

THE REGIONAL ROLE OF IRAN UNDER PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD

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Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences

Prof. Dr. Meliha Altunışık
Director

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science.

Prof. Dr. Özlem Tür
Head of Department

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science

Dr. Gulriz Sen
Co-Supervisor

Assist. Prof. Derya Gocer Akder
Supervisor

Examining Committee Members

Assist. Prof. Işık Kuşçu (METU, IR)

Assist. Prof. Derya Göçer Akder (METU, MES)

Assist. Prof. Bayram Sinkaya (YBU, IR)

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

Name, Last name : Çiğdem Dilek Aflaki

Signature:

ABSTRACT

THE REGIONAL ROLE OF IRAN UNDER PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD

Aflaki, ıđdem Dilek

MSc. ,Department of Middle East Studies

Supervisor: Assist. Prof. Dr. Derya Ger Akder

Co-Supervisor: Dr. Glriz Ően

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This thesis analyzes Iran's regional role during President Ahmadinejad era. From the beginning to the end of his presidency Iran's role in the Middle East was highly debated due to increasing assertiveness of Iran in the region. This thesis aims at reaching grounded conclusions about the actual role of Iran in the region, during the presidency of Mahmood Ahmadinejad. To this end, this thesis offers a typology which consists of three parameters which are self-perception of Iran, regional perceptions toward Iran's role and the hard power capacities of Iran. To do so, the thesis provides an examination of revolutionary, Islamic and national identities of Iran which offers Iran's self-perception regarding its regional role. Then, the study tests the self-perceived regional role of Iran in regard to regional perceptions towards

it and its material capacities. The thesis concludes that, Iran was a “potential regional dominant power” during President Ahmadinejad era. Besides, the thesis suggests that the regional role of Iran under President Ahmadinejad era may also be called as “regional dominator”, a term originated by Miriam Prys. The thesis also points out that, the increasing threat perception of regional countries towards Iran is viewed as a deterrent by Iran’s leaders, but it is at the same time the main obstacle for Iran to materialize its potential capacities.

Keywords: Regional Role of Iran, Mahmood Ahmadinejad, Regional Power, Identities of Iran

ÖZ

CUMHURBAŞKANI AHMEDİNEJAD DÖNEMİNDE İRAN'IN BÖLGESEL ROLÜ

Aflaki, Çiğdem Dilek

MSc. , Orta Doğu Çalışmaları Bölümü

Tez Yöneticisi: Assist. Prof. Dr. Derya Göçer Akder

Ortak Tez Yöneticisi: Dr. Gülriz Şen

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Bu tez Cumhurbaşkanı Ahmedinejad döneminde İran'ın bölgesel rolünü incelemektedir. Kendisinin giderek artan iddialı söylemlerinin de etkisiyle İran'ın bu dönemde bölgede ne tür bir rolü olduğu oldukça tartışmalı bir konu haline gelmiştir. Bu tezin amacı bu dönemde İran'ın nasıl bir rol oynadığına dair sağlam temellere dayanan sonuçlara ulaşmaktır. Bu amaçla, bu tez “İran'ın öz-algısı”, “bölge ülkelerinin İran'ın bölgesel rolü konusundaki algıları” ve “İran'ın sert gücü” olmak üzere üç parametreden oluşan bir tipoloji öne sürmektedir. Bu şekilde, bu tez İran'ın kendi bölgesel rolü konusundaki öz-algısına ulaşmak üzere İran'ın devrimci, İslami ve milli kimliklerinin bir değerlendirmesini yapmaktadır. Sonrasında, bu çalışma İran'ın kendi kendine üstlendiği bölgesel rollerininin geçerliliğini bölge ülkelerinin bu konuya yaklaşımları ve İran'ın ekonomik ve askeri kapasiteleri açısından test

etmektedir. Bu çalışma İran'ın Cumhurbaşkanı Ahmedinejad döneminde "potansiyel bölgesel baskın güç" olduğu sonucuna varır. Bunun dışında, bu tez İran'ın Ahmedinejad dönemindeki rolünün, Miriem Prys'in "bölgesel baskıcı güç" kavramına uygun gelebileceğini de öne sürer. Bunlara ek olarak, bu tez İran'a yönelik bölgede giderek artan tehdit algısının İran liderleri tarafından bir tür caydırıcılık mekanizması olarak görüldüğünü fakat aslında tam da bu tehdit algısının İran'ın potansiyel güçlerini gerçekleştirebilmesinin önündeki temel engel olduğuna da dikkati çeker.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İran'ın Bölgesel Rolü, Mahmud Ahmedinejad, Bölgesel Güç, İran'ın Kimlikleri

To the most beautiful and the most intelligent woman in my life...

