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**In Search of A Monroe Doctrine:
Iran's Role in the Stability of the Persian Gulf, and the Central Asian
Republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States**

By

Alian Ashkaan Zahedi

**A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of**

Master of Arts

**Department of Political Studies
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba**

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Allan Ashkaan Zahedi

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree
of
Master of Arts**

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ABSTRACT

Since the popular Revolution of 1979, Iran has been in political and economic isolation, and considered a “*rogue*” or pariah state. However, two major events, namely the 1991 Gulf War, and the election of Mohammad Khatami as Iran’s President in May 1997, have set in motion a momentum toward relative economic and political democratization, that could provide Iran with an opportunity to re-establish itself as a member of the international community of states.

This thesis is an analysis of the patterns of change and continuity in Iranian foreign policy since 1968 using the 1823 Monroe Doctrine as a theoretical framework. In so doing, it will demonstrate that Iran’s past and present foreign policy objectives have followed a pattern best described by the three central principles of the Monroe Doctrine; anti-colonialism, avoiding entanglement in extra-regional wars, and maintaining regional stability against external threats by preventing the imposition of alien political systems, through the development of political, economic and military means to promote the national interest of regional powers. Moreover, it will be argued that Iran under President Khatami will play a pivotal role in the future stability of the Persian Gulf, and the Central Asian Republics of the Commonwealth of the Independent States (CIS), by pursuing regional and international policy objectives that would enhance its status and influence.

The first chapter will focus on the history of the Monroe Doctrine, and its transformation and evolution up to 1917, when the US abandoned isolationism in favor of internationalism by entering the War in Europe. It will be concluded that the Monroe Doctrine may no longer seem relevant to the practice of American foreign policy, however, its fundamental principles remain intact and continue to be used by regional powers such as Iran. In the second chapter, comparing similarities between Iranian foreign policy and the principles of the Monroe Doctrine will be accomplished through historical examples of the Iranian foreign policy between 1968 to present. The Year 1968 is pivotal to Iran’s rise as a regional power, due to British decision to withdraw from the Persian Gulf. It will be concluded that the Doctrine can serve as a lense for understanding Iranian foreign policy. Iran’s role in the stability of the Persian Gulf and the Central Asian Republics of the CIS will be discussed in chapters three and four, consecutively. Both regions are considered Iran’s backyard, and are vital for Iran’s economic and strategic interests. It will be argued that Iran will continue to maintain an active diplomatic, economic, and military presence in these regions.

The last chapter concentrates on the US perception of an Iranian Islamic-fundamentalist threat, and will argue that this perception is a myth. Iran’s current political, economic and social conditions demand the restoration of ties with the West and the US. To achieve these goals Iran will embark on improving its international image, and will refrain from the radicalism that had isolated it for over 20 years. Iran aspires to become internationally recognized as an influential regional actor, and possibly a ‘factor for stability’, and in that regard may return to its regional posture under the deposed Shah.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work is dedicated to the memory of my father Colonel M. A. Zahedi, whose endurance and integrity taught me how to overcome obstacles of life. Also to my mother P. Mehmandoost, for her encouragement. My sincerest appreciations to Julie, and to Colin, who agreed to let me use his room as an office, and tolerated daddy's lack of time to play. My love and appreciation goes to my sister Lily, and my brothers Kia and Ramin, who in their own way helped me to get through the hardships of the past twelve years. I would like to also thank Dr. James Fergusson, for his assistance and guidance in completion of my thesis. My special regards to Dr. Ken Gibbons for supporting my enrolment in graduate school. I especially thank Massoud Moradi Taleghani, for patiently helping me in solving the technical problems I experienced during the completion of this work.

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Allan Ashkaan Zahedi

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page	
ABSTRACT	-I-	
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	-II-	
TABLE OF CONTENTS	-III-	
CHAPTER ONE	1	
<i>The Significance of the Concept of the Monroe Doctrine</i>		
<i>in the Foreign Policy of Regional Powers</i>		
<i>-The History of The Doctrine</i>		2
<i>-The Practical Implementation of the Doctrine.....</i>		5
<i>-The Doctrine's Gradual Transformation to</i>		
<i>Internationalism.....</i>		11
<i>-Universal Ideology.....</i>		14
CHAPTER TWO	22	
<i>A Comparison Between the Monroe Doctrine and</i>		
<i>Iranian Foreign Policy, 1968-Present</i>		
<i>-The Post 1968 Iranian Regional Policy.....</i>		23
<i>-The 1979 Revolution, The Iran-Iraq War (1980-88),</i>		
<i>and the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War.....</i>		28
<i>-Comparisons Between The Principles of the</i>		
<i>Monroe Doctrine and Iranian Foreign Policy.....</i>		34

	<i>-Future Direction of Iranian Foreign Policy.....</i>	43
CHAPTER THREE		48
	<i>Iran's Role in the Security of the Persian Gulf</i>	
	<i>-Iran in the Gulf: Between Two Wars</i>	
	<i>(1980-88,1991).....</i>	49
	<i>-The Significance of Iran To Gulf Security.....</i>	53
	<i>-The Need for Regional Security Initiatives.....</i>	63
	<i>-The Regional Options For Iran and the</i>	
	<i>Gulf States.....</i>	66
CHAPTER FOUR		73
	<i>Iran's Role in the Central Asian Republics of the CIS</i>	
	<i>-Iran's Historical Connection to Central Asia....</i>	74
	<i>-The New Contender in Central Asia's</i>	
	<i>Power Game.....</i>	77
	<i>-Russian-Iranian Relations, and Iran's Relative</i>	
	<i>Regional Success.....</i>	79
	<i>-Iran's Foreign Policy Toward Central Asia: The</i>	
	<i>Monroe Principle of Political Independence and</i>	
	<i>Inter-state Cooperation.....</i>	92
CHAPTER FIVE		97
	<i>The Myth of an Iranian Islamic-Fundamentalist Threat</i>	
	<i>-The Presumed Iranian Security Threat.....</i>	99

-Prospect of Iran's Role in Regional Stability....109
-Iran's Monroe Doctrine.....113
BIBLIOGRAPHY120

Chapter 1

The Significance of the Monroe Doctrine in the Foreign Policy of Regional Powers

This Chapter introduces the concept of the Monroe Doctrine as the theoretical basis for this thesis. The purpose of the chapter is to explain the evolution of the Doctrine from non-intervention to periodic intervention, and to illustrate its implicit significance in the formation of the foreign policies of regional powers. It will be argued that the Monroe Doctrine is neither obsolete, nor a relic of the past¹, and its fundamental principles remain intact. Although since 1917 the Doctrine has been occasionally and ritualistically invoked by the United States (US)², it has continued to be implicitly utilized as a practical dictum for developing foreign policies aimed at ensuring national security, regional stability, and international recognition by affluent regional powers³. A historical review of the US foreign policy from 1823 to 1917 demonstrates the impact of the Doctrine on the rise of the United States as a regional power in that period. This historical review will also prove that the

1

Views have been expressed from time to time, that the Monroe Doctrine has lost its relevance and has become an "anachronism" [(Dozer, Donald M., The Monroe Doctrine, Its Modern Significance, 2nd Ed., Tempe, Arizona, US: Published By Arizona State University's Centre for Latin-American Studies, 1976, p.189); and (Smith, Gaddis, The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine 1945-1993, New York, NY, US: Published By Hill and Wang, 1994, pp.211-230)].

2

Smith, p.216.

3

In the following chapter a comparison between the foreign policy principles of Iran -before and after the 1979 Revolution- and those identified in the Monroe Doctrine, will demonstrate the similarities between the two, and will put forth the argument that Iran, currently, is in search of a Monroe-like Doctrine to pursue its regional and global objectives.

Doctrine was not merely a statement of American foreign policy, but an *ideology* based on the universal principle of the right of “*self-preservation*”. In that regard, the principles of the Monroe Doctrine transcend the limitations of time, space, ethnicity, nationality, and political systems. The analysis will conclude by recognizing that although the Doctrine may not be alluded to, especially at the diplomatic level, by the US , its principles remain eternally prudent, and will be adopted tacitly by contemporary regional powers such as Iran.

THE HISTORY OF THE DOCTRINE:

On 2 December 1823, President James Monroe, delivered his seventh annual message to the Congress, and introduced the three main principles on which American foreign policy was to be based. These principles formed the pillars of what became known as the Monroe Doctrine: anti-colonialism, non-involvement in European wars, confronting the threats to the stability of the Continents of America, and the national security of the United States⁴. Tied to the later principle was the notion of cooperation with an extra-continental power, whose national security interest coincided with that of the continental power⁵. In this case, the similarity of interests and an effective naval capability for the defence of the continents against any aggression by the Colonial-European powers, made

4

Smith, pp.21-24; and Stockton, Alfred A., The Monroe Doctrine and Other Addresses, St. John, NB, Canada: Published BY L. & A. McMillan, 1898, pp.1-6; and Norman, Albert, The Monroe Doctrine Extended, 2nd Ed., Norfield, Vermont, US: Published By the Author, 1968, pp.10,12.

5

The outside power in this case was Great Britain, whose concerns over French aspirations to take over Spanish colonies in Latin-America, led to the “*Anglo-American cooperation as a remedy to the continental menace*” [(Rapaport, Armin, Edr., The Monroe Doctrine, CA, US: Published By Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964, pp.70-71); and (Quester, George H., Offence and Defence in the International System, New York, NY, US: Published By John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1977, pp.57, 95-96)].

Great Britain the external component of the Doctrine⁶.

It is worth mentioning that the role played by the British Navy was central to the successful implementation of the Monroe Doctrine in the Western Hemisphere. The British naval commitment to safeguard the waters of the Western Hemisphere provided the US with a much needed protective umbrella to maintain regional stability and its independence. Recognition of this crucial role is important, because reliance on the presence of an extra-regional power that shares similar interests, and is militarily committed to maintain regional stability through tacit cooperation with the regional power, is an essential pillar of the argument of this thesis.

The Monroe Doctrine in its original form was a pan-American doctrine of peaceful coexistence, political independence, and non-intervention⁷. However, these principles were gradually transformed, as successive US administrations interpreted them according to the circumstances of their time. What facilitated various interpretations of the Doctrine was the inherent ambiguity of its text in defining the type of response the US would implement against unfriendly dispositions or "*injurious*" actions to the peace and safety of the American Continents⁸. The Doctrine perceived the imposition of foreign political systems within the Western Hemisphere, by physical means or otherwise, as a threat to US national security and the Continents' stability. Therefore, drawing upon the international norm of

6

Stockton, pp.1-6.

7

Norman, p.10.

8

Any action to promote or to impose a foreign political system by advancement of frontier or otherwise is considered "*injurious*" to Hemispheric and to US peace and safety (Stockton, p.66).

“right of self-protection”, and in order to exercise its independent sovereignty, the US occasionally extended its influence beyond the limits of its territorial jurisdiction⁹.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the non-intervention principle was transformed to “*right of intervention*” under the Roosevelt Corollary (1904)¹⁰. However, subsequent to the US involvement in World War One in 1917, the Doctrine could no longer serve as the single most important element of American foreign policy. The United States’ national security concerns were transformed beyond its traditional isolationism, and were no longer limited to the boundaries of the American Continents. Although national defence remained central to the United States, the evolving nature and the concept of its vital interests required the addition of an internationalist pan-Americanism to the Doctrine¹¹.

“Although the internationalization or pan-Americanization of the principles of the Monroe Doctrine was not envisaged by James Monroe, John Quincy Adams, and their associates in the formulation of the policy, it eventually took that form as a corollary to the Good Neighbor Policy, without, however, losing its character as a policy of national defence.¹²”

Wilsonian internationalism limited the role of the Monroe Doctrine and obliged the US to

9

Dozer, p.31.

10

Perkins, Dexter, A History of The Monroe Doctrine, Boston, MA, US: Published By Little, Brown and Company, 1963, p.346.

11

Ibid., pp.6,14,31.

12

Ibid., p.4.

partake in conflicts outside the Western Hemisphere¹³ leading, eventually, to the extension of the Doctrine to include military intervention, mutual security treaties, economic aid to under-developed nations, and covert operations around the world¹⁴. Nevertheless, the drastic transformation in practice of US foreign policy neither repudiated the validity, nor abandoned the guidelines set by the Monroe Doctrine¹⁵.

THE PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DOCTRINE:

Pivotal to the successful implementation of the Monroe Doctrine was the resolve to engage in multilateral, or unilateral action against threats to hemispheric stability. This required two conditions to be satisfied first: developing what has often been identified as US- backyard policy; and second acquiring the naval (military) capability to fulfill such a policy¹⁶. An example of such policy was the so called “large policy” of President Theodore Roosevelt: a policy of American assertiveness abroad¹⁷. The attainment of the “large policy”

13

Kissinger, Henry, Diplomacy, New York, NY, US: Published By Simon and Schuster, 1994, p.372.

14

The Roosevelt Corollary of 1904, paved the way for a wide range of military, diplomatic, and economic cooperation staged by the future American policy makers to justify military, diplomatic, and covert intervention in other countries, when the security of the US was at stake. The 1954 Southeast Asia Mutual Defence Treaty (SEATO), the 1951 mutual security treaties with Phillipines, Australia, and New Zealand, the 1953 security treaty with the Republic of Korea, the Truman Doctrine of 1947; concerning Greece and Turkey, the Eisenhower Doctrine of 1957; covering all the Middle East, President Kennedy’s decision to stage the Cuban invasion at the Bay of Pigs in 1961, and President Lyndon Johnson’s decision to intervene militarily in the Dominican Republic in 1965, are some of the examples of the Extended Monroe Doctrine (Norman, pp.9-11).

15

Ibid., p.10.

16

Stockton, p.27.

17

Brands, H. W., TR: The Last Romantic, New York, NY, US: Published By Basic Books, 1997, p.238.

depended on US naval preparedness, which required US Navy to establish stronger coastal defences, to maintain a forward naval presence by acquiring bases near the enemy's lines of commerce, and to be able to fight and win a war¹⁸. The United States' need to generate a strong navy to defend the stability of the hemisphere and to protect its own safety, was re-enforced in 1895 when Britain intervened in Venezuela¹⁹. It was no longer prudent for the US to rely on the British pledge under George Canning (1822) to employ the British Navy "against the intrusion of the Allied Powers of Europe"²⁰.

What helped the expansion of the Doctrine was the assertion by President Theodore Roosevelt, that the United States should defend the supremacy of the Doctrine in the Western Hemisphere; "peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must"²¹. In order to uphold the principles of the Doctrine, and to achieve hemispheric supremacy, Theodore Roosevelt pushed for Congressional appropriations for the construction of a first-class navy²².

"As an American I should advocate keeping our Navy at a pitch that will enable us to interfere promptly if Germany [or other European

18

Ibid.

19

Ibid., p.288.

20

The Allied Powers of Europe refers to the Alliance Pact of 1815 between Austria, Russia, Prussia and Britain, that later included France. Britain, however, excluded itself from this alliance in 1822, when it refused to sign on to the joint pronouncement of the parties to the Conference of Verona; to put an end to the system of representative government in whatever country it might exist in Europe (McLaughlin, Andrew C., America & Britain, London, UK: Published By J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1919, pp.91-7).

21

Brands, p.288.

22

Ibid., p.290.

powers] ventures to touch a foot of American Soil”²³. ...A sense of responsibility must guide American foreign policy in other areas. The United States must defend and strengthen the Monroe Doctrine, making certain and un-challengeable the American position in the Western Hemisphere against European interlopers. To this end, among others, the United States must continue to build-up its navy ²⁴.

Roosevelt firmly believed that the Monroe Doctrine was as strong as the US Navy:

“In defending the continental policy of ‘America for the Americans’, the United States will have ample cause for keeping up an efficient navy, and to protect the seven thousand miles of coast line, including ‘the greater Panama Canal zone,’ she will need every ship that our non-military people will authorize to be constructed. It has been well said that the Monroe Doctrine is as strong as the navy of the United States.”²⁵

Further to his intention to affirm the supremacy of the US in the Western Hemisphere, Theodore Roosevelt, in 1904, introduced his corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, declaring that US will henceforth act as the sheriff of North and South America²⁶.

“Chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the US, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrong doing or impotence, to the exercise of

23

Ibid., p.318.

24

Ibid., p.429.

25

Chester, Colby N., “The Present Status of the Monroe Doctrine”, The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Baltimore, MD, US: Published By Williams and Wilkins Company, July 1914, Vol L IV , No.143, p.26.

26

Ibid., pp. 523-24.

an international police power.”²⁷

Roosevelt mentioned that the US has every intention to avoid interference in the affairs of its neighbors, but sometimes the neighboring countries inability to use their independence responsibly would jeopardize US interests and safety:

“The United States has no desire to interfere in the affairs of its neighbors. We would interfere with them only in the last resort, and the only if it became evident that their inability or unwillingness to do justice at home and abroad had violated the rights of the United States, or had invited foreign aggression to the detriment of the entire body of American Nation.”²⁸

Therefore, the US reserved the right to act as the policeman of the Western Hemisphere. The US, however, declined involvement in areas of the Hemisphere that were not proximate to its borders, did not have direct impact on its safety or interests, or were not in need of US protection:

“While the assertion of the Doctrine covers both continents, the measures of the United States in objecting to an invasion of the policy might be much less emphatic in the case where it was attempted in countries as remote as Argentina, Brazil, and Chile than in the countries surrounding the Carribean Sea.”²⁹

An important element in the evolution of the US backyard policy, and expansion of the Monroe Doctrine, was the construction of the Panama Canal in early 1900's, that brought

²⁷

Ibid. pp.257-58

²⁸

Ibid., p.528.

²⁹

Taft, William H., The United States and Peace, New York, NY, US: Published By Charles Scribner's Sons 1914, Reprinted By Kraus Reprint Co., 1971, p.9.

the countries of Central America even more closer to the US sphere of influence³⁰. The American decision to build the Canal was twofold: to use it as a self-supporting commercial enterprise; and to utilize it for military purposes by allowing American naval vessels a short transit from the Pacific to the Atlantic Ocean ³¹. The proximity of the often chaotic Central American and the Caribbean countries to one of America's most vital arteries, posed an even greater threat to US commerce and safety. President Roosevelt made it clear that any attempt by any external power to regain territories in this region would be rendered a violation of the Doctrine and would lead to war:

“The violation of the Monroe Doctrine by territorial aggrandizement [on the part of European powers] around the Caribbean would mean war, not ultimately, but immediately, and without any delay.”³²

Nevertheless, the US acknowledged the right of free shipping in the Caribbean Sea and through the Canal, as an imperative to international trade that should be assured under US protection. Under the provisions of the 1898 Hay-Pauncefote agreement, and the 1903 treaty with Panama, the United States declared:

“The Canal shall be free and open to the vessels of commerce and of war of all nations. The Canal shall never be blockaded, nor shall any right of war be exercised nor any hostility be committed within it. The United States, however, shall be at liberty to maintain such military police along the Canal as shall be necessary to protect it

30

Ibid., p.9.

31

Miller, Gordon, H., The Isthmian Highway: A Review of the Problems of the Caribbean, New York, NY, US: Published By Arno Press and The New York Times, 1970, p.158.

32

Brands, p.469.

against lawlessness and disorder.”³³

With this declaration, the US demonstrated adherence to the principles of the Doctrine , as strong as ever, and although it was willing to share the use of the Canal for commercial purposes, and to uphold international laws concerning the freedom of the seas, it was not willing to give-up the control of the water way³⁴. In turn, the US urged the American countries to take advantage of this opportunity to help the Monroe Doctrine become a greater pan-American Doctrine, as mentioned by Miller in his 1970 book *The Isthmian*

Highway:

“...the American Republics should take advantage of the opening of the Panama Canal, to signalize formally the beginning of a new Pan-American era in which the Monroe Doctrine, which represents the dictum of one government in the family of nations, shall evolve into a greater Pan-American Doctrine, which shall represent the mutual interest and protection of all.”³⁵

The US intention to evolve the Doctrine into a pan-American Doctrine did not receive a warm welcome elsewhere in the hemisphere, particularly among the Central American nations. To these countries the Monroe Doctrine was not a cherished principle, but a unilateral declaration by the US to justify intervention in their internal affairs³⁶. If a crisis were to arise in the region, they argued, it would be the US who would decide to put the

33

Chester, pp.25-6.

34

Brand, p.481-2.

35

Ibid., p.27.

36

Taft, p.29.

matter to arbitration or resort to intervention. The suspicion of US intentions grew as it became unclear as to when its right to self-determination contradicted that of others³⁷. The US, however, claimed that ensuring its peace and safety would not result in territorial expansion or the assertion of its sovereignty over its neighboring countries³⁸. The only reason for US intervention in these countries would be the presence of extra-continental forces, that would give practical control of parts of the hemisphere to an unfriendly nation. This was made clear in a resolution adopted into the US Senate in 1912:

“When any harbor or other place on the American continents is so situated that the occupation thereof for naval or military purposes might threaten the communications or safety of the United States, the government of the United States could not see without grave concern the possession of such harbor or other place by any corporation or association which has such a relation to another government, not American, as to give that government practical power of control for naval or military [or national] purposes.”³⁹

THE DOCTRINE'S GRADUAL TRANSFORMATION TO INTERNATIONALISM:

Despite the regional scope of its origins, the Doctrine gradually moved toward internationalization, as the United States under Woodrow Wilson (1917) distanced itself from isolationism. Wilson developed the Doctrine further by asserting and promoting its affirmative and the positive side⁴⁰. President Wilson reassured others that the United States

37

Brands, p.523.

38

Taft, pp. 38-9.

39

Ibid., p.36; Dozer, p.65.

40

McLaughlin, p.131.

had no desire for the territory or the resources of its neighbors, and was satisfied with its own territorial size and material prosperity⁴¹. He believed the Doctrine's principle of self-determination was not a barrier to cooperative internationalism, and its cosmopolitan nature would allow its adaptation by other countries⁴². The importance of commerce and the rise of economic interdependence in the 1900s was believed to be the new determinant of international relations in the world. International commerce would bring about the harmony of interests by sustaining national prosperity, and, therefore, reduce the possibility of territorial aggression worldwide. This would universalize the principles of the Doctrine, through international cooperation, not by regional isolation⁴³.

There was, however, an obstacle to internationalizing the Doctrine. The Doctrine in its 1823 form did not pertain to extra-continental affairs. This dilemma was rectified once the US realized the necessity of taking on the responsibility bestowed upon it, by the virtue of having become an economic and military power with global interests.

“The variety and extent of the interests which make our entrance into international politics render the United States an ally of consequence for any nation, and a power to be feared and courted. Our past traditions, our present intentions, ... will not alter the work of economic force whose potency has transformed the face of Nature and habits of mankind. With their work [Europeans] we must reckon and realize speedily that our [traditional] unwillingness to recognize and failure to accept these changes will simply plunges us into crises

41

Ibid., p.133.

42

Ibid., p.143.

