

## Archived Content

Information identified as archived on the Web is for reference, research or record-keeping purposes. It has not been altered or updated after the date of archiving. Web pages that are archived on the Web are not subject to the Government of Canada Web Standards.

As per the [Communications Policy of the Government of Canada](#), you can request alternate formats on the "[Contact Us](#)" page.

## Information archivée dans le Web

Information archivée dans le Web à des fins de consultation, de recherche ou de tenue de documents. Cette dernière n'a aucunement été modifiée ni mise à jour depuis sa date de mise en archive. Les pages archivées dans le Web ne sont pas assujetties aux normes qui s'appliquent aux sites Web du gouvernement du Canada.

Conformément à la [Politique de communication du gouvernement du Canada](#), vous pouvez demander de recevoir cette information dans tout autre format de rechange à la page « [Contactez-nous](#) ».

CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE / COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES  
JCSP 36 / PCEMI 36

MASTER OF DEFENCE STUDIES RESEARCH PAPER

**THE FORGOTTEN BORDER: IRAN'S EFFORTS TO DESTABILIZE AFGHANISTAN**

By/par LCol Robert W. Kamphuis

*This paper was written by a student attending the Canadian Forces College in fulfilment of one of the requirements of the Course of Studies. The paper is a scholastic document, and thus contains facts and opinions, which the author alone considered appropriate and correct for the subject. It does not necessarily reflect the policy or the opinion of any agency, including the Government of Canada and the Canadian Department of National Defence. This paper may not be released, quoted or copied, except with the express permission of the Canadian Department of National Defence.*

Word Count: 14,176

*La présente étude a été rédigée par un stagiaire du Collège des Forces canadiennes pour satisfaire à l'une des exigences du cours. L'étude est un document qui se rapporte au cours et contient donc des faits et des opinions que seul l'auteur considère appropriés et convenables au sujet. Elle ne reflète pas nécessairement la politique ou l'opinion d'un organisme quelconque, y compris le gouvernement du Canada et le ministère de la Défense nationale du Canada. Il est défendu de diffuser, de citer ou de reproduire cette étude sans la permission expresse du ministère de la Défense nationale.*

Compte de mots: 14,176

## CONTENTS

CONTENTS.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
CHAPTER 1 – THE DEBATE ON IRAN .....	1
CHAPTER 2 – THE HISTORICAL CONNECTION.....	6
ANCIENT HISTORY.....	7
THE ISLAMIC INVASION.....	8
THE GREAT GAME.....	9
THE PAHLAVI DYNASTY .....	12
Under an American Shadow .....	14
THE RISE OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC .....	17
The Iran – Iraq War .....	19
From Revolution to Reform and Back.....	21
SUMMARY .....	23
CHAPTER 3 – INSIDE IRAN .....	25
IRANIAN POLITICS – THE ISLAMIC STATE VS THE REPUBLIC .....	25
THE PASDARAN – “GUARDIANS OF THE REVOLUTION” .....	30
THE LEADERS OF SHIISM.....	33
SUMMARY .....	37
CHAPTER 4 – WHAT IS IRAN DOING IN AFGHANISTAN?.....	39
Post 9/11 .....	41
POLITICAL EFFORTS.....	44
ECONOMIC EFFORTS .....	48

SOCIO-CULTURAL EFFORTS.....	51
Education .....	52
The Media .....	53
The Shia Dimension.....	55
MILITARY EFFORTS.....	57
SUMMARY .....	61
CHAPTER 5 – A JUSTIFIABLE CONCERN.....	63
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	67

## ABSTRACT

It is only by virtue of the scale of the problem on Afghanistan's eastern border that, by comparison, the western border with Iran appears to receive scant attention. In addition, from an international media perspective, Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons alongside its history of enmity towards the United States tends to throw a substantial shadow over many of its other actions. There is no doubt, however, that Iran is heavily involved in Afghanistan on all fronts. The debate, then, revolves around whether Iran's actions in Afghanistan are having a stabilizing or destabilizing effect on the situation.

Iran's potential to interfere with international efforts to stabilize Afghanistan is considerable. Given the importance that a regional consensus has on Afghanistan's future, Iran therefore represents a significant dilemma for Western policy-makers. Many continue to believe that, despite the country's revolutionary and religious ideology, Tehran still leans towards pragmatic policies, particularly in terms of regional security concerns, and that engagement and cooperation with Tehran can therefore produce mutual trust and benefits for all concerned. However, by presenting a better understanding of the historical context surrounding Iran's interests in Afghanistan as well as the key internal factors that currently help shape its foreign policy, this paper concludes that the current Iranian government's true interest lies in a form of controlled instability in Afghanistan. In the absence of a regime change in Tehran, Iran is more likely to continue pursuit of policies more akin to "cutting off its nose to spite its face" than making worthwhile efforts to cooperate with the West.

## CHAPTER 1 – THE DEBATE ON IRAN

*Iran's destiny always lies to the east, not the west. Lowland Iraq may be a tempting morsel for Iranian strongmen, but Central Asia, Afghanistan and the lands beyond embody promises and perils - both yesterday and tomorrow - that exceed in importance anything to be found on Iran's western front.*<sup>1</sup> – Richard W. Bulliet, 2007.

More than eight years have passed since United States (US) forces, in concert with the Northern Alliance, ousted the ultra-conservative Sunni Islamist Taliban from power in Afghanistan due to their refusal to turn over al-Qaeda terrorists responsible for the attacks on September 11, 2001. During this time, the Taliban, a mostly ethnic-Pashtun movement that is widely acknowledged to have had major support in its creation from Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency, has undoubtedly had a significant resurgence over the last four years. As a result, the international community's primary focus has turned further away from development and more towards fighting a counter-insurgency campaign against an entrenched, elusive, and determined enemy. Meanwhile, the costs of this war to the US as well as members of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), both financial and in terms of the lives of their soldiers, continue to soar. Unfortunately, the fight appears far from over and the resulting end-state far from decided.

The acknowledged reality in Afghanistan is that a long-term solution to the country's woes will never succeed without some regional consensus on the issue. Of Afghanistan's immediate neighbours, the one the world has focused most of its attention on has been Pakistan, and for good reason. The long, rugged, and remote Pakistan-Afghanistan border, also known as the "Durand Line," divides the Pashtun tribes nearly in half and gives the Taliban perfect

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard W. Bulliet, "Iran between East and West," *Journal of International Affairs* 60, no. 2 (Spring, 2007), 2, <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1268001321&Fmt=7&clientId=13664&RQT=309&VName=PQD>.

opportunity to gain respite and restore their fighting capacity in territory that is, to a considerable degree, immune from attack by US or ISAF forces. It is also widely acknowledged that the Taliban leadership, known as the Quetta Shura, direct insurgent operations in Afghanistan from safe havens in Pakistan.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, many analysts remain sceptical of Pakistan's instantaneous post-9/11 change-of-heart in terms of support to the Taliban, maintaining that elements within Pakistan's military and the ISI in particular, continue to harbour close ties with Taliban leaders.

It is only by virtue of the scale of the problem on Afghanistan's eastern border that, by comparison, the western border with Iran appears to receive scant attention. In addition, from an international media perspective, Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons alongside its history of enmity towards the US tends to throw a substantial shadow over many of its other actions. There is no doubt, however, that Iran is heavily involved in Afghanistan on all fronts. The debate, then, revolves around whether Iran's actions in Afghanistan are having a stabilizing or destabilizing effect on the situation.

One analyst, Mohsen Milani, contends that "Iran has consistently sought to see a stable and independent Afghanistan, with Herat as a buffer zone and with a Tehran-friendly government in Kabul," while further adding that Iran's "overall Afghan policy has contributed more to moderation and stability than to extremism and instability."<sup>3</sup> Sharing this view is Barnett Rubin, a leading expert on Afghanistan, who sees Iran as a more positive force in the region than Pakistan, and maintains that the solution is for "a recalibration of U.S. policy in

---

<sup>2</sup> Eric Schmitt and Mark Mazzetti, "Taliban Haven in Pakistani City Raises Fears," *The New York Times*, [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/10/world/asia/10quetta.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/10/world/asia/10quetta.html?_r=1) (accessed April 2, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Mohsen M. Milani, "Iran's Policy Towards Afghanistan," *Middle East Journal* 60, no. 2 (Spring, 2006), 235, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=poh&AN=20835779&site=ehost-live>.

Afghanistan to tilt away from [engagement and support to] Pakistan and more toward Iran.”<sup>4</sup>

However, the view that Iran is having an overall positive effect in Afghanistan is not nearly unanimous. For example, a recent news report from December 2009 had this to say:

Afghanistan’s neighbors are helping destabilize the country as "time is running out" on the U.S. effort here, according to a senior intelligence official with the international military force in Kabul ... Separate Western officials have argued Iran's negative influence on Afghanistan has increased in recent months. One Western official familiar with Taliban financing said Iran has knowingly allowed money to flow through the country that eventually is destined for the Taliban.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, Michael Rubin, a leading expert on Iran, commented on Iran’s actions in Afghanistan by stating the following:

It is ironic that, as Iranian authorities prove their pragmatism and replicate strategies in Afghanistan that have worked in Iraq and Lebanon, rigid thinking in the West blinds many policymakers to the extent of possible Iranian subterfuge.<sup>6</sup>

That said, it seems likely that the preponderance of the situation with Pakistan has had undue influence on those analysts who describe Iran’s role in Afghanistan as being mainly positive. In addition, and as Richard Bulliet reminds, it is easy to forget the importance Iranians themselves place on the significance of their western border.

Notwithstanding what Michael Rubin calls Iranian subterfuge, it seems completely illogical that Iran actually would want the Taliban (or their al-Qaeda cohorts) to “win” in

---

<sup>4</sup> Barnett R. Rubin, *The U.S. and Iran in Afghanistan: Policy Gone Awry*, with Sara Batmanglich (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Center for International Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2008), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Nick Schifrin, "Intel Official: 'Time is Running Out' in Afghanistan," ABC News, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/Afghanistan/intel-official-time-running-afghanistan/story?id=9429416> (accessed February 17, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Peter Viggo Jakobsen and others, "Afghanistan: State and Society, Great Power Politics, and the Way Ahead" (Copenhagen, Denmark, RAND Corporation, June 2007, 2008), [http://www.rand.org/pubs/conf\\_proceedings/2008/RAND\\_CF238.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/conf_proceedings/2008/RAND_CF238.pdf) (accessed 23 January 2010).



Afghanistan. The Sunni Taliban government represented one of the worst enemies of Shia Iran, and Iranians are not keen to see this group return to power in Kabul. As a result, neither does Iran wish to destabilize completely the Afghan government of Hamid Karzai. Furthermore, one certainly cannot blame Iran as the principle reason behind the Taliban resurgence that occurred over the last number of years. As a result, many Western observers generally believe that a significant amount of alignment is achievable between Iran and the international community, and the US in particular, in terms of their respective policies towards Afghanistan.

As is typical of all things Iranian, however, nothing Iran is doing in Afghanistan appears as distinctly black or white, positive or negative. Instead, Tehran's policy towards its Afghan neighbour seems generally confusing, incoherent, and often contradictory. For the casual Western observer, the expansive chasm that exists between an understanding of Western versus Iranian culture, politics, and history further clouds the issue, and often brings into question whether Iran's actions seem reasonable or even rational. More so than most countries around the world, it is simply not sufficient to take Iran's words or deeds at face value. However, while Iran is not nearly as transparent a state as Westerners are used to dealing with, it is also far from being opaque. It may not be possible to bridge the chasm completely, however it is possible to build far enough to view the other side in generous detail.

The second chapter of this paper, then, will describe Iran's lengthy and rich history, with a focus on its cultural, religious, economic, and political ties to Afghanistan, and with further emphasis placed on the last thirty years starting from the 1979 Islamic Revolution. In the third chapter, a more detailed look inside the Islamic Republic will explore the three most important factors influencing Iran's foreign policy today; namely, the political construct of the Islamic Republic itself, the growing influence of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and

Iran's status as protector of the Shia Islam faith. The fourth chapter will delve into some of Iran's current actions in Afghanistan within the political, economic, socio-cultural, and military realms. Finally, the concluding chapter will present an analysis that links Iran's historical and internal factors to its most recent actions in Afghanistan.

Iran's potential to interfere with international efforts to stabilize Afghanistan is considerable. Given the importance that a regional consensus has on Afghanistan's future, Iran therefore represents a significant dilemma for Western policy-makers. Many continue to believe that, despite the country's revolutionary and religious ideology, Tehran still leans towards pragmatic policies, particularly in terms of regional security concerns, and that engagement and cooperation with Tehran can therefore produce mutual trust and benefits for all concerned. However, by presenting a better understanding of the historical context surrounding Iran's interests in Afghanistan as well as the key internal factors that currently help shape its foreign policy, this paper concludes that the current Iranian government's true interest lies in a form of controlled instability in Afghanistan. In the absence of a regime change in Tehran, Iran is more likely to continue pursuit of policies more akin to "cutting off its nose to spite its face" than making worthwhile efforts to cooperate with the West.

## CHAPTER 2 – THE HISTORICAL CONNECTION

*Iran is a maddeningly complicated state and society, and even a cursory understanding of its motives today requires knowing a fair bit about the forces that have shaped the nation over time.*<sup>7</sup> – Kenneth M. Pollack, 2004.

It is impossible to understand Iran's motives in, and strategy towards, Afghanistan today without examining the country's past. Much more so than in the West, Iranians perceive events in terms of long-term historical events. Iran's ancient history is deeply engrained in its people and forms an essential element of the country's character.<sup>8</sup> It is marked by eras of Iranian supremacy and domination interspersed with turbulent periods of invasion and intervention by foreign powers. In particular, Iranian ties with Afghanistan stretch back to the days of the Persian Empire. In the western Afghanistan city of Herat, for example, the majority of the population still speaks Persian.<sup>9</sup> From an Iranian perspective, it is likely that Afghanistan would form part of modern day Iran if not for British meddling and an accident of history,<sup>10</sup> and Iranian school textbooks continue to list Herat as a province of Iran.<sup>11</sup> This chapter will therefore look at Iran's history from the days of the Persian Empire onwards, with a focus on Iran's ties to Afghanistan.

---

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America* (New York: Random House, 2004), 4.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 3

<sup>9</sup> Jakobsen and others, *Afghanistan: State and Society, Great Power Politics, and the Way Ahead*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

## ANCIENT HISTORY

Iranian interest and involvement in Afghanistan is certainly not a recent phenomenon. Rather, it dates back literally thousands of years to the ancient Persian Achaemenid Empire of which Afghanistan formed a part.<sup>12</sup> Established by Cyrus the Great in the sixth century B.C.E., the Persian Empire was, at the time, a veritable superpower. Rich, powerful, and in control of a territory that spanned three continents stretching from Egypt to Central Asia, it fuelled its ambition towards world rule through an efficient system of administration and centralized authority.<sup>13</sup> Modern-day Iranians are knowledgeable and extremely proud of this period in their history. While ethnic Persians constitute only 51 percent of Iran's population,<sup>14</sup> the impressive legacy of the Persian Empire "established an Iranian mind-set of far-reaching influence and engagement that remains an inspiration to this day."<sup>15</sup> With this in mind, it is easy to see how Iran sees its natural role as the ruling nation of the region, including Afghanistan.

The Persian Empire ended with the invasion of Alexander the Great in 330 B.C.E. and for the next 550 years a succession of foreign powers, including the Seleucid Greeks and the Parthians, ruled over Iran.<sup>16</sup> However, Iranian dominance returned with the establishment of the Sassanian dynasty (224 – 642 C.E.) which once again brought power and prestige to Iran. This empire, of course, included what is known today as Afghanistan. The Sassanids revived the

---

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Glenn E. Curtis and Eric Hooglund, eds., *Iran: A Country Study*, 5th ed. (Washington DC: Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, 2008), 3.

