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# **Iranian Defense Doctrine and Decision Making**

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## Executive Summary

The Islamic regime in Iran is, in many ways, an enigma. It is an ideological revolutionary regime based on ostensible dogmatic religious principles, but at the same time has demonstrated remarkable adaptability and Realpolitik in dealing with the vicissitudes it has faced over the last two and a half decades. It is an authoritarian regime with draconian legal justification for suppressing human rights, but houses one of the most dynamic civil societies in the Muslim world, or at least in the Muslim Middle East. Despite its declared mission to spread Islam and support Islamic movements all over the world, it maintains intimate relations with countries that are engaged in bloody struggles against their own indigenous Islamic radicals.

Iran's defense and security policy derives from a concatenation of geo-political, cultural, and religious factors. Some of its current elements existed during the Shah's era and will probably find their way into the policy of any future regime; they stem from Iran's geographic and demographic location, deep-rooted cultural tendencies, religious mores, and national and religious worldviews. Other factors, however, are "regime dependent," a political and military translation of the particular brand of Shiite Islamic ideology developed by the Imam Khomeini.

Two facets of Iranian identity are dominant in the Iranian worldview: **Iranian nationalism** and **Shiite particularism**. The Iranian self-image is of a nation heir to an ancient civilization that gave the world cultural treasures centuries before Islam. At the same time, however, it suffers from a sense of strategic disadvantage, victimization, isolation, and historic injustice. All these result in a siege mentality and a tendency to accept and entertain conspiracy theories in which Iran is a loner in a jungle-like world of foreigners who scheme to deprive it of its lawful rights and to exploit it. Iran's dependence on oil exports exacerbates the sense of national vulnerability and oppression by the West. Its sense of strategic inferiority whets its thirst for recognition and its penchant for international legitimacy. The isolation it experienced during the war with Iraq in the 1980s and the present American occupation of Iraq are both seen as proof of the price of losing international legitimacy.

In spite of its religious-ideological nature, the **decision-making process** in the Islamic Republic is basically rational and pragmatic. It leans heavily on the Shiite concept of *maslahat* or *darurat* (public interest or necessities), which allows for religious compromise according to a cost-benefit calculus. Ideological and religious constraints do exist, but they are subject to the basic pragmatism of Iranian political strategy.

Decision-making on crucial matters of national security is concentrated around the *Rahbar*, together with fewer than a dozen veterans of the Revolution whose informal status, rather than formal positions, determine their real weight in the decision-making process. An even smaller clique, including some former senior military and security leaders, conducts Iran's defense and security policy and serve as the *Rahbar's* "information gatekeepers." In any case, it does not seem that the leadership suffers from significant cognitive distortions regarding the strategic reality.

Iran sees its security environment as one of persistent instability and hostility, with a possibility of surprise attacks. The United States is the chief ideological and strategic enemy of the Iranian regime, while the current geo-strategic situation of

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military and economic encirclement is interpreted as a premeditated American scheme to topple the Islamic regime in Iran. Israel and the Jewish people are also viewed as a compound threat: a nemesis in its own right, a major influence over American policy towards Iran, a willing agent of the United States, and a possessor of significant strategic capabilities.

The Iranian doctrine of Strategic Deterrent Defense is defined to meet a whole gamut of threats ranging from domestic unrest and counter-revolution supported by foreign powers, terrorism and border conflicts, to military action by the United States or by a neighboring country. The first line of defense in this doctrine is “soft security means,” i.e., international legitimacy, good foreign relations as well as multilateral regional security arrangements, and support of the Iranian people (unlike the lack of support for the Iraqi regime which was, in Iranian eyes, the cause of its downfall). These measures are augmented by “hard security means”: indigenous production of weaponry, conventional deterrence, and long-range (SSM) capabilities.

Iranian deterrence is based on threatening any aggressor with the capability to withstand a first strike and to deliver a “like for like” second strike, a non-proportional response and escalation, a willingness to prolong the war and accept casualties, widening the scope of the war to other theaters, escalation of means (including SSM and terrorism) and drawing in other pro-American countries in the region (Gulf states, Israel), and closure of the Persian Gulf to shipping of all countries. Terrorism (“export of the Islamic revolution”) has been a staple tool in Iran’s political arsenal since the Revolution. Despite formal denials of involvement in terrorism, Iran's reputation also serves as part of its deterrent image.

The achievement of a nuclear capability is perceived in Iran as both a strategic exigency and a well-deserved membership card in a select club to which Iran ought to belong. The fact that the United States attacked Iraq despite its having chemical and biological weapons only strengthens the Iranian resolve to achieve a nuclear capability, which is the only non-conventional capability that can effectively deter the United States. Meanwhile, as long as Iran does not possess a credible WMD capability, the defense establishment will not tend to overestimate the Iranian military option and will probably caution the leadership against involvement in a major confrontation with the United States. There are no signs of a real debate within the Iranian regime regarding the strategic imperative of developing WMD and MRBM/IRBM (an ad-hoc substitute for CBRN munitions).

The overriding strategic imperative for Iran is to buy time. As Iran comes closer to a military nuclear capability, its incentive will grow not to give the United States or Israel pretexts to attack and to preempt its nuclear status. For the meantime, there is no evidence to the effect that Iran has already crystallized its future nuclear doctrine. Based on existing Iranian behavior and cultural norms, however, it appears that Iran will prefer implied (“bomb in the basement”) deterrence in order not to lose international legitimacy, while at the same time retaining its ability to brandish a credible deterrent. A direct threat on Iran may raise the attractiveness of nuclear “outing,” in which case nationalistic tendencies may push Iran towards exposing its nuclear capabilities.

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## Introduction

The Islamic regime in Iran is, in many ways, an enigma. It is an ideological revolutionary regime based on dogmatic religious principles, but at the same time has demonstrated remarkable adaptability and Realpolitik in dealing with the vicissitudes it has faced over the last two and a half decades. It is an authoritarian regime with draconian legal justification for suppressing human rights, but houses one of the most dynamic civil societies in the Muslim world, or at least in the Muslim Middle East. Despite its declared mission to spread Islam and support Islamic movements all over the world, it maintains intimate relations with countries that are engaged in bloody struggles against their own indigenous Islamic radicals.

The strategic relevance of Iran derives from its regional status, its involvement in support of terrorism, disruption of the Israeli-Arab peace process, and potential for becoming a nuclear power. Observing Iran raises a wide range of questions: what is the *Weltanschauung* behind the Iranian regime; what is the self-image and the perception of the “other” behind this worldview; who are the real decision makers and how do they interact in the decision-making process; how does the leadership receive and filter information and what biases shape its view of the outside world; how does it define Iran’s national interests and how are these interests translated into national security doctrine and policy; what is the motivation for Iran’s quest for a military nuclear capability and what can be expected in its strategic posturing if and when it achieves such a capability? The recent uncovering of Iran’s military nuclear program and its growing involvement in neighboring Iraq make an understanding of the forces that motivate Iranian strategy all the more timely.

These questions are the basis of the present study, which is divided into three main chapters: worldview, authority and decision-making processes, and an analysis of the defense and security policy of the Islamic regime in Iran as a corollary of its “national psyche.” The former can be defined as a corresponding perception of the society’s strategic neighborhood and interests, strategic assessment and defense doctrine. The second relates to paradigms of acceptance of authority, cultural and religious aspects, and dynamics of decision-making. The latter encompasses a wide common perception among the members of society regarding their own self-image, expectations of a member of the society, common principles, cultural codes and religious traditions, and imperatives.<sup>1</sup>

The sources for this study include primary sources such as current press, Internet sites and newsgroups, memoirs of and interviews with senior officials, Iranian as well as foreign, and declassified documents. Some of the interviewees have requested anonymity and I have honored their request.<sup>2</sup> Secondary sources include articles and books on Iran – particularly since the Revolution.

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<sup>1</sup> A separate monograph, *Iran: Self Images, Values and Negotiating Culture*, will also be published by the Institute for Policy and Strategy, and some subjects taken up in the present study will be elaborated upon in it.

<sup>2</sup> Special thanks are due to a number of individuals who have helped in the collection and comments on this study: Mr. Menashe Amir (head of the Voice of Israel in Persian), Ambassador Uri Lubrani, Ambassador Meir Ezri, Mr. Morad Zamir and many others who may not be named. Thanks are also due to Prof. Martin Kramer of Tel Aviv University, Dr. Soli Shahvar of Haifa University, for their reading of the manuscript.



## Iranian Worldview

Iranian views of the world are strongly influenced by a number of sources, which together form a prevalent collective self-image. These include national identity, the legacy of ancient Persian history and mythology, traditions, religious codes and ideologies, along with a culturally influenced perception of reality, based on an image of the “other” and an interpretation of occurrences according to rational, superstitious, or religious causes.

### Self-image

The Iranian “national psyche” is deeply historic and nationalistic. Most modern Iranians define themselves not merely as a Persian sub-category of the Muslim nation, or as first and foremost the cultural progeny of Semitic Arabia, but as the successors of an ancient civilization that gave the world artistic, scientific and architectural treasures centuries before Islam came on the scene.<sup>3</sup> This civilization links Iran to the European-Aryan world.<sup>4</sup> The survival of the Persian language and Persian art despite the Arab-Islamic conquest testifies to the robustness of this civilization and its superiority over the backward Arabian culture that was imported with Islam. Islam reached its cultural and scientific heights when it was under the rule of the (enlightened) Persian ‘Abbasids and not under the (backward) Arab Umayyads or (decadent) Turkish Ottomans.<sup>5</sup>

The emphasis on the Iranian – as opposed to the Islamic – attribute of national identity is evident even in Khomeini’s Last Will and Testament, which is addressed to the people of Iran and not to Muslims in general.<sup>6</sup> Another expression of this nationalism is the failure of the regime in 1980 and again in 1990 to replace the former Iranian national anthem (*Ey Iran*) with an Islamic-flavored one.

Iranian nationalism is manifested as well in discrimination towards the non-Farsi minorities in Iran. The nationalist Persian policies of the late Shah had as their goal the complete assimilation of the non-Farsi (Arab, Turcoman, Baluchi, Azeri and Kurdish) minorities. Despite this campaign, a large number of the inhabitants of these areas are not fluent in Persian and are clearly branded as outsiders in Iranian society.

Iranian senior military officers of non-Farsi origin are few and far between, and so are non-Iranians among the political elite (these are mainly Persianized Arabs from

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<sup>3</sup> This link with the ancient heritage of Iranian civilization seems to engender a sense of affinity towards other nations that are perceived as belonging to the same “league” of ancient civilizations, *inter alia* China and India, as opposed to the “tribal” Arab States surrounding Iran. It is noteworthy that the sense of admiration towards ancient civilizations seems to overcome the religious basis for a condescending attitude towards these “pagan” or “atheistic” nations.

<sup>4</sup> Iranian schoolbooks, even since the revolution, are replete with references to the European origins of the Iranian people. For example, a social studies textbook explains to the student “the first people who came to our land were members of tribes called Aryans... that is ‘noble’ and ever since, our land has been called Iran.” Quotation from *Ta’limat-e-ejtema-e, Chaharom-e dabestan* (1373/1994-95) 105, in Gil Aloni, *Revolutionary Messages in Elementary School Textbooks in Iran* (Jerusalem: Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace, 2002) 27.

<sup>5</sup> Aloni, 34-35. Aloni presents more examples, taken from *Ta’limat-e-ejtema-e, Chaharom-e dabestan*, of the “supercilious” attitude towards the Turks.

<sup>6</sup> <<http://www.irna.com/occasion/ertehal/english/will/>>.

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Najaf, and not Iranian Arabs). The Islamic regime, responding to a perceived threat of ethnic Arab irredentism by the Arab-speaking minority, encouraged the Arab tribal system, thus further atomizing the Arab community and excluding it from the mainstream.<sup>7</sup>

Iranians at large see their national identity as *sui generis*,<sup>8</sup> with no real “cousin” nationality.<sup>9</sup> To the east of Iran, however, exists a large ethnic-Iranian backyard spread out in a number of Central and South Asian countries: the Shiite Hazaris and Sunnite Pashtuns of Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Azerbaijan, and of course, Pakistan. The Iranian regime cultivates a “motherland affinity” towards these “relations” and offers them cultural and religious ties. This, though, seems more a political ploy on the part of the regime than a genuine expression of ethnic identity; Iranian national identity remains restricted to Persian-speaking Shiites within the borders of Iran and to Iranian expatriates. Iran’s “sphere of national interests,” however, can be said to range from the Persian Gulf (including Iraq) to the heart of the Middle East (including Lebanon and Israel), and to Central Asia (the Persian-speaking neighbors, including Afghanistan and Pakistan). The political translation of the above is an emphatic Iranian demand for recognition of Iran's right to strategic centrality, if not hegemonic status, among other countries in its immediate neighborhood. The demand is articulated on the basis of history, size, “civilizational continuity,” natural resources (oil and gas), and military and technological potential.<sup>10</sup>

A central component in the Iranian national psyche is the sense of victimization and historical injustice inflicted upon Iran by international and regional powers, which continuously envied Iran’s wealth, plundered and exploited its resources and national rights, and attempted to rob the Iranian people of their riches and prevent them from achieving their rightful prominence in the family of nations, particularly in the family of Islamic nations. The American-led campaign to deny Iran its “right” to modern technology (on the pretext of weapons of mass destruction (WMD)) is perceived as another expression of this injustice.

The “injustice” committed against Iran began, according to the popular Iranian narrative, with the Islamic (Arab) conquest, and accelerated in modern times: the occupation of Iran thrice by foreign forces; British, Russian, and American intervention in Iranian politics throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century; and Western and Arab support for Saddam Hussein in the Iraq-Iran War of the 1980s. The steadfastness of Iran in the face of Iraqi invasion, missile attacks, and use of chemical

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<sup>7</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of the issue, see “The National Question; Arabs in Iran,” interview with Adnan Salman, Amir Howeizi, Mohammad Jaber and Jamil Miah, Spring 2003. In: <<http://www.ahwazstudies.org/english/TheNationalQuestionArabsinIranP1.htm>>. The interviewees are Arab activists in Iran.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Zonis notes the reasons that Iranians tend to ascribe to their national uniqueness: the continuity of Iranian history, the greatness of ancient rulers, the uniqueness of being the only Shiite country, and the persistence of the Iranian culture in the face of occupation. Martin Zonis, *The Political Elite of Iran* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) 211.

<sup>9</sup> While all national identifications are, by definition, singular and exclusive, as this is what sets them apart, many see themselves as belonging to a wider family. This trans-national milieu is lacking in the Persian context, though the Islamic and the Shiite facets supply it to a degree.

<sup>10</sup> Iran not only borders with a large number of countries (Turkey, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan by land; Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain by the Persian Gulf; and Russia and Kazakhstan by the Caspian Sea), but as a result also interacts with several different geo-political entities: Iraq, the Gulf States, Turkey, the CIS countries, and the Indian sub-continent. This too contributes to the Iranian sense of a right to regional status.

weapons is a staple in the regime's efforts to mobilize the populace against external threats. The Iranian people are seen as united in times of crisis.

The centrality of Iranian nationalism in the Iranian national psyche is exemplified in the reactions of exiles of the "ancient regime" to the Iraqi invasion of Iran in 1980. Many of them, including those who had been sentenced to death in absentia by the revolutionary courts, called on their Western friends and begged them to help Iran against the "Arab invasion."<sup>11</sup>

Iranian national mythology is a driving force in many Iranians' national psyche. It includes both the admiration of heroism and bravery drawn from the ancient Iranian mythology, and identification with the oppressed and with self-sacrifice. The two seemingly contradictory self-images of both a superior and a downtrodden nation are reflected in two primary figures of the Iranian national and religious pantheon, recognized by every Iranian from childhood: Cyrus, the great conqueror and imperial ruler of ancient Persia, and Hussein bin Ali – the third Imam who was tricked, defeated, and assassinated by the Umayyad Caliph Yazid in Karbalah. These two images interplay within the Iranian psyche. The first evokes a fierce reaction to any affront to national dignity or suggestion that Iranian culture is but a sub-category of Middle Eastern, Muslim, or (the worst suggestion) Arab culture; the second epitomizes the sense of oppression by outside forces and puts the Iranian on guard in face of any foreign involvement in Iranian domestic affairs or attempts on the part of foreign powers to dictate matters to Iran. As Hussein symbolizes the willingness to die for the truth, the Caliph Yazid is perceived as the epitome of the evil individual who brings ruin on others.<sup>12</sup> These images continue to play a role in modern Iranian discourse.

Iranian pride in the country's pre-Islamic history has not been diluted by the Islamic regime. The rapport of modern Iran with ancient Persia has been noted by observers as far back as the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> The sense of cultural superiority is echoed in the modern adulation of the tenth-century Iranian national poet, Hakim Aboulghasem Ferdousi Tousi (940-1020), author of the epic *Shahnameh* (*Book of Kings*), which recounts the history of ancient Persia from mythical times to the Arab conquest. In doing so he ridicules the Arabs as "barefoot nomads" from the desert.<sup>14</sup> In spite of his non-Islamic messages, Ferdousi and his writings remain a cultural symbol in modern Islamic Iran. The stories are told by mothers to their children and by storytellers to the clientele of teahouses. The cult of Ferdousi was instituted by the Shah; however, while his poetry has been downplayed in modern Iranian schoolbooks, it has remained a staple of Iranian culture.

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<sup>11</sup> In personal talks with referents, a number of foreigners who had been close to the Shah's regime, as well as Iranian exiles, have reported such a spontaneous reaction to the Iraqi invasion.

<sup>12</sup> *Yazid* is still an epitaph in Persian for an evil-minded person.

<sup>13</sup> Quotation of Count de Gobineau, who visited Iran in the 1860s in:

Fereydoun Hoveyda, *The Shah and the Ayatollah – Iranian Mythology and Islamic Revolution*. (London: Praeger, 2003) 37.

<sup>14</sup> Ferdousi expressed astonishment that "Drinkers of camel-milk and eaters of lizards, the Arabs came to dare aspire to the throne of the Kings of Kian [an ancient Persian dynasty] and they spit upon you, Oh wheel of Fate – they spit upon you!" quoted in: Zeev Maghen, "The New *Shu'ubiya*, Iranian Dissidents Resurrect an Ancient Polemic," *Ha-Mizrah He-Hadash* (Hebrew), 42, (2001): 185-208. Modern Iranian history books depict the Arabs as violent tribal idol-worshipping tent-dwellers who practiced the live burial of infant girls, as opposed to the Iranian civilization, which included athletics (before the Greeks), a developed ethical religion (Zoroastrianism, based on "good thought, good speech and good behavior"). See Aloni, 28-31.

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National identification with the pre-Islamic past is also echoed in the attitude towards this past. King Cyrus remains a venerated historic icon, cultivated by the late Shah, but not disowned by the Islamic regime.<sup>15</sup> A glance at official Iranian web sites – particularly during the *Newroz* (spring equinox) holiday – reveals a gallery of ancient Iranian motifs (artwork from ancient Iran, facsimiles of the *Shahnameh*, etc.), but no non-Iranian Islamic motifs.<sup>16</sup> Extreme expressions of the anti-Arab (and hence anti-Islamic and anti-“Semitic”) Iranian nationalism can be found among expatriate Iranians who tend to revive Zoroastrian motifs, seen as pure Iranian. While these are fringe movements, they conceal a core of cultural identity that came to the fore in many of the rebellions that took place in Iran against Arab domination, and is common to many Iranians.<sup>17</sup>

Historic myths are not the cultural property of the conservative camp alone. Liberals and reformists – including activists who may even be branded as counter-revolutionaries – also use history as a reference point and source of authority for their ideas.<sup>18</sup> Since the ideology of the regime is revolutionary and even contradicts the traditionalist Shiite worldview in a number of significant aspects, it is quite common for liberals to exploit orthodox and traditionalist concepts to the benefit of their political agenda.

Iran is also arguably the most aesthetic civilization in the Middle East. Persian artwork and poetry – whether Islamic or pre-Islamic – are a source of national pride. Iranians tend to attribute the purported superiority of the Persian artistic heritage over the Arab and Turkish traditions to both racial traits of the people and climatic advantages of the country: the Persians, they claim, are sedentary Aryans and not nomadic Semites like the Arabs. They have lived in their land from the dawn of history and appreciate its beauty. The temperate climate and the soft landscapes engendered poetic souls. Unlike the Arabs who had to create a paradise that would serve as an escape from the unfriendly desert, the Persian could imagine paradise in terms of his homeland.<sup>19</sup>

Since its inception, the revolutionary regime in Iran has cultivated its Islamic identity as the heart of its *raison d'être*. From a very early stage it has defined the “interest of Islam” as a derivative of its own interest. According to Khomeini's ruling, the State as a divine ordinance has priority over all other divine ordinances.

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<sup>15</sup> The celebration of the 2500th anniversary of Cyrus the Great in Persepolis (October 1971) was one of the most lavish events of the Shah's era; the army marched up to Cyrus's tomb and the Shah declared “To you Cyrus, great king, King of Kings, from myself, Shahanshah of Iran, and from my people, hail! We are here at the moment when Iran renews its pledge to history to bear witness to the immense gratitude of an entire people to you, immortal hero of history, founder of the world's oldest empire, great liberator of all time, worthy son of mankind. Cyrus, we stand before your eternal dwelling place to speak these solemn words: Sleep on in peace forever, for we are awake and we remain to watch over your glorious heritage.” Speech of Imam Khomeini at Shaykh Anasri Mosque, Najaf, Iraq, on June 22, 1971 in <<http://www.irib.ir/worldservice/imam/speech/in21.htm>>.

<sup>16</sup> See pages in Persian on tourism in <<http://www.irna.com>>.

<sup>17</sup> Maghen, 185-208.

<sup>18</sup> When the students called for a commemoration of the killing of students in the demonstrations of 9 July 1999, and the regime refused, claiming that not every unfortunate event has to become an anniversary. The students raised the point that there should be no difference between the commemoration of people who were killed in Karbalah in the year 61 AH (680 CE) and those killed in Teheran in 1420 AH (1999). Similarly, during the student protests, the students waved signs with slogans identical to those that the founders of the regime had used to protest the Shah. Menashe Amir, former head of the Voice of Israel in Persian, Personal interviews, March-May 2003.

<sup>19</sup> A popular interpretation heard from many Iranians (S.B.).

## *Iranian World View*

Therefore, since there is only one Islamic regime that is able to defend and propagate Islam, its survival becomes paramount to the survival of Islam as a civilization. By Islam, the founders of the Islamic Republic alluded to another attribute that is not formally part of the nomenclature of the Islamic Republic but is no less a part of it: *Shi'ah*. Iran is the only existing Shiite regime. As such, it has a duty to protect and support “oppressed” Muslims and Shiites worldwide and to serve as a center for Shiite culture.

Modern grudges against foreign exploitation and oppression of Iran resonate in the Iranian popular narrative with the historic memory of Shiite martyrology and a doctrine of the Shiites (and the Iranians in particular) representing “the oppressed upon the Earth.”<sup>20</sup> An overriding motif is the collective remembrance of suffering and martyrdom – first of the Imam ‘Ali (the fourth Caliph) and then of his son Hussein, the “Prince of Martyrs.” The circumstances of their martyrdom are seen as a guiding light for Shiites throughout the generations. The emulation of martyrdom is even portrayed on the flag of the Islamic republic of Iran: the central emblem is a tulip, the traditional symbol of the flower that grows on the grave of a young person who gives up his life for the defense of the homeland or of the faith.<sup>21</sup>

Iranian attitudes towards India and China are exemplary cases in point of the priority of ancient Iranian affinities over Islamic identification and dogma. By all Islamic criteria, the Iranian attitude towards India should be hostile: India is a pagan Hindi country (not even belonging to one of the tolerated revealed monotheistic religions), run by a radical Hindi ruling party. In addition, the relations of the Hindi majority with the Muslims are replete with incriminations and bitterness over Kashmir, destruction of mosques by Hindis, and mutual terror. Nevertheless, the Iranian sense of affinity with Aryan India supersedes these layers of hostility. Iran's neutral position between India and Pakistan is not only the fruit of Iranian political pragmatism. It derives from historic and nationalistic feelings of common heritage.

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<sup>20</sup> While the origins of the *Shi'ah* are ostensibly in a power struggle between the house of 'Ali (basing its legitimacy on family succession of the house of the Prophet) and the first Caliphs and later the Umayyads, in practice, the followers of 'Ali came to represent the rebellion of the *mawla and mawali* (non-Arab Muslim converts) against the discriminatory system of the Umayyad dynasty. This identification still survives today in the Iranian revolutionary rhetoric (speaking in the name of the *mustazifan* [the oppressed] and in the non-Arab ethnic makeup of most of the Shiites in the Muslim world.

<sup>21</sup> The symbol consists of four crescents and a sword. The four crescents are meant to stand for the word Allah. The five parts of the emblem symbolize the five principles of Islam. Above the sword (central part) is a *tashdid* (looks a bit like a W). In Arabic writing this is used to double a letter, here it doubles the strength of the sword and resembles the name of Allah. Taken together it looks like a tulip, the symbol of martyrdom.