43

Perkins, p.295, and; Hughes, Charles E., “The Centenary of the Monroe Doctrine”, The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Philadelphia, PA, US: Published By The American Academy of Political and Social Science, January 1924, Supplement to Vol. C XI, No.200, p.17.

whose origins and character we shall not understand and therefore shall not be able to solve, or will leave us at the mercy of foreign nations who have seen their comprehension worth unlimited time and infinite trouble. We too must understand that we may not be taken by surprise; we must prepare to meet the attempts of other nations to utilize these forces, and to mold the international future in their own image for the promotion of their own special interests.”⁴⁴

The US economy in early 1900s grew rapidly due to vast supplies of natural resources and increased industrial capabilities, while the rate of economic growth in Europe diminished as a result of a disparity of resources⁴⁵. Growing interdependence led the US economy to integrate into world market, and increased its dependence on Europe, that was the biggest market for American products. Furthermore, new developments in communications and transportation closed the distance between the continents, and enabled the US to further its interests by seeking new alliances and engaging in economic interaction⁴⁶. The Monroe Doctrine, therefore, was seen as an expedient principle to further the vital interests of the US; maintaining its regional supremacy, economic prosperity, and national safety⁴⁷.

The increased dependency of the Allied powers of Europe on US supplies during World War One (1914-1918), along with the changes in the elements and technology of warfare which rendered “Fortress America” obsolete, made US intervention in the war

44

Quoted from Roland G. Usher, in Usher, Roland G., Pan-Americanism, New York, NY, US: Published By The Century Co., 1915, pp.365-66.

45

Ibid., pp.351-356.

46

Ibid., p.365.

47

Ibid., pp.390-406.

inevitable⁴⁸. When the US entered the War in 1917, it did so to defend its vital interest in Europe, as embedded in the principles of the Doctrine, ⁴⁹. Although this violated the Doctrine's clause of non-involvement in European affairs, new circumstances required the US to abandon isolationism in favor of its growing global interests⁵⁰.

UNIVERSAL IDEOLOGY:

The opinions on the status of the Doctrine, since the United States' adoption of internationalism, has ranged from the presumption of interim retirement to total termination⁵¹. However, the former argument presents a more logical account of the condition of the Doctrine. The principles of the Doctrine have not vanished, but the verbal reference to it became less frequent, especially at the diplomatic level⁵². In practice US foreign policy had evolved since 1823, and had become global in scope. Nonetheless, history witnessed the continuity of the fundamental principles of the Monroe Doctrine. In other words, the enunciation of 1823 was not obsolete, but it had left a legacy by having generated a new mode of thought in the development and implementation of regional foreign policies.

48

Ibid., pp.80-97.

49

Hartman, Frederick, H., Relations Among Nations, 4th Ed., New York, NY, US: The Macmillan Company, 1973, pp.35,420.

50

Ibid., p.420.

51

Smith, p.211.

52

Perkins, p.389.

The Doctrine had presented many regional powers with a maxim, drawn upon the fundamental principle of “self-preservation”, which has been embedded in international law, and the body of many international agreements⁵³. Though the Doctrine has not been admitted into the code of international law, it represents an universally adaptable code of action, and characterized the fundamental feelings, desires, values, beliefs, interests and rights of any nation.

“...The principle which underlies the Monroe Doctrine -the right of self defence, the preservation of peace and safety of the nation- is recognized as an elementary part of international law....[and] it stands as a cardinal policy of our government. The Monroe Doctrine is the one vital Doctrine, which in our intercourse with other nations most vitally controls ‘our peace and happiness’ and ‘our peace and safety’”.⁵⁴

In this regard, the principles of the Doctrine have become an ideology, neither erasable, nor blurred, nor forgotten. The Monroe Doctrine is a policy that expresses the national sentiments, hopes and fears, and the aims of security or aggrandizement which are dominant in the national consciousness of any nation with regional power aspirations. More concretely, the Doctrine “defines national ambitions, interests and the strongly held national convictions, and seeks the assurance of freedom and opposes aggression”⁵⁵. A policy of this magnitude is a proposal of “national sentiments so preponderant and long cherished that

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The right of self-preservation and self-defence have been embedded in the body of international agreements. The UN Charter, and the Charter of the Organization of American States are two example of such agreements (Dozer, pp.219-57).

54

Ibid., pp.30-31.

55

Hughes, pp.7-19.

may be called opinion of the country”⁵⁶, or a national ideology.

Being described as an ideology drawn from universal maxims such as self-determination and self-preservation, the Monroe Doctrine is an “operational policy seeking popular support for the fulfilment of specific objectives”⁵⁷. The emotional appeal of the principles of the Doctrine to general population of any country allows its circumstantial modification and interpretation:

“just as in religion men have often derived remarkably divergent conclusions from identical articles of faith, so too in politics there can be drawn just such deductions as one wishes to draw from the established and cherished maxims of the past.”⁵⁸

The natural function of this policy, like any ideology, is to adapt to different circumstances, and to confront new challenges. This is a familiar fact of politics. Upholding the Monroe dictum of self-preservation, therefore, should be seen as an affirmative policy; eternally relevant, equal and consistent in adhering to security, independence, and political sovereignty⁵⁹.

The Monroe Doctrine “is not merely a shibboleth, nor a golden rule, rather a common sense principle of preserving ones peace and prosperity, that embodies a policy of

⁵⁶

Ibid., p.9.

⁵⁷

Smith, p.21.

⁵⁸

Perkins, p.286.

⁵⁹

Hughes, p.35.

self-defence.”⁶⁰ Such an ideology will continue to be relevant and is integral to the peace and safety of any nation. The Doctrine’s ambiguous nature, and the universality of its maxim (protection of ones vital interests), permits its modification into policy formulations capable of addressing contemporary political and military objectives of regional powers like Iran, irrespective of political systems. The United States could not expropriate the sole interpretation of the Doctrine, because, like all ideologies, it transcends the limitations of time, space, and the boundaries of race, ethnicity, and political systems⁶¹. As a maxim, the Monroe Doctrine not only applies to the US, but it can be adapted to meet the policy requirements of any regional power in search of a security doctrine; justifying immediate, decisive, and effective action against threats to political sovereignty, territorial integrity, and regional stability⁶².

In spite of the fact that American foreign policy is not limited to the 1823 principle, the inexhaustible, axiomatic, and unregulated nature of the Doctrine, makes it a plausible foreign policy alternative for generations of policy makers.

“The future holds infinite possibilities, therefore, the Monroe Doctrine would remain an essential policy to be applied whenever any exigency may arise requiring its application.”⁶³

60

Ibid., pp. 14,34,35,39.

61

Ibid., p.34-6.

62

MacCorkle, William, A., “The Monroe Doctrine and Its Application to Haiti”, The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, July 1914, p.55-6.

63

Hughes, p.19.

The genius of the drafters of the Doctrine in accepting its limitations and not attempting to predict all future possibilities has given the US policy makers the freedom required to manipulate circumstances⁶⁴. As Perkins mentions in his book:

“To think of all possibilities would be limiting and unwise. It is impossible to think of corollaries and phraseology, and clauses satisfying to every susceptibility of the Monroe Doctrine.”⁶⁵

It would not be tactful to expect the definitions of the past to fit the problems of future:

“a principle of action so varied in its application would have been extremely hard to describe, and such discretion [to define the Doctrine] would be limiting”⁶⁶.

Although the Monroe Doctrine was American foreign policy, American foreign policy should not be assumed as limited to the Monroe Doctrine. Neither should its principles be misunderstood as a catch-all policy ⁶⁷. It is imperative to recognize that the principles of the doctrine are best suited to regional powers and their security aspirations.

Despite the claims that the Monroe Doctrine has become obsolete, the fundamentals of its principles remain formidable today, as they did in 1823. The Monroe Doctrine remains a prudent policy option, because it is legally in harmony with such international legal convention as the United Nations Charter, and it is not contrary to national agreements

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Perkins, p.368.

⁶⁵

Ibid., p.364.

⁶⁶

Ibid., p.292.

⁶⁷

Ibid., p.37; Hughes 12-14.

binding under international law ⁶⁸. After all, modern conditions have not changed the necessity of self-defence, and only policy practices have been adjusted to accommodate the changed international security environment⁶⁹. The Monroe Doctrine continues to be a viable national mandate, and capable of justifying a range of foreign policy options from preventive diplomacy to power projection in order to eliminate threats to the “peace and safety” of a nation⁷⁰. The threat to regional and global stability is no longer single and identifiable, but multiple and ambiguous. A world devastated by ethnic conflicts, mounting economic problems, and increasing natural disasters requires flexible policies for global and regional powers to face these challenges⁷¹.

It is in such an environment that the principles of the Doctrine should be echoed as the universal commandments for promoting peace as a goal of international community, but not as the end in itself. Such a universal mandates should include: respect for territorial integrity of all nations, settlement of all national or international disputes through arbitration, minimum resort to use of armed force in settlement of disputes, acknowledgment of the duties and rights of the citizens of other states, and recognizing that ones right should not bear afflictions on the rights of others, avoiding the use of confiscatory and

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Perkins, 365-69.

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Dozer, p.64.

⁷⁰

Ibid., pp. 6,7.

⁷¹

Eksterowicz, Anthony J. and Hastedt, Glenn P., “Contending Foreign Policies: The Clinton Administration in the Post-Cold War Era”, In Depth: A Journal for Values and Foreign Policy, Washington, D.C., US: Published BY The Washington Institute of the Professors World Peace Academy, Winter 1994, p.9.

discriminatory policies, recognizing that such policies strike at the foundation of international relations, the popularization and conservation of international principles such as friendly assistance to promote stability, non-interference with the sovereignty and independence of other nations by territorial or ideological aggrandizement, endeavoring to establish self-control among nations, and promoting cooperation for collective security institutions, attune with the post-Cold War notion of security⁷².

In conclusion, once again, it should be emphasized that the Monroe Doctrine is not obsolete, only the verbal reference to it has temporarily ceased. Nonetheless, the Doctrine persists to be a viable policy option for both global and regional powers, capable of creating congenial regional and international security cooperation, and serving multilateral institutions such as the UN, NATO, and the OSCE⁷³. The maxim of the Doctrine and its corollaries, peace and safety, independence, happiness and prosperity, and justified intervention will continue to serve nations who aspire to peace and tranquility for all mankind.

The invocation of the Monroe Doctrine in modern times would be nominally and most likely initiated by regional powers like Iran, with tacit reliance on, or in cooperation with, an extra-regional power like the US to maintain regional stability in the Persian Gulf. The current security dilemma in the Gulf, resulted from the post-Revolutionary distrust

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The post-Cold War security is a more inclusive and comprehensive notion which includes individual, family, society, state, international system, and humanity as whole. It is concerned with crucial issues such as human rights, economics, the environment, drug trafficking, epidemics, crime, and social justice (Baldwin, D., "The Concept of Security", Review of International Studies, Cambridge, MA, US: Published By Cambridge University Press, January 1997, Vol. 23, No.1, p.5); Dozer. pp.16,17; and Hughes, pp. 15-17.

⁷³

Dozer, p.71; Perkins, pp. 270-71,286, 293.

between the US and Iran, and parallels the experience of US-Britain relationship in 1823. The US concerns about the loss of its independence due to its weak position relative to Britain is comparable to that of the post-Revolutionary Iran. Nevertheless, a tacit cooperation, or a "*modus vivendi*" between Iran and the US in the Persian Gulf would be the most plausible course of action based on the principles of the Monroe Doctrine.

Chapter 2

The Monroe Doctrine and Iranian Foreign Policy, 1968-Present

This chapter explores the similarities between the principles of the Monroe Doctrine and those of the Iranian foreign policy from 1968. The year 1968 is pivotal in the development of regional events in the Persian Gulf, due to the British decision to withdraw from the region. This led to Iran's dominant-stabilizing role in the Gulf. The object of this comparison is twofold: first, to confirm that Iran's notion of national security interest based on freedom, independence, and territorial integrity⁷⁴, is compatible to, and can be best understood in the context of, a Monroe like doctrine; and second, despite its transition from a monarchy to an Islamic state, Iran's foreign policy principles have demonstrated continuity, except for a period between 1980-89. Iran's regional policy changed as result of two significant events; the 1979 Revolution which ended Iran's dominant military role in the Gulf region, and the eight year War with Iraq (1980-88) that weakened Iran's economy and drastically reduced its military capability. Nonetheless, following the death of its spiritual leader Ayatollah Khomeini in 1988, and subsequent to the 1991 Gulf War, Iran's foreign policy once again began to reflect the regional and international objectives set forth by Pahlavi regime policies based on Iran's vital interest in maintaining peace and security in the region. This argument will be substantiated by contrasting the three essential pillars of the Monroe Doctrine, with those identified in Iranian foreign policy statements, and in Iran's

74

Hashemi, Seyed Mohammad, *Hoghugh-e Asasi-e Jomhuri-e Eslami-e Iran: Osoul va Mabani-e Koli-e Nezam (The Fundamental Rights of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Principles and Foundations of the System)*, Tehran, Iran: Published By The University of Shaheed Beheshti, 1995, Vol.1, pp.131-134, 135-139, 140-149.

pre and the post-Revolutionary Constitutions⁷⁵. Historical examples will be used to demonstrate that the rationale behind post-1968 Iranian foreign policy, including the special relationship with the US is a parallel to the 1823 Britain-US relationship. Moreover, it will be suggested that the post-revolutionary pause in Iran-US relations is comparable to concerns expressed by American policy makers with regard to the British ambitions in the Western Hemisphere, at the time of Monroe's enunciation⁷⁶.

THE POST 1968 IRANIAN REGIONAL POLICY:

In January 1968, the British government announced its plans to withdraw from the Persian Gulf by 1971⁷⁷. This announcement led to concerns among the Arab-Gulf states who relied on the British military presence for their security⁷⁸. This announcement caused three potential threats to the stability of the Gulf: the disruption of the existing domestic political environment within the small Arab-Gulf states; intervention by the Soviet Union or its

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Hojati-e Ashrafi, Gholamreza, Edr., Ghanoun-e Asasi-e Jomhuri-e Eslami-e Iran (The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran), Tehran, Iran: Published By Ganj-e Danesh Publishers, 1996; and Ghanoun-e Asasi va Motamam-e An (The Constitution of Iran and its Supplement), Tehran, Iran: Published By Safi-Ali Shah Publishing, 1967.

76

Jefferson, Madison, and John Quincy Adams were among the policy makers who advised President James Monroe, on exercising caution in agreeing to the British proposal for cooperation proposed by George Caning (May, E.R., The Making of The Monroe Doctrine, Cambridge, MA., US: Published By The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975, pp. 197-205.

77

Monroe, E. "The Report of an International Seminar at the Centre for Mediterranean Studies, on June 26th, 1972", The Changing Balance of Power in the Persian Gulf, New York, NY, US: Published By The American University Field Staff, Inc., 1972, p.18.

78

The Gulf: Implications of British Withdrawal, Washington, D.C., US: Published By The Centre for Strategic and International Studies, February 1969, Special Report Series No.8, p.85.

radical allies such as Egypt; and the outbreak of regional territorial, ethnic and religious disputes⁷⁹. The only regional instrument capable of confronting such threats was the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), composed of Iran, Turkey and Pakistan, that enjoyed the support of the United Kingdom, as well as the United States. However, Iran was the only member of this alliance that was directly threatened by the militant Arab nationalism instigated by Gamal Abdul-Nasser of Egypt, and the only regional country that provided a direct overland access to the Gulf for the Soviet Union⁸⁰. Moreover, the declining British presence in the region, due to its government's historic decision to withdraw from "East of Suez"⁸¹, and the American reluctance to support Turkey and Pakistan, due to their respective conflicts in Cyprus and in Kashmir⁸², coupled with disunity among its members largely rendered CENTO ineffective in preserving the stability of the Gulf region.

It was against this background that Iran decided to promote itself as the new dominant force in the region to fill the power vacuum that the British withdrawal would create⁸³. The 1972 American commitment, under President Nixon, to provide Iran with a *carte blanche* to purchase any conventional weapons it required to become the dominant

79

Ibid., p.88.

80

Ibid., pp.73,93.

81

Ibid., 85.

82

Ibid., p.93.

83

Carr, C.D., "The United States-Iranian Relationship 1948-1978: A Study in Reverse Influence", in Amirsadeghi, H., Ed., The Security of the Persian Gulf, New York, NY, US: Published By St. Martin's Press, 1981, p.74.

land, sea and air power in the region was the first step by the US to accept Iran's role as the only country in the region capable of maintaining the status quo and stability in the Gulf⁸⁴.

In December 1971, after the British withdrawal from the Gulf, Iran reasserted its dominance in the region by improving its presence in the Strait of Hormoz in an attempt to fill the power vacuum created by the British withdrawal⁸⁵. In a diplomatic maneuver, Iran waived its historical claims to Bahrain⁸⁶; and officially recognized that country's independence on August 14, 1971. Nevertheless, this recognition did not prevent the take over of the three strategic islands of Abu-Musa, the Greater, and the Lesser Tonbs, near the Strait of Hormoz, by Iranian forces in November of the same year⁸⁷. Iran's decision to occupy these islands emphasized its vital interest in uninterrupted freedom of navigation in the Gulf, and its self-proclaimed role of the regional protector. This role was clearly expressed in the Shah's 1975 remarks:

“We will tolerate no subversion in the Persian Gulf. Our life depends on the free flow of oil and navigation in the Gulf-it is our jugular vein”⁸⁸.

⁸⁴

Ibid., pp.75-77.

⁸⁵

Yodfat, A. and Abir, M., In the Direction of the Persian Gulf: The Soviet Union and the Persian Gulf, London, UK: Published By Frank Cass & Co., Ltd., 1977, p.65.

⁸⁶

In 1783, the Al-Khalifa tribal movement ended 200 years of Persian rule over Bahrain (Stork, Joe, “Bahrain Regime Stages Confessions, Rejects Compromise”, Middle East Report, Washington, D.C., US: Published By The Middle East Research and Information Project, Inc., July- September 1996, pp.45).

⁸⁷

Mostyn, T., Major Political Events in Iran, Iraq, and the Arabian Peninsula, 1945-1990, New York, NY, US: Published By Facts On File Publishing, 1991, p.118.

⁸⁸

Graves, W., “Iran, Desert Miracle”, National Geographic, Washington, D.C., US: Published By The National Geographic Society, 1975, p.23.

As an integral part of Iran's Gulf policy, the Shah devoted military and financial resources to contain the growing threat of radical-Arab movements in the lower Persian Gulf states⁸⁹. Iran's 1973 military intervention in Oman, at the request of that country's King Qabus, to assist in defeating the leftist rebellion in the province of Dhufar⁹⁰, was a clear display of that policy.

Iran's covert operations between 1967 to 1978 in Lebanon was also a part of Iran's regional policy to neutralize the destabilizing threat of Nasserist radical-Arab movements, and to stop the training of Iranian dissidents by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in that country⁹¹. The covert operation in support of the Kurdish rebellion in Iraq (1971-75), due to frontier disputes over the Shatt al-Arab waterway, and the mistreatment of the Shia minority in that country, were among other examples of Iran's regional activities⁹². Iran's assumption of the leading role in protection of the so called "mini-states" in the Persian Gulf, and confronting the threat of radical (communist) movements elsewhere in the Middle East, was in accordance with Iran's national interest: preserving the boundaries of the state, maintaining its political system, and defending the rights and

89

Ramazani, R.K., The Persian Gulf: Iran's Role, Charlottesville, Virginia, US: Published By University Press of Virginia, 1972, pp.46-7.

90

Fisher, Sydney N. and Ochsenswald, William, The Middle East: A History, 4th Ed., New York, NY, US: Published By McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1990, p.529.

91

Samii, Abbas William, "The Shah's Lebanon Policy: The Role of SAVAK", Middle Eastern Studies, London, UK: Published By Frank Cass, January 1997, Vol.33, No.1, pp.66-91.

92

Fisher and Ochsenswald, p.529.

freedoms of its citizens as embedded in Iran's Constitution⁹³.

Iran's regional posture under the Shah had been strengthened by a number of agreements with the US, that had replaced Britain as the dominant external-power with a critical interest in the Gulf. The 1972 Nixon-Kissinger pledge to provide Iran with "any US non-nuclear weapons systems in quantities specified by Iran"⁹⁴ was part of the American strategy to make Iran the West's "Policeman of the Gulf". This strategy was in fact compatible with Iran's regional policy of encouraging a "hands-off" approach by external-powers in regional issues⁹⁵. Iran's foreign policy under the Shah concentrated on maintaining a balance in its relationship with both superpowers, USSR and the US. Iran engaged in economic cooperation with Soviet Union, and assured them that Iran would never allow US missiles to be deployed in Iran. On the other hand, Iran guaranteed the Americans that Iran would never go down the Communist path⁹⁶. However, the 1979 Revolution halted Iran's dominant military role in the Gulf, marked by the withdrawal of the two Iranian brigades stationed in Oman since 1973⁹⁷ and the start of the eight year war with Iraq (1980-88).

93

These principles are indicated in Iranian Constitution of 1906, and its 1907 and 1925 Supplements under Articles 3, 22, 27, 35-57, 80, and 83 [Ghanoun-e Asasi-e Motamam-e Ann (The Constitution of Iran and its Supplement), 1967].

94

Mostyn, p.140.

95

Ramazani, p.102.

96

Ibid., pp.102-111.

97

Mostyn, p.168.

THE 1979 REVOLUTION, AND THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR (1980-88):

Revolutionary Iran adopted a policy of “*no to the West and no to the East*”⁹⁸. In so doing, it antagonized the Soviet Union, the US, and eventually the rest of the Western world. The post-revolutionary foreign policy of Iran was dominated by Ayatollah Khomeini’s vision to export his brand of revolutionary Islam throughout the Muslim world, starting with the Gulf Arab-monarchies:

“We will export our experiences to the whole world. The result of this exportation will certainly result in the blooming of the buds of victory and independence and in the implementation of Islamic teachings among enslaved nations”.⁹⁹

Iran’s revolutionary attitude posed a threat to many Middle Eastern Arab countries¹⁰⁰ in which the Sunni minority ruled over the Shia majority (Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait), and also in the Gulf monarchies whose population were increasingly becoming unhappy with their autocratic political systems (Saudi Arabia, Oman, UAE, Kuwait, and Jordan). This growing fear of internal political unrest among the Arab states of the Middle East, particularly in the Persian Gulf, was considered to be instigated by revolutionary Iran, and led to Iraqi invasion of Iran in 1980 using the long standing border dispute over the Shatt al-Arab water way as a pretext. Lack of the combat preparedness of the Iranian armed forces, due to post-

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Mackey, Sandra, 1998, pp.301-333.

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Excerpts from one of Khomeini’s speeches to the public in Tehran (Ibid., p.313).

