2010s, the Islamic Republic changed its transnational claims. The Islamic Republic priority changed from security to be a leader of the Shia community in the region. Of course, the Islamic Republic had such transnational claims since its establishment, but it have not got the chance to go further as much as today. The Arab uprisings politically dominated conjecture of the Middle East and the Islamic Republic successfully managed the turmoil in the region. It became one of the most active players and created proxies in order to project its power all over the region. The security is not a priority of the Islamic republic anymore after the 2010s, because it plays a regional leadership role with its old and newly founded proxies in the region and outside of the region. In this chapter, my main aim is to analyze the transformation of the Islamic Republic foreign policy from “resistance axis” to “Shia crescent”. With the effect of the regional incidents in the Middle East, the Islamic Republic expanded its sphere of influence and created a new paradigm for its transnational foreign policy. Proxies became the main foreign policy instrument of the Islamic Republic to project its power in other region’s states, such as Syria and Iraq.



I often use the concept of transnational in order to explain expansionist and partly sectarian policy of the Islamic Republic. That is why, the concept of expansionist, imperial or sectarian did not explain my points, the term of transnationalism best fits to explain my points in my research. The Islamic Republic uses its sectarian card in order to influence the Shias in the region. The final claim of the Islamic Republic is being an authority, which will bring all Shias under the custodianship of *velayat-e faqih* in Iran. This claim is beyond nation and state, it is not expansionist, sectarian or imperial. It is about being a transnational leader of regular Shiites and Shia authorities. “Much work on transnational activism based on an underlying assumption that these individuals and groups share fundamental norms and practices” (Stroup 2011, 151). The Islamic Republic uses sectarian card in order to attract attention to the region’s Shiites because they shares same fundamental norms and practices. All transnational activities of the Islamic Republic feeding from the Shia Islam, sharing religion and norms means is something strong in that relationship. Moreover, the flow of information with new technologies helped the transnational activities of governments. According to Vertovec, “Publishing and communications technologies make possible rapid and far-reaching forms of information dissemination, publicity and feedback, mobilization of support, enhancement of public participation and political organization, and lobbying of intergovernmental organizations” (Vertovec 2010, 10). Creating transnational cells with non-state actors feeds itself with the global world instruments. Additionally, the Islamic Republic uses soft and hard power in order to have relations with the none-state actors. The Islamic Republic supports the cross border none-state actors through providing military, logistic, and financial aid. Besides these, the Islamic Republic provide educational opportunities such as exchange programs, libraries and scholarships in order to impose its ideology to the region’s Shias “The transnational dimensions are reflected in their ability to provide and distribute resources (especially from constituent bodies in wealthy countries to ones in poorer countries) facilitate complementary or cross-cutting support in political campaigns, and provide safe heavens abroad for activities of resistance which are illegal or dangerous in home context.” (Vertovec 2010, 10). It is obvious that the Islamic Republic foreign policy can be explained by the term of transnationalism in order to explain the relations with non-states actors especially Shia groups.

#### **4. 1. The Domestic Elements of the Islamic Republic, Presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hassan Rohani**

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became the president on 3 June 2005. He classified the world as “oppressors” and “oppressed”, and he used a confrontational approach to the West. In other words, Ahmadinejad divided the world into two camps, as domination and anti-domination. The Islamic Republic has always been persistent on the enrichment of the nuclear facilities but the West tried to negotiate to stop enrichment. Ahmadinejad realized the West would not let the Islamic Republic have nuclear proliferation so if it became passive, the West pressures would continue stopping the nuclear enrichment of the Islamic Republic. Therefore, the Islamic Republic turned its face to the east and neighbors, and to improve the neighbor state became the priority of the foreign politics of the Islamic Republic. During two terms, Ahmadinejad visited Saudi Arabia four times, and he was the first president to visit the UAE (United Arab Emirates) in 2007 as well. He visited central Asia and the Caucasus and announced the retreatment of the relationship with Egypt. Ahmadinejad’s foreign policy was based on the power balance with America through supporting Hezbollah in Lebanon, he continued to have good relations with Syria, and he supported the same groups in Afghanistan and Iraq who opposed America. As a result, under the Ahmadinejad ruling, first the Islamic Republic sought to develop relations with neighbor states. Second, the Islamic Republic ignored the emerging threat of nuclear enrichment. Third, the Islamic Republic tried to develop relations with the region’s Shia groups and great powers such as Russia and China to reach an asymmetrical balance against America. Additionally, third world countries have had specific positions for Ahmadinejad, and this is mentioned in the Islamic Republic Constitution. To be with the oppressed is one of the main tenets of the Islamic Republic Constitution. The Islamic Republic foreign policy is confrontational-assertive on the one hand, accommodationist-active on the other in Ahmadinejad terms (Haji-Yousefi 2010, 7-15). From the beginning of the Arab Uprisings Ahmadinejad supported public protests and he stated that he was in the position of being with the oppressed people. He backed the public protests in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, and Yemen, unlike Syria. For example, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad talked on Iranian state television about Muammar Gaddafi’s violence against the Libyan opposition by stating, “It is unimaginable that he is killing his own citizens, shooting and bombing them”, he said. I think the entire world has been surprised by the behavior in Libya. It is grotesque. I strongly advise

them to let their people express their will and meet their demands... Of course any regime which does not heed to the voice of its people, and fails to meet their demands, will have sealed its own fate” (Ahmadinejad speech quoted in Parchami 2012, 42). Although, Ahmadinejad accused the west backed leader in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, unlikely, he did not accused Assad regime, he accused “west backed” public protests in Syria. The Islamic Republic backed and strongly supports the Assad regime in Syria. The relations between Syria and the Islamic Republic of Iran always have been good but also relations with Syria were expanded further in Ahmadinejad terms. Assad was the first president who visited Ahmadinejad first and he emphasized that Iran and Syria should act together against common enemies, this time is the time of unity. Ahmadinejad also visited Damascus, and Assad and the leader of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, came together with the leader of Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement to strengthen the resistance block (Sinkaya 2011, 38-48).

The Islamic Republic’s administrative system is complicated and limited. The Supreme Leader has ultimate control over state affairs, and the presidents of the Islamic Republic only have limited space to move. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic clearly shows the limited role of the presidency chair. If one is to compare Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s politics to Hassan Rohani, it can be seen that Ahmadinejad and Rohani discourse and instruments are different but the foreign policy is consistent, and it is impossible to mention overall changes for the Islamic Republic of Iran. Rohani uses a moderate language unlike Ahmadinejad’s assertiveness. Although the executive power is in the hands of the president, the Islamic Republic president’s constitutional and political authority is limited. While Ahmadinejad mentions two camp worlds as imperialist and anti-imperialist and calls for international justice, Rohani speaks of interdependency and win-win approach. Additionally, while Ahmadinejad accused the west for being dishonest and almost suspended the relations with the west, Rohani embraced both the West and the East approaches. When Ahmadinejad’s actions were seen as desultory in the region, Rohani pledged to help international and regional peace. Ahmadinejad calls for a world without imperialism and Zionism, Rohani calls a world against offensiveness and excessiveness. Rohani uses new social media instruments such as “Facebook” and “twitter” unlike Ahmadinejad. Also, Ahmadinejad uses Zionists hatred tone in politics, Rohani uses softer tone to redesign its policy as more political rather than religious toward Israel (Shanahan 2015, 8). On

the nuclear issue, the possibility of bombardment and more sanction issues were argued before Rohani but in terms of Rohani, a diplomatic solution probability became an option. The Islamic Republic partially relaxed with the Geneva negotiations and softened relations with America, with the help of relatively solving problems with the West, Rohani became more active in the Middle East comparing the past. Nuri el-Maliki visited Tehran and renewed his message regarding the strategic alliance between the two countries that would continue. Rohani embraced a new foreign policy, but the Islamic Republic approach never changed against regional problems, e.g. Rohani displayed the same approach towards Ahmadinejad about the Syrian case (Sinkaya 2014, 31-33). Although, each president comes from a different background and with a different election propaganda, they acted within the limits, which were determined by the constitution and the supreme leader. It is blank enthusiasm to expect an overall change in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, one may never deny that the Rohani foreign policy concern is mainly about ending the Islamic Republic's international isolation. This does not mean that Rohani had any interest in ending or even reforming the Islamic Republic's regime. Rohani saw the reality, which was that ending the Islamic Republic's isolation could only be achieved by solving the nuclear issue. The greater freedom of action would be available only if the Islamic Republic economically improved. Therefore, he redesigned the Islamic Republic foreign policy towards the west and the east.