## Perceptions of Reality

### Cultural-Religious Perceptions

Iranian worldview is heavily influenced by popular beliefs and superstitions. Ancient Iranian Zoroastrianism and popular Iranian Shiite Islam accept the belief in reincarnation. Thus, much as King Darius proclaimed himself the reincarnation of the mythical hero Fereydoun (who saved Iran from the tyrant Zahak and the Devil Ahriman), Khomeini's claim that he guides Iran on behalf of the hidden Imam was popularly interpreted as his being the reincarnation of the hidden Imam. The ancient Iranian belief that all events on earth are a reflection of celestial events was at the root of the endemic sighting in Iran of Khomeini's face in the moon – traditional proof of his having been anointed as leader.<sup>22</sup>

Iranian Shiite traditions also owe a great deal to the ancient Zoroastrian tradition of a dichotomist world. The world is divided between a “good” within the Iranian people and an “evil,” which enters Iran from outside.<sup>23</sup> In Islamic terms, these are *Hizb Allah* (the Party of Allah) and the *Hizb al-Sheytan* (Party of the Satan).<sup>24</sup> Humility, suffering, and martyrdom are the traits of 'Ali and Hussein, the classic role models that are embedded deep in the Iranian national psyche. While within the camp of the good there are fifth columns of evil, the camp of evil outside is unadulterated and total. Its traits are ruthlessness, arrogance, rebellion against the will of Allah, and presumption to be like Allah. Therefore, the enemy who incorporates evil (the Great Satan) is totally demonized, and as a result is not averse to or deterred from any act – no matter how despicable it may be.

If the Iranian nation is the epitome of good/in, then the opposing traits are those attributed to the forces of evil/out. The most prominent of these traits are *istikbar* or *takabor* (arrogance), *taghut* (pretensions of divinity), and *nifaq* (hypocrisy), a form of heresy attributed to the *monafiqin* (hypocrites).<sup>25</sup> The first two, which also serve as an epithet for Satan, are attributed on a regular basis to external enemies, primarily imperialist powers; the third is a pejorative applied in Islam to those who pretended to support the Prophet and betrayed him, and is contemporarily attributed in Iran to the *mojahedine Khalq*. All three are expressions of a total demonization.

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<sup>22</sup> Hoveyda, 35. In interviews a number of Iranians, including anti-Regime exiles, have repeated the story of this sighting.

<sup>23</sup> The concepts of *baten* (inside) and *zاهر* (outside) are pregnant with meaning in Iranian culture (including poetry, theater, etc.). The inside is the realm of peace, truth and stability; the outside is a threatening realm of corruption, power play and a place where it is power and not truth that prevails. Under these circumstances, one must adopt the pretenses of the outside when dealing with it. For additional discussion see M.C. Bateson, J.W. Clinton, J.B.M. Kassariyan, H. Safavi and M. Soraya, “*Safa-yi Batin*, A Study of the Interrelations of a Set of Iranian Ideal Character Types,” *Psychological Dimensions of Near East Studies*, ed. Carl Brown and Norman Itzkowitz (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977) 257-273.

<sup>24</sup> Koran, 58 (Mujadalla): 19-22.

<sup>25</sup> *Taghut* was a demon worshipped by the Qoraish tribe before Islam (Koran, 2(Al-Baqarah): 257-9). It is defined in Shiite theology as “everything that is worshipped, or followed or obeyed other than Allah” and is, therefore, the opposite of Allah (i.e., Satan and his followers). *Taghut* is the most extreme level of rebellion against Allah and entails a mortal arrogating to his self-divinity. This concept is closely linked to the idea of *istikbar* or *takabur* (arrogance), a trait that precludes a person's entrance into paradise. These traits are diametrically opposed in Shiite thought to the humility of the Imams. Thomas Patrick Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manhorial Publishers PVT Ltd., 1985/1999) 625 <<http://www.islam.com>>.

## **Conspiracy Theories**

Conspiracy theories are rife in all levels of Iranian society, and play a major role in the Iranian national narrative. Iranian proverbs and adages are full of admonitions such as “under the perfect plate, there is a broken one,” or “the half empty cup is actually full (of surprises).” The prevalence of these theories is so great that they are widely perceived as a distinctive mark of the Iranian national psyche. It is said that the Iranian believes in the Hand of God in human affairs, even if he is a proclaimed atheist. Consequently, Iranian political thinking tends to impute to political antagonists an uncanny level of premeditation of events and to accept complex theories involving multilateral conspiracies between strange political bedfellows. Some of the more famous conspiracy narratives which are widely accepted by Iranians include belief in the role of international organizations such as the Freemasons, Zionism, the Bahai, and the BBC as forces that are attempting to overcome Iran's spiritual essence by materialistic Hellenization of its culture, and belief in supernatural or super-technological conspiracies.<sup>26</sup>

The Iranian view of the outside world is replete with distrust.<sup>27</sup> This wary view of the world also engenders feelings of insecurity in all contexts outside the family, and conforms to the legitimacy of *taqiyya* – dissimulation and hiding of one's real intentions and thoughts.<sup>28</sup>

Social psychologists attribute this trait of Iranian society to a combination of political, social, and psychological elements: the history of colonial interference in modern Iran; the pre-Islamic Zoroastrian belief in the efficacy of the Satanic forces in the world; projection of the Islamic (including Shiite) belief in divine determinism into human affairs, giving birth to an exaggerated belief in pre-meditation in human affairs;<sup>29</sup> and the need for a collective defense mechanism in times of national weakness and humiliation. On the cultural level, it is claimed that the propensity of Persian historiography to mythological descriptions and the acceptance of poetic

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<sup>26</sup> Ahmad Ashraf, “Conspiracy Theories and the Persian Mind,” *Encyclopedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, (Costa Mesa, Ca.: Mazda Publishers, Vol. VI) 138-147. **The Freemasons** are considered either a tool in the hands of the British, or an extension of Israel and the Zionist movement. They are said to have control over tribal chiefs, *'Ulama*, politicians, bankers, etc. Regarding **Zionism**, on one hand, no step taken by the United States is unrelated to “Jewish influence” in the United States; on the other, no step taken by Israel or by Jews is divorced from U.S. schemes for regional hegemony through the services of Israel. The **Bahai conspiracy** theory is not limited to the Islamic regimes' rejection of the Bahai as a heretical sect; it is based on a widely accepted – but spurious – memoir from the 1930s attributed to the Russian Minister to Persia (1846–1854), Prince Dimitri Dolgurokov, which describes how he created the Bahai faith in order to weaken Persia. As for the **BBC**, the late Shah had a profound belief in the diabolical role of Western media, particularly the BBC, and frequently called the British ambassadors to demand that they rein in the anti-Iranian and pro-clergy forces in Bush House. For example: Britain, Telegram from the Ambassador in Tehran to FCO Anthony Parsons, FCO/8/1885, 6/9/1972, *The Pride and the Fall – Iran 1974-1979* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984) 72–73. The last point mentioned was **super-technology** conspiracies. For example, the world debate on the human genome, genetic engineering, and GMF gave rise to a stubborn rumor in Iran that Israel (famous in Iran since the days of the Shah for special agricultural techniques) had genetically modified the egg-laying chickens in Iran in a manner which makes anyone who eats the eggs stupid (from callers to the Voice of Israel in Persian, as reported by Menashe Amir).

<sup>27</sup> See Andrew Westwood, “The Politics of Distrust in Iran,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, 358, 1965: 123–135; William O. Beeman “What is (Iranian) National Character?” *Iranian Studies* 9.1, Winter 1976: 22–48, 37–39.

<sup>28</sup> The popular admonition “conceal your gold, your intentions, and your religion.”

<sup>29</sup> The Islamic concepts are *maktub* (written), *mismat* (ordained) or *maqdir* (fate).

## *Iranian Defense Doctrine and Decision Making*

license in normal discourse also contribute to the acceptability of conspiracy theories. The cultural tendency to accept conspiracy theories is also frequently encouraged and manipulated by the regime.

Popular Iranian historic narratives attribute the course of contemporary Iranian history to devious Machiavellian-type mechanizations of coalitions of enemies and foreign powers envious of Iran's riches and potential, by use of ubiquitous secret associations and intelligence organizations. These theories are taught in schools and are widely accepted by academic circles in Iran. The interpretation of current events through the prism of these theories tends to create a focus on issues or facts that may seem totally irrelevant to the outsider who is not aware of the current theory. The tendency of many Iranians to “lecture history” to their interlocutors is also rooted in such an interpretation of that history.

Some of the historic facts that contribute a great deal to Iranian conspiracy theories include:<sup>30</sup>

- British intervention in Iranian politics throughout the twentieth century is seen as continuing in present day British conspiracies.<sup>31</sup> The British affiliation with many Shiite *Mullahs* gave birth to a popular notion that the Shiite *'Ulama* themselves are part of a British conspiracy and continue to receive orders from London (via the BBC...).<sup>32</sup>
- American/CIA influence on the policies of the Shah's regime since the mid-twentieth century contributes to the image of ongoing CIA conspiracies.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See discussion on the subject in: Ehsan Yarshater, ed. *Encyclopedia Iranica* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1985-1999).  
<<http://www.iranian.com/May96/Opinion/Conspiracy.html>>.

<sup>31</sup> The weakness of the Qajar Shahs during the years 1896-1924, the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911, the Anglo-Russian convention of 1907, the Anglo-Persian agreement of 1919, and the British-inspired coup of 1921 are all seen as the results of British conspiracies through British patronage of the *'Ulama*. Iranian clergy had traditional ties with London, the Constitutional Revolution was a British conspiracy, the Pahlevi dynasty came to power through British mechanizations and – in opposition circles – even Khomeini was a British conspiracy.

<sup>32</sup> The well-known Persian joke asks the question why the Mullah grows a beard: “So that nobody will see Made in England or the Union Jack written under his chin.” Even today a large number of *Ulama* in Iran are purported to maintain strong links to London. An important example is the Ayatollah Mahdavi Kani, a hardliner who is known in Iran as someone who can help with visas to the UK, etc. He visits London frequently, but this relationship has not, till now, harmed him. Even twenty-four years after the Revolution, the popular image of close ties between the *'Ulama* and Great Britain has remained intact. The image is so prevalent that Khamene'i himself found it necessary to comment cynically on “some of our personalities, who too are taking pride in emulating [the British],” and to recount the iniquities of Great Britain towards Iran and Iraq from the Qajar dynasty onwards.

<sup>33</sup> The policies of the Shah's regime since the mid-twentieth century are attributed to CIA conspiracies (many Iranians will swear that all candidates for Prime Minister were chosen by the CIA). The land reform program of the 1960s was reputed to have been a plot by the CIA to destroy Iranian agriculture in order to create a market for American agricultural exports and to ensure Iranian dependence on the United States.



- Israeli relations with the Shah's regime<sup>34</sup> and Israel's special relationship with the United States. At the same time, the historic fact of the British mandate in Palestine contributes to a view that Israel is part of the British conspiracy.

The conspiratorial narrative of events is not confined to interpretation of old historic events. Opponents of the current regime claim that the Islamic Revolution was a British-American conspiracy to put the clergy in power, and thus keep Iran a backward nation and prevent it from taking its rightful place among the developed nations. For example, when the Shah visited the White House a short time before his fall, the Washington police used tear gas to disperse demonstrators in front of the White House, and some of the gas blew over to the White House lawn, causing President Carter and the Shah to cry and cough.

A popular interpretation of the incident was that the American government had set up the demonstration (the anti-regime demonstrators were wearing masks, "proof" that they were not Iranians, but professional troublemakers hired on the spot...) and the response in order to signal that it had abandoned the Shah. This assessment quickly became a popularly known certainty and encouraged the opposition to escalate its activities, knowing that the regime had lost its most important mainstay – U.S. support. Since the incident was publicized in Iran by the BBC (Radio London in Persian), many claimed that it had been planned by the British in order to topple the Shah and put their allies, the *Mullahs*, in power.<sup>35</sup> In fact, the BBC was a primary source of information for the man in the street in Iran.<sup>36</sup>

The Iranian proclivity towards acceptance of conspiracy theories has a two-fold effect: on the one hand it engenders a feeling of helplessness and determinism; on the other hand, it is the source of a deep suspicion towards any gesture and an unwillingness to trust the motives and statements of the "other." The experience with British MI6 and American CIA involvement in Iranian domestic affairs (borne out by the documents found in the American embassy after its takeover) strengthens the Iranian tendency to see foreigners with knowledge of Persian as potential spies.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See Meir Ezri, *Anyone of His People Among You – Mission in Iran*, (Or Yehudah, Israel: Hed Artzi, 2001) (Hebrew). For a British standpoint on these relations (the British tended to see them as cross-purposes with their own interests in Iran), see Britain, The British Ambassador in Iran to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, *Irano-Israeli Relations* Diplomatic report No. 347/70 ;FCO 17/1276. The report quotes "much educated belief" that "we know that if the Arabs defeat Israel, they will attack us next." Both left-wing and Islamic opposition to the Shah were anti-Israel, partially due to ideology and partly since Israel was perceived as an ally of the Shah.

<sup>35</sup> Parsons, 72–73. The story is recounted by many Iranians who continue to consider it a proven fact.

<sup>36</sup> See Afshin Matin Asgari, "Tehran Memoirs and Diaries, Winter 1979 and Summer 1997," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, XX.1&2, 171–183, 172: "During the revolution, foreign radio programs would let us know about the opposition's day-to-day progress and the strategy of its leaders in Iran and abroad. Hearing the dramatic news of our daily struggles echoed internationally was also a great encouragement. The BBC has had the most comprehensive coverage in Persian, including the opposition's proclamations and news. This is sometimes cited as evidence of the British encouraging Islamist opposition to the Shah" See also Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ali Mohammadi, *Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture, and the Iranian Revolution* (Minneapolis, MN.: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

<sup>37</sup> A prime and current example is that of David Reddaway, who was appointed in January 2002 by the UK as Ambassador to Iran, but rejected by Teheran on the grounds that he is a Jew (because his name is David) and an intelligence agent (because he speaks Persian). Neither allegation was true.

## **The Arabs**

Iran's primary neighborhood is that of the Arab Middle East, and acrimony towards Arabs runs deep and is embedded in popular customs.<sup>38</sup> The conflict took a symbolic form in the debate over the name of the Persian or Arab Gulf. When a compromise was suggested in Iran to rename it the Islamic Gulf in order to solve the differences, it caused uproar in the Iranian public, which was not willing to countenance any detraction, philological as it may be, from the Persian identity of the Gulf.<sup>39</sup>

Iranian disdain for the Arabs is mirrored in the animosity felt in much of the Arab world towards the *'ajami* (Non-Arab, mainly Persian) and in the Sunnite world towards the (heterodox) Shiite. This animosity took a political shape during the Iraq-Iran War of 1980-1988. The mobilization of the Arabs behind Iraq revealed the fear of Iranian domination of the Arab Middle East. The deep-rooted refusal of Arabs to accept Iranian predominance was clearly evident in the Arab support for Iraq during the Iraq-Iran War; Iraq was pictured in the Arabic press as "the eastern gate of the Arab homeland," under attack by the Persian. The aversion of Arabs – even Shiites – to accept Iranian hegemony was also apparent in the failure of Iran to mobilize the support of the Iraqi Shiites against the Saddam Hussein regime during the war. Similarly, despite its control over Lebanese Hezbollah, Iran failed to impose religious predominance over the Lebanese Shiites. Khamene'i's claim to the title of *Marja' Taqlid* (Source of Emulation) of the Shiites outside of Iran was met with total disdain by Lebanese Shiites who see the spiritual leader of Hezbollah as a more senior religious figure than Khamene'i.<sup>40</sup>

An interesting point in case is Syria, which is arguably Iran's major ally in the Arab world, and supported Iran both politically and militarily during the Iraq-Iran War. Iran returned the favor by writing off Syrian oil debts incurred during that period.<sup>41</sup> The two countries have collaborated intimately on development of surface to surface missiles (SSMs), and Iran's influence in Lebanon – one of the greatest achievements of the Islamic Republic's foreign and "export of Revolution" policies – is due to Syrian acquiescence and support. Maintaining these achievements is a high-priority goal of Iranian policy. These relations held priority over tensions such as the Syrian suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood rebellion in 1982 and unauthorized Iranian activity in Lebanon and Syria.<sup>42</sup> Iran's position with the Syrian leadership

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<sup>38</sup> For example, there is a popular Iranian holiday of bonfires (similar to the English Guy Fawkes Day) in which effigies of the Caliph Omar are burnt. It is clear to all that the Caliph Omar represents the Arab. This is not the same as the attitude towards the Caliph Yazid who tricked Hussein bin Ali. Yazid is a mythical figure; he is like the Biblical Amalek and every Iranian has a bit of Yazid inside him. Omar, on the other hand, is evil and stupid and represents an outside evil – the Arab occupation of Iran.

<sup>39</sup> The debate over the nomenclature of the Gulf has been going on for decades and was even the source of diplomatic friction with Arab countries. See Britain, British Embassy in Tehran PRO, FO 248/1652, 15 May 1968.

<sup>40</sup> For details on the Iranian attempt to impose Khamene'i as *Marja' Taqlid* in Lebanon, see *Al-Hayat* (London) 25 Jan. 2003, issue 14552, 4 Feb. 2003, issue 14562.

<sup>41</sup> Iran supplied Syria with about US\$1 billion worth of oil on a regular basis during the Iraq-Iran War. In negotiations between the two countries, half the sum was written off as a gift and Syria paid back only US\$500 million.

<sup>42</sup> Damascus is home to a major Shiite pilgrimage site, *Sit Zaynab*. The fact that despite the pilgrimages of Iranians and pro-Iranian Lebanese Shiites to the site there have been few tensions is indicative of the Iranian interest not to cause unnecessary tension with Damascus.

seems to have even strengthened since the death of President Hafez al-Asad and the succession of his son Bashar, and further still since the fall of the Iraqi regime.<sup>43</sup> The Syrian regime, however, is unique; it is an Alawite (theologically close to the Shiites) regime rejected by Sunnite (anti-Shiite) fundamentalists such as the Moslem Brotherhood.

Egypt is perceived as a major American proxy in the region, a major influence on the Gulf States, and a regime that has declared total war on the form of radical Islam that is at the core of Iran's involvement in the Arab world. The sense of competition with Egypt was rife in Iran during the Shah's era and especially during the Nasserist period in Egypt, and was a major factor in Iran's attitude towards Israel. The Islamic revolution in Iran coincided, historically, with what may be seen as its counterpoint – Anwar Sadat's peace initiative and the signing of the Camp David accords. While Egypt was extricating itself from the circle of conflict with Israel, Iran, which had been a strategic ally of Israel in the Middle East, was becoming the spearhead of refusal to Israel's existence. Over the years, Iranian subversion in Egypt and support of Egyptian Islamic opposition (albeit with a low profile, due to the reluctance of the latter to be identified with a non-Arab Shiite patron) and the naming of a street in Tehran (and erection of a statue) in honor of the assassin of Anwar Sadat became major obstacles to amelioration of the relations between the two countries, even when practical considerations dictated it.

## **The West**

The intimate relationship with the West has resulted in an ambivalent identification with Western culture. On one hand, during the Shah's era Iranians tended to look up to the West with a certain measure of diffidence. The admiration and desire to emulate Western culture is evident even more than two decades after the Revolution. On the other hand, the call to reject *Gharbzadegi* (Westoxication) and a deeply grained xenophobia preceded the Islamic Revolution.<sup>44</sup> Since the Revolution the regime has cultivated a sense of moral superiority towards the West, while admitting to the superiority of Western technology.

Iran's dependence on oil (eighty-five to ninety percent of its total exports) exacerbates its sense of national vulnerability and oppression by the West. Saudi Arabian manipulation of oil exports in order to maintain low prices is viewed in Iran as part of the conspiracy to weaken Iran, to increase its dependence on international loans and on debt rescheduling, and thus to stunt Iran's economic and military growth.

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<sup>43</sup> Bashar al-Asad has drawn extremely close to the leader of Hezbollah, Sheikh Hasan Nassrallah and has shown his willingness to develop "strategic cooperation" with Iran. The frequent meetings between the Secretary-General of Hezbollah and the President of Syria (a very rare phenomenon in the days of Hafez al-Asad), visits of Hezbollah military delegations to memorial commemorations for Hafez al-Asad, including in his hometown, Latekiya, all signify an upgrade in the status of Hezbollah, and consequently of Iran, in Damascus.

<sup>44</sup> **Westoxication** is a term invented in the 1960s by the left wing Iranian author and social critic, Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923–1969). His book of that name (1962) deals with the social conditions in Iran. The symptoms of westoxication are total national submission to the West and its technology through the Iranian monarchy which serves as no more than a native brokerage for Western influence, with no aims and identity of its own. See Jalal Al-e Ahmad, trans. John Green and Ahmad Alizadeh. *Gharbzadegi* [*Weststruckness*]. (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1997). As for **xenophobia**, British Ambassador to Tehran Dennis Wright reported home in his 1964 annual report that "xenophobia is not far from the surface in Iran. The new generation of men in office, though Western educated are, I believe, at heart more nationalistic and neutralist than their fathers."

## *Iranian Defense Doctrine and Decision Making*

The **United States** is at once the object of both popular admiration and ideological animosity. On one hand, the Iranian national ethos admires material – and notably commercial – success, and the U.S. is the epitome of such success in the modern world.<sup>45</sup> Regime spokesmen (albeit mainly of the reformist camp) distinguish between elements of American achievements (e.g. technology), which should be learned, adapted, and adopted, and the materialistic life style, which must be rejected, though they differentiate between the American People and the American Administration.

On the other hand, the conservative clergy views American civilization as the external evil force that aspires to corrupt the “good” inside Iran.<sup>46</sup> The United States epitomizes the most dangerous aspects of the Western Civilization – both corrupt and attractive. The influence of materialistic American culture over Iranian youth is a clear and present danger to the very existence of the Islamic regime, and hence, of Islam in general. Any compromise with American influence in Iran is thus considered a Trojan horse brought into the country. The American presence in Iraq makes the danger more imminent and more urgent to shut out any American influence.

A popular notion in Iran places the responsibility for most of the developments in Iranian history since the nineteenth century at the doorstep of **Great Britain**. This notion is not entirely baseless. From about 1828 Britain and Russia were engaged in a contest for spheres of influence in Iran. Britain had a pivotal role in the 1906 Constitutional Revolution and consolidated power through the Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919 and through its role in the *coup d’etat* of 1921, which brought the Pahlavi dynasty to power. By the mid-twentieth century, Britain held vast influence over the economy and politics of Iran through control of fiscal policy by the British Imperial Bank of Persia (later HSBC) and of the oil sector by the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (later BP).<sup>47</sup> In the light of this history, the British are seen as cunning and almost omnipotent. British weakness at any given juncture is only a deception since the British, in Iranian folklore, can “even cut off heads with cotton.” They stand behind the other powers (the United States and Russia) and make use of their former colonies (India, Israel) and manipulate them as they do the Iranian elite. The belief that the BBC was behind almost every development in Iranian politics in the last century has been mentioned.

Iranian perception of **Russia** is ambivalent. While Russia’s geographic proximity and history of intervention in Iran defines it as a potential threat, Russia is also perceived by the Iranian leadership as its main, albeit ad hoc, strategic ally, both for procurement of military and technological aid and for political support against any potential American intervention. The importance of preserving good relations with

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<sup>45</sup> See Patrick Clawson, “The Paradox of Anti-Americanism in Iran,” *MERIA Journal* 8.1 2004.

<sup>46</sup> The total demonization of the United States was an important leitmotif of the Khomeini era and appears unambiguously in his public Last Will and Testament: “The USA is the foremost enemy of Islam. It is a terrorist state by nature that has set fire to everything everywhere and its ally, the international Zionism, does not stop short of any crime to achieve its base and greedy desires, crimes that the tongue and pen are ashamed to utter or write. The stupid idea of a Greater Israel urges them to commit any shameful crime... What can be a better source of pride than the fact that the USA with all its military might, its boastfulness, its claims, its mass media and its allies among puppet regimes, has been so dumbfounded and disgraced in its dealings with the dauntless Iranian nation and the land of His Holiness Baqiyatullah...” <<http://www.irna.com/occasion/ertehal/english/will/>>.

<sup>47</sup> See Peter Avery, *Modern Iran*, (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1965). For a concise summary of Anglo-Iranian relations, see Memorandum submitted by Dr A. M. Ansari, University of Durham in **Great Britain, The United Kingdom Parliament, Iran: Foreign Affairs, Second Report for Session 2000–2001, Interim Report**, HC 80 2001.

Russia is highlighted by Iran's silence over Russia's actions in Chechnya. Nevertheless, the limits of Russian support are clear to Iran. Russian behavior in the crisis leading up to Operation Iraqi Freedom and during the military actions only served as further proof that Russia cannot be relied upon *in extremis*. Iran is also well aware that Russia prefers the interests of CIS States (e.g. in the Caspian Sea).

## **Israel and the Jews**

The Iranian attitude towards Israel and the Jews is a mix of animosity and admiration – both deriving from religious roots, but extending into the political sphere. Religiously, the Jews belong to the *dhimma* caste in Islamic society: the tolerated religious communities (along with Christians and Zoroastrians) which may live under an Islamic regime without accepting Islam, but under very harsh restrictions, exacerbated by the Shiite concept of *najes*, (impure).

In Iranian folklore, Jews are portrayed as *najes* (mean, miserly and polluted).<sup>48</sup> They could not touch water sources, and when it rained they had to stay indoors, since rain touching them would pollute the soil. In times of persecution their water sources would be cut off. Jews were forced to wear both a yellow badge and headgear, and their oath was not accepted in courts of justice. A Jew who converted to Islam could claim to be the sole inheritor of the family property, to the exclusion of all Jewish relatives. Blood libels were widely believed and children were warned that the Jews would kidnap them and drink their blood. Writers and poets such as Mulana Jalaedin Rumi, Nezami, Sadi, and many others used Jews as stereotypes to portray evil characters. The Jewish community was frequently subject to collective punishment for a crime or an illegal act committed by one member of the community. In 1839 the entire Jewish community of Mashhad was forced to convert to Islam. While other minorities were also persecuted, Christians were identified with the protection of superior European powers, whereas the Jews were to remain in the status of *dhimma*.