<sup>14</sup> "The World Factbook -- Iran," Central Intelligence Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html> (accessed February 13, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> John Brennan, "The Conundrum of Iran: Strengthening Moderates without Acquiescing to Belligerence," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 618, no. 1 (2008), 170, <http://ann.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/618/1/168.pdf> (accessed November 12, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 9.

greatness of the Persian Empire to the extent that theirs rivalled the Roman Empire for a period of nearly four hundred years.<sup>17</sup> Reminiscent of efforts by the current Islamic Republic of Iran, throughout their rule the Sassanids worked towards restoring Iranian traditions while attempting to eradicate foreign (mostly Greek) cultural influences.<sup>18</sup>

## THE ISLAMIC INVASION

The Islamic conquest in the seventh century, however, left an indelible mark on Iran. While full conversion to Islam took another one hundred years or so, Iran's status as a Muslim state remains unequivocally a predominant characteristic of its identity today. However, by no means was Iran's civilization and culture subsumed into that of its invaders. While the Islamic conquest brought Iran into the greater Muslim civilization, the Arab conquerors also adopted many Persian customs and traditions.<sup>19</sup> Iran, in many ways, "helped shape the new order."<sup>20</sup>

Iran remained under control of the larger Islamic empire until the decline of the Abbasid dynasty in the tenth and eleventh centuries, after which it became subject again to foreign intervention and invasion, this time by the Seljuk Turks in the twelfth century followed by the Mongols a century later.<sup>21</sup> The Mongols left a wake of devastation and death behind them that left Iran weak and vulnerable. Its territory subsequently became a battleground fought over by

---

<sup>17</sup> "Roman-Persian Wars - HistoryNet," Weider History Group, <http://www.historynet.com/roman-persian-wars.htm> (accessed February 13, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> "History of Iran: Sassanid Empire," Iran Chamber Society, <http://www.iranchamber.com/history/sassanids/sassanids.php> (accessed February 13, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 9.

<sup>20</sup> Curtis and Hooglund, *Iran: A Country Study*, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 10.

various Turkic and Afghan forces.<sup>22</sup> In the sixteenth century, however, Iran once again managed to pull itself out of chaos and restore itself to regional dominance with the rise of the Safavids, an Iranian indigenous group, in 1501.<sup>23</sup> Rivalling the Ottoman Empire in terms of regional influence, the Safavids ruled over a territory with borders that were similar to those of modern-day Iran but included much of Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Caucasus.<sup>24</sup>

The actions of the Safavid dynasty further demonstrate Iran's disposition to forge a unique identity for itself, for it was at this point that Iran converted to Shia Islam (as opposed to Sunni Islam), adopting it as the state religion<sup>25</sup> and forever distinguishing itself from the greater Muslim world. As a result, Iran represents the only Muslim state in the world today where Shia Islam is the official state religion.<sup>26</sup> Given the significance of this characteristic to the understanding of Iran's motives, this paper will expand further on the issue of Shia Islam in a subsequent chapter.

## **THE GREAT GAME**

The Safavid dynasty lasted until 1722 at which point a small group of Ghilzai tribesmen from Afghanistan took the capital after a series of easy victories.<sup>27</sup> For next 73 years, Iranians

---

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 10

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 11

<sup>24</sup> David E. Thaler and others, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics* (RAND Corporation,[2010]), [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND\\_MG878.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG878.pdf) (accessed February 6, 2010).

<sup>25</sup> Curtis and Hooglund, *Iran: A Country Study*, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Curtis and Hooglund, *Iran: A Country Study*, 21.

experienced chaotic rule once again as assorted internal and external groups contested power in Iran. In 1795, the Qajars – an ethnic Turkic tribe – established a dynasty over a reunified Persian state after successfully defeating their opponents.<sup>28</sup> However, the world was changing quickly and by the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Qajars found themselves facing pressure from two great European powers; namely, Britain and Russia.<sup>29</sup>

Unfortunately for the Iranian people, the Qajar state was corrupt, wasteful and extremely inefficient. Despite the country's lack of wealth and unbalanced trade, Qajar leaders spent lavishly on themselves and waged expensive wars for which they incurred huge foreign debts.<sup>30</sup> As time went on, “they were forced to begin selling concessions and the meagre manufacturing capability they had to foreigners to try to pay off their debts – which reduced future revenue and made them ever more dependent on the Europeans.”<sup>31</sup> Caught squarely between the main protagonists of “the Great Game,” Iran found itself whittled away and carved up between Britain and Russia.

The humiliation was immense, and wounded Iran's national psyche for years afterwards.<sup>32</sup> “Iranians (Persians, as they were then still known) were accustomed to looking down on Europeans as barbarian adherents to a superseded religion and a primitive civilization.”<sup>33</sup> However, two ruinous wars with Russia forced Iran into relinquishing all its territories in the Caucasus and, by the second half of the nineteenth century, all its claims to

---

<sup>28</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 13.

<sup>29</sup> Curtis and Hooglund, *Iran: A Country Study*, 22.

<sup>30</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 15.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 15

<sup>32</sup> Thaler and others, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, 8.

<sup>33</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 4.

territories in Central Asia.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, British military intervention in the country during the Anglo-Persian War of 1856-1857 prevented the Qajar regime from reclaiming the Afghan city of Herat.<sup>35</sup> The Treaty of Paris in 1857 humiliated Iran even further, and resulted in a loss of influence in Afghanistan and the surrounding region.<sup>36</sup> In essence, Iran's contemporary borders resulted from the treaties forced on it by Britain and Russia.<sup>37</sup>

The whittling down of Iranian borders was, however, just one effect of European interference in Iran's affairs. In addition, representatives from Britain and Russia "had a hand not only in making and unmaking ministers but also in stabilizing the monarchy and influencing the line of succession throughout the century."<sup>38</sup> The resulting paranoia shown by many political leaders of contemporary Iran is rooted in this era.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, foreign powers gained extensive commercial and diplomatic concessions at Iran's expense. The Qajar regime's almost utter surrender of the country to foreign commercial interests was extraordinary. For example, in 1872, in an attempt to break the cycle of government deficits, the Shah attempted to sell the sole right to construct mines, railways, tramways, dams, roads, and industrial plants to a British citizen for \$200,000 and 60 percent of annual profits.<sup>40</sup> While the regime ultimately cancelled the deal over nationalist and Russian protest, it was described as the "most complete surrender of

---

<sup>34</sup> Curtis and Hooglund, *Iran: A Country Study*, 22.

<sup>35</sup> Thaler and others, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, 7.

<sup>36</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 36.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 36

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 36

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 37

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 38



the entire resources of a kingdom into foreign hands that has ever been dreamed of, much less accomplished in history.”<sup>41</sup>

Disruption in Iran caused by the First World War, combined with bad harvests and disease, left the country in a condition nearing that of a failed state by the end of the conflict.<sup>42</sup> Once more, the British used this as opportunity to draw further concessions. The aborted Anglo-Persian agreement of 1919 would have given Britain “the exclusive right to provide all expert advisers to Iran, officer and supply the Army, build railroads and other infrastructure, and develop a joint committee to revise the Persian Tariff system,”<sup>43</sup> in return for a £2 million loan and recognition of Persian sovereignty and territorial integrity.<sup>44</sup> Despite the government’s support, outrage from the Iranian people over this wholesale sell-out once again prevented ratification of the agreement. Britain subsequently decided to withdraw all its troops in Persia in 1921, leaving in its wake a weak Iranian government incapable of dealing with the situation, and a populace suffering through misery, poverty and strife.<sup>45</sup> The country was ripe for a coup.

## **THE PAHLAVI DYNASTY**

The coup occurred early on February 21, 1921, when General Reza Khan, commander of the Cossack garrison of the Iranian Army, entered Tehran with three thousand men.<sup>46</sup> He

---

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 38

<sup>42</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 26.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 25

<sup>44</sup> Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 60.

<sup>45</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 27.

<sup>46</sup> Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 63.

proceeded to depose the last Shah of the Qajar dynasty in 1925, proclaimed himself Shah of Iran,<sup>47</sup> and changed his name to Reza Shah Pahlavi, thus founding the Pahlavi dynasty.<sup>48</sup> He launched a new era in Iran, although reviews of the new regime amongst the populace were certainly mixed.<sup>49</sup> For some, he brought order, development, and much-needed modernization. For others, his autocratic style of rule brought oppression, corruption and a police state.<sup>50</sup>

Reza Shah believed in a strong central state, and vastly expanded the army and the bureaucracy. He often deliberately aimed his reforms at undermining the religious hierarchy; for example, removing the clerics' near total control over education and creating secular laws.<sup>51</sup> As a result, the clerics viewed his efforts to modernize the country as inflicting Western culture on a traditional Islamic society.<sup>52</sup> A fervent nationalist, he strived to create an independent Iran free from the interventions of its old foreign adversaries, leading him to favour a growing alliance with Germany in order to keep Russia and Britain at bay.<sup>53</sup> Ironically, this is what led to his downfall when, at the outbreak of war, the Allies demanded that he expel all German nationals from Iran.<sup>54</sup> He refused, and when Britain and the Soviet Union proceeded to invade the country in 1941, Reza Shah's son, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, ascended to the Peacock Throne.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>47</sup> "History of Iran: Reza Shah Pahlavi," Iran Chamber Society, [http://www.iranchamber.com/history/reza\\_shah/reza\\_shah.php](http://www.iranchamber.com/history/reza_shah/reza_shah.php) (accessed February 13, 2010).

<sup>48</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 27.

<sup>49</sup> Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 91.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 91

<sup>51</sup> Curtis and Hooglund, *Iran: A Country Study*, 28.

<sup>52</sup> Thaler and others, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, 8.

<sup>53</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 37.

<sup>54</sup> Curtis and Hooglund, *Iran: A Country Study*, 30.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 30

## Under an American Shadow

Iran's relationship with the US consumes Iranians to this day, and understanding its complexity remains a key to comprehending its motives. The beginning of the new Shah's reign coincided with the introduction of large-scale contact between Americans and Iranians.<sup>56</sup> Initially, American intentions in Iran appeared quite altruistic. As an example, early in 1943 the US State Department criticized previous interference by both Britain and Russia and advocated a policy that fostered an independent Iran capable of standing up to them.<sup>57</sup> As a result, American pressure on its Soviet and British allies at the "Big Three" conference in Tehran in late 1943 resulted in the Tehran Declaration, recognizing Iran's independence and promising to promote Iranian development. In addition, the Tripartite Pact committed the Allies to withdrawing all their forces from Iran within six months of the war's end.<sup>58</sup> Despite US good intentions, however, the Iranian people had scant reason to feel optimistic about the American presence. The influx of foreign troops caused massive inflation and extensive famine, while cultural insensitivity on behalf of US troops did little to foster a positive image of Americans in the minds of Iranians.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, the two countries drew increasingly closer to each other in view of the communist threat posed by the Soviet Union and the start of the Cold War, signing an agreement in 1947 for the US to provide military aid and advice to train Iran's army.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 40.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 42

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 42

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 41

<sup>60</sup> Curtis and Hooglund, *Iran: A Country Study*, 32.

The new Shah also began his reign by taking actions directly intended to improve his image amongst the Iranian people and distance himself from his father's legacy as an autocrat and despot. These included vowing to reign as a constitutional monarch while respecting the law, taking measures to return his father's estates to their original owners, and overturning certain state actions that had aggravated the clerics.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, he still faced considerable domestic opposition and only narrowly escaped death after an assassination attempt in 1949.<sup>62</sup> Despite a boost in his personal popularity as a result of surviving the attack, the repressive actions he took in wake of the assassination attempt proved he was no less the autocrat than his father, and served to further unite his opponents.<sup>63</sup>

Meanwhile, a crisis with the British soon developed over control of Iran's oil industry. The situation turned into a power struggle between the Shah and his prime minister, Mohammad Mosaddeq, whose popularity amongst Iranians stemmed from his efforts to renegotiate British concessions and nationalize the country's oil industry.<sup>64</sup> Mossadeq managed to wrest power from the Shah in the summer of 1952, however his intransigence over a deal with the British, combined with fears he would turn to the Soviets for help, convinced the US that, despite their sympathy towards Iran's national aspirations, Mossadeq had to go.<sup>65</sup> As a result, the US Central

---

<sup>61</sup> Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 99.

<sup>62</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 52.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 52

<sup>64</sup> Curtis and Hooglund, *Iran: A Country Study*, 33.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 34

Intelligence Agency (CIA) led a coup in 1953, supported by British agents, to topple the Mossadeq government and returned the Shah to power.<sup>66</sup>

The coup has had long-standing negative repercussions for American-Iranian relations to this day. A common view amongst Iranians is that Mossadeq was “a wildly popular prime minister forging a new, democratic Iran fully in command of its own destiny, who was overthrown by American agents to prevent Iran from achieving political and economic freedom.”<sup>67</sup> While the truth is not quite so black and white, this myth added to Iranian perceptions that the Americans had supplanted the British (and formerly the Russians) as the main power interfering in Iranian affairs, preventing the country from achieving prosperity and taking its rightful place in the world. It also added to their fears that the US now controlled the Shah and thus allowed Iranians to assign blame for the Pahlavi regime’s hated policies to foreign interference.<sup>68</sup>

For the next two and a half decades, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi used oil revenue and American aid in various attempts to bring the economy out of stagnation and build Iranian military power. However, resentment towards his repressive regime continued to grow across the breadth of Iranian society.<sup>69</sup> The Iranian people saw little benefit come to them despite the massive influx of oil revenues in the 1970s, and the Shah seemed to spare no effort to antagonize the clerics.<sup>70</sup> Following fourteen months of protests against his regime that turned increasingly

---

<sup>66</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 67.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 68

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 70

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 137

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 118

larger and more violent, he made an inglorious departure from Tehran on January 16, 1979, never to return.<sup>71</sup>

## THE RISE OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC

While the Iranian people had managed to rid themselves of the hated Shah, the question of what type of government would replace the Pahlavi regime was by no means a settled issue. In the disorder that arose after the regime's collapse, numerous factions vied for power, "from the far left to the far right [and] from secular to ultra-Islamic."<sup>72</sup> In the end, the radical mullahs prevailed, reasons for which must include the immense popularity of the revolution's spiritual leader, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.<sup>73</sup> However, Khomeini also brought with him a new political philosophy called *velayat-e faqih* (rule of the jurisprudent), which would form the basis of the new regime.<sup>74</sup>

Khomeini's concept of *velayat-e faqih* originated from conventional Shia Islamic principles. The reasoning behind the concept was that God had given *sharia* (the "way" a Muslim should live) to the Prophets and Imams to guide the Muslim community, and that in the absence of the Twelfth Imam, it was the senior clerics who became guardians of *sharia* and who therefore had ultimate authority to rule the state.<sup>75</sup> In other words, by virtue of their superior

---

<sup>71</sup> Curtis and Hooglund, *Iran: A Country Study*, 50.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 52

<sup>73</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 143.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 144

<sup>75</sup> Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 146.

knowledge of God's laws, the people best qualified to rule society were the clerics.<sup>76</sup> Not all Iranians accepted Khomeini's political philosophy, however. Mehdi Bazargan, the official prime minister, and his liberal supporters envisioned a republic that would be Islamic in name but democratic in content.<sup>77</sup> Struggle ensued when it came time to draft a new constitution, and the final product produced a mixture of theocracy and democracy, although weighted heavily in favour of overall clerical authority.<sup>78</sup> Khomeini, then, became the final authority.