#### **4. 2. Politically Dominated Incidents: Arab Uprisings**

The political uprisings in the Arab world since 2010 transformed the political landscape of the Middle East. Dictators of the Arab world saw a guaranteed throne but the wave of democratization demand affected them deeply. The protests were not only about demand for democracy and freedom, but also against the social inequality, oppression, economically low standards and unemployment. Tunisia was the country where a series of protests occurred first in the Arab World. Uprisings created a domino effect in the region but few states felt it more deeply. Arab Uprisings started with the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi on 17 December 2010 in Tunisia. He positioned himself as a protest against corruption, political repression and poor living conditions. This incident was an initial point for the Arab revolts throughout the region that felt economically and politically uncomfortable. The incident came to an end with the resignation of Ben Ali in Tunisia. The overthrow of the Ben Ali regime prompted

the popular political action in Egypt. Protests were organized by civil society and opposition groups, and they brought unexpectedly approximately 20,000 participants in Egypt (Dalacoura 2012, 64). Mobility in Egypt and Tunisia provoked the rest of the region. Following the fall of the Mubarak regime in Egypt, protests broke out against the Qaddafi regime in Benghazi. Protests quickly spread out and came to an end with the overthrowing of the Qaddafi regime and he was brutally killed. Furthermore, there had been a longstanding political conflict between Sunni monarchy and the Shia majority in Bahrain. Public protest erupted in Bahrain on 14 February but the protest suppressed with the help of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) forces. Demonstrations started and were suppressed also in Yemen. Simultaneously, in Syria, protests occurred in March 2011, however they continue still today, and they have turned into a civil war (Dalacoura 2012, 65-66). Arab revolts are not in instant depression; these revolts have a background, and almost all regions face the same problems in the Middle East. Economy is one the most important reasons of unrest; most of the Arab countries' economies are based on rent. Some call them "rentier states", which means taking rent from oil, gas minerals, and tourism. This sector does not have links to the diversified productive economy, because oil is exported and manufactured goods and high tech services are imported by foreign multi-national companies. Rent based income may generate wealth but it has nothing to do with economic development, production and innovation. It is truly a lazy and dependent type of economy. Rent based economy provides few jobs, but they are controlled by family clan members and financial cooperation. Technical and low-end employment is taken by contracting foreign labors. The ruling class manages free trade, therefore any domestic start-up in the manufacturing, agricultural, or technical sector is undermined. As a result, there is no national capitalist or middle class (Petras 2011, 2). Additionally, rentier economies spend much on security issues and armed structures, so it causes a lack of capacity for productive investment. The system has components; they work together as natural energy resources, privileged national clans, neo-colonial recruits and active repressions on the population. When talking about Arab economies, one should not forget the effect of neo-liberal destabilization. Economic reforms reduce employment, taxes are increased etc., and neo-liberal reforms are exploited by Arab economies (Petras 2011, 3). Unemployment is another important matter, which caused the mobility of the youth in the cities. The young, who have qualified educations, could not find job opportunities to earn money. This is a great problem in

almost all Arab countries. The demography of Arab states triggered the uprisings because almost 60% of the population was under the age of 30, with no employment opportunities to set up a life (Gelvin 2012, 21). There was great social inequality in the Arab countries; people do not have equal social and economic opportunities. “Public perceptions of corruption 10 out of 17 Arab states ranked above the international mean” (Gelvin 2012, 4). People are tired of double standards and corruption. The government does not account for its actions; it oppresses people and plays its role in its own way. National will is ineffective and regimes have full freedom. The annual Arab Human Development Program, which was launched in 2012 explained the situation of Arab Countries. It was about the rapidly increasing inequality and poverty as well as gender and other impurities (Dahi 2011, 2). The unrest in the region has been understood from the reports, however no precaution was taken, and no rehabilitation took place. The problems were ignored and undermined, this is why events suddenly exploded

#### **4. 2. 1. The Reflections of Arab Uprisings to the Region**

Each state in the Middle East has its own structural characteristics and the characteristics of the leader differ, so each Arab state foresees a wave of revolts differently. Tunisia and Egypt are two examples where the regime changed by the popular uprising without outside intervention. The army did not want to open fire on the demonstrators in Tunisia, and it refused to use force against the people. This attitude of the army was important for pushing Ben Ali out. In Egypt, the army’s behavior was uncertain but at the end the army decided to remove the Mubarak regime. Unlike in Tunisia and Egypt, the Qaddafi regime was overthrown by outside intervention in Libya. Syria is a different case in which al-Assad hang on to power, and the Alawite regime. The army and the security forces had close ties with one another and they had control over the state intuition mechanisms as well (ICG, ii). It is not only the regimes and institutional systems that differ, but also, protesters’ problems differ from state to state. The Protesters were from a wide range of social classes; the very poor urban sub-proletariats and peasants in Egypt. The Tunisian uprisings were also a product of the consensus of a wide range of protesters against the regime. In contrast to Egypt and Tunisia, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya, and Syria were divided; some strongly supported the regime, whereas some were strongly against the regime. Although some of the dictators were overthrown by public protests, this does

not mean protesters succeeded in making revolutionary demands. Whatever the demands and hopes were behind the protests, these protests did not and will not bring democracy in the near future. In Syria civil war made democratization impossible and in Yemen weak state institutions are very insufficient to sustain the rule of law. In Egypt, the military undertook the ruling in the country. The Qaddafi regime is gone in Libya, but it was not a true product of public protests, it was a product of an intervention from external forces. In Bahrain, civil war is not on the agenda of the regime; suppression and oppression are the prior elements to hold on to power (Dalacoura 2012, 72). Although, these steps seem to be in the right direction, the regimes are seeking to secure their hold on power. They cannot afford to make amendments on economic standards or enhancements regarding democratization in the Arab countries.

None of the uprisings have Islamist factors at the origin or they do not have an Islamic agenda. In contrast to the Islamic Republic in Iran's point of view, religion did not play an active role at the beginning of the protests, but later on, it became a part and sometimes became the priority of the revolutions, such as in Egypt. Despite the Islamist movement's limited role, Islamists re-engaged in mainstream politics, thanks to the popular protests in the Arab world (Brown 2011). The revolutionary wave affected the whole region and created a domino effect. Also three major powers, Turkey, Iran, and Israel were affected deeply from the changing dynamics in the region. They adjusted themselves to the new regional developments. Additionally, The Arab revolts have had a multifaceted effect for the western interests in the region. France was one of the supporters of the Ben Ali regime with its own interpretations of Islam and democracy. A few weeks after the protests in Libya, few western countries such as France, Britain, and Italy initiated a military intervention to Libya. The west was equivocal for the Syrian uprising as well. Additionally, The Arab revolutions did not affect positively the interests of the Westerners. They were shocked and did not act in planned and logical manners. They underestimated the popular protests when they understood that the protesters were serious about their demands, and the west was surprised, faltered, and responded too late (Dalacoura 2012, 77-78).