The change in the status of the Jews of Iran came only in the twentieth century. The Jews participated in the Constitutional Revolution of 1905 and were involved in forming the multi-ethnic Secret Society of 1905, which began the debate on political change. In 1907, they cooperated with Christians, Bahais, and Zoroastrians in passing laws that accorded equal rights to all citizens. As a result, the Jews were identified as belonging to the anti-*ulama* coalition of secularists of the 1905 revolution. This suspicion towards the Jews is enhanced by the fact that Reza Shah himself encouraged a rapprochement with the Jewish community of Iran; he visited the Jewish synagogue of Isfahan and bowed in front of the Torah – a gesture that brought him accolades from the local Jewish community as the friendliest Iranian ruler since Cyrus. This very gesture and the Shah's military and Intelligence relationship with Israel, also strengthened the identification of Jews and Israel with the old regime.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Iran's Minister of Defense, Shamkhani was quoted as saying: "We consider Israel as najes (an Arabic word meaning dirty, or unclean, used by Muslims against mostly the Jews and also the Christians). So dirty that we are even not willing to ask them for payment of the debts they have to us from before the Islamic Revolution (of 1979), because we consider that even the money is also unclean". Safa Haeri, "Iran is updating Nuclear Defense and Missiles", [http://www.iran-press-service.com/ips/articles-2004/august/iran\\_defence\\_8704.shtml](http://www.iran-press-service.com/ips/articles-2004/august/iran_defence_8704.shtml)

<sup>49</sup> Massoum Price, *A Brief History of Iranian Jews* (Iran Chamber Society, September 2001), <<http://www.iranchamber.com>>; Meir Ezri, *Mi Baxem mikol 'Amo [Anyone of His People Among You – Mission in Iran]* (Hebrew), (Or Yehuda, Israel: Hed Artzi, 2001); Houman Sarshar, *Esther's Children: A Portrait of Iranian Jews*, (Jewish Publication Society, August 2001).

# Governance and Decision-Making

## Principles of Governance

### Traditions of Governance

Iran has been governed by monarchies since time immemorial. The nature of these monarchies – divinely anointed, mystical, patriarchal and absolute – has also changed little since the days of the Achaemenians and the Sassanides. The post of *Rahbar* (Leader) is, to all intents and purposes, akin to that of the ancient Iranian *Shahanshah* (King of Kings). There is little difference between the Shah's observation that "The King in Iran is a teacher, a master, a father; in short he is everything," and Khomeini's view of the *velayat-e faqi* as a paternal relationship between the *'ulama* and the Iranian people.<sup>50</sup>

Continuity and constancy are hallmarks of Iranian culture, with more in common than not between Cyrus the Great and Khamene'i. Historians have noted that statements made by the ancient Kings of Persia, the Shah, and Khomeini are almost interchangeable. Their governing styles are more or less similar: total obedience and discipline, and a patriarchal relationship between the ruler and his subjects. Even the structure of the Iranian military and Revolutionary Guards has been shown as harking back to the ancient Persian concept of a tripartite society (King, Priest, Warriors).<sup>51</sup> The prerogative of the ruler to employ extreme measures to ensure the continuity of the regime is a *leitmotif* of Iranian mythology; many of the Hero Kings of old are said to have killed their own kin (including their children) in order to assure their thrones. This behavior is not perceived as morally wrong by the mythological narrative, but as morally necessary. The Shiite belief in the "hidden Imam" also contributes to a belief in the supernatural attributes of the sovereign; after the fall of the Shah the masses did not dare enter the Royal Palace, and for years afterwards there was a popular belief that the Shah had gone into occultation and was waiting to discover who was loyal to him and who was not, and then would reappear.

The people, on the other hand, have the right to rebel, and perennially expect a savior who will overthrow the despot – and become a despot in his own right.<sup>52</sup> The classic Iranian attitude towards the relationship between the strong and the weak in society reflects an Orwellian "weakness is strength" equation: According to a popular Iranian perception, the individual or community which has, ostensibly, the "lower hand," or which is lowly and oppressed, has a strategic advantage over those above. A common metaphor is that those standing on the lowest rung of the ladder have nowhere to fall, whereas they can easily shake the ladder and those at the top. The implications for those at the top are twofold: they must be more cautious than those at the bottom, lest they be toppled; and they must "inhabit" the bottom of the ladder as well (by proxy) in order to insure themselves. In practice, certain forms of regime manipulation of the masses may resemble those of Arab autocratic regimes, but their goals are quite different: whereas in regimes like Baathist Iraq the goal is mass intimidation, in Iran it is mass mobilization.

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<sup>50</sup> Hoveyda, 45.

<sup>51</sup> Hoveyda, 50–56.

<sup>52</sup> Hoveyda, 38–45.

**Iran as The Islamic Republic**

The nomenclature The Islamic Republic of Iran contains three descriptors of religious, social-political, and national identity, which together form a frame of reference for the Iranian perception of national interests and security. This frame of reference is at the core of Iran's national security thinking. These three components, while meant by the founders of the regime to be complementary, are to a great extent contradictory – a contradiction that is a frequent source of tension within the regime.

The Islamic descriptor refers not only to the form of government inside Iran or to a religious-cultural identification of the majority of its populace. It is also meant to draw a wider frame of reference for collective identity and interest than the national one. It indicates that Shiite Iran is not at the sidelines of the Muslim world, but at its core, and can even serve as the rightful leader of the Muslim world. This Islamic identity was, for Khomeini, the real *raison d'être* of the regime.

The third element, Iran, is by far the strongest on the popular level, and is often at odds with the Islamic nature that the regime imposes. While Iran is widely perceived in the West as primarily a radical “Islamic” state, most of the Iranian body politic seems to prefer to emphasize the “Iranian” nationalist component in defining their frame of reference for collective identity, historic identification, and national interest. The prominence of Iranian nationalism is evident in the popularity of pre-revolution nationalist songs (with suitably adapted lyrics) on national days such as election day, the Persian New Year, etc.

However, it is mainly the concatenation of the “Islamic” and the *Jomhori* (Republican) descriptors that bears witness to the political antinomy inherent in the Iranian system. The idea of a Republic is not indigenous to an Islamic worldview; in Islam, and definitely in Khomeini's doctrine, the state is not *res publica*, a thing of the people, but *res dei*, a thing of Allah.

However, Iran has historically harbored a vibrant participatory society, be it the involvement of the *Bazaar* (economic sector), or intellectuals. Unlike its Arab neighbors, Iran has undergone not one but two popular revolutions in the twentieth century, its history is replete with popular rebellions, and it may be said that the Iranian national psyche accepts revolution as a normal and legitimate, though perhaps traumatic, feature of political life.<sup>53</sup> The Islamic concept of consensus as a legitimate basis for legislation, which is particularly present in Shiite jurisprudence, also lends itself to recognition of the “power of the people.” It seems, therefore, that the fact that the founders of the Islamic Republic found it necessary to compromise on a quasi-democratic system is testimony to the strength of the drive for popular participation

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<sup>53</sup> The archetype of Iranian revolution is the story of the overthrow of Dahhak, a child-eating tyrant, by Kaveh the blacksmith, as told in Ferdousi's *Shahnameh*. See [The Epic of Kings – Hero Tales of Ancient Persia by Firdausi](http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/f/f52ek/). Trans. Helen Zimmern. University of Adelaide Library Electronic Texts Collection, <<http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/f/f52ek/>>. Popular revolutions, usually nominally religious, have been a recurrent feature of Iranian political life since ancient times and up to the twentieth century, with the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–11, the unsuccessful popular movement of *Mossadeq* in the early 1950s, and the Islamic Revolution of 1978–79.

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within the Iranian body politic.<sup>54</sup> This drive has been strengthened by a sea change in the body politic of the country over the last years. This change is due to the predominance of young people in the electorate who did not experience the previous regime,<sup>55</sup> the erosion of revolutionary zeal, and above all, the death of the founder, Ayatollah Khomeini, in 1989. The establishment, against which it rebels, therefore, is not that of the Shah's regime, but of the Islamic Republic.

### **Sources of Authority and Decision-Making**

The core of the Iranian leadership is comprised of less than a dozen veterans of the Revolution.<sup>56</sup> These are the real decision-makers, whose formal positions are not necessarily indicative of their real involvement in the decision-making process. Their status and power is drawn from their personal informal relationship with the *Rahbar* (Supreme Leader) and their influence within sectors whose support is crucial to the regime (clerics, *Bazaaris*, IRGC (Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps), and the military). It is significant that most of the present leadership – both conservatives and reformists – is still composed entirely of first generation revolutionaries who participated in the 1979 revolution and its aftermath, and have a vested interest in its survival. Iranian political culture has no tradition of authority transfer from older to younger leaders and this will most likely remain for some time.

Definitions of authority in Iran are ambiguous, and decision-making processes are convoluted. As a hybrid democracy-hierocracy, or a clerical oligarchy, Iran holds general elections for Parliament and President and hosts an exceptionally lively civil society. On the other hand, the regime adheres to Khomeini's doctrine of "*Velayat-e (motleghi) Faqih*" ([absolute] Rule of the jurisprudents) that provides for constant scrutiny and overruling of the elected government by the *Rahbar* and self-elected bodies of conservative clerics. The status and authority of the *Rahbar*, Ayatollah Khamene'i, is evocative of the traditional Iranian Shah. However, he cannot be

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<sup>54</sup> According to the constitution, the *Shari'ah* is the judicial basis for the Islamic Republic. Despite this claim, the constitution contains important elements that have been borrowed not from the *Shari'ah*, but from Western democratic principles. For example, *qanun-e asassi* (constitution), *qanun* (law), *hakemiyat-e melli* (sovereignty of the people), *mellat* (nation), *hoqoq-e mellat* (the rights of the nation), *qovveh-e moqananeh* (the legislature), *qovveh-e qaza'iyeh* (the judiciary), *majeis* (parliament), *jomhuori* (republic), *hame Porsi* (consultation of the people), and *entekhabat* (elections) are some of the concepts that are borrowed from the West. See Asghar Schirazi, The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic, trans. John O'Kane (London and New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1997) 61-85.

<sup>55</sup> Over 65% of the population is under twenty-five and the voting age is sixteen. The conservatives are aware of the fact that this plays into the hands of the reformists and tried to raise the voting age.

<sup>56</sup> According to Wilfried Buchta, these "Patriarchs" include: Ay. Khamene'i, Hoj. Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Ay. Oz. Ali Meshkini, Ay. Ahmad Janati, Hoj. Mohammad Khatami, Hoj. Abbas Vaezi Tabassi, Hoj. Mohammad Mohammadi Reyshahri, Ay. Mahmud Hashemi Shahroudi, Hoj. Ali Taskhiri. Wilfried Buchta, Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000) 9. Other informed sources reduce the list of "real" power wielders to the first four (according to these sources, Khatami has little influence on real decisions, Tabasi and Reyshahri have lost much of their own influence and Shahroudi and Taskhiri, being of Iraqi origin, are too dependent on the Rahbar to be considered power wielders). Others add the former Head of the Judiciary, Ay. Mohammad Yazdi, the former Commander of the IRGC, Hoj. Mohsen Rezai, and the present commander of the IRGC, Yahya Rahim-Safavi. The placement of an individual within the circle of decision-formers or decision-makers depends mainly on the issue at stake. Hence, on defense and security issues, most sources add the Minister of Defense, Ali Shamkhani, and the Commander of the IRGC, Yehya Rahim-Safavi, to the primary circle. For a more complete map of the leadership, see appendix.



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likened to the typical Arab autocrat: both he and the reformist-elected government are more susceptible to public opinion constraints than such regimes.

Iranian paradigms of decision-making are also deeply rooted in Shiite legal doctrine. Having been the oppressed minority in most of the Muslim world, Shiite Islam developed defense mechanisms for survival: *ketman* (passive acceptance of political situations) and *taqiyya* (dissimulation) regarding its religious identity in order to stave off oppression, religious and cultural syncretism, allowing for the absorption of non-indigenous practice. While Khomeini's activist doctrine revolutionized Shiite doctrine, the traditional worldview remains dominant in religious circles in Iran.<sup>57</sup>

The most important of these defense mechanisms is *ijtihad* – the right of senior scholars (*mujtahid*, who are also *marja' taqlid*) to make innovative strategic religious decisions based on their own interpretation of the Koran, and not on legal precedent alone (as in Sunnite Islam).<sup>58</sup> The practice of *ijtihad* is in essence the mechanism by which leading Shiite religious leaders may implement a “cost-benefit calculus” in situations considered as posing a grave danger to the community, and in order not to be hamstrung by fossilized legal rulings. In Shiite legal thought, the basis for such a calculus is the acceptance of *maslahat* (public interest) or *darurat* (necessities) as one of the sources of law (along with the traditional sources of Koran, *Sunna*, analogy and consensus).<sup>59</sup> The use of *maslahat* allows for decision-making based on assessment of the severe damage that would otherwise be incurred by the community.<sup>60</sup> The very existence of a body to determine the interest of the regime (EDCS) underlines the importance of this concept. The *maslahat* of the Iranian regime is, in its own eyes, tantamount to that of the Islamic nation at large; its defeat would be disastrous for Islam as a whole.

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<sup>57</sup> Khomeini was quoted as deducing his activist view from the case of the Imam Hussein, the activist, as opposed to that of his brother Hassan, who accepted compromise with the Ummayyad dynasty but was assassinated in any case: “I am Husseini – not Hassani.”

<sup>58</sup> *Ijtihad* is not a purely Shiite concept, but in most Sunni Islamic schools of jurisprudence (*madhab/madhahib*), it has been unacceptable since the tenth century.

<sup>59</sup> *Maslahat* literally means utility or welfare. The jurists use it to denote public interest or general human good. The medieval jurist Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 505 A.H./1111 A.D.) developed it by ruling that the ultimate purpose of the *Shari'ah* is to further the *maslahah* of the Ummah. The *masalih* (plural of *maslahah*) are divided into the following three categories: *daruriyah* (essential), which protect *din* (religion), *nafs* (life), *nasl* (offspring), *'aql* (reason), and *mal* (property); *hajiyyah* (complementary); and *tahsiniyah* (desirable). The government's primary duty is to safeguard these at any cost. The complementary and desirable *masalih* tend to vary according to social and economic conditions. The government protects them only when it has fulfilled its primary duty of protecting the essential interests.

<sup>60</sup> In January 1983 Khomeini ruled that the *Majles* may pass laws that contradict the *Shari'ah* based on the principle of *darurat*. Towards the end of his life (January 1988), he went a step further by ruling that “the State (government) is **an absolute trusteeship which God conferred upon the Prophet (and from him to the Imams and the Jurists). It is the most important of God's ordinances and has precedence over all other of God's derived ordinances.**” In other words, the ruler has absolute authority, which cannot be restricted by the existing laws of the *Shari'ah* or agreements with the people (i.e., constitutions and democratic elections). The preservation of the regime has therefore such a priority that the State may even suspend in the favor of this goal primary religious duties (such as prayer, fasting during the Ramadan or *Haj* to Mecca), or order the destruction of a mosque. See Schirazi, 230-231; Meir Litvak, “The Rule of the Jurist (*Velayat-e Faqih*) in Iran: Ideal and Implementation,” *Ha-Mizrah He-Hadash* (Hebrew) 42 2001: 171.

## **Elites and Factions**

### **Families, Merchants and Clerics**

An important ingredient in Iranian decision-making is family and personal relations. Iranian politics makes a sharp differentiation between *khodi* (insiders) and *gheir-e khodi* (outsiders). The former have historic rights that protect them to a certain extent even when they become critical of the regime. The latter are suspect of trying to bring down the system, as they have no personal vested interest in its existence. There is a close knit “old boys club” made up of comrades in arms from the days of exile in Iraq or Europe, from the Shah's jails and from the time of the Revolution. Other prominent connections are those based on discreet business partnerships or on family ties, either directly through *aqazadehs* (princelings, the scions of senior clerics) or through marriage.<sup>61</sup> The significance of these connections cannot be overrated. They confer on the extended families a wide range of business advantages and protection from investigation and punishment for corruption.<sup>62</sup>

The *Bazaar*, the so-called class of traditional marketplace merchants, has played a pivotal role in Iranian politics since the *Qajar* era, in alliance with the *'ulama* against the modernizing political elite. The main association of the *Bazaar*, The Coalition of Islamic Associations is a powerful instrument of influence in the hands of the regime.<sup>63</sup>

The interest of the *Bazaar*, though, has always been economic, and not necessarily an ideological objection to secularization, as was the clerics' position. While the Islamic regime has been much more attentive to the needs of the *Bazaar* than the Shah's regime, the economic agenda of the reformists would, by definition, erode the *Bazaar's* privileges. Furthermore, lately new entrepreneurial industrial elites linked with the regime and the banking sector have threatened the predominance of the *Bazaar's* monopoly over distribution of goods and money. There are also signs that some of the younger members of the *Bazaar* have adopted more modern economic

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<sup>61</sup> For example, the family of Hoj. Abbas Vaez-Tabasi is of Mashhadi origin. Vaez-Tabasi has been close to Khamene'i for over forty years and runs the powerful Bonyad Imam Reza. His son Nasser is married to Khamene'i's daughter, while Khamene'i's son Sayyid Hasan is married to Vaez-Tabasi's daughter. Ali Akbar Nateq-Nouri's daughter is married to Khomeini's son Rasouli-Mahalati. Khatami's reformist brother, Mohammad-Reza Khatami, is married to a granddaughter of Khomeini.

<sup>62</sup> According to reformist sources, some sixty investigations of corruption by sons of senior clerics are being investigated. Some salient examples of such connections are the family of Rafsanjani – Rafsanjani's son Mehdi Hashemi-Rafsanjani heads a company called Iranian Offshore Engineering and Construction, which is involved in a variety of lucrative joint ventures. Vaez-Tabasi's son Nasser (mentioned above) is involved in business ventures in Central Asia and was investigated, tried, and acquitted in a controversial case regarding embezzlement.

<sup>63</sup> *Hay'atha-ye Mo'talefe-ye Eslami* or *Jamiat-e Moutalefe-ye Eslami* (Islamic Coalition Association) was formed through the merger of three religious groups in the Tehran Bazaar, with the common objective of campaigning against the Shah according to the leadership of Khomeini. The ICA Secretary General is Habibollah Asgar-Owladi, a veteran of the Revolution. Other prominent leaders of the party from the Bazaar are Assadollah Badamchian, Ali Akbar Parvareh, Said Amani, Mohammad Javad Rafiq-Doust, Habibollah Shafiq and Asghar Rokhsefat. Said Amani is also the Secretary General of another Bazaar-based organization, the *Jame'e Anjomanha-ye Eslam-ye Baazaar Va Asnaf* (Society of Islamic Associations of the Bazaar & Trade Unions). This is a group composed of members of Islamic associations of various trade unions in the Tehran Bazaar. Its objective is to forge coordination among Islamic trade unions associations in order to execute the Islamic practice of "inviting to good and enjoining from evil."

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concepts. It seems, though, that while the *Bazaar* has and will continue to serve as a tool for the conservatives in the internal struggle with the reformists, it is not involved in the decision-making process in security affairs.

The role of the '*ulama* (clerics) in the Iranian political system is that of a source of legitimacy for the regime, and is incorporated into the constitution, which defines the post and functions of the *Rahbar* and various formal bodies of clerics that advise the leader. This structure, as invented by Khomeini, was a departure from the traditional apolitical role of the '*ulama* in Shiite society. The formal channels through which the clerics in Iran influence the decision-making process include a number of bodies established by the Constitution and subsequent decrees, which are charged with the implementation of the *velayet-e-Faqih*. The wider circle of the "ulama of Qom" – which includes the leading Ayatollahs (approximately 500 in Iran alone) and Ayatollah Ozmas (who number no more than 20) – have little or no influence on the decision-making process of the regime.

Notwithstanding, the '*ulama* wield influence through informal channels. The pluralist nature of Shiite authority maintains that the competence to arrive at *ijtihad* (original decisions and interpretations of Islamic law) lies with living authorities – *marja'*, *taqlid* or *mujtahid* – and every Shiite Muslim must choose one to follow. This concept accorded the Shiite '*ulama* hierocracy and the institution of the *marja'* *taqlid* immense spiritual power, which led to indirect political and economic power. Furthermore, due to the large number of *maraja'* from different backgrounds and different countries (the numbers in the last generations were in the tens, if not more), religious power remained decentralized.<sup>64</sup> The campaign waged by Khamene'i to gain wide support for himself as *marja'* (see below) constitutes a divergence from the conventionalities of Shiite religious politics.

Another concept of religious origin but with political overtones is that of *erfan*. *Erfan* is Iranian mysticism closely affiliated with, but not identical to Sufism. It is an esoteric wisdom, not openly acknowledged but widespread among the pupils of the various seminaries in Qom and elsewhere. The very substance of the *erfan* teachings – a sense of fearlessness towards everything external including all the seemingly coercive political powers of the world – is anathema to the regime, which is based on fear. The philosophical basis of *erfan* featured in the thought of Ali Shari'ati and as such stands in contrast to the Khomeinist doctrine. Due to its heterodox nature, it is not openly taught and teachers and pupils alike tend to conceal the very fact of their relationship in imparting it. As a result, the seminaries of Qom have developed a non-declared "honeycomb of ties of *erfan*" in which the teacher has a hidden moral influence on his disciples.<sup>65</sup>

A Shiite Muslim may only be a *muqallid* (follower, literally imitator) of a living *marja'*. In principle, when a *marja'* dies, his authority dies with him and his *muqallidun* must accept the authority of another *marja'*. This principle operates as well on the collective level. If all the '*ulama* of a certain generation accept a given

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<sup>64</sup> The sects that declared a sole "source of emulation" in the nineteenth century, the Shaykhis and Babis, were effectively marginalized. Even in the time of Ayatollah Ozmas, who were widely perceived as *marja'* of the generation (such as Ayatollah Burujerdi in Iran, Hakim and Khu'i in Najaf), there were other *maraja'* who had local followings.

<sup>65</sup> Roy Mottahadeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet – Religion and Politics in Iran*, NY: Pantheon books, 1985, p. 182; Abbas manoocheri, *Critical Religious Reason*, 'Ali Shari'ati on religion, Philosophy and Emancipation, <http://www.them.polylog.org/4/index-en.htm>

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ruling (by consensus, *ijma'*) such a decision is only binding on that generation and not in the future. The regime's attempt to impose Khamene'i's leadership through the residual authority of Khomeini is a break with tradition.

### **Conservatives and Reformists**

Almost every analysis of Iran resorts to the distinction between the “reformist” camp and the “conservatives.” The Iranian case fits neither the classic paradigm of a government vs. opposition in a Western democracy, or of regime vs. anti-regime forces in a despotic Middle Eastern autocracy. In Iran both “parties” are “in power” and strive to preserve the framework of the State. Decision-making on a multitude of issues is a process involving both sides. The two camps are not two separate “governments,” but rather an intricate system of checks and balances between a (formally) democratically elected “secular” government and a clerical ruling caste.<sup>66</sup> Most of the “reformists” are not secular and do not call for the abolishment of the Islamic Regime, just as most of the conservatives do not call for the abolishment of democratic elements in the constitution.

The reformist camp is a wide coalition that incorporates a variety of agendas, ranging from radical reformists who call for a transformation of the regime into a liberal democracy in which religion is completely separated from politics, to gradualists, who call for change in order to secure the essence of the Islamic regime from a possible counter-revolution.<sup>67</sup> The latter – among them Khatami – fear that continued denial of demands for more personal freedoms and animosity towards the United States will only cause increased alienation of the young urban and educated population from the regime, increase economic distress and destabilize the society, and eventually pose a threat to the very existence of the regime. Therefore, in their eyes, the gradualists believe that gradual incremental reform is the order of the day and emphasize the necessity to increase those personal and economic freedoms that seem the most urgent.

**The conservatives**, on the other hand, perceive even the most innocuous reforms as an “oyster knife,” a thin blade with which the oyster is opened, after which the opening is widened and the “pearl” – the Islamic essence of the regime – is taken (a pearl is a common metaphor for the quintessence of beauty and worth). For them, the issue at stake is the survival of the Islamic regime in Iran.

This is not merely a question of the regime that will govern Iran, but of the existence of the only Islamic (as opposed to Muslim) state that has a mission to support Muslims, spread Islam, and to defend the Shiites in other countries. The demise of the regime or its modification would, therefore, be devastating to Islam as a civilization and as a nation.<sup>68</sup> Some conservatives even consider the present situation already a corruption of Khomeini’s vision, and call for a return to the original rigid model of government instituted at the inception of the revolution. Even among the

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<sup>66</sup> The process by which government candidates are vetted for their religious credentials does not meet Western standards of democratic elections. The mutual interest of both sides in stability, however keeps the conservatives from taking advantage of all their coercive levers.

<sup>67</sup> The more radical group contains, among others, intellectuals such as **Abdulkarim Soroush**, **Akbar Ganji**, and the intellectual heirs of **Ali Shari'ati**.

<sup>68</sup> There are many among the conservatives who invoke the “Gorbachev syndrome” and claim that the end result of gradual “Glasnost” would undermine the very essence of the Islamic regime. See Shahram Chubin, Iran and Reform: Domestic Politics and National Security, draft, 11.

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conservatives, however, there are those who fear that total rejection of the calls for reform might lead to public unrest and even possible counter-revolution.

