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MASTER OF DEFENCE STUDIES

The Islamic Republic of Iran: Unveiling the Strategic Culture of a Theocratic Regime

By/par Neil Nicholson Lieutenant Colonel

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ABSTRACT

This paper will examine Iranian strategic culture by uncovering its foundation in Iran's history, politics, policies and relationship building. First, a study of Iran's historical context through to the revolution of 1979 will establish their desire for regional power with insecurity towards internal and external vulnerabilities, especially evident through their extreme anti-Americanism attitude. Next, the revolution that created the Islamic Republic of Iran and its unique theocratic government will be examined in order to demonstrate a legitimate organization capable of some democratic balance; however it will decisively show that the majority of power is held by a single person who is driven to ensure survival of the Republic as his duty to Islam. Lastly, policy issues that support the Shia religious movement, the exploitation of hydrocarbon demand and supply, the threat of nuclear weapons, and relationships with state and non-state actors will be studied to demonstrate how each contributes to the Iranian deterrence based survival strategy. This paper will conclude that the Iranian Republic has a rationally based, pragmatic strategic culture heavily influenced by 300 years of experience which has been etched into their theocratic system and supported by atypical policies founded in religion, hydrocarbons, nuclear capabilities and relationship building.

INTRODUCTION

"...while Iran has been aggressive, anti-American and murderous, its behavior has been neither irrational nor reckless. It has calibrated its actions carefully, showed restraint when the risks were high, and pulled back when threatened with painful consequences."¹

The Islamic Republic of Iran has one of the largest populations in the Persian Gulf. Of the 70 million people, approximately 70 per cent of the population is literate, culturally and economically advanced, with the majority committed to a modern theocracy.² It is located in a region of the world that has known much conflict throughout its history and is not expected to be without violence for some time. In addition, the region represents a significant quantity of the hydrocarbons that are needed to drive much of the world industry and daily lives, it remains a location with much religious and ethnic tension, and it also has an unbalanced distribution of nuclear weapon capabilities.³ There is any number of things that could effect a flashpoint within the region market control, establish itself as the Islamic lead nation, and expand its nuclear power capability has the attention of other regional powers as well as the Western nations.

¹Kenneth Pollack and Ray Takeyh, "Taking on Tehran," *Foreign Affairs 84, no. 2 (March/April 2005):* 1-2.

²Frontline, *Showdown with Iran.* Documentary directed by Frontline, Public Broadcasting Service, (2007); available from http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/showdown/view/; Internet; accessed 7 March 2009. The term "modern theocracy" may seem an oxymoron to some but it is accurate from an Iranian point of view.

³According to the US Department of Energy, in 2007 Iran has the fourth largest oil production in the world at 4.0 million barrels of crude oil per day, subordinate to Saudi Arabia, Russia and the US. The Middle East contains the largest world reserve of crude oil at 745 billion barrels, far exceeding any other region. See US Department of Energy, Energy Information Administration, Country Analysis Brief: Iran, January 2006; available from http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Iran/Background.html; Internet; accessed April 2009.

Many authors have attempted to answer the question of how to deal with the numerous countries in the Persian Gulf, and particularly how to deal with Iran. It seems that most will agree that Iran has unique attributes that makes it much more difficult to formulate a foreign policy. Some believe it is the nature of the Iran people and their heritage, the fact that it is the only Islamic Shia Muslim nation, or that it is because of the unique theocracy it has adopted that makes it so different. This paper will provide evidence that, like every other nation, it is not simply one aspect of the nation that contributes to the formation of a strategic culture but the combination of many historical and modern factors.⁴

The evolution of Iran from a monarch to a Republic has not been without challenges, yet the regime continues to survive. These modern day challenges, in combination with the many historical challenges have shaped the situation that exists today. Since 1979, post-revolutionary strife coupled with slow political and economic growth, the Iran-Iraq war, and relative power of Iran until the 1991 Gulf War constrained Iran from evolving.⁵ However, throughout this period Iran continued to forge alliances, gain experience in building and sustaining an economy in light of stringent sanctions, has remained a Shia nation, and has retained its theocracy. It highly values the Republic established by the revolution, its territorial integrity, and its self-declared responsibility to

⁴Strategic Culture, as defined by Willis Stanley, "The Strategic Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran," SAIC project prepared for the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (31 October 2006), 8; available from

http://www.dtra.mil/documents/asco/publications/comparitive_strategic_cultures_curriculum/case%20studi es/Iran%20(Stanley)%20final%201%20Nov.pdf; Internet; accessed 7 April 2009, is that set of shared beliefs, assumptions, and modes of behaviour, derived from common experiences and accepted narratives, that shape collective identity and relationships to other groups, and which determine appropriate ends and means for achieving security objectives.

⁵M.R. Dabros, "Rogue State or Rational State Actor? Understanding and Dealing with Iran's Nuclear Aspirations" (Toronto: Canadian Forces College, 19 May 2008), 9.

prepare a regional (if not global) hegemony in order to prepare the kingdom for return of the hidden Imam.⁶

There is much debate of what it is that motivates Iran to be so outwardly hostile towards Israel and Western influence of the region. Is it real hostility or just aggressive deterrence? Although it is difficult to ascertain another entity's motivation, it is possible to examine some of the considerations that contribute to Iran's strategic culture which, in turn, formulate their foreign policy. Before studying the strategic culture, the question of whether or not Iran is a rogue state, a member of "an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world" as suggested by US President George Bush must be addressed.

The point has been analyzed by scholars, yet many are concluding that Iran cannot be a rouge state.⁷ As an example, Colonel M.R. Dabros, using the Morgenthau's Realist Theory in his paper *Rouge State or Rational State Actor?* found that Iran was a rational state actor, motivated by self-interest and the preservation of state power.⁸ Dabros also concluded that "the notion of rogue behavior appears to be the result of the rhetoric and lack of official dialogue that exists between Iran and the US, and is compounded by a strong Israeli influence over the US policies related to Iran."⁹

⁶Jennifer Knepper, "Nuclear Weapons and Iranian Strategic Culture," *Comparative Strategy: An International Journal* 27, no. 5 (2008): 459.

⁷President Bush quoted by CNN, "*Bush State of the Union address*," from the President's State of the Union Address, 29 January 2002; available from http://archives.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/01/29/bush.speech.txt/; Internet; accessed 7 March 2009.

⁸Dabros, "Rogue State or Rational State Actor? Understanding and Dealing with Iran's Nuclear Aspirations", 4. The same deduction was formulated by Pollack and Takeyh in "Taking on Tehran," 1-2 as they found "[a]lthough Tehran has been aggressive, anti-American, and murderous, its behavior has been neither irrational nor reckless. It has calculated its actions carefully, showed restraint when the risks were high, and pulled back when threatened with painful consequences."

is the preservation of state power, than it is a reasonable assumption that Iran will avoid confrontation that may threaten the existence the Republic. This is not to say that Iran will avoid all confrontation, as it may be necessary to use confrontation to some degree as a means to ensure its survival. Secondly, it must be acknowledged that Iran is cognizant of the influential geographic position they occupy in the Middle East; that is, Iran could influence the flow of significant quantities of hydrocarbons. As the world is highly dependant upon these resources, each nation is highly sensitive to the manner in which Iran conducts itself. Thus, it can be accepted that Iran will manipulate these sensitivities but not beyond the point that would justify an external force action, as this could threaten its state power.

This paper will examine Iranian strategic culture by uncovering its foundation in Iran's history, politics, policies and relationship building. First, a study of Iran's historical context through to the revolution of 1979 will establish their desire for regional power with insecurity towards internal and external vulnerabilities, especially evident through their extreme anti-Americanism attitude. Next, the revolution that created the Islamic Republic of Iran and its unique theocratic government will be examined in order to demonstrate a legitimate organization capable of some democratic balance; however, it will decisively show that the majority of power is held by a single person who is driven to ensure survival of the Republic as his duty to Islam. Lastly, policy issues that support the Shia religious movement, the exploitation of hydrocarbon demand and supply, the threat of nuclear weapons, and relationships with state and non-state actors will be studied to demonstrate how each contributes to the Iranian deterrence based survival strategy. This paper will conclude that the Iranian Republic has a rationally based,

⁹Ibid., 40.

pragmatic strategic culture heavily influenced by 300 years of experience which has been etched into their theocratic system and supported by atypical policies founded in religion, hydrocarbons, nuclear capabilities and relationship building.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Iran can trace its roots back as one of the oldest continuous major civilizations with historical and urban settlements dating back to approximately 4000 BC.¹⁰ Although filled with a history of kingdoms, dynasties, and foreign occupation Iran was last unified into an independent state in 1501 by the Safavid dynasty, which also promoted Shia Islam as their official religion.¹¹ Iran was a monarchy ruled by a Shah, or emperor, almost without interruption from 1501 to 1979, at which time the Iranian Revolution succeeded in creating the Islamic Republic of Iran on April 1, 1979. This paper will now examine the historical aspects that have not only shaped modern day strategic culture but also enabled the establishment of a theocratic republic.

In his book, *The Persian Puzzle*, Ken Pollack identified three key areas of Iranian history that have shaped the Iranian culture. First, the terrain that defines current day Iran was held by a long line of incredible leaders. "In its day, the Persian Empire was a superpower …with a monotheistic religion, a vast army, a rich civilization, a new and remarkably efficient method of administration, and a territory stretching from Egypt to Central Asia."¹² Current day Iranians have studied their history and are extremely proud

¹⁰Yann Richard, *Shi'ite Islam: Polity, Ideology and Creed*, translated by Antonia Nevill, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 1.

¹¹Said Armir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 12.

¹²Kenneth Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America* (New York: Random House, 2004), 3. In about 559 BC, Cryus the Great took the throne of Persia and created the vast Persian Empire (which included Asia minor, Babylon, and Egypt) that lasted until 334 BC when Alexander the Great defeated the reigning Persian King. See Willis Stanley, "The Strategic Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran," SAIC project prepared for the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (31 October 2006), 8; available from

http://www.dtra.mil/documents/asco/publications/comparitive_strategic_cultures_curriculum/case%20studi es/Iran%20(Stanley)%20final%201%20Nov.pdf; Internet; accessed 7 April 2009 for a detailed outline of the rise and fall of the Persian Empire.

of this fact to the point that it manifests into a sense of superiority over all of their neighbours. Secondly, for the past 500 years, Iran has been the only Shia Muslim state in the world. This uniqueness contributed to Iran's isolationism or "siege mentality" and has obviously shaped Iran in ways not seen in other Muslim states. Lastly, although Iran maintained its sovereignty and was never colonized it was nonetheless heavily impacted by the superpower nations of Russia, France, England and the US over the past 200 years. After being a superpower itself, to experience other nations taking advantage of the property, economy, manipulating their governments without regard for the people was humiliating, frustrating and frightening. Such engrained emotions have obviously influenced Iranian policy today. This section will examine the last 300 years of Iranian history as these events, including how they were perceived by Iranians, have become one of the most significant factors in modern day Iranian policy. Their desire to regain that status of the Persian Empire and religion are important factors and they will be discussed later.

Russia, Britain and the Qajar Regime

The powerful Persian empire began its demise in the late 1700's as the increase in maritime commerce diminished the use of the Iran trade routes, impacting the economy, encouraging a growth in the nomad culture, thus decreasing the strength of the government.¹³ As Persian power waned, Europe and Russia grew more powerful and began to see opportunity in Iran.¹⁴ The British East India Company was granted

¹³Although referred to as Iran throughout this paper, the country currently known as Iran was called Persia until it was changed to Iran by Reza Shah in 1935. Richard, *Shi'ite Islam* ..., 1.

¹⁴Yonah Alexander and Milton Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership: Ahmadinejad, Terrorism, Nuclear Ambition, and the Middle East* (United States: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc, 2008), 1.

authority to build a base and trading post on the Persian Gulf.¹⁵ Then, in 1804, Iran and Russia commenced fighting with Russia winning again. But, this was also the age of the Great Game between Britain and Russia and therefore, increased Russian attention in Iran only served to involve Britain in a way that could curb future Russian advances. Foreign influence such as this can be traced through to the 1979 revolution: "[i]t was increasingly apparent that Iran was being treated as an appendage of a wider diplomatic and political system."¹⁶ Iran has had to accept that it was not going to achieve victory through tactical or operational conflict with these superpowers. There were many other political issues, temporary or convenient alliances, and power plays that would negate any military power Iran could muster. This exposure to power playing rather then conflict, within a wider diplomatic and political system, was not lost on Iranians and has also shaped how they implement their current day national strategy.

In 1856, the US entered the region and signed a trade pact with Iran. Iran was also looking for yet another foreign power to counter Russian and British influence; however the Americans were cautious and limited their involvement to a diplomatic mission in 1883 – a theme the US would seem to forget as their reliance upon Iranian oil increased post World War (WW) II. As desertification, changing trade patterns, the growth of European manufacturing, and the persistent problems of communications across Iran's mountains and deserts continued to impoverish the nation, the Qajar regime weakened.¹⁷ As a result, Iran became more and more reliant upon relationships with

¹⁵Pollack, *Persian Puzzle* . . ., 14.

¹⁶Ali M Ansari, *Confronting Iran: The Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Next Great Crisis in the Middle East* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 12.

¹⁷Pollack, *Persian Puzzle* . . ., 15.

superpowers: Russia – the bully, Britain – anxious to reduce liability, and the US – cautious. With much difficulty and failure over the next 100 years Iran attempted to balance superpower interests in its territory conceding much, and imprinting an engrained phobia of foreign internal interference that has continued to shape the policies of the current Islamic Republic of Iran.

As the economy failed, the Qajar regime turned again to the British to generate revenues. While the Shah was merely looking for a means to fund his personal activities, the prime minister of the day believed that enlisting the support of the British was the only way to improve it. The net result was the Reuter Concession in 1872, which the British were granted a monopoly over virtually all Iran's economic and financial resources.¹⁸ Such a surrendering of control to a foreign power was fought by not only Iranian industrialists, nationalists, but also Russia and was eventually cancelled in 1873. Another example of the Qajar regime hunger for foreign cash was the 1901, 60-year concession to the British government (51% ownership) Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) for all oil exploitation rights throughout Southern Iran. Although there was little backlash at the time, this concession proved to be a future point of contention.

1906 Constitutional Revolution and Pahlavi Dynasty

The next key event in Iran's history was the 1906 Constitutional Revolution, where the people believed that they could use democracy as a means to stop the Shah and his greedy appointees from selling their nation and patrimony to the foreigners. However, the lesson grasped by the people of Iran was that the problem was the

¹⁸Ibid., 16. In the words of Lord Curzon, then Britain's foreign secretary, it was "the most complete and extraordinary surrender of the entire industrial resources of a Kingdom into foreign hands that has probably ever been dreamt of, much less accomplished, in history."

foreigners; foreigners were observed raising and then toppling the different factions of the revolution for their own interest. Thus, 1906 burned into many Iranian hearts the idea that nationalism – Iran for Iranians and the foreigners out – was the essential precursor for any and all other changes hoped to make in their government, their society, and their lives.¹⁹ This was made obvious with the British and Russian Anglo-Russian Agreement in 1907 which ended the Great Game over the increasing concern over the rising German Empire. Without adoption or ratification of the agreement by Iran, Britain and Russia agreed to divide up Iran up into three bands; Russia controlling the North, British the South and Iran the centre. Security of the Southern band, especially the oilfield was so important to the British that they secretly made a deal with Russia to ensure British control of the centre band of Iran. Over the course of WW I, Iran became a battleground which only further drove it into economic chaos. By the end of the war the British were in control of Iran and implemented the Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919 which, although it recognized Iranian sovereignty and territorial integrity, it essentially allowed Britain to control Iran. Iranian nationalists later claimed the agreement of 1919 as an attempt by the British to establish Iran as their protectorate; to maintain its stability in order to control Russian advances, facilitate British profits on the back of the Iranian economy, and lastly, to use Iran as a buffer between Russia and the British empire in India.²⁰ Then in 1921, Iran had become so chaotic that the war-poor British had withdrawn its forces leaving a weak government to deal with all significant internal strife as well as the clear thought in the minds of all Iranians that foreign interference seemed

¹⁹Ibid., 24.