Khomeini's fanatical hatred for the US was a central theme behind his decisions. "Anti-Americanism was not a tool he used to achieve power; rather, it was one of his primary goals – and to some extent, the achievement of power was an instrument toward achieving that goal."<sup>79</sup> As Khomeini slowly proceeded to consolidate his power over the country, fears of foreign intervention were constantly on Iranian minds. The result was a takeover of the American Embassy on November 4, 1979, by a group of Iranian students, ostensibly to preclude another coup in addition to avenging Mossadeq's overthrow in 1953.<sup>80</sup> The attackers held fifty-two Americans hostage for 444 days while Khomeini "railed against the American government, denouncing it as the "Great Satan" and "Enemy of Islam."<sup>81</sup> Extreme anti-Americanism became the test of allegiance to the revolution and allowed radicals to cleanse the system of any moderates who argued for freeing the hostages.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> Curtis and Hooglund, *Iran: A Country Study*, 120.Iran

<sup>77</sup> Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 162.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 163

<sup>79</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 156.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 154

<sup>81</sup> "Iran Hostage Crisis " <http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h2021.html> (accessed February 14, 2010).

<sup>82</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 158.

While an anti-American sentiment was, therefore, quite rampant amongst the general population at the time of the revolution, Khomeini's legacy was to institutionalize it deep within the Iranian political scene, the government bureaucracy, and the clerical establishment. Whether Iran's animosity towards the US is deserved or not matters little in the end – the US was certainly not as innocent as many Americans might have liked to believe, but neither was it as culpable as Iranians made it out to be.<sup>83</sup> The fact remains that this animosity has played a primary role in Iran's actions from the hostage crisis and onwards to this day. The hostage crisis also taught Iranians a vital lesson; namely, that the US was not all-powerful. It demonstrated that the US could be weak and vulnerable in some areas, and that Iran could prevail over it – particularly if it employed “unconventional” means of coercion. This lesson seemed reinforced when, in 1984, the Americans withdrew from Lebanon shortly after two suicide bombers struck the Marine barracks in Beirut killing over 200 American soldiers.<sup>84</sup> Iran's long-established anti-Americanism, combined with the Iranian perception that the US will not stomach a fight, remain central themes of Iranian policy towards the US,<sup>85</sup> and explain many of the motives behind Iran's current actions in Afghanistan as well.

### **The Iran – Iraq War**

It is of vital importance to look, at least briefly, at the war between Iran and Iraq since the Iran of today was, in a sizeable way, formed during the 1980s.<sup>86</sup> Despite Khomeini's rise as

---

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 174

<sup>84</sup> "BBC on this Day | 26 | 1984: US Troops Withdraw from Beirut," British Broadcasting Corporation, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/february/26/newsid\\_4153000/4153013.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/february/26/newsid_4153000/4153013.stm) (accessed February 20, 2010).

<sup>85</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 205.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 181



Supreme Leader, when Saddam Hussein's Iraqi army invaded Iran on September 22, 1980, Iran remained in the midst of significant internal political turmoil.<sup>87</sup> Considerable conflict existed between the radical revolutionary mullahs represented by the Islamic Republic Party and those who promoted a more professional and secular approach such as President Bani Sadr.<sup>88</sup> The invasion caught Iran completely off guard, and the war would have likely ended quickly in Iraq's favour but for the sheer incompetency of their armed forces.<sup>89</sup> Instead, it helped to further establish and strengthen the power of Iranian revolutionary hardliners and radicals. Moreover, the initial successes experienced by Iran using massed Pasdaran and Basij infantry attacks served to transform the IRGC into a fully-fledged military force,<sup>90</sup> giving IRGC commanders, who saw the war as a jihad, increasing sway over the country.<sup>91</sup>

The conflict also served to reinforce Iran's bitterness towards the US. Iranians, inspired by a combination of religion and patriotism, saw this as a revolutionary war.<sup>92</sup> As a result, US support for Iraq infuriated them, particularly when Iraq used chemical weapons against Iranian forces.<sup>93</sup> In the end, the war with Iraq helped entrench the most radical and revolutionary-minded factions in Iran into an uncontested position of control of the country.<sup>94</sup> This has had far-reaching implications to this day due to the substantial number of current Iranian leaders who

---

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 182

<sup>88</sup> Curtis and Hooglund, *Iran: A Country Study*, 61.

<sup>89</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 186.

<sup>90</sup> Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 175.

<sup>91</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 193.

<sup>92</sup> Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 176.

<sup>93</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 208.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 189

hail from the IRGC with mindsets tempered by their experiences during the Iran-Iraq war.<sup>95</sup> Recent remarks made by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who warned that Iran was “becoming a military dictatorship,”<sup>96</sup> demonstrate the importance of this issue in understanding Iran’s overall foreign policy.

### **From Revolution to Reform and Back**

By war’s end, the Iranian economy was in tatters. The CIA estimated that the conflict had cost Iran 160 billion dollars,<sup>97</sup> and per capita income had dropped precipitously since the revolution.<sup>98</sup> This, in combination with Khomeini’s death in 1989, left political space for more pragmatic policies to emerge as Iranian leaders, in particular President Rafsanjani, could now focus on reconstruction, job creation, and economic development, which in turn required foreign investment and repairs to Iran’s international relations.<sup>99</sup> Even Khomeini’s successor as Supreme Leader, Sayyid Ali Khamenei, appeared ready to acknowledge the extent to which Iran’s extremist policies had damaged its reputation and isolated the country from its neighbours.<sup>100</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> Frederic Wehrey and others, *The Rise of the Pasdaran: Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps* (RAND Corporation,[2009]), [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND\\_MG821.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG821.pdf) (accessed December 12 , 2009).

<sup>96</sup> "Clinton Warns Iran 'Becoming a Military Dictatorship'," British Broadcasting Corporation, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/8515623.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8515623.stm) (accessed February 20, 2010).

<sup>97</sup> *Iran's Economy: A Survey of its Decline* (Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence,[1991]), [http://www.foia.cia.gov/browse\\_docs\\_full.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/browse_docs_full.asp) (accessed February 20, 2010).

<sup>98</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 238.

<sup>99</sup> Curtis and Hooglund, *Iran: A Country Study*, 70.

<sup>100</sup> Thaler and others, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, 15.

Rafsanjani's efforts to liberalize the economy ran into trouble in 1997, however, when a combination of US sanctions and a fall in oil prices triggered economic recession in Iran.<sup>101</sup> In what was, in hindsight, a gross miscalculation by clerical hardliners, they allowed Sayyed Muhammad Khatemi, a relatively unknown politician with a liberal reputation, to run for President. Believing that internal reform, not ideological violence, was the solution needed to guard the future welfare of Iran,<sup>102</sup> Khatemi won handily with seventy percent of the vote,<sup>103</sup> and ushered in an age of political reform in Iran that lasted until President Ahmadinejad's successful bid for election in 2005.

Notwithstanding both Rafsanjani's and Khatemi's efforts, the hardliner elements within Iran continued to maintain considerable control. Iran never abandoned its ideological aims, which served to increase the number of confrontations it had during the 1990s with both regional countries and, most significantly, the US. Khomeini's initial tendency towards pragmatism was soon brought in line by the underlying hardliner forces put in place by his predecessor, Khomeini. As Kenneth Pollack notes:

Khomeini had made it very clear that his vision of the Islamic Revolution was the most radical, dogmatic, ideological, uncompromising, and anti-American version of it. If Khomeini were to be seen as legitimate by the Iranian people, he would have to adhere to that legacy.<sup>104</sup>

As a result, the current Iranian leadership state-of-affairs, with Khomeini as Supreme Leader and Ahmadinejad as President, demonstrates that the regime's predisposition to ideological and

---

<sup>101</sup> Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 185.

<sup>102</sup> Thaler and others, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, 17.

<sup>103</sup> Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 186.

<sup>104</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 242.

revolutionary policies is, in many ways, as strong as it was during Khomeini's reign in the 1980s. A clear understanding of this situation is vital in order to comprehend Iran's actions in Afghanistan today.

## **SUMMARY**

The rise and fall of the various Persian empires have taught Iranians that they will eventually succeed in dominating affairs once again, if not throughout the world, at least in the Middle East and Central Asia. Iran's strategic geographic location, vast energy resources, unique cultural legacy, and leading role in terms of Shia Islam are all primary factors that further fuel Iranian ambitions in this regard. Iranians see their recent status, including what they perceive to have been subjugation by foreign countries over the last few centuries, as but one more interlude between periods of greatness. Afghanistan is, to Iran, simply a part of their former great empire, and no doubt will be part of it again, in one form or another, some day in the future. In summary, Iran's aspirations for superiority over its neighbours in terms of regional hegemony, and perhaps future global hegemony, are real and must be taken into consideration when looking at Iran's foreign policy towards Kabul.

The Great Game era taught Iranian leaders never again to put their trust in foreign powers. They also learned the lesson that naked power politics in the pursuit of national interests was the only game worth playing. The humiliation, fear, and frustration felt by Iranians throughout the 1800s, as the weak and vulnerable Iranian state fell prey to European powers,

“reinforced a powerful sense of xenophobia coupled with an inferiority complex among Iranians to complement their superiority complex.”<sup>105</sup>

The Pahlavi years focussed Iranian foreign distrust and hatred on the US. After looking to the US to counter its old European adversaries, Iranians came to the conclusion that the Americans were no better than their British and Russian counterparts, and might probably even be worse. The coup orchestrated by the CIA in 1953 sowed the seeds for the anti-American sloganeering of the 1979 revolution and the hostage crisis that fell out of it. Combined with the current US status as a global hegemonic superpower, Iran therefore views the US as their direct competitor and principal enemy. In relation to Afghanistan, therefore, Iran sees US forces stationed there as an existential threat to its security.

Finally, from the beginning of the 1979 revolution, Khomeini nurtured intense Iranian anti-American feelings, combined them with revolutionary slogans and posturing, and then embedded them deep within the Iranian political system, the IRGC, and the religious hierarchy. Although various successive Iranian leaders attempted to bring normalcy and legitimacy to the regime, their weak performance, particularly in terms of improving Iran’s economic prospects, never could supplant the ideology of “permanent revolution”, which remains today an indispensable means of control for Iran’s elites.<sup>106</sup>

---

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 4

<sup>106</sup> Thaler and others, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, 77.

### CHAPTER 3 - INSIDE IRAN

*I pray to the Almighty to bless the Iranian and American nations and indeed all nations of the world with dignity and success.*<sup>107</sup> – President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, 2006

Public pronouncements made by Iranian officials often confuse Westerners. For example, a year after President Ahmadinejad called for Israel to be “wiped off the map,” he wrote an open letter to the American people stating that both Iranians and Americans “greatly value and readily embrace the promotion of human ideals such as compassion, empathy, [and] respect for the rights of human beings.”<sup>108</sup> Iran is the ultimate paradox – a modern state beholden to traditional Islamic values, claiming peaceful intent yet aggressively pursuing weapons of mass destruction. It is also an Islamic theocracy, but one in which democracy plays a significantly larger role than many other contemporary Muslim states.

Understanding Iranian interest and intent in Afghanistan requires an understanding of the major influences behind Iranian decision-making and foreign policy. This chapter will look at three of the main factors – the dual nature of the Iranian political system, the Islamic Republican Guard Corp, or Pasdaran, and the role of Shia Islam.

#### IRANIAN POLITICS – THE ISLAMIC STATE VS THE REPUBLIC

The Iranian political system has been described as “one of the most complex, Byzantine, fragmented, and opaque on earth.”<sup>109</sup> Its characteristics include severe dysfunction, factional

---

<sup>107</sup> "Iranian President Ahmadinejad's Letter to the American People," Information Clearing House, <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article15770.htm> (accessed February 20, 2010).

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> Kenneth M. Pollack and others, *Which Path to Persia? Options for a New American Strategy Toward Iran* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2009), 17.

rivalry, and a resulting tendency towards stasis.<sup>110</sup> In Iranian politics, informal relationships often trump the formal, and while Iran's strategic goals could present opportunity for various factions to unite in pursuit of common objectives, more often Iran's foreign policy approach, including its approach to Afghanistan, comes across as confusing and incoherent.<sup>111</sup>

Furthermore, according to the former CIA analyst Kenneth Pollack, Iran's domestic politics represent the most important force determining the course of US-Iranian relations over the past fifty years.<sup>112</sup> Given the role played by these relations in determining Iranian policy towards Afghanistan, it follows that Iran's domestic politics also play an important role in Tehran's dealings with Kabul.

A look at Iran's constitution highlights key strategic goals of the revolutionary regime. The constitution includes a number of articles that deal with foreign policy objectives, such as "the complete elimination of imperialism and the prevention of foreign influence" and "the framing of foreign policy of the country on the basis of Islamic criteria, fraternal commitment to all Muslims, and unsparing support to the oppressed of the world."<sup>113</sup> These goals reflect the dual nature of theocracy and republicanism forming the basis of the Iranian political system, although the arrangement is heavily weighted towards theocracy and Khomeini's concept of *velayat-e faqih*. This duality can be viewed in the structure of the Iranian political system with the roles of the Supreme Leader and the President representing, respectively, the theocratic and

---

<sup>110</sup> Thaler and others, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, 113.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 303.

<sup>113</sup> Önder Özar, "Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era," *Turkish Review of Middle East Studies* 15 (Annual, 2004), 272.

republican (or democratic) dimensions. Furthermore, the constant tension between democracy and theocracy is also reflected in what can be considered, broadly speaking, the two main factions in Iranian politics; namely, the reformists who wish to pursue some sort of rapprochement with the US and the West in order bring Iran into the global system, and the hardliners who are wedded to the pursuit of revolutionary goals through the adoption of an aggressive foreign policy in defence of Islamic interests.<sup>114</sup>

It is important to note that the dual structure of Iran's political system does not signify that the position of Supreme Leader represents the hardliner faction while that of the President represents the reformist faction. In fact, both the Supreme Leader as well as the President must maintain balance between competing interests in order to preserve their positions, keeping in mind that, unlike the President, the Supreme Leader need not worry about being re-elected every few years. That said, it is clear that while Khomeini has yielded somewhat in the past to policies advocated by reformist-minded presidents such as Khatami, "by inclination and preference he is a hardliner, comfortable with pure revolutionary ideologues like Ahmadinejad."<sup>115</sup>

Clearly then, to understand current Iranian politics, one must look at who these hardliners are as well as the political class they represent. According to Kenneth Pollack,

The men who rule in Tehran today have believed reflexively for fifty years that the U.S. government is evil, that it is the source of all of the problems in the world and the ultimate cause of all of Iran's problems.<sup>116</sup>

---

<sup>114</sup> Thaler and others, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, 79.

<sup>115</sup> Shahram Chubin, "Iran's Power in Context," *Survival* 51, no. 1 (February-March, 2009), 175.

<sup>116</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 399.



Furthermore, unlike the reformists who draw support mainly from the urban, middle-class population, the hardliners rely on the rural populace, the lower religious classes, and the IRGC and Basij as the foundation for their support.<sup>117</sup> In essence, their political force stems directly from Khomeini's revolutionary heritage, building on the disaffection with reformists whom they consider having betrayed its ideals.<sup>118</sup>

As a result of the competition between democracy and theocracy, the Iranian political system also has considerable institutional duplication and includes a number of autonomous centres of power, each of which is capable of some independent action yet also able to paralyze initiatives by others.<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, "factions use foreign policy to promote their domestic agendas,"<sup>120</sup> which is apparent when looking at the actions taken by hardliner elements in their quest to wrest control of the regime from the reformists in the early 2000s. Such actions as sending arms to the Palestinian Authority, as witnessed by the *Karine A* incident in January 2002, and providing support for terrorist attacks such as the Riyadh bombings in May 2003, succeeded in provoking sufficient anti-Iranian reaction in the US that President Khatami's attempts at détente with the West were ultimately sabotaged.<sup>121</sup> Since their takeover of the Majles and presidency in 2004 and 2005 respectively, it is the hardliners who have clearly gained

---

<sup>117</sup> Thaler and others, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, 83.

<sup>118</sup> Saïd Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini: Iran Under His Successors* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 150.

<sup>119</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 235.

<sup>120</sup> Thaler and others, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, xv.

<sup>121</sup> Arjomand, *After Khomeini: Iran Under His Successors*, 197.

the upper hand,<sup>122</sup> and it is their ideology which is now driving Tehran's policy towards Afghanistan.