National security in Iran is, by and large, a nonpartisan issue. The fierce debates regarding the nature of the regime, the extent of democracy, and the role of religion have not, for the most part, extended to questions of national security. Nevertheless, there is an intricate interaction between the pluralism of the Iranian regime and definitions of national interest and national security. Consequently, foreign policy – especially regional policy and the attitude towards relations with the United States and the Israeli-Arab issue – is to a certain extent an extension of internal factional politics.

There is no definitive line between reformists and conservatives on foreign and defense matters. Many of the “domestic reformists” reject the logic that reform necessarily entails mending the bridges with the United States, keeping a distance from radical Islamic positions, and refraining from ultra-radical positions on the Palestinian issue. A few “domestic conservatives” have taken moderate positions on foreign affairs.<sup>69</sup> Notwithstanding, the reformists tend to have a more modest and a less Islamic view of geopolitics and to demonstrate a heightened sensitivity to Iran's international image abroad and to the economic consequences of Iran's impaired international legitimacy. Consequently, the reformist camp has placed the issues of holding a dialogue with the United States and improving the relations with the Arab Gulf states on its political agenda, and has been willing to be at odds with the conservatives and even with the *Rahbar* on this issue.

One area affected by the internal rivalry is the perception of the imminence of the threat: the greater the demonization of the enemy, the greater the magnification of the perceived threat to the nation. The level of the American threat is considered significantly lower by the reformists than it is by conservatives. Furthermore, many reformists consider the conservative's animosity towards the United States as an irrational ideological position, or worse, a cynical ploy to brand the reformist domestic agenda as pro-American, and thus to de-legitimize it. The conservatives therefore have a domestic interest in a manageable confrontation with the United States in order to unite the public behind the regime and to discredit, or at least to silence, internal factions identified with the “American style of political ideals. Even the most informative reporting in the reformist press on American advances in Iraq was seen as expressions of support or gloating over the American victory.<sup>70</sup>

The two camps differ on the pertinence of international relations and international legitimacy as a guarantee for national security. The conservatives embrace a siege mentality in which Iran is a loner in a jungle-like world, a battlefield populated by

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<sup>69</sup> One prominent example to the reformists is **Ay. Oz. Yusef Sanei**, who has published far-reaching reformist rulings on domestic issues while at the same time upholding the *Fatwa* against Salman Rushdie (as head of the fifteenth Khordad Foundation, he even raised the prize), and ruled in favor of active support of the Palestinians. Another is **Ali Akbar Mohtashemi-Pour**, who is a domestic reformist by all accounts, but was the de facto founder of Hezbollah in Lebanon and continues to play a role in supporting Lebanese and Palestinian terrorism as Secretary General of the Organization for Support of the Palestinian *Intifadah*.

<sup>70</sup> The reformist newspaper *Hamshahri* reported (7 April 2004) in a headline “American Tanks in Baghdad.” The next day, the conservative press attacked the reformists for having “cheered on the American occupation” of a Muslim country with their headlines. The reformist reaction was swift; the next day the paper published a “correction”: “Instead of ‘American Tanks in Baghdad,’ the headline should have read ‘Iraqi tanks in Los Angeles....’”

agents of Evil who attempt to seduce Iran into giving up its Islamic and national principles. Globalization is no more than American arrogance attempting to impose itself by different means. Therefore, none of these foreign elements can be true friends of Iran or truly guarantee Iran's security.<sup>71</sup> The reformists, on the other hand, hold a more Western view: for them, friendly international relations and international legitimacy is an important shield against those elements within the international community that are intrinsically hostile to Iran.

## **Leadership and Gatekeepers**

### **The Supreme Leader**

The post of Supreme Leader, *Rahbar*, or of a sole living supreme religious authority, had not existed in Shiite tradition since the *ghaibah* (occultation) of the last Imam of the line of 'Ali. The concept was invented by Khomeini and tailored to his measurements. In a way, the post reflects an adaptation to the autocratic tradition of Persia of the utopian concept of “rule by the scholars (plural!).”<sup>72</sup> The *Rahbar* is, in essence, a Shah.

The concept of *velayat-e faqih* developed over time from a transfer of authority from temporal secularly motivated rulers, to religious experts (plural!), into the final evolution of *velayat-e faqih-e motleqe-e fardi* – absolute rule of the individual cleric.<sup>73</sup> Even in his capacity as a political leader, Khomeini was, first and foremost, a spiritual leader who derived his temporal decisions almost exclusively from his strict and unbending understanding of Shiite-Islamic traditions and the *Shari'ah*. In a conflict between the clear rulings of Islam and pragmatic Realpolitik, the former would always have the upper hand. Khomeini had very little experience of contact with the outside world, spoke no foreign languages, and received his “inputs” of political developments through opaque religious filters.

Upon his nomination in 1989, Khamene'i was promoted from the rank of *Hojat al-Islam* to Ayatollah, though he never fulfilled the scholarly prerequisites for this rank (writing of a *Risalah 'Amaliya*, a legal dissertation, and recognition by other Ayatollahs<sup>74</sup>). However, since he had none of the qualifications to be seen as *Marja' Taqlid* (Source of Emulation), the Constitution was hastily amended to allow for the appointment of a *Rahbar* who does not hold that rank, but has the political qualifications. Consequently, while formally serving as *Rahbar*, Khamene'i has the same formal total authority as his predecessor.

The fact that his religious authority remains in doubt even after fourteen years in office gave rise to a lively discussion within Iran regarding the future of *velayat-e faqih*. The modernists' proposals range from the demand that the post of the *Rahbar* become spiritualized and divorced from everyday political decisions, through ideas for collectivization of the *Rahbariya* (replacing the sole *Rahbar* with a council) and

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<sup>71</sup> See Khamene'i's speeches at <<http://www.khamenei.de/speeches>>.

<sup>72</sup> The concept is not remote from Plato's Philosopher King.

<sup>73</sup> On the development of the concept see Schirazi, 61-85.

<sup>74</sup> Rumors in Iran have it that Khamene'i is having his *Risalah* written for him by a group of senior clerics: **Ay. Hasan Taheri Khoromabadi**, **Ay. Mo'emen**, **Ay. Oz. Fazel Lankarani**, and the Head of the Judiciary, **Ay. Sharoudi**.

election of the *Rahbar* by popular vote.<sup>75</sup> On the other hand, the conservatives (*khatt-e emam* – followers of the line of the Imam Khomeini) see the continuation of the status quo as vital for the survival of the regime, and even find religious justification for autocratic rule.<sup>76</sup> While Khamene'i has not appointed a successor, the conventional wisdom in Iran is that Khamene'i sees Rafsanjani as the next *Rahbar*.<sup>77</sup>

Over the years though, Khamene'i has come to enjoy absolute power and religious authority. He remains aware, however, of his inferiority vis-à-vis the Great Ayatollahs of Qom and Najaf. Since the death of a number of senior ayatollahs (Golpaigani and Araki of Qom and Khoi of Najaf) in 1993-94, Khamene'i initiated a campaign to bolster his religious credentials by pressuring Shiite leaders to accept him as their *marja'*. The use of political coercion, or at least implicit coercion, to attain religious authority is rare or even unprecedented in Shiite Islam. This is an act that even Khomeini, with his superior religious credentials as an "Ayatollah *Ozma*," dared not to attempt – or perhaps did not need to. Nevertheless, Khamene'i has failed to wrest recognition of his religious authority even from many of the Iranian clerical establishment, not to mention from Shiites outside Iran. Realizing that he cannot be accepted as *marja'* for Iranian Shiites, he has concentrated his efforts mainly into having his religious authority accepted among Shiites outside Iran.

Since Khamene'i came to power, he has attempted to promote a number of younger clerics to the rank of Ayatollah *Ozma*, but they do not have a wide following in Qom.<sup>78</sup> Khamene'i has also made use of his financial resources to tighten his control over the sixty or more religious schools of the *Hawza 'Ilmi* in Qom through the *Jame'e-modarresin-e houze-ye 'elmiye-ye Qom* (Society of Qom Theological School Teachers).<sup>79</sup> These efforts have given rise to a rival association (with the same

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<sup>75</sup> Examples of the first include **Ay. Mohammad Shirazi**, who rejects *velayat-e faqih* all-out; **Ay. Azari-Qomi**, an erstwhile supporter of Khamene'i; and **Ay. Oz. Hasan Tabatabai-Qomi** and his school, with support in Mashhad. Among the second group is **Ay. Oz. Seyyed Sadeq Shirazi** of Qom. This is commensurate with the traditional concept that in the period of the occultation of the "infallible Imam," the task of leadership is laid on the *foqaha* (entire community of scholars). One of the supporters of the latter idea is **Ay. Oz. Hussein Ali Montazeri**, who takes this position along with **Mohammad Khoeini-ha** and **Khalkhali**. **Ay. Azari-Qomi** also proposed a referendum on the authority of the *Rahbar* and *velayat-e faqih*. It seems that the basic concept of this camp is that the *Rahbar* should supervise but not rule.

<sup>76</sup> The proponents of this concept were organized in the now defunct **Hojjatiya Society** (the forerunner of the hard line Islamic Coalition Association), which denied the concept of any popular voice in government according to Islam. **Ay. Taqi-i Misbah Yazdi** has gone on record that freedom is contradictory to Islam (which is based on utter submission to the law of Allah). **Ay. Ali Meshkini** and **Ay. Nasser-e Makarem Shirazi** have voiced similar positions (according to the Israeli Persian Radio Service). See also a pupil of Yazdi, **Hoj. Karavian**, a graduate of the *Haqqani* School in Qom: "Despotism is not necessarily a bad thing if it means obeying divine decrees." (ISNA, 21 Apr. 2001). Karivan points to the fact that Imam Hussein was in the minority (public opinion was against him) at Karbalah; however, this did not make him less right. "Story of Two Seminaries: *Feyzieh* and *Haqqani*," *Gozarash; Economic, Political, Social & Scientific*, Mar. & Apr. 2001, Nos. 120 & 121, 39-44

<sup>77</sup> This is not unusual in Iranian or Islamic terms; the official appointment of a successor is not expected and may even be perceived as a sign of weakness. Refraining from such a step is even legitimate from the Islamic point of view since even the Prophet Mohammad did not appoint his successor. However, as the Prophet (at least according to the Shiite traditions) indicated his preference of 'Ali as his successor, certain gestures are seen as indicative of favoring one successor or another.

<sup>78</sup> For example, Ay. Oz. Fazel al-Lankarani, Ay. Vaezi Tabessi (Khorasani).

<sup>79</sup> The budget allocated for this purpose is app. \$72 million per annum. Buchta, 94.

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name) of young clerics and to (mainly) expatriate groups of clerics.<sup>80</sup> These clerics, while conservative in their basic *Weltanschauung*, are more receptive to the demands for reform.

Khamene'i's dubious spiritual authority increases his dependence on more temporal levers of control. First and foremost among these is his control over finances. The *Rahbar* has extensive influence over the all-encompassing *bonyad* economy, and he uses these resources to allocate budgets.<sup>81</sup> Like Khomeini before him, Khamene'i tends to intervene as a moderator between the reformist and the conservative camps when the conflict between them exacerbates to the point of a potential crisis. However, while Khomeini was widely perceived as relatively aloof from internal power politics, Khamene'i is closely identified with the radical camp. The level of obedience to his orders by all parties is, accordingly, much weaker. In various instances, senior officials on both sides tended to vacillate on carrying out his instructions – a behavior which probably would have been unthinkable under Khomeini.<sup>82</sup>

### **The Executive, Legislative and Judiciary Branches**

While the President is elected by popular vote (under the constraints of vetting of candidates), his actual authority derives from his relationship with the *Rahbar* and the latter's willingness to co-opt him. In a way, the status of the President in the Islamic Regime is much like that of the Prime Minister under the Shah: accountability without responsibility.<sup>83</sup> While statements or actions by the government and the President may differ from those of the *Rahbar* by nuances, they cannot utterly contradict them.

The authority of the President varies, though, according to the personality of the incumbent. While former President Rafsanjani was a central figure in the Defense and

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<sup>80</sup> The emergence of young clerics resembles the development that took place in Teheran during Khomeini's rule: the *Jame-e-ye Rohaniyate – Mobare-e-Teheran* (Association of Militant Clerics of Teheran), lead by Ay. Kani (Mahdavi), represented the conservative split. The younger clerics formed the *Majmai Rohaniyn Mobarez* (Association of Militant Clerics) lead by Hoj. Mohammad Mousavi Khoweiniha and Hoj. Ali Akbar Mohtashemi-Pour (former Iranian Ambassador in Beirut), which, in time, became a faction in the reformist movement. The expatriate groups of clerics include, for example, the *lajnat al-difa' 'an huquq al-marja'iyah al-shi'iyah* (Committee for the Defense of the Rights of the Shi'ite *Marja'iyat*), based in London. See Buchta, 166.

<sup>81</sup> There are approximately 120 *Bonyads*. These foundations, many of which were created after the Revolution, are Iranian style “non-profit” (and non-tax-paying) NGO's with immense economic power. They run hundreds of factories and farms, control almost ninety percent of the modern electronic industries, and are exempt from taxes. The most important ones are the *Bonyad-e Mostazafan va Janbazan* (estimated at \$10 billion) and the *Bonyad Imam Reza* (estimated at \$20 billion), which “owns” most of the land in Khorasan and runs dozens of companies. Their directors are known for the vast wealth they have accrued, their corruption, and their political power. Many of them are run by Bazaaris and senior figures in the regime, such as the former Commander of the IRGC, **Mohsen Rafiq-Dost**, (headed *Bonyad Mostazafan*) and **Hoj. Vaez-Tabassi** (head of *Imam Reza*, Member of the EC and connected by marriage to Khamene'i.). See appendix.

<sup>82</sup> For example, the Head of the Judiciary, **Ay. Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi**, received instructions from Khamene'i to review the case of the intellectual Aghajari, who was sentenced to death for apostasy. The case threatened to ignite widespread dissent. Shahroudi took more than two weeks to obey the order. On the other hand, when Khamene'i ordered the *Majlis* to cease the debate on the Journalism Law, it was stopped initially, but renewed by the reformists under other pretexts.

<sup>83</sup> In the Shah's days, orders were frequently transmitted to ministers and military officers bypassing regular channels, including those of the Prime Minister. It was well known that whether the P.M. was privy to the act or not, he would bear the brunt of the punishment if the need arose.



## *Governance and Decision Making*

Security decision-making process, Khatami seems to have been totally sidelined in this area. After his election, the *Rahbar* transferred the control of internal security forces to his own line of command, and effectively neutralized Khatami in this area. The reformists in Khatami's cabinet (June 2002) have no bearing on the decision-making process in defense and security matters. The officials responsible for these areas (Minister of Defense, Ali Shamkhani and Commander of the IRGC, Yahya Rahim-Safavi) are both conservatives, close to the *Rahbar*, and imposed by him on the President. While the last two officials who served as Minister of Information and Security (MOIS), Hoj. Qorban-Ali Dori Najafabadi and Ali Yunessi, were considered confidantes of the President, both have been limited in actual powers. The President's position as Chairman of the Supreme National Security Council is also less relevant than it seems, since its Hoj. Secretary, Hasan Rouhani, is an appointee of the *Rahbar*, and the chief members of the Council are conservatives. Nevertheless, the fact that the President is a *de jure* member of the decision-making elite and has access to the *Rahbar* ranks him – at least – as one of the channels of information for the leadership.

Former President Rafsanjani continues to wield a great deal of influence over political and security affairs, even after leaving office. This will not be the case regarding Khatami. During his period in office, Khatami's *de facto* authority has been systematically eroded with the tacit consent or active support of Khamene'i. His failure to promote the political agenda of his constituency in the realm of the economy and civil liberties has widened the gap between him and his own supporters.

During most of Khatami's term of office, the *Majles* (Parliament) was also predominately reformist. Elections to the Seventh *Majles* have changed this picture. During the reformist period, the *Majles* took a number of steps that contradicted the *Rahbar's* express policy: debates on the relations with the United States, civil rights bills, attempts to strengthen itself vis-à-vis the Council of Guardians and the Judiciary. In any case, the *Majles* is not a decision-making or decision-forming body; it has little bearing on the decision-making process in foreign and defense policy and, at the most, may be seen as a barometer of social and political trends within the wider Iranian body politic.

Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi has headed the Judiciary since August 1999 and is considered a close confidant of Khamene'i.<sup>84</sup> Most of the members of the Judiciary are conservative both in domestic and in foreign affairs. Alongside the regular Judiciary, *Dadgah-e Yizhe-ye Ruhaniyat* (the Special Clerical Court), founded in 1987, is a powerful instrument for imposing the regime's will on both senior clerics and the rank and file.<sup>85</sup> It serves to intimidate critics of the regime, and has executed more than 600 clerics, stripped thousands of others of their ranks, confiscated bank accounts, and banned books and pictures of the *Rahbar's* critics among the clerics.

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<sup>84</sup> **Mahmoud al-Hashemi** (the original Arabic version of his name) was born in Najaf of an Iranian family from Shahroud (hence Shahroudi) that migrated to the city three generations before his birth. Like 'Ali Taskhiri, as an "Arabized" Iranian, he was widely seen as an outsider by Iranians, and his appointment to the Head of the Judiciary met with not a little opposition, *inter alia* due to his broken Persian. His position, however, exemplifies an important aspect of the Iranian political dynamics: As an Iraqi, he was the first chairman of the Iranian proxy Iraqi Shiite opposition, SAIRI. He became close to Khamene'i during the early days of the Revolution and Khamene'i even published two religious tracts in Persian that were, according to sources, actually written by al-Hashemi. The fact of his being non-Iranian, however, made him a convenient ally to Khamene'i, since unlike other senior clerics, al-Hashemi had no power base of his own that could be expected to "toe the line" of the *Rahbar*.

<sup>85</sup> It was headed by Ay. Reyshahri, and since 1998, by Hoj. Gholam-Hosseini Ezhe'i.

**“Information Gatekeepers” and Filters**

Khamene'i does not speak foreign languages (except for Arabic), and is not a direct recipient of information from foreign media (though it is said that he listens occasionally to BBC in Persian and Arabic and to Israeli Persian broadcasts, as well as reading translations of the foreign press in Iranian newspapers).<sup>86</sup> Therefore, he is almost totally dependent on his “gatekeepers” for both raw information on foreign affairs and its interpretation. Nevertheless, as a former President of Iran, Khamene'i possesses political experience and should, theoretically at least, have the know-how of policy-making, and of the types and sources of information he needs, and where to get it.

The circle of people around Khamene'i who have an influence on him primarily represents the conservative faction: select *'ulama*, the heads of the Revolutionary Guard and the senior members of the *Daftar-e Maqam-e Mo'azzam-e Rahbari* (Office of the *Rahbar*, see below). The inner cabinet of the Office of the *Rahbar* includes Mohammad Mohammadi Golpayegani, Ahmad Mir Hejazi, Mahmoud al-Hashemi Shahroudi (now Head of the Judiciary), and 'Ali al-Taskhiri. There are another half dozen senior advisors in the office, and an estimated six hundred officials who are affiliated with it.<sup>87</sup>

However, while Khamene'i obviously receives from these circles a great deal of the information from which he draws his picture of the world, he has, potentially, access to other channels of information, including those managed by the reformist government.

Many of the Iranian elite have traditional pre-Revolution relations with foreign countries and have maintained these relations since the Revolution. Along with London as the Western capital most favored by the clerical elite, many members of the high-technological elite have close pre-Revolutionary links with their alma maters in the United States, France, Germany, and Pakistan.<sup>88</sup> This background remains the basis for cliques within the various organs of the regime; however, within the more important organs (MOIS, IRGC) most officials have little or no foreign education.

In addition, many of the clerics have strong Arab links to the *'Ulama* of Najaf in Iraq, or religious or economic ties to Lebanon and Syria. Indeed, Khamene'i's “court” has a predominantly large number of Iraqi Shiite clerics, or Iraqi clerics of Iranian origin.<sup>89</sup> This may be due to the fact that they lack a power base of their own within

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<sup>86</sup> An informed Iranian religious source.

<sup>87</sup> For details, see appendix.

<sup>88</sup> For example, Mohammad 'Ali Najafi, the Deputy President, studied at MIT; Foreign Minister Kharazi received his Ph.D. from the University of Houston.

<sup>89</sup> Among the Iraqi Shiite clerics are the former head of *Ahul Bayt*, **Ay. Ali Taskhiri**; the Head of the Judiciary, **Ay. Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi**; the head of *Ahul Bayt*, **Sheikh Mohammad Mahdi Assefi**; the Chief Prosecutor, **Ay. Abdolnabi Namazi**; the leader of SAIRI, **Ay. Baqer al-Hakim**; **General Mohammed Reza Shams (Naqdi)**, former head of Intelligence and Security for the LEF and currently a senior intelligence officer with the Iranian General Staff. Many Iraqi clerics were honored retroactively with Iranian birth certificates attesting to their Iranian nationality from birth. Examples of “Persianized Iraqis” include Ay. Mahmoud Hashemi-Shahroudi (whose original name was al-Hashemi but was Persianized, see above); Defense Minister Ali Shamkhani (born in Iran of Iraqi origin), **Ay. Shaykh Haadi Ma'rifat**, **Ay. Sayyid Kazem al-Ha'eri**. See Alireza Nourizadeh. “Why Does Khamenei Co-opt Iraqi Shiite oppositionists?” *Daily Star* (Lebanon) 18 March 2003.

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the Iranian clerical establishment and, hence, are dependent on him. These links are not limited to the formerly expatriate Iranians (such as Shahroudi) but include a large number of former senior members of the IRGC who served in Lebanon and maintain links with Lebanese factions.<sup>90</sup> It is not clear how great a bearing these links have on the strategic thinking or considerations of these individuals; however, it would be safe to assume that they provide these individuals with potential access to foreign sources of information and the cultural tools to interpret such information.

To what extent is Khamene'i "intelligence-driven" in his decisions? Or is his ideological predilection so inflexible that even strategic information does not have a real influence on his decisions? Most of the evidence points to the "Byzantine court" nature of the *Rahbar's* immediate vicinity; sources have pointed out that his staff prefers not to deliver him "bad" news – even going to the lengths of preparing alternative versions of newspapers. If this were so, it would have an adverse effect on his decisions. While it cannot be confirmed, an analysis of Khamene'i's reactions to events seems to bear witness to a certain delay in digesting current events.<sup>91</sup> Nevertheless, the Iranian press on its own is informative enough to allow Khamene'i a relatively good picture of public opinion and domestic developments.

Rafsanjani is widely considered in Iran as the closest person to Khamene'i; the two have a long history of both cooperation and personal rivalry. Their rivalry reached the point that Khomeini had to intervene and mediate between them; however, it seems that today Rafsanjani is the only public figure seen by Khamene'i as a possible successor that would maintain the essence of the regime. Rafsanjani's position at the head of the Expediency Discernment Council of the System (EDCS) places him as the second most important person in the regime. The EDCS is an example of an institution that has been adapted to serve as a power platform for its incumbent head. Until Rafsanjani's appointment, it had been a relatively small and insignificant body created to solve disputes between the Parliament and the Guardians Council. After Rafsanjani failed in his bid for re-election to the *Majles*, he received backing from the *Rahbar* to increase the authority of the EDCS. Rafsanjani continues to play a role in the formulation of defense and foreign Policy. Foreign dignitaries frequently meet him before or after they meet Khamene'i and he expresses – with a ring of authority – positions on a variety of domestic, foreign and defense issues.

Beside Rafsanjani, there are a number of influential figures that provide information and support the decision-making process – all of them identified with the conservatives.<sup>92</sup> Most of the *Rahbar's* religious, defense, and security advisors (such as the Commander of the IRGC, Rahim-Safavi, and his deputy) also maintain a high degree of revolutionary zeal. They have limited secular education and an extremely biased and uninformed picture of the outside world. These individuals usually limit themselves to providing information and advice in their own fields.

The advisory process that precedes decision-making at the level of the *Rahbar* is

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<sup>90</sup> For example, **Ali Akbar Mohtashemi-Pour**, the architect of Iran's involvement in Lebanon, who continues to play a role in the links with Hezbollah, Abbas Abdi, Said Hajarian, and Iranian Ambassador to Damascus, Hussein Sheikholislam.

<sup>91</sup> Khamene'i seemed to have taken a longer time than other senior figures (such as Rafsanjani) in digesting the implications of the American decision to go to war in Iraq. His statements had a tendency to continue to be one stage behind the actual events.

<sup>92</sup> See appendix.

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neither the King's Council nor an Islamic *Shoura* (in which each member gives his opinion on all matters on the agenda and then the Head decides). The mechanism seems to resemble the ideal of the Shiite infallible Imam who arrives at his decisions through divine inspiration and asks for tactical advice on various matters. This too is indicative of Khamene'i's attempt to shape his leadership according to the mold of the *Rahbar* that was initially aimed at by Khomeini.

According to various reports, Khamene'i's "court" is very much influenced by the traditions of the Iranian monarchy. Great importance is accorded to seating procedures, advice is asked for but not volunteered, and disagreements are not aired in a plenum out of deference to the position of the member of the forum whose opinion is being disagreed with. Unlike the Shah's meetings with his principal advisors, however, the *Rahbar* has no formal framework (official cabinet) for these consultations. He may invite whomever he wishes and forego the advice of others.