²⁰Ansari, *Confronting Iran*..., 22.

to be at the source of all their problems.²¹ In reaction to this movement, Britain was prepared to support anyone that may be capable of providing stability, and they quickly lent their support to Reza Khan Mir Panj and his supporters.²²

Reza Khan was uneducated and barely literate; however he "fit the mold of the autocratic modernizer typical of the interwar years."²³ He quickly moved from Minster of war to Prime Minister, and eventually to Shah by parliamentary decree in 1926. Reza Shah's primary goal was to diminish, if not completely remove, foreign influence in Iranian affairs. He felt that this was the main reason for the fall of the Qajar Dynasty, and therefore vital to effect in order to prevent his own fall.²⁴ Iran signed a new treaty with Russia that saw them redeploy their troops and forgive Iranian debt. Next, Iran abrogated the never-ratified 1919 Anglo-Persian Agreement and by using Russian and British interests against each other Iran was able to neutralize each of them with little negative effects. At the same time, Reza Shah reached out to the US in hopes that it could provide some balance to the influence from Russia and Great Britain.²⁵ He was unable to attain a US alliance beyond a new commercial treaty that re-affirmed their most-favoured-nation reciprocity.

²⁴Ibid., 29.

²¹ Houman A Sadri, "Surrounded: Seeing the World from Iran's Point of View," *Military Review* 87, no. 4 (July-August 2007): 16 and Pollack, *Persian Puzzle* . . ., 26.

²²Mohsen M Milani, *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic* (Colorado: Westview Press, Inc., 1988), 58. By 1925, Reza Shah adopted the Pahlavi as part of the newly established Pahlavi dynasty, the first dynasty ascending to power without the assistance of any tribe.

²³Pollack, *Persian Puzzle* . . ., 28.

²⁵Sadri, "Surrounded . . .," 16 and Pollack, *Persian Puzzle* . . ., 29.

What became increasing obvious to Reza Shah was the amount that APOC was pilfering from their concession deal with Iran. A 1925 study confirmed that APOC was underreporting profits, amongst other creative accounting procedures. The Shah attempted a new deal with APOC in 1927, and then implemented a 4% income tax in 1930 which APOC refused to pay. Reza Shah then unilaterally cancelled the concession in 1932. A new deal, including profit reporting procedures, was agreed to in 1933. It was these oil profits that enabled much of Reza Shah's modernization movement. He was able to build up the Iranian military and limited military factories, which enable him to maintain a strong, centrally controlled nation-state. Conscription was introduced to both engrain a sense of nationalism and to increase the strength of the military. Many other elements of modernization were achieved with the oil profits, however the profit could not be gained without British industrialization but the funds did allow the Shah independence without having to resort to foreign loans.

In time, though, Reza Shah's autocratic modernization and imposed secularization became more and more unpopular. His neglect of the agricultural sector adversely affected the large number of poor Iranians; he forced nomadic tribes to settle on inhospitable land; women and children were exploited in factories; he rigged elections, censored newspapers, banned labour unions and outlawed communists; these are only examples of the means that Reza Shah deemed necessary to achieve his ends. From a religious perspective his reforms included public schools where teachers and schoolgirls were unveiled; disbanding the Shari'a courts; establishment of a government agency to oversee religious endowments; and, a government test to allow mullahs to preach. Over time, the Shah had to rely upon repression to maintain control especially as frustration grew over the increasing gap of the Westernized wealthy upper class and the impoverished lower classes.²⁶

WW II and Mohammad Reza Shah

With the start of WW II, the same foreign powers that Reza Shah had worked so hard to prevent from influencing Iran were the ones that invaded. Alarmed with the Shah's potential ties to Germany, Russia and Britain invaded Iran to secure its ports and rail system in order to provide logistics to the Red Army. The Shah was forced to abdicate in favour of his son, Mohammad Reza Shah. The new Shah, like his father before him, acknowledged the requirement to minimize foreign influence through the increase of Iranian power and independence. The people of Iran, although not sad to see Reza Shad abdicated, now became frustrated with the occupying powers that seemed to continue to be primarily focused on their own interests with no regard of their impact upon Iran and its peoples.²⁷

The US became involved with Iran after entering the war and quickly developed the necessary infrastructure to allow it to send military aid to Russia. The US did provide some balance amongst the invading powers and was instrumental in establishing the January 1942 Tripartite Pact which confirmed that the takeover of Iran was only in support of the war and that Iran's territorial sovereignty and independence post war.²⁸ This news was received hesitantly by Iranians, who no longer trusted Russia or Britain. In addition, US popularity amongst the common Iranian also began to wan partly due to

²⁶Milani, The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic, 63 and Pollack, Persian Puzzle . . ., 37.

²⁷Ansari, *Confronting Iran*..., 23.

their lack of cultural sensitivity as well as the newly broadcast communist ideology and threat of global capitalism.²⁹

As per the Tripartie Pact, the end of WW II was supposed to signal the withdrawal of Russian, British and American forces however it soon became one of the first Cold War power struggles between the US and Russia. Russia refused to withdraw until 1946 and it is believed it did so partially due to the US threat, the desire to avoid conflict so soon after WW II, and the hope to gain Iranian support for an oil concession in Northern Iran.³⁰ In the end, Iran saw the US as their source of power that forced Russia out of their country. They also saw the US as a means of reducing British influence on their economy via the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC – formally APOC) and the British Imperial Bank of Persia.³¹

Operation AJAX

Up until 1953, it appeared as though Iran was in chaos. Although the Shah's power gradually rose with ability to increase the size of the military, it was his attempted fixing of elections that caused much frustration with the people of Iran. There was also an increasing frustration over the way the AIOC was using Iran and by 1951, Iran had voted to nationalize all Iran's oil production. Britain responded by bringing what it considered being an illegal nationalization to the United Nations, while at the same time they formulated plans to invade and seize Iranian oil fields. The US felt this disagreement could either force a division in the Western alliance or would drive Iran to

²⁹Ibid., 23 and Pollack, *Persian Puzzle*..., 41.

³⁰Pollack, *Persian Puzzle* . . ., 46-47.

³¹Ansari, *Confronting Iran*..., 25.

the Soviet Union. Out of this rose Mohammad Mosaddeq, in a bid to become the prime minister he was able to neutralize the Shah, disband the Parliament (Majles) and essentially became the undisputed, unconstitutional ruler of Iran. Mosaddeq was able to first seize the support of the average Iranian through his attempts to overthrow the British imperialism. And, although he was unable to persuade the US to forgo its key ally in favour of Iran, he was able to foster such an anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist attitude against the British that once diplomatic relations were terminated and they were ousted from Iran, the attitude was quickly redirected to the only remaining foreign group – the Americans.³²

In an effort to regain its access to Iranian oil, the next step the British thought necessary was to stage a coup d'état by creating an environment where the Shah could exercise his constitutional authority to dismiss the government and appoint a new prime minister. To accomplish this Britain would have to work with the US diplomatic elements still in Iran. The US agreed to support the Shah as they viewed him as more anti-Soviet and more likely to support US economic interests, especially in the oil industry and Operation AJAX was created.³³ On August 19, 1953, they accomplished the coup and Mosaddeq was put under arrest and the Shah regained control. It was this well-intended arrest that has served to erode US support in Iran. Popular Iranian versions of the event notes a popular prime minister who was creating a truly independent Iran, who was overthrown by the US in order to prevent it from achieving political and

³²Ibid., 33.

³³Sadri, "Surrounded . . .," 16 and Milani, *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic*, 75.

economical independence.³⁴ Although only one of many examples of foreign influences in Iran over the past 200 years, the US-sponsored coup has had significant influence on Iran's modern day strategy. Mosaddeq's example encouraged the belief among Iranians that staking out extreme positions, even if the result is of great hardship, is the right course of action.³⁵ Iranians, already well exposed to foreign subversion, have accepted Mosaddeq's lesson as instrumental to their independence.

For the next twenty-five years, the US was tightly connected to the young Shah. It has been noted by many writers that the US desired a client state, essentially a subservient middle-eastern state that could aid the US in the protection of the world from communism. The US learned that building a client state quickly "poisons the relationship between nations, frustrates the donor, and causes revulsion in the recipient....Where the recipient government is corrupt, the donor government appears, in the judgment of the public, to support corruption."³⁶ Iran saw the US attempting to control the Iranian people through the Shah's draconian repression, which then served to displace their anger with the Shah towards the US. Iranians held Americans responsible for the corruption; for diluting their culture; for the significant military spending rather than education, social progress, and economic reform; and they even feared the US would "...build American colonies outside major Iranian cities..." as yet another means of exploiting all of Iran.³⁷ A closer analysis of this period of time will aid in the

³⁴Pollack, *Persian Puzzle* . . ., 68.

³⁵Ibid., 70.

³⁶Iranian delivering a lecture in the USA about the impact of the USA on Iran and how it was perceived. Ansari, *Confronting Iran*..., 45-46.

³⁷Pollack, *Persian Puzzle* . . ., 124-125 and Stanley, "The Strategic Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran," 15.

appreciation of how these lessons have shaped US and Iranian current day policy and strategy.

"Having expended considerable time and money in overthrowing Mosaddeq, the US was determined to ensure that their political investment would not be squandered by the ineptitude of the Iranian leadership."³⁸ The Shah used US fears of communism and Iran's strategic role in being able to repel the Soviet threat to leverage support and funding. Also, one of the second order effects of the 1953 coup was the combined destruction of the balance of power within the Majles, the Shah and the prime minister. Independent voices from the Shah were no longer in existence after the Shah arrested all those who were or could have been in support of Mosaddeq. Having gained experience from the coup, the Shah went on to rig elections to permanently cripple the Majles and he used the CIA to train a police apparatus – the National Intelligence and Security Organization (SAVAK), all to ensure he was able to maintain his power.³⁹ SAVAK soon penetrated Iranian society and created an atmosphere of fear and distrust consequently becoming a hated symbol of both the Shah and US interference.⁴⁰ The US was not ignorant of being used by the Shah, nor of the common Iranian distrust and the relationship with the Shah eroded somewhat.

⁴⁰Sadri, "Surrounded . . .," 17.

³⁸Ansari, *Confronting Iran*..., 42.

³⁹Pollack, *Persian Puzzle* . . ., 73.

Transforming into a Theocratic Republic

"Iranians clung to Islam and saw in it a source of strength and guidance well beyond what became the norm in many other nations."⁴¹ There was an increasing tide of Iranians turning towards religion through the 1960s and 1970s and the contributing factors were numerous. Some of the key factors include: urbanization due mostly to the White Revolution, exposure to Western capitalization and US polices, the Shah's secular and disrespectful attitude towards Iranian society, and the mistreatment and alienation of the Shia clerics. Each had its profound impact upon the Iranian people and contributed to the 1979 revolution and the creation of a unique Republic not yet replicated anywhere else in the world. The unique combination of factors that formed the Islamic Republic of Iran has continued to shape its policies and strategy in the twenty first century and therefore, they must be appreciated in order to assess its strategic culture.

Urbanization and the White Revolution

First in a series of steps that directly impacted the peasants, the land reform or also called the White Revolution, was imposed in 1962 as a means of modernizing them from mere surfs to land owners and to counter-communist uprising occurring in the region (Iraq in 1958 and Turkey in 1960). The US had visions of economic regeneration and nationalism, however the Shah saw an opportunity to disenfranchise the aristocracy and centralize even more power in his position.⁴² Indirectly it also negatively impacted the clergy who obtained their power base (and their funding) through the village landlords. Worse yet, the middle class were not enticed by his revolution either as there

⁴¹Pollack, *Persian Puzzle* . . ., 117.

⁴²Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership*..., 4 and Ansari, *Confronting Iran*..., 47.

was nothing directly benefitting them and they saw it as merely bending to Western influence and a way of buying the support of the peasantry. Although the revolution was initially heavily supported by the peasantry they were torn between the Shah and supporting their distressed clergy.⁴³ Poorly envisioned agriculture policy continued, government farm financing was minimal and food prices were controlled to ensure cheap prices for the urban population.⁴⁴ This drove the agriculture sector into widespread suffering and when the government realized that the many small landowners lacked capital or even operating funds, they directed that the peasants sell the farms. The peasants sold their property back to their former landlords at a loss and fled to the city. The new landowners continued agricultural production but not at market pace, nor would they reinvest into the agriculture sector.

The exodus of peasants from their rural way of life to the quickly growing Iranian cities was, in one way, a method of forcing backward peasants into the current century but the enormity of the change created uncertainty in their lives. In the end, the economy was propped up with tariffs and taxes and most peasants were working in factories, manufacturing Western "modern" items that they could not afford. The Iranian peasants turned away from the monarchy and back to their faith to counter their uncertainty and fill the cultural void created by the Shah's quest for modernization. As a result of his efforts, the Shah had eroded any powerbase he might have had with any of the wealthy, the middle class, the clergy and finally the peasants.

⁴³Pollack, *Persian Puzzle* . . ., 86.

⁴⁴Ibid., 110.

At this point Ayatollah Khomeini became more widely known when he advised the Iranian people that the Shah regime was opposed to Islam itself and the existence of a religious class.⁴⁵ As a result he served six months under house arrest and was soon cast as a political leader.⁴⁶ It was also during this period that the 1964 American Forces Immunities Bill, which granted all American military personnel and their dependents with full diplomatic immunity, was tabled and approved by the Majles. The same day the Majles voted to accept a \$200 million dollar loan from US banks in order for the Shah to purchase more weapons. To all, it was as though the Shah had sold the country's sovereignty to the US for \$200 million worth of weapons. Khomeini spoke to the masses again: "...They have sold us, they have sold our independence....They have reduced the Iranian people to a level lower than that of an American dog...."⁴⁷ He was quickly exiled, which only further exasperated the nationalist fervor over the whole issue. The net result only further tarnished the US in the eyes of the Iranian people and reinforced their nonalignment and anti-foreign involvement perceptions.

Exposure to Western Capitalism and US Policies

A second important factor in the rise of the Islamic Republic of Iran was the exposure to Western capitalism and US policies. What the Iranian people saw and perceived of Western capitalism only further engrained anti-Americanism. The Shah's attempt at industrialization and the manufacturing of sophisticated goods and products meant that few Iranians had the skills necessary to work at these factories, let alone

⁴⁵Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership*..., 4.

⁴⁶Ansari, *Confronting Iran* . . ., 49.

⁴⁷Ibid., 53.

manage them. Also, the American's had established multiple bases within Iran from which they could track and observe Soviet activities within the Cold War context. Just these two situations led to over 45,000 Americans in Iran by 1978.⁴⁸ Americans were in the lucrative and high-profile positions and this contributed to the widely held belief that the US was running Iran through their puppet Shah.

One example of the impact of a US policy was the US Twin Pillars Policy, where the US requested Iran and Saudi Arabia to jointly police the region to "...defend themselves and their neighbours, maintain stability, and ensure that American interests were looked after while the US concentrated on the Soviets."⁴⁹ In turn, the Shah was allowed to purchase any nonnuclear weapon it wanted from the US. As a result Iran became involved in regional politics and was often accused of serving its own interests.⁵⁰

Oil revenue was another area where Iran was faced with challenges. As the oil market demand established a seller's market the Shah sought ways to increase Iran revenues such as his nationalization of the oil consortium in January 1973.⁵¹ Iranian oil revenues rose from \$885 million in 1971 through to \$17.8 billion by 1975 as prices skyrocketed.⁵² The impact upon the Iranian economy was disastrous; inflation and

⁴⁹Ibid., 103.

⁵⁰Examples of such include supporting Pakistan during its war with India in 1971 and implicated the US in the support of the Kurds against Saddam Hussein, where the Shah turned around and abandoned them in the Algiers Accord with Hussein, effectively then allowing the Iraqi Army to crush the Kurds whom he (and through him, the US) had promised their support.

⁵¹Iran seized the initiative to boost oil revenues as a result of the Yom Kippur/Ramadan War, earning even more money by boosting production to compensate for the Arab state embargo on US exports due to the US support of Israel. The Shah was then able to influence a price increase again in 1973 which created an oil crisis through to 1974.

⁵²Mehran Kamrava, *Revolution in Iran: The Roots of Turmoil* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 17.

⁴⁸Pollack, *Persian Puzzle* . . ., 124.

unemployment, urbanization of peasants and the resulting symptoms of overcrowding in the cities. As a means to control the population through these trying times, the Shah continued to manipulate elections, controlled the press, controlled unions and suppressed all vehicles of political expression. In March, 1975, he even disbanded the two-party system and formed a single party system along the lines of other twentieth-century totalitarian parties.⁵³

In 1977 Jimmy Carter was elected the US President and his reputation as a defender of human rights was feared by the Shah and respected by the people of Iran.⁵⁴ The Shah anticipated pressure from Carter to reform his oppressive means of maintaining order in Iran. The people of Iran expected that Carter would support their cause and had begun to protest. Carter appeared to do nothing aside from support the Shah's regime; in fact, he made various public statements praising the Shah including calling Iran "an island of stability in a turbulent corner of the world."⁵⁵ The people of Iran interpreted his lack of action as a betrayal of the Iranian people's plight; many even believed that the US had ordered the Shah to continue his repression.⁵⁶ It was one more nail in the coffin; the US was becoming more widely hated by the Iranian public. Unhampered by any US pressure, the Shah moved to repress the public protests which only further enforced the Iranian hatred of the US.