#### **4. 3. The Islamic Republic's Reaction to the Protests.**

Public protests in the Arab world were underestimated by Arab governments at first. But time passed and Arab regimes realized that there was a great issue to solve. Arab regimes took action against the possibility of uprisings spreading to the whole region. Regimes tried to strengthen themselves and gave partial concession to the public rather than solving the problem, they wanted to soften the protests. However, one of the region states, The Islamic Republic of Iran, which is not Arab in origin called itself the "Islamic awakening". The Islamic Republic of Iran stood by the public, and it advocated that the will of freedom is the most natural right of human beings. It also advocated "we are going to be oppressed people". Naturally, as a major regional power, the Islamic Republic of Iran had vested interests in the outcome of the Arab revolts. This is why these series of Arab events were taken seriously by the Iranian government. The upheavals in the Arab world may serve The Islamic Republic of Iran's ambitions and geostrategic thinking. With the inception of the Islamic Republic, Khomeini always stated that Muslim states will rise up and overthrow their pro-western government and establish an Iranian type of Islamic Republic. Iran always acted as an actor in prompting people to upheaval against the existing government by using the ideology of exporting the Islamic Revolution. According to the Iranian view, the new order would be revisionist and Islamic when the Arab public achieved revolution. The Iranian regime emphasized especially the tide of history is on their side. Although the people had democratic and secular demands, the Islamic Republic of Iran interpreted them as the beginning of an Iranian type of Islamist order (Parchami 2012, 36). The Islamic Republic television channel broadcasted the daily clashes of the protesters, and the newspapers articles were all on the fall of "next dictator". The popular unrest in the Arab world was interpreted as an "Islamic awakening" in the Iranian media. The headings were not only about the revolts; they also referred to the "Islamic Revolution" as well. The Islamic Republic of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei's views about the uprisings were, "west backed corrupt autocracies are falling". The international media view saw the Arab uprising as a secular movement, but the Iranian clergy stated, "the global arrogance" (A reference to America, Great Britain and what the Islamic Republic describes as "Global Zionism"), distorting the truth. Khamenei commented about the Egypt and Tunisia uprisings and he stated, "the awakening of Islamic Egyptian people is an Islamic



liberation movement and I in the name of the Iranian government, salute the Egyptian and Tunisian people” (Parchami 2012, 37). According to the supreme leader of Iran, the Muslim *umma* exploited and suppressed all over the Arab world, and America encouraged Mubarak and some other regional dictators in order to protect its own interest and the creation of Israel. Additionally, according to Khamenei, the uprisings were a struggle between the Muslim *umma* and their enemies (USA, Israel, and the West). If Muslims were to succeed, this would be a deep frustration for the enemies of the Muslims. The Arab revolts were an elusive opportunity for the Islamic Republic of Iran to create a new narrative, which would serve the regional ambitions of the regime.

The Islamic Republic’s fiction regarding the Arab uprisings has both international and regional dynamics. The Islamic Republic has geostrategic ambitions and regional expectations and its concern about the regional balance of power is vital. The Islamic Republic anticipates the emergence of Islamic governments in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Bahrain etc., which will give power to the Islamic Republic in the international arena and the idea of the creation of regimes with Islamist orientation will be advantages for the Islamic Republic against Sunni enemies in the region. It is understood from the Iran’s news headlines as well, that the subject as a “wave of Islamic Revolution” was discussed (Parchami 2012, 38). Iranian propaganda and the wishful thinking towards the uprising did not correspond to the reality in the Muslim states, because people were fighting for freedom and democracy. The Islamic Republic tried to find similarities between the Arab Uprisings and the 1979 Islamic Revolution, nevertheless, Arab revolts against the monarchy, which were led by divergent groups such as constitutional monarchists, secular liberals, nationalists, socialist, communists, and the Islamists. The public protests were not for the sake of creating an Islamic Republic. The Islamic Republic did not anticipate that the Islamists would seize the power in the Arab world, because fragile and fragmented states are an opportunity for Iran to dominate. If the country is not fragmented then the Islamic oriented one may be better for the Islamic Republic of Iran. Therefore, having a fragmented and corrupted state is a priority, if it is not achieved, then, the Islamist oriented state may be applicable for the Islamic Republic. Such as in the case of Iraq: the possibility of a stable and strong Iraq is a serious concern for the Islamic Republic, so it prefers unstable and fragmented neighbors in the Middle East (Terril 2005, 14-15). The Iraq

example is a significant experience for the Islamic Republic. The Islamic Republic knows that the dynamics differs in each state; the regime change does not mean Iranian influence can be applicable. Therefore, the Islamic Republic tries to turn changes to an opportunity via sponsorship or offering support to state or non-state actors, which may serve regional and international ambitions.

The Islamic Republic politics towards the Arab uprising, pragmatically has political and strategic considerations. The Islamic Republic hopes that the wave of Yemen and the Bahrain uprisings will spread to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The Islamic Republic is deeply involved in Yemen, the conflict is rooted by local rivalries, and it is a “proxy” fighting between the Shia Islamic Republic and the Sunni Saudi Arabia (Charbonneau 2015). Yemen’s president Ali Abdullah Saleh is backed by Saudi Arabia and Al-Qaeda, therefore, the Islamic Republic’s concern is not about Shia constituency, so it supports any opposition movement against Al-Qaeda and Saudi Arabia. The Islamic Republic’s intervention in Yemen is about controlling the regional balance of power against Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the protests occurred in Bahrain as well and the bulk of protesters are Shias. The Islamic Republic surely played a significant role in the Bahraini uprisings, but this was not for the sake of protecting sectarian brothers, rather, it transcended sectarianism. Be they Shia or Sunni, the sectarian identity is not a consideration of the Islamic Republic, Bahrain is strategically significant in the Persian Gulf and it has close political and military ties with America, this is why, the Islamic Republic always takes Bahrain seriously (Parchami 2012, 40). According to Doran, “in Bahrain, Iran wins no matter what: if the state violently represses the Shiite majority... Tehran can plausibly claim that it did so at the behest America. And if the protesters topple the regime, Iran can work to shape the new order” (Doran 2011, 24). The Islamic Republic is confident about the new developments in the Arab world. Bin Ali and Mubarak are the first fruits of the decade’s old policy and hostility regarding America and Israel. The Islamic Republic paid heavy prices in the form of wars, sanctions, and isolations, and it is expected that the new regimes will be “collaborationist” signaling difficult days for the survival of Israel. Additionally, because of the Arab uprising the attractiveness of America is declining and its influence on the Arab world is declining as well. According to the Islamic Republic, Arab masses first would get rid of the “Puppet Regimes” and then they would never forget and forgive America and its allies who supported the dictators and oppressed

them for decades (Parchami 2012, 41). The narrative has been cleverly constructed and improved by the Islamic Republic of Iran with the help of regional events.

The Islamic Republic's unclear position in the Arab Uprisings is other evidence to show how the Islamic Republic's foreign policy is determined by political strategic considerations. In other words, the Islamic Republic's foreign policy is pragmatic rather than ideology or religion driven. The Syrian uprising broke out and The Islamic Republic did not adopt the same attitude compared to the Arab revolts generally. The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic interpreted the Syrian protests as "illegitimate" and a "deviant current", which is made by imperial and Zionist powers. Therefore, the Islamic Republic encouraged the Syrian government to take precaution against the foreign backed unrest in its borders. Furthermore, western diplomats claim Iran gives intelligence and technical support to the Syrian regime (The News 2011 and Tisdall 2011). Syrian uprisings are evaluated as destabilizing actions and it is accepted as foreign intervention towards the Syrian domestic politics. According to the Islamic Republic, the "Islamic awakening" across the Arab world was organic, legitimate and democratic, but the protest movement was planned and inorganic in Syria. Ayatollah Khamenei publicly accused America for the protests in Syria, especially the progress of the "Islamic awakening" because he claimed that it threatens the influence of America in the Middle East. Therefore, for the Islamic Republic, a seditious movement in Syria is an organized grand strategy of the West to regain the control of the greater Middle East and the protesters of seditious movements are the puppets of imperialist and Zionist masters. It is clearly seen that hypocrisy is one of the significant features of the Islamic Republic policies both at home and abroad. Therefore, it is not surprising that Iran behaves differently towards the public protests in Syria compared to Arab states. The Islamic Republic also never made a correlation between the Arab uprisings and the protests in its own country. The Green movement never found a place for popular public protests, because they were suppressed brutally by the regime. The Green movement is not called a spring, but it is called a West backed inorganic protest by the Islamic Republic (Parchami 2012, 42-43).