In summary, the dual republican and theocratic nature of Iran's constitution has resulted in a convoluted, capricious political system, the characteristics of which "preclude coherent, forward-looking policies."<sup>123</sup> Due to institutional inertia, actors in the Iranian political system derive as much, if not more, power and influence from personal relationships as they do from position, explaining why factional dynamics are so much at the forefront of policymaking.<sup>124</sup> As well, while the Supreme Leader holds unparalleled power in Iran's political system, he is not omnipotent and must normally attempt to balance off various factions in order to hold on to power. That said, Khomeini's tendency is towards the hardliner element, and with Ahmadinejad's rise to power as President, the stage has been set for the predomination of a radical and aggressive foreign policy. As a result, the determination of Iran's foreign policy is now firmly the prerogative of hardliner elements adhering to Islamic revolutionary ideology. In Afghanistan, therefore, that policy is to counter foreign (mainly Western) interference, promote the Islamic revolutionary agenda, and use all means to weaken US power and influence in the region.

---

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 196

<sup>123</sup> Thaler and others, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, 113.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

## THE PASDARAN – “GUARDIANS OF THE REVOLUTION”

Due to the amount of influence it exerts over Iran’s highly factionalized political system, a key centre of gravity of the Iranian state is the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps,<sup>125</sup> also known as the Pasdaran. Reflecting the dual nature of the Iranian political system, Iran also has two separate militaries. Held over from Shah Pahlavi’s era, the regular military maintains the conventional role of defending Iranian territory from external threats.<sup>126</sup> In contrast, the IRGC, founded by a decree from Ayatollah Khomeini shortly after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, was initially established to guard Iran’s emergent revolutionary government by maintaining internal security and exporting the revolution.<sup>127</sup> This separation of purpose between the two militaries served to elevate the IRGC’s status from Iran’s regular military.<sup>128</sup> Today, the role of the Pasdaran has evolved considerably such that “the IRGC functions as an expansive sociopolitical-economic conglomerate whose influence extends into virtually every corner of Iranian political life and society.”<sup>129</sup>

Within the IRGC, the elite Qods (Jerusalem) Force, numbering somewhere between 10,000 and 15,000 personnel, has been established primarily to “export the revolution” outside

---

<sup>125</sup> Matthew M. Frick, "Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps: An Open Source Analysis," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 49 (2nd quarter, 2008), 121, [http://www.ndu.edu/inss/Press/jfq\\_pages/editions/i49/31.pdf](http://www.ndu.edu/inss/Press/jfq_pages/editions/i49/31.pdf) (accessed April 1, 2010).

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 123

<sup>127</sup> Kenneth Katzman, *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses* (Congressional Research Service,[2010]), <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL32048.pdf> (accessed February 22, 2010).

<sup>128</sup> Frick, *Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps: An Open Source Analysis*, 123.

<sup>129</sup> Wehrey and others, *The Rise of the Pasdaran: Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps*, xi.

Iran.<sup>130</sup> In addition to running a global intelligence network, it has the role of supporting pro-Iranian movements outside the country, including such places as Lebanon, Iraq, the Persian Gulf states, Gaza and the West Bank, Central Asia, and Afghanistan, through the provision of advice, support, and the procurement of weapons.<sup>131</sup>

Another significant element of the Pasdaran is the volunteer “people’s militia” established in 1980, known as the Basij Resistance Force, a group estimated at somewhere between 400,000 and possibly 1,000,000 or more personnel.<sup>132</sup> While most Basij personnel are not heavily armed and receive only minimal training, their primary task in the event of an attack on Iran would be to harass an enemy’s rear area, attacking lines of communication and preventing extended occupation of the homeland.<sup>133</sup> Increasingly, however, the IRGC and Basij have taken on another new and important role in terms of suppressing dissent and delivering election victories.

In the presidential elections of June 2005, the [IRGC] and the Basijis perfected the new function of bringing voters to the ballot box, something they had begun experimentally in the municipal elections of 2003 and the Majles elections of 2004. The 2005 presidential elections could indeed be accurately described as their first electoral coup d’état.<sup>134</sup>

For handing him an election victory in 2005, President Ahmadinejad rewarded the Pasdaran generously, declaring a special week to celebrate “the culture of the Basij reigning in the nation

---

<sup>130</sup> Frick, *Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps: An Open Source Analysis*, 123.

<sup>131</sup> Katzman, *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses*, 18.

<sup>132</sup> "Niruyeh Moghavemat Basij - Mobilisation Resistance Force," GlobalSecurity.org, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/world/iran/basij.htm> (accessed March 28, 2010).

<sup>133</sup> Wehrey and others, *The Rise of the Pasdaran: Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps*, 45.

<sup>134</sup> Arjomand, *After Khomeini: Iran Under His Successors*, 151.

and the country,” and later helping the Basij to secure no-bid government contracts.<sup>135</sup> In addition, the IRGC was given lucrative development projects, including a multi-billion dollar contract to build a gas pipeline.<sup>136</sup>

On the economic front, the IRGC is heavily involved in the Iranian economy and, as is clear from Ahmadinejad’s rewards, stands ready to use its political influence to win business contracts.<sup>137</sup> A recent example in September 2009 saw the IRGC purchase a fifty percent stake in the Iran Telecommunications Company for 7.8 billion dollars while in the past 5 years it has also been awarded 750 oil and gas and construction projects.<sup>138</sup> This large-scale economic activity is becoming increasingly entrenched while the IRGC remains largely beyond government oversight and control. As a result, larger and larger portions of Iran’s national economy are being dominated by individuals whose interests are not necessarily in line with the government’s economic objectives.<sup>139</sup> Further to this, the IRGC has considerable control over borders and airports and exclusive control over a number of illegal jetties and other entry points, leading to allegations it is also in control of an extensive underground economy by which contraband goods are smuggled into the country.<sup>140</sup> The IRGC, it is argued, is the only organization in Iran with the means to carry out such large-scale trafficking.<sup>141</sup> Some analysts

---

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 153

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 153

<sup>137</sup> Katzman, *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses*, 18.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> Thaler and others, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, 109.

<sup>140</sup> Shayerah Ilias, *Iran's Economic Conditions: U.S. Policy Issues* (Congressional Research Service,[2009]), <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34525.pdf> (accessed February 22, 2010).

<sup>141</sup> Wehrey and others, *The Rise of the Pasdaran: Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps*, 64.

consider it logical that at least part of the profits from the IRGC's extensive business activities are used to support covert operations abroad, including Afghanistan.<sup>142</sup>

Since the election of Ahmadinejad in 2005, the IRGC has increased its political and economic influence within Iran considerably. Part of this stems from the fact that Ahmadinejad represents just one of a new generation of political leaders whose background hails from IRGC roots.<sup>143</sup> This influence, however, combined with its conventional military strength, its constitutional mandate to guard the revolution, and its dominant role in internal security issues, has made it "the key to the internal survival of the regime and the top enforcer of the despotic oppression inside Iran."<sup>144</sup> In summary, the IRGC holds the key to the Islamic Republic's power, both at home and abroad.<sup>145</sup>

## THE LEADERS OF SHIISM

The third important factor inside Iran that requires discussion in order to understand its foreign policy objectives is Shia Islam. While Iran's historical greatness may stem from its Persian Empire roots, it is Islam that today "serves as the anchor Iran's national self-image."<sup>146</sup> Of the global Muslim population, approximately 10 to 15 percent, or 140 million people, are Shiites,<sup>147</sup> and while other countries around the world also have significant Shiite populations,

---

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> Thaler and others, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, xv.

<sup>144</sup> Frick, *Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps: An Open Source Analysis*, 125.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 122

<sup>146</sup> Thaler and others, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, 6.

<sup>147</sup> "Shiia Islam," GlobalSecurity.org, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/intro/islam-shiia.htm> (accessed March 28, 2010).

Iran holds the distinction of being the only country in the world in which Shiism is the official state religion, with approximately ninety percent of its population subscribing to that faith.<sup>148</sup> As a result, Iran retains the title of de facto leader of global Shiism, giving the country significant influence and prestige amongst the one-fifth to one-quarter of Afghanistan's population who are also Shia Muslims.

The Sunni-Shiite split occurred in the seventh century, shortly after the death of the Prophet Mohammad, over disagreement on who could rightly claim the title of caliph, or leader of the Muslim community.<sup>149</sup> While Sunnis only recognize the first four caliphs as "rightly guided", Shiites believe that Ali, cousin of the Prophet Mohammed and husband to his daughter Fatima, was the first caliph, followed by his descendants.<sup>150</sup> Most Iranians subscribe to the largest branch of the Shiite faith known as Twelver Shiism, believing that the twelfth Imam was hidden while still a baby to protect him from Shiite enemies.<sup>151</sup> Thereafter he "entered into a form of occultation and would return only at a much later date in messianic fashion as Lord of the Age, the Mahdi, who will bring an era of justice followed by ultimate judgement for all mankind."<sup>152</sup>

While Sunnis and Shias generally recognize each other as Muslims and agree on the core fundamentals of Islam,<sup>153</sup> there is a long history of marginalization and oppression directed

---

<sup>148</sup> Pierre Pahlavi, "The Shia Crescent: Between Myth and Reality" (Canadian Forces College, 2008).

<sup>149</sup> Hussein Abdulwaheed Amin, "The Origins of the Sunni/Shia Split in Islam," IslamForToday.com, <http://www.islamfortoday.com/shia.htm> (accessed March 28, 2010).

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 12.

<sup>153</sup> Amin, *The Origins of the Sunni/Shia Split in Islam*

towards Shiite minorities in Sunni-dominated countries in the past, including in Afghanistan. As a result, an important practice developed within the Shia faith known as *taqiyah*, or religious dissimulation. The concept encourages Shiites to be disingenuous regarding their true intent in situations where doing otherwise could present significant danger to themselves from opponents of Shiism.<sup>154</sup> Some analysts believe that the practice of *taqiyah* by Iranian leaders is evident by their continued denials regarding the pursuit of nuclear weapons. While it is certainly true that politicians and leaders from many different countries and religious faiths have demonstrated little or no compulsion against acting disingenuously, the fact that it is a religiously sanctioned practice in Iran is a factor to be considered when attempting to interpret statements coming from Tehran.

Of even more importance to this paper, however, is the role of Islam in Iranian foreign policy, and in particular, its policy towards Afghanistan. As leader of the greater Shia Muslim community, Iran has long had the symbolic role of ‘protector of the Shia faithful’ even during the years of the Pahlavi dynasty.<sup>155</sup> Throughout the 1980s, however, Iranian leaders embraced this role more fully in futile attempts to export their radical form of Shiism to neighbouring countries.<sup>156</sup> Meanwhile, due to the fragmented nature of the Shia community, many analysts do not consider the pursuit of a regional pan-Shiite association to be a realistic goal of the Iranian government today. At a minimum, however, its leaders certainly continue to employ the concept of pan-Shiism and pan-Islamism as a means to expand their regional power and international prestige.<sup>157</sup>

---

<sup>154</sup> *Shiia Islam*

<sup>155</sup> Pahlavi, *The Shia Crescent: Between Myth and Reality*, 6.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*



Regionally, in fact, one of Iran's primary aims has long been to exert as much influence as possible on former territories controlled in the past by various Persian empires.<sup>158</sup> In Afghanistan and elsewhere, these efforts gained strength of late through use of a variety of sophisticated new tools, particularly with respect to religious diplomacy."<sup>159</sup> As Dr Pahlavi writes,

Iranian policies towards Shia communities across the region rest upon an impressive clerico-diplomatic machine, coordinated at the top by the Islamic regime and combining public institutions with a multitude of non-governmental actors and networks. The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution ... is without contest the great coordinator of Iran's Shia policy.<sup>160</sup>

In the western regions of Afghanistan, including the province of Herat, and within the Shia Hazara minority, Iran's promotion of a pan-Shiite association has resulted in considerable gains. Afghan Shia religious leaders, such leading Shiite cleric Ayatollah Asif Mohseni, are very much pro-Iranian and Tehran's relations with Kabul today are becoming increasingly close to the point that Iran has gained the status of being a "privileged partner" of the Afghan government.<sup>161</sup> However, Iran's efforts to promote pan-Shiism in Afghanistan have often alienated and angered the majority Sunni (mostly Pashtun) populace. As a result, Tehran has begun emphasizing a more pan-Islamic approach in Kabul.

Furthermore, with the takeover of the Majles and the presidency by hardliners in 2004 and 2005, Twelver Shiism has been given an even more pronounced role in Iranian politics. President Ahmadinejad, in particular, seems convinced that the reappearance of the twelfth, or

---

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.* 7

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.* 8

hidden Imam, is imminent,<sup>162</sup> and that his government must prepare Iran for this event.<sup>163</sup> This belief, along with other statements from Ahmadinejad, such as feeling “the hand of God” while delivering a speech to the United Nations General Assembly in September 2005, have raised fears of “a religious messianism that, some suspect, is giving the Iranian leader a dangerous sense of divine mission.”<sup>164</sup>

While Shia Islam continues to play a major role in shaping Iranian society, some analysts highlight the fact that divisions are increasing between Iranian Shia groups with disparate views on what constitutes Shiite authority, leading to a crisis of legitimacy.<sup>165</sup> Notwithstanding this, Iran’s self-promotion as the role model for both the Shia and greater Islamic communities is likely to remain a central element of its foreign policy.

## SUMMARY

Western confusion about Iran’s foreign policy intentions are often due to ignorance of the internal machinations that make up the Islamic Republic. However, even those considered experts on Iran would likely admit that while their knowledge provides them with insight on Iran’s actions, it is often impossible to get the full picture as to what Tehran’s motives truly are. Nevertheless, a basic understanding of Iran’s domestic political system, the influence of the IRGC, and the role of Shia Islam is of critical importance to any analysis.

---

<sup>162</sup> Arjomand, *After Khomeini: Iran Under His Successors*, 149.

<sup>163</sup> Anton La Guardia, "'Divine Mission' Driving Iran's New Leader," Telegraph.co.uk, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/1507818/Divine-mission-driving-Irans-new-leader.html> (accessed April 1, 2010).

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> Thomas Juneau, "Insights into the Future of Iran as a Regional Power" (Ottawa, Canada, Canadian Security Intelligence Service, March 30-31, 2009).

The constant tension between democracy and theocracy in Iran's political system is the first essential factor to comprehend. The resulting dual nature of Iran's political structure has led to autonomous centres of power that also have the capability to hamper and restrict each other, leading to inertia and an often confusing approach to foreign policy. However, the continued failing prospects of the reformist elements in the wake of a hardliner resurgence beginning in 2004 have actually provided some clarity to the situation. In essence, the hardliners have regressed to a similar aggressive and anti-American foreign policy based on the Islamic revolutionary ideology in place during the 1980s under Ayatollah Khomeini. This forms the underlying basis of Iran's motives in Afghanistan.

The Pasdaran's influence in Iranian politics and its status in society are also key issues to comprehend. Partly resulting from its traditional constitutional role as guardians of the revolution, the IRGC has grown in strength and prestige to the point where it can compete with the mullahs themselves over ownership of Iran's revolutionary ideology. This is evident by the large number of Iranian lay-leaders, most notably Ahmadinejad himself, whose backgrounds include service in the IRGC during the immediate decade following the 1979 revolution. The IRGC currently enjoys considerable political influence as well as extensive independent economic and military power. It is also predisposed to favour hardliner political groups who remain devoted to the ideals of Iran's Islamic Revolution.

Finally, understanding the role of Iran as the spiritual centre of gravity for Shia Islam is of critical importance. While Iran is unlikely to pursue a policy of pan-Shiism or pan-Islamism as an end unto itself, it remains an effective tool useful for increasing its regional influence and international prestige. Iran's sophisticated wielding of this tool in Afghanistan has been largely successful to date, and will undoubtedly remain a key element of its efforts for the near future.