Iranians believed that the Shah was wasting their oil profits on military hardware at the bequest of the US. An intellectual within the Ayatollah Khomeini's circle had said,

⁵⁶Ibid., 124.

⁵³Pollack, *Persian Puzzle* . . ., 115.

⁵⁴Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership* . . ., 4.

⁵⁵Pollack, *Persian Puzzle* . . ., 124.

"The economic health, social welfare and cultural integrity of the nation are being sacrificed so that the Shah can continue to rule within the framework of American strategic objectives." The US, and its Western influence, was deemed to be a Satan, not because of its military might or economic power but because of the way it erodes Iranian culture.⁵⁷ In the eyes of Iran, US capitalist greed was the root of all things evil in Iran. The Shah, as much as he attempted to distance himself from the growing US resentment, was commonly viewed as the "American King."⁵⁸

Secular and Disrespectful Attitude

In his effort to embrace the West in order to modernize Iran, to recreate the once all powerful Persian Empire, the Shah attempted to secularize all things that could inhibit change. His tolerance of religious minorities, equal rights for women, and reforms of law and education all served to threaten the Iranian culture. He even attempted to cease use of the Islamic calendar and adopt one founded on the Persian Empire. The Shah's police state terrorized the Iranian people, "[t]ens of thousands may have been tortured by SAVAK, and at least thousands were murdered."⁵⁹ All these acts forced change upon the people at such a rapid rate that, like the peasants who sought shelter in religion, forced his population to turn back to their clergy for support. Iranians turned back to their religion almost as a way of defying the Shah.⁶⁰

⁵⁷Stanley, "The Strategic Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran," 19.

⁵⁸Pollack, *Persian Puzzle* . . ., 124.

⁵⁹Ibid., 139.

Treatment of the Clergy

A last critical area that impacted Iran was the manner in which the Shah treated the clergy. As mentioned earlier, he stripped them of their land, took over religious endowments, controlled religious publishing and organizations, restricted pilgrimages, and finally his regime arrested, imprisoned, tortured and even executed many clerics.⁶¹ On his quest to modernization, the Shah attempted to portray that religion was no longer essential and that the mullahs were no longer necessary; they only hindered advancement of the empire. Encouraged by Khomeini and the oppressive nature of the Shah, the clergy established a network to communicate their message to the Iranian people which not only reinforced the importance of the clergy to the people of Iran but also served to establish the network to mobilize the people.⁶² The social order changes, the influence of the Western powers, the Shah's obvious attack of Iranian culture and finally his attack upon the clerics drove the people back into the arms of their religion.

Through this turbulence, Khomeini had remained a beacon from a religious perspective gaining ground on the Shah's regime of violent oppression and marginalization of Khomeini.⁶³ The people were disgusted that the government would slander Khomeini as he was considered a devout leader; this only served to elevate Khomeini as a symbol of the revolution. Khomeini was now capable of mobilizing the population and it was his two key positions that would serve to define the revolution: first that the Shah and his regime could no longer lead Iran and second, that the US was one of

⁶¹Ibid., 118.

⁶²Richard, *Shi'ite Islam* ..., 79.

⁶³Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership* . . ., 4.

the main sources of evil in the world.⁶⁴ This, combined with the recession caused by the Shah's oil price increases put in place all the necessary conditions for the establishment of a theocratic regime with extreme anti-Americanism.

Summary of Historical Impacts

All told Iranian history over this period formulated three key messages effectively becoming etched in future Iranian policies. First lesson was that a monarchy did not always make choices to benefit the people; instead they would only satisfy their own material or power greed. This had occurred with the Qajar Regime, Reza Shah, and Mohammad Reza Shah. Iran had also attempted a democratic constitution and it had failed probably because it had failed to appeal to all Iranian factions. To do so they needed something other than a monarch, they needed a form of government that would synergize the factions to achieve goals in the best interest of the country. Religion, with its pure intent, was prepared to provide the structure while working to establish a nation based on Islamic religious parameters. This shaped the welcoming of the theocratic solution presented after the revolution.

Secondly, that conflict is not as effective as power-play diplomacy and politics. First learned in the 19th century as a result of repeated losses with Russia, Iranians watched as the British, Russians and US effectively conducted power play diplomacy and politics to achieve results typically unattainable in conflict without significant effort. This was reconfirmed in the eight year war with Iraq, where, in the end, little was achieved. Another political-based lesson learned was through Mosaddeq's example of

⁶⁴Pollack, *Persian Puzzle* . . ., 128.

staking out an extreme position as occurred with the events surrounding the 1953 coup. The belief among Iranians that staking out of extreme positions is the right course of action even if the result is of great hardship. Without doubt this lesson has continued to resound within Iranian politics shaping the manner in which the Republic chooses to address international issues.

And lastly, that Iran has little to gain from aligning with a specific superpower that cannot be expected to remain loyal as shifts in politics make it undesirable. This hard lesson has reinforced policy in a number of ways. First lesson was in the Republic's adoption of their non-alignment and anti-foreign involvement policies post-1979. The Republic non-alignment foreign policy has been reinforced by the Russian-Britain tug of war over control of their territory, followed by the detrimental British exploitation of their resources, and finally the US passive acceptance of an oppressive regime all in order to maintain accessibility to hydrocarbons.

Secondly, that the extreme anti-foreign, specifically anti-US theme will continue through to the 21st century. Although there are numerous examples of foreign interference and manipulation of Iran, the threat has also been used by Iranian elites to rally the masses as was believed to be a contributing factor to the duration of the 1979 Hostage Crisis. Additional detail is provided at Appendix 1 to this paper, however it is important to note that the crisis was not only fueled by anti-foreign attitudes, it was encouraged by the Republic. The US, ignorant of the underlying issues within Iran was shocked at the manner in which the Republic handled itself essentially creating anti-Iranian theme themselves. All told the event served to firmly set the stage for a longstanding rift between the two nations. Third, this served to reinforce Iran's siege mentality or isolationism already established by their Shia religion. Iran needed to stand alone and not become aligned with a foreign power that would do little in the best interest of Iran, just as it had done with Shia Islamic it would do again as a theocracy and anti-foreign elements included in their constitution. The Republic also realized that it could wield the same diplomatic and political power at the regional level through the development of relationships with state and non-state actors. Each of these three themes: anti-monarchy, the use of power-play diplomacy and politics, and their non-alignment have served to mold the Iranian strategic culture into one that has successfully ensured their survival through many turbulent crises.

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

I never use my sword where the stick suffices, nor my stick where the tongue is enough; and if it is only a thread that binds me with my opponents, it will never be broken: if they pull it, I let it; and if they relax it I straighten it.⁶⁵

Revolutions are dramatic events in which the people rise up against the status quo, often without a clear picture of what it should be replaced with other than the fact that it must be replaced by another state instrument.⁶⁶ The resulting disorder can only be organized by someone in whom the people of the revolution recognize, someone who knows what the revolution sought to achieve, and Khomeini was that leader. Immediately after the revolution different groups around the country were attempting taking control back over their areas of interest, whether it was economic, religious, political, tribal, ethnic or even personal.⁶⁷ The fabric of the country seemed to be disintegrating. The one group which appeared to survive the revolution with some public recognition of authority was the clergy. The clergy retained their network that had worked so well against the Shah, the Islamic religion continued to be the one reliable constant in the lives of people, and the symbol of the revolution, Khomeini, had returned to Iran. Not everyone understood or even supported Khomeini and his philosophy, however each segment of Iranian society seemed to have interpreted his call for an Islamic Republic to represent their own best wishes and thereby the 1980 referendum (as

⁶⁵Kalif-Mouawia, founder of the Omayah Dynasty in 660 AD, quoted in Yonah Alexander and Milton Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership: Ahmadinejad, Terrorism, Nuclear Ambition, and the Middle East* (United States: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc, 2008), xi.

⁶⁶Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*..., 4. Although the people may not have a clear picture of a desired end state, Khomeini did.

⁶⁷Pollack, *Persian Puzzle* . . ., 142.

to whether the monarchy should be replaced by a republic) received a 98% yes vote from over 20 million voters.⁶⁸

 \dots [R]ight from the start, Khomeini emerged as the guiding light and defining spirit of Iran. He was the one person who could transcend the rancorous Iranian political battles and define the nation's course in a way that silenced most – and often all – opposition.⁶⁹

From a democratic perspective, the Republic and its unique government organization lacks Western state legitimacy and should be a weak state that can be easily manipulated. Based just upon the history of the Republic since the revolution this is not the case. In order to understand Iran, to comprehend its motivation and to appreciate its strategic culture it is necessary to appreciate that there are differences between Western and Iranian perspectives of a state and how the state obtains legitimacy. Appendix 2 provides an examination which concludes that the Republic is indeed legitimate in the eyes of Iranians. The Republic's strength comes from the overlapping of religion, the ideological task to liberate the Muslim nation of Western influence and the consent or social contract it has formed with the people of Iran; the net result is that Iranian's obey the commands of the state not out of fear or self-interest, but because they believe that the Iranian leadership have a moral authority to issue commands.⁷⁰

With the understanding that the people of Iran recognize legitimacy in the Islamic Republic of Iran – thus ensuring it is not a weak state – it is now necessary to study how the government was formed; key facts about its executive, legislative and judicial branches; and, a review of its different leaders since the revolution. This study will

⁶⁸Ibid., 152.

⁶⁹Ibid., 143.

provide keen insight as to how their strategy is formulated and widely applied within the Republic.

Theocratic Government

Iran's government structure, policies, and activities since the 1979 revolution are rather unique as it is the only theological Shi'ite state in existence. Khomeini's political philosophy was a concept based upon *veleyat-e fagih*, which means "rule of the jurisprudent," and Shi'ite traditions. As a believer in Plato's utopian society, he believed in "...a state that was ruled over by a theocratic philosopher-king -a man so learned in Islamic law that all of his peers and all of his countrymen would recognize that only he could provide the necessary guidance."⁷¹ Khomeini put forth the guidelines of his veleyat-e faqih in his 1970 political treatise, Islamic Government (Hukumat e-Islami) and once the referendum confirmed the people's desire to become a Republic, Khomeini set in place the necessary mechanism to establish an Assembly of Experts to revise the 1906 Constitution that would embody his concept. The result was a new religious institution that worked in parallel with the already existing, yet subordinated, state bureaucracy. There are those of the Shia clergy who do not share his interpretation of executive authority within the theocracy; however the Republic goes to great lengths to stem any opposing views.⁷²

⁷⁰Kalevi Holsti, *The State, War, and the State of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 87.

⁷¹Robert Baer, *The Devil We Know: Dealing with the New Iranian Superpower* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2008), 70.

⁷²These movements include the Iranian Freedom Movement; Clerics who either believe Khamenei is unqualified, that there should be a council of leaders instead of a Supreme Leader, and those who oppose the system of *valayat-e-faqih* altogether; the *Mojahedin-e-Khalq* (MEK); and numerous religious intellectuals. Keith Crane, Rollie Lal and Jeffrey Martini, *Iran's Political, Demographic, and Economic Vulnerabilities* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2008), 25-28. Additional detail of the clerics opposed

Within the revised constitution, the highest religious and political authority within *veleyat-e faqih* is the Supreme Leader who, based on his mastery of religious law and practice, is responsible for all domestic and foreign policies.⁷³ He is also the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, controls the intelligence and security operations, and is the sole authority to declare war or peace. The Supreme Leader also has the power to control the appointment and dismissal of the leaders of the judiciary, state media networks, and the supreme commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. He also has approximately 2,000 representatives throughout the government who have the power to intervene in the legislative process on his behalf if necessary.⁷⁴

According to the Iranian Constitution, the Supreme Leader is elected and supervised, and can be dismissed by the Assembly of Experts. The Assembly of Experts is made up of clerics who are elected by popular vote; however their candidacy is subject to approval by the Council of Guardians. Although they have the power to extend or dismiss the Supreme Leader, they have never challenged the Leader in any way that has been made known outside of their bi-annual meetings.

The Islamic Republic also has a president that is elected by the people for a period of four years and can serve no more than two terms. The president's power is second only to the Supreme Leader. Not unlike the Assembly of Experts, the constitution notes specific qualifications that one must have in order to be the president and it is the same Council of Guardians which assess whether presidential nominations meet these

to Khomeini's proposal have also been described by Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam will Shape the Future* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006), 125-126.

⁷³Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini* (Berkeley, California: Muzan Press, 1981), 60-61.

⁷⁴Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership*..., 14.

qualifications. For example, the 2005 elections had 2,000 applicants for nomination and the Council of Guardians only selected eight; the Supreme Leader further reduced the pool to two candidates.⁷⁵ Elections are typically stable and competitive between conservative and reformist nominees.⁷⁶

Primarily, the president is responsible for economic policy, including budgets and development plans and acts as chief dignitary for international relations. Subject to approval of the Supreme Leader, he presides over the Supreme National Security Council and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security. The council of ministers are confirmed by the Parliament (Majles) however the Council of Guardians provides over watch and has veto over who is selected as a minister.⁷⁷

The Supreme National Security Council coordinates foreign and military policies and includes the Speaker of the Majles; the head of the judiciary; the chief of the combined general staff of the armed forces; the ministers of foreign affairs, interior, intelligence; and the commanders of the Islamic Revolutionary Corps and regular military. According to Article 176 of the constitution, it is responsible for "preserving the Islamic Revolution, territorial integrity, and national sovereignty." Although technically part of the judicial branch it is effectively managed by the president.⁷⁸

The Legislative Branch of the Republic includes the Majles, the Council of Guardians and the Expediency Council. The Majles consist of 290 members who are

⁷⁵Ibid., 14.

⁷⁶Sadri, "Surrounded . . .," 22.

⁷⁷Crane, Lal and Martini, *Iran's Political, Demographic, and Economic Vulnerabilities*, 11.

⁷⁸Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership*..., 15.

elected every four years. As with the presidency, there are a number of criteria that must be met to become a candidate and it is the Council of Guardians who remains the approving authority for anyone who wishes to become a candidate for the Majles. Although the Majles typically have both open and closed deliberations, they remain subordinate to the Council of Guardians, who may veto their decisions should they deem them to be against the spirit of the constitution. However, it is important to note that the Majles does hold much public debate on many of the current world issues affecting Iran and its people.⁷⁹ The Majles reflect conservative and reformist opinions, the majority reflecting the results of the elections. The relationship between the Council of Guardians and the Majles became so unproductive that in 1988, the Supreme Leaders established the Iranian Expediency Discernment Council of the System to mediate between the two parties.

The Council of Guardians, the controlling entity of the whole system, consists of twelve religious jurisprudence trained jurists. Six are appointed by the Supreme Leader and six are nominated by the judiciary and voted on by the Majles. The Council of Guardians is responsible to ensure all legislation passed by the Majles is consistent with Islamic Law and their constitution.⁸⁰ They also control the approval of all nominations to be considered for president, the Majles, and the Assembly of Experts. As such they are in a position to heavily influence the composition of each of the key organizations, simply by managing who is authorized to become a candidate. If, for some reason, they still are unable to control the parliament through nominations then they can just return the

⁷⁹Sadri, "Surrounded . . .," 22.

⁸⁰Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership*..., 17.

legislation back to the Majles for revision until it meets what they believe to be consistent with the constitution and Islamic Law.

Another influential power broker within the Republic is the State non-profit organizations called *Bonyads*, as they have the ability to redistribute income and influence loyalty. Their official activities include providing for war veterans, propagating Islam, and aiding the poor but they are also used to put resources into the hands of friendly state and non-state actors and to help fund groups tasked with suppressing regime opponents.⁸¹ Having existed well before the Revolution, they took over all the confiscated assets of the Shah and his supporters and have now expanded into the manufacturing and industrial enterprises representing approximately 40 percent of Iran's nonoil economy.⁸² They report directly to the Supreme Leader and use his influence to their advantage, maintaining their status as a religious and tax-exempt organization. As such they have much to lose with any liberalization of the economy or reforming of the political system, and they use their influence to maintain the status quo. Acting as a monopoly in many sectors, they strangle competitors and serve to inhibit growth in the Iranian economy.