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Omid, Homa, Islam and the Post-Revolutionary State in Iran, New York, NY, US: St. Martin’s Press, 1994, p.106; and Stemple, John D., Inside the Iranian Revolution, Bloomington, Indiana, US: Published By Indiana University Press, 1981, pp. 302-308.

revolutionary chaos, provided the opportunity for Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, to initiate his long dream of replacing Iran as the dominant regional force, and becoming the leader of the Arab world. Comparing Khomeini to the Shah, Saddam Hussein had warned all regional states not to submit to Khomeini's threat, and in so doing avoid an Iraqi reprisal:

“After all, this Khomeini comes and calls on the Iraqi people to go out on the rooftops and protest against the government. He said the Shah had gone and someone else had come. It turned out that it was another Shah, but this time wearing a turban.Iraq is once again to assume its leading Arab role. Iraq is destined once again to face the concerted machinations of the forces of darkness”¹⁰¹.

The Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) posed a threat to the stability of the Gulf region, and the entire Middle East, as well the US-Western/Russian interests in the energy sources of the region, and free navigation in the Gulf¹⁰². The US embarked on a policy of providing aid and intelligence to the Iraqi Baathist regime, an ally of the Soviet Union, by invoking a similar policy to that of Kissinger's doctrine of a 'factor for stability'¹⁰³.

The self-imposed isolation, post-revolutionary military weakness, political instability and economic hardship (due to international sanctions), coupled with the combination of the Arab-coalition, and the US and USSR military and financial support to Iraq, led Iran to

101

Excerpts from the speech given by Saddam Hussein, in April 1980 9Mostyn, pp.171-2.

102

Cordesman, Anthony H., The Iran-Iraq War and Western Security 1984-87: Strategic Implications and Policy Options, London, UK: Jane's Publishing Company Ltd., 1987, p.157.

103

The 'factor for stability', was ensued by Henry Kissinger in the 1970s, who mediated an alliance between the Shah and Saddam Hussein as an stabilizing factor in the Middle East, particularly in the Gulf (Bresheth, Haim and Yuval-Davis, Nira, Eds., The Gulf War and the New World Order, New Jersey, US: Published By Zed Books Ltd., 1991, pp.59-60).

evaluate its idealistic-revolutionary policies¹⁰⁴. Iran's utopian notion of Islamic ideological transparency, brotherhood and unity beyond borders, had failed in the face of overwhelming ethnic Arab unity. This sobering experience persuaded the Iranian policymakers to once again embrace the *realpolitik* that had been an inherent feature of Iranian foreign policy during the Shah's reign. The security dilemma for Iran, like that of Israel, had once again become the historical struggle for survival, and rendered Iran's territorial integrity and its physical security the most important notion of its foreign policy, similar to the pre-Revolutionary times¹⁰⁵.

Faced with internal political opposition during its war with Iraq, the regime in Tehran had to persuade its domestic supporters that its revolutionary principles remained intact, while sustaining support for the Shia political movements outside its borders. In order to achieve these objectives, and to maintain its territorial integrity, Iran adopted a foreign policy that adhered to the values endorsed by Ayatollah Khomeini, while addressing its regional security concerns. Chapter 10, Article 152, of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, described Iran's foreign policy as:

“The Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based on the rejection of all desires to rule, or to be ruled, maintenance of the independence and the territorial integrity of the country, defence of the rights of all Muslims and nonalignment toward hegemonic powers, and mutual peaceful relations with

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Ibid.,pp.14, 61-2; and Mottale, Morris M., Iran: The Political Sociology of the Islamic Revolution, Lanham, Maryland, US: Published By The University Press of America, Inc., 1995,pp.46-9.

105

Mottale, p.47.

non-belligerent governments”¹⁰⁶.

Iran’s new foreign policy stance was to assure its Muslim neighbors that it had no desire to export its political system to their respective countries, and at the same time to take the steps necessary to protect itself from those it perceived as *belligerent*. To achieve its foreign policy objectives, Iran developed a four-pronged strategy, similar to that of the Shah. These strategies were to establish an active military presence in the Persian Gulf, form an alliance with regional countries with whom Iran shared analogous political goals, undertake covert operations in support of regional political movements with similar ideological aspirations, and conduct clandestine operations to neutralize political opposition to the regime abroad. For the ruling elite in Iran, survival had replaced ideology as the *raison d’état*¹⁰⁷.

Iran’s emerging *realpolitik* was manifested in the reassertion of its ownership of the strategic islands of Abu-Musa and the Greater and the Lesser Tonbs close to the Strait of Hormoz¹⁰⁸; the close relationship with the Baathist regime in Syria and Lybia, to undermine Iraq’s goal of becoming a dominant power within a pan-Arab movement¹⁰⁹; the ideological, military and financial sponsorship of radical Shia movements in Lebanon, and accommodating and supporting Iraqi opposition groups including the Kurds and the

106

Hojati-e Ashrafi, Gholamreza, p.6.

107

Rahnema, Ali and Nomani, Farhad, The Secular Miracle: Religion, Politics and Economic Policy in Iran, London, UK: Published By Zed Books Ltd., 1990, pp.299-302.

108

Mostyn, p.193.

109

Mottale, p.39.

Shiites¹¹⁰; and the pursuit and elimination of active Iranian-political opposition in Europe¹¹¹.

In 1988, the revolutionary appeal of the Islamic Republic, and its perceived destabilizing role in the Middle East, particularly in the Gulf, began to fade as a result of the UN sponsored peace between Iran and Iraq. The death of Iran's spiritual leader Ayatollah Khomeini, further influenced the decline of Iran's fundamentalist fervor¹¹². At the end of the war Iran's ideological ambitions halted and were replaced by an urgent need for post-war economic recovery and reconstruction. The carnage of the war was an unpleasant experience for Iran¹¹³, and had reinforced its resolve to pursue a dominant regional role. To fulfil such a goal, however, Iran had to reintegrate itself into the international community, by modifying its radical approach to world politics, and by developing its socioeconomic conditions. During the 1991 Gulf War between the US led international coalition and Iraq, Iran demonstrated its desire for a diplomatic resolution to the conflict by reasserting its opposition to foreign powers' presence in the Gulf, and condemning the Iraqi aggression

110

Bresheeth and Davis, p.148.

111

Sancton, Thomas, "The Tehran Connection", TIME, Toronto, Ont., Canada: Published By Time Canada Ltd., March 21, 1994, Vol.143, No.12, pp.35-9.

112

Viorst, Milton, "100 Leaders and Revolutionaries", TIME, Toronto, Ont., Canada: Published By Time Canada Ltd., April 13, 1998, Vol.151, No 14., pp.127-9.

113

Aside from the destruction of many cities, Iran experienced a number of Iraqi-chemical attacks against its troops. The worst of these attacks took place in March 1988, in the Iranian-captured Iraqi city of Halabja. This attack resulted in the death of thousands of Iraqi-Kurdish civilians (Wilson, William, "Chemical and Biological Warfare", In Depth: A Journal of Values and Public Policy, Washington D.C., US: Published By The Professors World Peace Academy, Spring 1993, Vol.3, No.2, pp. 101-116).

against Kuwait, while maintaining its neutrality during the conflict¹¹⁴.

Iran moved toward a more active role in the Gulf region and internationally in the 1990s. The desire to reintegrate itself into the world community stemmed from the government's need to affirm its legitimacy. Internal socioeconomic and political problems following the eight-year war with Iraq had taken away its revolutionary enthusiasm. Moreover, internal political rivalries between moderate elements and the traditionalists, had led to factionalism and threatened the country's stability. The discussion over Khomeini's succession further deteriorated the situation, by shattering the ideological unity among Shia groups in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon¹¹⁵. Growing public discontent over the state of the national economy forced the internal factions to compromise, and present a moderate outlook by adopting relaxed and more pragmatic policies¹¹⁶. Focusing on internal socioeconomic reform, maintaining a peaceful regional-international posture, and a determination to acquire the necessary capability for self-defence¹¹⁷, became the central policy of the Iranian

114

Despite speculations about the possibility of a direct or an indirect Iranian involvement in the war in support of Iraq, Iranian government decided to maintain its neutrality. Iran also assisted the US led coalition by retaining some 200 Iraqi aircrafts in its custody, preventing their use against the coalition forces or the Kurdish and Shia rebellions in Northern and Southern Iraq. Furthermore, Iran assisted the international community by accommodating thousands of Kurdish and Shia refugee fleeing the Iraqi forces at the end of the 1991 Gulf War (Bresheeth and Davis, pp.92-3).

115

Barzin, Saeed, "Factionalism in Iran", The World Today, London, UK: Published By The Royal Institute of International Affairs, October 1995, Vol.51, No.10, pp.202-5; and Foroohar, Kambiz and Akti, Tahsin, "Khamenei Didn't Make It", The Middle East, London, UK: Published By IC Publications, February 1995, No.242, pp.12-14.

116

Feuilherade, Peter, "Media and the Message", The Middle East, London, UK: Published By IC Publications, April 1994, No.233, pp.13-15.

117

In a report entitled "Rafsanjani: Iran Serious in Military Buildup" President Rafsanjani had stressed Iran's need to maintain a level of military capability to protect its national security from potential regional and extra-regional

government.

Iranian policymakers had begun to realize that as in the Shah's days, Iran shared certain regional interests with the West. The common interest between the West, particularly the US and Iran was mutual accommodation through establishing direct communication channels to ameliorate possible future crises. The 1997 election of a moderate element to the executive branch of government, President Khatami, signaled the development of a pattern in the Iranian polity, characterized by friendly gestures toward the US, the West and the East (Russia), a relaxation of revolutionary rhetoric¹¹⁸, the improvement of socioeconomic conditions, and increased international cooperation¹¹⁹.

COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE PRINCIPLES OF THE MONROE DOCTRINE AND IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY:

The foregoing review of the patterns of change and continuity in Iranian foreign policy from 1968 provides a background for the empirical evaluation of the argument that the principles of the Monroe Doctrine have been, and are compatible with Iran's foreign

military threats. He further argued that Iran is in the process of rapprochement with most of the Gulf Arab-states, particularly with its 'arch-rival' in the region and in the Islamic world; Saudi Arabia (CNN, <http://cnn.com>, July 19, 1997).

118

"Khatami Praises American Public, Calls for Better Iran-US Relations", Associated Press, MSNBC News, <http://www.msnbc.com>, August 1, 1998.

119

"Iran's Rafsanjani Leaves Mixed Legacy", The Globe and Mail, Toronto, Ont.:Canada: Published By Thomson Canada Ltd., August 6, 1997; and York G., "Iran Under Khatami, Inches Toward Freedom", The Globe and Mail, February 7, 1998; and York, G., "Applause Greets Flying of US Flags in Tehran", The Globe and Mail, February 1998; and "Iran Names Woman as Vice-President", Washington Post, <http://search.washingtonpost.com>, August 25, 1997; and "Iran's Parliament Approves Reform Cabinet", CNN, <http://costomnews.cnn.com>, August 22, 1997.

policy objectives. In the next segment, a brief reminder of the Monroe principles, and their sequential comparison with Iranian foreign policy experience in the same time period, will further support this argument.

The three principles of the Monroe Doctrine, as mentioned in the first chapter were anti-colonialism, non-involvement in European wars, and confronting external political and military threats to the stability of the continents of America by taking all steps necessary to protect and promote the national security of the United States, including a tactical alliance with an outside power. These principles were aimed to secure peaceful coexistence and political independence by way of non-interference/ non-intervention (militarily or politically) in the affairs of other countries. However, this latter maxim changed as the United State's interests expanded, due to its political, economic, and military growth. Consequently, the US abandoned non-intervention in favor of occasional intervention, instigated by the 1904 Roosevelt Corollary, isolationism in favor of post-Versailles liberal-internationalism under President Wilson, and non-interference in favor of subversion (late 1960s' covert operations in Cambodia). The emergence of the Cold War had altered the nature and the source of threat to US national security, and expanded the US political and military presences beyond the boundaries of the Western Hemisphere¹²⁰. Nevertheless, the diversion of the US from pan-Americanism to internationalism did not change the essential element of the Doctrine; the "*right of self-protection*" inherent in all nations. The Doctrine had simply evolved to confront the modern political, economic, and military challenges

120

Kissinger, Henry, Diplomacy, New York, NY, US: Published By Simon and Schuster, 1994, pp.36-55, 224,234-45.

dictated by the advancement of technology, and the new international environment¹²¹.

Despite contending opinions on its relevance and adequacy as a blueprint for modern US foreign policy, and aside from claims to its distinctive '*American-ness*', the Doctrine¹²², in and of itself, is a pragmatic foreign policy prerogative, compatible with various regional-indigenous foreign policy models. The Doctrine is particularly applicable to the foreign policies of regional powers such as Iran, that have continuously sought to maintain a dominant regional posture, as a means of protecting their national security interests. Although the utilization of the Monroe Doctrine, has never been adhered to officially by Iran, it can serve as an analytical tool through which an understanding of the past and present foreign policies of Iran is possible.

Like the United States, the modern political-history of Iran is marked by a continuous struggle for sovereignty and independence. The 1906 Constitutional Revolution, which transformed Iran from absolutism to a Constitutional Monarchy¹²³, and the 1952 Oil Nationalization movement, which gave Iran complete sovereignty over its natural resources¹²⁴, were two of the most important pre-1968 events. However, the strive for independence did not cease even as the British withdrew from the Gulf in 1971. The 1979

121

Ibid., pp.281, 389.

122

See Chapter One of this thesis.

123

For more information on the history of the 1906 Constitutional Revolution, see Bayat, Mongol, Iran's First Revolution: Shi'ism and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909, New York, NY, US: Published By Oxford University Press, 199.

124

To know more about the 1952 Oil-Nationalization movement see Cottom, R.W., Nationalism in Iran, Pittsburgh, PA, US:, Published By Pittsburgh University Press, 1964.

Revolution that led to the formation of an Islamic-nationalist Republic, was yet the most pivotal event in the modern Iranian struggle for political independence¹²⁵.

Even though the US had not colonized Iran, its close relationship and cooperation with the Shah had created a semi-colonial affect. What is significant is the implicit recognition by the US under President Carter, that Iran's lack of independence and democracy had led to the emergence of Iranian revolutionary movements and their leaders. Therefore, during the ascension of the revolutionary movement in 1978-79, the US government had politically assisted the Iranian opposition groups by criticizing the Shah's human rights practices¹²⁶.

On the other hand, Iran had abandoned its imperialistic ambitions and had been satisfied with its territorial holdings since the 1838 defeat by the British, which led to the loss of the northern-Afghan city of Herat¹²⁷. Iran under the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979), and the successive Islamic regime (1979-present) has maintained the principle of independence and anti-colonialism, by avoiding regional-expansionist ambitions through adopting a "good-neighbor" policy, and adhering to the principle of non-aggression against the territorial

125

For a comprehensive view of the events leading to the 1979 Revolution, and the subsequent formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran see Stempel, John D. Inside the Iranian Revolution, Bloomington, Indiana, US: Published By Indiana University Press, 1981; and Mackey, Sandra, The Iranians: Persia, Islam and the Soul of a Nation, New York, NY, US: Published By Penguin Group, 1998.

126

See Mackey, pp.164-5, 165 *n.*; and Stemple, Chapter 4, pp. 59-80 and Chapter 14, pp.283-308; and Farmanfarmaian, Manucher and Roxane, Inside The Shah's Iran: Blood and Oil, New York, NY, US: Published By The Modern Library, 1997, pp.150-51, 154,,164,180.

127

Mackey, p.130; and Ramazani, pp.12-13.

integrity of its neighbors¹²⁸.

With regard to the policy of non-involvement in European or extra-regional wars, it is essential to look at the period starting in 1914, when Iran adopted the policy of neutrality, and avoided entanglement in external conflicts that did not threaten its territorial integrity, or sovereignty. Occupation by the Allies during World War Two (1941-46)¹²⁹, despite its declared neutrality, realized Iran's fear of being dragged into European conflicts, and falling victim to their expansionist aspirations. The British and US forces invaded Iran under the false pretext of Reza Shah's sympathy for Hitler¹³⁰, and forced the King to abdicate in favor of his son. The Russian refusal to withdraw its troops from Iran until late 1946, and the sponsoring of the short-lived Soviet-style independent Republic of Mah-Abad, in the northwestern province of Azerbaijan¹³¹, reaffirmed Iran's conviction to establish a strong military capable of defending its territorial integrity, and to avoid entanglement in conflicts that might undermine its security and sovereignty.

Moreover, Iran's non-involvement in numerous Arab-Israeli wars and Indo-Pakistani conflicts under the Shah, and its non-direct approach to the Soviet-Afghan conflict (1979-89), as well as its continued neutrality in Indo-Pakistani conflict over Kashmir under the

¹²⁸

Famanfarmaian, p. xxi; and Ramazani, pp.143-48; and Mottale, pp.42-9; and Bresheeth and Davis, p.88.

¹²⁹

Farmanfarmaian, pp.139-43.

¹³⁰

Ibid.

¹³¹

McDowall, David, "The Kurds: A Report on the History and the Current Problems of the Kurds", The Minority Rights Group, Report No. 23, 1989, London, UK: Minority Rights Group, 1989, p.16.

Islamic regime, attest to Iran's commitment to the Monroe principle of non-interference. Iran's covert operations in Lebanon, before and after the 1979 Revolution, although not sanctioned by the text of the Doctrine, has been in accordance with the graduated notion of national security interest developed in the US in the 1950s.

Confronting extra-hemispheric or extra-regional threats to the stability of the American continents, was a crucial element of the Monroe Doctrine. Hence, the ability to defend the US and the Western Hemisphere from European political and military interference was a sign of independence. For Iran, too, maintenance of the regional stability has been an important aspect of establishing political sovereignty and independence. Iran's policy of keeping the superpowers out of the Gulf region¹³² has been an enduring feature of its regional policy, since the 1970s. Pursuit of a dominant role by Iran in the Gulf, in the entire Middle East, and recently in the Muslim republics of the CIS, has been due to its vested interest in the stability of these regions for political and economic reasons. Iran's geostrategic location, its sources of energy, its access to free waters, and the heterogeneity of its population are all among the reasons for successive governments' concerns over the possibility of spillover and involvement in regional conflicts. The previously mentioned involvement in Oman, 1970s, and the recent Iranian posturing near the Afghan border (1998) due to the threat of ethnic-conflict posed by the Taliban¹³³, once more demonstrate the compatibility of its policies with those of the Monroe Doctrine, and the US backyard policy.

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Ramazani, pp.147-8; and Bresheeth and Davis, pp. 91-103.

133

Reports from the Associated Press and Reuters, <http://cnn.costumnews.com>, August 10,1998.

Furthermore, taking all steps necessary to protect and preserve the national security of the state, including a tactical alliance with an outside power like the US, was a feature of Iranian regional policy under the Pahlavies, and would be a plausible course of action for the Islamic Republic to be pursue. Iran, on the one hand, is following a policy of maintaining an armed force capable of defending its territorial integrity and preserving its national security, as indicated by the provisions of its Constitution. On the other hand, the presence of the US forces in the Gulf, although opposed by Iran for domestic political reasons, has provided a tacit security umbrella needed for regional stability. Embarking on sizable military procurement projects by the Shah and by the Islamic government point to the fact that Iran is not willing to compromise its security, and is determined to exercise its sovereign right of self-defense and self-preservation. Iran's experiences with a number of invasions in the modern time alone, including the most violent one in 1980 by Iraq, have adversely affected the national psyche of Iranians, and provide the justification for its defensive-military buildup. Having the territorial integrity, and the political sovereignty of the country undermined so many times in the past, has made military preparedness, and the desire for regional dominance an integral part of Iran's national security interest, regardless of the political nature of the regime in power.¹³⁴

Naturally, just as the United States, however reluctantly, sought British naval support to protect the waters of the Western Hemisphere, until such time that it had formed a strong military power of its own, Iran had to rely on an outside power to share the burden of

134

Mackey, pp.160-65.

regional stability. Traditionally this role was played by Great Britain, until its withdrawal from the Gulf in 1968. Iran had assumed the role of the regional protector immediately following the British withdrawal, but in order to do this effectively it needed the assistance of the new superpower with whom Iran shared similar security interests, the US. Iran's drive to secure the Strait of Hormoz, and to maintain the free navigation in the Gulf paralleled the American initiative to protect the freedom of navigation in the Panama Canal, as declared by President Roosevelt, who first assumed the role of the regional enforcer or the policeman of the Hemisphere¹³⁵.

Although the Revolution of 1979 brought an end to the bilateral Iran-US relationship in the Gulf, protecting the security of this region remained a constant in the foreign policy of both countries. The Revolutionary governments's alternative focus on domestic issues as the main source of foreign policy¹³⁶, and its condemnation of the Shah for assuming the role of the 'Gendarme of the Gulf', changed as a result of Iraqi attacks against Iranian navigation and oil installations in the Persian Gulf¹³⁷. It was the need for American armament that forced Iran to mediate the release of Western hostages held by Iranian backed Shia groups

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See Chapter One for more details on the US role in creation and the policy toward Panama Canal.

136

Rahnema and Nomani, p.302.

137

Mostyn, pp.193-200.

in Lebanon¹³⁸. The Iran-Contra affair (also known as Irangate) in 1986¹³⁹, which provided for the transfer of American weapons to Iran through Israeli assistance, was a clear indication of Iran's return to its traditional foreign policy agenda during the reign of the Shah. In order to avoid the disillusionment of a public exhausted from post-revolutionary hardships and the war with Iraq, the Islamic government used anti-American and anti-Israeli rhetoric to prove its loyalty to the revolutionary ideals, while in practice it returned to the principles laid down by David Ben-Gurion, the Shah and the United States¹⁴⁰.

Iran payed the price of its post-revolutionary self-imposed isolation during the war with Iraq, when it had to purchase badly needed military equipment at inflated price from black markets. Also by adopting an anti-American and anti-Israel posture for regional and domestic political purposes, Iran disabled itself from receiving the direct assistance of two of its most natural allies. Recognition of this mistake led Iran to risk domestic political discontent amongst the hard-core supporters of the regime, when it approached the US and Israel for armaments in late 1980s. In the end, Iran had to succumb to the reality that it could not win the war against Iraq on its own, and its animosity with the US and Israel had caused

138

Esposito, John L., The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?, New York, NY, US: Published By Oxord University Press, 1995, pp.22,116,141, 142, 146-50.

139

Mostyn, pp.219-20.

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In the 1950s, David Ben-Gurion had suggested the creation of strategy known as the 'periphery strategy', to promote cooperation between states with common security concerns in the Middle East, particularly, Iran, Ethiopia, Israel and Turkey (Ferdinand, 1994, p.66). This strategy, and the close Iranian-Israeli security cooperation abruptly ended after the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Nevertheless, Iran and Israel continue to be sharing the same security dilemma in the region, i.e. pan-Arab nationalism and expansionism. For more details on Iranian -Israeli security cooperation under the Shah, see Reppa, Sir. Robert B., Israel and Iran: Bilateral Relationships and Effects on the Indian Ocean Basin, New York, NY, US: Praeger Publishers, 1974.

it to lose the support it once enjoyed in pursuing its regional goals. As a result, Iran began to change its revolutionary posture in the 1990s through its neutrality during 1991 Gulf War, and by indicating its readiness to approach the US and the West diplomatically.