## CHAPTER 4 – WHAT IS IRAN DOING IN AFGHANISTAN?

*Afghanistan is like a swamp; anyone can fall into it, but [only] a few can get out of it safely and undamaged.*<sup>166</sup> – Hashemi-Rafsanjani, 2001

While the border between Iran and Afghanistan stretches 936 kilometres,<sup>167</sup> roughly from Mashad in the north to Zahedan in the south, Iran has consistently viewed western Afghanistan, particularly the area around Herat, as within its rightful sphere of influence. While Iran's interest in Afghan territory dates back thousands of years, in the 1980s, Tehran's concentration on the Iran-Iraq war left them little time to focus on their eastern flank despite the 1 to 1.5 million refugees that flooded into Iran as a result of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.<sup>168</sup>

Nevertheless, as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, backed by the US, stepped up their efforts to support the Afghan resistance to Soviet occupation, Iran felt increasingly threatened by their loss of influence and the distinct potential that a government would emerge in Kabul that was unfriendly to Tehran. Their subsequent efforts to rally the Shiite community came to fruition when the eight Iran-based Afghan-Shiite resistance groups formed an alliance in 1987.<sup>169</sup> With the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, however, the US lost interest in Afghanistan leaving space for Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Iran to continue the fight for influence.<sup>170</sup> Indeed, "Iran was a full

---

<sup>166</sup> Milani, *Iran's Policy Towards Afghanistan*, 245.

<sup>167</sup> "Afghanistan Border," Maps of the World.com, <http://www.mapsofworld.com/afghanistan/afghanistan-border.html> (accessed February 21, 2010).

<sup>168</sup> Milani, *Iran's Policy Towards Afghanistan*, 237.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 238

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 239

player by proxy in the Afghan civil war, assisting a loose coalition of Persian, Shi'a, and Turkic factions against the Pakistan and Saudi-supported Pushtuns."<sup>171</sup>

As a result, the Taliban consolidation of power over Afghanistan in 1996 dealt a severe blow to Iran. As one analyst states:

Not since the independence of Afghanistan, in 1919, had there been an Afghan government as antagonistic toward Iran as the Taliban; not since Saddam Husayn invaded Iran in September 1980 had any Iranian neighbour posed as great a security threat than the Taliban. Iran feared that Taliban rule would increase instability on its eastern borders and accelerate the flood of refugees into Iran. Tehran labelled the Taliban "narco-terrorists," who provided sanctuary to terrorist organizations and who "cherry picked" elements of both Islam and Pushtun tribal traditions to justify an un-Islamic and repressive ideology.<sup>172</sup>

To a paranoid Iranian leadership conditioned to see the hand of foreign interference everywhere, the Taliban represented efforts by the US, through their regional puppets, to weaken Iran's power in the region.<sup>173</sup> The situation grew worse in the summer of 1998 when the Taliban seized the city of Mazar-i Sharif in northern Afghanistan. Taliban troops attacked the Iranian consulate, killing several Iranian diplomats in what was possibly as an act of revenge for an earlier massacre of Taliban soldiers in Shibergan.<sup>174</sup> Iranians were outraged, and Tehran threatened military action by deploying roughly 200,000 troops to its eastern border. Although tensions subsided somewhat when Tehran subsequently made known its intentions to pursue a diplomatic

---

<sup>171</sup> Jakobsen and others, *Afghanistan: State and Society, Great Power Politics, and the Way Ahead*, 13.

<sup>172</sup> Milani, *Iran's Policy Towards Afghanistan*, 243.

<sup>173</sup> A. Wilde, "Continuity and Hiatus: Structural Patterns of Iran's Policy in Afghanistan," *Internationales Asien Forum. International Quarterly for Asian Studies* 40, no. 1/2 (May, 2009), 25, <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1857893281&Fmt=7&clientId=1711&RQT=309&VName=PQD>.

<sup>174</sup> Hafeez Malik, *US Relations with Afghanistan and Pakistan: The Imperial Dimension* (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 2008), 169.

solution,<sup>175</sup> Iran stepped up its support for the Northern Alliance and began urging the US to take a more active role in countering the Taliban.<sup>176</sup> These efforts proved mainly fruitless, however – that is, until the morning of September 11, 2001 when al-Qaeda, based in Afghanistan and harboured by the Taliban, attacked the US homeland.

### **Post 9/11**

Iranian reaction to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on US territory was demonstrably sympathetic, even more so than in most other Islamic countries. President Khatami, the reformist, immediately condemned the attacks. Iranians held spontaneous candlelight vigils, sixty thousand spectators held a minute of silence during a soccer match in Tehran, and many of even the most conservative Iranian media and authorities proclaimed solidarity with America.<sup>177</sup> In the world of US-Iranian relations, the world appeared to have turned upside-down.

Aside from popular sympathy for the US, for Iranian conservative hardliners as well as reformists, the 9/11 terrorist attacks presented a compelling basis on which to unite efforts and help the US resulting in, at least initially, an unprecedented era of cooperation between the two countries. First and foremost, the situation presented Iran with an excellent opportunity to rid itself of an irritating security threat on its eastern border. Indeed, “Tehran was delighted to see its friends in the Northern Alliance regain considerable power in Kabul,”<sup>178</sup> following the

---

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 170

<sup>176</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 345.

<sup>177</sup> Kashif Mumtaz Ghumman, "Iran-US Relations in the Post-9/11 Days," The Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad, [http://www.issi.org.pk/journal/2002\\_files/no\\_3/article/8a.htm](http://www.issi.org.pk/journal/2002_files/no_3/article/8a.htm) (accessed February 21, 2010).

<sup>178</sup> Milani, *Iran's Policy Towards Afghanistan*, 246.

Taliban's removal. For Iranian reformists led by President Khatami, however, there was also the opportunity to normalize relations with the US.<sup>179</sup> As a result, Tehran followed up its words with action and went to great lengths to aid the US in their subsequent invasion of Afghanistan in the fall of 2001, including providing the Americans with crucial diplomatic, intelligence, and logistical support.<sup>180</sup>

Unfortunately, the US failed to leverage this remarkable shift in Iranian behaviour towards a more lasting positive relationship. On the one hand, the US State Department was working quietly behind the scenes with its Iranian counterparts on the Afghanistan file. Meanwhile, President George W. Bush and his close advisors in the White House remained wedded to their view of Iran as a sponsor of terrorism and confirmed enemy of the US.<sup>181</sup> Moreover, another surprise turn of events took place that appeared to confirm the view taken by the White House – on January 3, 2002, Israel intercepted the *Karine A*, a Palestinian freighter carrying 50 tons of Iranian weapons, in the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>182</sup>

What happened a few weeks later dealt a near mortal blow to the Iranian reformists and their hope for a strategic shift in relations with the US. During President Bush's State of the Union Address on January 29, 2002, he listed Iran (along with Iraq and North Korea) as part of an "axis of evil," further stating, "Iran aggressively pursues ... weapons [of mass destruction],

---

<sup>179</sup> Stephen C. Poulson, "Nested Institutions, Political Opportunity, and the Decline of the Iranian Reform Movement Post 9/11," *American Behavioral Scientist* 53 (September, 2009), 27, <http://abs.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/53/1/27> (accessed November 12, 2009).

<sup>180</sup> Milani, *Iran's Policy Towards Afghanistan*, 247.

<sup>181</sup> Ghumman, *Iran-US Relations in the Post-9/11 Days*

<sup>182</sup> Curtis and Hooglund, *Iran: A Country Study*, 246.

while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom."<sup>183</sup> This was perfect fodder to feed the radical anti-Americanism amongst the hardliners in Iran. As a result, whatever inertia had built up in terms of an expanding dialogue between the US and Iran ground to a near halt.<sup>184</sup>

That the Bush administration overtly promoted regime change in Iran also played a significant role by increasing Iran's worries about a US invasion.<sup>185</sup> In 2003, Iran countered by further building up its already considerable asymmetric warfare capabilities as a means to slow down and attrit invading forces as well as conduct strikes outside Iran.<sup>186</sup> Ultimately, Iranian hardliners, energized by Bush's speech and working with a renewed sense of urgency, reclaimed power through the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as the Islamic Republic's president in 2005. Attempts at rapprochement with the West initiated by the former reformist presidency were discarded, and Iranian foreign policy returned to its 1980s roots in many ways with an ideological focus on "permanent revolution" and extreme anti-Americanism.<sup>187</sup>

These represent fundamental principles for the current crop of Iranian leaders in power, particularly those leaders who are ex-IRGC. These principles have substantively supplanted Iran's basic desire to see a stable, independent, pluralistic Afghan government on its border. In addition, shortly after Ahmadinejad's election as president, popular perception was that the US forces in Afghanistan and Iraq had become significantly bogged down and that, despite a

---

<sup>183</sup> "Bush State of the Union Address - January 29, 2002," Cable News Network, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/01/29/bush.speech.txt/> (accessed February 21, 2010).

<sup>184</sup> Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, 353.

<sup>185</sup> Katzman, *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses*, 40.

<sup>186</sup> Curtis and Hooglund, *Iran: A Country Study*, 284.

<sup>187</sup> Milani, *Iran's Policy Towards Afghanistan*, 254.



belligerent US rhetoric calling for regime change, the threat of the US invading Iran had become increasingly unlikely.<sup>188</sup> It is from this point of view that one must view Iran in order to understand their current involvement in Afghanistan over the last three to four years, or from approximately 2007 onwards. This paper will now look at the various instruments of national power Iran has at its disposal, and how Iran has been using them in Afghanistan in order to meet their national and strategic goals.

## **POLITICAL EFFORTS**

Iran initially aimed its diplomatic activity in Afghanistan towards bringing its old allies in the Northern Alliance back into positions of power. One of the reasons Iran was initially so helpful to the US during its invasion was that the method the US chose to carry out this task largely aided Iran's goals in this regard. The invasion was carried out using small numbers of American special forces troops combined with air power, all in support of the Northern Alliance, itself a group made up of mostly non-Pashtun factions and warlords whom Iran had supported prior to the Taliban's fall.

The immediate postwar situation suited Iran quite well – Ismail Khan, the Persian-speaking, Iran-friendly Northern Alliance warlord was firmly established as governor of the province of Herat, providing a convenient buffer zone from areas of the country where American forces were fighting the Taliban.<sup>189</sup> With broad ethnic representation of Tajiks, Uzbeks and Shiites in the Afghan government, as well as Northern Alliance control of the defence and

---

<sup>188</sup> Thaler and others, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, 10.

<sup>189</sup> Wilde, *Continuity and Hiatus: Structural Patterns of Iran's Policy in Afghanistan*, 32.

foreign ministries, Iran was also content with supporting Hamid Karzai, a Durrani Pashtun, as president of the interim Afghan government.<sup>190</sup> However, by 2004 growing US pressure on Karzai to remove Ismail Khan as governor due to his ties to Iran, as well as Karzai's own push to increase Pashtun representation in the Afghan government, brought increased strain between Iran and Afghanistan.<sup>191</sup> During the 2004 Afghan presidential elections, which Iran publicly supported, broadcasts in Persian through Iranian media questioned the election's legitimacy and called Karzai a "stooge of the US."<sup>192</sup>

While there seems little doubt that Iran continues to view the Karzai government as an American puppet, rather than actively undermining him, their efforts over the last few years have focused on driving a wedge between Kabul and Washington. Iran has been busy promoting itself as Afghanistan's true strategic partner in the region, with Iranian officials consistently putting blame on the presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan for all of the country's woes, including poverty, lack of security, and problems with narcotics, while simultaneously juxtaposing these against Iran's "peaceful" efforts and intent.<sup>193</sup> For example, in a statement made to Afghan journalists in March 2007, former Iranian President Khatami opined,

The major powers seek to plunder the region's oil and gain dominance under the name of development and democracy. Afghanistan used to be the epicentre of humanity and

---

<sup>190</sup> "Iranian Leader Vows Support for Karzai, Slams U.S." United Nations Foundation, [http://www.unwire.org/unwire/20020814/28340\\_story.asp](http://www.unwire.org/unwire/20020814/28340_story.asp) (accessed February 22, 2010).

<sup>191</sup> Milani, *Iran's Policy Towards Afghanistan*, 250.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 251

<sup>193</sup> "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 27 June - 10 July 2007," Open Source Center, [https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20070807306002?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=46](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20070807306002?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=46) (accessed January 23, 2010).

compassion but why is it the center of drugs now? What happened to the great aid that the major powers had promised to Afghanistan?<sup>194</sup>

In another media report, President Ahmadinejad rhetorically declared there would be “no limit to Iran’s contribution to the progress and welfare of the Afghan people,” and that “the enemies’ [i.e., the US’s] ill-natured attempts to block Afghan progress would not be effective.”<sup>195</sup>

Moreover, Iran has made use of Afghan refugee repatriation efforts as a means to leverage concessions from the Afghan government. The exact number of Afghan refugees living in Iran is unclear, although one Iranian newspaper claimed that, in 2008, the country was spending 6 million dollars per day on three million refugees, of which two million were considered illegal.<sup>196</sup> Several crises have erupted between the two countries over this issue, particularly during the harsh winter months when Afghanistan is ill prepared to accept large groups of returning refugees, which Iran has used to show Kabul (and the US) that it can easily cause difficulties for the Afghan government. In 2007, Afghan media reported that the country’s Foreign Minister, Dr Spanta, accused Iran of applying direct pressure on Afghanistan through the accelerated repatriation of Afghan refugees from Iran in order to secure an agreement on water access as well to get the Karzai government to declare publicly that “no military action would be taken against Iran from Afghanistan.”<sup>197</sup> While Presidents Karzai and Bush had signed the US-

---

<sup>194</sup> "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments, 22 February - 6 March 2007," Open Source Center, [https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20070307339001?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=54](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20070307339001?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=54) (accessed January 23, 2010).

<sup>195</sup> *Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 27 June - 10 July 2007*

<sup>196</sup> "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 16 - 31 July 2008," Open Source Center, [https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20080908004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=26](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20080908004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=26) (accessed January 23, 2010).

<sup>197</sup> "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 2 - 15 May 2007," Open Source Center, [https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20070524321001?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=49](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20070524321001?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=49) (accessed January 23, 2010).

Afghan Declaration for Strategic Partnership in May, 2005, the US had pressured Karzai from signing a similar agreement with Iran.<sup>198</sup> Nevertheless, in July 2007, Karzai publicly stated that Afghanistan opposed use of its territory for the US to launch an attack on Iran,<sup>199</sup> also naming Iran to be Afghanistan's "very close friend,"<sup>200</sup> whilst nearly simultaneously criticizing NATO and US-led troops for "carelessly killing scores of Afghan civilians" in their fight against the Taliban insurgency.<sup>201</sup>

Caught directly in the middle of the US-Iranian dispute, Karzai has made consistent calls for the two countries to normalize their relations.<sup>202</sup> Recently, however, in the face of scathing criticism of his leadership, particularly from the US, for failing to curb corruption within the Afghan government, Karzai has appeared eager to ingratiate himself to Tehran. Relations between Karzai and Ahmadinejad seem particularly good, as both sent early congratulations to each other on their elections in the summer of 2009 despite ongoing and widespread accusations of election fraud in both cases.<sup>203</sup> As well, Karzai "signalled his strategic leaning toward Tehran by naming two pro-Iran politicians as his vice-presidential running mates."<sup>204</sup> Finally, Iran is

---

<sup>198</sup> Rubin, *The U.S. and Iran in Afghanistan: Policy Gone Awry*, 3.

<sup>199</sup> Sayed Salahuddin, "Karzai Opposes US use of Afghan Soil Against Iran," Reuters, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSISL225617> (accessed February 22, 2010).

<sup>200</sup> Peter Spiegel, "Karzai Calls Iran a 'very Close Friend'," The Boston Globe, [http://www.boston.com/news/world/articles/2007/06/05/karzai\\_calls\\_iran\\_a\\_very\\_close\\_friend/](http://www.boston.com/news/world/articles/2007/06/05/karzai_calls_iran_a_very_close_friend/) (accessed February 22, 2010).