The Syrian regime is not supported by most of the Arab states, unlike the Islamic Republic, America and the West called the Assad regime to resign. But, The Islamic Republic fully supported the Assad regime. As I explained in the previous chapters, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Syria have a close relationship. Their historical

background and their perception of a common enemy threat united them under the same umbrella. They are good friends, allies and a resistance bloc against common enemies. Because of these reasons, the Islamic Republic interpreted the Syrian uprising as a conspiracy of the imperialist power to exceed the Syrian obstacle and weaken the Syrian-Iranian resistance block. The meaning of the fall of the Assad regime for Iran is not only losing a significant regional ally, but also damaging the links between Hezbollah and the Islamic Republic. As a result, the Islamic Republic did not support the Syrian protesters as other uprisings; the Islamic Republic concentrates on Syrian stability (Bigdeli 2011). Khamenei stated that the stance is clear, and that he supports every movement against America and the Zionists, if there is a movement, which is provoked by America and the Zionists in order to occupy a country or topple a regime, he would never take part with the imperialists powers (Pomeroy 2011). According to the Islamic Republic, if it supports the Syrian public protests, it would damage the Iranian image because the Syrian Uprising is a game of the Western powers. If the Assad regime fails, this means the international oppression will increase on Iran. Because of all these reasons, the Islamic Republic of Iran gives diplomatic, logistic, financial and training support to the Syrian regime (Sinkaya 2011, 42).

The Islamic Republic is one of the most important actors in the Middle East, therefore, to “what extent the Arab uprisings will effect Islamic Republic” is the most popular topic of the international relations and region’s states. However, it is extremely difficult to measure or predict the impact of the events in the Middle East, especially in the Islamic Republic. It is a secret lover state that lacks transparency in order to exaggerate its regional and supra-regional influence (Sick 2003, 89). It is difficult to say that the Arab uprisings increase or decrease the Islamic Republic’s geostrategic power and influence in the region. Suzanne Maloney who is a Senior Fellow at Brookings argues that, if the protests had not occurred in Syria, Iran may have been the beneficiary of almost every event that is happening in the region. Because the Islamic Republic has tendency towards the uncertainty and turmoil, it is successful in exploiting (Tait 2011). “Iran has risen by default,” said Robert Baer, a former CIA case officer in the Middle East (Warrick 2011). Additionally, the Islamic Republic’s restraint in the region is seen as a signal of its growing confidence. The New York Times argues that the following events are America’s decision maker actions’ to fix

the Islamic Republic position, as far as Washington is concerned and the events in the Middle East are a part of the “greater game”; it is a rivalry between America and Iran for regional influence (Sanger 2011 and Tait 2011).

The Arab Upheavals are mostly seen as an advantage for the Islamic Republic’s influence in the region but it has also some disadvantages, which sharpened the pre-existing limitations of the Islamic Republic’s influence in the region. First, the Arab protesters are not calling for an Islamic Republic, they are calling for a popular governance, freedom, and equality and good economy. The Islamic Republic of Iran entrenched authoritarianism by aiding the regional Shiite groups and Sunni extremist groups to demonstrate its own indispensability against America and regional enemies. These actions of the Islamic Republic damaged its image among Arab revolutionaries. Most of the Arab revolutionaries are young, and the region youth are more pragmatic than ideological, their aims are not to establish a different ideology to the state affairs, it is only about good life standards. The hypocrisy of the Islamic Republic is also another disadvantage, which damages the Islamic Republic’s image in the eyes of the protesters. The Islamic Republic’s policy towards the Arab unrest is established on creating a variation of its own Islamic revolution. Additionally, Bashar al-Assad’s brutal crackdown in Syria is backed by the Islamic Republic and the Green Movement opposition group was suppressed violently in Iran. The actions of the Islamic Republic are seen as a true hypocrisy among the regions’ young protesters (Kaye and Wehrey 2011, 1-7). The Islamic Republic is a beset country that has external and internal problems around it. In the short term, the Islamic Republic gains limited geopolitical advantages from the Arab uprisings over its regional adversaries. However, in the domestic politics the Islamic Republic regime had no legitimacy because of its brutal suppression of the Green Movement in 2009. As a result, the Islamic Republic cannot set a model for Arab masses and it has no working political system to present to Arab masses as an example. Arab masses may admire the Islamic Republic’s political stance against the West and Israel but the young people in Iran have seen the Islamic Republic as a failure (Sadeghhi-Boroujerdi 2011, 267–286). The Islamic Republic’s dreams of a creation of an Iranian type Islamic Republic after the wave of the “Islamic awakening”. However, the Arab masses poured into the streets, not to create an Iranian type of regime but to free and equal system that the Green Movement had been fighting for in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Moreover, the Islamic Republic is very successful

at exploiting chaos, but it is not as successful at re-establishing stability or engineering the same type of regime. The Islamic Republic of Iran is oppressive in domestic politics, and it is inefficient to find a more peaceful way to re-establish stabilization in the country, therefore, the changes in the Middle East may be seen as an advantage for Iran in the short term, but in the long term, Iran might be more isolated both in the region and in the international arena.

#### **4. 4. Transnational Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic**

The Islamic Republic as a non-Arab country in the Middle East has extensively focused on the expansion of its relations with the non-state actors in the region. As I mentioned in an earlier chapter, the American intervention to Afghanistan and Iraq expanded the Islamic Republic's elbowroom in the region. Besides this, with the assistance of a revolutionary atmosphere in the Middle East, the Islamic Republic found a chance to feed itself with conflict and turmoil. The Islamic Republic is creating numerous proxy Shiite groups in order to manage conflict according to national interests. The Islamic Republic always has a security problem with its neighbors as a non-Arab region state but the region developments carried the Islamic Republic to a new stage, which enabled it as a main player in the region. Additionally, the 1979 Iran Islamic Revolution reshaped the state's foreign policy and it undertook the role of the savior of the Islam, especially the Shia faction of Islam. The Islamic Republic tends to play a grand game to be one of the legitimate leaders of the Shiite Islam in the Middle East and Arab uprisings create a turmoil and it enabled the Islamic Republic transnational claims to be a leader country in the region and international platform. Moreover, its foreign policy served the national and strategic ambitions but the last revolts gave elbowroom, which was unexpected. As I said earlier, the Islamic Republic has a close relationship with region's non-state Shia actors but with the Arab revolts, it focused more on the expansion of its relations with Shiite authorities. The Islamic Republic invents a chance to project its power and state ideology into the region's states as well. Hezbollah is one of the successful creations as a proxy of the Islamic Republic in Lebanon. The Islamic Republic has never limited itself to Hezbollah and its factions. Moreover, the proxy organizations of the Islamic Republic are not atomized entities. The proxies of Iran should be evaluated as sub-groups of the IRGC-Quds Force network and it is a part of a larger regional strategy. Shiite militias, their fronts and established political and armed groups thus far have proven that they are

effective in projecting the Islamic Republic ideology and power in the region. The Islamic Republic expands its ties with non-state actors in Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq. In order to analyze in-depth, I will use Syria and Iraq as an example.