Alongside the gallery of senior regime officials who comprise Khamene'i's informal circle of advisors, he maintains an official Office of the *Rahbar* (*Daftar-e Rahbar*) that is comprised of a varying number of senior and middle rank officials. Many of these officials had served in the "government" side of the regime and had been pushed aside by their reformist rivals (*Velayati, Fallahian*). Others, such as 'Ali Akbar Nategh-Nouri "grew up" with Khamene'i and owe him absolute loyalty. The Office of the *Rahbar* is comprised of a number of bureaus: religious affairs, internal security and intelligence, domestic politics, foreign affairs, military affairs, and *tablighat-e islami* (Islamic propaganda, propagation of Islam, e.g. export of the revolution).

Each of these bureaus consists of clerics who, among other duties, prepare *fatwas* for the *Rahbar*.<sup>93</sup> The *Daftar-e Rahbar* also coordinates approximately two thousand "Imam's representatives" – loyal middle-ranking clerics spread throughout the various branches of the regime and abroad who serve both as informants and commissars. These "eyes, ears, and mouths" of the *Rahbar* are charged with maintaining the religious, political, and ideological purity of those bodies, and reporting back to the *Rahbar's* office on deviations. Their proposals have great influence and many of them play important roles in sensitive contacts with Islamic organizations.<sup>94</sup> The *Daftar*<sup>95</sup> also co-ordinates the network of regional *Emam Jome'h* (Friday Preachers) and controls a variety of organizations such as the *Sazeman-e tablighat-e Islami* (Islamic Propagation Organization) and other organizations designed to enhance the Leader's religious prestige and political control.

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<sup>93</sup> For the inner cabinet of the Office of the *Rahbar* see appendix.

<sup>94</sup> For example, **Ay. Yousef Tabatabai-Nejad**, who was recently appointed as Imam *Joma'a* in Isfahan (after the dismissal of **Ay. Jallaledin Taheri** for having criticized the conservatives) had served as the *Rahbar's* representative in Damascus where he had been involved in distributing money to Palestinian Islamic *Jihad* and to Hezbollah. Bill Samii, "Changing of Guard in Isfahan," *Iran Report*, 5.34(2002). <<http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2002/09/34-230902.asp>>. Another salient example is **Ay. Hadi Khosro-shahi**, a member of the Council of Experts, who served as Khomeini's representative to the Ministry of Islamic Guidance and then later as representative to the Vatican. Today he is considered close to Khamene'i.

<sup>95</sup> Two examples are the *Haj* and Welfare Organization headed by Ay. Mohammad Mohammadi Reyshahri, *Majma'-e jahani-ye ahl-e beit (Ahul Beit)*, headed until 1999 by Hoj. 'Ali al-Taskhiri, then by 'Ali Akbar Velayati, and since October 2002 by Sheikh Mohammad Mahdi Assefi; and the *Majma'-e jahani baraye taqrib-e bein-e mazaheb-e eslami* (Society for Reconciliation Between the Schools) under Hoj. Mohammad Va'ez-Zadeh Khorasani.

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Two important institutions in the information and decision-making process in the *Rahbar's* office are the *Rahbar's* Intelligence Bureau and the Supreme Council for Intelligence and Crisis Management.<sup>96</sup> These were formed by Khamene'i after Khatami's first presidential victory, in order to guarantee that the *Rahbar* would enjoy a flow of information without the bias of the reformist government. This was obviously deemed a necessity insofar as domestic intelligence was concerned, but it is not clear to what extent this is true regarding intelligence on foreign affairs. It is also widely claimed that the former chiefs of MOIS, Ali Fallahian and Mohammadi-Pour, still have direct influence over MOIS through the *Rahbar's* Office, bypassing the line of command and the Minister, 'Ali Younessi.<sup>97</sup>

### **The Defense and Security Establishment**

According to the Iranian Constitution, the *Rahbar* is the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. There is no evidence, however, that Khamene'i plays an active role in routine defense decisions. At levels beneath the *Rahbar*, the Iranian military lacks unity of command. Iran can be said to have a number of official armed forces, as well as paramilitary forces operating under the auspices of the regime.

One of the well-known stories of the Revolution is that of the refusal of the army to open fire on demonstrators. This behavior should not be seen only in the context of the twilight of the Shah's regime and the assessment of the officers that there was no hope left for the regime. Nor is the "revolutionary" narrative (that the soldiers were good Muslims and hence would not open fire on their brethren) the entire truth. The neutrality of the army in domestic affairs is said to be deeply ingrained in Iranian political culture and an offshoot of the ancient Iranian tripartite concept of governance (King-Clergy; Army; Market) in which each category has its own function. The army's function is to wage war against external threats; it obeyed the Shah until he left Iran, and obeyed the "new Shah" (Khomeini) when he took power.

The *Pasdaran* (IRGC) is officially subordinate to the Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces' Logistics (MODAFL), but in practice takes orders directly from the *Rahbar*.<sup>98</sup> The IRGC is the ideological military arm of the regime, with a remit of preserving the regime. It was created by Khomeini as a bastion of the regime which would execute any order of the *Rahbar*. As such, while it continues to be committed to operations on certain borders (e.g. Afghanistan) its officers are involved in supporting Islamic terrorist groups elsewhere in the Middle East (Hezbollah in Lebanon). It appears that the IRGC is also responsible for the Iranian ballistic missile program and for elements of the nuclear weapons program. Inside Iran, the IRGC is mainly stationed in the major cities where it is earmarked for domestic security operations (quelling riots, etc.). The IRGC has all three corps (Army, Navy, and Air Force, though its navy and air force are much smaller than those of the regular army), and its own intelligence service.<sup>99</sup> In any case, the IRGC is not dependent on the regular military for any major needs.

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<sup>96</sup> The former is headed by Hoj. Ali al-Taskhiri.

<sup>97</sup> According to sources close to clerical circles in Iran.

<sup>98</sup> The present chief of the IRGC (*Pasdaran-e Inqilab-e Islami*), Yahya Rahim-Safavi, is one of Khamene'i's closest advisors and has gone on record with a number of extremely radical statements.

<sup>99</sup> The IRGC intelligence service cooperates with the MOIS and serves as an additional source of information and assessment for the leadership.

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The training of the IRGC tended to underscore the human factor evident in the ideological fervor of the soldiers, while the regular military remained in line with conventional military thinking, and was seen as less ideologically reliable. The years of the war with Iraq and the general passage of time since the Revolution seem to have assuaged this distrust, and the doubts the regime may have regarding the loyalty of the troops *in extremis* are similar in both cases. Nevertheless, the predominance of the IRGC has endured, and service in the IRGC remains a road to senior posts of the regular military, but not vice versa.

Other military and paramilitary forces include the *Basij* Militia, a national guard assigned to the control of domestic unrest; and the Law Enforcement Forces (LEF), nominally subordinate to the Ministry of Interior.<sup>100</sup> In practice, the LEF acts mainly in conjunction with the clergy. It pushes a radical anti-reform agenda.

The regular military (*ARTESH*) is subordinate to the MODAFL and to the Minister of Defense as Supreme Commander.<sup>101</sup> Its remit is to protect the national borders. Consequently, its units are mainly stationed on the Iraqi and Afghani borders where they perform routine defense tasks (prevention of infiltrations, military intelligence, etc.).

The **Ministry of Intelligence and Security** (MOIS) is officially subordinate to the President.<sup>102</sup> In practice, the heads of MOIS have traditionally been close to the *Rahbar*. While the MOIS has lowered its radical profile since the disclosure of its involvement in a series of ideological murders of reformists, it is said that factions within it are still run by the radical former head, ‘Ali Fallahian, out of the Office of the *Rahbar*.

Formally, the principal figures in Iran’s defense and security community are the *Rahbar*, the President, the Defense Minister, the Commander of the IRGC (who also holds a rank of minister), the Minister of Intelligence, and the Chief of the LEF. Among these, conservatives or former IRGC officers fill all the operational posts. They include first of all, Khamene’i himself, the commander of the IRGC. The second is the incumbent Defense Minister ‘Ali Shamkhani, who began his military career (after a “revolutionary career” against the Shah’s regime) in the IRGC. After having served as IRGC Minister, he was transferred to the post of Navy Chief and then to Defense Minister by Khamene’i. The third is the Chief of LEF, Gen. Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, who served until his appointment as the commander of the IRGC Air

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<sup>100</sup> The former, *Nirou-ye Moqavemat-e Basij* (Basij Resistance Force), was initially a home defense force, but is used by the IRGC as an offensive and crowd-control force. The latter, *Nirouha-ye Entezami-ye Jomhuri-ye Islami*, is not only a police force as such, but serves as a religious police. Its independence of the Ministry of Interior has been seen in a number of incidents since Khatami took office.

<sup>101</sup> The position of Supreme Commander of the regular Army was created by Khamene’i in October 1998, in the midst of the Afghanistan crisis. This reflected an upgrading of the regular army vis-a-vis the IRGC. Until then the IRGC had a Supreme Commander and was clearly senior to the regular army.

<sup>102</sup> *Vezerat-ye Ettelaat va Ammiyat Keshvar* – except for the short-termed MOIS minister under Khatami, Qorban-Ali Dori Najafabadi, all MOIS ministers have had strong revolutionary credentials and were identified with the conservatives.

## *Governance and Decision Making*

Force.<sup>103</sup> While he is not outspoken in internal political affairs, he is commonly assumed to owe his allegiance to Khamene'i, and stood as the conservative candidate for President against Khatami. The fourth is the commander of the regular army, Hasan Firouzabadi, who also serves as the *Rahbar's* personal adviser on military affairs.<sup>104</sup>

The formal structure notwithstanding, the de facto decision-making forum for national security matters includes an additional circle of senior regime figures. Some former senior military and security officials also continue to play a role behind the scenes in formulating defense policies. This informal structure is especially relevant in issues involving specific regions (Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi Arabia) in which these individuals have past experience. The *Rahbar* is also advised by an intelligence bureau inside the Office of the *Rahbar*, and by the Supreme Council for Intelligence and Crisis Management, which reports directly to him.

Defense issues are discussed in the framework of the **Supreme National Security Council** (SNSC). This institution was founded in the course of revision of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The SNSC was established with an aim of watching over the Islamic Revolution and safeguarding the Islamic Republic of Iran's national interests, as well as its sovereignty and territorial integrity. The SNSC is a consultative rather than a decision-making body, its composition and the fact that the President heads it, and that its membership is functional rather than personal (with the exception of the Secretary, Hasan Rouhani, who is closely associated with Khamene'i), precludes any real authority. Rouhani's authority is evident in the fact that he is the main negotiator with the AEIA in the dispute with the international agency over Iran's nuclear program. The Council may, however, serve as a channel for informing the *Rahbar* of the military's concerns and limitations.

According to Article 177 of the Constitution, the responsibilities of the SNSC are as follows:

- To determine the national defense/security policies within the framework of general policies put down by the Leader
- To coordinate political, intelligence, social, cultural and economic activities in relation to general defense/security policies
- To exploit material and non-material resources of the country for facing internal and external threats

The Supreme National Security Council has also established sub-committees, including a defense subcommittee and a national security sub-committee. They are headed by the President or one of the members of the SNSC appointed by the President. Limits on the authority and functions of the sub-committees are laid down by law, and their organizational structure is approved by the SNSC. Approvals of the SNSC are enforceable after ratification of the Leader.

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<sup>103</sup> In this capacity he had some involvement in the Shihab-3 project, declaring that Iran's SSM capabilities are "a tool for defending Muslim Ummah and the oppressed nations," *Tehran Times* 6 Aug. 1998 in: <[http://www.iran-e-azad.org/english/boi/09610811\\_98.html](http://www.iran-e-azad.org/english/boi/09610811_98.html)>.

<sup>104</sup> Firuz-abadi is an old friend of Khamene'i and is also considered close to Rafsanjani. His military credentials are dubious. He holds a M.D. from Mashhad University and was involved in organizing support for the war effort during the Iraqi war. Farrokh Moini, *Who's Who in Iran* (Meckenheim: MB Medien und Bucher, 1990).

## *Iranian Defense Doctrine and Decision Making*

The members of the SNSC include:

- Heads of the three branches of government (executive, legislative and Judiciary) – Khatami, Haddadade, Shahroudi
- Chief of the Supreme Command Council of the Armed Forces (SCCAF) – Gen. Hassan Firouzabadi
- The official in charge of the Planning and Budget Organization (PBO) – Reza Aref
- Secretary nominated by the Leader – Hassan Rouhani. The Chief of the Secretariat of the Council is Ali Rabei, nominated by Khatami.
- An additional representative of the *Rahbar*– Minister of Foreign Affairs (Kharazi)
- Minister of the Interior – Abdolvahed Mousavi-Lari
- Minister of Information and Security – Ali Younesi
- Representative of the IRGC – Yahya Rahim-Safavi<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Data regarding the SNCS is taken from Asghar Schirazi, The Constitution of Iran – Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998) 96–97.



# National Security Doctrine

## Main Principles

The goals of Iran's defense policy are the defense of the borders of the nation; maintaining the Islamic regime; guaranteeing perceived security interests in Iran's close neighborhood (the Gulf, Central Asia and the Middle East); and export of the Islamic revolution, both as a religious duty and as a security asset and deterrent factor.

Iran has never published a public "White Paper" regarding its national security doctrine. This is not surprising in light of the opaqueness of defense planning in the regime and the natural cultural tendency towards dissimulation. Nevertheless, from various public statements and reactions to security developments, it is possible to decipher the main ideological principles and domestic drivers of such a doctrine and to draw an outline of its main principles. These were originally drawn up by the founder of the Islamic republic, Ayatollah Khomeini, who shortly after having come to power was forced, by the war with Iraq, to formulate the regime's ideological and practical attitudes towards war in general, and war with a Muslim country in particular. Among these principles a number of requisites can be identified. These include **self-reliance** in achieving strategic capabilities, **recognition** of Iran's regional status and legitimacy, and an ability to maintain a credible deterrent posture so as to deny the opponent escalation dominance.<sup>106</sup>

These principles have developed since the end of the Iraq-Iran War and Khomeini's death. Many of the events in the region over the last fifteen years strengthened the basic premises and principles that were already in place. The Iranian defense establishment, though, is highly aware of changes that take place in the regional strategic balance. Therefore, the existing Iranian defense policy is the end-product of a sound evaluation of Iran's geo-political interests and theaters of strategic value, a constantly updated identification of the countries or entities which pose a threat to those interests. Last but not least, all these are weighed on the backdrop of religious and ideological principles and ingrained values of Iran's national self-image and perception of reality, as discussed above, within the unique decision-making system that characterizes the Iranian regime.

The fact that there is no unified command of the Iranian defense and security establishment colors the threat perceptions of the various factions of this establishment. Nevertheless, the following description represents, as much as possible, a wide consensus of the various elements of the defense and security establishment, and the regime.

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<sup>106</sup> Escalation dominance is defined as the capability to escalate a conflict to a level where an adversary cannot respond, i.e., to threaten a greater and greater price for defiance while denying the adversary the ability to counter-escalate. Harry G. Summers Jr., The New World Strategy: A Military Policy for America's Future (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995) 231. This is perceived in Iran as the American tactic of compellence which may be used against Iran

## **Threat Assessment**

### **Main Theaters**

Iran's geographical position, with no less than fifteen immediate neighbors, is both a source of, and a factor exacerbating, the Iranian proclivity to sense insecurity and multiple threats. Iran's first and foremost strategic and economic area of interest is the naval commercial route of the Persian Gulf. The Tanker War (1984-1987) during the Iran-Iraq War brought home to Iranian policy-makers the vulnerability of this route. Maintaining this route is therefore the primary economic and strategic interest of Iran that brought it to draw a hypothetical red line according to which, as long as it succeeds in exporting half of its oil production, the situation is tenable. The American naval presence in the Gulf is therefore a major strategic threat, and any restriction on Iranian freedom of naval movement in the Gulf is considered a threat to the economic lifeline of Iran.

The need to diversify routes of marketing oil and gas leads Iran to put more importance on the Caspian Sea routes and consequently, upon the Southern CIS Caucasus countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Here too, however, Iran finds itself up against American pressures on these countries to limit their economic relations with Iran. In Central Asia, Iran projects its capability to support or retract support from radical Islamic forces. The "carrot" in this context is the Iranian offer to participate in a regional defense system in the Caucasus that will include all Caucasian countries (Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia), as well as Iran, Russia, and Turkey.<sup>107</sup> Here too it seems that the concept was put forth in order to offer an alternative to American involvement in the region.

A third region that holds high security value for Iran is the western borders of the Indian subcontinent – Afghanistan and Pakistan. Both countries are seen by Iran as part of an ethnic Persian expanse. The Hazari region between Herat in the West (on the Iranian border), Tajik- Persian speaking Tajikistan, and Urdu-Persian speaking Pakistan is widely perceived as an area of Iranian influence and strategic interest. The interests derive however, not only from vague ethnic ties, but also from a variety of more concrete reasons. During the Taliban era, when Afghanistan was under the rule of a hostile anti-Shiite regime, Afghan refugees swamped the eastern provinces of Iran (mainly the area of Mashhad), and drug trafficking to and through Iran was a major problem. Iran had projected force towards Taliban-ruled Afghanistan through occasional military exercises and veiled threats of possible intervention. Since the American operation in Afghanistan, Iran views this country as an extension of the American threat, replacing a weak, primitive adversary under international sanctions, with the presence of a superpower. The nuclear "outing" of Pakistan, the rise to power of "Ata-Turk inspired" General Musharef in Islamabad, and the Pakistani decision to support the United States in the war against terror, all raised the strategic importance of Pakistan for Iran.

The Iranian security interest in the heart of the Arab Middle East (*Mashraq* or the Levant) is linked to Iran's search for regional status. As opposed to the other regions, involvement in the Israeli-Arab conflict does not enjoy a consensus within the Iranian body politic, and it may be assumed that there are similar differences between various parts of the security establishment.

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<sup>107</sup> Foreign Minister Kharazi to IRNA, 1 May, 2003.

## **Threat Countries**

### **Iraq**

Iraq is the primary threat in Iran's strategic assessment. This perception derives from historic and geographic factors, and not necessarily from the policies of the incumbent regimes in the two countries. The animosity towards Iraq reached new heights during the Saddam Hussein regime. The Imposed War has remained, fifteen years after coming to an end, a national trauma. The destruction wreaked by the missile war, the number of casualties, the sense of victimization due to having been attacked by chemical weapons, the bitter pill of Khomeini's unexplained decision to accept the ceasefire, prisoners of war who returned only on the eve of the first Gulf War, the uncountable missing in action, and stories of Iranian clerics in Najaf who had been slaughtered by the Ba'ath regime – all these left relations with Iraq a festering wound and preserved Saddam Hussein's position at the apex of Iran's "axis of evil." When, on the eve of the first Gulf War, Iraq sent its air force to Iran for safekeeping, Iran made no pretenses of returning the planes to its neighbor; they were repainted and kept as partial compensation for the damage caused to Iran during the war.

The destruction of the Iraqi regime by the United States (seen in Iran as the result of lack of popular support for the Saddam regime) changed the equation.<sup>108</sup> The American occupation of Iraq is unanimously perceived by both conservatives and reformists as a major threat to Iranian national security, as it makes the U.S. into Iran's neighbor, and Iraq into another arm of the U.S. An American-oriented Iraq is seen as a step towards an American campaign against Iran and an even greater threat than the previous threat of the (internationally restrained) Iraqi regime.<sup>109</sup> Iran's strategic concern now is the fear of an American invasion (either directly or by proxy), or subversion through the American presence on Iran's borders.<sup>110</sup>

Iran has always viewed Iraq as an artificial compilation of various ethnic groups put together to suit British colonialism (including British interest to limit Iranian influence in the region). Nevertheless, today Iran has a vested interest in the preservation of Iraq's territorial integrity. This is due to the greater evil of ethnic-motivated changes in national borders, which may free the "genie" of separatism and irredentism in Iran itself, primarily among Iranian Kurds, but also among the Azeris.<sup>111</sup> Kurdish sovereignty is also seen as potentially forcing Turkey into a more active role in Northern Iraq and a possible conflict with Iranian interests.

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<sup>108</sup> See Khamene'i's sermon to the Iraqi people in Arabic, "The American aggressors defeated the Ba'ath regime. This is what we expected regarding a regime which is not supported by the people but by oppressive instruments and apparati." *al-Arabiya* TV, Dubai, 11 Apr. 2003.

<sup>109</sup> See Rafsanjani in a Friday sermon, "the presence of the United States in the region is worse than Saddam's Weapons of Mass Destruction." *IRNA*, 7 Feb. 2003.

<sup>110</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of the Iranian view of Iraq after the war, see Kayhan Barzegarr, "Iran and the New Iraq: The Challenges Ahead from an Iranian Perspective," [Pugwash Meeting No. 293, 11<sup>th</sup> Pugwash Workshop on the Middle East, Prospects for the Peace Process](http://www.pugwash.org/reports/re/me/ME2004/me2004barzegar.htm), 4–7 Mar. 2004, Amman, Jordan, <<http://www.pugwash.org/reports/re/me/ME2004/me2004barzegar.htm>>.

<sup>111</sup> One of the latest jokes circulating in Iran is based on the custom of adding the name of a holy city to the surname of a person who performed a pilgrimage to that site. It is said that the American 101<sup>st</sup> Division was renamed Najafi and Karbalahi after having made the pilgrimage to Najaf and Karbala, and that "soon, if Allah wills it, it will bear the name Qomi and Mashhadi..." (source in Iran).

## *Iranian Defense Doctrine and Decision Making*

A frequently mentioned lever of power for Iran in Iraq is its relationship with the Iraqi Shiites. The sense of kinship between Iran and the Shiites of Iraq is honored more in the breach than in the observance.<sup>112</sup> True, the Iranian Shiite clerics are intimately linked to the *Najaf Hawza* in Iraq, where many of them studied and lectured.<sup>113</sup> Since the Revolution, the very position of the *Shi'ah* in Iran as the state religion, and the policies of the Islamic regime strengthened Qom, bringing many of the Najafite schools – teachers and students alike – to move there. Nevertheless, during the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s the Iraqi Shiites not only did not rebel against Saddam Hussein's regime, but many of them even fought with exceptional valor.

Iran has developed leverage over the Iraqi Shiites through proxy organizations such as SCIRI (The Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq). Since the American occupation of Iraq, Iran has made use of these ties with the Iraqi Shiites in order to foment opposition to the American presence, but has not relinquished links with the Shiites inside the new pro-American regime. However, Tehran does not see Shiite dominance in a new Iraqi regime as necessarily strengthening its own influence in that country; the threat that such dominance poses for the other ethnic groups in Iraq would have a destabilizing effect that may even strengthen the centrifugal forces in Iraqi society – an undesirable development in Iranian eyes. It also has the potential of reviving Iraqi Shiite claims to religious independence or even predominance over Qom, as well as rekindling Arab “Shiaphobia” and strengthening the American case against Iran (due to Iran's links with the Shiites).<sup>114</sup>

### **Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States**

On the religious-ideological level, the Wahabbi (and by definition anti-Shiite) regime of Saudi Arabia is Iran's primary ideological adversary, as it challenges not only the Iranian Islamic regime's claim to leadership of the Islamic world, but its very religious legitimacy. The Saudi control over the holy cities is a perennial bone of contention. The liberation of the Shiite population of Iraq and pictures of the Shiite revival in Southern Iraq have already aroused dormant anti-Shiism among fundamentalist Sunnite circles in the Gulf. For these very reasons, Iran has tried to engage the Gulf states in a political-strategic dialogue for reducing tensions,<sup>115</sup> has refrained from instigating provocative religious acts in Mecca, and has launched diplomatic offensives for improving relations with these countries.

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<sup>112</sup> The most authoritative source on this subject with many points of current relevance is Yitshak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>113</sup> Many of them did so because of their political convictions and fear of persecution by the Shah. The same reasons brought many Iraqi Shiite clerics to flee Najaf during the Saddam Hussein regime and to move to Qom. The many examples of those whose biographies include a decades-long sojourn in Iraq include **Ay. Khomeini** himself, **Ay. Janaati**, **Ay. Oz**, **Sayyid Ali Husaini Sistani**, **Ay. Sayyid Sadiq Husayni Rouhani**, **Ay. Ali Rasti Kashani**.

<sup>114</sup> *Al-Hayyat* presents a convincing case for Iranian concern of the ramifications of a revival of the schools of Najaf and Karbala under a pro-American regime. *Al-Hayyat*, 25 Jan. 2003 & 4 Feb. 2003.

<sup>115</sup> This effort goes back to the early days of Khatemi's first term in office. See Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran–Saudi Arabian Relations and Regional Security*, Adelphi Papers No. 1996. Also: Real Admiral Abbas Mohtaj, *IRNA* in English, 8 October, 1997: “The naval forces of the army and the IRGC are prepared to cooperate with the forces of the other Persian Gulf states to bring sustainable security, peace and stability to the region...[the] tension [in the region is] the consequence of the foreign powers' illegitimate presence in the region, especially that of the USA.

## *National Security Doctrine*

The intimacy of American strategic relations with Saudi Arabia, the American military presence in the Kingdom, and the Iranian perception of Saudi predilection towards the relationship with the United States as against Arab or Islamic considerations are all sources of strategic concern to Iran. American naval-military relations with the other Gulf states are also seen in Tehran as potential levers for destabilizing the Islamic regime. As seen from Tehran, the Persian Gulf has been transformed into a virtual American Gulf. Iran attempts to block this threat by demonstrating its power in the Gulf through displays of land and naval military capabilities towards the Gulf states (including seizing of Gulf state shipping vessels that “encroach” on Iranian waters), incitement (of the Shiites in the eastern coast and of radical Sunnite movements in general), involvement in terrorist attacks inside Saudi Arabia (the attack on the American base in Khobar),<sup>116</sup> and demonstration of a deterrent strategic capability.<sup>117</sup>

An indicative case in point of the Iranian-Gulf states relationship is the dispute over the two Tunb islands and Abu Mussa Island. After Iran laid claim to the islands in 1971 the dispute was dormant for most of the Shah’s era. Since 1992, Iran has taken steps to assert its sovereignty over the islands, first by occupation of Abu Mussa (previously governed by an agreement signed in 1971 between Iran and the UAE, which gave equal rights to both countries). The Gulf countries accused Iran of using the island to set up a naval missile system to control the Hormuz Straits. Whether these claims are true or not, the Iranian policy towards the islands serves as a “stick” towards the Gulf States.