Iran's neutrality in the 1991 Gulf War, and its dire need for Western investment its economy, also, forced Iran to reduce its direct involvement in Lebanon. Despite a continuing power struggle with the hard-line factions within the government, Iranian moderates gradually and systematically altered the course of Iranian politics towards reform. However, to avoid internal chaos and clashes with the fundamentalist elements, the government of President Rafsanjani searched for an alternative outlet to demonstrate to the hardliners that Iran still cherished its revolutionary ideals. The ethnic war in the Balkans (mid-1990s) provided Iran with an opportunity to be involved in an international crisis, using the pretext of protecting the Bosnian Muslims¹⁴¹. In so doing, it reasserted itself as an influential element within the Islamic political arena, and as a concerned member of the international community.

FUTURE DIRECTION OF THE IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY:

The new Iranian foreign policy advocates the principles of dialogue and cooperation between Iran and the world community. Iran does not perceive itself as a threat, and is determined to once again establish itself as an active member in regional and international organizations. The following excerpt from an official statement of objectives made by the

¹⁴¹

Mottale, pp44-5; and O'Ballance, E., Islamic Fundamentalist Terrorism, 1979-95, New York, NY, US: Published By New York University Press, 1997, pp.163-5.

Iranian Foreign Ministry, points to Iran's desire to change its so called 'rogue' image:

"... Iran [has] conceptualized its foreign policy in three interconnected loops. The first loop includes Iran and its neighbors. Iran enjoys satisfactory relationship with Turkey, Iraq, Pakistan and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). We are neither a threat to their security, nor do we see them as intending to adopt a hostile approach towards us. Our relations with all Persian Gulf countries also stand at the satisfactory level, while we continue to seek confidence-building measures. At the same time, the varying size of the countries on the one hand, and the interventions of great powers on the other hand, inhibits the process of confidence building on this loop. Some of our southern neighbors in the Persian Gulf, promoted by external powers, have mis-perceptions about us. Our foreign policy objectives are clearly aimed at eliminating such mis-perceptions and creating confidence."¹⁴²

Furthermore, the foreign policy of Iran, geared toward economic development and protecting Islamic values abroad, also continues to echo the sentiments expressed by the late Shah with regard to threats to Iran's national security:

"The maintenance of territorial integrity and security is clearly an acknowledged right and duty of every nation-state. For us, it has also been particularly immediate foreign policy objective, as we have been forced to fight for our territorial integrity and security with blood, as well as diplomatic maneuvering in very recent years. What is important to be reiterated in this regard, however, is that Iran, unlike many of its neighbors, can easily be considered a territorially satisfied state, with its diplomatic and military efforts directed at guarding well-established borders and maintaining status in a region in which territorial disputes constitute a norm."¹⁴³

In this regard Iran's pursuit of advanced weapons should be seen as a defensive measure

142

Maleki, Abbas, "The Islamic Republic of Iran's Foreign Policy: From Iran", *Salam Iran*, Ottawa, Ont., Canada, Distributed By the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Ottawa, (online), <http://www.salamiran.org/Iraninfo/State/Government/Foreign/maleki.html>, December 13, 1998.

143

Ibid.

against the increasing military acquisition among the Gulf-Arab states that would render Iran's acquisitions pale in comparison¹⁴⁴. For example Saudi Arabia, one of the world's largest military spenders next to the US, Russia and China, spends a total of \$13.2 billion annually on arms. The countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) spend a total of \$7.49 billion a year on armament. Iran on the other hand, spends \$2.5 billion annually on armaments¹⁴⁵. The growing military capability of these states, who have historically seen Iran as an outsider, is a legitimate threat to Iran's security and to its goal of re-establishing itself as an influential regional actor, since the power in the Persian Gulf is seen first and foremost in terms of military capability:

“In broad terms, power in the [Persian] Gulf is determined largely by military power and stability is largely the result of the local military balance and the ability to use military force to maintain internal control [and to deter external aggression]”.¹⁴⁶

The increased arms race in the Persian Gulf can dangerously affect regional stability, and could lead Iran to respond with resorting to military force. Iran, like the US, has a permanent interest in the stability of the Persian Gulf, as well as in the Muslim republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The terrorist attacks against the US in the

144

“Arms Through the Backdoor”, The Middle EAST, London, UK: Published By The IC Publication, February 1995, No.242, p.34.

145

Gause, Gregory F., “Arms Supplies and Military Spending in the Gulf”, Middle East Report, Washington, D.C., US: Published By The Middle East Research and Information Project, Inc., July-September 1997, No.204, Vol.27, No.3, p.13.

146

Lindberg, Michael, “The Persian Gulf Arms Race: Myth or Reality?”, An Occasional Paper, Winnipeg, MB, Canada, Published By The Centre for Defence and Security Studies, Department of Political Studies, University of Manitoba, 1993, p1.

region (the 1995 bombing of the US military compound in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia) and elsewhere in the Third World (the 1998 bombing of US embassies in Kenya and Darussalam, in Africa) particularly among Arab/Sunni countries demonstrate a growing pattern of Sunni-fundamentalist insurgency. Iran has also experienced the same type of hostility staged by Sunni-fundamentalists in 1998, when eleven of its diplomats were killed by the Taliban in Northern Afghanistan¹⁴⁷. This could be indicative of a rising threat to regional stability and to the interests of both Iran and the US. Therefore, tacit cooperation between Iran and the US due to common security concerns, would render fruitful for the stability of the Persian Gulf and the CIS in the long run. Iran and the US, as a result of the above mentioned experiences, share the perception of a rising Sunni-fundamentalist threat in the Gulf, in the CIS, and in the Middle East, and remain cautious about the possible resurgence of an expansionist Russia, that is increasingly destabilized by economic and political mismanagement under President Yeltsin.

Iran in its quest for regional influence and international prestige will continue to utilize the Monroe Principles, since they are built around the notion of balance of power, hegemony, and limited alliances. Just as the US national security interest led to its self-proclaimed regional hegemony, the future of regional stability in the Gulf and in the CIS, may well require Iran's renewed role as the occasional enforcer of the status quo. Iran's lack of territorial ambition, its political continuity, its human and economic resources, as well as its relative industrial-technological capacity will make Iran the best candidate to be the

147

Davis, Anthony, "Iran Drives for Diplomacy in Afghan Border Exercise" Jane's Defence Weekly, London, UK: Published By Jane's Information Group, September 30, 1998, Vol.30, No.13, p.4.

dominant regional power, as the US aims to reduce gradually its presence in the region.

Chapter 3

Iran's Role in the Security of the Persian Gulf

Iran's central role in the security of the Persian Gulf is one of the most controversial issues surrounding the future of military, political and economic cooperation in the region. In this chapter, it will be emphasized that Iran, just as prior to the Revolution of 1979, continues to play a significant role in the stability of the region, and can neither be ignored, nor excluded from attempts to form lasting regional institutions aiming for perpetual peace. The Persian Gulf has been one of the most vital regions of the world, due to its rich deposits of oil, and its geostrategic location. This region has witnessed many upheavals throughout its history, and has faced political and economic turmoil, as well as violent conflicts, in the latter half of the twentieth century. Not even the end of the Cold War has brought a lasting peace or stopped external intervention in the region. However, the 1991 Gulf War between Iraq and the US-led international coalition did provide the Gulf states and the international community with a chance to promote peace and stability in the region. Although the present situation in the Gulf remains volatile and unpredictable, the relative stability of the post-Gulf War environment is unlikely to change drastically. The prevalent interest among the regional states is to improve their domestic socioeconomic and political conditions.

Security, external and internal, will remain high on the agenda of all Gulf countries, and the prospect of an inclusive regional-security arrangement could lead to the reintroduction of the pre-1979 stabilizing factor through possible cooperation between Iran and the US, as the most influential actors. Iran is the best regional candidate for establishing

a regional security forum that could lead to the formation of a new security environment. Iran's evolving domestic and international political objectives, as well as its size, resources, and capabilities are among the characteristics which make it central to the Persian Gulf politics. Furthermore, despite Iran's revolutionary and often antagonistic rhetoric, its foreign policy with respect to the Gulf reflects that of the deposed Shah and aims to resume its central role in the Persian Gulf security. Achieving this objective, however, requires the re-establishment of formal or informal diplomatic ties with the US, and the improvement of Iran's relationship with the neighboring Arab states. Recent developments in its domestic politics, following the election of the moderate President Khatami, led to peaceful and cooperative regional and international overtures. This suggests that Iran's emergence as an influential diplomatic and military actor in the Persian Gulf is taking place.

IRAN IN THE GULF: BETWEEN TWO WARS (1980-88 & 1991):

From 1980 to 1991, two major conflicts took place in the Persian Gulf, both of which had significant international implications. First, the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), caused the massive loss of human lives and economic resources for both countries. The war between Iran and Iraq posed a great danger to Gulf navigation and the free flow of oil from the region. By targeting international shipping in the Gulf, Iran and Iraq threatened the oil-dependent economies of the region, as well as the livelihood of the countries which exclusively depended on Persian Gulf oil¹⁴⁸. The Iran-Iraq War also influenced political

¹⁴⁸

Gordon, M., Ed., Conflict in the Persian Gulf Region, New York, NY, US: Published By Facts On File, 1981, p.131.

stability of the region in two ways. First, it facilitated Soviet expansionism amid regional chaos, and second, it increased the risk of spillover to the neighboring countries¹⁴⁹.

In order to contain the risk of spillover, and to stop Soviet expansionism in the region (initiated by the invasion of Afghanistan, 1980), the United States adapted a new policy of intervention under President Carter by creating the Rapid Deployment Force (R.D.F.)¹⁵⁰. In the mid-1980s, the US policy of direct intervention in the Gulf had been replaced by the so called "Reagan Initiative", which played Iran and Iraq against one another by providing military aid to both countries¹⁵¹. President Reagan's Iran-Iraq policy failed in 1985, when the so called "Irangate" (weapon sales to Iran in exchange for Western hostages in Beirut, and using the funds to finance Nicaraguan Contras) was uncovered¹⁵². Despite the lack of success of President Reagan's Iran Policy, the United States continued a similar incoherent approach under the Bush Administration, that eventually resulted in the invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi forces, in August of 1990¹⁵³. The invasion of Kuwait represented the inability of the US to predict and prevent major inter-state conflicts in the Gulf Region.

149

Darius, Robert G., Amos, John W. and Magnus, Ralph H., Eds., Gulf Security into 1980s, Stanford, California, US: Published By Stanford University's Hoover Institution Press, 1984, p.49.

150

Meo, L., Ed., US Strategy in the Gulf: Intervention Against Liberation, Belmont, MA, US: Published By The Association of Arab-American University Graduate, Inc., 1981, pp.99-100.

151

Shirley, Edward G., "The Iran Policy Trap", Foreign Policy, Washington, D.C., US: Published By The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Summer 1994, p.75.

152

Mostyn, Trevor, Major Political Events in Iran, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula 1945-1990, New York, NY, US: Published By Facts On File, 1991, pp.219-20.

153

Ibid., p.262.

"As a Superpower with a global array of interests, yet with a limited capacity for comprehending the social, cultural, and political underpinnings of these interests, let alone for attending to them simultaneously, the United States had often failed to identify unfavorable regional developments before their escalation into fully-fledged conflicts...".¹⁵⁴

In 1993, the Clinton Administration adopted the Dual Containment Policy (DCP) designed to limit the mutual strength and reach of Iran and Iraq¹⁵⁵. The DCP, too, proved inadequate, and resulted in American isolation instead¹⁵⁶. The United States found itself alone in its quest for containing Iran and Iraq, due to the lack of support from its allies (particularly Germany and Japan) who declined to sacrifice financial profit for political principles¹⁵⁷. Although the Gulf War coalition of 1991 represented a watershed in the history of relations between the Gulf states and the West, it lost its appeal amongst both regional and European allies, as a result of repeated unilateral actions by the US in the Gulf¹⁵⁸.

Although the Islamic Revolution of 1979 isolated Iran from the rest of the world, the 1991 Gulf War provided Iran with an opportunity to become an active participant in future

154

Karsh, E., "Cold War, Post-Cold War: Does it Make a Difference for the Middle East", Review of International Studies, Cambridge, UK: Published By The British International Studies Association, Cambridge University Press, July 1997, Vol.23, No.3, p.281.

155

Shirley, p.75.

156

Brzezinski, z., Scowcroft, B. and Murphy, R., "Differentiated Containment", Foreign Affairs, New York, NY, US: Published By The Council on Foreign Relations, Inc., May/June 1997, p.20.

157

Shirley, p.76.

158

Brzezinski, Scowcroft and Murphy, p.29.

regional security arrangements¹⁵⁹. Faced with domestic and international problems, Iran decided to shift its revolutionary policies in favor of resolving its socioeconomic problems, as well as ending its international isolation¹⁶⁰. Iran needed to improve its economy and, therefore, aimed to reestablish its ties with the West and particularly with the US in order to receive assistance. According to Nikola Schahgaldian:

"the [Iranian] government has faced considerable difficulty in resolving urgent domestic and foreign problems. These include reining in the rampant inflation, eliminating severe shortages created largely by the war and earlier nationalization of the private-sector economy, and reconstruction of the war-shattered economy. The urgency has been highlighted, however, by the growing popular realization in Tehran, that the gap between the resources Iran commands and what it needs is so wide that it cannot be bridged without foreign assistance".¹⁶¹

Iran's internal political condition had become more unsettled after the 1991 Gulf War due to high inflation, unemployment, and population problems exacerbated by the addition of war-stricken refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia, and Azerbaijan¹⁶². In addition, the internal power struggle had split the Shia clergy into two camps (moderates and hardliners), and had become a possible source of civil conflict¹⁶³. The government of Iran,

159

Schahgaldian, Nikola B., "Iran and the Postwar Security in the Persian Gulf", RAND, Santa Monica, CA, US: Published By RAND's National Defence Research Institute, 1994, p. vii.

160

Ibid., p.16.

161

Ibid., p.7.

162

Ibid., p.8.

163

Ibid.

mainly composed of moderate elements, sought to expand its sources of support by modifying its domestic and international posturing, in order to ensure domestic and regional stability¹⁶⁴. With regard to regional stability, the government of Iran undertook efforts to improve its relations with the Gulf states. Iran initiated dialogue with most Arab-Gulf neighbors, and emphasized that it would not seek to export its brand of government to these countries.¹⁶⁵

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF IRAN TO GULF SECURITY:

Iran has a central role in the Gulf security, due to its size and population, its stronger economy (regionally), and its military capabilities. According to the former US Secretary of State Zbigniew Brzezinski:

“[Iran] is a country with potentially considerable military and economic capabilities and an imperial tradition which occupies a crucial position ... in the Gulf.. Iran represents a geopolitical challenge of far greater magnitude and complexity”¹⁶⁶

Although Iran, like its Gulf neighbors, depends on oil exports as the main source of its revenue, it has a comparatively diversified industrial base, bigger economy, and a political

164

Ibid., pp.8-9.

165

Makram, Mohamad Ahmad, “Repairing Iran’s Ties With the Arab World; The Islamic Summit in Tehran”, World Press Review, Muscatine, Iowa, US: Published By The Stanley foundation, March 1998, p.9.

166

Brzezinski, Scowcroft, and Murphy, p.21.

system that is constitutional and has continuity¹⁶⁷. Militarily, Iranian weapons acquisition is not superior compared to other Gulf states including Saudi Arabia. However, Iranian armed forces are relatively well equipped (in comparative regional terms), well trained and battle hardened and efficient. Eight years of war with Iraq, along with a number of internal conflicts including eight years of clashes with the Kurdish guerillas, putting down communist uprisings in Northern province of Mazandaran, in Gonbad and Amol, and occasional clashes with separatist movements in the Southeastern province of Baluchestan has made the Iranian military a force capable of fighting in various operations conducive to different terrains and conditions¹⁶⁸. The show of force near the border with Afghanistan in August 1998, which included 70,000 fully equipped personnel from all branches deployed in a week, demonstrated the Iranian armed forces efficiency¹⁶⁹. It should be also recognized that Iran has a strong navy; being the only regional country with underwater combat capability¹⁷⁰.

During the 1991 Gulf War, Iran maintained its commitment to a policy of neutrality,

167

Shirley, p.77; and Sick, Gary, "The Coming Crisis in the Persian Gulf", The Washington Quarterly, Cambridge, MA, US: Published By MIT Press, Spring 1998, Vol. 21, No.2, pp.205-6.

168

Zabih, Sepehr, The Iranian Military in Revolution and War, New York, NY, US: Published By Routledge, 1988, Chapters 8&9.

169

"Iranian Military Exercise Draw Warning from Afghanistan", CNN, Cable News Network, Inc., (Online), August 31, 1998.

170

Iran is the only Gulf country that has 3 'Kilo' type Russian Submarines (See Blanche, Ed, "Third 'Kilo' Delivered to Iran's Gulf Naval Base", Jane's Defence Weekly, London, UK: Published By Jane's Information Group, January 27, 1997, Vol.27, No.4, p.16; and The Military Balance 1997/98, London, UK: Published By Oxford University Press for The International Institute for Strategic Studies, October 1997, pp.125-7.

and demonstrated its lack of intention to challenge the US, or threaten its Gulf neighbors¹⁷¹. Furthermore, Iran's attempts to improve its relationship with the West, and with the Gulf states, have to some extent lessened the perception of the threat posed by Iran. According to Brzezinski, Scowcroft and Murphy, this change of perception partially resulted from the Gulf War experience in which Iraq became the dominant threat to Gulf stability¹⁷². Also, growing concerns about increasing Saudi military capability amongst the Gulf States, including Iran, has raised the necessity for cooperation between regional actors, and presented Iran with a unique opportunity to opt for collective security arrangements in the Persian Gulf; the foundations of which were to be laid during the 1997 Islamic Conference in Tehran¹⁷³.

Iran's significance in the Gulf security is twofold. First, Iran's geopolitical position in the Gulf, access to the largest coast line along the Gulf, natural resources, and economic and military capabilities could pose a complicated and potential challenge to regional stability if ignored¹⁷⁴. Second, Iran's political system and its socio-cultural prominence within the region makes it a powerful candidate for leadership in future regional security

171

Schahgaldian, p.1.

172

Brzezinski, Scowcroft and Murphy, p.21.

173

Schahgaldian, pp.16-20.

174

Brzezinski, Scowcroft and Murphy, p.26.

pacts or forum¹⁷⁵. Of course there are a number of problems concerning Iran as the leading force behind regional security cooperation, that include the possibility of the resurgence of a revisionist international agenda claiming Islamic universalism, the acquisition of nuclear weapons, or return to use of international-terrorism as a political tool¹⁷⁶. Nevertheless, its relative political stability, its lack of tribal and dynastic disputes that dominate the politics of most Arab-Gulf states, and the official reiteration by both the hardline and moderate elements denouncing terrorism (during the 1997 Islamic Conference in Tehran) and declaring the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programs¹⁷⁷, gives Iran a chance of becoming a regional leader¹⁷⁸. However, due to the mistrust and animosity with the US since 1979, Iran's venture to become once again a dominant regional figure remains distant, unless a working relationship between these two most influential actors in the Gulf is reached.

The Persian Gulf remains important for US interests, due to its massive deposits of oil and geostrategic location. Gulf stability and its defense against external aggression has

175

Ibid.; and Fuller, G., "The Next Ideology", *Foreign Policy*, Washington D.C., US: Published By The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Summer 1995, p.156; and Shirley, p.77.

176

Brzezinski, Scowcroft and Murphy, p.26; Fuller, p.156; and Schahgaldian, p.20.

177

The former Iranian President Rafsanjani in 1996 declared officially that Iran has no ambition in acquiring nuclear weapons, and its nuclear programs were for peaceful means only. This claim was supported by a report of the International Atomic Energy Organization (IAEO) that rejected US claims about Iran's nuclear activities for military purposes, *Ettela'at International*, An International Persian Daily News Paper, New York, NY, US, December 24, 1996, ISSN 1383-8824, No.644.

178

Darios, Amos and Magnus, pp.117-118.

been a linchpin of American regional policy¹⁷⁹. Prior to the 1979 revolution in Iran, the defence of the Gulf was assigned to Iran and Saudi Arabia. This had been known as the United States' "two-pillar" policy that was initiated under the Nixon Doctrine¹⁸⁰. This policy changed in 1980, when the US assumed an active role in the defense of its interests in the region¹⁸¹.

In the aftermath of Iran-Iraq war, the threat of spillover and destabilization of the region that could be caused by future conflicts forced the US to adopt the Dual Containment Policy (DCP)¹⁸². The DCP was a result of American recognition of its lack of political leverage in the region, particularly with Iran and Iraq¹⁸³. However, the DCP lost its initial impact and led to US isolation, rather than that of Iran or Iraq¹⁸⁴. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1991, along with Iran's continuing trade and diplomatic relationship with many US allies, rendered the DCP ineffective¹⁸⁵.

Many have argued that DCP was particularly designed to contain Iran, because of its

179

Gordon, p.89.

180

Ibid.

181

Ibid., p.90.

182

Shirley, p.76.

183

Gordon, pp.164-7.

184

Shirley, pp.76-81.

185

Weymouth, L., "US Needs New Strategy in Middle East", Guardian Weekly, September 15, 1996, p.15.

role as an influential regional actor, politically and militarily. Since 1979, Iran has been the cause of concern for the American policy makers, as a potential threat to US interests not just in the Gulf and in the Middle East, but also worldwide. These concerns range from sponsoring international terrorism, its military buildup and acquisition of weapons of mass destruction, opposition to the US brokered Middle East peace process, and the promotion of Islamic militancy¹⁸⁶. However, recent Iranian attempts to initiate a dialogue with the US following the election of the new president Mohammad Khatami, in May 1997, coupled with Iran's improving relations with the Gulf states following the Tehran Islamic Summit, in December 1997, point to Iran's willingness to take a new approach in the conduct of its foreign policy¹⁸⁷.

A number of former US officials, Brzezinski, Scowcroft and Murphy, are of firm belief that the DCP is no longer a viable option and should be replaced with a policy of constructive and gradual engagement¹⁸⁸. They argue that the new policy focus should be on the common interests that exist between Iran and the US, such as Gulf security, and concentrate less on Iran's nuclear threat by allowing its civilian nuclear program to develop and in so doing encourage Iran to open its nuclear facilities for inspection¹⁸⁹. The US could

¹⁸⁶

Brzezinski, Scowcroft and Murphy, p.27.

¹⁸⁷

Ibid.; and Rodenbeck, M., "Is Islam Losing Its Thunder?" The Washington Quarterly, Cambridge, MA, US: Published By MIT Press, Spring 1998, Vol.21, No.2, p.183.

¹⁸⁸

"Iran's New Face", The Economist, London, UK: Published By The Economist Newspaper Limited, August 1997, pp.13.

¹⁸⁹

Ibid.

use Iranian influence and connection (diplomatic, historical, religious, cultural and ethnic) in the newly independent republics of Central Asia, and should therefore refrain from opposing the construction of the proposed Central Asian gas and oil lines across Iran¹⁹⁰. Moreover, the US should rethink its trade relations with Iran, by allowing commercial engagement in those fields that are considered non-threatening to US interests¹⁹¹. After all, US interests and commitments in the Gulf will remain the same for the foreseeable future (defense of allies and free flow of oil), and it is in the best interest of Iran and the US, as well as other regional actors, to be accommodating and to emphasize commonality of interests, rather than differences¹⁹².