#### **4. 4. 1. Shia Militants in Syria**

The Syrian civil war began in the early spring of 2011. During 2012 and early 2013 the Bashar al-Assad regime lost its control against Sunni rebel forces (Starr 2012). By the spring of 2014 Syria and Iraq created a joined front and Assad not only survived but also regained and secured its territory. Foreign fighters were central for the Assad regime's survival and power; they were mainly coming from Iraq and Lebanon, but also from other countries. The foreign fighter's main aim was to defend Shiite holy sites in Syria, these holy sites organized by geostrategic and ideological efforts of the Islamic Republic. Shiite holy sites designated strategically is in order to protect the Islamic Republic's ally in Syria and projecting the Islamic Republic power in Syria, Iraq and across the Middle East. Foreign fighters in Syria are good to creating new front groups, which are engineered by the Islamic Republic so as to spread its regional network of Shiite militia-type organizations as the Hezbollah model in Lebanon. Foreign Shia fighters expand the Islamic Republic radical ideology more intensively, which is a vital interest since the 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran. The foreign fighters come from different nationalities, and this shows the Islamic Republic power projection in Shiite communities worldwide (Smyth 2015, 1-2). The actors are creating several narratives, which are rooted in a highly sectarian rhetoric, and radical ideology and even nationalist themes. The messaging campaign was designed to justify the Islamic Republic and its proxies. Creating a narrative was to enforce the growth of the sectarian outlook among Shiite fighters. This narrative sought to revive Khomeini's revolutionary ideologies although the primary aim was to secure the Assad regime in Syria. It is easily seen that the Islamic Republic used the turmoil to promote its ambitions to become predominant regionally and a global representative of Shiism.

The Sayyeda Zainab shrine has been central since Iran and its proxies announced the involvement in the Syrian war. Sayyeda Zainab is one of the most popular instruments for the Shiite fighters in Syria. The slogan "*Labayk ya Zainab*" (At your service, O Zainab!) is sung regularly at the funerals for Lebanese Hezbollah and Iraqi Shiites

killed in Syria (Symth 2013). On Shiite social media sites, especially on Facebook, “*Labayk ya Zainab*” is commonly used by people all around the world who support the Shiite militia fight in Syria. This propagation campaign raised the acceptance of the narrative which is the Shiite militias are fighting in Syria for religious purposes. The creation of narrative justified the Islamic Republic actions in the region and its support for proxies as well. Following, the Hussein death of Karbala battle that accepted as separation between Sunni and Shiite Islam and Zainab was taken to Damascus by Yazid, The Umayyad leader and Hussein’s killer (Aghaie 2004, 7-8). Edith Szanto explains, “Zainab courageously confronted the Umayyad caliph in Damascus and spread the message of Husayn by conducting commemorative mourning gatherings at which pious Shiite listened to the story of Karbala, cried, and, at times, performed self-flagellation.” (Szanto 2012, 286). In Shiite Islam, Yazid is presented as a symbol of immorality, corruption, and tyrannical evil so the rebels are often linked to the evil Yazid. The defense of the Zainab shrine is referred to as a Sacred Defense (*al-Difa al-Muqaddas*), by Shiite militias in Syria, and the term was previously used in the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, as I mentioned in the previous chapters. The Sayyeda Zainab shrine became an important instrument for the Islamic Republic in order to spread the religious and political influence among Shiite militia in Syria. The Islamic Republic makes religious programs around the shrine and 202,000 Iranian tourists have visited the shrine in 2003 (Sindawi 2009). The Islamic Republic also announced scholarship for education in Qum or Tehran, which is available only to Shiites of Sayyeda Zainab (Sindawi 2009). The education in the Islamic Republic, strongly opposes other forms of Shiite religious ideologies, they clearly brainwashed the young Shiite with the ideology of the Islamic Republic. The Islamic Republic lends libraries and distributes religious books as well (Sindawi 2009).

Lebanese Hezbollah has strong ties with the Sayyeda Zainab shrine. It uses web sites to identify potential militant recruits. For the Saudi Shia particularly, the Sayyeda Zainab shrine is used as a transfer hub for recruits and then they are sent to Lebanon or Iran for training (Levitt and Zelin 2013). For example, a number of Saudi Hezbollah members who attended the 1996 bombing at the Khobar Tower were recruited at the Sayyeda Zainab Shrine by the Lebanese Hezbollah members (Levitt 2013, 185). However, the Islamic Republic and Shiite Militias are never had limited concern about



one particular holy site. The justification and legitimization of Shiite Jihad have been promoted by its agents to be a defense of all holly Shiite sites. As an illustration; Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada (KSS) is an Iran-backed movement based in Iraq, and it announced its main aim as defending all Shiite shrines worldwide (Symth 2013). Moreover, the Iranian proxy Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba (HHN) created an organization called Liwa Ammar ibn Yasir (LAIY) which is an Iraqi Shia militia who are sent to Raqqa, Syria, shrine to Ammar ibn Yassir that was attacked by Sunni Jihadist rebel (Smyth 2013). The shrine protection narrative is used to create a shared memory and hatred for the Sunni Jihadists. Memories for example, of the al-Qaeda attack on the al-Askari shrine (the Golden Mosque) in Samarra in 2006 are still fresh in the mindset of the Iraqi Shiite militias as well as broader Shiite circles (Cockburn 2006). The attack of the Sunni Jihadists against the Shiite holy sites serves the Shiite militia organization for the purpose of creating a common enemy narrative. As the Syrian civil war continues, the Sayyida Zainab shrine remains the main instrument for Iranian, Iraqi, and Lebanese proxies. As well, ISIS and other Sunni Jihadist group attacks on Shiite holy sites help expand the shrine-defense narrative across the Shiite circles.

The shrine defense narrative expanded and even shifted to Pan-Shiism. Hezbollah announced that the reason for sending Shia militia to Syria was to protect border villages where there is Shiite inhabitancy (Chararah 2013). For example, the Egyptian Shiite community leader Sheikh Hassan Shehata and four other members of the group were lynched by the Salafi mob in June (PresTV 2013). Iranian and Hezbollah media focused on the abuse of Shiite Muslims by Wahhabis or *takfiris* (extremists) (Jafria News 2013 and Rasa News Agency 2013). Iran backed Shiism considering it as a duty to protect all Shias in the world, which is also the main theme of the Islamic Republic's constitution and ideology. Additionally, Iran backed Hezbollah while it presented itself as the defender of regional Shiites. Iranian proxies were organized and interlinked; the same logo may have been used by other Iran backed Shiite militias. The *Takfiris* narrative is used as much as the Sayyeda Zainab shrine narrative around Shiite circles by the Islamic Republic and its proxies. The *Takfiris* narrative is used as synonymous with the extremist Sunni Wahhabis who have dominated in Saudi Arabia as well (Daily Star 2013). Besides this, the Islamic Republic of Iran backed the media emphasis on Sunni attacks to Christians who suffered from Al-Qaeda and ISIS (Fars News Agency 2013). This shows that the messaging strategy not only embraces the