At the same time, Iran offers the Gulf states the alternative option of security cooperation between the regional forces in the Gulf in lieu of their reliance on the United States.<sup>118</sup> The basis of such cooperation, according to the Iranian paradigm, would be a multilateral security mechanism of the Gulf countries within the framework of Iranian predominance, and advancement towards the final goal of precluding the United States from involvement in the defense mechanisms of the Gulf.<sup>119</sup>

### **The United States and Great Britain**

The United States is the principal ideological, and therefore strategic, enemy of the Iranian regime. Nevertheless, on the military level, Iranian force building is not geared to dealing with the U.S. threat as such, and the Iranian political and military leadership is well aware of this inferiority. Iran has no strategic capability to pit

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<sup>116</sup> The attack took place on 25 Jun. 1996 when a truck-bomb exploded in an American military base in Khobar, near Daharan on the eastern coast of Saudi Arabia. Nineteen Americans were killed. The American investigation, including direct FBI interviews with six of the terrorists who were arrested by the Saudis, uncovered a link between the Saudi and Lebanese terrorists and Iran, including through Lebanese Hezbollah, the IRGC, and MOIS. Louis J. Freeh, “Remember Khobar Towers,” Wall Street Journal, 20 May 2003.

<sup>117</sup> For example, the military presence on the Tunb islands and unilateral acts on Abu Mussa Island.

<sup>118</sup> In a meeting in Oman on 14 Jun. 2004, First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref-Yazdi called for the creation of a collective security system. He described collective security and economic cooperation as the path to regional development and tranquility, adding that the presence of foreigners in the region causes instability, as events in Iraq proved. RFE/RL Iran Report 7.20 2004.

<sup>119</sup> See Foreign Minister, **Kamal Kharazi**, IRNA 18 Feb. 2003; Minister of Defense **Shamkhani** to al-Oods al-Arabi, 14 Mar. 2003.

## *Iranian Defense Doctrine and Decision Making*

against the United States. According to Defense Minister Shamkhani, the United States was forced after 11 September to change its defense posture from one of “absolute deterrence” (based on strategic defense initiative, national missile defense and theater missile defense) to one of initiatives for “neutralization of regional, naval and 'structural' threats.”<sup>120</sup> The American strategy is seen as taking the initiative, imposing coalitions to bolster its actions, and putting a high premium on low casualties.

The American scheme today is seen as an attempt to use its military, political, and economic influence to force other countries to downgrade their relations with Iran and to surround Iran with hostile regimes in Turkey, Central Asian Muslim countries, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq, for the purpose of toppling the Islamic regime in Iran, and installing a secular pro-American regime in its place. By so doing, the Americans will be free to implement their master plan: achieving hegemony in the Middle East, particularly in the oil-rich areas of the Gulf.<sup>121</sup> Iran sees the destruction of the Iraqi regime as a step in this strategy. The American *causus belli* for attacking Iraq (WMD) is seen as applicable to Iran as well, and it accentuates its apprehension.<sup>122</sup>

The demonization of the United States as the Great Satan by the conservatives makes pragmatic assessments of military and ethical constraints of the Satan difficult, since the Satan has no such constraints. The resolve that the United States showed in taking internationally controversial steps in Afghanistan and Iraq, including her willingness to absorb criticism for a high rate of collateral civilian casualties, was seen in Tehran as proof of the futility – or even counter-productivity – of attempting to deter the United States through rhetoric alone, or of depending on international pressure to restrain and strengthen the image of the United States as a “lawless cowboy” who has assumed the task of the “world sheriff,” and has no respect for international legitimacy. The election of a Republican administration served to enhance this image. While Carter and Clinton, the two Democratic Presidents since the Iranian Revolution, were considered by Iran as hesitant and reluctant to use brute force to impose the will of the United States, Republican administrations are perceived as a more credible threat to Iranian interests.<sup>123</sup> President Bush is widely portrayed as a Texan and a scion of a “cowboy family,” a fearless hooligan adventurer in his first term of office, a President who failed to prosecute the war against terror and therefore needs a victory in order to be re-elected.

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<sup>120</sup> Shamkhani to Eqtesad-e Iran [Economy of Iran]; International Financial & Economic (Monthly) 2001: 22–23. Translated in: <<http://www.netiran.com>>.

<sup>121</sup> See the Commander of the IRGC, Rahim-Safavi: “The Americans are looking beyond Iraq... to boost and complete their military encirclement of the region. This belt is threatening the Central Asian nations, Russia, Middle East Arab states, Iran, India and China and this is a big satanic plan.”. IRNA, 5 Apr. 2003.

<sup>122</sup> See Iran Daily 9 Feb. 2003; Kayhan, 18 Feb. 2003; IRNA 9 Feb. 2003. Iran presents the issue of WMD as an “excuse;” even were it to be proven that Iraq has disarmed, the United States would find another excuse.

<sup>123</sup> According to an Iranian businessman, it was widely believed at the time in Iran that the decision to free the American hostages upon the inauguration of President Reagan was not meant as an insult to President Carter, so much as it derived from Iranian assessment that a Republican President would be far less hesitant to take action against Iran were the affair to draw on. The bazaar gossip of the time claimed that the decision was taken in the wake of a Reagan message that if the hostages were not freed immediately, his first orders will be to bomb Tehran. Such a threat makes the concession politically correct in Iranian eyes.

## *National Security Doctrine*

The Iranian image of Great Britain has been described above. The view of Britain as a strategic enemy, however, is ambivalent. While London is perceived by many as pulling the strings in Washington, British foreign policy has been much more amenable to Iranian interests than would be expected in the light of the Anglo-American alliance. The general tone of Anglo-Iranian relations is conciliatory, British Foreign Ministers have visited Tehran and there is wide political support in Britain for bypassing the obstacles in their relations. In Iranian eyes, therefore, Britain is at once both a strategic threat in conjunction with the United States, and a strategic asset as a country that may restrain American adventurism against it.<sup>124</sup>

### **Europe**

In Iran's quest for international legitimacy, the European Union plays a pivotal role as a natural counterbalance in the West to American predominance in the Middle East and the Gulf. The progress in European integration and the establishment of the EU and its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) raised high hopes in Iran for the development of an independent European stance in the region. The Iraqi crisis, it seems, holds two contradictory lessons for Iran: on the one hand, the divergence of American and European interests and positions (mainly U.S. vis-à-vis France and Germany, two of the closest West European countries to Tehran); and on the other, the irrelevance of the European protest in preventing unilateral American action. Within Western Europe the Iranian leadership holds Germany in relatively high esteem and despite good relations with France has not forgotten France's close relations with Iraq.

### **“Expanded NATO”**

NATO is seen by Tehran as a strategic tool used by the United States to receive international legitimacy for its own policies of aggression. The history of the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO)<sup>125</sup> is the reference point for Iranian perception of the expansion of NATO, as directed against Iran. It would provide the United States with a political and military foothold in three areas of strategic importance to Iran – the Middle East/Persian Gulf; Central Asia, and the Caucasus – and with control over most of the world's energy resources. This control would afford the United States important leverage for economic warfare against Iran.<sup>126</sup>

### **Russia**

Russia's increasingly intimate relationship with NATO is also a matter of concern for Iran. Russian-led naval exercises in the Caspian Sea were seen by some in Iran as a potential backdoor for NATO involvement. Iranian strategy against this danger includes: military presence in the area (through naval exercises) and a veiled threat of subversion, along with proposals<sup>127</sup> for the de-militarization of the Caspian and a South Caucasus security system that would include only the countries of the region.

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<sup>124</sup> The United Kingdom, House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, Iran Third Report for Session 2003–2004, HC 80, 19 Mar. 2004.

<sup>125</sup> CENTO, founded in 1958, included Iraq and Pakistan, as well as Turkey and Iran, and was formally abolished only after the Iranian revolution in 1979.

<sup>126</sup> See speeches by Rahim Safavi, the commander of the IRGC quoted in RFE/RL Iran report.

<sup>127</sup> “The NATO Prague Summit” Special Report by RFE/RL Regional Analysis, 19 Nov. 2002: 18-19.

## **Israel and the Jews**

The basic cultural and religious attitude towards the Jews of Iran has been discussed above. The State of Israel is perceived as both an extension of the Jews, and hence an illegitimate political entity occupying Muslim lands, and as a strategic threat to Iranian interests. In its latter capacity, Israel enjoys significant strategic advantages: a nuclear capability with long-range delivery systems capable of reaching Iran, and American support. Israel is perceived as a major actor in the American arena and in the forming of American policy towards Iran by virtue of a strategic alliance with the United States, as well as the economic and political support of World Jewry. It is also viewed as a potential competitor with Iran in the Gulf countries, in case of peace. As such, it is a compound threat: first, as a nemesis in its own right, second, as a willing agent of the United States. Any attempt to harm Israel, even through proxies, is weighed with an eye to possible Israeli retaliation, with U.S. support as a political given. At the same time, Iran's active sub-conventional "proxy war" against Israel provides a number of strategic advantages: it strengthens Iran's claim to leadership of the Muslim world and involvement in the heart of the Arab Middle East, keeps Israel preoccupied so as to prevent it from initiating a conflict with Iran (over WMD), and inhibits Israel's efforts to improve relations with the Arab world and especially with the Gulf states.

Nevertheless, the conflict with Israel usually takes a back seat to Iran's more pressing regional conflicts.<sup>128</sup> Occasional voices in Iran cast doubts about whether Iran's preoccupation with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is in Iran's interest. Iran, it is claimed, should not be "more Palestinian than the Palestinians," and there is no real difference between the conflict of the Muslims of Palestine with Jewish Israel, that of the Muslims of Kashmir with Pagan India, and that of the Muslims of Chechnya against Christian Russia.<sup>129</sup> This argument however, has had little real impact even on the public positions of the reformists. For them, it is not a central issue, and even those who present the above case are aware that crossing swords with the conservatives over it when there are so many domestic issues in dispute, would only serve the conservatives' effort to de-legitimize them.<sup>130</sup>

## **Turkey**

The Iranian attitude towards Turkey derives from a history of cultural anti-Turkish bias and an antipathy towards a Muslim country that is governed by a secular ideology (of Atta Turk) reminiscent of that of the Shah.<sup>131</sup> At the same time, Turkey is perceived as an important strategic counter-balance to Iraq and a hindrance to Kurdish national aspirations that may have an effect on the Kurds of Iran. This, of course, did not prevent Iran from supporting the PKK and its own anti-Turkish Kurdish group.

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<sup>128</sup> This priority was expressed well by a regime-oriented senior Iranian cleric who explained that Iran has to deal first with Najaf and Karbala, then with Mecca and Medina, and only then with Jerusalem (Personal info – Y. Segev).

<sup>129</sup> "More Palestinian than the Palestinians." In Persian, "A soup dish which is hotter than the soup in it," or "More Catholic than the Pope."

<sup>130</sup> See David Menashri, "The New Post-Revolutionary Thought in Iran: The Extent of the Change and the Limits of Power," *Iran and Iraq: Revolutionary Regimes in Distress* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Dayan Center, 2002) 49-61.

<sup>131</sup> See Gokhan Cetinsaya, "Essential Friends and Natural Enemies: The Historic Roots of Turkish-Iranian Relations," *MERIA Journal* 7.3 2003.



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Alongside these geopolitical and culture perceptions, Turkey is seen as a potential military threat and ally of Iran's most dangerous enemies. First and foremost, Turkey's membership in NATO raises the scepter of a potential Turkish involvement in any American plan against Iran (the Turkish refusal to support the American operation in Iraq was not enough to reassure Iran). Turkey also maintains close technological and military cooperation with Israel. The Turkish-Israeli agreement on the use of Turkish airspace for training of the Israeli Air Force was seen by Tehran as possible Turkish complicity in an Israeli plot to destroy Iranian nuclear facilities. Notwithstanding, Iran pays little strategic attention to Turkey.

As a result, the Islamic regime in Iran is deeply involved in attempts to influence Turkish fundamentalist circles, and Iranian intelligence has been implicated in a number of terrorist attacks in Turkey, including direct command over the Turkish Hezbollah organization.<sup>132</sup>

### **Pakistan**

As with Turkey, Iran's threat perception of Pakistan is linked to that country's position as a pro-American Muslim state with strategic (nuclear and SSM ) capabilities. To this must be added the Iranian support of Shiite militias in Pakistan and a long-standing conflict of interests in Afghanistan (due to the Pakistani support of the anti-Shiite and anti-Iranian Taliban regime). The Pakistani stance on the war against terror strengthened Iran's perception of threat from the East. On the other hand, Pakistan was a source of important elements for Iran's nuclear weapons program. This was achieved through Iran's special relationship with high-level individuals in the Pakistani defense establishment (such as A.Q. Khan).<sup>133</sup>

### **Threat Scenarios**

The Iranian defense doctrine is geared for a variety of security threats including foreign aggression, war, border incidents, espionage and sabotage, regional crisis as a result of proliferation of WMD, organized crime, and state-sponsored terrorism. The main scenarios in which these threats are seen as potentially emerging are:

- Domestic unrest bordering on revolution – The regime assumes that this contingency could ensue in the wake of “U.S. psychological warfare aimed at creating panic inside the country and undermining the political will and the spirit of resistance within the political system.”<sup>134</sup>
- Subversion by other neighboring states is also seen by Iran as a scenario

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<sup>132</sup> Ely Carmon, “Islamic Terrorist Activities in Turkey in the 1990s,” Terrorism and Political Violence 10.4 1998:101-121

<sup>133</sup> David Albright and Corey Hinderstein, “Documents Indicate A.Q. Khan Offered Nuclear Weapon Designs to Iraq in 1990: Did He Approach Other Countries?” <<http://www.isis-online.org>> 4 Feb. 2004.

<sup>134</sup> Defense Minister Shamkhani, in an interview to Siasat-e Rouz, 18 Feb. 2003. Translation by MEMRI in:<<http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP50203>>.

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that may lead to escalation and direct conflict.<sup>135</sup> Potential sectors for such unrest are the youth (students), ethnic groups (Kurds, Azeris, Baluchis, Turkemans, Khuzestanis), and disgruntled traditionalist clerics in Qom and Mashhad.

- Military action by a neighboring country as a proxy of the United States, or directly by the United States. The main candidates for proxies in this scenario are Israel, Iraq (under a new pro-American regime), Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. Such an attack might target suspected WMD sites.
- Independent military action by an enemy (Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan, or Israel).
- Instability in a neighboring country, which would lead to mass movement of refugees into Iran and would destabilize the border areas. This is not only a threat regarding Afghanistan, but also a fear of a breakdown in Pakistan or instability in Armenia, Azerbaijan or Turkey.

### **Self Assessment**

Iran is well aware of the inadequacy of its conventional military power – particularly in the theaters of air, air defense, and sea. It has no significant force projection capability, even in terms of the first circle of its strategic interests. Nationalistic boasting aside, the Iranian leadership is well aware of its inferiority in the latter theater. The Iranian air and naval capability to counter any real (American) threat to its presence in the Gulf is small, and any boosting of its naval capabilities in the Gulf is only liable to encourage the Arab Gulf countries to turn to the United States for defense.

Another significant facet of Iran's self-assessment is its sense that if it ever faces a direct American threat, it will not receive support from any of its neighbors. The Arab support of Iraq (except for Syria and Libya) during the Iran-Iraq War is deeply embedded in the Iranian national memory, as is the fact that even the Arab countries closest to Iran did not support it in its dispute with the UAE over the three islands. The passivity of the Arabs vis-à-vis the American attack on Iraq was also perceived in Tehran as an important lesson: if the Arabs did not rally to defend an Arab state, if Iran were to be attacked, it would not be able to expect support from regional parties.

Despite close relations with Syria, Iran does not expect Damascus to risk its own security interests to defend it. Many politicians and intellectuals in Iran complain<sup>136</sup> about the lack of reciprocity in the relationships with the Arabs: Sudan and Lebanon

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<sup>135</sup> Ministry of Intelligence and Security Chief Hojatoleslam Ali Yunesi claimed (20 Dec. 2002), "The enemy intends to take advantage of ethnic and religious differences in the country." He reiterated this (2 Jan. 2003), claiming, "Foreign intelligence services are trying to set the stage for tribal and religious wars. During the past year, the [MOIS] agents have discovered and neutralized a large number of these plots inside the country." Iran Report RFERL 6.1 2003. <<http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2003/01/1-060103.asp>>.

<sup>136</sup> See Ayelet Savyon, "Iranian Intellectuals Against Khamenei – Dr. Qassem Sa'adi: 'Your Regime Is Illegitimate, Your Foreign and Domestic Policies Are Failing and Despotism'" MEMRI Inquiry and Analysis Series 125 2003. In an open letter to Khamene'i, **Dr. Qassem Sho'leh Sa'adi** criticizes Iran's foreign policy, which prefers nurturing revolutionary interests in the Arab world to the "real" strategic interests of Iran. Syria is criticized for not standing by Iran's side against the UAE on the issue of the disputed islands; Lebanon is castigated for not repaying debts; Russia is put to task for having concluded secret agreements with the Caspian Sea countries which preclude Iranian interests.

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owe Iran millions of dollars; and Syria, which was generously compensated by Iran after the war, does not support Iran in inter-Arab forums.

The regime does its utmost to project the impression that it expects the military and the people to remain loyal against an external threat. Nevertheless, the growing tension between the reform-seeking population and the regime may raise some questions as to whether this assessment is true or justified. Recent polls conducted by the Expediency Council itself showed that forty-five percent of the respondents wanted changes in the political system, even if this were to come about through foreign intervention.<sup>137</sup> As regards to an internal threat, however, it is becoming more and more clear that IRGC personnel are split along the same general lines of the Iranian public.<sup>138</sup> Iranians are quick to draw on the events of the Revolution to point out that unlike in tribal societies like Iraq, where it is easy to use soldiers of one origin to commit mass murder of citizens of another tribe, Iranian nationalism inhibits such behavior.

Therefore, as long as it lacks a credible WMD capability, the defense establishment will probably continue to demonstrate considerable prudence, and seems to refrain from proposing military options that may lead to a military confrontation. This seems to be true today of both the regular military and the IRGC, despite the latter's belligerent rhetoric.

### **The Defense Doctrine**

#### **Strategic Principles**

In the light of Iran's geographic sphere of interests and strategic assessment, its National Security Doctrine contains both proactive (offensive) and reactive (defensive) components.

**On the proactive level**, Iran strives to achieve the status of a regional superpower in the Persian Gulf, in the Arab world, in Central Asia and in the Afghani-Pakistani context. It also maintains an ideological obligation to "export of the revolution" to other Muslim countries, and especially to Shiite populations.<sup>139</sup>

The Iranian defense doctrine is defined by the Minister of Defense as "Strategic Deterrent Defense." Iran endeavors to deter strategic rivals, and counters their

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<sup>137</sup> *Yas-I*, 22 2003, quoted in *Iran Report* 6.27 2003, RFERL <<http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2003/06/27-300603.asp>>.

<sup>138</sup> See William Samii, "Factionalism in Iran's Domestic Security Forces," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, February 2002. It is said that Khatami won 73% of the vote in the IRGC units in 1998 (Interview with Hoj. Mohammad Abtahi, *al-Wasat*, 22 Jun. 1998 8, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 5 Oct. 1998) and a similar percentage in the 2002 elections. This should not have come as a surprise since the IRGC troops are recruited from the general public and therefore naturally reflect the existing splits within Iranian society. The feeling that the IRGC has become less reliable in the eyes of the conservatives is given by the fact that it was the LEF and the *Ansar* Hezbollah and not the IRGC that were charged with quelling the student riots.

<sup>139</sup> The extent to which "export of revolution" is a declared policy is problematic. On the one hand, it is part and parcel of the formal ideology of the state, the task is incorporated in the very existence of various organs (such as the IRGC and the *Qods* force), and in practice there is not one country in the Middle East that has not exposed Iranian involvement in domestic subversion. On the other hand, the reformist branch of the regime goes to pains to disassociate itself from any such involvement.

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deterrence through radical rhetoric, implied willingness to endorse “popular resistance” (e.g. terror) and by projecting the image of an indomitable nation that cannot be intimidated or deterred. In this context, the regime promotes – in public statements, in propaganda, and in indoctrination – the national narrative of the readiness of the Iranian public to absorb the most extreme damage, and of the Iranian soldier for self-sacrifice. The essence of Iranian deterrence, however, is the threat of total insecurity for the entire region in case Iran is attacked. Iranian statements meant to deter any (American) attack on Iran threaten any aggressor with:

- A non-proportional response and possible escalation.
- Use of terrorism and subversion.
- Willingness to prolong the war and accept casualties.
- Widening the scope of the war to other theaters and drawing in other pro-American countries in the region.
- Closure of the Persian Gulf to shipping of all countries.<sup>140</sup>

Iranian Minister of Defense Shamkhani defined his country’s defense doctrine as based on the following three components: the security environment, hard security means, and soft security means.<sup>141</sup>

The Security Environment is hostile towards Iran, coveting of its resources and, hence, creates a threat of surprise attacks. According to Shamkhani, Iran will not take the offensive, but it must build the capability to withstand a first strike of the enemy and to raise the price of such a strike to a level that would deter the enemy.<sup>142</sup> Another aspect of the security environment is persistent instability. Iran is portrayed as a country seeking stability in a region besieged by areas of turmoil that may export their instability into Iran.

Hard Security Means include the acquisition through purchase or indigenous development of sophisticated weaponry commensurate with that of the perceived enemy.<sup>143</sup> The acquisition of this weaponry has to be based as much as possible on “self-reliance” – a lesson from the trauma of the eight years of war with Iraq.<sup>144</sup>

Soft Security Means include strategic principles, political legitimacy, and the faith of the Iranian people. The doctrine is integrated with the political doctrine of “reliance

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<sup>140</sup> Some Iranians claim that Defense Minister Shamkhani retains a “naval orientation” since his period as Commander of the Navy.

<sup>141</sup> Shamkhani, *Siasat-e Rouz* 18 Feb. 2003.

<sup>142</sup> It should be noted that Iran has very rarely taken the initiative in conflicts with other countries, and has more often than not gone to elaborate maneuvers of deterrence (such as on the Afghani or Iraqi borders) without having allowed the situation to escalate.

<sup>143</sup> Iran emphasizes the importance of possession of arms that are equivalent to those of the enemy. This insistence relates to the Iranian concept of “like for like deterrence.” Therefore, the possession of chemical weapons is dictated by the fact that these weapons are in the hands of Iraq; the acquisition of nuclear weapons will be eventually justified by the fact that Israel, Pakistan (and India) have such weapons.

<sup>144</sup> The Iranian concept of self-reliance and development of an extensive indigenous arms industry is not as extreme as the North Korean *chuche*. It seems to extend only to the area of primary weapon systems. For the implication of the war with Iraq on Iran’s strive for self-reliance, see Michael Eisenstadt, “The Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran: An Assessment” *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 5.1 2001: 1.

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on international relations” and multilateral regional security arrangements in order to reduce to a minimum the excuses for intervention of regional and international powers (i.e., the United States).

The inclusion of international legitimacy among the “soft” strategic measures is significant. Iranian strategic decisions are deeply affected by the Iranian desire for international legitimacy. The ability of the United States to attack Iraq with impunity is regularly explained as the result of Saddam Hussein’s loss of such legitimacy. Therefore, the fear of losing this legitimacy is an important component in Iran’s strategic considerations. It is perceived as a line of political defense against a possible American attack to pre-empt Iran’s achievement of a nuclear capability or reprisal for Iranian support of terrorism. International legitimacy is achieved, *inter alia*, through regional status. Therefore, Iran attempts to promote a Gulf security set-up in which it would play a major part would reduce the reliance of the Gulf states on the United States, and accord regional legitimacy to its own role in the Gulf.

### **Ideological and Religious Principles**

For the Iranian regime, the security of the Iranian nation-state is tantamount to that of the Islamic nation, and there can be no issue that serves Iranian interests but contradicts the wider interests of the Islamic nation. This thinking is also applicable regarding the interests of the Shiites in general and of ethnic Persians.<sup>145</sup> Rafsanjani succinctly expounded the priority of Iranian national interests over ideological duties.

In a candid statement, he admitted that had the Islamic constitution been rewritten, it would have been kept more ambiguous regarding Iran’s mission to combat oppression of Muslims everywhere. These elements would have been written in a “more relative and limited” fashion, and priority would have been accorded to preserving the independence of Iran over fighting oppression.<sup>146</sup> In fact, the commitment of the leadership to *maslahat* (public interest) serves as a safeguard against “suicidal” tendencies of leaders (i.e., *Après moi, le deluge*) by providing a legitimate escape clause in situations when the ante has been raised too high. According to Khomeini's doctrine, while personal martyrdom is a highly valued status in the Shiite and Iranian religious ethos, communal (or national) survival is the supreme consideration.