One of the most important events influencing the direction of future Iranian regional policy, has been the outcome of the 1991 Gulf War. The Iraqi defeat by the international coalition presented Iran with an opportunity to break out of isolation and once again be involved in regional issues¹⁹³. As a result, Iran entered a transitional period and has become more pragmatic in the conduct of its domestic and foreign policies¹⁹⁴. Iran, for the foreseeable future, will continue to maximize its economic, political and strategic advantages at home and abroad. The Islamic regime has realized that internal economic and

¹⁹⁰

Brzezinsky, Scowcroft, Murphy, pp.27-8.

¹⁹¹

Ibid., p.29.

¹⁹²

Ibid.

¹⁹³

Schahgaldian, p.28.

¹⁹⁴

Ibid.

social problems, and external confrontation with the West, could bring about the demise of the Islamic State. This concern was raised by the late Ayatollah Khomeini before his death:

“the God given mandate of an Islamic state is the most important of the divine commandments and has priority over all derivative divine commandments...even over prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage to Mecca”¹⁹⁵

Iran’s future aspirations would be focused on re-establishing ties with the West, particularly the US, by increasing its participation in international community, rebuilding its economy through limited free trade and private enterprise, and attending to domestic political reforms. Improving its relations with the lower Gulf states, particularly with Saudi Arabia, pursuing a long-term policy of rebuilding its military, with the intention of becoming at least equal in conventional strength to other major regional powers, and developing a moderate and mainly peaceful nuclear program are among other future aspirations of Iran¹⁹⁶.

Iran’s future international behavior will largely be determined by two factors: first the nature of its relationship with the US; and second, its internal economic, political, and social development in the years to come. Despite its political rhetoric, Iran will not oppose an American presence in the Gulf, unless the US adopts a policy of developing Saudi Arabia’s offensive capabilities¹⁹⁷. The Saudi Arabia’s acquisition of strike capability will not only threaten Iran, but Israel as well. This, in fact, would increase the possibility of arms

¹⁹⁵

Sick, p.206.

¹⁹⁶

Schahgaldian, pp.28-9.

¹⁹⁷

Ibid., p.20-30.

race and would potentially lead to escalation of conflict leading to preemptive strikes by Iran or Israel against Saudi weapons facilities. Iran, however, would not be a threat to the region or to American interests, and its blanket opposition to US presence in the Gulf is merely for domestic political purposes. The Islamic movement in Iran had gained popular support by opposing the American domination of regional agenda during the Revolution and the War with Iraq. It is aware of the rhetorical political value of opposing the US when in need of radical-Islamic political support. Nonetheless, Iran seeks to improve its international image and its economy, and would realize that further antagonization of the US could be detrimental to its domestic, regional and international economic and political aspirations. Iran would most likely continue its path toward moderate regional and international policy; so long as it would receive equal encouragement and assistance from the world community¹⁹⁸.

Although demonized and isolated from the international scene in the last twenty years, Iran's regional goals, following the 1991 Gulf War, resemble those of the deposed Shah, and are aimed at maintaining the status quo in the Gulf. Iran, as the "natural hegemon" of the Gulf, would lose whenever any other state in the region gains power. Furthermore, unlike Iraq and Saudi Arabia who have alternate ways of exporting their oil over land, Iran depends on the free shipping in the Gulf, as its largest outlet. Thus, Iranian strategic participation in regional security arrangements would coincide with the goal of some of the Gulf states, as well as the United States, in preserving the flow of the region's oil throughout

¹⁹⁸

Ibid. p.30.

the world¹⁹⁹. Any attempts by the regional and/or non-regional actors to exclude Iran from future security undertakings in the Gulf, would be destabilizing, and would force a tactical alliance between Iran and regional anti-status quo elements (such as Iraq). Ignoring Iran can be extremely detrimental to regional and outside political and economic interests in the Gulf²⁰⁰, because it may lead to a return by Iran to its militant-revolutionary ways experienced in the 1980s.

Unlike the lower Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia, Iran is not a net security consumer, and has a diverse base of support for its military procurement projects. On the other hand, the lower Gulf states' attempts at forming a collective defence pact without Iran, such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), has proven futile, due to their complete dependency on US arms and military presence in the region, as well as their elementary national military institutions and inability to conduct joint military operations²⁰¹.

Iran, just as in Shah's days, remains sensitive to political and military changes in the Gulf, because of the negative impact such changes would have on its security. Iran would, therefore, be a best candidate for a leadership role in a regional security institution, considering its lack of territorial expansionism, willingness to share the burdens of security cooperation, and its relatively superior military capability and political stability²⁰². Iran

199

Fuller, Graham and Lesser, "Persian Gulf Myths", Foreign Affairs, May/June 1997, P.47.

200

Ibid.p.48.

201

Ibid., pp.48-9.

202

Ibid., p.49-52; and Shirley, p.77.

would insist that the central component of any comprehensive security arrangement in the Gulf should be founded on the principle of free flow of oil. For Iran, the formation of a security forum that would include all regional actors, including a politically reformed Iraq, as well as non-regional actors with critical interest in the region, would be essential. This would enhance the security of the militarily weak and politically vulnerable smaller oil-producing Gulf states. On the other hand, the long-term presence of external powers in the Gulf, like the US, is politically detrimental to domestic stability of the regional states due to the rising anti-American/anti-Western sentiments, particularly in Saudi Arabia²⁰³. Such a presence is also economically unfeasible for the Gulf states who have to share the financial burden of accommodating foreign troops for their defence, as well as for the countries supplying the troops. Creating a balanced strategic cooperation among regional and non-regional actors would, therefore, ease the political and economic cost of such an undertaking, by the equally distribution of the burden of protecting the Gulf security²⁰⁴.

THE NEED FOR REGIONAL SECURITY INITIATIVES:

Preserving regional political stability is a very important component of any security establishment in the Gulf. The growing internal political unrest in the Gulf; particularly in the Arab countries, would make it impossible for the regional governments and their foreign allies to maintain the status quo in the future. The role of external powers in regional

203

The 1996 and 1998 bombing against US targets in Saudi Arabia and in Africa are examples of the growing anti American sentiments in the region.

204

Ibid., pp.43-4.

security is becoming increasingly limited to the prevention of cross-border aggression²⁰⁵, as in the case of Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The US/Western attempts to preserve and protect the undemocratic political systems of the regional allies is no longer a prudent measure of stability, because it prevents domestic political maturation and could lead to more opposition to foreign presence in the region. Close political association of the US and the West with the Gulf-Arab monarchies has long been perceived as a crucial factor for the continuation of undemocratic and oppressive regimes, and is the leading cause for anti-Western sentiments amongst the population of these states. The domestic political stability in the region should be monitored by regional organizations with similar concerns, and is dependent upon the willingness of the regional governments to move towards political maturity, responsible government and liberalization. Change is indeed necessary and if not dealt with immediately (at the regional domestic level) will result in massive convulsion, especially in the lower Gulf monarchies²⁰⁶.

Traditionally, Gulf politics has been dominated by conflicting national aspirations, ethnic cleavages, religious militancy, and economic and territorial greed. It is, therefore, impossible to achieve any viable security establishment, unless a mechanism for the reconciliation of regional differences is in place. Such a mechanism, however, is only attainable through the utilization of all regional players (especially Iran) with indigenous regional interests that are tuned to specific regional circumstances and environment.

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Ibid., pp.44-5.

206

Ibid., pp. 45-6.

“The [regional] state’s parochial outlook and localized interests make it better tuned to the threats and opportunities in its immediate environment than the... [outside power] whose ... range of interests preclude ‘ipso facto’ full and lasting concentration on specific regional problems. To local actors, regional developments are an absolute; to the ...[outside actor] they are one of many problems competing for attention and resources”.²⁰⁷

Localized participation in regional security is a pre-requisite to any successful multilateral security establishment in the Gulf. The historical experience of the region has demonstrated that outside actors do not engage in long-term commitment to regional security, and are politically and culturally ill-equipped in responding to the long-lasting political and territorial quarrels in the region. Just as the British commitment to the region ended by 1971, due to domestic political opposition over the financial cost of military commitment to the Gulf, the US presence could too be reduced, if not ceased, as a result of similar concerns. The popular reluctance to endanger American lives for the defence of such systems, as seen in the case of Somalia, is another reason that could eventually reduce US commitment to the security of the region.

“The forceful eviction of Iraq from Kuwait may prove to be the exception rather than the rule in the ‘New World Order’; the unique historical juncture that made Operation Desert Storm possible is unlikely to recur in the foreseeable future, as already evidenced by the muddled Western response to a string of local conflicts and wars, from Yugoslavia to Somalia to Chechnya”.²⁰⁸

Above all else, the regional actors have realized the diminishing utility of applying military

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Karsh, p.290.

²⁰⁸

Ibid.

solutions to political problems. Although most regional actors have engaged in a process of military buildup (due to continued indigenous political dynamics), they have demonstrated a readiness for cultivating the benefits of the post-Cold War regional environment. The nascent Middle East Peace Process is an evidence of the willingness to change.

“...the readiness that was missing [from the regional political scene] seems to exist [on all sides], at least in the mainstream bodies politic, the [outside] Powers can add a valuable input to this historic indigenous process. They will not be the factor to make or break the deal [process of change]; but they can help cultivating the process through a string of mediatory and supportive roles, from the narrowing of political and perceptual gaps, to economic aid, to construction of confidence-building measures and international structures to underpin the various [regional] peace [and cooperation] treaties”.²⁰⁹

THE REGIONAL OPTIONS FOR IRAN AND THE GULF STATES:

Iran is a hopeful candidate for initiating, or taking part in a collective regional security establishment, due to previously mentioned reasons. Inclusion of Iran in any such undertaking is necessary, because its progress toward a more moderate posture at regional and inter-national levels has diminished the threat it once posed to Gulf security. Iran's livelihood depends on the stability of the region, and it realizes that its military is no match for US conventional forces in the region. Iran would not challenge the US military presence in the Gulf for two reasons: first, having witnessed the Iraqi defeat in 1991, and second, due

209

Ibid., p.291.

to recent inclinations demonstrated by President Khatami, to regain American trust²¹⁰.

Three types of conflicts are likely to threaten the stability of the Gulf: internal, traditional (tribal and dynastic rivalries), and regional (interstate, territorial) conflicts²¹¹. However, the range of policy options to deal with these threats are no longer limited to “Conservative” (Iran’s regional policy under the Shah) or “Revolutionary” (Iran under the Islamic government) national policies²¹². For example, the abandonment of post-revolutionary Islamic radicalism, due to diminishing domestic appeal resulting from socioeconomic hardships, and the failure to gather support elsewhere in the Islamic world²¹³, has resulted in Iran’s adoption of the pre-revolutionary regional posture by attempting to engage in confidence-building through regional cooperation. An official statement from Iran’s Foreign Ministry, in March 1998, emphasized the desire to improve and broaden relations with the Gulf-Arab states, and the need for strengthening common grounds and forming institutions for “cooperation and exchange of mutual views”²¹⁴. This statement was welcomed by the GCC Council of Foreign Ministers who responded:

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Fuller, p.43; *The Economist*, pp.13-14; and Arkin, William, “Iran and the Virtual Reality of US War Games”, *Middle East Report*, Washington D.C., US: Published By He Middle East Research and Information Project, Inc., November-December 1995, Vol.25, No.6, pp.10-13.

211

Darius, Amos and Magnus, pp.120-1.

212

Amin, S.H., *Political and Strategic Issues in the Persian-Arabian Gulf*, Glasgow, Scotland: Published By Royston Ltd., 1984, pp.33-49.

213

Rodenbeck, pp.178-184.

214

“Khatami’s Election Improved Ties With Gulf-Iran”, *CNN*, Cable News Net Work, Inc. <http://cnn.worldnews.com>, March 10, 1998; “Gulf Arabs Laud Positive Trends in Iran Ties”, *CNN*, (online) March 9, 1998; and “Iran Warship Visits Saudi Arabia”, *Reuters* (online), March 9, 1998.

“[These trends] reflect a new vision for relations with the GCC states which is bound to build the bridges of mutual trust and establish them on solid foundations to bring about real, positive results between the two sides”.²¹⁵

Iran has entered a transitional phase following the death of its spiritual leader Ayatollah Khomeini, that has been marked by increased political and economic difficulties. Nevertheless, Iran is determined to reestablish itself as a legitimate member of the international community, despite occasional, albeit superficial, yielding revolutionary sentiments. Iran’s previous President, Hashemi Rafsanjani, asserted that Iran would not adopt offensive military posture, and reiterated that Iran would continue to buildup its strategically-defensive resources to achieve the pre-Iran-Iraq War defensive capability:

“We spent all of our strategically-defensive resources in the (1980-1988) war (with Iraq). Now we have to reach a sure position. If, God forbid, there is another event (war), we should be ready”.²¹⁶

Furthermore, Iran would hesitate to engage in political actions that would jeopardize its newly acquired opportunity to attain economic prosperity and international recognition. As noted earlier, the fear of Tehran’s arms acquisition programs has been exaggerated by the West and some of the Gulf states, despite Iran’s official declaration that its pursuit of advanced military capabilities are for defensive purposes²¹⁷. Iran’s growing arsenal should not be seen as a threat to the stability of the region, since Iran is in favor of a balanced

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“Gulf Arabs Laud Positive Trends in Iran Ties”, CNN (Online), March 10, 1998.

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“Rafsanjani: Iran Serious in Military Buildup”, CNN (Online), July 19, 1997.

²¹⁷

Ibid.

gradual growth of regional military forces for defensive purposes. Moreover, the US commitment to defend the Gulf monarchies, and its military presence in the region would serve as a deterrent against Iran, Iraq or other would be aggressors²¹⁸.

Iran, would, most plausibly, continue to support the formation of a Gulf security arrangement which would include the GCC states, as well as a non-Gulf component as an option²¹⁹. This external component could be the United States, or another Middle Eastern country with ties to the region such as Egypt or Syria²²⁰. However, the most difficult task for Iran will be to strike a balanced role with Saudi Arabia, the other contestant in the Gulf security arena. The latter's support of the Sunni fundamentalist movements around the world is a growing threat to Iran. Saudi sponsorship of the Taliban is not well received in Tehran, particularly after the events of August 1998, that led to Iranian military deployment at the Iran-Afghanistan border²²¹. Moreover, inconclusive air and missile attacks on the Sunni-fundamentalist groups inside Afghanistan, as a reprisal for the bombing of US embassies in Africa in 1998, increased US dissatisfaction with the Saudi's inability to control the actions carried out by the radical Sunni groups it is financing. American frustration with the Saudis, coupled with the Iranian show of diplomacy backed by military force in dealing with the

218

Gause, Gregory F., "Arms Supplies and Military Spending in the Gulf", Middle East Report, Washington, D.C., US: Published By The Middle East Research and Information Project, Inc., July-September 1997, No.204, Vol.27, No.3, p.12-14.

219

Schahgaldian, p.18.

220

Ibid.

221

"Iranian Military Exercises Draw Warning from Afghanistan", CNN (online), August 31, 1998; and "Iran Reports Clashes with Afghan Militia" Ibid., October 8, 1998.

Taliban, demonstrated to the US that Iran has the resolve, the diplomatic maturity, and the military capability to once again become an essential figure in the stability of the Gulf and related region of southwest Asia²²².

Aside from major ideological differences between Iran and many of the Gulf states, two integral elements necessitate the recognition of Iran's crucial role in the region. First, in the face of growing domestic discontent against foreign intervention, the US must gradually reduce its presence in the region. This could lead to a power vacuum in the region. In that case Iran would be an alternative regional force to replace the US. Any security arrangement would benefit from Iran's leadership due to its integrated diplomatic, military, and economic attempts since 1992, to engage the southern Gulf monarchies for confidence building and cooperation²²³. In the event of a US withdrawal from the Gulf, the smallest Arab monarchies may come under the threat of an overland invasion by the Saudis, aiming to gain additional territorial access to southern ports of the Gulf, and thus prevent Iran's naval dominance in the region.

Also, an American withdrawal from the Gulf, would most conceivably lead to disintegration of the political systems of the Gulf monarchies, including Saudi Arabia, due to growing political dissatisfaction among their populations that has been resulted from worsening socioeconomic conditions. Calls for the overthrow of dynastic monarchies in the

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Davis, Anthony, "Iran Drives for Diplomacy in Afghan Border Exercise", Jane's Defence Weekly, September 30, 1998, Vol.30, No.13, p.4.

223

Schahgaldian, p.16.

Gulf started after the 1979 Iranian Revolution²²⁴, and heightened by the 1991 Gulf War²²⁵, may well be characterized in the form of Sunni-fundamentalism and a resurgence of radical pan-Arab nationalism. The addition of the Taliban-Sunni threat from Afghanistan and Pakistan to the latter scenario would be a potential threat to the existence of Persian-Shia Iran, and to that of other non-arab states in the Middle East, like Turkey and Israel.

Second, notwithstanding the continuing American interest in the energy sources of the Gulf, the US government has to realize that its global superiority can not last forever, and its increasing global interests can not match its financial, and human resources. As hinted by Paul Kennedy in 1987:

“the United States now runs the risk, so familiar to historians of the rise and fall of previous Great powers, of what might roughly be called “imperial overstretch”: that is to say, decision-makers in Washington must face the awkward and enduring fact that the sum total of the United States’ global interests and obligations is nowadays far larger than the country’s power to defend them all simultaneously”.²²⁶

Added to this equation is the plausibility of a US failure in encouraging the democratization of Russia, which could lead to the revival of the Russian expansionism southward to the Gulf. Having the advantage of overland connection to the Middle East, Russian conventional

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Plascov, Avi, Security in the Persian Gulf: Modernization, Political Development and Stability, United Kingdom: Published By The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1982, p.99.

225

Gause, Gregory F., “The Gulf Conundrum: Economic Changes, Population Growth, and Political Stability in the GCC States”, The Washington Quarterly, Winter 1997, Vol.20, No.1, pp.145-65.

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Niou, Emerson M.S., Ordeshook, Peter C. and Rose, Gregory F., The Balance of Power: Stability in International System, New York, NY, US: Published By Cambridge University Press, 1989, p.329.

forces can overwhelm the American troops in the region and threaten more than 50% of the worlds oil supply. It is highly inconceivable that the US would extend its nuclear umbrella to its allies in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, and risk the lives of its citizens in a nuclear exchange with Russia.

It is under such circumstances that the US should reconsider its policy in the region by reestablishing diplomatic ties with Iran. By applying the Clinton Administration's policy of 'engagement' toward Iran, the US will strengthen the ability of the only regional country that can use its ideological, diplomatic, and military might to stop a Russian advance on the Persian Gulf, using the Muslim Republics of Central Asia as a buffer²²⁷. Washington policy makers should recognize that Iran has witnessed the reach and the power of US military forces in the Gulf and around the world, and has no incentive in supporting or mounting military actions, regionally or globally, against America. Iran would continue on course to reintegrate itself into the world community, if given the right economic and diplomatic incentives. The slow and implicit process of mutual accommodation between Iran and the United States may soon turn into official economic and diplomatic cooperation, proving, once again, that commercial interests could overcome long-lasting ideological differences. The re-establishment of commercial and diplomatic ties between Vietnam and the US after twenty years is a case in point.

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Iran's Role in Central Asia will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

Chapter 4

Iran's Role in the Central Asian Republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)

This chapter focuses on Iran's role in the Central Asian Republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). It will be argued that achieving political and commercial influence in Muslim Central Asia has been an ambition of Iranian foreign policy, since the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in the early 1990s. The chapter will conclude that Iran's interest in Central Asia stems from its desire to be recognized as an influential regional actor with sufficient diplomatic and commercial capacity to affect the political and economic future of the region. Iran, however, is not a regional military counterweight to Russia, and would likely refrain from actions that would alienate or undermine the military dominance of its foremost supplier of arms and military technology.

Iran's diplomatic efforts have shown its determination to support regional stability as a means to promote economic prosperity and commerce with Central Asia. Iran's aspiration in Central Asia are to prevent the imposition of foreign political systems in the region either through the use of force or by other means. Iran would take the imposition of foreign political systems in the region as unfriendly act and "injurious" to its national security interests. Iran's position relative to the political independence and sovereignty of the newly independent republics of Central Asia is parallel to the first and the third principles of the Doctrine, that forbade the interference of foreign powers in the internal

affairs, and opposed the re-colonization of the republics of the Western Hemisphere. Such action would be considered as antagonistic, and would justify action, diplomatic or otherwise, in protecting what was considered to be a vital American regional interest.

IRAN'S HISTORICAL CONNECTION TO CENTRAL ASIA:

Iran's prominent historic, cultural, religious, and ethnic ties to Central Asia dates back to the tenth century. The successive Saffarids, Samanid, Ghaznavid, and Buyaid dynasties, taking advantage of the declining Arab-Abbasid dynasty, gained power in east-central, and northeastern Iran, and pushed north into Central Asia to the areas where Afghanistan and Pakistan stand today²²⁸. As a result, the Central Asian cities of Tashkent, Bukhara, Samarkand, and the Afghan city of Kabul became renowned cultural, scientific, and religious centres under Persian influence²²⁹. This impact continued even as Iran was numerously invaded by Turkic-Mongolian tribes from central and northeast Asia. The Seljuk Turks invasion in the eleventh century was followed by the Mongols in the thirteenth century, and by Tamerlane (a tribal leader from Turkestan) in the fourteenth century²³⁰. During this period, the lack of a strong central authority led to the Turkic political domination of Iran. Although Iran achieved nationhood in the sixteenth century under the Safavid dynasty, the Turkic-Persian connection did not fade away, since the Safavids and

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Mackey, Sandra, The Iranians: Persia, Islam and the Soul of a Nation, New York, NY, US: Published By The Penguin Group, 1998, pp.60-1.

229

Ibid., p.61.

230

Ibid., pp.67-71.

their successive dynasties (1736-1925) were formed by tribes or individuals of Turkic origins²³¹.

Three main factors led to a gradual decline in Iran's influence in the Khanates of Central Asia. First, the predominance of Sunni Islam, and a shift in regional political control from Shia-Iran to Sunni-Turkic dynasties in the tenth century. Second, the transformation of political rule from Turkic to Czarist Russia, and subsequent Iranian defeats in 1813 and 1828 in which Iran surrendered the southern shores of the Caspian Sea to Russia. Third, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1918 and the creation of the Soviet Union that cutoff Central Asia from Iran through the formation of the new boundary of Sarakhs-Khazar, in 1921²³².

Under Stalin's policy of fragmentation, what had been known as the Turkestan Region of Russia was divided into five artificially created Soviet Socialist Republics in 1924²³³. This initiative, designed to protect the southern borders of the Soviet Union, led to the cultural isolation, and ethnic and religious alienation of the Turkic-Persian people of the region²³⁴. Nevertheless, the breakup of the Soviet Union and the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on 21 December 1991, once again changed the

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Ibid., pp.68,125.