The current composition of the Majles is believed to have been manipulated by the Council of Guardians through their control of nominations as it has shown nationalistic tendencies, favouring a traditional approach to foreign policy and collective empowerment.⁸³ One must remember though that the Council of Guardians is really an

⁸¹Crane, Lal and Martini, *Iran's Political, Demographic, and Economic Vulnerabilities*, 16.
⁸²Ibid., 16.

⁸³Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership*..., 17.

extension of the Supreme Leader, who fills six of the twelve positions on the council at his own discretion and undoubtedly influences the nomination and vote of the remaining six. Like the Supreme Leader's 2000 representatives throughout the government ministries bidding his wishes, the Council of Guardians allows him to exercise almost complete control of the Republic. Although the people are entitled to vote and can observe Majles debate, it is tightly controlled behind the scenes as to who they vote for and what actual legislation is passed. However, public support is an essential component in ensuring the endurance of the Republic therefore the Supreme Leader and his cohorts must consider it and address public interest issues. So, although long-term reform is theoretically possible within this theocracy, it will not occur without the support of the Supreme Leader. By acknowledging these influences, it may be possible to more fully appreciate how strategy and policy is formulated within the Republic.

Sadr and Khamenei

In January 1980 Abolhassan Bani Sadr, the first elected president of the Islamic Republic, took his office. In the newly established constitution the presidency was established as the highest office directly elected by the people but it was subordinate to the Supreme Leader and his Council of Guardians as per Khomeini's concept of *veleyat-e faqih*. When Bani Sadr attempted to challenge this theology, he was impeached by the Maljes and fled to Paris.⁸⁴ Sayyed Ali Khamenei became the President in 1981 and he dutifully followed Khomeini's lead and served two consecutive terms as president and then, in an unusual turn of events he was appointed as Supreme Leader, replacing

⁸⁴Ibid., 6. Sadr was replaced by Mohammad Ali Rajai, who allegedly won a rigged election and was soon died in a bomb attack by elements of the MEK. Khamenei then succeeded Rajai and was the first clergy to be granted the authority to submit his name for president.

Khomeini after his death in 1989. Much turmoil surrounded the appointment as Khamenei was chosen over much more qualified religious experts. Khomeini's decision was a pragmatic one, selecting his successor based on his political skills and rather than *velayat-e faqih*.⁸⁵ Overall the transition was smooth and other than some initial perceived lack of religious legitimacy, Khamenei has continued where Khomeini left off.

Rafsanjani

Hashemi Rafsanjani was elected as president after Khamenei in 1989 and he also served two consecutive four year terms. His goals included rebuilding the economy which had been dramatically affected by the eight year war with Iraq. He also wished to decentralize large industry and eliminate corruption while also attempting to support a women's movement. However, much of his efforts were thwarted by the conservative Islamic clerics and unaided by the US refusal to unfreeze Iranian assets after the release of hostages.⁸⁶ This was also a key period of time in the history of the Republic where the kaleidoscope of Iranian politics first becomes apparent to the outside world. It has been noted that Rafsanjani was very politically motivated and even had (and continues to have) aspirations of succeeding Khamenei as the Supreme Leader.⁸⁷ Thus, it is deduced that he was quick to compromise his principles in order to advance his own career. Although he realized that Iran needed good relations with the rest of the world including

⁸⁵Khomeini's ideological policy faced stark reality through the termination of the Iran-Iraq War and was faced with having to make more and more pragmatic and nationalistic decisions to ensure the survival of the Republic. His decision to make Khamenei his successor clearly identified his acceptance of a more realist policy approach. This argument is further detailed by Sam Razavi, "Post-Khomeini Iran: A Case of Pragmatic Foreign Policy," Paper presentation, ISA 50th Annual Convention, New York, February 2009: 1-13.

⁸⁶Ibid., 7.

⁸⁷Pollack, Persian Puzzle . . ., 249.

the US, he would not directly propose to open those negotiations for loss of popular support.⁸⁸ There were still Khomeini believers in many strategic positions in the government and those that believed in some type of reform failed to emerge as a unified group. The net result was a fragmented Kaleidoscope of small groups and individuals each with their own perspective.⁸⁹

Lastly, the Supreme Leader was loath to allow Rafsanjani any freedom with foreign policy. Although he let Rafsanjani manage domestic issues, Khamenei maintained the Khomeini position of anti-US and the "exportation" of the revolution. Throughout this period Iranian foreign policy was essentially being shaped by four key factors: the destruction of Iraq, the fall of the Soviet Union, the rise of various Islamic movements worldwide and US-sponsored Middle East peace process.⁹⁰ The 1988 and 2003 conflicts in Iraq, while it removed their Western threat, it came with a significant build-up of US forces in the Middle East that was very threatening to Iran. The 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union removed their northern threat but it also opened a new source for military equipment for Iran to increase its military strength. There were also an increasing number of Islamic movements that looked to the Iranian Revolution as a model they could someday achieve and Iran saw in them natural allies.⁹¹ Using this newfound political momentum of the shared intent to reduce US influence and counter

⁸⁸Ibid., 250.

⁸⁹Ibid., 251.

⁹⁰Ibid., 253.

⁹¹Ibid., 254. During this time period there were many countries in which Islamic movement began to gain momentum such as the Islamist in Algeria saw an electoral wins in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the rise of an Islamic government in Sudan, Hezballah in Lebanon, the rise of HAMAS in Palestine, growth of Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, and growing support for Islamic groups in Egypt.

Israel, Iran adapted their foreign policy to work with these movements. Supporting these movements was engrained in the Iranian constitution (article 154 which directs assistance to the oppressed) and Khomeini's foreign policy desire to export the revolution. These movements not only fit their ideology of assisting the oppressed but also provided another opportunity to indirectly attack their greatest threat, the US. Lastly, the Middle East peace process represented an unacceptable degree of foreign influence in the Middle East; it could also lead to the loss of key allies that enabled Iran to dabble in Islamic movements, such as the Hezballah in Lebanon.

With all these factors considered, Iran still had to keep in mind US military strength and it devised a foreign policy which would enable it to achieve its objectives through means and ends that would not give the US sufficient reason to employ its powerful military might against Iran. They adopted dimensions that included diplomacy, propaganda, subversion, terrorism as well as a defensive military component all with a view to deterring a US invasion. Although deterrence of the US was not the only factor which justified the Iranian nuclear program it probably was the most significant. There were other justifications such as an alternate source of energy, deterring Israel, building international prestige and dealing with regional threats that had kept the program from being discontinued in the early 1980's.

The world reacted in two ways with the US adopting a "containment" policy that essentially maintained the status quo of sanctions against oil development and eventually against all commerce with Iran while the European nations emphasized a policy of "critical dialogue" where it desired maintenance of communications with Iran as a means to curb their internal misbehaviours. It has been suggested that the Europeans adopted this indirect strategy as a means of ensuring continued economic relations without sanction impediments.⁹² Whatever the reasons, both policies did not appear to be successful as Iranian behaviour did not change and, in fact, their sponsorship of Islamic movements only increased.

Even without the Supreme Leader's support and throughout the escalated sponsored violence, Rafsanjani still attempted to open discussions with the US but when the conservatives believed this was being considered Rafsanjani quickly reversed his position. These frequent changes in policy only further confused and frustrated Western nations. If it were not already stereotypically considered a rouge nation by the Western public at large, Iran provided the justification needed in its public statements after the assassination of the infamous peace broker, the Prime Minister of Israel in 1995. Although Iran was overjoyed at having the peace process threat so dramatically ceased, their public statements on such a respected individual and their increasing support or Islamic movements did nothing but lose respect in the eyes of the world.⁹³ This, in turn, would discourage others (even though not necessarily bothered by the Iranian position) to remain at an arms length to the Republic in order to avoid too close of an association with what was quickly being publically accepted as a rouge nation. Again, Iran would need to reassess the factors that formulate their foreign policy and determine the success of this exportation of the revolution.

⁹²Ibid., 264.

⁹³Ibid., 277.

Khatami

The tide began to change in 1997 with the election of Seyyed Mohammed Khatami. Khatami was a reformer who enticed the people of Iran because he was a change from the post-revolutionary regime and he favoured social and cultural freedom. He was not well known by the people and therefore was probably approved by the Council of Guardians because of the unlikelihood of his winning.⁹⁴ The voter turn out was tremendous and reinforced the popular desire for change. The Khatami win was as shocking to Khatami himself as it was to the Majles, which may explain how Khatami was able to make some reform in his first term. He also supported attempts to open discussions with the US and, although he succeeded more than Rafsanjani, his efforts were nonetheless rejected by the conservatives.

Khatami did succeed in encouraging the US to acknowledge his efforts and to make several gestures of support (such as the liberalizing of visas, sending wrestlers and other cultural exchanges, allowing the sale of food and medicine, the President's Millennium Evening near apology) that could reinforce his reform movement within Iran but it was not enough. The ideological clash between his reformist attempts and the conservatives lead to oppressive activities within the country.⁹⁵ Although this led to a popular revolt, Khatami was unprepared to lead it and backed down to conservative pressures. His reformist movement quickly lost momentum and even through he continued to fight for change through a second term he was unable to wrestle the power

⁹⁴Ibid., 306.

⁹⁵Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership*..., 8. Terrorist and oppressive activities increased such as, closing down of a majority of reformist newspapers and charging key staff with death sentences, allegedly trumped up corruption charges were laid against key political figures which sparked rioting, journal offices were firebombed, and assassinations.

from the conservatives. The Supreme Leader and his Council of Guardians learned well from this experience, wherein Khamenei even decreed that any Iranian official attempting to establish bilateral relationships with the US would be dismissed.⁹⁶

This attempt to cease bilateral relationships seemed to fall by the wayside as a result of terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (9/11) and Afghanistan becoming the next US concern. It drew Iran and US into closer and closer discussions as Iran also vehemently opposed the Taliban. Based upon the US President public addresses post-9/11, it was clear that the US was going to attack Afghanistan leaving Iran with three choices. Iran's first option was to work with the US and then be able to influence to ensure their own interests were respected, to remain neutral, or to oppose the US and possibly have the US negatively impact upon Iranian interests.⁹⁷ Iran selected the first option but not without an expected degree of "double-talk" where the Supreme Leader would privately authorize working with the US but then would also publically condemn it.

Iran did work with the US on many issues on Afghanistan, even indicating a desire to move towards discussions other than Afghanistan. This did not last long once the US suspected that Iran had sold military equipment to the Palestinian Authority (PA) and soon become aware that Iran was supporting terrorism through the Hezballah, HAMAS and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). The US also became aware of the suspicious Iranian nuclear intentions and people began to believe that nuclear weapons could be a capability provided to these Islamic movements. In 2002 US President Bush

⁹⁶Ibid., 9.

⁹⁷Pollack, *Persian Puzzle* . . ., 348.

labelled Iran an "Axis of Evil" and in response, Khatami stated that "[w]hen a big power uses a militant, humiliating and threatening tone to speak to us, our nation will refuse to negotiate or show any flexibility."⁹⁸

Although the move and countermove did not cease US/Iran discussions on Afghanistan, if nothing else it gave each country an ability to study the other in hopes of learning their intentions. This served its purpose when it became clear to Iran that the US was going to invade Iraq and remove Saddam. As discussed in detail within Appendix 3, Iran was interested not only because Saddam was considered an enemy but because, like Afghanistan, what happened in Iraq could significantly impact an already unhappy and economically weakened Iranian people.⁹⁹ Iran believed that the US would transform Iraq into an independent democratic Iraq that could favour the Shia majority. Thus the US could achieve for Iran what it could not do itself – to create an Iranian ally in a new Iraq.¹⁰⁰ To do this Iran new that the US would need to stabilize Iraq after they removed Saddam, therefore this will ensure Iraq did not slip into a chaos that could quickly spread into Iran. The longer that the US remained in place ensured stability as well as a Shia majority government.

With a strategy which reinforces the fact that Iran is not a rouge nation and demonstrates a nation that formulates policy in order to preserve its national interests,

⁹⁸"US 'Evil Access' Charge Enrages Iran," *China Daily*. New York, 5 June 2002 quoted in Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership* . . . ,10.

⁹⁹Referring to the axiom "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," anyone that removes the Iran's enemy Saddam Hussein and confronts al-Qaeda (Sunni fundamentalists also engaged in a holy war with Shia Muslims) can be considered a friend to Iran. Although this goes against the engrained anti-US fever within the Republic leadership, it is an opportunity that Iran has opted to gain advantage very cautiously. David L Phillips, *Losing Iraq: Inside the Postwar Reconstruction Fiasco* (United States: Westview Press, 2005), 103.

Khamenei managed Iranian interests in Iraq to Iran's benefit. He allowed the intelligence forces to deploy into Iraq to make the necessary arrangements in order to be prepared to take action should it become clear that the US was planning to launch into Iran and no action was authorized except by the Supreme Leader.¹⁰¹ In this way, Iran deployed a number of assets into Iraq; however, they remained officially neutral towards the US thereby allowing the US to expend effort and manpower to achieve stability and democracy rule for the majority. As long as the US continues to do this work to the benefit of Iran, without the threat of launching into Iran, the Supreme Leader will continue to direct his forces to remain neutral yet poised should the tides change.

Ahmadinejad

In 2005, the presidency election was won by Majmoud Ahmadinejad even though he had been publically accused of being an Islamic radical by his election rivals.¹⁰² To appreciate Ahmadinejad's conservative nature, one must just examine his first act as president: he kissed the hand of the Supreme Leader and pledged his alliance. This was the first time any president had done this and symbolizes the close link between the elected president and the Supreme Leader. Khamenei had exactly what he needed to help him deal with the numerous threats building in the Middle East. Ahmadinejad was in favour of a true and pure theocracy, was opposed to improving relations with the US, and was totally dedicated to the wishes of the Supreme Leader.¹⁰³ Considering the challenges

¹⁰⁰Iran had attempted to rally the Iraq Shi'a during the Iran-Iraq War and was unable to convince them to rise up against Saddam.

¹⁰¹Pollack, *Persian Puzzle* . . ., 357.

¹⁰²Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership*..., 9.

¹⁰³Yossi Melman and Meir Javedanfar, *The Nuclear Sphinx of Tehran: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad* and the State of Iran (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2007), 40.

that Khamenei had with his last two presidents, Ahmadinejad would support him to do what was necessary to ensure the survival of the Republic.

Ahmadinejad had been a senior officer of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as well as a long serving member of the civil service having most recently been the Mayor of Tehran from 1997-2005. He is well educated and has a PhD in engineering and traffic transportation planning from the Iran University of Science and Technology. As Mayor, Ahmadinejad was instrumental in making the city more Islamic and encouraged traditional culture over that which the reformists had fostered. He has adopted many conservative foreign policies such as denying Israel's right to exist, supporting a Shia constituencies throughout the Middle East, refusing to comply with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and publicly denying the occurrence of the Holocaust.¹⁰⁴ Ahmadinejad has had little difficult in obtaining the Supreme Leader's support to implement conservative laws to ban Western music, ban reformist newspapers, and the removal of liberal and secular professors from universities.¹⁰⁵

Oil was not only something that Ahmadinejad believed he could use to help the Iranian poor, he also believed that he could use it to shield it against international sanctions or military attack. He sees it as an important tool to implement his policies and his political rivals know that and use their influence to temper his ability to gain full control of the industry. Simultaneously, his focus on the nuclear program and inflammatory remarks on Iran's right to acquire nuclear power has provided Israel grounds to convince the world that Iran poses a threat to the existence of a Jewish state,

¹⁰⁴Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership*..., 32.
¹⁰⁵Ibid., 10.

as well as the stability of the region and indeed the world.¹⁰⁶ His comments have indeed concerned the region as well as the Western nations and have included: "The people of Iran will not give up their right to exploit peaceful nuclear technology....They are not intimated by the arrogant uproar and propaganda today."¹⁰⁷ Further, he had also stated that "Iran is ready to transfer nuclear [power] know-how to the Islamic countries due to their need."¹⁰⁸ Others, such as Knepper in *Nuclear Weapons and Iranian Strategic Culture*, offer that Iran's intent is merely a diplomatic offer to help its Sunni neighbours with the joint development of nuclear energy and this offer reinforces Iran's regional power.¹⁰⁹ Unfortunately, the message being passed by Ahmadinejad has gone beyond simply deterring Iran's enemies, it is likely going to force them to take proactive measures to ensure Iran' nuclear development ceases or at least only proceeds under the eyes of the international community.

Ahmadinejad, through his years of experience in the military and public service, is a man of conviction who is convinced that negotiating, compromise or even engagement is a wasted effort and that strength is the only attribute that is truly respected, thus his confrontational approach to most everything. Experience and his perception of Iranian history has taught him several lessons: results will only come to those who remain determined against significant challenges despite the hardship; the Republic can face its

¹⁰⁶Melman and Javedanfar, *The Nuclear Sphinx of Tehran* . . ., 224.