<sup>201</sup> Lindsay Goldwert, "Karzai to NATO: "Afghan Life Not Cheap"," CBS News, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/06/22/terror/main2969960.shtml> (accessed February 22, 2010).

<sup>202</sup> Poulson, *Nested Institutions, Political Opportunity, and the Decline of the Iranian Reform Movement Post 9/11*, 33.

<sup>203</sup> Casey L. Addis and others, *Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy* (Congressional Research Service,[2010]), <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R40849.pdf> (accessed February 22, 2010).

<sup>204</sup> Amir Taheri, "Afghanistan Angst," New York Post, [http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/item\\_iNLB4cjGAAJXQ2LTGxDENk](http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/item_iNLB4cjGAAJXQ2LTGxDENk) (accessed February 22, 2010).

having some success with its effort to draw Kabul closer to Tehran while slowly edging the US out, as evidenced by the recent tripartite statement in January, 2010, from Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan that “resolving the Afghan conflict should co-opt only immediate neighbours of the war-ravaged country.”<sup>205</sup>

## ECONOMIC EFFORTS

Shortly after the fall of the Taliban in late 2001, Iran initiated a rather robust effort to support Afghanistan’s economic reconstruction. Today, Iran is considered one of the most generous donors in that country, having contributed an estimated 1.164 billion dollars to rebuilding Afghanistan’s underdeveloped transport, communications, and other economic infrastructure.<sup>206</sup> This amount is quite impressive considering the continued declining state of the Iranian economy as well as the increasing contention amongst Iran’s domestic political factions as a result of Tehran’s failure to curb that decline.<sup>207</sup> Nevertheless, Iran’s economic efforts in Afghanistan serve to promote the country’s self-aggrandizing view as an industrial power and the regional model for economic development.<sup>208</sup> At the surface, it appears that Iran’s support to Afghan reconstruction efforts are having a positive effect, bringing economic growth and increasing stability to its neighbour. This is undoubtedly true to a large extent. However,

---

<sup>205</sup> Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Inclusion of ‘Outsiders’ in Afghan Plan Opposed," The DAWN Media Group, <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/pakistan/04-tripartite-meeting-qs-08> (accessed February 22, 2010).

<sup>206</sup> Addis and others, *Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy*, 25.

<sup>207</sup> Thaler and others, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, 107.

<sup>208</sup> Wilde, *Continuity and Hiatus: Structural Patterns of Iran's Policy in Afghanistan*, 29.

several aspects of Iran's involvement in this regard lay bare its true motives, and should be cause for concern over the success of Western efforts in Afghanistan.

Iran, for example, has directed the bulk of its economic aid and development efforts towards western Afghanistan in general, and the city of Herat in particular, in an effort to pull the region closer to Iran and away from Kabul.<sup>209</sup> Unlike the majority of the country, Herat has consequently benefitted from 24-hour electricity, numerous paved roads, industrial zones, and other essential infrastructure.<sup>210</sup> Iran has also allocated millions of dollars to improving transit routes between eastern Iran and Herat, including the construction of a 176 km railroad,<sup>211</sup> and has recently proposed the development of rail links connecting Herat to Tajikistan as well China.<sup>212</sup> In addition, the electrical grid in western Afghanistan has become an extension of Iran's rather than part of Afghanistan's national grid.<sup>213</sup> Such actions are indicative of Iran's intent to develop a long-term economic presence in Afghanistan.<sup>214</sup> Furthermore, western Afghanistan has largely become an adjunct of the Iranian economy, giving Iran significant opportunity to influence the Afghan government in Iran's favour.

---

<sup>209</sup> Jakobsen and others, *Afghanistan: State and Society, Great Power Politics, and the Way Ahead*, 14.

<sup>210</sup> Anand Gopal, "US-Iran Thaw could Bolster Afghanistan Rebuilding Efforts," *The Christian Science Monitor*, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2009/0403/p06s01-wosc.html> (accessed February 22, 2010).

<sup>211</sup> Milani, *Iran's Policy Towards Afghanistan*, 252.

<sup>212</sup> Maseh Zarif and Ahmad Majidiyar, "Iranian Influence in Afghanistan: Recent Developments | IranTracker," <http://www.irantracker.org/analysis/iranian-influence-afghanistan-recent-developments> (accessed February 22, 2010).

<sup>213</sup> Jakobsen and others, *Afghanistan: State and Society, Great Power Politics, and the Way Ahead*, 14.

<sup>214</sup> Zarif and Majidiyar, *Iranian Influence in Afghanistan: Recent Developments | IranTracker*

Meanwhile, Tehran has signed numerous trade agreements with Kabul, further increasing Iran's ability to be a major player in the Afghan economy.<sup>215</sup> In 2008, Iran exported 590 million dollars worth of non-oil goods into Afghanistan, while Afghan exports to Iran totalled only 10 million dollars.<sup>216</sup> Afghanistan has also become highly dependent on Iranian transit routes for foreign trade, which include key imports such as electronics, cars, and spare parts as well as essential products such as food and clothing.<sup>217</sup> Along these lines, an Iranian official recently stated that Iran is intensifying efforts to make Chabahar, Iran's port city by the Gulf of Oman, into the major transit hub between Afghanistan and the world at large by offering tax exemptions, preferential rates, and banking, insurance, and foreign exchange services to Afghan businesses.<sup>218</sup>

As a result, Afghanistan's growing economic reliance on Iran has provided Tehran with another effective tool for applying pressure on the Karzai administration to distance itself from Washington. A recent example of Iran's success in this regard can be seen in statements made by Dr Spanta, the Afghan Foreign Minister, in October, 2009. Following his address to the Economic Cooperation Organization in which he expressed hope that recently concluded transit agreements would connect Afghanistan with Iran and Uzbekistan, Dr Spanta held a press conference in Kabul to emphasize the Afghan government's position against allowing "any

---

<sup>215</sup> Muhammad Tahir, "Iranian Involvement in Afghanistan," The Jamestown Foundation, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=1004&tx\\_ttnews\[backPid\]=182&no\\_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=1004&tx_ttnews[backPid]=182&no_cache=1) (accessed February 22, 2010).

<sup>216</sup> "Iran, Afghanistan Stress Increase in Border Exchanges," Fars News Agency, <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8804311242> (accessed March 6, 2010).

<sup>217</sup> Tahir, *Iranian Involvement in Afghanistan*

<sup>218</sup> "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 10 - 31 October 2009," Open Source Center, [https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20091104513004?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=10](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20091104513004?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=10) (accessed January 23, 2010).

country to use its territory to launch attacks on Iran and other neighbouring countries.<sup>219</sup> As well, the reality of Afghan economic dependence on Iran severely limits Washington's ability to apply pressure on Tehran over such issues as Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons, and gives Iran the ability to create significant destabilizing effects in Afghanistan at any time.<sup>220</sup>

## **SOCIO-CULTURAL EFFORTS**

Iran appears to have accelerated efforts over the last few years to leverage its long-standing cultural and religious ties to Afghanistan's Persian-speaking and Shia ethnic groups as a means to gain considerable influence in western Afghanistan and Kabul. In so doing, Iran also seeks to diminish US or Western cultural affect on Afghanistan.<sup>221</sup> While notable incidents of Afghan backlash have been evident, overall these efforts continue to bear fruit. Iran has had substantial success in spreading its official propaganda to ordinary Afghans while simultaneously putting pressure on the country's political elite, with the ultimate goal of convincing Afghans that their best chance for stability lies under the umbrella of Iranian regional hegemony. Iran's involvement in Afghanistan within the socio-cultural sphere is most apparent in the realms of education and the media. What joins them together is the Iranian revolutionary form of Shia Islam.

---

<sup>219</sup> "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments, 19 September - 9 October 2009," Open Source Center, [https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20091019513001?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=11](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20091019513001?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=11) (accessed January 23, 2010).

<sup>220</sup> Tahir, *Iranian Involvement in Afghanistan*

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*



## Education

As Afghanistan continues to develop its institutions after decades of war and violence, Iran has made a marked attempt in recent years to expand its presence in the Afghan education system through a wide variety of methods. In June, 2009, for example, the head of Iran's printing industry exporting union announced that Iran would be publishing textbooks for Afghan schools.<sup>222</sup> Iran also donated considerable money towards the establishment of a training centre for Afghan teachers in Kabul, and was thanked by the Afghan Vice President who added that "his country should boost cultural cooperation with Iran given the two countries' strong religious, linguistic and historical commonalities."<sup>223</sup> In February, 2009, Iran announced it would open a new branch of Ferdowsi University of Mashad in Herat.<sup>224</sup> In October, 2009, an Afghan newspaper reported that one thousand Afghan students would be accepted for advanced studies sponsored by Iran's Al-Sadeq Society Institute, the majority of these being male Shia students.<sup>225</sup> Another Iranian news report in November, 2009, noted that Iran "has been moving aggressively to expand the scope and frequency of cultural and educational programs at ... [an] educational complex in Herat."<sup>226</sup>

---

<sup>222</sup> "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments June 2009," Open Source Center, [https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20090804004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=12](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20090804004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=12) (accessed January 23, 2010).

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>224</sup> "Iran Universities to Open Branches Abroad," Fars News Agency, <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8711270604> (accessed February 22, 2010).

<sup>225</sup> *Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 10 - 31 October 2009*

<sup>226</sup> "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 1 - 15 November 2009," Open Source Center, [https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20091120513001?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=9](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20091120513001?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=9) (accessed January 23, 2010).

However, it is clear Iran's motives in developing the Afghan education system remain less than altruistic. In one incident, an attaché at the Iran embassy in Kabul was quoted saying that "Shiite students who have graduated from Iranian universities are the messengers of Iran in Afghanistan and they should play a more important role."<sup>227</sup> As well, a newspaper in Peshawar gave warning in 2008 that "the preparation of [an Afghan] syllabus for history, Islamic jurisprudence, geography, and literature has been given to Iran to prepare."<sup>228</sup> Furthermore, a recent Kabul newspaper article criticized a plan to build a religious school by Afghan Shiite leader Ayatollah Mohseni as "Iranian-style religious extremism."<sup>229</sup> Of note, some believe that Iran's contribution of Persian-speaking teachers and other volunteers to Afghanistan is also a means to provide cover for Pasdaran and intelligence operatives.<sup>230</sup> As these examples demonstrate, there is certainly justifiable reason for Afghans and Western forces to remain concerned over Iran's involvement.

## The Media

In addition to the Afghan education system, Iran has also managed to exert a growing and, to some degree, worrying influence in and on Afghan media. As part of its development efforts, it has aided in the reconstruction of Afghan radio and television infrastructure.<sup>231</sup>

---

<sup>227</sup> Tahir, *Iranian Involvement in Afghanistan*

<sup>228</sup> "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 1 - 15 May 2008," Open Source Center, [https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20080603004002?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=30](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20080603004002?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=30) (accessed January 23, 2010).

<sup>229</sup> "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments April 2009," Open Source Center, [https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20090529004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=500&index=14](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20090529004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=500&index=14) (accessed January 23, 2010).

<sup>230</sup> Jakobsen and others, *Afghanistan: State and Society, Great Power Politics, and the Way Ahead*, 13.

<sup>231</sup> Milani, *Iran's Policy Towards Afghanistan*, 251.

However, it has also used its own media, such as radio stations in Mashad, Iran, to broadcast anti-American propaganda.<sup>232</sup> In October, 2009, for example, conservative Iranian media portrayed the alleged desecration of the Koran by NATO forces in Afghanistan as a larger “War on Islam,” yet gave no coverage to a statement made a few days later by Afghan authorities that denied the event took place.<sup>233</sup> Meanwhile, media entities in the two countries have signed cooperation agreements to jointly produce films on cultural issues<sup>234</sup> and improve public knowledge of developments in the Islamic world,<sup>235</sup> all amidst a growing popularity amongst Afghans for Iranian films and television shows.<sup>236</sup>

There are claims, in fact, that Iranian news and broadcast agencies represent the most influential foreign media in Afghanistan, and have more users than any other foreign media organization.<sup>237</sup> Reports indicate that Afghan journalists, particularly those in Herat and western Afghanistan, have developed close working relationships with their Iranian counterparts.<sup>238</sup> Furthermore, in February 2009, in a meeting with Iran’s Broadcasting Chief, President Karzai proposed, “the mutual sponsoring of a media satellite by Afghanistan and Iran.”<sup>239</sup> However, the degree to which Iran has permeated itself within Afghan media has raised objections in some

---

<sup>232</sup> "Iran’s Afghan Strategy: A Historical Overview," Kabul Center for Strategic Studies, <http://kabulcenter.org/?p=112> (accessed February 22, 2010).

<sup>233</sup> *Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 10 - 31 October 2009*

<sup>234</sup> *Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 16 - 31 July 2008*

<sup>235</sup> *Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments April 2009*

<sup>236</sup> *Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments, 19 September - 9 October 2009*

<sup>237</sup> *Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 10 - 31 October 2009*

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>239</sup> *Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments, 22 February - 6 March 2007*

quarters. As just one example, the head of a private Afghan television station, the owner of which is also an Afghan parliamentary deputy, decried Iran's involvement, claiming that a rival station "represents Qom and is financed by the Iranians."<sup>240</sup>

### **The Shia Dimension**

Iran's efforts in Afghanistan give proof to one of its underlying motives – to bolster its ideological role as leader of the global Shia community and use this influence in order to discredit the West while promoting Iran's aims of regional hegemony. Reports indicate that Iran has "funnelled millions of dollars to a web of Shiite religious schools and charities in western Afghanistan" in efforts to spread Shiite fundamentalism.<sup>241</sup> In addition, there are claims that the Iran-educated Ayatollah Asif Mohseni, the foremost Afghan Shiite cleric who reportedly directs a radio station and an Iran-sponsored madrassa in Kabul, further supports this agenda.<sup>242</sup> Of note, the conservative Mohseni was the main influence behind the Shiite Family Law passed by the Karzai government in 2009,<sup>243</sup> which drew widespread international criticism for legalizing what many considered as marital rape, with the effect of further reducing popular Western support for the Afghan government.

---

<sup>240</sup> "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments October 2008," Open Source Center, [https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20090112004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=500&index=20](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20090112004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=500&index=20) (accessed January 23, 2010).

<sup>241</sup> David Rohde, "Iran is Seeking More Influence in Afghanistan," *The New York Times* December 27, 2006, [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/27/world/asia/27afghan\\_ready.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/27/world/asia/27afghan_ready.html?_r=2) (accessed February 25, 2010).

<sup>242</sup> Zarif and Majidiyar, *Iranian Influence in Afghanistan: Recent Developments* / *IranTracker*

<sup>243</sup> "Hazara MPs Criticize Iran-Backed Cleric," *Hazaristan Times*, <http://hazaristantimes.wordpress.com/2009/04/18/hazara-mps-criticize-iran-backed-cleric/> (accessed February 25, 2010).

Further evidence includes the allegation that the Shiite Scientific School of Sadiqiyah in Herat uses textbooks from Iran, which pay tribute to the Iranian-backed terrorists groups, Hezbollah and Hamas.<sup>244</sup> The importation of Iranian books into Afghanistan has often been controversial, and has fuelled sectarian division in Afghanistan while increasing suspicion amongst Afghans of Iran's motives. In February, 2009, customs officials in Nimroz province in Afghanistan seized Iranian textbooks that were said to "seriously insult a number of companions of the Prophet Muhammad and the Sunni faith, including the wife of the Prophet Muhammad, Bibi Aisha."<sup>245</sup> Thousands of books were subsequently disposed of by being thrown into a river.<sup>246</sup>

Sunni Pashtuns, in particular, appear mainly distrustful of Iranians, and perceive Iran as favouring the Persian-speaking and Shiite minorities at their expense.<sup>247</sup> Notwithstanding, Iran appears to be making efforts of late to woo Afghanistan's Pashtuns in the spirit of pan-Islamism. While historically Iranian interest lies in western Afghanistan, it has increased its presence in the eastern part of the country, which, according to Iran's consul-general in Nangarhar province, has "helped change the negative perceptions the Pashtuns had of Iran."<sup>248</sup> In addition, President Ahmadinejad recently called Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan part of a "large family" with historic

---

<sup>244</sup> Zarif and Majidyar, *Iranian Influence in Afghanistan: Recent Developments* / *IranTracker*

<sup>245</sup> "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments February 2009," Open Source Center, [https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20090404004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=500&index=16](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20090404004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=500&index=16) (accessed January 23, 2010).