The Iranian preference for Realpolitik over defense of principles was evident in numerous cases: the lack of response to the Syrian regime’s massacre of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1982, passivity during the suppression of the Iraqi Shiite rebellion after Desert Storm, restraint during periods of tension with the Taliban in Afghanistan (including during Taliban massacres of the Hazari Persian-speaking Shiites and the

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<sup>145</sup> Iran’s Realpolitik basis for defining foreign relations becomes evident in the cases of relations with non-Muslim nations involved in domestic struggles with Muslim, or even Islamic-oriented, insurgents. In all these cases, when there was a conflict between Iranian political interests and the interests of a Muslim minority, the former has almost always prevailed. This was the case regarding the relations with India (despite Kashmir), with Armenia (despite the struggle in Nagorna Karabach), with China (despite the oppression of the Uighur Muslims in Western China), with the Philippines (despite Mindanao), with Malaysia (despite the fact that *Shi’ah* is outlawed in the country), and in Russia (despite Chechnya). Of course, one may add the cases of Muslim regimes involved in conflicts with Islamic terrorism.

<sup>146</sup> “Analyses of Approaches towards Iranian Foreign Policy: An Interview with Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani” *Rahbord*, Journal of the Center for Strategic Research 27 2003: 7-31.

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murder of Iranian diplomats in Afghanistan in Fall, 1998), de facto assistance to the United States against the Taliban during the American invasion of Afghanistan, and standing on the sidelines during Iraqi Freedom.<sup>147</sup>

In all these cases, factors in favor of intervention were counterbalanced by military pragmatism. The leaders in Tehran decided then that discretion is the better part of valor, and refrained from supporting their coreligionists.<sup>148</sup> This traditional Realpolitik was evident in the Iranian position of active neutrality both during the American invasion of Afghanistan against the hated Taliban regime, and during the 2003 American offensive in Iraq. During the second campaign Iranian spokesmen went to lengths to explain that this position derives of deep enmity towards both parties (a pox on both your houses), declared that it would not “back one side against the other,” and concluded that both success and failure of the American operation would be detrimental to Iranian interests.<sup>149</sup>

From the theological point of view, Iran’s attitudes towards war and peace are derived from traditional Shiite doctrines of *jihad* and *difa*’ (defense). The former, according to Khomeini (and traditional Shiite ‘*Ulama*’), is the military struggle for spreading Islam in the world under the command of the (hidden) Imam, while the latter is *keshwar* (war in defense of the country). When war broke out with Iraq, the regime could have sufficed with declaring the war a *difa*. Nevertheless, Khomeini declared it a *jihad*. The terminology used to describe the war left no doubt regarding the sacralization of the war: it was *defa-e mughaddas/jang-i mughadas*’ (holy defense) or *jehad fi-sabil Allah/jehad dar rah-i Khuda* (jihad for the cause of God). As a “defensive *jihad*” with the aim of defense of Islamic lands from infidels (as opposed to a *jihad* for spreading Islam among the infidels, which remains in abeyance until the re-appearance of the hidden Imam), participation in the war is a *fard ‘eyn* (personal religious duty) incumbent on every able bodied Muslim – man, woman, and child.<sup>150</sup>

The religious categorization of Saddam Hussein was no less relevant for the justification of Iran’s war policy. Saddam was branded at various times *zalim* (oppressor), *fasiq* (sinner), *mushrik* (polytheist, pagan), *mulhid* (deviator), *mustakbir* (arrogant), *baghi* (a Muslim who rebels against God or his Imam and, hence in Shiite theology, a heretic), *taghut* (a ruler who defies God) and *kafer* (infidel). These appellatives were not mere rhetoric against the nation’s archenemy; each of them implies a religious duty to struggle against such an evil or to wage *jihad*. Almost all of

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<sup>147</sup> The Iranian disinclination to get involved directly in Afghanistan is also based on a reading of the Russian experience in this country and a long historic acquaintance with the tribal realities in it. As for Iraq, in the wake of the American victory there, Rafsanjani raised the possibility that the relationship with the United States would be determined either by a national referendum (ratified by the *Majles* and the *Rahbar*) or by the EDCS, grounding the idea in Khomeini’s ruling that even basic religious duties may be put aside if the interest of the regime demands it.

<sup>148</sup> For an analysis of the Iranian reaction to the rebellions, see Itshak Nakash, “The Iraqi and the Iranian *Shia’ah*: How Similar are They?” (Hebrew); Meir Litvak, “The Shiite Religious Scholars in Iraq: Historic Remarks”; and Amatzia Bar-Am, “The Shiites in Iraq Under the Ba’ath Regime: Between Acceptance and Revolt,” all in: *Iran and Iraq: Revolutionary Regimes in Distress*, ed. Ami Ayalon (Tel Aviv: Dayan Center, 2002).

<sup>149</sup> An editorial, apropos the upcoming meeting of the Supreme National Security Council on the war, IRNA, 5 Apr. 2003. See also Khamene'i's speech after the fall of Baghdad. Baghdad, 11 Apr. 2003. <<http://www.khamenei.de/speeches/>>.

<sup>150</sup> Saskia Gieling, *Religion and War in Revolutionary Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999) 44–50.

them entail continuing the jihad until the enemy is eliminated or – when applicable – repents. At large, these definitions meant that Iran must “fight them until there is no dissent” (*al-Baqara* II:193, *al-Anfal* VIII:39), i.e., to continue the war until victory.<sup>151</sup> Indeed, Khomeini’s own statements, which reflected his religious reasoning and his absolute authority as *Marja’*, seemed to indicate that the war would go on as long as he lived.<sup>152</sup> Negotiation and peace with such a *kafer* was forbidden by Islam.<sup>153</sup>

The reasoning behind Khomeini’s decision to take the “cup of hemlock” and to accept the cease-fire with Iraq (UNSC Resolution 598) ending the eight-year war in 1988, was also couched in Islamic terminology.<sup>154</sup> The religious spokesmen of the regime delved into the history of the wars of the Prophet to draw upon the precedent of the Treaty of Hudaibiya, which was concluded between the Prophet and the *kuffar* of Mecca in the year 628 in circumstances of Muslim strategic inferiority. Other statements pointed out that the primary mission of the Islamic regime of Iran was *tabligh-e Eslami* (to spread Islam), and the war with Iraq prevented it from engaging in this mission. Finally, it was the principle of *maslahat* (public interest) that prevailed over political prestige. The unique status of Khomeini as an almost supernatural leader also played a role; the wisdom of his decision should be accepted without argument.<sup>155</sup>

### **The Conventional Military**

The strategic principles outlined above are the basis for Iran’s conventional and non-conventional military build-up. Iran maintains a large military (approximately 415,000 men in the regular military and an additional 120,000 men in the IRGC, as well as 350,000 reservists), with a price tag of at least US\$14 billion (not including WMD facilities).<sup>156</sup> This force far exceeds any conventional threat it currently faces; however, its strategic branches (Air Force, Navy) cannot provide a credible offensive military option against any of Iran’s perceived enemies. Iran is aware of this inferiority, and during the last decade has put an emphasis on enhancing the Navy’s capability to achieve dominance in the Persian Gulf by means of long-range (up to 50 miles- 30 km) “fire and forget” capability against naval vessels, mining capabilities, submarines, and on upgrading the Air Force with Russian made MIG-29s and SU-24s.

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<sup>151</sup> Gieling, 80–94.

<sup>152</sup> As mentioned above, a *Marja’ Taqlid* is to be followed by his *Muqallidun* only as long as he lives. A Shiite Muslim cannot be a *Muqallid* of a dead *Marja’*. Ostensibly, this mechanism can open the door for decisions that can open a religious conundrum left by a dead leader. Insofar as Khomeini is concerned, however, the revolutionary regime has set new standards by declaring that no one may abrogate the *fatwas* made by Khomeini. The most blatant example is that of the *fatwa* regarding Salman Rushdie.

<sup>153</sup> Gieling, 165.

<sup>154</sup> The concept *Jaam-e Zahr* (cup of hemlock) — has become a synonym for such a political *volte-face* and for a correct and wise decision made in the face of clear necessity. For example, on 25 May 2003, almost half of the members of the reformist *Majles* signed a petition calling for fundamental political change in the face of the American plan to “change the geopolitical map of the region” and warning that “if this is a cup of hemlock, it should be drunk before our country’s independence and territorial integrity are placed in danger.”

<sup>155</sup> Gieling, 164–175.

<sup>156</sup> Assessments drawn from various experts. For an authoritative breakdown see Shawn Pine, “Iran: Strategic Orientation and Military Assets,” *NATIV* 90.1 2003: 52-59; Michael Eisenstadt, “The Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran: An Assessment,” *MERIA Journal* 5.1 2001.

### **Surface to Surface Missiles**

The Iranian defense establishment has been zealously pursuing the goal of an autarchic weapons' industry. However, due to budgetary constraints, the main focus of this autarchic industry is the production of missiles.<sup>157</sup> A missile capability (under the control of the IRGC) serves Iran threefold: as a substitute for long-range modern aircraft (which Iran cannot purchase due to American sanctions and pressures), as a deterrent vis-à-vis Iraq, Israel, and the United States (mainly American presence in the Gulf), and as a symbol of Iran's membership in the club of regional superpowers possessing a long arm, and thus, a country that must be duly respected. The strategic logic behind developing a non-conventional and long-range ballistic missile capability as an ad hoc substitute for chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear weapons (CBRN) munitions is not subject to a divisive debate within the defense establishment. The immense popularity of the achievement of a long-range missile capability injects a domestic factor into the strategic decision regarding the use of such weapons.

### **Non-Conventional Weapons**

Iran's strategic inferiority, a sense of humiliation at the hands of enemies during the last century, and the Iraqi drive for nuclear weapons, all prompted Iran's effort to acquire WMD, primarily nuclear weapons.<sup>158</sup> Iran's conventional inferiority, as mentioned above, can only be rectified by a non-conventional capability. The acquisition of nuclear weapons is also presented (albeit rarely) as part of a possible strategy against Israel.<sup>159</sup>

The reasoning in favor of developing a nuclear capability is not purely strategic; however, it is perceived as a "membership card" to an exclusive and respected club of nuclear powers, a status that Iranian national pride considers as much deserved. The existence of other nuclear states in Iran's neighborhood (primarily Israel and Pakistan) exacerbates the Iranian sense of discrimination in the international demand for Iran to forego its own nuclear program.<sup>160</sup> Foreign attempts to deter Iran from achieving this goal are seen as an affront to national pride and have aroused patriotic support of the WMD effort, even if it is not overtly declared. The fact that the United States attacked Iraq despite its having chemical and biological weapons only

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<sup>157</sup> Iran manufactures locally a range of SSMS: Fajer 3 and 5 (50-70 kms), Fazeat (80-150 kms), Zelzal (200 kms), Shihab 3 (1300 kms), Fateh A-110 (200 km). Mershad.

<sup>158</sup> This is Iran's drive, and not the regime's, since the Iranian military nuclear program began in the days of the Shah, was frozen by Khomeini, and then renewed. This chain of events attests to the strength of the nationalist element in the decision.

<sup>159</sup> Rafsanjani in the Friday sermon (14 Dec. 2001): "In their opposition to Zionism, the Muslims must surround colonialism and force the colonialists to decide whether Israel is useful to them. If, one day, the Islamic world will be equipped with the weapon that Israel now holds, the road of world arrogance (*istikbar*) will reach a dead end. One nuclear bomb on Israel will not leave a thing on the face of that land; however, this would cause the Muslims damage as well..." *Kayhan, el-Ofaq*, *Iran News*, 15 Dec. 2001 See translation in MEMRI:

<<http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP32502>>.

<sup>160</sup> See Ali Akbar Velayati to *Qods Daily*, 10-15 Feb. 1998: "[Iran's] neighbors have all sorts of weapons, missiles, armored weapons, air, chemical and biological weapons. They have everything. From Israel to Iraq, from Pakistan to India, from Russia to China, and from Turkey to European countries. They have all sorts of weapons or some of the conventional weapons which form a part of the weapons of mass destruction." <<http://www.netiran.com>>.



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strengthens the Iranian resolve to achieve a nuclear capability, which presumably is the only non-conventional capability which can effectively deter the United States.

Therefore, while Iran officially denies any form of existing CBRN capabilities or programs, it is presented as a conscious yielding of a national right to obtain nuclear weapons for the sake of regional confidence building and stability.<sup>161</sup> Iran has signed the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which allows for relatively intrusive inspection. Upon signing, Iran revealed that it had a chemical weapons program developed towards the end of the Iraq-Iran war, and later dismantled it. It claims that it has no further R&D in this field.<sup>162</sup>

The nuclear policy of Iran is among the most opaque facets of Iranian strategic thinking. Some discussion is going on within the regime regarding the pros and cons and the ramifications of “going nuclear.” This debate cuts across the reformist-conservative lines. The political-strategic arguments against such a policy state that having nuclear weapons would lead the Persian Gulf states to strengthen their ties with the United States and even provide the pretext for further projection of U.S. power in the region, and see a net loss for Iran in choosing the nuclear option.<sup>163</sup> Even the Iranian scientific community has taken part in the debate, pointing at the cost-effectiveness of a military nuclear program and Iran’s technological deficiencies, which make an attempt to achieve a nuclear balance with Israel prohibitive.<sup>164</sup>

The Iranian military (including IRGC) establishment, however, seems to be firmly in favor of keeping the nuclear option viable (but not necessarily openly going nuclear). The Commander of the IRGC, Yahya Rahim Safavi, presented a case against all international conventions on WMD as far back as 1998, and it may be assumed that he has not changed his mind since then.<sup>165</sup> The Pakistani nuclear test in 1998 also brought the issue into the realm of public debate and emboldened the pro-

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<sup>161</sup> Shamkhani stated, “Many Western strategists have underlined Iran's nuclear necessities...[and said that] even if Iran gets close to becoming nuclear, this will be considered as the natural reaction of the Islamic Republic of Iran to achieving its national and regional security... Iran is ignoring parts of its security concerns ... for the sake of broader security goals for all countries. This can be viewed as an effective model that should be followed by other countries of the region. In other words, none of regional countries should be after becoming a nuclear power because this process will meet the effective defense reactions of other players... Therefore, Iran's defense strategy is such that it does not follow the principle of its natural right in meeting its security needs for the sake of its confidence building policy in the region, despite the fact that threatens to the national security of the Islamic Republic all point to a security imbalance. This poses additional threats to Iran... Israel, which possesses nuclear arms... the domination geopolitics of the big powers...In the subcontinent and Southwest Asia, there are nuclear power countries, which are always at loggerheads. Russia as the new ally of the United States in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is a country with high nuclear capability. To this must be added many of U.S. naval fleets deployed in the region that are carrying atomic weapons.” *Jaam-e Jam*, 3.638 & 639 2002. See translation in: <<http://www.netiran.com>>.

<sup>162</sup> Geoffrey Kemp, “Iran’s Nuclear Options,” Geoffrey Kemp, et al., *Iran’s Nuclear Weapons Options, Issues and Analysis*, The Nixon Center Jan. 2001: 1–17, 5-6.

<sup>163</sup> The reformist journal Farda observed, “Deploying such weapons cannot solve any problems for Iran; it will only add to our problems.” (“Azmayesh-haye hasteyee hend va pakistan va chalesh-haye siyasat-e khareji-ye iran”) in “Nuclear Tests in India and Pakistan and Challenges for Iran's Foreign Policy,” Farda 101 1377/1999. Farda was run by Ahmad Tavakoli, a former conservative presidential candidate.

<sup>164</sup> See article by the Iranian physicist Reza Mansoori in *Payam-e Emrouz*, quoted in *Farida Farhi*, “To Have or Have Not: Iran’s Domestic Debate on Nuclear Options,” in Geoffrey Kemp, et. al., *Iran’s Nuclear Weapons Options, Issues and Analysis*, The Nixon Center, January 2001: 35-53, 44-45.

<sup>165</sup> Farida Farhi, 35.

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nuclear lobby to speak out.<sup>166</sup> The strategic argument in favor of nuclear weapons is basically one of deterrence; Iran lives in a dangerous neighborhood and is surrounded by nuclear or potentially nuclear neighbors.<sup>167</sup> The case for nuclearization is openly supported by more radical *‘ulama*, the most outspoken of them Ayatollah Ahmad Janati.

The discussion broke out from behind the scenes in the wake of Iran’s open conflict with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The reformist M.P. for Isfahan, Ahmad Shirzad, claimed (24 November 2003) that contrary to its claims, the regime is secretly preparing to produce weapons of mass destruction, believing that the program would not be discovered. By doing so, he accused, the regime had undermined its position as a peaceful member of the international community. His comments were met with counter-accusations that he was parroting the allegations of “America and Israel.”<sup>168</sup> The debate over the signing of the additional non-proliferation treaty (NPT) protocol also exposed deep differences. Reformist politicians who criticized the regime for having reached the point where Iran was put under pressure (for not having signed the protocol from the beginning) were again attacked by the conservatives for abusing their right of speech, since the issue should be decided by the Supreme National Security Council alone.<sup>169</sup>

The debate – like all other issues of political importance in Iran – has a theological side to it. Upon his accession to power in 1979, Khomeini ordered the suspension of the Shah’s nuclear program on the basis of his legal opinion regarding the Islamic illegality of nuclear weapons. This position was temporary, however, and the nuclear program was revived while Khomeini was still alive, though this position remained in force among many of the traditional “quietist” clerics. The most prominent of these are Ayatollah Montazeri and the reformist, though hawkish, Ayatollah Ozma Yousef Saanei.<sup>170</sup> The latter claimed that a consensus exists among the senior clerics that the prohibition on nuclear weapons is “self-evident in Islam” and an “eternal law” that cannot be reversed, since the basic function of these weapons is to kill innocent people. According to Saanei, this position has been put forth by the *‘ulama* in Qom for years and was behind the Iranian decision not to make use of chemical weapons against Iraq during the war.<sup>171</sup> This position took the form of a *fatwa* by conservative *‘ulama* in Qom (Sep. 2003) stating “Nuclear weapons are un-Islamic because they are inhumane.”<sup>172</sup> This *fatwa* has provided religious justification for a controversial realpolitik decision that was seen by many in Iran as capitulation to American demands – Iran’s acceptance of the additional NPT protocol in Dec. 2003.

It is safe to assume that the present Iranian regime’s acceptance of the NPT derives from its having been inherited from the Shah’s regime. The discriminatory nature of the treaty, and the fact that both Israel and Pakistan are not signatories, would have been enough for Iran not to sign the treaty were it brought up today. The

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<sup>166</sup> For example, reformist politician Mustafa Tajzadeh said, “It’s basically a matter of equilibrium. If I don’t have them, I don’t have security,” and conservative Amir Mohebian, “The Americans say, in order to preserve the peace for my children, I should have nuclear weapons and you shouldn’t have them.”

<sup>167</sup> “*Pasokh beh yek soal*” (Answer to a question), *Farda* 101 1377/1999. Quoted in Farida Farhi, 47.

<sup>168</sup> *Iran Report*, RFERL, 6.47 2003. <<http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2003/12/47-081203.asp>>.

<sup>169</sup> *Iran Report* RFERL, 6.39 2003. <<http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2003/09/39-290903.asp>>.

<sup>170</sup> Interview of Montazeri and to *Die Welt*, 9 Nov. 2003.

<sup>171</sup> Interview of Saanei with Robert Collier, *San Fransico Chronicle*, 31 Oct. 2003: A-1.

<sup>172</sup> Mustafa al-Labbad, “Pressuring Tehran,” *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 656 2003.

importance that Iran accords to international legitimacy, however, creates constraints that require it to remain within the treaty's bounds. Iran's behavior in the wake of recent discoveries of incriminating evidence of a uranium enrichment program seems to indicate a sense of impunity, which until now was justified. Iran assesses that the U.S., bogged down in Iraq, does not have either the willpower or the international support required to take effective action in the face of Iran's violation of the NPT. It also may indicate that Iran has abandoned the tactic of concealment of its military nuclear program, and is now allowing the inspections to discover evidence. This would allow Iran to take advantage of the sense of urgency that the findings create in order to lower demands (from dismantling to capping of the program), and to extract a higher *quid pro quo* in return.

One of the most comprehensive expositions of the reasoning behind maintaining the nuclear option and of a concept of international relations as seen by the traditional conservative camp can be found in an article by Hossein Shariatmadari, who is considered close to the *Rahbar*. He wrote, "... An irrefutable fact is that despite its imbalanced conflict [with the West] and despite the various sanctions and egotism of the great powers, our country has managed to obtain exclusive, high-level nuclear technology... Iran's transformation into a nuclear power contains a powerful and wide-ranging message... the Europeans and the Americans made various and diverse excuses ... they expected us to ... accept that they are a master cult and race, and that the rest of the world is a backwards race that must work at hard labor and enslave itself... Under the existing circumstances, we face two choices: Either we go along with the pressure they are applying, throw up our hands, and slaughter at their feet the 'daring' and the 'will' that are the foundations for building civilization, honor, and progress – or we do not give in to blackmail, and value and preserve the rare pearl for which we have labored greatly... If our country wants to attain glory in the world, it has no choice but to lay out a strategy in this direction, and to prepare the appropriate means for this strategy... Every country [that] can surprise the other side ... again and again will neutralize a large part of the energy, daring, and initiative of [its] rival, as did the Imam Khomeini in the affair of the insolence of Salman Rushdie and as did [Ali Khamenei] in the Mykonos scandal, in which the German ambassador was expelled and was the last of the European ambassadors who was brought back to Iran. [They] turned belligerence and insolence [against Iran] into something to be paid for, which is also unexpected for the enemies. We must ... defend our right in the face of the wolves of the world of the jungle... We must make the enemies understand that it is inconceivable that instability, insecurity, and shock will be our lot, while theirs will be stability, security, and tranquility."<sup>173</sup>

### **Potential Nuclear Policy**

The “nuclear threshold syndrome” also determines Iranian behavior towards what it perceives as provocations by the United States. The overriding strategic imperative is to buy time. As Iran comes closer to a military nuclear capability, its incentive will grow not to give the United States pretexts to attack and to pre-empt its nuclear status. Iran's notification on the uranium conversion facility, its signing of the 93+2 protocol, and its announcement that it does not plan to manufacture the Shihab 4-5 SSMs (which have a range that would threaten Europe as well), is part of this policy: to incrementally “launder” components of the military program and to calm the political front, while the nuclear option is going into its last stages.

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<sup>173</sup> Kayhan, 12 Jun. 2004 (trans.: MEMRI, *Inquiry and Analysis* 181 2004).

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The discovery of traces of highly enriched uranium in Iran and the subsequent crisis with the IAEA brought the Iranian nuclear policy to a new stage. Conceivably, Iran could have employed legitimate filibusters to prevent disclosure of its program, and relied on its allies in the international community (France, Russia, and China) to forestall any radical response. Its strategy is to buy time, to trade suspension (rather than dismantling) of an illicit, complicated, and problematic uranium route to a bomb, for an almost overt plutonium route under IAEA auspices. The facilities for reprocessing the plutonium are smaller and less obtrusive than the centrifuge project that Iran has committed itself to freezing. Iran has also given notice that it will continue construction of the centrifuges to ready them for use in the future and, in the wake of IAEA condemnation, it announced that it would renew the enrichment process, which had been suspended. A plausible route for Iran may be, therefore, that taken by North Korea:<sup>174</sup> gaining international support for the civil nuclear program in return for freezing an illicit military program, stalling on demands for a roll-back of the military program and then –when the time is ripe – leaving the NPT (giving the three-month notice and the justification of “extraordinary events that jeopardize the supreme interests of the country” as stipulated in the treaty, and thus not being in formal contravention of the treaty, even when withdrawing from it), and using the installations to prepare nuclear weapons.

There is no evidence to the effect that Iran has already crystallized its nuclear doctrine for the period when it will come close to or arrive at a military nuclear capability; one may speculate, however, on the basis of existing Iranian behavior and cultural norms. It seems that Iran will have to decide between four basic paradigms of nuclear posturing:<sup>175</sup>

- Premature Posturing – this would be similar to the Iraqi model in which Iraq, in order to achieve deterrence, made oblique references to WMD capabilities, even when some of these capabilities were not operational at the time.
- Early Posturing – similar to India’s detonation in 1972 of a nuclear device even before it had real delivery capabilities.
- Credible Nuclear Posturing after a delivery system was available – similar to the Pakistani model.
- Implied deterrence – a “bomb in the basement,” similar to the model which is attributed to Israel and to South Africa in the 1980s.

Iranian tactics of nuclear ambiguity may conceivably focus on the issue of Iran’s continued commitment to the NPT. As Iran approaches the nuclear threshold, and if its program is dependent on the reprocessing of nuclear fuel that is under safeguards, in order not to implement the threat it may announce its intention to withdraw from the NPT and bargain for concessions. In an attempt to gain concessions for not actually building a bomb it may also announce its withdrawal and keep the question of producing nuclear weapons ambiguous. The North Korean model will surely be

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<sup>174</sup> For an Iranian analysis of the pros and cons of the North Korean method, see “*Azmayesh-haye hasteyee hend va pakistan va chalesh-haye siyasat-e khareji-ye iran*” (Nuclear Tests in India and Pakistan and Challenges for Iran's Foreign Policy), *Farda* 101 1377/ 1999. Quoted in *Farida Farhi*, 46–47.

<sup>175</sup> See Eisenstadt, 10. Eisenstadt proposes three nuclear options for Iran: remaining silent about nuclear capabilities, declaration, and opacity.