¹⁰⁷Fox News, "*Iran Shrugs off Security Council Referral*," 13 July 2006; available from http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,203285,00.html; Internet; accessed 2 April 2009.

¹⁰⁸The American Israel Public Affairs Committee. 15 September 2005 quoted in Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership* . . ., 35.

¹⁰⁹Knepper, "Nuclear Weapons and Iranian Strategic Culture," 454.

enemies only if it stays united and firm; and that force provides its own justification. Ali Ansari in his book *Confronting Iran* suggests that Ahmadinejad simply seeks a state of continued tension and confrontation which then enables Iran to stand alone – isolated without interference from the US.¹¹⁰ Western nations have obviously been concerned with his unorthodox views and hard-line politics, but their criticism of Ahmadinejad will only confirm Iran's righteousness.¹¹¹ His desire for Iran to thrive in its protective isolationism is supported with a high price of oil but unlikely to entice Iranian support without that sizeable revenue.

Lastly, the attempts that Ahmadinejad is making to resolve the Iranian economic problems of the poor are not having the desired effects. Dubbed as Ahmadinejadenomics, his efforts have not been supported by the Iranian economists. Nor have his attempts to address corruption made much progress. Corruption appears to be throughout the government, even the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, making it difficult to change as it would necessitate taking on the leadership. This is something Ahmadinejad is just not prepared to do.

Summary of Political Impacts

The history of Iran has shaped its government and politics. The themes of religious *veleyat-e faqih*, power-play politics with double-talk, and a sense of isolation or siege mentality have duly influenced the adoption of non-alignment and anti-Western positions throughout the structure and workings of the government. The political system

¹¹⁰Ansari, *Confronting Iran*..., 230. Also supported by Sanam Vakil, "Tehran Gambles to Survive," *Current History* 106, no. 704 (December 2007): 414-421. Shahram Chubin states that Ahmadinejad uses confrontation to enhance his domestic standing, to energize national pride and nationalism in Shahram Chubin, "Iran's Power in Context," *Survival* 51, no. 1 (February-March 2009): 175.

¹¹¹Ansari, *Confronting Iran* . . ., 231.

has overpowered the ideological policies, now supporting a pragmatic approach to achieving national interests such as the survival of the Regime. Power-play politics has provided the Republic with a non-violent, realist-type means of deterring external threats and maintaining its regional power. Although the double-talk does lead to frustration with foreign nations, exploring its underlying message provides insight into the Iranian strategy of deterrence. For example, the "…persistent antagonism toward Israel cannot be solely attributed to its Islamist pretensions: the [Islamic Republic of Iran] believes that its strident ideological position on Israel gives it a strategic benefit by legitimizing its leadership of the world's Muslim population."¹¹² The Iranian regime is using the Palestinian struggle "to assert its influence, garner popular approbation, and affirm claims as a regional power."¹¹³ The Iranian rhetoric has never specifically outlined the physical destruction of the state of Israel; rather it is about the removal of the current regime in favour of one state nation that unites Jews, Arabs, and Muslims.¹¹⁴

Iran's history of occupation and persistent interference by other nations has reinforced their non-alignment policy. When this is combined with the fact that Iran has "neither the ethnic background nor communal ties to form durable alliances based upon shared values and a common vision with its neighbours," it will dogmatically refuse fruitful relationships with other nations.¹¹⁵ In fact, this has become so engrained that it is

¹¹²Ray Takeyh, *Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2006), 199.

¹¹³Ibid., 200.

¹¹⁴Dabros, "Rogue State or Rational State Actor? . . .," 21.

¹¹⁵Takeyh, *Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 62. This point was reinforced by Knepper, "Nuclear Weapons and Iranian Strategic Culture," 455-456.

necessary for all politicians to speak like anti-American hardliners in order to maintain creditability and to just survive. Also, its unique hybrid political system has also reasoned that because Republic did not sign the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia it has justified to itself that the Republic can manipulate international law and pay little attention to what the West defines as an acceptable modern nation-state.¹¹⁶

This investigation has noted that the Iranian political system has the capability to reflect the desire of the people, with checks and balances principled into the system spreading the decision making authority across a number of bodies.¹¹⁷ Secondly, it proved that change was possible within the Iranian theocracy even when change was not supported by the conservatives or the Supreme Leader himself. As such, Khatami provided some results in this regard but appeared to lack a developed strategy or he may have been able to further exploit the freedom offered by the Majles. Instead, he led with popular social and cultural reform that did little other than address symptoms of the conservative system.

Lastly, it does provide significant insight into the competing strategies within the Iranian Republic. The conservative leaders care deeply for their Islamic Republic and will pragmatically sacrifice or suppress the freedoms of their people for the betterment or survival of the Republic. Based upon their last 200 years of experience with Western Powers, the Soviet Union, their own Monarchy and even regional war the Republic represents the only means for them to sustain their way of life as they believe it.

¹¹⁶Baer, The Devil We Know: Dealing with the New Iranian Superpower, 127.

¹¹⁷Sadri, "Surrounded . . .," 22.

SURVIVIAL INSURANCE POLICIES

For both prestige and deterrence purpose nations seek to impress other nations with the power one's own nation actually possess, or with the power it believes, or wants the other nations to believe, it possesses.¹¹⁸

The impact of Iranian history on its strategic culture can be traced through to its major policies of the 21st century and four areas will be examined. First, religious policies and how the Republic focuses on Shi'ism as well as pan-Islamic issues to maintain its regional deterrence power. Second, the economic policies with respect to hydrocarbons will be reviewed to demonstrate how they are also providing Iran a means of dominating the region. Third, the military organization and the use of nuclear power will make obvious that Iran's survival strategy is supported through military deterrence. Lastly, the Republic's relationships and position of non-alignment will be examined. Iranian strategic culture formed through their history and political structure will be made clear through the assessment of these four areas of policy, reinforcing their uniqueness as the only theocratic state.

Shia Crescent and Pan-Islam Policies

Founded in the 7th century by the Prophet Muhammad, Islam believers (Muslims) can be divided amongst two primary denominations that are similar in belief but which have theological and legal differences: the Sunni and the Shia. The Sunni's believe that God gave mankind all it needed to manage and guide their own lives using the *Quaran* and the saying and history of the Prophet whereas the Shia's believe that the *Imams* (divinely ordained leaders) were responsible to guide their communities and uphold the

¹¹⁸Hans Morgenthau quoted in Jennifer Knepper, "Nuclear Weapons and Iranian Strategic Culture," *Comparative Strategy: An International Journal* 27, no. 5 (2008): 461.

tradition of martyrdom and sacrifice in the face of opposition and attack.¹¹⁹ In the absence of the *Imams*, the Shia have turned to religious leaders called *mujtahids* to lead their communities and this became the root to Khomeini's concept of *veleyat-e faqih*.¹²⁰ The result was a community leader that has both religious and political responsibility, unifying church and state with a political spirituality.

It is believed that approximately 85% of the world's Muslims are Sunni and approximately 15% are Shia, and they are distributed as per figure 1 below. Not only is there a sizeable population of Muslims (1.2 billion) of which approximately 140 million are Shia, there is a continuous geographic belt of Muslims which also happen to also occupy the terrain over key internationally required hydrocarbon deposits. Specially, Shia population concentrations are over three quarters of those deposits, representing a significant geo-cultural and geo-strategic force.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ The largest Shia group is called the twelvers as they believe that there were twelve imams and that the twelfth imam would return to rule the world followed by ultimate judgment of all mankind. There are other Shia sects which believe in different numbers of imam. Pollack, *Persian Puzzle*..., 12. Willis Stanley provides insight as to the tradition of martyrdom and sacrifice in Willis Stanley, "The Strategic Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran," 8.

¹²⁰Pollack, *Persian Puzzle* . . ., 13.

¹²¹Thierry Dufour, "L'influence de L'Iran au travers du chiisme. Mode operatoire, succes et limites de la politique por-chiite iranienne". *Diploweb.com*; available from http:///www.diploweb.com; Internet; accessed 7 April 2009 as quoted in Pierre Pahlavi, "Iran's Policy of Regional Influence: Pan-Shiism or Pan-Islamism?" Paper presentation, ISA 49th Annual Convention, San Francisco, March 2008: 3.

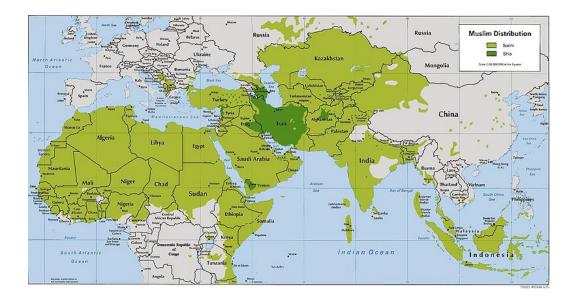


Figure 1 – Muslim Distribution Source: Available at http://islamicweb.com; Internet; accessed 3 April 2009.

Shi'ism is not an Iranian version of Islam, although Iran now defines itself through its association with Shi'ism. The *Imams* were Arabs who lived and died in Arab lands and all the prayers and theological texts are in Arabic; even one of their most reverent religious centres is Najaf, Iraq. Iran's adoption of Shi'ism in 1501 served to isolate its culture and formation of politics like an island surrounded by a sea of Sunni Ottoman Turks, so much so that it evolved much different from the rest of the Muslim world.¹²² The net result was a political formation of clergy responsible to lead their communities as the sole person who can interpret their faith. This was unintentionally reinforced by the Shah, who crushed any political parties motivated to effect change. As was discussed in the first section, the Shahs were unable to effectively control the clergy in the same way as his other opponents which reinforced the clergy becoming the social body empowered as both religious and political leaders with the Iranian society.

¹²²Richard, *Shi'ite Islam* ..., 78.

The 1979 Revolution that formed the Islamic Republic of Iran became the first Islamic power structure to exist since the fall of the Caliphate in 1924 and, although it did not outwardly call for the restoration of a global Caliphate, its constitution encouraged ideological exportation. It included article 152, which stated that Iran would protect the rights of all Muslims and article 154, where Iran committed to supporting the underprivileged for their rights against the powerful in every region of the world.¹²³ Even so, Iran found that its attempts to export its ideology were challenged as it was using pure Shi'ite religious themes to mobilize regional Shi'ites while at the same time reaching out to the Sunnis, who were immobilized by messages that were incompatible with their own beliefs.¹²⁴ As a result, in 1992, Iranian policy became more realist in nature, adopting a less political religious policy in favour of becoming a model of Shia development through a number of non-governmental actors and networks, financing Iranian political and paramilitary activity across Islamic communities through a variety of economic systems such as the *Bonvads*.¹²⁵ Shi'ism did however provide constitutional justification for all political decisions, religious structures, and military doctrine and has formed the primary means for Iranian's to self-identify.¹²⁶

The Supreme Leader and his follower's interpretation of Islam define both domestic and international policy. It also influences the behaviour of its leaders much in the same way as the ingrained anti-foreign attitude shapes Iranian interaction with the

¹²⁶Stanley, "The Strategic Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran," 20-21.

¹²³Ibid., 204.

¹²⁴Ibid., 199.

¹²⁵Pierre Pahlavi, "Iran's Policy of Regional Influence: Pan-Shiism or Pan-Islamism?" Paper presentation, ISA 49th Annual Convention, San Francisco, March 2008: 7.

international community; that is, if you do not speak the message according to the Supreme Leader or according to his interpretation of Islam you will lose credibility and support from the people of Iran. The ultimate service of all Iranians is to ensure the survival of the regime, "...to abandon it would be to abandon the will of God."¹²⁷ This viewpoint has even evolved into a realist perspective as a result of the Iran-Iraq war where Khomeini opted to end the war based upon state survival rather than continuing it as a legitimacy of the revolution.¹²⁸ This realist perspective can also be seen in Iran's recommencement of its weapons of mass destruction and even its suspected nuclear weapon programs in direct contradiction to Khomeini having stated that these weapons were immoral according to Islamic law.¹²⁹

Even though Khomeini was not as successful at exporting the revolution to all Muslims as he might have wished, there is little doubt that Shi'ism has undergone revitalization since 1979. Most recently, the installation of a shia-based government in Iraq, the inroads made with the Shia minority within Afghanistan, as well as the political victories of the Hezbollah and the growing community of Shia in Lebanon, and the increasing influence of the Shia minority in Pakistan have generated concern in the other Sunni communities.¹³⁰ As many of these communities have sizable minorities of Shia,

¹²⁷Ibid., 19.

¹³⁰Pahlavi, "Iran's Policy of Regional Influence: Pan-Shiism or Pan-Islamism?", 3.

¹²⁸Knepper, "Nuclear Weapons and Iranian Strategic Culture," 453.

¹²⁹Anthony C Cain, "Iran's Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction: Implications of US Policy." Maxwell Air Force Base: Air War College Maxwell Paper no. 26, 2002; available from http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/maxwell/mp26.pdf; Internet; accessed 7 April 2009, 9.

there has been growing political accommodation of their Shia.¹³¹ Several authors have written that this combination of the influence and accommodation plus the emerging Shia leadership of Iraq clearly demonstrates the emergence of a supposed Shia crescent.

The concern does have some basis in fact as discussed by Kayhan Barzegar in The Shia Factor in Iran's Foreign Policy, where Barzegar outlines some realities: (1) an alliance between Iran and Shia communities will unbalance Sunni-led governments, (2) this alliance has already occurred in Iran, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon where the regimes are against the existing political balance in the Middle East, and (3) it is expected that this alliance would confront US presence and involvement in the region and this in turn, will further weaken the Sunni regimes who are supporting the foreign involvement.¹³² These concerns, whether generated out of a true concern or merely as a means for Sunni leaders to obtain additional US funds and support, have created some doubt internationally as it is not clear that Iran is merely continuing its realist policies to establish friendly relationships with states in the region. It is possible that relationships with other Shia communities will help expand mutual trade and cultural interactions, will help expand the Shia community, and it may help Iran demonstrate a realist approach to establishing security and economic opportunities thus providing some grounds for resolving some challenges with the US.¹³³

¹³³Ibid., 3.

¹³¹Ibid., 5.

¹³²Dr Kayhan Barzegar, "The Shia Factor in Iran's Foreign Policy." Center for Strategic Research, November 2008; available at http://www.csr.ir/Departments.aspx"1ng=en&semid=1421&depid=74&abtid=07; Internet; accessed 1 December 2008, 4.

The Shia factor within Iran's foreign policy does provide leverage with both Sunni and US leaders, but it especially provides Iran with an advantage on the US. Iran's ability to exercise natural influence through geography and religion will far exceed the influence the US hopes to gain through the use of troops - whether the US opts to stay or withdraw, either option supports Iranian natural influence.¹³⁴ While it can be accepted that Iran's regional hegemony depends to a significant degree on its ties with other Shia populations and movements in the Gulf region it is clear that Iran could not rely exclusively on Shi'ism to maintain its regional power.

The fallacy of the "Shia crescent" is revealed through its religious base as well as Iranian national limitations as outlined by Pierre Pahlavi in *The Shia Crescent: Between Myth and Reality*. First, the Shia religion is made up of many different factions that are divided geographically, ethnically, and culturally. Although some common religious ground has been established it is unlikely that Iran could overcome the major differences outside its own borders. Second, the Shia clergy are not structured to counter the many theological and ethno-national sub-groupings of the whole region that encompasses the Shia population. Lastly, Iran's economic model has failed to be overly successful to date making it less likely to provide anything beyond religious unity. It is reasonable to assume that a realist Iran is aware of these limitations and has therefore begun to adopt a more positive and likely more successful pan-Islamic approach in order to achieve its goal of maintaining regional hegemony.