Shiites and minority groups, but also calls out to Sunnis who are not extremists and doctrinally different. This is also understood from the Nasrallah speech about Syria's battle of al-Qusayr, where it is stated, "This *Takfiri* mind has killed [many] more Sunnis than members of other Muslim sects...We are not evaluating the matter from a Sunni or Shiite perspective, but from a perspective joining all Muslims and Christians together because they are all threatened by this *Takfiri* project" (Naharnet 2013, 1). The Islamic Republic runs a successful messaging strategy both used Sunni Jihadists attacks as victimization and Islamic Republic market the west as a protector of the Sunni 'unjust' movements. The Free Syrian Army is identified as Western-backed Free Syrian Army. Qassem Soleimani who is the commander of Army of the Guardian of the IRGC Quds Force, states that America uses various methods to topple the Assad regime, and to bring in al-Qaeda (Karami 2011). As a result, it is seen that the messaging and narrative strategy of the Islamic Republic and its proxies are masterfully designed. When there is an attack on Shiites and their holy sites, the Islamic Republic uses it as a messaging campaign and it gives more power to the Shiite circles across the Middle East. The messaging strategy of the Islamic Republic is as a self-fulfilling prophecy, as well, which serves the vital interests of the Shiite proxies and of course the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Islamic Republic calls for Shiite Jihad in Syria, although traditional clerics in Najaf Iraq and radicals such as Muqtada al-Sadr do not fully agree. Even Najaf based Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani does not support the Shiite jihad in Syria, and he has never supported the *velayat-e faqih* ideology of the Islamic Republic, but the Islamic Republic and its proxies manipulate his speech. The Islamic Republic and its proxies behave as he is one of the supporters of Shiite jihad in Syria in order to attract attention of both radical and quietist clerics. Sistani also evaluated that it is a "huge mistake" establishing Khomeini's form of government in Iraq (Symth 2015, 13-14). Although there are Shiite authorities in Iraq who do not support the Islamic Republic doctrine and actions in Syria, the Islamic Republic is insistent on taking them on its own side. The Islamic Republic tries to extend its opinion to fighting in Syria, and in order not to only legitimate war it is also supported by religious Shiite authorities. The Islamic Republic tries to take Sadrist movement splinters on its side. Its main aim is to market itself to work with the group that is under the direct control of the Sadr movement. The Islamic Republic's continuing efforts main aim is to usurp the legitimacy of the most

influential radical Shiite clerics (Smyth 2015 17-19). Although most of the Shiite militias are trained by Hezbollah and IRGC, the Shiite militias fight for Syria and follow two main ideological trends. One of them supports the absolute *velayat-e faqih*, the other is the splinters of the Sadr movement who are direct followers of the Muqtada al-Sadr. Moreover, the Islamic Republic uses several recruitment techniques, familial links, scouts, websites, Facebook and the other forms of Internet. Afghan Shiite groups are also important for Shiite jihad in Syria because they have provided the largest supply from non-Arab fighters. The Afghan foreign fighters regularly fight with the pro-regime Shiite groups in Syria. The Islamic Republic is linked to Afghan Shiite groups and this also demonstrates the potential spot for future recruits abroad (Smyth 2015 37-43). Reportedly, about 30,000 Shiites in India signed up to be involved in the Jihad in Iraq (Tharoor 2014). Additionally, the West Africa's Shiite population grows, which helped the Islamic Republic's transnational politics and Islamic Movement in Nigeria is created as well (Zenn 2013). The promotion of foreign Shiite fighters is another transnational foreign policy push by the Islamic Republic.

#### **4. 4. 2. Shia Militants in Iraq**

After the fall of Saddam in Iraq, the Islamic Republic faced a security problem. The possibility of the institutionalization of the American army in Iraq was the main security concern of the Islamic Republic. Ahmadinejad adopted two key components in foreign policy making in order to overcome the security problem. First, the Islamic Republic sought to expand its cooperation with region states such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt, which may be called "accommodating policy". Second, the Islamic Republic sought to strengthen links with brother countries and non-state actors such as Syria, Hezbollah, and Shia groups (Bargezar 2010, 173). When the American army withdrew from Iraqi territory, the Islamic Republic focused on the Shia authorities in Iraq. The Islamic Republic focused on having a close relationship with the region's Shia circles, and succeeded. The Islamic Republic's stealth takeover of Iraq is one of the main purposes of its transnational activities. The Islamic Republic successfully combined the recruitment and manipulation of sectarian loyalties and established political and paramilitary front groups who follow the Islamic Republic's agenda. The power in Iraq today is held by a Shiite militia who known as Hashed al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilization), and who brought dozens of armed groups. The most powerful Shiite militias in Iraq are the Badr Organization, the Asaib Ahl al-Haq, the Kataeb Hizballah,

and the Sarayat al-Salam. All of them are pro-Iranian militias who have links with the Islamic Republic and IRGC. The decision maker of the Shiite militias has founded an organization in his own structural scheme, but at the end the organization became directly organized and controlled by the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei himself (Spyer August 3, 2015). The creation of proxy bodies in Iraq both for political and military influence complemented one another and finally the Islamic Republic of Iran gained benefit both in terms of power and influence.

The Islamic Republic has taken a key role in the fight against ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham) in Iraq. The Iraqi government is also dominated by Shiite and the pro-Iranian *Dawa* Party (Spyer April 16, 2015). Successes of the Shiite militias against ISIS in Iraq are not a result of their combat skills, but a product of the IRGC. The effectiveness of the Shiite militia in Iraq is also the effectiveness of the IRGC doctrine regarding the construction, support, and the use of sectarian political and military proxies as central tools of the Islamic Republic policy in the region. “What is happening in Iraq today is directly analogous to what happened in Syria. The Iran-aligned, Shia-dominated government in Baghdad is being protected from Sunni insurgents through the efforts and methods of the IRGC’s Quds Force” (The Tower 2014, 1). The three main proxy groups of the Islamic Republic, Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), which developed particularly close relations with ex-Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, Kata’ib Hezbollah, and the Badr Organization has sent its fighters to Syria to help the Assad regime who lost the control on borders. It is seen that the Islamic Republic considers Iraq as a client or proxy regime as the regime in Damascus. They serve the Islamic Republic’s interests and they will continue to serve in the future as well. The Islamic Republic’s innovative use of sectarian militia power and the cultivation of a variety of paramilitary clients help the Islamic Republic today and for the future, it demonstrates the Islamic Republic will gather ally governments and non-state actors for future threats.

The Islamic Republic has always had close ties with the region’s Shiite circles. However, the fall of Saddam caused an absence of the authority in Iraq and the Islamic Republic saw this as a chance to accelerate its activities in expanding relations with Shiite authorities in Iraq. When the civil war broke out in Syria, Iran backed the Shiite fighters sent to Syria to help the Assad Regime. The Islamic Republic created a narrative and announced a Shiite jihad in Syria. The Shiite jihad which is organized by

Iran is not only limited to Syria. When the ISIS began to be active in Iraq in early 2015, many Shiite fighters in Syria were redeployed to Iraq (Smyth 2015, 2). The Islamic Republic used its proxies as a Shiite army of Iran, when there was need to protect the Islamic Republic interests in the region, the proxies called and were redeployed to the threatened area. The recent deployment of the Iraqi Shiite forces in Iraq managed the expanded Iranian controlled network of the “Islamic Resistance” organization. Moreover, Iran backed proxies were trained by IRGC and Hezbollah, the “Hezbollahization” of the security field in Iraq and Syria can be clearly seen. This also shows how the Islamic Republic chose the proxies to carry out specific missions (Smyth 29 May 2015). Several Shiite militias who were clearly aligned with the Islamic Republic are an imitation of Hezbollah brands such as Kta’ib al-Imam al Gha’ib, Hizballah al-Tha’irun, Hizballah al Akhyar, and Hizballah the Mujahidin in Iraq. These Shiite militias who fought in Syria tended to vie Syria-Iraq as one battlefield. For example, the Sadrist shaykh Aws al-Khafaji who supported jihad in Syria created the Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas Forces militias brand in Iraq (Al-Tamimi 2015, 81-82). In Iraq, Sunni attacks specifically targeted the Islamic Republic proxies and four bombs were set off in mostly Shiite areas in Baghdad. Apart from this, Shiite fighters who returned from Syria to Iraq did not limit their activities as non-state actors; they ran for positions in the parliament. The Iran backed Shiite proxies formed a close relationship with the Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri el-Maliki. Additionally, Shiite proxies who had close ties with Maliki sent forces to Syria under the rule of Maliki’s State of Law Alliance. During May 2014 elections for seats in the Iraqi parliamentary, and most of the Shiite proxies used wartime activities in order to gain votes. For example, AAH emphasis on the group positioned in Syria used the defense of the shrines narrative during the election campaign (Smyth 2015, 49). The militias were dependent on the capabilities and capacity provided by the Islamic Republic of Iran (Spyer July 6, 2015). As a result, the growth of the Shiite militias expanded the hypersectarianization and radicalization of conflicts in the region. The rise of Shiite militias in Iraq and Syria with the sponsorship of the Islamic Republic, and also the “Hezbollahization” of the Shiite militias demonstrates that the transnational ambitions of the Islamic Republic never changed and still continues to grow.