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Ibid., p.130; and Mesbahi, Mohiaddin, Central Asia and the Caucasus After the Soviet Union: Domestic and International Dynamics, Gainesville, FL, US: Published By Florida University Press, 1994, p.37; and McLachlan, Keith, Edr., The Boundaries of Modern Iran, New York, NY, US: Published By St. Martin's Press, 1994, p11.

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Mesbahi, pp.63-4; and Eickelman, Dale F., Edr., Russia's Muslim Frontiers: New Directions in Cross-Cultural Analysis, Bloomington, Indiana, US: Published By Indiana University Press, 1993, pp.50-1.

234

Mesbahi, pp.64-6.

political scene in the region. The Muslim Central Asian Republics became a focus of the world because they laid claim to some of the worlds richest oil and natural gas deposits, and controlled 104 SS-18 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs)²³⁵. Moreover, the alienating impact of Soviet domination led to increased nostalgia and a desire to reexamine past religious and cultural identities. The heightened involvement of Iran, Afghanistan, and some of the other Muslim Middle Eastern countries for political and economic purposes, brought a new perception of threat to the stability of the region.

The new perceived threat was Islamic-fundamentalism that gradually replaced that of Communism, and was considered the most significant post-Cold War challenge to international stability and the regional security of Central Asia:

“The collapse of the Soviet Union and the ‘demise’ of Communism as a competing ideology have given rise to the potential emergence of Islam and the Islamic world as replacements and new challenges facing the Western world in the post-Cold War era. The emergence of independent states in Central Asia and Caucasus has led to significant enlargement of this perceived threat. Geopolitically, the black hole of Central Asia now constitutes an expanded part of the new Middle East. Geoculturally, few other regions entail a nation-state border system of such potential transparency, where common and cross-border religious, ethnic, linguistic, and collective memories could act individually or jointly as destabilizing or integrating factors.”²³⁶

The source of this threat was considered to be generated by Iran. In 1991 even Russia perceived Iran and its revolutionary brand of ideology as the main threat to the stability of

235

Rashid, pp.4,234.

236

Mesbahi, p.2.

Central Asia²³⁷.

THE NEW CONTENDER IN CENTRAL ASIA'S POWER GAME:

The collapse of the Soviet system marked the end of the colonization of Muslim Central Asia, and opened a new chapter in its relationship with Iran²³⁸. Although Iran's growing economic-political interest in Central Asia has been countered by that of Russia and Turkey, it is relatively more influential and will likely play a crucial role in future developments in the region. Iran's historical, cultural, ethnic and religious ties to Central Asia has translated into a degree of political influence, and has increased its viability as a commercial and diplomatic partner. Despite Turkey's call for pan-Turkic unity, and its growing economic interest in the region, Central Asian leaders have recognized that Turkey merely seeks to prove its diplomatic competence to the West. Gaining political influence in Central Asia would render Turkey a valuable political force capable of furthering Western interests in the region. Such an accomplishment could actualize Turkey's long desired goal of becoming a full member of the European Union (EU), and not just a military force within NATO. Turkey's involvement in the region, therefore, would be more likely to favor the West instead of the Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

²³⁷

Ibid.

²³⁸

Rashid, Ahmed, The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism?, London, UK: Published by Zed Books, 1994, p.4; and Peimani, Hooman, Regional Security and The Future of Central Asia: The Competition of Iran, Turkey, and Russia, Westport, CT, US: Published By Praeger, 1998, pp. ix, x; and " Turkey and Iran: 'It will Burn Nicely Anyway' ", The Economist, London, UK: Published By The Economist Newspaper Limited, August 7th, 1997, p.30.

Russian ambitions in Central Asia, on the other hand, are a function of its economic and security interests, and might not be mutually beneficial. Russia's return to a Soviet style government under a communist regime, or traditional nationalism under a right wing political leader such as Zhirinovskiy, could lead to colonial aspirations detrimental to Central Asian republics. This could be brought on by Russia's disastrous economic and political conditions under President Yeltsin. Consequently Iran potentially presents the most attractive commercial and political partner for these republics.

Perceiving Iran as a threat to regional stability of Central Asia, due to its proximity, historical ties, and its revolutionary brand of Islam, has been a misconception of Iran's foreign policy interests. Iran has not been the only Islamic country in the Middle East or West Asia that has sought closer ties with the Muslim republics of Central Asia. Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan have been among the contenders for regional influence, that seek to strengthen their political and economic ties with Central Asia²³⁹. Nevertheless, of all these contenders, Russia and Iran have been the two most successful countries in Central Asia's power game.

As mentioned before, in the early 1990s, Russia, like the West, was concerned with the threat of Islamic Iran to the stability of Central Asia. Considering Central Asia as its backyard, or "underbelly"²⁴⁰, Russia was faced with a host of military, political, "ethno-

239

Naumkin, Vitaly V. Edr., Central Asia and Transcaucasia : Ethnicity and Conflict, Westport, Ct, US: Published By Greenwood Press, 1994, pp.148-155.

240

Razov, Sergei, "New Developments in Central Asia", International Affairs: A Russian Journal of World Politics, Diplomacy and International Relations, Minneapolis, MN, US: Published By East View publications, 1997, Vol.43, No.3, p.59.

sectarian” and economic challenges in these newly sovereign entities²⁴¹. Russia’s perception of the Iranian threat, however, gradually shifted as it became more concerned with NATO’s expansion in the southern region through Turkey’s influence. Also, the rising threat of Sunni-fundamentalism in Afghanistan, backed by a Saudi-Pakistani partnership, gained prominence in Russian strategic thinking. This was due to the Central Asian Republics’ adherence to Sunni- Islam, along with the Afghan involvement in the Tajik Civil War²⁴². Russia’s fear that the Central Asian Republics, along with those of Transcaucasia, located in the so called “arc of instability”, would go under the influence of the “Islamic Belt”(stretching from Russia’s western borders with Turkey, to its eastern borders with Afghanistan and China²⁴³), was a plausible concern. Nonetheless, that perception did not focus as strongly on Iran, since the two countries moved closer together in a tactical alliance based on common security concerns and the need for economic/military cooperation²⁴⁴.

RUSSIAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS, AND IRAN’S RELATIVE SUCCESS IN CENTRAL ASIA:

Despite the demise of the Soviet Union, the regional configuration of power in

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Ibid., p.56.

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Ibid., pp.56-9.

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Ibid., p.60; and Ferdinand, Peter, Edr., The New States of Central Asia and Their Neighbors, New York, NY, US: Published By The Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994, p.97.

244

Freedman, Robert O., “A Tactical Alliance”, SAIS Review, US: Published By Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, Vol.17, No.2, p.108.

Central Asia is still dominated by Russia. It is Russia's interests that determine the parameters for outside actors eager to play a role in the emerging economies and the political systems in Central Asia. Even after the creation of the CIS, Central Asia has remained within Russia's sphere of security, and no country perceived as a threat to Russia's vital interests could effectively partake in political or economic developments in the region. The Central Asian Republics have also acknowledged the continuing role of Russia as the main source of regional stability, and are unlikely to adopt policies, or engage in actions that would be considered detrimental to Russia's national security interests.

Russia's change of perception about Iran has been due to several factors. First, Russia's has realized that the threat of Iranian-Islamic fundamentalism, aiming to export its brand of government into central Asia, has been over-exaggerated by the West²⁴⁵. Despite Iran's adherence to Islamic values and the rhetorical support of Islamic revolutionary ideology, Russia recognized significant barriers to the export of Iranian ideology to Central Asia. Iran's brand of Shia-Islam differs from the Sunni brand upheld by all five Central Asian Republics²⁴⁶, and its implementation is rendered difficult, even in the ethnically Persian Tajikistan. Moreover, Iran's financial and military support of the Islamic opposition groups in the Tajik Civil War, since 1992²⁴⁷, did not create a type of patron-client

245

Parsons, Anthony, Sir., Central Asia: The Last Decolonization, London, UK: Published By The David Davies Memorial institute of International Studies, August 1993, Occasional Paper No.4, p.7.

246

Ibid.

247

Olcott, Martha Brill, Central Asia's New States: Independence, Foreign Policy, and Regional Security, Washington, D.C., US: Published By The United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996, p.173.

relationship threatening to Russian interests. The 1994 temporary cease fire in the Tajik conflict reached in Tehran²⁴⁸, gave Iran the diplomatic leverage it needed with Russia. Thereafter, Iran has been viewed by Russia as an effective negotiator or peacemaker, and not a destabilizing regional force.

Second, Iran's disinclination to use Islam as a political tool for gaining influence in Central Asia, by entering into economic cooperation agreements with other non-Muslim members of Russian federation like Armenia, despite the latter's conflict with the Shia Republic of Azerbaijan²⁴⁹, has been an element of confidence building with Russia. The 1993 Turkmenistan-Iran-Armenia agreement for car, rail and air links via Iran, and the agreement for the export of Turkmen natural gas to Armenia through an Iranian pipeline, are among the examples of Iranian relations with non-Muslim republics of Russian Federation²⁵⁰.

Third, Russia has found a potential ally in Iran²⁵¹, as both countries have become concerned with the threat of Sunni expansionism in Central Asia initiated by Afghanistan,

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Ibid., p.172.

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Freedman, p.108.

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Iran has also established a cargo transportation company with Armenia and Turkmenistan in 1995 (Peimani, pp.109-10).

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Gusher, Anatolii, "On Russian-Iranian Relations". International Affairs: A Russian Journal of World Politics, Diplomacy and International Relations, Minneapolis, MN, US: Published By East View Publications, 1997, Vol. 43, No.2, pp.38-9.

and sponsored by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan²⁵². Moreover, both countries aim to check Turkey's aspirations in Central Asia. Turkey's increased influence in the region would bring the Atlantic Alliance to the heartland of Central Asia and directly into the backyard of Russia and Iran. This is unacceptable because NATO's enlargement eastward threaten's the regional balance of power dominated by Russia.

"NATO's expansion eastward is making Russia look around hurriedly for at least some kind of strategic allies. in this situation, the anti-Western and anti-American regime in Iran would be a natural and very important partner."²⁵³

Iran shares Russia's opposition to the hegemonic presence of outside powers in Central Asia; a region it considers its sphere of influence or backyard²⁵⁴. Russia and Iran both agree that Turkey's domination of the development agenda in Central Asia would undermine regional stability and pose a challenge to their sovereignty.

Fourth, the five newly independent republics of Central Asia have adopted a path of political and economic development that would lead them to market economies and secular political systems, and not Islamic fundamentalist governments. Only in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the potential for Islamic revivalism has led to concerns over the future of the two republics in Moscow. However, this has not lasted as non-Islamic or coalition governments

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Freedman, p.108.

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Gareev, Makhmut, Gen., "The Expansion of NATO Does not Solve, but Aggravates Security Issues", International Affairs: A Russian Journal of World Politics, Diplomacy and International Relations, Minneapolis, MN, US: Published By East View Publications, 1996, Vol.43, No.3, p.141.

254

Gusher, p.40; and Freedman, p.103.

brought relative stability to these regions. The reason behind the region's lack of interest in pursuing an Islamic path in government or economic development is the systemic desensitization and secularization policies conducted by Moscow, during seventy years of communist regime²⁵⁵. Seen as a destabilizing factor by Russia, Islam has proven not to be a viable alternative for the region. Central Asia's dependence on the Russian military to ensure regional stability²⁵⁶, and the anxiety over the loss of the Russian minority's technical expertise²⁵⁷ from the region, due to their migration to the Russian Federation, has made the Islamic model of development an unreliable option. Furthermore, diminishing Western interest and investment in the region since mid 1990s, as a result of false speculations about the profitability of the energy sector in Central Asia²⁵⁸, has compelled the Muslim republics to refrain from any policy that would alienate Russian interests and investment.

Fifth, Russia's historical attitude toward the region as its protectorate in the "near-abroad" is not likely to change in the future. The importance of Russia to the Central Asian Republics stems from their political infancy, and lack of resources to obtain military-security independence from Moscow. Russia, however, has often been impulsive toward political developments within its borders and within the CIS. The reactive and harsh handling of the

²⁵⁵ Mesbahi, p.139.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.138-9.

²⁵⁷ Eickelman, p.55.

²⁵⁸

Olcott, Marth Brill, "The Caspian's False Promise", *Foreign Policy*, Washington, D.C., US: Published By The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Summer 1998, No.111, p.102.

Chechnyan Crisis in the mid 90s²⁵⁹, along with its superpower demeanor portrays Russia as an expansionist, militaristic, and self-serving regional actor. Nonetheless, it is highly unlikely that the US would oppose Russia's hegemony in Central Asia²⁶⁰, because of Washington's desire to bring democratization to Russia.

"Russia is now and will always be more important than Central Asia to US security concerns at a time when the West's long-term security interests include integrating Russia into Western alliance as a full and responsible partner."²⁶¹

Russia's future ambitions in Central Asia maybe best described in Dostoevsky's 1881 remarks:

"What is the need of future seizure of Asia? What's our business there? This is necessary because Russia is not only in Europe, but also in Asia, because the Russian is not only a European, but also an Asiatic. Not only that: in our coming destiny, perhaps it is precisely Asia that represents our main way out."²⁶²

Russia's New-Euroasianist foreign policy²⁶³ could gradually distance it from the West and the US, while it would remain sensitive to the situations and policies of the neighboring Islamic countries, particularly Iran. Sensitivity to Iran's aspirations in Central Asia is

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McFaul, Michael, "Eurasia Letter: Russian Politics After Chechnya", Foreign Policy, Washington D.C., US: Published By The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Summer 1995, No.99, pp.149-65.

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Olcott, 1996, pp.175-9.

²⁶¹

Ibid., p.179.

²⁶²

Mesbahi, p.224.

²⁶³

Ibid., p.279.

Russian Achilles heel. Maintaining a balanced relationship with Iran has become the most crucial aspect of Russia's regional policy:

"Although Russia's priorities have shifted since the collapse of the Soviet Union away from the Middle East to the "near-abroad", the Russian-Iranian relationship has assumed greater importance since December 1991. Iran's critical geopolitical position enables it to play a role in both Central Asia and the Transcaucasus, as well as in the Persian Gulf."²⁶⁴

Russia maintains close cooperative ties with Iran to avoid the possibility of latent Islamic-revolutionary sentiments in Central Asia:

"Cooperation with Iran is more than just a question of money and orders for the Russia atomic industry. Today a hostile Tehran could cause a great deal of unpleasantness for Russia in the North Caucasus and in Tajikistan if it were to really set its mind to supporting the Muslim insurgents with weapons, money and volunteers. On the other hand, a friendly Iran could become an important strategic ally in the future."²⁶⁵

Iran's relative success in gaining political and economic influence among the Central Asian republics, has been a result of its acceptance of the dominant role of Russia in the region. Unlike Turkey, Iran has not engaged in potentially destabilizing rhetoric that instigated cultural nostalgia. In fact, Turkey's initial attempts to create pan-Turkic cooperation ended abruptly, as it failed to fulfil its financial promises to the Central Asian Republics²⁶⁶. Geographically disadvantaged Turkey (sharing no borders with Central Asia),

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Freedman, p.98.

²⁶⁵

Ibid., p.103.

²⁶⁶ Rashid, p.212.

shifted its focus to Azerbaijan, and became involved in financing that countries war effort against Armenia, and financing Abkhazian separatists in Georgia²⁶⁷. Turkey's actions were seen by Central Asians and the Russians as destabilizing, and tarnished Turkey's "big brother" image. The potential use of Turkey's model of development, based on capitalism and secularism, although plausible, lost its attraction as Ankara did not back its pan-Turkic vision²⁶⁸. The comments made by Turkey's Prime Minister Turgut Ozal on 2 April 1993, put an end to Turkey's official commitment to Turkic-Central Asian republics:

"Fantasies of pan-Turkism are totally out of the question, especially in today's world. What do we have instead? These republics are all separate states. They are equal and brotherly states. We can form a community with them. For example... we can work as a group at the United Nations, and we are together in ECO [Economic Cooperation Organization]. In time we can become a community of Turkish states, just like the Arabs, but we must regard all of them as independent states. Let no one even think of a big brother role."²⁶⁹

In reality Turkey's failure to take a leading role in the development of Central Asian republics hinted at its own precarious economic and political situation²⁷⁰. Even Ozal's successor Suleiman Demirel, who advocated an active role by Turkey in Central Asia²⁷¹,

²⁶⁷ Naumkin, p.142.

²⁶⁸ Mesbahi, p.258.

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Haghayeghi, Mehrdad, Islam and Politics in Central Asia, New York, NY, US: Published By St. Martin's Press, 1995, p.183.

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Ibid.; and Pettifer, James, The Turkish Labyrinth: Atatürk and the New Islam, Toronto, Ont., Can.: Published By Penguin Books, 1997, pp.209,211,215,217.

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Hyman, Anthony, "Eastern Approaches: Turkey Is Determined to be the Big Brother to its Central Asian Neighbors", The Middle East, London, UK: Published By IC Publications, February 1995, No.242, pp.32-4.

after his election, had considered the goal of a so called “Turkish Empire” as utopian²⁷². This clearly demonstrated that Turkey’s leaders use Central Asia as a tool to gain popular support, and are largely uninterested in long-term direct involvement in Central Asia.

On the other hand, Iran’s decision not to exploit its ethno-cultural, religious and historical ties to Central Asia as means for furthering its political objectives, has proven its diplomatic maturity. For example, unlike Saudi Arabia who has attempted to use Islam as a means of influence by engaging non-governmental charitable-Islamic groups, Iran has refrained from engaging such groups unless through local governmental channels. Iran’s actions in Central Asia have been reflective of its recognition of Russia’s regional role, and a desire for maintaining friendly relations with that country. Therefore, Iran has not pursued radical political goals that would alienate Russia and interrupt the transfer of Russia’s military technology and hardware to Iran. Also, Iran has remained mindful of the political elites of the newly independent republics of Central Asia and their desire to develop their economies without engaging in power-politics that would antagonize Russia.

Having realized the limitation of Turkey’s promises, declining US and Western economic interest in the region, and the lack of political and social appeal of the other contenders for influence in the region (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and China), the political elites in Central Asia have sought to rebuild their ties with Iran. Iran’s proximity and geographic advantage over Turkey, Pakistan, or Saudi Arabia has made Iran the preferred route for the transportation of the region’s raw material through its territory and

272

Mesbahi, p.258.

via the Persian Gulf. Having Iran as an alternative transport route has given Central Asian republics the diplomatic leverage they needed to offset Moscow's pressure to monopolize the export routes for Central Asian gas and oil exports. Russia, although interested in benefitting from the transport of Central Asian raw materials through its territory, has not been able to compete with Iran's ability to provide the shortest and the most economical route. In addition, Russia has been supporting arrangements between Iran and Central Asian republics, because it has been convinced that Iran's prosperity is essential for maintaining Russia's lucrative military, technical, and technological exports to that country.

Iran's preference by Russia, over the other Western supported contenders (Pakistan and Turkey), has stemmed from its commitment to regional economic development in Central Asia. Iran's initiative in forming the Caspian Cooperation Council, and encouraging the membership of the Transcaucasian and the Central Asian republics in the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)²⁷³, are among the reasons for Russian-Central Asian acceptance of Iran's role ²⁷⁴.

The success enjoyed by Iran in Central Asia has been also due to the lack of other appealing alternatives among the competitors like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, or even China. For example, Pakistan's lack of a direct-overland connection to the region, and adequate financial resources to invest in Central Asia has made it an unsuccessful

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The ECO is an organization for regional economic cooperation created after the disintegration of the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in the 1960s, and is composed of three of the original CENTO members: Iran, Pakistan and Turkey.

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Parsons, p.9; and "Mosco Az Syasathay-e Iran Hemayat Mikonad (*Moscow Supports Iran's [regional] Policies*)", Ettela'at, International (An International Persian Daily Newspaper), New York, NY, US: 24 December, 1996, Vol.3, No.649, p.2.

competitor for regional influence. Pakistan continues to press for the construction of a transportation line that would go through Afghanistan²⁷⁵ and would deliver Central Asia's exports to the Pakistani port of Karachi, for worldwide distribution. However, this plan demands a stable political-national system in Afghanistan, that has been amidst destructive civil war for which the prospect of peace remains dim. Moreover, the mountainous terrain of Afghanistan is not easily accessed and building a transport route through it is a costly and time consuming venture. Finally, the Russian, Iranian, and Central Asian suspicions of a Pakistani desire to pursue an Islamic coalition against India, has been another reason for that countries unattractiveness as a political and economic partner.

Furthermore, with regard to an Afghan-Pakistani route, the possible threat of the Taliban-fundamentalist ambitions in Central Asia, and the destabilizing involvement of Afghan Mujahedin in the Tajik Civil War, along with the previously mentioned geographic reasons, has made this route an unthinkable option²⁷⁶. Likewise, Saudi involvement in political and economic developments in Central Asia has been counter-productive. Saudi Arabia's interest in developing ties with Islamic communities to promote its brand of Wahhabi-Sunni Islam²⁷⁷ has not been welcomed by the former communist-turned nationalist political elites in Central Asia²⁷⁸. Moreover, the Saudis' financing of the Pakistani backed

275

Mesbahi, p.259.

276

Naumkin, pp.149-52.

277

Ferdinand, p.69.

278

Mesbahi, p.136.

Taliban, and their US-Western backed image has been seen as a destabilizing factor, due to its antagonizing effect on the two most influential regional actors, Iran and Russia²⁷⁹.

China is another hopeful in Central Asia's power game. Nonetheless, being linked by land to Central Asia has not presented China as a feasible alternative route for the transportation of the region's gas and oil. China's interest in the outcome of the political-economic developments in the region initially resulted from the desire to contain the rising threat of Islamic-ethnic nationalism it faces in the Xinjiang autonomous province. The formation of independent Muslim ethnic republics in Central Asia has encouraged the Uighur majority, as well as the Kazakh and Uzbek minorities, in Xinjiang to demand independence, or reunion with their ethnic kinsmen in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Calls for an independent Uighuristan, bordering Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, has further concerned China, as it potentially provokes a confrontation with Kazakhstan over the fate of the Kazakh minority in the region. China's determination to improve relations with Russia, and the desire to benefit from the economic development in Central Asia through cooperation²⁸⁰, along with the above mentioned infeasibility factor, are among the reasons that make China a lesser influential contender in the region.

The only remaining formidable challenge to Iran's role in the Central Asia is the U.S. Politically, the US has opposed Iranian involvement in the region, due to its suspicions of Iranian aspirations. Iran's revolutionary rhetoric and its history of support for radical

279

Freedman, p.99.

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Naumkin, pp.148-9.