To my Mother...

To Zekiye Karaođlan.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The roles of regional states have gained more importance in terms of their increasing influence in international relations due to the transformations of global order after the end of Cold war. In other words, the projections of regionalism as a whole within a multilateral international order have become popular after the collapse of USSR that transformed USA into the only superpower of the world. Relatedly, the order of the Middle East was also influenced by the lack of bipolar competition that was providing more freedom of choice to regional countries in their foreign policy behaviors by utilizing such a rivalry among big powers. Hereby, Middle Eastern states whose identity has not yet formed since the decolonization have started to redefine their regional roles during the post-Cold War era. Most recently, the major turning point of role redefinition struggles of the Middle Eastern states one decade after the end of cold-war began with “the new middle east” initiative after 9/11 attacks which followed with the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq.

In this context, Iran’s role in the region attracted much attention as a result of its expanding influence in Iraq after the replacement of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq by the first Shia dominated Arab regime. In addition to that the revelation of nuclear projects of Iran increased the concerns about the ambitions and intentions of Islamic Republic in the region. Such concerns led to “Shia crescent” debates among Sunni Arab regimes of the region since 2004 when Iran’s parliamentary elections resulted with the victory of

conservative factions over pragmatists and reformists. The following year, the new president of Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) was elected as Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. That was important because for the first time after the passing of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini both Islamic and republican institutions of the country were dominated by conservatives. At the same time President Ahmadinejad's era with his extraordinary foreign policy statements was more outstanding than his predecessors in terms of the increasing debate about the role of Iran in the region and the worsening posture of Iran in the International scene¹.

Within such a context, as one of the most influential actors in the Middle East throughout history due to its long experience of statehood together with its rich energy resources, Iran's regional role is the main theme of this thesis. Thus, the goal of this study is to reach some grounded suggestions about the regional role of Iran in the Middle East during President Ahmadinejad term. In this respect, the purpose of this study is to answer the following questions: Was Iran a regional power during the Presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad? If Iran was not a regional power during Ahmadinejad era, what was the regional role of it in the Middle East?

Therefore, the conceptual framework of this study is constructed by initially through analyzing the concept of regional power and regionalism. After such analysis to evaluate the regional role of Iran, a framework with three parameters is reached. The parameters of this framework are "self-perception of Iran", "regional perceptions towards Iran" and "economic and military capacity of Iran". Therefore this thesis aims to test the validity of the first parameter through other two parameters. Other than this, this thesis aims to find out the regional role of Iran during the Presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad through comparing these three parameters without taking the claims of Iran as the first step.

¹ Farhang Morady, "Who Rules Iran? The June 2009 Election and Political Turmoil", *Capital&Class*, Vol.35, No.1, (February 2011), pp. 50-52

Here it is necessary to emphasize that the reason for focusing on the Presidential terms of Ahmadinejad while analyzing the regional role of Iran is not about the personality of the president but related to the importance of the timing of his Presidency that is indicated above. Therefore, keeping in mind the superior status of Ayatollah Khamenei in the IRI system regardless of who is the president² is important in order to avoid exaggeration of the personalities of presidents in the determination of foreign policy of IRI. However, President Ahmadinejad was still distinctive for attracting regional and international attention to Iran's ambition in the region so it is still important to take a look at the foreign policy approaches of Mr. Ahmadinejad, in short.

In this way, generally President Ahmadinejad claimed that his two predecessors Rafsanjani and Khatami weakened the country against West and its regional allies due to their accommodative approaches in dealing with international issues.³ At the same time according to him they did not give the necessary importance to the revolutionary ideals and values of the regime that negatively impacts the power of the regime and country. Therefore, as a representative of "principlist" camp he advocated to the vision of turning to the revolutionary ideals again⁴ in the frame of so-called "third revolution".⁵

Hereby, contrary to his predecessor's détente and reconstruction oriented foreign policy endeavors the aggressive and assertive foreign policy approach of the President Ahmadinejad enhanced the concerns about what kind of regional role Iran is seeking for. In this regard, his strong support of nuclear activities of the country in addition to his statements about the elimination of Israel from Middle East region combined with the

² Karim Sadjadpour, *Reading Khamenei: The World view of Iran's Most Powerful Leader*, (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009), p.7.