#### **4. 5. The Transformation of Transnational Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran**

Iran created the Islamic Republic through the achievement of the Iran Islamic Revolution in 1979. The Islamic Republic and the revolutionary leader, Khomeini, created an Islamist governing system, he made a comprehensive change in the Iran foreign policy as well. The transnational foreign policy constituted as a vital element of the state. Being the leader of Shiite Islam and exporting a Shia type Islamic state system became the main tenets of the Islamic constitution and the core ambitions of the Islamic Republic of Iran. For the first years after the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Khomeini focused on formation the *velayat-e faqih* system in domestic affairs. However, this does not mean Khomeini only strove for the institutionalization of the system, the idea of exporting the revolution was the prior element of the Islamic Republic transnational foreign policy because the Islamic Republic felt itself insecure since the beginning. During the first years of the republic even though Khomeini focused on domestic affairs, he attempted to expand relations with region states and also non-state Shia actors in the region in order to guarantee the regime's survival. After the death of Khomeini, Khamenei became the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Khamenei's foreign policy differs, in that he adopted more pragmatic foreign politics unlike Khomeini's religious and ideological driven foreign policy. Khamenei was more pragmatic regarding transnational foreign policy, in order to serve the security based national interest of the state. He made an effort excessively towards non-state actors and created client regimes and proxies more comparing the Khomeini's formation years. Today, Khamenei's pragmatic politics can be clearly seen in the revolutionary waves in the Middle East. The turmoil in the Arab world serves the Islamic Republic's national ambitions so the Islamic Republic has proxies almost in every state to externalize state's ideology.

The Islamic Republic has been the sponsor of the Islamic Jihad movement among Palestinians since its emergence. As a non-Arab and as an outsider, via the sponsorship of the Islamic Republic of the Palestinian resistance organization, the Islamic Republic rectifies its outsider status (Spyer April 16, 2015). Iran pursues a transnational foreign policy, which does not refrain to use hard power in regional competition, nevertheless, it refrains from being a direct adversary, though it uses hard power (Orhan 2015, 5). Under the sanctions imposed because of nuclear enrichment, the Islamic Republic

never abandons supporting its clients and allies. The Islamic Republic continues to support Hezbollah, the proxies in Iraq and Syria, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad among Palestinians. Under the sanctions of the West, the Islamic Republic chose the way to follow its national interest especially its regional ambitions. With the recent events and the collapse of the regimes in the Middle East, the Islamic Republic has become committed to support its proxies and allies directly in active war in three Middle Eastern countries, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. It also continues its actions and supports its clients in two other fraught areas, Lebanon and Israel/Palestine (Spyer April 16, 2015).

The Islamic Republic and America came to an end regarding nuclear negotiations and the Islamic Republic partially accepted America's conditions. As a result of the partial negotiations, the West decided to lift sanctions on the Islamic Republic. The final sanctions on IRGC is likely to freeze revenue which will enable Iran to massively increase its support, training, and funding to regional clients and proxies. In Syria the Assad regime was supported strongly by the Islamic Republic, but also the Islamic Republic deployed its proxies to the threatened borders of Syria. In Iraq, the Islamic Republic backed Shiite militia plays key role in defending Baghdad from ISIS threat. In Yemen, the Islamic Republic provides weapons and support to Ansar Allah or Houthi rebels who are involved in insurgent activities against President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi. (Spyer July 18, 2015). As a soft power, there are five thousand Yemenis studying in seminaries in Qom, according to the Shiite doctrine of the Islamic Republic and they receive their salaries from the Iranian government (Gold 2015, 61). The Islamic Republic's assistance to the Houthis in Yemen is long standing. Toppling of the leader Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2011 provide backdrop for both Shia and Sunni non-state actors who enjoy the political vacuum in the country. The Islamic Republic's support for Houthis in Yemen is permanent but the support has become more apparent since the movement took Sana'a in January 2015 (Spyer April 16, 2015). In Palestine, the Islamic Republic supported the Palestinian Islamic Jihad as a client/proxy organization and also it has been in the process of rebuilding its relations with the Hamas powerful military wing, Izzadin Kassam. These developments are not only due to the nuclear agreements of the Islamic Republic with the west but also America brushed its activities off to continue nuclear negotiations with the Islamic Republic (Spyer July 18, 2015). The incidents managed cleverly and successfully by the Islamic Republic, while the Islamic Republic main priority is security in transnational foreign

policy, it is trying to create a new regional order under the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The activities of Iran may be seen as monopolizing their region's Shia movements under the leadership of Iran.

In conclusion, the Islamic Republic's transnational foreign policy was transformed by regional developments. The transformation of the transnational foreign policy of the Islamic Republic can be seen in three phases. First, the 1979 Iran Islamic Revolution and the ten-year governance of Khomeini can be analyzed as the formation years. However, the Islamic Republic had a transnational vision since its establishment, so the idea of exporting the revolution was a long lasting activity during the years in which Khomeini governed. The second phase is Khamenei's term until the Arab revolts in 2010. The American intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq are the main issues of the period, in which expanded the Islamic Republic activities in the region. Khamenei adopted pragmatic politics to see the opportunity to improve relations with the region's states and non-state actors. The main similarity between these two stages was the priority of security concerns in foreign policy although, the foreign policy approaches were different. The third phase can be seen as the phase in which the 2010 Arab revolts occurred and the Islamic Republic nurtured itself with the turmoil. The Islamic Republic has relations with non-state actors almost in all countries in the Middle East. Above all, the Islamic Republic creates its client regimes and proxies with the help of Arab revolutions. The Islamic Republic transnational foreign policy is run by its proxies that are trained by IRGC and Hezbollah. Iraq and Syria are the main battle fields of the Islamic Republic where the Islamic Republic backs proxies actively fighting for the projection of the Islamic Republic's ideology.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The main aim of this study was to examine the transformation of transnational politics of the Islamic Republic from 1979 until 2015. This transformation started from “resistance axis” to the “Shia crescent”, in other words security-based foreign policy of the Islamic Republic paved a way to create a Shia crescent in the region under the authority of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The purpose of this research necessitates focus on the historical background of the transnational activities, which started with the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The *Velayat-faqih* system, the Islamic Republic’s new constitution, containing revolutionary ideologies of Khomeini, which dominated the political atmosphere and regional developments, were examined first. Furthermore, as the successor of Khomeini, Khamenei’s institutionalization and pragmatization of the Islamic Republic foreign politics is detailed. The progress of the military missions of the Islamic Republic was detailed in order to understand the transformation of its foreign policy. The 1989-2010 period’s important incidents were analyzed in order to see changing dynamics and changes in the foreign policy tolls of the Islamic Republic. Lastly, the Arab revolts were analyzed intensely, which greatly affected the Islamic Republic’s transnational politics, in order to analyze the transformation of the security-oriented transnational politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Although Iran had transnational tendencies in the pre-revolutionary era, the 1979 Iran Islamic Revolution brought a new transnational philosophy. The transnational philosophy of the Islamic Republic constituted by Khomeini’s words. Khomeini’s *velayat-e Faqih* system is best fit into the transnational activities as well. The priority of the Islamic Republic was exporting the revolution into other region’s state through the messianic claims of Khomeini. Khomeini created a *Sharia*-based constitution, which claims the Islamic Republic has a duty to protect “oppressed” Muslim by unjust rulers. All the system was designed to intervene in other’s domestic affairs in the name of Islam and for the sake of *Mahdi*. As aforementioned, the Islamic Republic legitimized its transnational activities as a true spiritual power and Khomeini