As was seen in the early 1990's, Iran began to shift from focusing just on Shia to the entirety of the Muslim world. Most recently, these efforts have redoubled with the election of President Ahmadinejad whose public addresses often contain themes of anti-

¹³⁴Gareth Porter, "Iran's Regional Power Rooted in Shia Ties," Antiwar.com, 17 December 2008.

imperialism and anti-Zionism, and refer to the "Muslim peoples", "the future of Islam", and "the Islamic nation." He had even stated that "a threat to [any] Islamic country must be seen as a threat to all Islamic countries. A joint defensive and security alliance, and its ratification, will prevent these threats."¹³⁵ These statements all have an appeal to the Muslim world rather than just Shia. Iran has also formed relationships with such non-state actors as Hezbollah, HAMAS, Islamic Jihad and the UCK (the Kosovo Liberation Army) to broker the image of a defender of Islam, which has gained much support from the Islamic community.¹³⁶ It is obvious that Iran found advantage in its efforts to unite Shia and Sunni, however it is also clear that religion can be but one of the contributing policies to ensure the survival of the Republic. This highlights Iran's "opportunistic character...; it has no real geographic or ideological frontiers, and it can be adapted as circumstances demand..." in order to serve its national interests.¹³⁷

Hydrocarbon Highways

Nikki Keddie, in *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* concluded that Iran is a "renter state", defining a renter state as one which derives all or a substantial portion of their national revenues from sale of its indigenous resources to external clients. The significant income earner through the sale of hydrocarbons has allowed the government to control the economy and the increase in the price of oil in the early 2000s boosted exports and government revenues. The centralized control of both oil monies as

¹³⁵"Iranian Leaders: Statements and Positions (Part I)." Middle East Media Research Institute, Special Report No. 39, 5 January 2006; available from http://memri.org/bin/opener.cgi?ID=SR3906; Internet; accessed 4 April 2009.

¹³⁶Pahlavi, "Iran's Policy of Regional Influence: Pan-Shiism or Pan-Islamism?", 15.

¹³⁷Pierre Pahlavi, "The Place of Shi'ism in Iranian Grand Strategy," *Revue de Défense Nationale*, no. 8-9 (August-September 2008): 216.

well as the *Bonyads* have made economic reform slow and wrought with opposition from the conservatives. Khatami economic reform attempts in the late 1990s had limited success in areas such as the unification of the exchange rate, the relaxation of import barriers, and some privatization which in turn contributed to the increased output and employment in trade and manufacturing.¹³⁸ It did not, however, raise prices on refined oil products, nor did it reduce subsidies on foods and fertilizer and it continued to fund poorly managed state-owned enterprises. As a result, price subsidies have continued to absorb an unacceptable portion of the gross domestic product.¹³⁹

However, in most cases it widened the gap between the rich and poor, thereby providing fertile ground for Ahmadinejad to become president based upon his promises of change to aid the poor.¹⁴⁰ Ahmadinejad and his policies of state ownership, controlled prices, subsidies, and opposition to foreign investment has been unable to provide substantial improvement to the economy and as discussed previously, his "Ahmadinejadenomics" have failed to impress economists or even his own ministers. There are also a significant number of baby-boomers entering the job market and the government must grow the economy at approximately eight percent per year, something it has failed to do from more than period greater than three years since the revolution. ¹⁴¹ As a result it is expected that the generation of youth will become upset with the

¹³⁸Crane, Lal and Martini, Iran's Political, Demographic, and Economic Vulnerabilities, xvi.

¹³⁹Ibid., 93.

¹⁴⁰Nikki R Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (London: Yale University Press, 2006), 342.

¹⁴¹Ahmad R Jalali-Naini, "Capital Accumulation, Financial Market Reform and Growth in Iran: Past Experience and Future Prospects," In *Iran in the 21st Century: Politics, Economics and Conflict*, ed. Homa Katouzian and Hossein Shahidi, 217-242 (New York: Routledge, 2008), 238.

regulation, government control and the corruption of Iran's bureaucratic, and the staterun economic system. In addition, high inflation continues and unless the Ahmadinejad can improve the effectiveness of monetary control growth will remain slow and the people will become more frustrated.¹⁴²

Although other than hydrocarbon sectors represent a larger portion of the Iranian gross domestic product, hydrocarbons remain a critical source of government revenues and country exports.¹⁴³ They also play a significant role in enabling Iran to retain its regional hegemony and achieve other national objectives; in essence hydrocarbons ensure the survival of the Iranian economy and by extension of the Republic itself.¹⁴⁴ In 2009, the US Department of Energy estimated that hydrocarbons represent approximately 85 percent of total export earnings.¹⁴⁵ There are many possible factors that appear to be encouraging the corruption within the oil industry, such as: price controls, state ownership of major companies and assets, complicated regulations, and lack of oversight of government contracting to name a few. In addition, the engrained fear of foreign influence or control of their resources has restricted foreign investment resulting in an environment that constrains the full development of Iran's rich hydrocarbon resources.

Although unable to exploit the full economic potential of Iran's hydrocarbons, it has been suggest by Robert Baer in *The Devil We Know* that Iran is progressing well in developing control and influence over the energy corridor within the Middle East. In

¹⁴²Crane, Lal and Martini, Iran's Political, Demographic, and Economic Vulnerabilities, xvi.

¹⁴³Ibid., xvi.

¹⁴⁴Stanley, "The Strategic Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran," 22.

¹⁴⁵US Department of Energy, Energy Information Administration, Country Analysis Brief: Iran, January 2006; available from http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Iran/Background.html; Internet; accessed 4 April 2009.

addition to heavily influencing Iraqi oil deals and helping itself to Iraqi oil, Iran has been proposing a pipeline to move Iraqi oil from Basra to the Iranian terminal at Abadan.¹⁴⁶ Iran has developed inroads in Iraqi Kurdistan and by funding Turkey Kurds has secured an energy route with Turkey, which will also provide it future influence and, by extension, regional power.¹⁴⁷ The next energy corridor that Iran could attempt to control is one that would support Pakistan and India; it would either travel through Afghanistan or Iran but either way Baer has indicated that Iran would find a way to control it and then, in turn, would be able to wield influential power over Pakistan.¹⁴⁸ Baer goes onto propose that Iran also has a desire to influence the flow of oil from Azerbaijan to the Mediterranean; even made more possible since Azerbaijan has a Shia majority. Rather than have the oil flow through the low capacity pipelines of Georgia and Turkey, Iran has also offered a high capacity pipeline through Iran to the Persian Gulf.¹⁴⁹ Lastly, Iran has also put in place sufficient strategic weapons along the Strait of Hormuz to effectively stem the flow of oil; again, this offers Iran an option for exerting some control over the major Middle East energy corridors.¹⁵⁰

Military Power and the Nuclear Program

There are three military and intelligence organizations in Iran: the conventional military, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (referred to as the Army of the

¹⁴⁹Ibid., 132.

¹⁴⁶Baer, *The Devil We Know: Dealing with the New Iranian Superpower*, 134.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., 126-130.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., 132.

Guardians of the Islamic Revolution by non-Western media), and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security. The Ministry of Intelligence and Security evolved from the SAVAK, an organization originally organized by the Shah with the assistance of the US. It is tasked with the monitoring, control and suppression of internal dissidents and is believed to have committed over eighty assassinations of Iranian dissidents worldwide since 1979.¹⁵¹ The Ministry often deals directly to the Supreme Leader and has a secret budget, clearly demonstrating the power available to the Supreme Leader.

The conventional military is comprised of an army, air force and navy. However, since the revolution its capability has been eroded due to the Western embargo on arms sales to the Republic and the resulting reliance upon domestic weapon production.¹⁵² As well, it has had limited success in obtaining government funding as it is in competition with the larger and more effective Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

Considered by some to be Iran's Special Forces, IRGC is the largest military organization and, as outline in article 150 of the Constitution, have the responsibility to "maintain Iran's religious nature and spirit."¹⁵³ It is not only responsible for domestic security but also has the responsibility to aid the oppressed people of the world in accordance with article 154 of the constitution thus justifying its involvement with such organizations as Hezbollah and HAMAS as a means to provide assistance and services to

¹⁵²Ibid., 19.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., 134. Baer notes that there are numerous Silkworm missiles buried along the Strait of Hormuz, which is only 21 miles across at its narrowest point. The missiles are so numerous and so deeply buried that constant bombing could not confirm their 100 per cent destruction.

¹⁵¹Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership*..., 22.

¹⁵³Patrick Devenny, "Iran's Most Radical Regime." *Front Page Magazine.com*, 23 August 2005; available from http://www.frontpagemagazine.com/Articles/Read.aspx?GUID=7C586EA7-1002-4ED0-878A-AFDBD266CD65; Internet; accessed 4 April 2009.

other Muslims. The IRGC is made up of five branches and the first three branches; a ground force, air force, and navy are integrated into and mirror the conventional forces. The elite *al Quds* Force is the intelligence arm of the IRGC and is responsible to organize, train, equip and finance foreign Islamic revolutionary movements.¹⁵⁴ Interestingly, it is believed to report directly to the Supreme Leader which yet a further example of the power that the Supreme Leader has. The largest arm of the IRGC is the *Basij* Corps, a civilian volunteer militia responsible for maintaining domestic order. By providing this volunteer militia with military training, the IRGC can mobilize an armed opposition to oppress the reformists and urban unrest and turn out massed support for political leaders while at the same time providing an ominous threat to reform-minded voters.¹⁵⁵

The IRGC was founded in 1979 by Khomeini to solidify control over Iran after the revolution and started as a "brutal vigilante outfit, torturing or assassinating anyone suspected of opposing the revolution."¹⁵⁶ Upon the commencement of the Iran-Iraq war they were integrated into the conventional forces for battle; this theme of integration has continued and over time they have become more and more integrated into all aspects of the Republic. As noted by Patrick Devenny in 2005, the officer core of the IRGC has drifted into positions such as police chiefs, economic advisors, conventional military officers, university presidencies, professorships. There are former or active members of

¹⁵⁴ Quds in Arabic means Jerusalem, a promise that one day the Revolutionary Guards would liberate Jerusalem from the Jewish colonizers and destroy Israel. Baer, *The Devil We Know: Dealing with the New Iranian Superpower*, 35.

¹⁵⁵Devenny, "Iran's Most Radical Regime."

¹⁵⁶Baer, *The Devil We Know: Dealing with the New Iranian Superpower*, 34.

the IRGC in 70 of the 290 seats in the Majlis, most notably the current president, Ahmadinejad, who joined the IRGC in 1980.¹⁵⁷ Although constitutionally they are a component of the Iranian military they are like a "state within a state", with numerous companies and as much as \$12 billion in assets.¹⁵⁸ The Revolutionary Guards are an exclusive fraternity, almost a rite of passage for Iranian men with political ambition.¹⁵⁹ They dominate the telecommunications sector and most of the ports within Iran, all allowing it to exercise significant influence over the Iranian economy. IRGC is also involved in nongovernmental organizations and has contacts within trading companies, banks, and cultural centres. They even operate charitable organizations (*bonyads*) offering them near perfect recruiting grounds to further expand the ranks of the IRGC to suit its causes.¹⁶⁰

The IRGC is also responsible for the Iranian nuclear program, as well as the chemical and biological programs.¹⁶¹ The IRGC has also taken a hard stand on the nuclear program, openly questioning how a foreign power could constrain their desire for nuclear weapons.¹⁶² With all these factors considered, the IRGC still remains devoted and loyal to the protection of the nation's clerical leadership. They are anti-Western and

¹⁶²Crane, Lal and Martini, Iran's Political, Demographic, and Economic Vulnerabilities, 14.

¹⁵⁷Devenny, "Iran's Most Radical Regime."

¹⁵⁸Ibid. Also found at Baer where he refers to the IRGC as almost a state within a state. Baer, *The Devil We Know: Dealing with the New Iranian Superpower*, 34.

¹⁵⁹Baer, The Devil We Know: Dealing with the New Iranian Superpower, 35.

¹⁶⁰Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership* . . ., 20. As discussed earlier, *Bonyads*, such as the Martyrs Foundation, help families of those killed in the revolution, as well as supporting lower-class families, religious schools, hospital clinics, and building projects.

¹⁶¹Devenny, "Iran's Most Radical Regime." and Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership* . . ., 20.

anti-Semitic while also well educated and aware of international politics and its essential part to play in support of Iranian nationalism.¹⁶³ While it is not expected that the IRGC will ever choose to take over the Republic it is necessary to note their significant leverage and their religious motivation in order to comprehend Iranian military and nuclear policies.

Nuclear power is not a new idea in Iran as it had been initiated by the Shah in the 1970s in order to counter the current electricity shortages and the forecasted oil depletion as well as the glory, pride and regional power that could be gained through a nuclear capability.¹⁶⁴ After the Revolution, Khomeini declared nuclear and chemical weapons as against Islam, but, as discussed previously, his ideological stance was pushed aside after having been attacked by chemical weapons in the Iraq-Iran War and then learning that Iraq was pursuing nuclear weapons.¹⁶⁵ This viewpoint was reaffirmed again after the first Gulf War, when Iran realized that the US could use its military might in the same way to invade Iran. Iran then developed a strategy which still enabled its constitutional requirement to aid foreign oppressed Muslims through Islamic movement organizations, while not doing anything that would give the US an option to invade Iran. In support of this strategy, Iran also needed other means to deter the US from invading and the only real way to achieve this was through a renewed effort in their nuclear program. Although both Khomeini and Khamenei have stated that nuclear weapons were ideologically against Islam, there is little doubt that while Iran is advancing with nuclear power

¹⁶³Devenny, "Iran's Most Radical Regime."

¹⁶⁴Pollack, *Persian Puzzle* . . ., 258-259.

¹⁶⁵Crane, Lal and Martini, Iran's Political, Demographic, and Economic Vulnerabilities, 259.

generation capabilities it is by no means excluding the potential to establish nuclear weapons.¹⁶⁶

In 1995, Iran was able to make a covert deal with Moscow to build a nuclear reactor. Argentina, China, as well as Dr A.Q. Khan of Pakistan, were all aiding Iran's nuclear program in one way or another.¹⁶⁷ Iran's concealment continued until October 2003 when it formally announced its nuclear power requirement in response of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) deadline. Initially agreeing to implement the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) safeguards and even the additional protocol, Iran later refused when it became clear that the world community was attempting to use these mechanisms to limit its nuclear program. The Supreme Leader did issue a *Fatawa* in September 2005 that forbid the production, stockpiling or use of nuclear weapons by the Republic.

There are a number of possible goals of the Supreme Leader. One could be that he simply wishes to have unconstrained ability to acquire the necessary nuclear technology, not only to provide an alternate source of energy to the Iranian nation but to also provide it with the status of a nuclear-powered country. Another might be a desire to keep the Iranian nuclear program within a strategic ambiguity; letting the world believe what it may but slowly advancing the program for civil reasons while all the time obtaining the necessary leverage, power and prestige to fuel its strategy of survival

¹⁶⁶Pollack, *Persian Puzzle*..., 259 and Knepper, "Nuclear Weapons and Iranian Strategic Culture," 453.

¹⁶⁷Micheal A Ledeen, *The Iranian Time Bomb: The Mullah Zealots' Quest for Destruction* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007), 86. Pollack, *Persian Puzzle*..., 259 and 268-269. Baer, *The Devil We Know: Dealing with the New Iranian Superpower*, 110.

through deterrence.¹⁶⁸ Another goal may be a veiled desire to attain nuclear weapons as quickly as possible in order to add its name to the lists of existing nuclear powers, thus gaining real prestige, power and a true deterrence capability. Whatever its true intentions, the fact that it was operating a program in secret for so long, and then refusing to accept NPT safeguards and additional protocol has led to much international doubt of the Supreme Leader's *Fatawa* or true intentions.

The question of whether Iran would use a nuclear weapon, or even distribute it to terrorist, if it had one has worried many nations, especially Israel who has received much threatening rhetoric from Ahmadinejad. Few experts, less a few extremely ideological ones, believe that Iran would ever attack Israel with nuclear weapons. Ahmadinejad has never said that Iran (or any other country) should use nuclear weapons against Israel. In fact, many believe that those who declare it a possibility are actually attempting to foster anti-Iran feelings and solicit US support for Israel. Such a nuclear attack would not only kill a significant number of Muslim Arabs but it would also result in devastating retaliation attacks. Even so, there is nothing to guarantee that any country would never evolve to irrational or purely ideological measures against another nation it may feel insecure with. The second potential threat, the provision of nuclear or even chemical weapon capability to an Islamic fundamentalist group is also not likely. Iran has had chemical weapons previously and as would be expected by a rational state, they were not provided to any other organization.¹⁶⁹ In the same way, it can be expected that they will

¹⁶⁸Barbara Slavin, *Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies: Iran, the US and the Twisted Path to Confrontation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007), 38.