<sup>246</sup> "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments May 2009," Open Source Center, [https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20090714004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=500&index=13](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20090714004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=500&index=13) (accessed January 23, 2010).

<sup>247</sup> Gopal, *US-Iran Thaw could Bolster Afghanistan Rebuilding Efforts*, 2.

<sup>248</sup> *Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments, 19 September - 9 October 2009*

and cultural links, and that those who attempted to break these links apart would “fall headlong to the ground.”<sup>249</sup>

## MILITARY EFFORTS

Iranian military involvement in Afghanistan remains the subject of some debate. Many analysts refuse to believe that, based on the historical animosity between Iran and the ultra-conservative Sunni Taliban, Tehran would have anything to do with such a group. As well, incontrovertible evidence of direct support by the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Taliban is extremely difficult to establish, particularly from open sources. Furthermore, it would appear logical that Iran does not wish to see the Taliban back in power in Kabul, particularly a Taliban government remaining extremely hostile towards Iran. Even an Iranian Majles Research Centre report noted in April, 2007 that “the Afghan government is planning to weaken and ultimately eliminate the Taliban factor, but this group has regained power in other areas and that is a threat to Iran.”<sup>250</sup>

However, analysts note that by 2005-2006, US progress in Afghanistan and Iraq appeared bogged down, its position in the region weak and vulnerable to a resurgent and ever more confident Iran.<sup>251</sup> It seems hardly coincidental then that, in early 2006, an Afghan news agency reported that Iran was covertly deploying military officers in Afghanistan.<sup>252</sup> In May, 2007, the

---

<sup>249</sup> "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 16 - 30 September 2008," Open Source Center, [https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20081014004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=500&index=21](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20081014004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=500&index=21) (accessed January 23, 2010).

<sup>250</sup> "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 4 - 17 April 2007," Open Source Center, [https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20070419339001?searchKey=838101&rpp=500&index=51](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20070419339001?searchKey=838101&rpp=500&index=51) (accessed January 23, 2010).

<sup>251</sup> Pollack and others, *Which Path to Persia? Options for a New American Strategy Toward Iran*, 7.

<sup>252</sup> *Iran's Afghan Strategy: A Historical Overview*

National Council of Resistance of Iran, an Iraqi-based opposition group, remarked on its website that “a new project of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps ... is unfolding in neighboring Afghanistan. Since last year, the IRGC has been planning new tactics to make life more difficult for U.S. troops.”<sup>253</sup> The website report further indicated that the plan included deception efforts by IRGC personnel pretending to be involved in reconstruction efforts, and that Iran “is dispatching trained personnel disguised as laborers, engineers, physicians, nurses, contractors and other professionals to Afghanistan.”<sup>254</sup>

Around the same time, the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force announced that it had recovered Iranian-made weapons, including rocket-propelled grenade launchers, light guns, and explosive devices, during counter-insurgency operations.<sup>255</sup> Of note, ISAF initially refrained from accusing the Iranian government of direct involvement due to lack of concrete evidence. Soon thereafter, however, Afghan news reports claimed that the IRGC had extended help to the Taliban, citing the names of two Taliban commanders that had received “logistical and financial assistance from various organs of the Islamic Republic of Iran.”<sup>256</sup> Meanwhile, other Afghan news media reported statements from an Afghan lawmaker, Khaled Pushtun, who suggested that Iran’s support of the Taliban was in reaction to international opposition towards Iran’s uranium enrichment program.<sup>257</sup>

---

<sup>253</sup> *Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 2 -15 May 2007*

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>256</sup> "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 30 May - 12 June 2007," Open Source Center, [https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20070718306002?searchKey=838744&rpp=100&index=48](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20070718306002?searchKey=838744&rpp=100&index=48) (accessed January 23, 2010).

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

Accusations of Tehran's support to the Taliban were quickly denounced by Iranian officials as well as President Karzai who stated, "I do not believe Iran needs to support the Taliban ... our economic relations with Iran over the past five years is worth \$500 million. Therefore, Iran and Afghanistan have important relations."<sup>258</sup> Speculation ensued in other media sources that "rogue elements, perhaps the [Qods] force of Iran's Revolutionary Guard, maybe [sic] operating on their own,"<sup>259</sup> or that drug traffickers were perhaps responsible for transferring weapons to the Taliban.<sup>260</sup> President Ahmadinejad appeared to exploit these reservations when, on his first visit to Afghanistan in August, 2007, he did not deny outright the accusations, but instead expressed "serious doubts" about whether Iranian arms had indeed been found amongst insurgent groups in Afghanistan.<sup>261</sup>

Despite official denials by the presidents of Iran and Afghanistan while maintaining that Iranian support for the Taliban was "never proven," numerous lower Afghan officials have repeatedly confirmed this support. For example, Esmael Yun, a member of Afghanistan's National Security Council, stated that the Afghan government was well aware of Iran's actions.<sup>262</sup> In January, 2009, the police chief for Farah province in Afghanistan made statements broadcast on Afghan television claiming that insurgents were travelling freely to and from Iran, and that "the Islamic Republic of Iran is well aware that these insurgents are fighting the Afghan

---

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>260</sup> "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 8 - 21 August 2007," Open Source Center, [https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20071109513001?searchKey=838744&rpp=100&index=43](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20071109513001?searchKey=838744&rpp=100&index=43) (accessed January 23, 2010).

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>262</sup> *Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 16 - 30 September 2008*



government.”<sup>263</sup> In November, 2009, Afghan media continued to report on accusations that Iran is arming Taliban insurgents,<sup>264</sup> while another report in Western media in March, 2010 stated that “one Afghan Taleban commander claims that the Iranian border is assuming greater importance than that into Pakistan.”<sup>265</sup>

The weight of evidence clearly supports the premise that Iranian elements have assisted the Taliban and other insurgents in Afghanistan. As a US State Department report notes:

The Qods Force provided training to the Taliban on small unit tactics, small arms, explosives, and indirect fire weapons. Since at least 2006, Iran has arranged arms shipments including small arms and associated ammunition, rocket propelled grenades, mortar rounds, 107 mm rockets, and plastic explosives to select Taliban members.<sup>266</sup>

On the question whether this is being done with the knowledge and approval of the Iranian government, a summary of presentations by experts who gathered for a conference organized by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service in March, 2009, had this to say:

It has often been said that the Pasdaran, or more specifically its [Qods] force, work as rogue operators, without the knowledge of the National Security Council or of the Supreme Leader. This is dubious: there is a network linking these operators all the way to the senior levels of the government. Diplomatically, there is a tactical advantage in perpetuating the myth that these groups operate as rogues. They are, however, part of the intelligence apparatus and are linked to the state and to the Office of the Supreme Leader.<sup>267</sup>

---

<sup>263</sup> "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments January 2009," Open Source Center, [https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20090319004001?searchKey=838744&rpp=100&index=17](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20090319004001?searchKey=838744&rpp=100&index=17) (accessed January 23, 2010).

<sup>264</sup> "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 16 - 30 November 2009," Open Source Center, [https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20091204513002?searchKey=838744&rpp=100&index=8](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20091204513002?searchKey=838744&rpp=100&index=8) (accessed January 23, 2010).

<sup>265</sup> Tom Coghlan, "Tehran Accused of Arming Taleban with Weapons and Explosives," Times Online, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/afghanistan/article7066239.ece> (accessed March 23, 2010).

<sup>266</sup> "Country Reports on Terrorism 2008 Chapter 3: State Sponsors of Terrorism," U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2008/122436.htm> (accessed February 22, 2010).

<sup>267</sup> Juneau, *Insights into the Future of Iran as a Regional Power*, 12.

In the words of one analyst, “assumptions that such aid and assistance is impossible given the sectarian divide and historical animosity between Iran and the Taliban are misplaced.”<sup>268</sup>

## SUMMARY

Iran’s involvement in Afghanistan since 2001 has gone through three phases. The first phase occurred immediately after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, when both Iranian reformists and hardliners were able to coalesce around the goal of ridding Iran of one of its most troublesome regional issues, the Taliban government in Kabul. The result was a short period of unparalleled cooperation between Tehran and Washington in purging the Taliban from power. The second phase began shortly after Bush’s “axis of evil” speech in 2002, when Iranian leaders became extremely fearful of possible US action towards regime change in Iran,<sup>269</sup> particularly following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. During this period, Iran appeared generally intent on supporting stabilization efforts in Afghanistan, albeit in a way that consistently undermined the US and ISAF. Meanwhile, with the Iranian reformist movement fatally weakened, in part due to aggressive US rhetoric, the hardliners were able to regain power with the election of Ahmadinejad as president in 2005. This began the third phase, continuing to this day, in which Iran included elements of military power in its Afghan policy.

Up until now, the scale of Iran’s military efforts in Afghanistan has remained relatively small, particularly when viewed against the backdrop of recent significant troop increases by US

---

<sup>268</sup> Jakobsen and others, *Afghanistan: State and Society, Great Power Politics, and the Way Ahead*, 15.

<sup>269</sup> Thaler and others, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, 93.

forces announced by President Obama in the fall of 2009. However, there are no recent signs that Tehran appears to be reconsidering its current actions in supplying limited support to the Taliban. Meanwhile, its efforts in the diplomatic, economic, and informational realm have resulted in some notable successes in drawing Kabul closer to Tehran and further from Washington. Iran's policy towards Afghanistan remains multi-faceted, and although it appears paradoxical on the surface, it is entirely consistent with its strategy elsewhere. As one analyst notes, "in Western Afghanistan and Herat, the Iranian government is implementing its Hezbollah, supporting proxies while seeking to monopolize the social service net."<sup>270</sup> From the US perspective, it is useful to note what Senator John McCain had to say in his testimony before the US Senate Armed Services Committee:

I think Iran is trying to have it both ways, to cultivate a close relationship with Afghanistan and the Afghan government for both political and economic reasons and at the same time impose the highest possible costs on ourselves and on our coalition partners.<sup>271</sup>

---

<sup>270</sup> Jakobsen and others, *Afghanistan: State and Society, Great Power Politics, and the Way Ahead*, 13.

<sup>271</sup> U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Hearing to Receive Testimony on the Challenges Facing the Department of Defense*, 2009, <http://armed-services.senate.gov/Transcripts/2009/01%20January/A%20Full%20Committee/09-02%20-%201-27-09.pdf> (accessed February 22, 2010).

## CHAPTER 5 – A JUSTIFIABLE CONCERN

*Tehran has become habituated to seeing threats everywhere ... Meanwhile, the real threat to the country's security – instability in Iraq and Afghanistan – has been treated as a battleground in the fight against the United States.*<sup>272</sup> – Shahram Chubin, 2009.

According to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, the international community's goals in Afghanistan are to promote peace and stability through “the rebuilding of the country and strengthening of the foundations of peace and a constitutional democracy.”<sup>273</sup> While on the surface, none of these goals should necessarily appear as an anathema to Iran, its ongoing struggle against US global hegemony and an international system considered biased towards Western interests remains at the forefront of Tehran's Afghanistan policy. Although the widespread belief that Pakistan holds the key to stability in Afghanistan remains very much true, a singular focus on Afghanistan's eastern border serves to mask further this growing threat from Iran. There is, indeed, some reason to be concerned.

From a historical perspective, Iran has always considered western Afghanistan within its rightful sphere of influence, if not Iranian territory outright. From the days of the first Persian Empire established by Cyrus the Great, Iran has long dominated this part of the world, and most if not all Iranians are conditioned to believe that their country will be restored to its rightful place as the dominant power in the region. Iran's actions in western Afghanistan bear this out – the outpouring of development aid to Herat and its surroundings has drawn the region nearly wholly under the economic umbrella of Tehran and away from Kabul.

---

<sup>272</sup> Chubin, *Iran's Power in Context*, 179.

<sup>273</sup> "United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan - Mandate," <http://unama.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=1742> (accessed April 12, 2010).

On top of this goal for regional dominance lays the country's deep mistrust of foreign powers, of which the US tops the list amongst Iran's elites. That the US leads international efforts in Afghanistan serves as reason enough for many Iranians to undermine efforts at stabilizing the country. This is particularly true for the current crop of Iran's leaders who maintain a view of the US impressed on them by Khomeini in the immediate post-Islamic Revolution era. Against a background of belligerent rhetoric from the US promoting regime change in Tehran, it should come as no surprise that Iranian leaders would look to promote continued low-level insurgency in Afghanistan as a means to divert US attention from possibly taking military action against Iran.

Further to this is the belief by some of Iran's leaders, particularly Ahmadinejad and his hardliner allies, that the US-dominated international system is facing collapse.<sup>274</sup> Combined with the declining support in the West to continue spending money and soldier's lives in Afghanistan, Iran's leaders are convinced that foreign troops will depart Afghanistan sooner rather than later. In view of this, by providing limited support to the insurgents, Tehran may be hoping to reduce the likelihood that a resurgent Taliban government in Kabul would be as unfriendly towards Iran as it had been in the past.

A look at some of the critical factors inside Iran also sheds light on its motives in Afghanistan. Some may argue that the Iranian people themselves are revolution-weary and are therefore against the promotion of violence and instability in the region. While this is likely true, it has very little bearing on the situation given the construct of the current regime. Although some semblance of balance occurred in the past due to the dual construct of Iran's political system, the current government is dominated by hardliners in nearly all respects. This includes

---

<sup>274</sup> Thaler and others, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, 19.

the offices of Supreme Leader and President as well as a significant number of those Iranians holding seats in the Majles. As a result, elements of reformism in Iran's foreign policy have all but disappeared, replaced instead with much the same aggressive ideological policies present during Iran's immediate post-Islamic Revolution era.

Iran's hardliners have increasingly promoted anti-Americanism, support for the "oppressed", and a siege mentality amongst Iranians in order to justify an environment of "permanent revolution." These concepts have become fundamental elements of Iran's identity, forming the basis of the regime's legitimacy and, with the help of the IRGC, an essential part of maintaining elite control over the population.<sup>275</sup> The regime's success in squashing popular reformist dissent in the summer of 2009 against fraudulent election results, and more recently in February, 2010, during celebrations marking the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the revolution, demonstrate the power of the IRGC and the extent to which Iran's leaders now rely the organization. From a regime survival perspective, supporting the insurgency in Afghanistan not only neutralizes US military strength, it also prevents liberal ideologies from spreading in Afghanistan and subsequently threatening the Iranian theocracy.<sup>276</sup>

Iran's spiritual position as global leader of Shiites is also of critical importance, although it appears unlikely that pan-Shiism plays but a secondary role in terms of foreign policy objectives. That said, it certainly provides Iran with a powerful tool useful for undermining the legitimacy of international efforts in stabilizing Afghanistan. Moreover, notwithstanding President Ahmadinejad's messianic Shia beliefs, Iran's recent emphasis on pan-Islamism as a

---

<sup>275</sup> Chubin, *Iran's Power in Context*, 166.