Islamic groups has led the US to perceive Iran as a destabilizing factor and detrimental to its interests in the region. Furthermore, since the adoption of the Dual Containment Policy (DCP) by the Clinton Administration, the US has intensified its attempts to keep Iran politically and economically in isolation. The DCP has been seen by Washington as a prudent measure to coerce Iran to withdraw its support from radical Islamic movements, and to change its unfriendly posture toward the West and particularly the US. Tied to the US political aims is the notion of the economic isolation of Iran. The US has forbidden its subsidiaries from engaging in joint ventures or direct dealings with Iran²⁸¹. The US claims that Iran's economic prosperity would further enable the Islamic government to fulfil its regional and international fundamentalist agenda. The US has also tried to discourage Russia from providing military technology to Iran, by arguing that an enhanced Iranian military capability would be detrimental to regional security and would eventually enable Iran to contest and impair Russian influence in Central Asia.

Nevertheless, in the light of a number of developments in Iran and in regional strategic configuration, the US has relaxed its initial strong opposition to Iran's role in Central Asia. The reasons are as follows: first, the election of the moderate President Khatami in May 1997, and his peaceful overture, that has led the US policy-makers to believe Iran's readiness to end all hostilities between the two nations; second, the rise of Sunni-fundamentalism in Afghanistan, due to the emergence of the Saudi-Pakistani backed Taliban, and its hostility toward the US, manifested in the mid 90s bombing of US forces

281

Foroohar, Kambiz, "Big Oil Versus Clinton", The Middle East, London, UK: Published By IC Publications, May 1995, No. 245, pp.18-19.

compound in Dahran, Saudi Arabia, and the 1998 bombing of US embassies in Africa²⁸²; third, the US realization of the myth of a lucrative energy market of Central Asia, and the Caspian Region²⁸³; and fourth, a desire by the US to sustain its Confidence Building Measures (CBM), by not offending Russia, through excessive involvement in Russia's backyard²⁸⁴.

IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD CENTRAL ASIA; THE MONROE PRINCIPLE OF POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE AND INTER-STATE COOPERATION:

Iran's future involvement in Central Asia will potentially encompass the Monroe principle of regional-political independence, and regional cooperation necessary to maintain the peace and safety of the newly independent republics. Just as the US had a vital interest in promoting the regional stability of the Latin American republics of the Western Hemisphere, Iran perceives itself as the regional-diplomatic guarantor of peace and stability in Central Asia. The regional stability proposed and defended by the Monroe Doctrine is the central aspect of Iranian foreign policy toward the region. Iran recognizes its limited military

282

"Fear Along The Silk Road: The Taliban Virus", World Press Review, Muscatine, Iowa, US: Published By The Stanley Foundation, December 1998, Vol.45, No.12, pp.6-7.

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Myers Jaffe, Amy and Manning, Robert, "The Myth of the Caspian's 'Great Game': The Real Geopolitics of Energy", Survival, London, UK: Published By The International Institute for Strategic Studies, Winter 1998-99, Vol.40, No.4, pp.112-29.

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Ibid., p. 127.

role in the region, due to predominant Russian military presence in Central Asia²⁸⁵. Iran has limited itself to promotion of regional stability through friendly-diplomatic and economic involvement in Central Asia²⁸⁶. Iran, however, will likely remain mindful of possible political shifts in Moscow that could lead to an expansionist Russian foreign policy²⁸⁷. In that case Iran might seek to use its ideological influence on Islamic revivalists in the region²⁸⁸, that would lead to instability not only in Central Asia, but also in the Muslim regions of the Russian federation.

Iran has proven a key player in the political-economic developments in Central Asia. For the most part, Iran, not least of all for its own domestic interests, will likely continue its economic cooperation with the Central Asian Republics in the future. The two new agreements signed between Iran-Turkmenistan-Turkey, for export of Turkmen gas to Turkey via Iran (1997), and the ten-year agreement to transport Kazakhstan oil via Iranian facilities²⁸⁹, has made Iran's foothold in Central Asia stronger. Iran, however, will not likely venture into any political activity that may threaten its relationship with Russia, and yet, it will remain mindful of any change of direction in Russian foreign policy favoring Iran's

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Zhang, Yongjin, and Azizian, Rouben, Eds., Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders, New York, NY, US: Published By St. Martins's Press, Inc., 1998, p.26.

286

Ibid, p.229.

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Amuzegar, Jahangir, "Adjusting to Sanctions", Foreign Affairs, New York, NY, US: Published By The Council on Foreign Relations, Inc., May/June 1997, Vol.76, No.3, p.40.

288

Olcott, p.173.

289

Peimani, p. ix

regional rivals such as the Afghan-Saudi- Pakistani coalition²⁹⁰. Although Russia's hegemonic attitude may empower Iran's main regional enemy in the Gulf (Iraq), it is unlikely that Russia would jeopardize its current working arrangements with Iran for the foreseeable future.

Iran's attempt to come out of its self-imposed 20 year isolation has been the main motivator of its involvement in Central Asia²⁹¹, and may yet prove to be valuable regional asset as well as for the international community. Iran's Islamic model will not be exported to Central Asia, and therefore, should not be seen as the destabilizing factor. Iran's desire to prosper economically and to gain political recognition internationally has softened its revolutionary image and shifted its, so called, confrontational-fundamentalist agenda.

The most serious threat to the stability of the region would most likely arise out of inter-ethnic conflict²⁹², due to the mixed ethnic composition, and as a result of deliberate shifts in the current boundaries of these republics. The relative political stability at the present can not last long²⁹³. In the event of escalating political-economic crises, the inexperienced political elites of Central Asian republics, would most plausibly blame the presence of minorities for their economic hardships, and the mismanagement of their resources. Therefore, particular consideration should be given to the possibility of an

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Freedman, p.104.

291

Ferdinand, pp.67-8.

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Zhang, Yongjin, p.108.

293

Ibid., p.109; and Peimani, pp.66-87.

extended inter-ethnic conflict, similar to the Balkans (1994 Bosnia and Croatia, and 1999 Kosovo), between the Asian and Slavic groups. Such conflict would be extremely destabilizing, as it would lead to confrontation between Russia and a coalition of Muslim-Central Asian-Transcaucasian republics, with a threat of spillover to other Islamic enclaves within the Russian Federation.

There is also a chance of inter-ethnic conflict amongst the Muslim republics themselves, arising from differences between the secular ruling elites and the more traditional public. The end result of a conflict of this nature could be the formation of secular-militaristic systems of government similar to that in Turkey, or the formation of populist-Islamic governments. The former option is bound to fail, as it would become repressive of minorities and other political views, in an attempt to form a homogenous ethno-nationalist identity. Turkey's treatment of its thirteen million Kurds, as well as other minorities such as Alavites, is a clear indication of its intolerance. An Islamic option, although majoritarian, could antagonize the US and the West, and possibly Russia. Nevertheless, Iran's twenty-year experience in developing an Islamic system²⁹⁴ in a multi-ethnic society may seem an attractive model for prevention of inter-ethnic violence in the region, should the latter option prevail. In that case, Islam should not be seen as a destabilizing factor²⁹⁵, but potentially as an integrating force capable of containing inter-ethnic confrontation among the Muslim republics of the region.

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Zhang and Azizian, pp. 120-1.

²⁹⁵

Haghayeghi, pp.207-11.

Finally, Iran would likely not foster an ambition to become a model for the region's political-economic development, so long as Russia, US or other external powers refrain from imposing a foreign political or economic system of development into the region. Nevertheless, growing socioeconomic hardships, a post-Communist nationalistic attitude, as well as its hegemonic posture toward the CIS republics, could lead Russia to adopt an imperialist/expansionist foreign policy. Russia's New-Euroasianists embracement of "*realpolitik*" could antagonize Tehran, and lead to a Monroe type defensive-political alignment with an extra regional power (most probably the US) in order to contain a Russian threat.

Russia's historical interest in gaining access to the warm waters of the Persian Gulf, would equally endanger the national security interests of Iran and the US. The resurgence of Russian imperial aspirations would undermine Iran's independence and territorial integrity, and on the same token would threaten US interest in preserving the free and uninterrupted flow of the region's Oil²⁹⁶. As mentioned earlier, should such a scenario emerge, Iran would utilize its Islamic card in Central Asia, and use the region as a defensive buffer zone against Russian expansionism.

296

Amuzgar, p.40.

Chapter 5

Seeing Iran Through the Lense of the Monroe Doctrine;

The Myth of an Iranian Islamic-Fundamentalist Threat

In the previous chapters Iran's role in the Persian Gulf and in the Central Asian Republics of CIS was discussed. It was emphasized that Iran's foreign policy aspirations in both regions could be best described by comparison to the principles of the Monroe Doctrine. It was also highlighted that the shift in Iran's attitude towards the US, since the election of Mohammad Khatami, has started a new era in the foreign policy of Iran, and has provided the opportunity for Iran's reintegration into the international community. However, the pressure and the negative image bestowed on Iran by the international community, particularly the West, in order to compel that country to relinquish nearly two decades of its radical demeanor, has damaged Iran's economy as well as its reputation. Various diplomatic and economic sanctions imposed on Iran debilitated the country's capacity for rapid development, and weakened its military to the extent that it lost its historically stabilizing position in the Persian Gulf. The Iraqi invasion of Iran in 1980 and Kuwait in 1990 was as direct result of a militarily weak and politically and economically vulnerable Iran. The presence of a domestically stable and regionally dominant Iran might have prevented the outbreak of numerous conflicts in the Gulf, as well as elsewhere in the Middle East.

Although the revolutionary fervor instigated in 1979 led Iran to engage in uncharacteristically revisionist activities in the region, the sobering experiences of eight years of war with Iraq, internal political conflicts, and economic hardships due to

international sanctions revived Iran's sense of self-respect and responsibility. Such experiences have been the driving force behind Iran's recent attempts to restore its reputation not as a source of an Islamic-fundamentalist threat, but as a peaceful, active, and committed member of the international community of states. Iran's return to its pre-revolutionary style of foreign policy is a consequence of realizing its place and role in the regional power configuration. In that regard, Iran could reassume the role of regional protector with a tacit reliance on the presence of an extra-regional power who would guarantee the regional balance of power. In so doing, Iran's foreign policy toward the Gulf and Central Asia would reflect the three principles of the Monroe Doctrine: anti-colonialism, non-involvement in extra-regional conflicts, and opposition to the imposition of extra-regional political systems in Central Asia, or the Gulf.

Since the 1979 Revolution, Iran has been portrayed as a threat to the stability and the security of the Persian Gulf, the Middle East, and as early as 1991, the Muslim republics of the CIS. The image of a "rogue" state has been so over-exaggerated as to force the Western public, particularly in the US, to believe that Iran is systematically planning to annihilate Western Civilization as a part of an international Islamic fundamentalist agenda. However, Iran is no more dangerous today in the pursuit of its regional and international foreign policy objectives, than it was under the Shah. This argument will be supported by first identifying the source and the perception of the regional and international threat posed by Iran, and second, by arguing that Iran is in search regional economic and military dominance similar to the US in the Americas as reflected in the principles of the Monroe Doctrine. Iran's military buildup will remain a national defence priority, and should not pose a systematic

threat to the regional stability and security of the Persian Gulf, Central Asia, or the West. Moreover, Iran is unlikely to return to its radicalism of the early 1980s, provided that its transition from isolation to international participation is recognized and assisted.

THE PRESUMED IRANIAN SECURITY THREAT:

Despite Iran's active involvement in the Persian Gulf, and the CIS, it has not espoused expansionist territorial or political ambitions within these regions. Many Western Countries, particularly the US, as well as a number of Middle Eastern countries like Israel, Egypt, Turkey, and Jordan, have expressed concerns over Iran's potential threat to their security. These threats are the military and financial sponsoring of terrorist activities, opposition to Arab-Israeli peace process, the acquisition and development of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and ideological backing of Islamic-fundamentalist groups aiming to wage war on the West and Western-backed Middle Eastern governments. Iran's revolutionary expressions, nevertheless, are merely for domestic political consumption and a means for diverting popular attention from domestic political and economic problems that particularly challenge Middle Eastern governments. To further illustrate the latter argument the validity of each of the above concerns will be examined in detail.

Taking the US diplomatic staff hostage in Tehran (1979) became a turning point in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The unprecedented nature and the boldness of this action, exacerbated by the failure of the US military-rescue operation and coupled with Iran's dire need to receive military equipment to defend itself against Iraq, led Iran to embark on a new political venture. Iran ventured to provide financial and military

sponsorship for the so called terrorist groups like Hizbullah and AMAL, and to assist them in their fight against external and internal aggression during Lebanon's civil war. The rationale for Iran's action was twofold: to protect the Lebanese Shia population to whom Iranian religious leaders had expressed allegiance, and to launch hostage-taking operations against Western nationals, whose release would be negotiated through Iran's assistance, in exchange for the badly needed US/Western military hardware²⁹⁷.

Except for Lebanon, Iran's sponsoring of radical Islamic groups has remained indirect, inspirational, and ideological. Iran's direct and indirect involvement in support of such groups ended in the wake of the growing post Iran-Iraq War economic and social discontent. Following Ayatollah Khomeini's death, President Rafsanjani started the processes of reform to end Iran's self-imposed isolation by helping to release all Western hostages in Lebanon. In turn, this decision signaled a shift in Iran's revolutionary foreign policy²⁹⁸. Iran's presence in Lebanon decreased after the 1991 Gulf War, and Syria replaced Iran²⁹⁹ as the primary supporter of Hizbullah and AMAL, who continues to use these groups in its dispute with Israel over the Golan Heights. Furthermore, accusations against Iran for its opposition to the Arab-Israeli peace process by allegedly sponsoring the terrorist activities

297

For more information on Iran's hostages for arms (Iran-contra affair), see Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis. Also see Joyner, Christopher C., Ed., The Persian Gulf War: Lessons for Strategy, Law and Diplomacy, New York, NY, US: Published By Greenwood Press, 1990, pp.22, 47,49,79-80,103-5,112-14, 143,146,230; and Esposito, 1995, pp.114,140-50.

298

Esposito, pp. 115-18.

299

Iran's declining involvement in Lebanon and its replacement by Syria as the main sponsor of Hizbullah, has been echoed by the Western media in recent clashes between Israeli forces and the Hizbullah guerrillas on March 1st, 1999, specifically referring to the latter as Syrian-backed group (<http://cbc.newsworld.ca>, March 1, 1999).

of the Palestinian group Hamas, was largely instigated by the supporters of the right-wing Likud Party for reelection³⁰⁰.

The real Iranian opposition to the peace process, on the one hand, has been a diplomatic maneuver to prevent domestic opposition by the hard-liners who could accuse the moderates of betraying revolutionary ideals and abandoning the cause of Palestinian liberation. On the other hand, the exclusion of Iran from the peace process has been perceived as an attempt to undermine Iran's diplomatic role in the Middle East. From an Iranian perspective, any permanent settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should include the full participation of all regional countries, that historically, theologically, and politically are affected by the events in a land claimed by the three dominant faiths in the Middle East. The importance of Israeli-Palestinian issue for Iran has been underscored by the late Ayatollah Khomeini's remarks that:

“...[T]oday, the issue of Jerusalem is the most important issue of the Islamic world”.³⁰¹

Iran's political disagreement with the peace talks stems from its fear of being isolated regionally. As a result, Iran continues to oppose any settlement that would exclude it from participating in regional arrangements concerning lasting peace in the Middle East.

Despite the rhetorical animosity between Iran and Israel since 1979, the two

300

This information was received through an interview with a confidential source, however, the growing diplomatic exchange between Iran and Israel after the reelection of the Likud Party supported this claim. It has been reported that Israel has repeatedly send teams of irrigation experts, and Jewish clergy to Iran since Likud's reelection in 1996 (“Israeli Group Heads for Iran”, BBC, (Online), March 5, 1998).

301

Fuller, Graham, “The Next Ideology”, Foreign Policy, Washington, D.C., US: Published By The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Spring 1995, No.98, p.153.

countries have maintained a tacit security relationship, that has been highlighted by the transfer of arms during Iran-Iraq war³⁰², the mutual threat of a revived Iraqi military threat, and the possible re-emergence of an expansionist pan-Arab nationalism, triggered by the rise of Sunni-Arab fundamentalism. Though in the recent years Israel has sought to strengthen its security by entering bilateral security agreements with Turkey³⁰³, the natural-tacit alliance between Iran and Israel, against the above mentioned mutual threats, has not disappeared.

Iran's program to develop weapons of mass destruction (chemical and biological weapons), and/or to purchase nuclear technology from China, Russia, North Korea, or possibly India, has alarmed most countries in the Middle East. Israel has been so far the most vocal regional member against the potential threat of an Iranian nuclear, biological and chemical arsenal. Nevertheless, despite having acquired the missile technology capable of striking Israel and Saudi Arabia³⁰⁴, Iran's weapons procurement programs are defensive in nature. Iran's military purchases are minimal compared to those of Israel, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and is a direct result of its security dilemma triggered by the increasing arsenal of some of its Gulf neighbors, the Taliban threat in Afghanistan, and the increasing Shia-Sunni

302

Clarke, Duncan, "Israel's Unauthorized Arms Transfers", Foreign Policy, Washington, D.C., US: Published By The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Summer 1995, No.99, pp.93,104,108.

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Blanche, Ed. and Sariibrahimoglu, Lale, "The Phntom Alliance", Jane's Defence Weekly, London, UK: Published By Jane's Information Group, March 10, 1999, Vol.31, No.10, pp.53-57.

304

Iran has acquired delivery capabilities ranging up to 1200 miles, after a test in Summer of 1998, and is currently looking to further improve such capabilities. According to the 1997/98 The Military Balance, Iran has over 210 Scud Band C and over 200 CSS25s. Further reports by the British Publication Jane's Defence Weekly indicate that Iran is upgrading the range of its missile using the technology provided by North Korea (Ibid.; and The Military Balance 1997/98, London, UK: Published By Oxford University Press for The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1997, p.126).

conflict in Pakistan who has recently declared its nuclear capability. Iran has no intention to threaten any nation in the Gulf, or in the entire Middle East, because it is fully aware of the consequences that developing offensive capabilities would have on its security. The fact that if threatened Israel would carry out a pre-emptive strike against Iran's nuclear, biological and chemical weapons facilities, just as it did in 1981 against Iraqi nuclear facilities in Osirak³⁰⁵, is a deterrent for Iran. Israel should recognize that Iraqi chemical attacks against Iranian forces during the 1980-88 War has led Iran to increase its capabilities to deter any future attempts by a regional belligerent.

Furthermore, Iran's military buildup, and acquisition of such weapons, should not be considered as a threat by any nation in the world, particularly by the US. Iran has witnessed American tactical air-superiority against Iraq a number of times since 1991, and is aware of the possibility of a nuclear response by the US. Although the US has not committed itself to an explicit nuclear response against an Iranian nuclear, biological, or chemical attack on its neighbors or on Israel, the fact remains that its conventional and nuclear capabilities remain a deterrent for Iran³⁰⁶. Iran's defence procurement programs, as well as its increasing military posture in the Persian Gulf and near its Eastern borders, are merely defensive, and are comparatively insignificant to the similar programs undertaken

305

Mostyn, p.184.

306

See Arnett, Eric, "Iran's Missile Ambitions Scaled Down, Says SIRPI", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, London, UK: Published By Jane's Information Group, April 16, 1997, Vol.27, No.15, p.16; and Blanche Ed, "Israel Objects to Russian Missile Sales to Iran", *Ibid.*, March 12, 1997, Vol.27, No.10, p.6 & March 19, 1997, Vol.27, No.11, p.3; and Starr, Barbara, "Iran has Vast Stockpiles of CW agents, Says CIA", *Ibid.*, August 14, 1996, Vol.26, No.7, p.3; and *Ibid.*, July 3, 1996, Vol.26, No.1, p.21; and Goodpaster, Andrew J., "Nuclear Roles in the Post-Cold War World", *The Washington Quarterly*, Cambridge, MA, US: Published By MIT Press, Summer 1997, Vol.20, No.3, pp.164-65.

by its Gulf neighbors or other Middle Eastern countries including Turkey, Jordan, and Israel who have recently signed joint military cooperation agreements³⁰⁷. Moreover, successful diplomatic engagement and a Monroe like tacit cooperation for regional stability between the US and Iran, similar to the Shah's days, could prevent Iran's desire to acquire Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Aside from an active defence posturing in the Middle East³⁰⁸, and its occasional unfriendly rhetoric toward Israel, the US, and other Arab Monarchies or Western-backed regimes in the region, Iran has neither the intention, nor the incentive to alienate or isolate itself once again by antagonizing the West and the regional countries. Iran's development of delivery systems like Scud B and C, and CSS 25s, are the linchpin of Iran's defence policy to deter attacks against its territorial integrity. In this regard Iran continues to declare its regional policy to be one of a friendly-neighbor, and has based its international policy on cooperative and issue based alignments³⁰⁹. At the same time, Iran has pursued bilateral

307

See Blanche Ed, "Third 'Kilo' Delivered to Iran's Gulf Naval Base", Jane's Defence Weekly, London, UK: Published By Jane's Information Group, January 27, 1997, Vol.27, No.4, p.16; and Starr, Barbara, "Global Military Spending is Lowest for 20 Years", Ibid., May 22, 1996, Vol.25, No.21,p.3; and Blanche & Sariibrahimolu, Ibid., 1999,p.55-57; and "Iran to Stage Military Maneuver", CNN, Cable News Network, Inc., <http://cnn.worldnews.com>., July 16, 1997.

308

Since 1991, Iran has staged a number of military exercises in the Gulf region as well as in its central and northeastern provinces to demonstrate its readiness to defend its territorial integrity and enhance its national security (Ibid.).

309

See Lennox, Duncan and Blanche, Ed, "Shifting Balance", Jane's Defence Weekly, London, UK: Published By Jane's Information Group, March 10, 1999, Vol.31, No.10, pp.59-63; and Ibid., "Military Aid for Jordan Arrives, January 8, 1997, Vol.27, No.1, p.14; and Bruce, James, "Iran Warn's USA to 'Think Twice' about an Attack", Ibid., June 12, 1996, Vol.25, No.24, p.27; and Bruce, "Iran to Boost Air Transport", Ibid., July 3, 1996, Vol.26, No.1, p.20; and Bruce, "Iran and China in \$4.5 Billion Partnership", Ibid., September 11, 1996, Vol.26, No.11, p.3.

tactical-military cooperation agreements with countries who share the same perception of threat, such as Turkey (instability in Kurdish areas of Iran, Iraq and Turkey), and Greece (concerned over Turkish-Israeli alliance undermining its Mediterranean and Aegean interests) , Armenia (threat of Turkish-Azeri alliance), and Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States (alarmed by the military alliance between two militarily strong non-Arab Middle Eastern countries namely Turkey and Israel)³¹⁰.

The biggest myth, so far, surrounding Iran's regional and international foreign policy objectives is an Iranian desire to use Islam as a political, military or ideological force to establish a system of East-West rivalry similar to the Cold War era. This perception has been overdramatized by the West, particularly in the US, as a result of drastic changes in international politics following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the shift from a single-identifiable threat to unpredictable security threats.