¹⁶⁹Takeyh, *Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 147 and Daniel Kunsberg Rosenfield, "US and Iranian Security Motives in the Proliferation Crisis," Canadian International Council, Strategic Datalink 5 (September 2008); available from http://www.canadianinternationalcouncil.org; Internet; accessed February 2009 where he outlined that there has been no precedent for transfer of a

retain any nuclear capability internally as a strategic deterrence tool for the regime. A policy of deterrence though does require the use of rhetoric and "sabre rattling" to be effective and that is much of what has been heard from the Iranian regime. Much of the public misconceptions have been based upon Ahmadinejad's seemingly aggressive and irrational rhetoric but one must remember that the president has no control or authority over foreign policy nor the nuclear program.¹⁷⁰

A Report of an Independent Task Force sponsored by the US Bipartisan Policy Center has offered four disadvantages of an Iranian deterrence strategy: (1) deterrence was less effective than commonly believed through the Cold War, (2) that the Iran Ideology foundation cannot fundamentally confirm with a true deterrence strategy, (3) that a nuclear Iran becomes not just a regional threat but an international one and end the NPT security regime, and lastly (4) that it would weaken the NPT and the UN.¹⁷¹ Knepper reinforces points (3) and (4) above and notes that there is a growing desire of many other Persian Gulf nations to seek nuclear program support to counter potential Iranian influence and to augment ebbing Western support in the region.¹⁷² It is not

¹⁷²Knepper, "Nuclear Weapons and Iranian Strategic Culture," 454.

nuclear weapon to a terrorist proxy and that any use of a nuclear weapon by Iran would be suicide due to the undeniable retaliation. Supported again by Melman and Javedanfar, *The Nuclear Sphinx of Tehran*..., 227.

¹⁷⁰Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of*, 338. This point is further supported by John Brennan, "The Conundrum of Iran: Strengthening Moderates with Acquiescing to Belligerence," *The Annals of the American Academy*, 618 (July 2008): 174 and Christopher De Bellaigue, *The Struggle for Iran* (New York: The New York Review of Books, 2007), 224.

¹⁷¹ United States, Bipartisan Policy Center. "Meeting the Challenge: US Policy Toward Iranian Nuclear Development," (September 2008); available from http://www.bipartisanpolicy.org/ht/a/GetDocumentAction/i/8448; Internet; accessed 7 April 2009, ii. These reasons were further justified by Rosenfield, US and Iranian Security Motives in the Proliferation Crisis, Canadian International Council, (September 2008), 1. Deterrence is not a proven theory and the fear of rapid escalation and near no reaction times. Other risks could include a radical change in ideological motives or the theft or loss of a weapon.

agreed that Iran's ideology would pre-empt its survival instinct. As has been clearly shown throughout this paper, Iran and especially its Supreme Leader is motivated by a pragmatic and religious responsibility to ensure the survival of the Republic. Nuclear deterrence may offer the Supreme Leader an effective means to ensure survival but he is not expected to see it as an absolute necessity to achieve his aim, nor could its use be justified ideologically. It is agreed that deterrence may not be as effective as during the Cold War but it is the only means that Iran could even deal equally with the US at this point in time. Unless other options are offered by the US which reinforce Iranian regional power and influence, acknowledges Iran's desire to be recognized internationally as other than a rouge nation, and does not foster its inherent feelings of insecurity, it is possible that Iran would chose to conduct its nuclear program in accordance with the NPT and any additional protocol.

Nuclear weapons could provide the Iranian regime with a tool to ensure its survival; but it also serves as a possible means to satisfy its realist appetites to regain the greatness of the Persian Empire, to deter Pakistan, US and Israel influence upon their nation, to exercise influence throughout the Persian Gulf, and to mitigate its own sense of insecurity. In addition, much of the population of Iran strongly believe they have the right to develop nuclear energy, including the construction and operation of nuclear enrichment facilities.¹⁷³

¹⁷³The defensive argument that Iran must develop nuclear energy is no longer as clear as it was in the 1970s, the amount of oil and natural gas available to Iran would enable energy production well into the future at a much lower cost. A nuclear reactor is expensive technology, therefore it is believed that although the public may have been justified the program in terms of energy requirements it is far more likely that their end state is nuclear weapon capability in order to provide deterrence and prestige to the Republic. Crane, Lal and Martini, *Iran's Political, Demographic, and Economic Vulnerabilities*, xvii and 78.

From this analysis of the historical and political factors that have established the Republic, one can conclude that Iran's military doctrine is defensive and their nuclear program would provide them with the capability to effectively deter the nation they feel the most vulnerable to – the US. Nuclear capability would also mitigate its own perceived sense of insecurity and to bolster its regional stature as a pan-Islamic leader.

Building Influential Relationships

The last area that this paper will examine is Iran's use of relationships that it establishes, both direct and by proxy. Appreciating Iran's geographic location and its resulting impacts on cultural, political and security issues that face its neighbours and the Middle East as a whole will provide an insight on how important relationships are to the achievement of Iran's national aims. Khomeini first spoke to relationships by stating "neither East nor West, [only] an Islamic Republic" and although there lacks any specific detail beyond this statement it has obviously shaped Iran's foreign policy of today. Today Iran is aligned with no one; it has maintained its independence, much as it did through the colonizing period.

Dr Kayhan Bargezar, an Iranian researcher, has written that Iran has had two significant challenges with respect to its foreign policy and the relationships it chooses to foster.¹⁷⁴ The first is the requirement to regulate interaction with the international community in order to achieve a balance within the political, economic and cultural affinities between East and West. The second challenge is the regulation of relations within the Arab world and this is complicated by opposing views amongst Iranians. Aside from the obvious religious, cultural, historical and geographic connections, an

¹⁷⁴Dr Kayha Bargezar, "Iran's Foreign Policy towards Iraq and Syria," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (Summer 2007); available from http:///www.esiweb.org; Internet; accessed 26 February 2009.

affiliation with the Arab nations of the Persian Gulf empowers Iran and enables a balanced relation with the greater powers of the East and West. Given the perspective proposed by Barzegar, one can focus on Iran's relations within its region by examining Iran's membership within the non-alignment movement and its sponsorship of Islamic fundamentalist groups to act as proxies to gain Iran influence throughout Islamic region. Non-Alignment Policy

The non-alignment movement (NAM) has a policy that is not just about avoiding superpowers but has been seen as a means to provide policy options and a sense of independence for states, especially those just formed post the de-colonization process.¹⁷⁵ Iran remains a strong advocate for NAM, stemming from its anti-foreign influence policies forged from its history prior to the revolution. True to this policy, after the revolution Iran cut all ties with the US and opted not to join with any other potential power in order to achieve four policy objectives: (1) cease foreign influence on its foreign policy making, (2) avoid the costly involvement in the Cold War escalations, (3) to end Iran's dependence on a single superpower, and (4) to improve relationships with all nations (less Israel and the former South African regime).¹⁷⁶ Iran sought to maintain its independence as the most effective means of sustaining it culture and religion while also giving Iran the unrestricted freedom to establish mutually beneficial relationships with whatever entity it deemed could achieve or help achieve Iranian interests.

¹⁷⁵Houman A Sadri, "An Islamic Perspective on Non-alignment: Iranian Foreign Policy in Theory and Practice." Journal of Third World Studies 16, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 29.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., 30.

Iran's non-alignment is rooted within Iranian history, religion and law as outlined by Houman Sadri in *An Islamic Perspective on Non-alignment: Iranian Foreign Policy in Theory and Practice*.¹⁷⁷ A brief review will provide perspective to examine current and possibly future Iranian relationships. There are three religious principles which influence Iranian policy development. First, Islam is an "unaligned religion" in itself, prospering in spite of the other major religions. Secondly, the religious bond to politics through *vilayat-e faqih* has linked the two, to the point where Iran perceives a sovereign threat as a threat against holy state and thus a threat against God. Lastly, the honour of confrontation, struggle or challenge against the oppressive or powerful is represented in Islamic through Jihad (holy war). Thus Iran has a religious responsibility to continue an ideological struggle against greater powers.

Legally, non-alignment is encompassed within the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Article 152 refers to the responsibility to protect the independence and territorial integrity of the Republic, practicing non-alignment toward hegemonic states and mutually peaceful ties to non-hegemonic ones, rejecting any form of hegemony and defending the rights of all Muslim. Article 56 declares that sovereignty belongs to God who has granted people the right to self-rule which no ruler should deny. Another example of the legal influence to remain unaligned is at article 146, which prohibits the establishment of a foreign military base within Iran, even for peaceful purposes.

Through these religious and legal factors it appears that Iran's non-alignment policy is moralistic, rigid, and even hostile; however, once the human factor is applied

¹⁷⁷Ibid., 31.

the policy its interpretation becomes subject to the individual and the circumstances.¹⁷⁸ Not only has this caused the policy to fluctuate from rigid and hostile to flexible and almost friendly, it has also confused and frustrated many Western nations. The most essential fact is that the Republic and its sovereignty can never be threatened, to allow this would be to fail God; therefore, Iranian leaders will do whatever is necessary to deter enemies and ensure survival. In the breadth of possible circumstances, one particular leader's survival instincts may support cooperation or conflict.

Sponsoring Islamic Freedom Fighters

The community of Islamic fundamentalist groups are considered to be Islamic freedom fighters by Iran – not terrorists as defined by the Western nations. Iran sponsors these organizations with funding, equipment, and training and the majority of this support is provided through the IRGC *al Quds* Force. Iran has been quite successful through this sponsorship, not in exporting the revolution, but in gaining allies and regional influence in the Persian Gulf. Three organizations in particular have been identified by the US government as terrorist groups: the Hezballah, HAMAS and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). It is believed that the *al Quds* Forces works with these organizations in order to achieve three goals.¹⁷⁹ The first goal is to facilitate the spread of the Islamic revolution through the deployment of clergy and the funding of religious centers in Europe, Africa, Asia and South America. The second goal is to enhance Iranian interests through the construction of infrastructure within Shi'ite communities. Their final goal is to use this infrastructure to pursue and attack political enemies and dissidents.

¹⁷⁸Ibid., 32.

¹⁷⁹Three goals have been proposed by Melman and Javedanfar, *The Nuclear Sphinx of Tehran* . . ., 209.

Iran had initially supported their freedom fighters as a means to export the revolution and support the greater Islamic cause against oppressive powers. As a result of the threat of American military retaliation against the regime in the 1990s, Iran accepted that it needed to cease or appear to cease operations.¹⁸⁰ Although it is clear that Iran has not stopped acting as the protectorate of the Islamic world through these organizations, it no longer authorizes them to conduct activities that may awaken the "sleeping giants" – the Western superpowers. The Iranian relationship with Hezballah and HAMAS in particular will be examined in more detail to further understand how they contribute to the Iranian survival strategy.

Hezballah, or Party of God, was founded in 1982 during the Lebanese civil war and Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Hezballah is politically anti-Western and its objectives had initially included the complete removal all Israel forces from Lebanon, to form a Shi'ite Islamic Republic like that of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and then to export that Iranian-inspired Islamic revolution world wide.¹⁸¹ It is comprised of Shia groups that believed the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and its proxy, the Southern Lebanon Army (SLA), had invaded their nation and opted to form together to fight a holy war in their defence. Hezballah's method of conducting its holy war has been recognized internationally as terrorist acts. Iran provided IRGC elements to assist, representing the Shia interests and hoping to expand its influence within the Lebanon Shia population as well as being recognized regionally as the Shia protectorate.¹⁸² With its support from

¹⁸¹Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership*..., 67.
¹⁸²Ibid., 65.

¹⁸⁰Pollack, Persian Puzzle . . ., 255-257.

both Iran and Syria, Hezballah has fought extensively against Israeli forces in 2004, while at the same it has supported the Lebanon Shi'ite community with social services not offered by the government and providing order where no order existed before.

It is important to note that Hezballah has been active in the Lebanon political process since 1992. This bond does not export an Islamic Republic similar to Iran; however it was strongly encouraged by both Syria and Iran.¹⁸³ Iran came to the conclusion that pure ideology was unable to deliver and through a pragmatic realist approach, it could still achieve the regional influence it needed to support Islamic movements. In this vein, Iran has maintained close ties with Hezballah and Hezballah has achieved much political success to the point of being granted veto power in Lebanon's parliament in 2008.

HAMAS (The Islamic Resistance Movement within Palestine) is a Sunni-Islamist organization founded in 1987 that is dedicated to armed Palestinian resistance against Israel. It is committed to the destruction of the state of Israel and replacement with a Sunni-Islamic state, as well as the non-negotiable establishment of a non-Islamic entity on previously Palestine terrain.¹⁸⁴ HAMAS, like the PIJ, grew from the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and its early funding came from Saudi Arabia. By the 1990s, the HAMAS effectively represented a majority of the Palestinians in Gaza, and Iran wished to win them over.¹⁸⁵ Through the Hezballah, Iran was able to make contact and begin to provide support while also gaining standing in the Middle East as coming to the aid of

¹⁸³Ibid., 67.

¹⁸⁴Ibid., 86.

¹⁸⁵Baer, The Devil We Know: Dealing with the New Iranian Superpower, 172.

oppressed Muslims. Even though a Sunni organization, it is extensively funded by Iran which has helped to reinforce its image of coming to the aid of Muslims in the Middle East. The HAMAS has become another means for Iran to make inroads with the Arab community.¹⁸⁶ Robert Baer, in *The Devil We Know*, has even suggested that if Iran can gave enough Sunni support in Palestine it will only be a matter of time before the Palestinian refugees recognize Iran as a protectorate power; thus, Iran is able to gain additional regional power.¹⁸⁷ The HAMAS/Iran union is another example of Iran's realist approach, gaining regional power as a means of providing deterrence to foreign powers.

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¹⁸⁷Ibid., 178.

¹⁸⁶Ibid., 175.

CONCLUSION

Iran is a country of contradictions and paradoxes. It is both grandiose in its selfperception, yet intensely insecure. It seeks to lead the region while remaining largely suspicious and disdainful of its neighbors. Its rhetoric is infused with revolutionary dogma, yet its actual conduct is practical, if not realistic. A perennial struggle between aspirations and capabilities, hegemony and pragmatism has characterized Iran's uneasy approach to the Greater Middle East.¹⁸⁸

Iran's strategic culture is not surprising given their experience; what makes it unique is the fact that such a theocracy continues to thrive against so many odds. Historically, Iran was trodden upon by the superpowers that used the country as leverage in their "great games." Next, the Cold War occurred where the same was much repeated. Then, when hydrocarbons were found in force, it became geo-politically important to the superpowers to influence and work with the Iranian monarchy as a means to ensure a stable source and price for world markets. As a result, Iran garnered at least three lessons which have provided the basis of their policy and political decision making. First lesson was that individual leaders can be corrupted as was clear throughout their period of monarchy; therefore, a nation based on religious principles could possible help to extinguish corruptness. Second lesson was that power-play politics can likely accomplish much more then frank discussions or even conflict, especially by those with less military or economic weight than their competitors. This influenced a nation construct that appears to play politics against each other, adopting extreme positions as their course of action even if the result is of great hardship, and attempting to reinforce their position through politic and indirect means. Lastly, Iran acknowledged that they must remain unaligned and isolated in order to prevent them from being unduly influenced or dependent

¹⁸⁸Takeyh, *Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 63.

upon another who clearly does not have Iranian interests at heart. Each of these three lesson have shaped the Iranian strategic culture and can be traced through to the organization of its political system, and through to its current day application of policy.

Politically, Iran is not a rouge or weak state. Although its unique *veleyat-e faqih* foundation empowers a single person with the authority of leading Iran, there remain checks and balances however weak, including elected officials to represent the public potential to impact Republic strategy and policy. It is also clear that interpretation of *veleyat-e faqih* can vary. Although the Republic was initially heavily ideologically based, attempting to export the revolution for example, it has evolved to a pragmatic one adopting realistic strategies in order to survival in a non-theocratic world environment. It has a religious responsibility to survive and in many cases this may require policy not necessarily supported by ideology. It is also recognized that there are competing strategies within the Iranian Republic. The conservative leaders care deeply for their Islamic Republic and have been willingly sacrifice or suppress the freedoms of their people for the betterment or survival of the Republic.

Each of the selected policies have been influenced by the historical factors that have shaped Iranian pragmatic strategic culture and serve to provide the Republic with additional means to deter foreign interference while also attempting to expand Iranian power and influence. The reportedly threat of the Shia Crescent has limited capability to Iran simply because it is limited to religion and would be challenged by the geographically dispersal, as well as the many cultural and ethnic differences. Rather Iran has adopted a Pan-Islamic policy as a defender of Islam which is more attractive to all Muslims. Hydrocarbons provide both an economic and influential opportunity to Iran, especially if Iran can exert sufficient control over the hydrocarbon highways that either flow through or in close proximity to its territory. The price of oil and the diversification into natural gas also enables Iran to achieve its goals and support its ailing economy.

The IRGC, although military-like at first glance, is yet another unique almost independent corporation apparatus of the Republic enabling it to exert overt and covert influence, power, and resource proxies far beyond the territorial boundaries of Iran with little threat to Iran's own security. Although little can be confirmed of the true Iranian intentions about their nuclear program, it can be deduced that if the program were to extend to nuclear weapons capability it might be based on a policy of pragmatic deterrence and provide Iran a means to mitigate its own perceived sense of insecurity and to bolster its regional stature as a pan-Islamic leader.