announced himself as a chosen one to save the world from an unjust system. Although, the Islamic Republic went into an eight-year war with Iraq, a year after the revolution, it expanded its relations with the non-states actors in the region. Additionally, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 was one of the significant incidents that caused the creation of Hezbollah by the Islamic Republic. The Islamic Republic had several transnational Shia cells in the region as well. The reason behind the Islamic Republic active transnational foreign policy is due to their perception of a security threat. The West and Zionism is in opposition to the Islamic Republic is main tenet of both the revolution and Islamic constitution, the Islamic Republic must resist against all type of Western domination. Therefore, Western powers, Israel, and the Sunni regimes in the region were seen as a real security threat by the Islamic Republic. In order to protect itself from its enemies, the Islamic Republic pursued an active transnational foreign policy to find non-state actors allies. There were not many states that wanted to become an ally of the Islamic Republic, so it found its own way to secure itself. Survival is one of the main concerns of the Islamic Republic formation years, but also the projecting its ideology was constant policy. It was easy to project its ideology into to small Shia communities and groups rather than states while the Islamic Republic had so many enemies. As a result the formation years of the Islamic, which started with the 1979 Islamic Revolution until the death of the revolutionary figure, Khomeini, were the years to sustain regime's survival through expanding their Shia networks in the region. The idea of exporting the revolution was popular, but security was the priority in order to sustain the regime.

After the death of Khomeini, Khamenei became the Supreme leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, these years started with 1989 until 2010 was the progression period. In this period, the Islamic Republic transnational foreign policy was institutionalized and pragmatized and may be named as a new synthesis of ideology and pragmatization. Furthermore, the military missions institutionalized and best served the national interest of the Islamic Republic. Such as, Pasdaran (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps), MOIS, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Culture and Guidance, and other proxies cordially worked together in cooperation to achieve beyond their border missions. The IRGC carries out training of terrorist organizations and assists radical groups throughout the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and Asia. MOIS plays a key role in planning, supporting, and carrying out terrorist operations on foreign soil, using

Iranian embassies and diplomatic missions as cover. Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides financing, weapons, and intelligence for the Islamic Republic agents and proxies. Ministry of Culture and Guidance is very successful in infiltration of Islamic Republics agents within local Muslim populations in foreign nations via diplomatic missions. The proxies serve to promote the Islamic Republic radical cross border agenda. The Islamic Republic sophisticatedly uses these missions for the achievement of transnational activities. In addition to the progress in the military missions, regional developments expanded the elbowroom of the Islamic Republic in the region. In this period, the Islamic Republic not only expand its relations with Shia communities, it also enhanced the relations with region's radical Shia groups.

Regional incidents pushed the Islamic Republic to focus more on transnational activities. First, the Shia revival in the region that started in the 1960's, after the Islamic Revolution and transnational vision of the Islamic Republic, when Shias became politically active all over the Middle East. Shias were politicized in the region and they fed the Iranian transnational ambitions. Second, the 1990 Gulf War changed the fate of the region, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was a great mistake for Iraq, and it brought upon the American intervention into the war. Following on, the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers, America invaded Afghanistan in 2001, the Taliban regime and the Islamic Republic created an animosity. The Islamic Republic perceived the Taliban regime as a threat through the unconscious help of America, the Islamic Republic acted freely in comparison to the past. The American invasion continued with the invasion of Iraq in 2003, America overthrew Saddam Hussein's regime. Saddam Hussein was a great enemy of the Islamic Republic and he was toppled by America. America unconsciously helped the Islamic Republic and it accelerated Iranian transnational activities in the region. However, while the Islamic Republic sped up its activities, it felt a huge security threat because of the American presence in the Middle East. Therefore, the Islamic Republic created a "resistance axis" with Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Although, the Islamic Republic was partly relaxed through the American intervention into the Afghanistan and Iraq, it felt itself under the security threat because of the American presence.

The "Arab Uprisings", which started in the late 2010s, deeply changed the political landscape of the Middle East. The Islamic Republic is one of the main players in the Middle East who were greatly affected by the Arab revolts and reshaped its

transnational foreign politics. The Arab revolts started in Tunisia and unexpectedly spread to the region. The Arab revolts are not over even today, they dominate the politics of the Middle East and create regional turmoil. The Islamic Republic successfully managed the wave of the Arab revolts and enhanced its geostrategic ambitions through the help of the political vacuum. Indispensable elements of the Islamic Republic's transnational foreign politics is "permanence" and "change", in other word, the transnational ambitions and change in the foreign policy instruments according to the changing dynamic are immutable characteristics of the Islamic Republic. Because of the regional incidents, the Islamic Republic changed its foreign policy instruments through creating numerous proxies in the conflicting states. The Islamic Republic became one of the most active players who created proxies in order to project its power all over the region. Security is not priority of the Islamic republic anymore after the 2010s, because it plays a regional leadership role with its old and newly-founded proxies in the region and outside of the region. The Islamic Republic foreign policy transformed from the "resistance axis" to the "Shia crescent". With the continued effect of the regional incidents in the Middle East, the Islamic Republic expanded its sphere of influence and created a new paradigm for its transnational foreign policy. Its proxies became the main foreign policy instrument of the Islamic Republic to consolidate its ideology in other region's states. The Islamic Republic uses its proxies under the cover of helping brother regime, but proxies best serve to create an Iranian type government system under the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Islamic Republic tries to be only and unique Shia authority in the region in other word, it tries to monopolize the Shia authority. Regional leadership is the main aim of Iran today, and being leader of the Shia communities in the Middle East means the creation a powerful state in the international system. The Islamic Republic plays a "grand game" since the Arab revolts started. It uses proxies as a jihadist movement in region's failed states, the ultimate end is a creation of Shia unity under the leadership of the Islamic Republic Supreme Leader's. The main theaters of the Islamic Republic are Syria and Iraq. The Islamic Republic recruits numerous Shiite jihadists through several channels like web sites, Facebook, and twitter etc., it is also very successful in creating narratives to unite the Shia communities under an ideology. As I already mentioned in the previous chapter, the Islamic Republic has numerous proxy groups all over the Middle East mainly in Iraq and Syria. Therefore, the fate of Iraq and Syria is in the hands of the Islamic Republic. As a result, the Islamic Republic's transnational

foreign policy transformed over the years, it was security based at the beginning, and nowadays the Islamic Republic acts to be a regional leader without security concerns. It can be summed up as, the transnational foreign politics of the Islamic Republic transformed from “resistance axes” to “Shia crescent”.

As a last comment, the Islamic Republic should play its role as a “normal” and ethical player. It should not enhance the difference between Shia and Sunni groups and it should abandon the sectarian approach. The Islamic Republic needs to be successful in creating an order for peace in order to sustain its power in the region. The conflicting region is always dangerous, so the Islamic Republic should concern establishing peaceful system in the region rather than supporting the conflict. The Islamic Republic should focus on establishing economic cooperation with the region’s states to avoid a conflicting and unstable atmosphere.

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