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carefully studied in Tehran in this context. In any case, the position of Iran towards the NPT may become an important element in Iran's strategic arsenal of deterrence after the Bushier reactor becomes operational.<sup>176</sup>

The Iranian choice of a position will be the result of a number of considerations. Nationalistic considerations may push Iran towards exposing its nuclear capabilities – the existence of nuclear neighbors (Pakistan and Israel) may increase the attractiveness of an early deterrence. Such a positioning would probably have a positive “national pride” effect on a large sector of the Iranian public. In spite of the dire consequences for the relations with (some of) the West, it would be virtually impossible for the reformist camp to oppose such a step. Such a step would probably have an additional positive effect from the point of view of the conservative camp: the tension with the West (or at least with the United States) would help them in their conflict with the reformists.

Realpolitik considerations of the relations with the West and with the neighboring Gulf states would have a converse effect. Iran has no interest in precipitating an arms race with the Gulf states or forcing them to seek a more comprehensive (including nuclear) defense umbrella from the United States. These considerations, coupled with the traditional Shiite proclivity to avoid conflict, may strengthen the Iranian tendency towards keeping any nuclear capability “in the basement.”

Another relevant consideration would be Iran's assessments of potential U.S. (and Israeli) responses – Iran is carefully observing the responses of the U.S. and Israel to other cases of rogue states involved in development of WMD. The Iraqi and North Korean examples will be, for Iran, cases in point. In the first case, as things stand at the time of the writing of this report, Iran attributed the American willingness to go to war against Iraq as the result of a mixture of causes: the “open account” of the Bush family, the illegitimacy of the Saddam Hussein regime, proximity to 9/11, and the possibility of linking the Iraqi WMD effort to terror and tacit support of the Arab countries. The Iranian lesson is to ascertain that Iran does not find itself in any of these categories. The North Korean case, on the other hand, is watched as a possible paradigm for Iran to succeed in its development of WMD: the United States lacks regional support for an attack on North Korea, and the activation of the nuclear facility after having withdrawn from the NPT becomes a *fait accompli*. There is no doubt that Iran will be carefully watching the development of American behavior on this issue in the near future.

Finally, religious dictates will play a role. Despite the strategic realities that, in Iran's eyes, impose acquisition of a nuclear capability, Khomeini's unambiguous judgment regarding the immorality of nuclear weapons remains extant. This consideration may strengthen the tendency to keep the capability under covers.

### **Subversion and Terrorism**

Subversion and terrorism have been standard tools in Iran's strategic arsenal since the revolution. They have served as tactical weapons in the struggle against the Iranian opposition, the American presence in the Middle East (Lebanon, Saudi Arabia), and Israel. Terrorism against Israel is also seen as a religious duty (*Tablighi Islami* –Export of the Islam Revolution) enshrined in the Constitution and the works

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<sup>176</sup> See Kemp, *Iran's Nuclear Options*, 14.

## *Iranian Defense Doctrine and Decision Making*

of the Imam Khomeini, and as an important lever for involvement in the Islamic World, from Lebanon and Palestine to Afghanistan, and even as far as China. A far-reaching interpretation of the pivotal importance of “export of revolution” for the Islamic Regime was provided by Rafsanjani, who stated that “revolutionarism” is the essence of the regime; if it loses it – Iran will become “an ordinary country”.<sup>177</sup>

Iranian subversion is not limited to strictly violent means. To paraphrase Carl Von Clausewitz, “religion is an extension of politics by other means.” Iran maintains an extensive network for recruitment of agents of influence through religious institutions (such as *Ahul Bayt*, which specializes in gaining support for Iran among Sunni Muslims, particularly in Asia and Africa), teachers, supply of religious books and services to diverse Muslim communities, radio broadcasts, and other media.

The image of influence that Iran gains from such a pervasive presence contributes by itself to the leverage that Iran wields in the relevant country and to Iran’s deterrent image as able to create domestic problems for the country’s regime.<sup>178</sup> An important point in case is Iranian involvement among the Shiites of Iraq, Bahrain, and the eastern coast of Saudi Arabia, where Iran has maintained opposition front organizations, such as the Supreme Council of Iranian Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, Hizbollah Hejaz, The Islamic Front for the Liberation of Saudi Arabia, and more recently, Moqtada Sadr’s Mahdi’s Army. The most important means of achieving influence, in this context, is not classic subversion through financing and training of small opposition movements. Acceptance of Iranian religious authority by other Shiite communities provides Iran with a reservoir of potential supporters by virtue of their allegiance to an Iranian *marja’ taqlid*. While Iran is engaged in promoting the status of Khamane’i, other Iranian ayatollahs are also used.<sup>179</sup> All these organizations are, in fact, run by Iranian intelligence or the IRGC (including the Qods force within the IRGC, which specializes in subversion).

While acts of terrorism against Israel and the United States have received Iranian accolades, publicly Iran has constantly denied any involvement in directing or funding these acts. At the same time, Iran seems to consciously take advantage of its reputation of willingness to use terrorism as a deterrent against potential enemies. Thus, statements predicting massive Muslim reaction to American policies are, as they were meant to be, properly construed as a threat of terrorism.

This mode of deterrence has been employed recently in the context of the controversy with the West over the Iranian nuclear program. The Iranian concern was translated into a policy of escalation of terrorist threats – some implicit and some explicit – against the United States and its allies in the Gulf and the Middle East. The new Committee for Tribute to the Martyrs of the Global Islamic Movement, linked to the IRGC, announced that “martyrdom operations” are the only way to expel the

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<sup>177</sup> Rafsanjani to Iranian TV, 23 Aug. 1994, BBC ME/2085SI/8, 27 Aug.1994.

<sup>178</sup> See Iranian COS General Hassan Firouzabadi’s warning in Jan. 1999 (in the context of U.S. involvement in the CIS countries) regarding “Shiite Azeris with Iranian blood in their veins,” The NATO Prague Summit, A Special Report by RFE/RL Regional Analysis, 19 Nov. 2002: 19.

<sup>179</sup> For example, after the murder of the head of the Iranian-supported SCIRI Ay. Mohammad Baker al-Hakim, Iran has been pressuring the organization to accept Ay. Kazem al-Haeri (an Iranian cleric) as *marja’ taqlid* and to declare fealty to Khamane’i. RFE/RL Iraq Report, 13 Oct. 2003, <<http://www.rferl.org>>, quoting Alireza Nourizadeh in al-Sharq al-Awsat, 8 Oct. 2003.

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British and American forces from Iraq, and that it has already begun registering volunteers for such operations.<sup>180</sup> Mohammad Ali Samadi, a spokesman for the Committee, declared that the targets are “the occupying American and British forces in the holy Iraqi cities, all the Zionists in Palestine and Salman Rushdie.” The head of another IRGC-linked academic center, The Center for Doctrinal Studies, Hassan Abbasi, was quoted as vowing to “burn the roots of the Anglo-Saxon race” and claiming that “Iran has formed a plan to crumble the U.S.; the plan will soon be passed on to the hands of various militant organizations worldwide in order to attack twenty-nine targets considered to be important for the Americans.”<sup>181</sup> Another seminar convened in Tehran (2 June 2004) brought together members of the *Majlis*, military officers, and religious scholars to discuss Martyrdom Operations and Military and Security Strategies. In this conference, IRGC General Hossein Salami warned “there is not a single safe clod of earth for [the United states] on Islamic soil,” and foretold that “very soon, the American empire will fall before the Muslim empire.”<sup>182</sup> The threat of terrorism was accentuated by the “spontaneous” attack of demonstrators on the British Embassy in Tehran – an attack that could not have taken place without the regime’s blessing.

While the regular military and the Supreme National Security Council are involved in regular military operations with the *Rahbar*, and the IRGC has the last say, the line of command of Iranian-inspired terrorism is less convoluted. The total responsibility for initiating, planning, and executing terrorism against non-Iranian targets is in the hands of the IRGC, the MOIS, and the *Rahbar*. There is no evidence that the President is in the loop of these attacks, though it is doubtful that he would oppose most of them. The list of domestic and foreign policy controversies between the two camps in Iran is long enough, and the reformist camp has no interest in adding to it a clash over actions that are considered as legitimate “export of the revolution.”

As indicated above, Iran sees Israel as a formidable enemy with clear advantages over itself in conventional, non-conventional, and political power. Iran's reply to this asymmetry is the use of non-conventional weapons of terror. This includes attacks on Israel from Lebanon, taking Israeli hostages, support of Palestinian terrorism, and occasional use of international terror to demonstrate a long arm capability commensurate with that of Israel to hit Iran (*mutatis mutandis*). Iran has developed a formidable presence in radio broadcasts to the Shiites in Iraq, which manifests itself in the Iranian ability to foment rioting and attacks against the American presence.<sup>183</sup>

The Iranian insistence on the legitimacy of support of terrorism against Israel notwithstanding, this issue holds important lessons for Iran’s response to conflicts of interest and to messages of deterrence. An effort to deter Iran from support of terror against Israel would be construed by Iran not as “deterrence” but “compellence,” and as an erosion of the status quo of Iran's freedom of operation. The Iraqi precedent and the pressure brought to bear on Syria taught the Iranian leadership that “plausible deniability” no longer provides a political shield against retaliation for involvement in terrorist attacks.

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<sup>180</sup> *Kayhan* 22 May 2004.

<sup>181</sup> *Vaqa-yi Etefaqi-yi*, 25 May 2004; *al-Shark al-Awsat*, 28 May 2004.

<sup>182</sup> MEMRI, *Inquiry and Analysis*, 181 2004.

<sup>183</sup> According to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Iran is the source of 33 out of 59 AM broadcasts and 41 out of 63 FM and TV broadcasts heard in Iraq (as opposed to the U.Ss supported Iraqi Media Network with one TV station and two radio stations.<<http://www.rferl.org>>.

## Summary

Iran's security policy derives from a concatenation of geo-political, cultural and religious factors. Some of its current elements existed during the Shah's era and will probably find their way into the policy of any future regime; they stem from Iran's geographic and demographic location, deep-rooted cultural tendencies, religious mores, and national and religious worldviews. Other factors, however, are "regime dependent," a political and military translation of the particular brand of Shiite Islamic ideology developed by the Imam Khomeini.

Two facets of Iranian identity are dominant in the Iranian worldview: Iranian nationalism and Shiite particularism. Both contribute to a form of siege mentality in which Iran is a loner in a jungle-like world – a battlefield populated by foreigners who covet its land, its wealth, and even its culture, and scheme to deprive Iran of its lawful rights and to exploit it. Consequently, there is in the Iranian worldview a tendency to accept and entertain conspiracy theories and exaggerate the lack of restraints of the demonized adversary (primarily the United States and Israel).

Iran's history and geography dictate much of its national worldview and resultant security doctrine. On one hand, the Iranian self-image is of a nation heir to an ancient civilization that gave the world cultural treasures centuries before Islam, and one greatly superior to the "backward" Arabian culture. On the other hand, Iran's history of occupation and intervention by foreign powers gave birth to a sense of strategic disadvantage, victimization, isolation, and historic injustice. All these result in a thirst for recognition, for redress of historic wrongs, and a penchant for international legitimacy. Iran's isolation during the war with Iraq in the 1980s and the present American occupation of Iraq are both seen as proof of the price of losing international legitimacy.

Iranian decision-making process is basically rational and pragmatic. The regime's radical ideology does not make it prone to extreme brinkmanship. Decision-making on crucial matters of national security is concentrated around the *Rahbar*, together with less than a dozen veterans of the Revolution whose informal status, rather than formal positions, determine their real weight in the decision-making process. An even smaller clique, including some former senior military and security leaders, conducts Iran's defense and security policy and serve as the *Rahbar's* "information gatekeepers." In any case, it does not seem that the leadership suffers from significant cognitive distortions regarding the strategic reality.

The Islamic regime's decision-making leans heavily on traditional cultural modes. The Shiite concept of religious compromise according to a cost-benefit calculus, *maslahat or darurat* (public interest or necessities), is a powerful tool for facilitating concessions in the face of an external threat to the public, or to the future existence of the regime. Iranian cultural "business" behavior too is characterized by high sophistication and brinkmanship. Such brinkmanship, however, is based on calculated risks and does not extend to Saddam Hussein-like "*après moi, le deluge*" tendencies. Ideological and religious constraints exist, but are subject to the pragmatism of Iranian political strategy.



## *Summary*

Iranian military doctrine, which derives from the above, relies heavily on deterrence. Iran sees its security environment as one of persistent instability and hostility, with a possibility of surprise attacks. Geographically, this environment encompasses the waters of the Persian Gulf together with the Caucasus, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the Arab world.

Iran's security doctrine factors in the fact that Iran is a "Persian" nation- state surrounded by mainly ethnically diverse neighbors including traditional ethnic (Arab) and religious (Sunnite) adversaries. Its dependence on oil exports exacerbates the sense of national vulnerability and oppression by the West. The possibility of an embargo of oil exports enforced by an American naval presence in the Persian Gulf has been Iran's strategic nightmare.

The United States is both the object of popular admiration for its material success, and the chief ideological and strategic enemy of the Iranian regime. The current geo-strategic situation of military and economic encirclement is interpreted as a premeditated American scheme to topple the Islamic regime in Iran. Israel and the Jewish people are also viewed with both extreme hostility and high regard. The Jews are seen as diabolically cunning and well organized. Israel is seen as a compound threat: a nemesis in its own right, a major influence over American policy towards Iran, a willing agent of the United States, and a possessor of significant strategic capabilities. Iran's perception of Israel as a threat is a main source of its security interests in Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinian territories.

The Iranian doctrine of Strategic Deterrent Defense is defined to meet a whole gamut of threats ranging from domestic unrest and counter-revolution supported by foreign powers, terrorism and border conflicts, to military action by the United States or by a neighboring country. The first line of defense in this doctrine is "soft security means," i.e., international legitimacy, good foreign relations as well as multilateral regional security arrangements, and support of the Iranian people (unlike the lack of support for the Iraqi regime which was, in Iranian eyes, the cause of its downfall). These measures are augmented by "hard security means": indigenous production of weaponry, conventional deterrence, and long-range (SSM) capabilities.

Iranian deterrence is based on threatening any aggressor with the capability to withstand a first strike and to deliver a "like for like" second strike, a non-proportional response and escalation, a willingness to prolong the war and accept casualties, widening the scope of the war to other theaters, escalation of means (including SSM and terrorism) and drawing in other pro-American countries in the region (Gulf states, Israel), and closure of the Persian Gulf to shipping of all countries. Terrorism ("export of the Islamic revolution") has been a staple tool in Iran's political arsenal since the revolution. Despite formal denials of involvement in terrorism, Iran's reputation also serves as part of its deterrent image.

Iran is well aware of its conventional strategic inferiority in these theaters. In the long run, it depends on acquisition of WMD. The fact that the United States attacked Iraq despite its having chemical and biological weapons only strengthens the Iranian resolve

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to achieve a nuclear capability, which is the only non-conventional capability that can effectively deter the United States. Meanwhile, as long as Iran does not possess a credible WMD capability, the defense establishment will not tend to overestimate the Iranian military option and will probably caution the leadership against involvement in a major confrontation with the United States.

The “nuclear threshold syndrome” also plays a role in Iranian behavior. The overriding strategic imperative is to buy time. As Iran comes closer to a military nuclear capability, its incentive will grow not to give the United States or Israel pretexts to attack and to preempt its nuclear status.

The achievement of a nuclear capability is perceived in Iran not only as a strategic exigency, but also as a well-deserved membership card in a select club to which Iran deserves to belong. There is no evidence to the effect that Iran has already crystallized its future nuclear doctrine. Based on existing Iranian behavior and cultural norms, however, it appears that Iran will prefer implied (“bomb in the basement”) deterrence in order not to lose international legitimacy, but at the same time to be able to brandish a credible deterrent. A direct threat on Iran may raise the attractiveness of nuclear “outing,” in which case nationalistic tendencies may push Iran towards exposing its nuclear capabilities.

## Appendix 1

### Abbreviations and Terminology

#### Abbreviations

- BRF – Basij Resistance Force (*Nirou-ye Moqavemat-e Basij*)  
CE – The Council of Experts (*Majles-e Khobregan*)  
GC – The Guardians Council (*Shoura-ye Nagahban*)  
EDCS – The Expediency Discernment Council of the System (*Majma'-e Tashkhis-e Maslahat-e Nezam*)  
IRGC – Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (*Sepah-e Pasdaran*).  
LEF – Law Enforcement Force (*Nirouha-ye Entezami-ye Jomhori-ye Eslami*)  
MOIS – Ministry of Information and Security (*Vezerat-e Ettelaat va Amniyat-e Keshvar*)

#### Terminology

- Ajami* – a pejorative for Persian among Arabs  
*Ayatollah* – (lit: “Sign of Allah”) – High level of Shiite cleric  
*Ayatollah Ozma* – Highest level of Ayatollah  
*Bonyad* – Foundation  
*Hojat al-Eslam* – (lit: “Proof of Islam”) – medium ranking Shiite cleric  
*Bonyad-e Mostazafan va-Janbazan* – Foundation of the Oppressed. One of the most important Iranian “foundations”  
*Ijma'* – consensus  
*Jame-e Rouhaniyat-e Mobare-e Teheran* – The Association of Militant Clerics of Teheran  
*Majles* – Parliament  
*Majma-e Rouhaniyoun Mobarez* – Association of Militant Clerics  
*Marja' Taqlid* – source of emulation.  
*Mujtahid* – senior cleric who may perform exegeses from the Koran.  
*Muqallid* – One who follows a *Marja'*  
*Rahbar* – Leader, the “Supreme Leader” in Iran.  
*Theghat al-Islam* – (“loyal to Islam”) – lowest rank of Shiite cleric. No longer used.  
*Velayat-e-Faghih* – rule of the religious/legal experts

## **Appendix 2**

### **Institutions Under the Supreme Leader**

Panzdah Khordad Foundation (*Bonyad-e Panzdah Khordad*)

Martyr Foundation (*Bonyad-e Shahid*)

Housing Foundation (*Bonyad-e Maskan*)

Literacy Movement (*Nehzat-e Savad-Amoozi*)

Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution (*Shouray-e Aali-e Enqelab-e Farhangi*)

Islamic Propagation Organization (*Sazeman-e Tablighat-e Islami*)

Land Allocation Committees (*Hay'atha-ye Vagozari Zamin*)

Foundation of the Oppressed and Disabled (*Bonyad-e Mostaz'afan-e Janbazan*)

## *Appendices*

### **Appendix 3**

#### **Persons in the Decision-Making Circle**

**Defense and Revolutionary Affairs:** Defense Minister ‘Ali Shamkhani; The Head of the General Staff of the Armed Forces Hasan Firouzabadi; The Commander of the Revolutionary Guards (*Pasdaran*) Yahya Rahim-Safavi; his deputy, Mohammad Bagher Zoulghader; Commander of the LEF Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf; Secretary of the SNSC Hassan Rouhani. Also consulted in these areas are Sayed Ibrahim Mir Hejazi, Abu Hassan Moein Sherazi, Mahmoud Mohamadi Araki, and Movahadi Kirani. On security and intelligence matters, Former Minister of Intelligence Ali Falakhian and Former Commander of the IRGC Mohsen Rezai are consulted.

**International Affairs:** Former Minister of Foreign Affairs (under Rafsanjani) ‘Ali Akbar Velayati.

**Domestic Affairs:** Head of the EDSC, Former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani; Former *Majles* Speakers Ali Akbar Nategh-Nouri and Mahdi Karoubi; Ay. Ali Mashkini, Ay. Ahmad Janaati, Ay. Taqi Misbah Yazdi, Ay. Khoromabadi, Ay. Mohammad Emami-Kashani.

**Islamic Affairs:** Ay. Mohammad Reza Mahdavi (Kani), Hoj. Hassan Rouhani, Ay. Ahmad Janati, Sheikh Ali Faiz Mashkini, Ay. Abbas Vaezi Tabasi, Ay. Ahmad Janaati Najaf-Abadi, Ay. Mohammad Yazdi (Mohammad Kheirkhah), Sheikh Mohammadi Araki, Hoj. Mohammadi Golpayegani, Sheikh Mohammad Ibrahim Najafabadi (Amin), Ay. Taqi Misbah Yazdi, Ay. Aboulghassem Khaza’ali Khorassani, Hoj. Mohammad Mohammadi Reyshahri, Ay. Sayed Hadi Khosrowshahi.

## **Appendix 4**

### **The Office of the *Rahbar***

**Mohamad Mohammadi Golpayegani\*** – Former senior MOIS official. Chief of the *Daftar*. He served Khamene'i as the head of the important committee of Imam *Joma'a* (Friday preachers). He is also considered to be close to Khatami.

**Ahmad Mir-Hejazi\*** – Formerly deputy head of MOIS. Purported to be the head of security issues in the *Daftar* and implicated in the notorious committee for assassination of reformist oppositionists in the late 1990s

**Hoj. 'Ali al-Taskhiri\*** – An Iraqi Shiite, formerly a member of the leadership of the Iraqi Shiite opposition, SAIRI. He served in the Office of the *Rahbar* under Khomeini as head of international relations of the Office. He is purported to be the head of the “*Rahbar's* Foreign Intelligence Service and the Supreme Council for Intelligence. He is also head of *al-majma' al-'alami lilahl al-bait* (an Iranian organization for spreading the influence of Iran among Sunnite Muslims)

**Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi\*** – An Iraqi Shiite, holds a position in SAIRI.

**Asgar Hejazi** – responsible for the *Rahbar's* agenda (According to well placed sources, he is also the coordinator of the intelligence reports. His friendship with Khamene'i goes back some time and they are said to enjoy smoking opium in each others company.)

**Ali Akbar Nategh-Nouri** – President of the Supreme Institution for Inspection in the *Rahbar's* Office. (Nategh-Nouri was Khamene'i's candidate for President and lost to Khatami. As President of the Supreme Council for Criticism, he oversees the functioning of the government according to the directives of the *Rahbar*. In addition to his close personal relations with Khamene'i, his son in law Rasouli-Mahalati is a member of Khomeini's family).

\* Member of the inner circle of the *Rahbar's* advisors.

## *Appendices*

### **Appendix 5**

#### **Main Institutions in Qom\***

**Madrased-e Haqqani** – a reclusive school headed by Ay. Ahmad Janati, and financed by the ultra-conservative *Haj Mirza Abdollah Tavasoli* (Islamic Coalition Association) from which religious officials of MOIS, IRGC, the Judiciary, and the Special Clerical Court are drawn. These include former Haqqani school director Ay. Qoddusi, who headed the Revolutionary Courts; Ay. Beheshti, a former director of the school who headed the Judiciary; Ay. Mohammad Taqi-Misbah Yazdi (a founder of the school); Hoj. Fallahian-Khuzestani and Hoj. Ali Yunesi (ministers of MOIS); and Hoj. Fallah, Islami and Purmohammadi (now in the Special Court for the Clergy). In MOIS, Hoj. Rohollah, Hoj. Husseinian, Hoj. Mohammad Mohammadi-Araqi (Head of the Islamic Propagation Organization), and Hoj. Hejazi are also Haqqani alumni. The Haqqani graduates act as a “old boy’s club” making sure of each other’s promotions and positions in the regime hierarchy.<sup>184</sup>

**The Imam Baqer College** – The alma mater of many of the IRGC and MOIS.<sup>185</sup> Imam Baker was founded by Ay. Taqi Misbah Yazdi, financed by the Bonyad Mostazafan, and influenced by former IRGC Commander, Mohsen Rafiq-Dost.

**Madrased-e Feyzieh** – One of the most venerable schools. Originally it was the base of Khomeini’s movement; however, the “quietist” bent of the scholars in the school caused its decline since the revolution.

**Dar Rah-i Haq** – run until lately by Ay. Taqi-Misbah Yazdi.

**Madrasat Imam Ali**

**Madrasat Imam Hasan Mojtaba,**

**Madrasat Imam Hosein**

**Maktab-i Islami** – managed by Ay. Makarem Shirazi

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\* According to the official site of the *Hawza*, there are no less than 52 *madrasas* incorporated in the *Hawza*. Most of them are traditionalist and do not have strong links to the regime.

<sup>184</sup> See Buchta, *Who Rules Iran*, 166; “Haqqani: Theology and Thought,” *Iran Report*, 4.17 2001 <<http://www.rferl.org/iran-report/2001/04/17-300401.html>>; “Story of Two Seminaries: Feyzieh and Haqqani,” *Gozaresh, Economic, Political, Social & Scientific*, 120 & 121 2001: 39-44 <<http://www.netiran.com/Htdocs/Clippings/DPolitics/010428XXDP01.html>>.

<sup>185</sup> *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, London, 18 Feb. 2003.

## **Appendix 6**

### **The Military Balance Iran and its Neighbors**

Country*	Personnel	Tanks	APCs + AFV's	Artillery	Aircraft	Warships
Iran	~520,000	~1700	1,570	2,700	207	29
Iraq**	53,600					
S. Arabia	171,500	750	4,300	410	~345	27
UAE	65,500	539	1190	405	47	12
Oman	34,000	151	385	148	29	9
Kuwait	15,500	318	~530	~100	390	10
Qatar	11,800	44	~260	56	18	7
Bahrain	7,400	180	277	48	33	11

\*Data regarding Iran and Bahrain is updated to December 2003. All other are updated to January 2004. Numbers refer to facilities in use only.

\*\*Iraqi forces are composed of the following components: Iraqi national army – 1,000; Civil defense force – 5,000; Facility protection – 36,000; Border guards – 11,600

All data is regarding Iraqi soldiers only

Data taken from: Jaffa Center for Strategic Studies; Middle East Military Balance, in the website:

<<http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/balance/toc.html>>. Last checked 27/5/2004.



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