Iran's approach to relationships best highlights its own insecurity, siege mentality and fear of undue foreign interference. The Republic's attempts to balance the East and the West, even relationships internal to the Islamic world. Iran's non-alignment policy is rooted in religion and reinforced in the constitution. It will not support alignment with any hegemony and considers the maintenance of its sovereignty as a responsibility to God. Secondly, it has formed close ties with non-state actors such as Islamic Fundamentalist groups it considers Islamic Freedom Fighters to which it provides resources in support of their cause to provide aid to all oppressed Muslims. Lastly, the relationship void that was created by the US invasion into Iraq has provided Iran with an opportunity to increase their presence and influence as a means of ensuring their own security. Given Iran's failed experience attempting to export the revolution, and the success they have achieved by not adopting ideological strategies with proxies such as Hezballah and HAMAS it is unlikely that the influence they attempt in Iraq will be anything but that based upon pragmatic and realistic policies that will ensure regional security and thereby, Iran's ability to deter foreign interference and increase its influence.

In conclusion, Iran's strategic culture has been clearly formulated based on historical influences, its political organization has been designed to ensure the survival of the theocracy, and its key policies act as tools to implement this strategy to ensure sovereignty above all else. It has often been said that it is not the veil that blinds Iranians, it is the veil that blinds the outside world; one must appreciate the Republic's strategic culture and unveil its rhetoric to understand its true intentions. Iran has demonstrated an opportunistic attitude and the fact that it will not be constrained by ideological beliefs, its historical engrained anti-foreign influence, or geography. Motivated by national interest, Iran has willingly sacrificed ideals in order to minimize direct conflict and ensure it maintains maximum control of its own destiny. Based upon these findings it is concluded that Iranian Republic has a rationally based, pragmatic strategic culture heavily influenced by 300 years of experience which has been etched into their theocratic system and supported by atypical policies founded in religion, hydrocarbons, nuclear capabilities and relationship building.

APPENDIX 1 - HOSTAGE CRISIS

Shortly after the 1979 Revolution, the Iranian anti-US feelings manifested into the infamous US Embassy hostage crisis. It became known that the US had accepted the overthrown Shah into a US hospital for cancer treatment and this sparked a fear that the US may be positioning the Shah in a coup similar to what was facilitated by the US in 1953. There was also a youthful desire to avenge the earlier overthrow and teach the US to keep its hands off of Iran.¹⁸⁹ Khomeini saw this hostage-taking as a second revolution, one directly against Iran's greatest evil – the US.¹⁹⁰ He may have also been using it to divert public attention from the internal turmoil. There was inflation, unemployment, skilled Iranians were leaving and industry was failing due to loss of capital and personnel. Oil production had dropped and natural gas sales were ceased. Also, as expected in a post revolutionary environment, various political groups were all trying to gain power within the establishing government. The hostage crisis provided Khomeini and his supporters with a lengthy diversion, while reinforcing anti-US feelings, in order to establish the necessary governmental structure of the new Republic.

The hostage crisis only served to increase the divide between the US and new Iranian leadership. The Iranian Foreign Ministry announced four conditions for the release of the hostages: return of the Shah for a fair trial, return of the Shah's assets, an end to interference in Iran, and an apology for past American crimes in Iran.¹⁹¹ The US reacted by prohibiting the purchase of Iranian oil, freezing Iranian assets in US banks,

¹⁹⁰Ibid., 157.

¹⁸⁹Pollack, *Persian Puzzle* . . ., 154.

¹⁹¹Harold Saunders, "Diplomacy and Pressure, November 1979-May 1980," In *American Hostages in Iran: The Conduct of a Crisis*, ed. Warren Christopher and Paul H. Kreisberg. (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1985), 81.

and ceasing trade with Iran less humanitarian goods such as food and medicine.¹⁹² For 444 days, Iran was able to revel in its ability to control the great evil and it was not until the change of US presidents that the hostages were released as detailed in the Algiers Accords on January 19, 1981. The accords detailed that the US would not intervene in Iran's internal affairs, would unfreeze Iranian assets, lift trade sanctions and both governments would cease litigation surrounding the hostage crisis.¹⁹³ Some believe that the hostage crisis also enabled Khomeini to show that Iran could also influence foreign politics as the US had done in Iran in 1953. He accomplished this by not agreeing to end the hostage crisis until the swearing in President Carter's replacement. The hostage crisis established anger within the American psyche that would continue to cloud any further dealings with Iran. Not only has this influenced US foreign policy with Iran, the experience and the American reaction to it has continued to shape Iranian policy to current day.

During the hostage crisis Iraq invaded Iran in a battle that lasted eight years and resulted in over 1 million deaths. The US was faced with a major foreign policy challenge as the result of this war could destabilize the Middle East power balance. As a result, the US opted to support both sides of the battle in an attempt to ensure neither would emerge as the leading regional power.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹²Ibid., 93-94.

¹⁹³Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership*..., 6.
¹⁹⁴Ibid.. 6.

APPENDIX 2 – LEGITIMACY OF THE REPUBLIC

Is the Islamic Republic of Iran a weak or weakened state that should be unable to command or lead its citizens through any other means to achieve its national goals? From a democratic standard, Iran lacks Western state legitimacy and should be a weak state that can be easily manipulated. From the review of the Iran's history, this is not the case. In order to understand Iran, to comprehend its motivation and to appreciate it strategic culture, it is necessary to appreciate the differences between Western and Iranian perspectives of a state and how the state is obtains legitimacy.

A democratic state has been described as something made up of three components: the idea of the state, the physical basis of the state, and the institutional expression of the state.¹⁹⁵ A powerful state is a state that has the capacity to command loyalty to extract resources necessary to rule and provide services, to maintain that essential element of sovereignty, a monopoly over the legitimate use of force within defined territorial limits, and to operate within the context of consensus-based political community.¹⁹⁶ A democratic state earns loyalty through performance and legitimacy is maintained through community, societal agreement of political procedures, equal opportunity to seek political power, a distinction between public service and personal gain, a public monopoly over the legitimate use of power, and an international acknowledgement of its fixed and permanent existence.¹⁹⁷ Democratic thought has generally accepted that the only legitimate state is one formed based upon consent or a

¹⁹⁶Ibid., 83.

¹⁹⁷Ibid., 91-94.

¹⁹⁵Holsti, The State, War, and the State of War, 83.

social contract with its society. Although democracy does appear to have significant legitimacy with the members of its state, there is no definite method of proving it is the only means of maximizing legitimacy.¹⁹⁸

In Islamic thought, the relevant community on which to base the state is the community of believers; territoriality is irrelevant to faith and only creates artificial division between believers.¹⁹⁹ "Islam does not recognize geographical frontiers and does not take into account racial differences."²⁰⁰ The purpose of the state is not to provide welfare or to guarantee civil liberties; it is to apply the law of God on Earth.²⁰¹ The Islamic Republic of Iran achieves its authority by the claim that they are the official secular interpreters of the faith while also making efforts to recognize some public demands. Iran achieves loyalty and legitimacy through an emphasis upon religion. The community is defined first by religion as well as history and culture thus allowing it to expand beyond its physical borders. Societal agreement and equal opportunity is sought within religious parameters, a distinction between public service and personal gain is maintained, and a public monopoly over the legitimate use of power exists.

Iran definitely has international acknowledgement of its fixed and permanent existence. Their strength comes from the overlapping of religion, the ideological task to liberate the Muslim nation of Western influence and the consent or social contract it has formed with the people of Iran; the net result is that Iranians obey the commands of the state not out of fear or self-interest, but because they believe that the Iranian leadership

¹⁹⁸Ibid., 87.

¹⁹⁹Ibid., 112.

²⁰⁰Ibid., 114.

²⁰¹Ibid., 114.

have a moral authority to issue commands.²⁰² Thus, the Republic is a strong state in that it represents a legitimate authority in the eyes of Iranians.

APPENDIX 3 – FILLING THE VOID IN IRAQ

The US invasion of Iraq, followed by the toppling of Saddam Hussein created an unbalance as well as a new opportunity in the Middle East; the previously subordinate Shia majority had been empowered to lead the newly established order. The current US occupation attempts to keep Iraq contained but there remains a void that will remain unfilled for some time. Iran is one of the central nations attempting to not only ensure that the chaos and upheaval does not cross the border into Iran but they would also like to gain advantage from the situation. Due to the previously established animosity between the US and Iran this has netted many options on the potential threats, hidden intentions and relative success of each power in Iraq. Nasr and Takeyh have suggested that the centre of gravity in the Middle East has transferred from Palestine to the fate of the struggling states of Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon.²⁰³ They also argue that because the US has traditional taken sides in the Middle East conflict they have increased tension and are part of the imbalance. Iran has gained significant "soft power" through their support of the Arab people and Palestine, and it is recognized that Iran is a pragmatic and opportunistic nation that will always attempt to gain regional influence.²⁰⁴ Iran believes it necessary to counter US influence in the area and to do this they need to increase regional influence through the support of the communities which the US ostracizes when they take sides.

²⁰³Vali Nasr and Ray Takeyh, "The Costs of Containing Iran: Washington's Misguided New Middle East Policy," *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2008); available from http://www.foreignaffairs.org; Internet; accessed 7 January 2009, 3.

To better appreciate the Iranian strategy with respect to Iraq, three opinions on the Iranian reaction to the invasion of Iraq will be examined. The first opinion has been offered by Robert Baer, who states that Iran plans to use new Iraq as a platform for gaining the influence essential to dominate the Persian Gulf.²⁰⁵ He has indicated that Iran is winning against the US with their consistent coherent strategy throughout the Middle East and that Iran is just waiting the US out in Iraq.²⁰⁶ Iran is letting the US spend its money and kill Sunni, verses them having to do the same in order to maintain the balance and ensure security of their borders. Also, as long as the US is bogged down in Iraq, it is less likely to attack Iran. Baer provides three reasons why the US will fail in Iraq and thereby further empower Iran: (1) any government of Iraq will be perceived as a puppet regime of the US, (2) Iran has more will and more to lose should Iraq rise up as a moderate rival of a quietist Shia Islam, and (3) Iran has a pragmatic and realistic strategy that will use it well evolved proxy operating procedures to control the Shia majority in Iraq through money, arms, or through border security. Bottom line, Baer has stated that Iran will continue their campaign longer than any US fiscal year and will use its regional similarities to gain influence within Iraq.

The second author, Houman Sadri, wrote of the situation from an Iranian perspective and queried how the US would react to a foreign nation that is threatening them with military force as well as offering support to anyone attempting an overthrow of

²⁰⁵Baer, The Devil We Know: Dealing with the New Iranian Superpower, 50.

²⁰⁶Ibid., 47-49 and 180. Baer goes on to state examples where he indicates that Iran imposes order within Iraq, summoning and dressing down or arresting renegade commanders who threaten or attack US military forces without Iranian authority. Carpenter and Innocent offer similar goals for Iran in Iraq: (1) to tie down coalition forces in order to inhibit confrontation with Iran and (2) deepen Shia ties with Iraqi Shias as detailed in: Ted Galen Carpenter and Malou Innocent, "The Iraq War and Iranian Power," *Survival* 49, no. 4 (Winter 2007-2008): 70-71.

their government, all while establishing military bases in Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean.²⁰⁷ It is expected that the US reaction would not be much different from what Iran has been doing, especially given that Iran does not have the military might of the threatening nation. Sadri acknowledges that Iran has temporarily inspired the Shia population through the region but not with significant political gains that could be considered an exportation of the revolution or even having gained any substantial influence in Iraq. He also argues that American officials claim Iran influence in Iran only to cover their own mistakes.²⁰⁸ Security in Iraq is noted as being of critical issue to both the US and Iran, and Sadri proposes that the US should seek options with Iran to cooperate on Iraq and use this as the lead-in discussion to gain further ground in reopening positive political discourse with Iran. In summary, Sadri notes that although he acknowledges that Iran is concerned over Iraq and the overt US presence, they have been ineffectively in truly influencing Iraqis; however, the Iraqi security concern could be used to bring the US and Iran together to seek a cooperation solution.

The last author that will be examined is Kayhan Bargezar, who describes an Iranian foreign policy in Iraq to have two goals: (1) to establish security and (2) creating economic and cultural opportunities.²⁰⁹ Security is deemed as the number one concern is to attempt to reduce the traditional threat perception of Iraq that entrenched firmly in the minds of the Iranians as a result of the eight year Iran-Iraq war. Secondly, Iran wishes to prevent domestic strife and power struggles from crossing the border into Iran. Lastly,

²⁰⁷Sadri, "Surrounded . . .," 13.

²⁰⁸Ibid., 24.

²⁰⁹Bargezar, "Iran's Foreign Policy towards Iraq and Syria," 3.

the US presence in Iraq offers its own threat to Iran. The type of government and the support it may provide the US in any attempt to influence Iran will continue to shape Iranian foreign policy in Iraq. Economic and cultural opportunities will enable stability and could be an opportunity for not only an Iraq-Iran relationship but Iran's work in Iraq may also provide a means to instigate new discussions with the US. Secondly, there is also the attraction of a coalition of Shi'ites across the two regions that could balance Sunni influence in the region. Bargezar states that this pragmatic policy is based on four factors: (1) the Iranian people want stable relations for cultural-religious reasons, (2) academic elites and intellectuals want stable relations to counter the threat of a potentially hostile and rearmed neighbour, (3) political, military and religious elites want a secure and stable neighbour that will not threaten Iran, and (4) principles of good faith security concerns versus expansionist designs. Although Bargezar does not comment on the degree of success of Iran with respect to Iraq, it is clear that he believes the policy is in place and that he expects Iran to insist on a greater regional presence as it naturally seeks to achieve its national interests.

Indeed, the Iraqi invasion has created a void in the Middle East region and there are many countries naturally attempting to increase their presence and influence as a means of ensuring their own security. Common to all three authors is the fact that the security issue in Iraq is of the most concern to Iran and it can be expected that they will attempt to influence it to their advantage. Whether it has been or will be effective is unknown, but it is clear that to act in a pragmatic and realistic manner is clearly in Iran's interest. Given Iran's failed experience attempting to export the revolution, and the success they have achieved by not wedding themselves just to Shia ideological strategies it is unlikely that the influence they attempt in Iraq will be anything but that based upon pragmatic and realistic policies and nothing to do with attempting to install an Iranian model of government.²¹⁰

Although there are other nations, such as the Arabs, who are also motivated to try to balance Iranian influence in Iraq, they do not have the geographic or religious advantage of a Shi'ite Iran. This has increased Sunni fear and resurfaced the Shi'ite Crescent fable discussed earlier.²¹¹ Is Iran allowing the US to become weighed down by the demands of stabilizing Iraq? Has Iran really be successful at achieving any influence in Iraq, especially amongst the Shi'ite majority? Is Iran supporting the democratic process in Iraq just as a means of ensuring Iraq remains a decentralized state more easily influence by Iran? It is difficult to answer these questions but the path to the solution is not possible without consideration of Iran's national interests in Iraq. Iran desire for security mirrors that of the US, thereby there is an opportunity with the bilateral convergence of policy that, if synergized, may be able to effect not only positive change in Iraq but open the door to positive relations between the US and Iran. It is true that the Iraqi invasion unbalanced the region but the unbalancing has created opportunity; a potentially positive opportunity if approached bilaterally between the US and Iran. In

²¹⁰Takeyh, *Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 179-181. This point is reinforced by the fact that both Shi'ite parties in Iran have publically noted that they do not wish to replicate an Islamic Republic in Iraq. Baer has also noted that the Iranians realize the Iraqi Shia would reject occupation just as the Lebanese had in 1982. Iran would dominate Iraq not through invasion but by proxy, spreading religious conviction and employing the new form of guerrilla warfare it had learned in Lebanon. Baer, *The Devil We Know: Dealing with the New Iranian Superpower*, 21.

²¹¹Nasr and Takeyh, "The Costs of Containing Iran: Washington's Misguided New Middle East Policy," 3 states that the Arabs still do not believe Iraq to be a bigger issue than the decades-old Arab-Israeli conflict. It might be important then that Ahmadinejad has continued to focus much of his rhetoric on Israel and continued support to HAMAS and Hezballah. It may be possible that Iran is attempting to balance Arab fear of Iran's influence in Iraq with Iran's support of the Arabs in Palestine.

conclusion, it can be expected that Iran will remain overtly neutral to the US presence in Iraq, however they will remain poised to react should the tides change.

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