<sup>276</sup> Jakobsen and others, *Afghanistan: State and Society, Great Power Politics, and the Way Ahead*, 16.

means to expand its influence amongst Afghanistan's Pashtuns demonstrates a certain level of pragmatism within the regime. As one observer states:

The supplying of weapons from the world bastion of Shi'a Islam to the ultraconservative Sunni Taliban fighters indicates Iran's willingness to turn a blind eye, at least momentarily, to sectarian differences in order to cause chaos and bloodshed throughout the region and to open the door for uncontested regional hegemony upon the departure of Western troops.<sup>277</sup>

While certainly not at a level that could decidedly tip the balance, Iran's military support to insurgent groups in Afghanistan provides unmistakable evidence as to its true motives. It is clear that the current hardliner leadership in Iran has determined that a pro-West government in Kabul, to include a large, long-term US troop presence in the country, is decidedly not in its interests.<sup>278</sup> Under the guise of pan-Islamism, it endeavours to draw its eastern neighbour further into a cultural and economic sphere dominated by Iran, meanwhile directing political efforts towards creating distance between Kabul and Washington in efforts to delegitimize Western attempts to stabilize the country. As a result, Tehran's policy in Afghanistan should be cause for increasing concern to Western policy-makers.

---

<sup>277</sup> Frick, *Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps: An Open Source Analysis*, 124.

<sup>278</sup> Tahir, *Iranian Involvement in Afghanistan*

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- "Afghanistan Border." Maps of the World.com.  
<http://www.mapsofworld.com/afghanistan/afghanistan-border.html> (accessed February 21, 2010).
- "BBC on this Day | 26 | 1984: US Troops Withdraw from Beirut." British Broadcasting Corporation.  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/february/26/newsid\\_4153000/4153013.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/february/26/newsid_4153000/4153013.stm) (accessed February 20, 2010).
- "Bush State of the Union Address - January 29, 2002." Cable News Network.  
<http://transcripts.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/01/29/bush.speech.txt/> (accessed February 21, 2010).
- "Clinton Warns Iran 'Becoming a Military Dictatorship'." British Broadcasting Corporation.  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/8515623.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8515623.stm) (accessed February 20, 2010).
- "Country Reports on Terrorism 2008 Chapter 3: State Sponsors of Terrorism." U.S. Department of State. <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2008/122436.htm> (accessed February 22, 2010).
- "Hazara MPs Criticize Iran-Backed Cleric." Hazaristan Times.  
<http://hazaristantimes.wordpress.com/2009/04/18/hazara-mps-criticize-iran-backed-cleric/> (accessed February 25, 2010).
- U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services. *Hearing to Receive Testimony on the Challenges Facing the Department of Defense*. January 27, 2009b, <http://armed-services.senate.gov/Transcripts/2009/01%20January/A%20Full%20Committee/09-02%20-%201-27-09.pdf> (accessed February 22, 2010).
- "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 1 - 15 May 2008." Open Source Center.  
[https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20080603004002?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=30](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20080603004002?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=30) (accessed January 23, 2010).
- "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 1 - 15 November 2009." Open Source Center.  
[https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20091120513001?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=9](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20091120513001?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=9) (accessed January 23, 2010).
- "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 10 - 31 October 2009." Open Source Center.  
[https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20091104513004?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=10](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20091104513004?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=10) (accessed January 23, 2010).



- "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 16 - 30 November 2009." Open Source Center.  
[https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20091204513002?searchKey=838744&rpp=100&index=8](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20091204513002?searchKey=838744&rpp=100&index=8) (accessed January 23, 2010).
- "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 16 - 30 September 2008." Open Source Center.  
[https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20081014004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=500&index=21](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20081014004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=500&index=21) (accessed January 23, 2010).
- "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 16 - 31 July 2008." Open Source Center.  
[https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20080908004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=26](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20080908004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=26) (accessed January 23, 2010).
- "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 2 -15 May 2007." Open Source Center.  
[https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20070524321001?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=49](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20070524321001?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=49) (accessed January 23, 2010).
- "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 27 June - 10 July 2007." Open Source Center.  
[https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20070807306002?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=46](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20070807306002?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=46) (accessed January 23, 2010).
- "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 30 May - 12 June 2007." Open Source Center.  
[https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20070718306002?searchKey=838744&rpp=100&index=48](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20070718306002?searchKey=838744&rpp=100&index=48) (accessed January 23, 2010).
- "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 4 - 17 April 2007." Open Source Center.  
[https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20070419339001?searchKey=838101&rpp=500&index=51](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20070419339001?searchKey=838101&rpp=500&index=51) (accessed January 23, 2010).
- "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments 8 - 21 August 2007." Open Source Center.  
[https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20071109513001?searchKey=838744&rpp=100&index=43](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20071109513001?searchKey=838744&rpp=100&index=43) (accessed January 23, 2010).
- "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments April 2009." Open Source Center.  
[https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20090529004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=500&index=14](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20090529004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=500&index=14) (accessed January 23, 2010).

- "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments February 2009." Open Source Center.  
[https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20090404004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=500&index=16](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20090404004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=500&index=16) (accessed January 23, 2010).
- "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments January 2009." Open Source Center.  
[https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20090319004001?searchKey=838744&rpp=100&index=17](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20090319004001?searchKey=838744&rpp=100&index=17) (accessed January 23, 2010).
- "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments June 2009." Open Source Center.  
[https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20090804004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=12](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20090804004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=12) (accessed January 23, 2010).
- "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments May 2009." Open Source Center.  
[https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20090714004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=500&index=13](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20090714004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=500&index=13) (accessed January 23, 2010).
- "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments October 2008." Open Source Center.  
[https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20090112004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=500&index=20](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20090112004001?searchKey=838101&rpp=500&index=20) (accessed January 23, 2010).
- "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments, 19 September - 9 October 2009." Open Source Center.  
[https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20091019513001?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=11](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20091019513001?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=11) (accessed January 23, 2010).
- "Highlights: Iran-Afghanistan Developments, 22 February - 6 March 2007." Open Source Center.  
[https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_203\\_121123\\_43/content/Display/IAP20070307339001?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=54](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/IAP20070307339001?searchKey=838101&rpp=25&index=54) (accessed January 23, 2010).
- "History of Iran: Reza Shah Pahlavi." Iran Chamber Society.  
[http://www.iranchamber.com/history/reza\\_shah/reza\\_shah.php](http://www.iranchamber.com/history/reza_shah/reza_shah.php) (accessed February 13, 2010).
- "History of Iran: Sassanid Empire." Iran Chamber Society.  
<http://www.iranchamber.com/history/sassanids/sassanids.php> (accessed February 13, 2010).
- "Iran Hostage Crisis" <http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h2021.html> (accessed February 14, 2010).

- "Iran Universities to Open Branches Abroad." Fars News Agency.  
<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8711270604> (accessed February 22, 2010).
- "Iran, Afghanistan Stress Increase in Border Exchanges." Fars News Agency.  
<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8804311242> (accessed March 6, 2010).
- "Iran's Afghan Strategy: A Historical Overview." Kabul Center for Strategic Studies.  
<http://kabulcenter.org/?p=112> (accessed February 22, 2010).
- "Iranian Leader Vows Support for Karzai, Slams U.S." United Nations Foundation.  
[http://www.unwire.org/unwire/20020814/28340\\_story.asp](http://www.unwire.org/unwire/20020814/28340_story.asp) (accessed February 22, 2010).
- "Iranian President Ahmadinejad's Letter to the American People." Information Clearing House.  
<http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article15770.htm> (accessed February 20, 2010).
- Iran's Economy: A Survey of its Decline*: Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, 1991, [http://www.foia.cia.gov/browse\\_docs\\_full.asp](http://www.foia.cia.gov/browse_docs_full.asp) (accessed February 20, 2010).
- "Niruyeh Moghavemat Basij - Mobilisation Resistance Force." GlobalSecurity.org.  
<http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/world/iran/basij.htm> (accessed March 28, 2010).
- "Roman-Persian Wars - HistoryNet." Weider History Group. <http://www.historynet.com/roman-persian-wars.htm> (accessed February 13, 2010).
- "Shiia Islam." GlobalSecurity.org. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/intro/islam-shiia.htm> (accessed March 28, 2010).
- "United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan - Mandate."  
<http://unama.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=1742> (accessed April 12, 2010).
- "The World Factbook -- Iran." Central Intelligence Agency.  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html> (accessed February 13, 2010).
- Abrahamian, Ervand. *A History of Modern Iran*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Addis, Casey L., Christopher M. Blanchard, Kenneth Katzman, Carol Migdalovitz, Jim Nichol, Jeremy M. Sharp, and Jim Zanotti. *Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy*: Congressional Research Service, 2010, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R40849.pdf> (accessed February 22, 2010).
- Amin, Hussein A. "The Origins of the Sunni/Shia Split in Islam." IslamForToday.com.  
<http://www.islamfortoday.com/shia.htm> (accessed March 28, 2010).

- Arjomand, Saïd Amir. *After Khomeini: Iran Under His Successors*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Brennan, John. "The Conundrum of Iran: Strengthening Moderates without Acquiescing to Belligerence." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 618, no. 1 (2008): 168-179, <http://ann.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/618/1/168.pdf> (accessed November 12, 2009).
- Bulliet, Richard W. "Iran between East and West." *Journal of International Affairs* 60, no. 2 (Spring, 2007): 1.
- Chubin, Shahram. "Iran's Power in Context." *Survival* 51, no. 1 (February-March, 2009): 165-190.
- Coghlan, Tom. "Tehran Accused of Arming Taleban with Weapons and Explosives." Times Online. <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/afghanistan/article7066239.ece> (accessed March 23, 2010).
- Curtis, Glenn E. and Eric Hooglund, eds. *Iran: A Country Study*. 5th ed. Washington DC: Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, 2008.
- Frick, Matthew M. "Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps: An Open Source Analysis." *Joint Force Quarterly* no. 49 (2nd quarter, 2008): 121-127, [http://www.ndu.edu/inss/Press/jfq\\_pages/editions/i49/31.pdf](http://www.ndu.edu/inss/Press/jfq_pages/editions/i49/31.pdf) (accessed April 1, 2010).
- Ghumman, Kashif M. "Iran-US Relations in the Post-9/11 Days." The Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad. [http://www.issi.org.pk/journal/2002\\_files/no\\_3/article/8a.htm](http://www.issi.org.pk/journal/2002_files/no_3/article/8a.htm) (accessed February 21, 2010).
- Goldwert, Lindsay. "Karzai to NATO: "Afghan Life Not Cheap"." CBS News. <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/06/22/terror/main2969960.shtml> (accessed February 22, 2010).
- Gopal, Anand. "US-Iran Thaw could Bolster Afghanistan Rebuilding Efforts." The Christian Science Monitor. <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2009/0403/p06s01-wosc.html> (accessed February 22, 2010).
- Ilias, Shayerah. *Iran's Economic Conditions: U.S. Policy Issues*: Congressional Research Service, 2009, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34525.pdf> (accessed February 22, 2010).
- Jakobsen, Peter Viggo, Michael Rubin, Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen, Ali Alfoneh, Angel Rabasa, Pavel K. Baev, Cheryl Benard, et al. "Afghanistan: State and Society, Great Power Politics, and the Way Ahead." Copenhagen, Denmark, RAND Corporation, June 2007, 2008.

- Juneau, Thomas. "Insights into the Future of Iran as a Regional Power." Ottawa, Canada, Canadian Security Intelligence Service, March 30-31, 2009.
- Katzman, Kenneth. *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses*: Congressional Research Service, 2010, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL32048.pdf> (accessed February 22, 2010).
- La Guardia, Anton. "'Divine Mission' Driving Iran's New Leader." Telegraph.co.uk. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/1507818/Divine-mission-driving-Irans-new-leader.html> (accessed April 1, 2010).
- Malik, Hafeez. *US Relations with Afghanistan and Pakistan: The Imperial Dimension*. Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Milani, Mohsen M. "Iran's Policy Towards Afghanistan." *Middle East Journal* 60, no. 2 (Spring, 2006): 235-256.
- Özar, Önder. "Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era." *Turkish Review of Middle East Studies* 15, (Annual, 2004): 267-328.
- Pahlavi, Pierre. "The Shia Crescent: Between Myth and Reality." Canadian Forces College.
- Pollack, Kenneth M. *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*. New York: Random House, 2004.
- Pollack, Kenneth M., Daniel L. Byman, Martin Indyk, Suzanne Maloney, Michael E. O'Hanlon, and Bruce Riedel. *Which Path to Persia? Options for a New American Strategy Toward Iran*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2009.
- Poulson, Stephen C. "Nested Institutions, Political Opportunity, and the Decline of the Iranian Reform Movement Post 9/11." *American Behavioral Scientist* 53, (September, 2009): 27-43, <http://abs.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/53/1/27> (accessed November 12, 2009).
- Rohde, David. "Iran is Seeking More Influence in Afghanistan." *The New York Times*, December 27, 2006, [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/27/world/asia/27afghan.ready.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/27/world/asia/27afghan.ready.html?_r=2) (accessed February 25, 2010).
- Rubin, Barnett R. *The U.S. and Iran in Afghanistan: Policy Gone Awry*, Edited by Sara Batmanglich. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Center for International Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2008, [http://web.mit.edu/cis/pdf/Audit\\_10\\_08\\_Rubin.pdf](http://web.mit.edu/cis/pdf/Audit_10_08_Rubin.pdf) (accessed February 22, 2010).
- Salahuddin, Sayed. "Karzai Opposes US Use of Afghan Soil Against Iran." Reuters. <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSISL225617> (accessed February 22, 2010).

- Schiffrin, Nick. "Intel Official: 'Time is Running Out' in Afghanistan." ABC News. <http://abcnews.go.com/International/Afghanistan/intel-official-time-running-afghanistan/story?id=9429416> (accessed February 17, 2010).
- Schmitt, Eric and Mazzetti, Mark. "Taliban Haven in Pakistani City Raises Fears." The New York Times. [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/10/world/asia/10quetta.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/10/world/asia/10quetta.html?_r=1) (accessed April 2, 2010).
- Spiegel, Peter. "Karzai Calls Iran a 'Very Close Friend'." The Boston Globe. [http://www.boston.com/news/world/articles/2007/06/05/karzai\\_calls\\_iran\\_a\\_very\\_close\\_friend/](http://www.boston.com/news/world/articles/2007/06/05/karzai_calls_iran_a_very_close_friend/) (accessed February 22, 2010).
- Syed, Baqir S. "Inclusion of 'Outsiders' in Afghan Plan Opposed." The DAWN Media Group. <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/pakistan/04-tripartite-meeting-qs-08> (accessed February 22, 2010).
- Taheri, Amir. "Afghanistan Angst." New York Post. [http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/item\\_iNLB4cjGAAJXQ2LTGxDENK](http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/item_iNLB4cjGAAJXQ2LTGxDENK) (accessed February 22, 2010).
- Tahir, Muhammad. "Iranian Involvement in Afghanistan." The Jamestown Foundation. [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=1004&tx\\_ttnews\[backPid\]=182&no\\_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=1004&tx_ttnews[backPid]=182&no_cache=1) (accessed February 22, 2010).
- Thaler, David E., Alireza Nader, Shahram Chubin, Jerrold D. Green, Charlotte Lynch, and Frederic Wehrey. *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*: RAND Corporation, 2010, [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND\\_MG878.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG878.pdf) (accessed February 6, 2010).
- Wehrey, Frederic, Jerrold D. Green, Brian Nichiporuk, Alireza Nader, Lydia Hansell, Rasool Nafisi, and S. R. Bohandy. *The Rise of the Pasdaran: Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps*: RAND Corporation, 2009, [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND\\_MG821.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG821.pdf) (accessed December 12, 2009).
- Wilde, A. "Continuity and Hiatus: Structural Patterns of Iran's Policy in Afghanistan." *Internationales Asien Forum. International Quarterly for Asian Studies* 40, no. 1/2 (May, 2009): 11.
- Zarif, Maseh and Majidiyar, Ahmad. "Iranian Influence in Afghanistan: Recent Developments | IranTracker." <http://www.irantracker.org/analysis/iranian-influence-afghanistan-recent-developments> (accessed February 22, 2010).