Iran's revolutionary-expansionist rhetoric was brought to life in the wake of massive political changes in 1979, and in the face of the costly economic, political, and military isolation that it had suffered during eight years of war with Iraq. In reality, radicalism was a means of protection and continuation of the Islamic regime, and a tool for Iran's survival threatened by the war. The end of Iran-Iraq war largely brought an end to Iran's revolutionary and anti-Western policies, although it maintained its dissatisfaction with the US hypocrisy in supporting democratization and political freedom in Iran, Lybia, Syria, and

310

See Sariibrahimoglu, Lale, "Turkey to Detail Pact with Iran", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, London, UK: Published By Jane's Information Group, January 8, 1997, Vol.27, No.1,p. 14; and Blanche, Ed, "Mediterranean Exercise Alarms Arab States, Iran", *Ibid.*, September 10, 1997, Vol.28, No.10,p.3 & "Briefing: Turkish Army; Turbulent Times for Forces in Transition",pp.39-51.

Iraq on the one hand, and turning a blind eye to the political repression practiced by its regional allies like Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt³¹¹. The perception of a growing Islamic threat was in fact due to the inability of the Muslim population within most Middle Eastern countries to express their views through a unified voice, in a world drawn closer together by cooperation and communication³¹². Iran, involuntarily, had become an attractive model for those Islamic nations who sought to improve their domestic political conditions. Iran's early radical outlook had only been a tactical stepping-stone to utilize the emerging force of political Shia-Islam within its population to defend its territorial integrity and political sovereignty against Iraqi aggression supported by regional and international forces. However, as the momentum of Islamic-fundamentalism increased, the differences between Shia Iran and the mainly Sunni-Arab countries in the region grew wider.

“...as a Shia state, [Iran] suffere[d] problems of historical friction and poor communication with Sunni Muslim sates. Its Islamic religious orientation and relatively small size also limit[ed] its potential claim to Third World universalism”.³¹³

By the mid-1990s, Islamic fundamentalism had become an object of disunity between Iran and other Islamic countries in the region, and lost its potential as a unique threat comparable to that once posed by the USSR

“...the diffuse nature of Islamic fundamentalism and the disunity

311

Karabell, Zachary, “Fundamental Misconception: Islamic Foreign Policy”, Foreign Policy, Washington, D.C., US: Published By The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Winter 1996-97, No.105, pp.77-9.

312

Ibid., p.81-4.

313

Fuller, p.156.

among such fundamentalists suggests that a Middle East dominated by fundamentalism would be less of a problem for the United States than a secular dictator with illusions of grandeur... Islamic fundamentalism should matter no more to the non-Muslim world than Québécois nationalism matters to Thailand".³¹⁴

Moreover, unequivocal support of the US to prevent another diplomatic setback similar to the 1979 Revolution in Iran, made the prospect of a universalist Islamic-fundamentalist agenda inconceivable³¹⁵.

Iran's designation as a potential threat to international peace and security was largely a myth perpetuated by the adoption of the "rogue doctrine" by the US³¹⁶. In the aftermath of the Cold War, US military planners were in need of a new military strategy to counter the emerging threat of the Third World military powers, personified by Iran, Iraq, Lybia, North Korea, and Syria, known as the "rogue gallery"³¹⁷. However, the changes in Iranian outlook since the election of Khatami in 1997, and its rapprochement with the US and the West, has rendered the "rogue doctrine" ineffective, at least in case of Iran. Moreover, the

314

Ibid., pp.87-8, also for more information on the nature and rise of political Islam see Hirschkind, Charles, "What is Political Islam?", Middle East Report, Washington D.C., US: Published By The Middle East Research and Information Project, Inc., October-December, 1997, No.205, Vol. 27, No.4, pp.12-14; and Arkin, William M., "Iran and the Virtual Reality of US War Games", Ibid., November-December, 1995, No197, Vo.25, No.6, pp.10-13.

315

Maynes, William C., "Relearning Intervention", Foreign Policy, Washington, D.C., US; Published By The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Spring 1995, No.98, p.105.

316

Klare, Michael, "Rise and Fall of the 'Rogue Doctrine': the Pentagon's Quest for a Post-Cold War Military Strategy", Middle East Report, Washington, D.C., US: Published By The Middle East Research and Information project, Inc., Fall 1998, No.208, Vol.28, No.3, pp.12-15.

317

Ibid., pp.12-3.

ineffectiveness of this policy was further highlighted as Western-European governments declined to support US policy in the region³¹⁸. The image of a rogue Iran is no longer an accurate characterization of its ambitions or foreign policy objectives. Iran by no means poses a regional-international threat of the magnitude posed by Iraq³¹⁹, and will not likely constitute the long-term threat as once anticipated by American policymakers³²⁰.

Iran's maintenance of a large, mainly conscript, armed force has historically been an instrument of ensuring internal stability, as well as a measure of defence against regional threats. Countries like Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Russia, who maintain relatively large armed forces (regular and irregular), continue to pose a threat to Iran's territorial integrity, as they have in the past. Added to this equation is the threat posed by ethnic and political opposition groups such as the armed Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran, the armed Komoleh Communist-Kurdish Party, the military force of the Islamic-Marxist Iranian Mujahedin³²¹ stationed inside Iraq, and a variety of other radical armed groups. Since its formation under a unified central command by the Reza Shah, the Iranian armed forces [ground forces, Air force, Navy, Gendarmerie, and the post 1979 Revolutionary Guard

318

Ibid., pp14-5 & Perthes, Volker, "Points of Difference, Case for Cooperation: European Critiques of US Middle East Policy", Ibid., pp.30-2.

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Karabell, p.88.

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Wong, Francisco, "The Leadership of Richard Nixon", In Depth: A Journal of Values and Public Policy, Rockville, MD, US: Published By the Washington Institute of the Professors World Peace Academy, Spring 1995-96, Vol.5, No.2, pp.83-5.

321

See Serrill, Michael S., "Armed Women of Iran", TIME, Toronto, Ont., Canada: Published By Time Canada Lit., April 21, 1997, pp.44-5.

Corps, and the Basij (popular mobilized force)] have confronted a number of separatist and subversive armed conflicts around the country, as well as the Iraqi invasion in 1980. Conflicts in Kurdistan (1979-1989), Khusistan (1979-80), Baluchistan (1980s), Western Azerbaijan (1980s), Mazenderan; Gonbad and Amol (1980s), and in Mehran against the Iraqi-based Mujahedin (1987-88), are examples underlining the importance of maintaining well trained, well equipped armed forces to the territorial and political integrity and sovereignty of Iran³²².

PROSPECT OF IRAN' S ROLE IN REGIONAL STABILITY:

In the absence of an Iranian Islamic-fundamentalist threat to regional and international peace and security, it can be argued that Iran is once again ready to take on a regional leadership role. Iran has shown a desire for pursuing an influential, if not dominant, role in the Persian Gulf, and in the Central Asian Muslim-republics of the CIS. Iran's explicit interest in developing regional cooperation, as mentioned in earlier chapters, could be accomplished by engaging in Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBMs) such as crisis management, increased transparency, multilateral cooperation for non-proliferation, conventional forces reduction³²³, and through its commitment to peace and economic

322

See Zabih, Sepehr, The Iranian Military in Revolution and War, New York, NY, US: Published By Routledge, 1988, Chapters: 1,2,6,8,& 9; also Amirsadeghi, Hossein, Ed., The Security of The Persian Gulf, New York, NY, US: Published By St. Martin's Press, 1981, Chapters: 4 & 6; and Mackey, 1996, p.131.

323

Ganguly, Sumit and Greenwood, Ted, Eds., Mending Fences: Confidence and Security-Building Measures in South Asia, Delhi, India: Published By Oxford University Press, 1997, pp.52-3,54,96,106.

democratization and development in the Gulf and in Central Asia³²⁴. Iran has increasingly demonstrated its readiness to reassume a regional, non-ideological, politico-economic leadership role. Iran's suitability for such a role derives from its theoretical characteristics as a regional "leadership-state", best described by Graham Fuller:

"a theoretical profile of a potential leadership-state... would very well combine depth of historical civilization, a sense of national superiority of its culture, some continuity in a meaningful role in history, plausible claim to regional leadership, ...experience in the adoption of an anti-status quo ideology in the past, and a particular sense of frustration in not having been able to fulfill its cultural-historical mission, because of Western colonialism".³²⁵

Iran, however, is unlikely to challenge the US/Western presence in the region militarily, nor will it be a threat to its neighbors or Israel. The fear of Iran's ballistic missile threat should not be exaggerated as Israel, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Syria all poses long-range missile capabilities³²⁶. Iran will most likely use its leadership to develop an economic and diplomatic regional bloc, perhaps similar to the future European Union. In that regard Iran, in concert with other regional actors, will seek to gain leverage in bargaining with the West, and become an influential counterweight in international institutions³²⁷, comparable to the early 1970s OPEC. Iran, however, aware of the declining role of the OPEC and the persistent

324

See Chapters 3 and 4, for information on Iran's role in the Gulf and the Central Asian Republics of the CIS.

325

Fuller, p.155.

326

Jane's Defence Weekly, March 10, 1999, pp.53-63.

327

Ibid., p.154.

drop in oil prices, is unlikely to use that institution as the central element of its regional cooperation agenda³²⁸. Rather, it will engage in creating new institutions for which the regional members of the Conference of Islamic Countries would act as the focal components.

Being the last remaining superpower, the US has to realize that facing the challenges of the new world necessitates the involvement of regional powers such as Iran. In the words of Samuel Huntington:

“Contemporary international politics, is an strange hybrid, a uni-multipolar system with one super power and several regional powers. The settlement of key international issues requires action by the single superpower but always with some combination of other major states”³²⁹.

Iran is the only actor in South West Asia with such characteristics for leadership. It has the political will, a regionally strong economic and military capability, and a vested interest to take up the role of the regional power. Although US and Iran have similar interests in the region, the continuing American military presence in the Gulf, and its attempts to use Turkey as a counterweight to Iran in Central Asia, constitute a serious challenge to Iran’s role in the region. Such a challenge would not have been appreciated, even if Iran had remained a US-

328

See Mohamedi, Fareed, “Oil, Gas and the Future of Arab Gulf Countries”, *Middle East Report*, Washington D.C., US: Published By The Middle East Research and Information Project, Inc., July-September, 1997, No.204, Vol.27, No.3, pp.2-6; and speculations on the future role of OPEC, in Brkeshly, Fereidoun, “OPEC; Back to the Driver’s Seat”, *Majale-ye Eghtesad-e Energy (Journal of Energy Economics)*, Autumn 1996, Vol.1, No.1, pp.2-3, <http://netiran.com>, January 28, 1997.

329

Huntington, Samuel P., “The Lonely Superpower”, *Foreign Affairs*, New York, NY: US: Published By The Council on Foreign Relations, Inc., March/April 1999, p.36.

friendly monarchy³³⁰. The underlying precondition to a successful US policy in the region is the acceptance of Iran's crucial stabilizing role in both the Persian Gulf and the Central Asia. As Henry Kissinger said, in a speech in Montreal in September 1998: "no one can accuse Richard Nixon of excessive sentimentality. The US firmly believed that Iran could be a factor for stability in the region".³³¹

The essence of this vision should remain the linchpin of American foreign policy, and the basis for reconstructing its relations with Iran. Any attempts by the US or the West to replace Iran with another regional actor most likely Turkey in Central Asia or Saudi Arabia in the Gulf is a short-term solution destined to fail, not least of all due to Turkey's turbulent socio-political conditions, and its self-constructed image and desire to be European rather than Middle Eastern, or as a result of Saudi Arabia's uncertain political future. Moreover, constructive diplomatic engagement with Iran would potentially act as a guarantee to regional US allies that their security will not be threatened by Iran. Rather, as in the Shah's days, a politically, economically, and militarily strong Iran would be an element of regional stability not turmoil. It was Iran's decline in power after the 1979 Revolution that led to two major wars in the Gulf, and the invasion of Afghanistan by the USSR.

330

Ibid., p.44.

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Excerpts from a speech given by Henry Kissinger, in Montreal, Canada, on September 9, 1998, <http://cbc.newsworld.com>, September 9, 1998; also see Pirnia, Mnsureh, "An interview with Queen Farah Diba about Iran's past, present and the future", *Nimrouz (High-noon)*, A Farsi Newspaper Published in the US, August 6, 1996, pp.8-11.

IRAN'S MONROE DOCTRINE:

Iran is the most populous regional country, and shares the largest land and sea borders with the countries of Central Asia and the Persian Gulf. Coupled with elements such as political continuity, maritime access, relative size, a unique national culture, a relatively diversified industrial base, and a lesser dependence on oil revenues (compare to other Gulf states), Iran is a natural candidate for leadership in all aspects of regional developments³³². Iran's ability to overcome internal political and economic challenges, however, is the key to Iran's successful role as an influential regional power. It is in the area of domestic political and economic issues, that a friendly gesture by the US and the West would assist Iran's transition into a responsible and effective regional component of a multipolar international system. The US/Western assistance of Iran could provide the extra-regional involvement expressed by the Monroe Doctrine that would enhance the flourishing of regional independence and political maturation. The present amiable political circumstances in Iran, due to President Khatami's election³³³, has set in motion a progressive momentum that is unlikely to be stopped in the future. Iran's resolve to improve its domestic economic conditions is strong, and socioeconomic development should survive even the election of

332

Sick, Gary, "The Coming Crisis in the Persian Gulf", The Washington Quarterly, Cambridge, MA, US: Published By MIT Press, Spring 1998, Vol.21, No.2, pp.203-5.

333

See Katz, Mark N., "The Khatemi Factor: How Much Does it Matter?", The National Interest, Washington, D.C., US: Published By National Affairs, Inc., Spring 1999, No.51, pp.85-90; and Bakhash, Shaul, "Iran's Unlikely President", The New York Review, US: November 5, 1998, pp.51; and Roy, Oliver, "Tensions in Iran: The Future of the Islamic Revolution", Middle East Report, Washington, D.C., US: Published By MERIP, Summer 1998, No.207, Vol.28, No.2, pp.38-41; and Ramazani, R. K., "The Shifting Premise of Iran's Foreign Policy: Towards A Democratic Peace?", The Middle East Journal, US: Published By Middle East Institute, Spring 1998, Vol.52, No.2, pp.177-87.

conservatives in the next presidential elections. The election of conservative elements, however, could bring about a Chinese style reform, characterized by political repression while maintaining economic modernization. Increasing attacks by the conservative elements against the Iranian government's relative freedom of press and open intellectual discourse confirms such a possibility³³⁴.

Regardless of future possibilities, under the current moderate administration a diplomatic and peaceful settlement of regional grievances and disputes can be possible. Therefore, it is in the best interest of all parties, regional and extra-regional not alienate the most significant political, economic, and military component of regional stability, namely Iran. The US, in particular, should support current political developments in Iran. Just as Britain ended its presence in the Western Hemisphere, and in the Gulf, the US could eventually leave the Gulf. It is only reasonable to share the burden of international security with those regional powers who have the will and the capacity for leadership, and share similar interests with the US³³⁵. Through cooperation and mutual respect, Iran and the US could pave the foundation for lasting stability in the Persian Gulf, and Central Asia. The US should recognize, however, that Iran will take on the leading regional role not as an American proxy, as the Shah was wrongfully accused of doing, but as an independent actor equal in discourse and in action.

334

Wright, Robin, "Iran's Greatest Political Challenge: Abdol Karim Soroush" World Policy Journal, New York, NY, US: Published By The World Policy Institute, Summer 1997, Vol. XIV, No.2, pp.67-74.

335

Maynes, William, C., "The Perils of (and for) an Imperial America", Foreign Policy, Washington, D.C., US: Published By The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Summer, 1998, No.111, pp.36-47.

The US and Iran can rebuild the shattered confidence caused by nearly 21 years of mistrust and animosity by remaining focused on *rapprochement*³³⁶, as a solid course of action, provided that the two countries do not make colossal strategic mistakes. Iran should not allow the current progressive agenda to be hijacked by the hardliners, and should continue on its path toward liberalization of its economy and its foreign policy. Moreover, Iran should continue its attempts to reintegrate itself into the regional and international community of states, and avoid any temptations to regress into revolutionary diplomatic or military configuration in the Persian Gulf or in Central Asia. Iran must maintain open and direct dialogue with the West and the US, in case of future regional-international crises, and preserve its neutrality in possible confrontations between Russia and the US, by avoiding strategic re-alignment with either superpower. Iran should not venture into political and military actions that would alter the geopolitical balance in the Persian Gulf, or in Central Asia. In so doing Iran should strive to maintain the regional status quo by regaining its traditional role as the regional protector, particularly in the Gulf. In so doing, Iran would have tacitly invoked the Monroe principle of self-preservation and the right to self-defence, justified by the 1904 Roosevelt Corollary, by strengthening its military capability and naval presence in the Gulf, and extending its protection to those vulnerable regional actors in need of assistance.

On the other hand, the US, should proceed with its policy of engagement, and avoid tendencies to resort to forceful diplomatic or military confrontation with Iran. By continuing

336

Kemp, Geoffery, "The Persian Gulf Remains the Strategic Prize", *Survival*, London, UK: Published By The International Institute for Strategic Studies, Winter, 1998-99, Vol.40, No.4, pp.132-49.

bridge-building between the two nations, the US could rapidly and conclusively achieve its regional objectives far sooner than it has hoped to achieve through diplomatic and economic coercion. In that regard, the US could start by lifting its economic sanctions³³⁷, and enter into mutually beneficial economic ventures with Iran. Also, the US could cooperate with Iran in dealing with regional security concerns such as Iraq, drug-trafficking, the Taliban threat, Pakistani nuclear proliferation, and mutual security concerns in the Muslim Central Asian republics³³⁸. Moreover, the US should stop its denunciation of Iran as a supporter of international terrorism and a rogue state³³⁹. The US should avoid recognition of armed Iranian opposition groups such as the Iraqi based and financed People's Mujahedin, or other subversive political groups. Legitimation of such groups as political alternatives to the current Iranian government by the US would be detrimental to political developments in Iran. The US should acknowledge that any change within the political system of Iran should be decided by the consent of the majority of Iranians and through peaceful means. The US should neither legitimize, arm, nor finance such groups for two reasons: threat of internal instability in Iran that could undermine its territorial integrity, and threat of a return by the

337

For more information on the effectiveness and failure of US economic sanctions against Iran, see Hufbauer, Gary Clyde and Schott, Jeffrey J., "Economic Sanctions and U.S. Foreign Policy", Political Science Quarterly, US: Published By The American Political Science Association, Fall 1985, Vol. xviii, No.4, pp.727-35; and Amuzegar, Jahangir, "Adjusting to Sanctions", Foreign Affairs, May/June 1997, Vol.76, No.3, pp.31-41.

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See "US warn's Iran to Curb armed Iraqi Opposition", Associated Press (online), www.canoe.ca, December 12, 1998; and "Naval Exercise in Persian Gulf", Iranian News Agency (IRNA) (online), www.irna.com, November, 11, 1998; and Lippman, Thomas W., "U.S. Removes Iran from its Drug List", Washington Post (online), www.washingtonpost.com, December, 13, 1998.

339

See the Amnesty International's Recent Report on Iran's human rights violations, Associated Press (online), www.iran-e-azad.org, November 12, 1998.

Islamic government to fundamentalist, repressive, and undemocratic rule in order to stay in power.

The US should not succumb to the pressures of the Arab lobby in changing the name of the Persian Gulf to Arabian Gulf³⁴⁰. Such an alteration would be seen as a hostile action and its political connotations would undermine Iranian sovereignty and regional influence. Furthermore, the US should not conceive its political-cultural differences with Iran as a source of conflict, and not perceive such contrasts as causes for a clash between Iranian and American Civilizations. The US should not subscribe to the parochial vision of Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations" theory³⁴¹. In addition, the US should avoid the imposition of Western-generalized notions as to what democracy and democratization should mean to Iran³⁴². Lastly, the US should allow the humiliation of 1979 Hostage Crisis to be forgotten, as Iranians have tried to put behind the anguish caused by years of American economic sanctions, the loss of their national dignity as a result of US/Western Propaganda, and the loss of half a million Iranian lives during the war with the US/Western supported Iraq, as well as the memory of the 290 Iranians killed when an Iranian Airliner was shot down by the USS *Vincennes*, in 1988³⁴³.

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See Mojtahed-Zadeh, Pirouz, "Persian Gulf, A Name Evolved Throughout History of Mankind", Ettela'at (online), www.ettelaat.com, 1996.

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See Huntington, Samuel P., "The Clash of Civilizations?", Foreign Affairs, Summer 1993, Vol.27, No.3, pp.22-49.

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See Eslami-Nadoushan, Mohammad-Ali, Dr., Be Donbale Saye-e Homa (In Search of the Shadow of the Phoenix), Tehran, Iran: Published By Yazdan Publications, 1991, pp.207-16.

343

Mackey, p.331.

In conclusion, it should be strongly reasserted that Iran's national destiny demands the survival of a politically, economically, and militarily strong state, capable of active regional and international presence. The US/Western perception of Iran as a threat has been a product of two decades of mistrust and demonization of a regime reluctant to abide by long-established international norms. That image, however, is already out of date, and the US hesitation in engaging Iran at a higher level must change as well. The lack of a productive and concise US response to Iran's invitation for reconciliation, will force Iran to look elsewhere for friends, most probably among US European allies or Japan. The US can not afford to stand still, while Europe (Germany and France in particular) or Japan become a dominant external political and commercial force in the region.

Every aspect of Iranian foreign policy since 1968 to present, has pointed to a national desire for greatness, prosperity, and regional and international recognition. The unique Iranian patriotism with its militaristic loyalty to the land, resembles that of the Americans, and is reinforced by a history of war against external and internal hostile forces, who aimed to destroy its nationhood. Nonetheless, throughout its modern history, Iran has not committed military aggression against any of its neighbors, and has demonstrated responsibility and national preeminence, by allocating resources to assist the economic hardships and humanitarian disasters that have overshadowed the Middle East, West Asia and even the Balkans. Accommodating more than two million displaced persons from Afghanistan, thousands of Iraqi Shia and Kurdish refugees, and hundreds of Azerbaijani and Bosnian refugees are examples of Iranian sensitivity to human plight, and its natural leadership affinity only matched by that of the US. Like the US, after the adoption of the

Monroe Doctrine, Iran's goal of regional hegemony has been branded as a pretext for territorial expansion, maximization of self-interest, and meddling in the internal affairs of those countries within its sphere of influence. Nevertheless, Iran's military advisors and troops, its financial assistance, and the very spirit of its hegemony has been invoked many times, by the same countries accusing it of imperialism.

Iran's development and implementation of a moderate foreign policy unmistakably reflects a tacit and constant adherence to the vision and the principles of the Monroe Doctrine. In that regard, the Monroe Doctrine embodies a blue print for Iran's regional and international policy aspirations, and also enables the Western observers, particularly in the US, to make sense of Iran's future foreign policy direction. The Monroe Doctrine, may have become a silent law of American foreign policy in the post-Cold War years, but its principles remain valid and compatible to the foreign policy of a regional power like Iran, whose national security interests — maintaining territorial integrity, political sovereignty, and national prosperity— could be best served and appreciated in the context of a Monroe like Doctrine.

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