³ Amir M. Haji-Yousefi, "Iran's Foreign Policy during Ahmadinejad: From Confrontation to Accommodation", *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, Vol.9, No.2, (Summer 2010), p.17.

⁴ Maryam Panah, *The Islamic Republic and the World: Global Dimensions of the Iranian Revolution* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), pp. 148-156.

⁵ Frederic M. Wehreyet. al, *Dangerous but Not Omnipotent: Exploring the Reach and Limitations of Iranian Power in the Middle East* (Santa Monica: RAND Project Air Force, 2009), p.25.

defeat of Israel by Hezbollah, the so-called proxy of Iran, in 2006 led to the claims about the hegemonic ambitions of Iran in the region.

Actually, such claims were familiar to those that emerged as a reaction to “exporting revolution” tendency of IRI in the early days of 1979 Revolution. Especially, the so-called “Islamic Awakening” interpretation of Arab Uprisings that emerged at the last year of Mr. Ahmadinejad’s presidential term, as the continuation of Islamic Revolution of Iran by IRI officials, enhanced the claims of the expansionist policies of IRI.

On the other hand, except for short-lived Banisadr government, Mr. Ahmadinejad was the first non-clerical president of IRI. Domestically he has been criticized several time for “being more Arabs than the Arabs” due to his quite strong support of Palestinian cause with the support of IRGC group. Actually this support is suggested as a tactic of his “Arab street” strategy to become more involved with the Arab issues but still this was one of the reasons that made President Ahmadinejad the most popular leader of the region together with Hassan Nasrallah.

In accordance with the “Third World hero” image of President Ahmadinejad⁶ which was also a result of his “Look to The East” policy, IRI’s bilateral relations with anti-hegemonic Latin American and African countries increased during his tenure. Simultaneously, the President of IRI gave quite importance to strengthening Iran’s ties with the GCC countries including Saudi Arabia so regionally Iran became an active player.

On the other hand, Mr. Ahmadinejad did not promote only the Islamic and revolutionary identity of IRI, he also emphasized the nationalist identity of Iran through evoking the glory of Persian nation among the people of Iran. Especially in nuclear issue he utilized such nationalist drives in order to gain domestic support against dramatically increasing sanctions on the country in order to prevent domestic discontent.

⁶ See AnoushiravanEhteshami and MahjoobZweiri, *Iran and the Rise of its NeoConservatives: The Politics of Tehran’s Silent Revolution*, (London: I.B.Tauris, 2007), p. 108.

At the same time, the president was of course widely known with his distinctive apocalyptic beliefs that are also repeated in UN General Assembly where he gave his speech about the “current unjust World order”.⁷ In relation to that, President Ahmadinejad promoted his strong support for resistance movements among the region through IRGC, particularly al-Quds force as a struggle against this unjust order. Ultimately, the economic and political position of IRGC incredibly increased among other interest groups and they became the main beneficiary group during President Ahmadinejad.

Shortly, Mahmood Ahmadinejad ‘s foreign policy approach seems as if designed to fit the redefined regional role of IRI in accordance with the transforming picture of the region which is interpreted as in favor of Iran.

Therefore, this study focuses on President Ahmadinejad’s term while aiming to reach some evaluations about the regional role of Iran in the Middle East. In accordance with this goal, this thesis is divided into two parts that are on the one hand the conceptual framework of this study and on the other hand the empirical part of it. Hence, chapter 2 will provide the conceptual framework for analyzing the regional role of Iran. While the following chapter 3, chapter 4 and chapter 5 will provide the empirical data about the case of Iran in accordance with this conceptual framework.

Chapter 2 provides a short examination of studies about the regional role conceptualizations in general. After that, through detecting the common points of these various regional role conceptualizations in this chapter, three parameters that could be used for analyzing the regional role of any country in its respective region are reached. These three parameters are, “self-perception of a country, “regional perceptions towards this country” and “hard power capacities of the country” as it is the conceptual frame of

⁷ See, Address by President Dr. Mahmood Ahmadinejad to the Sixtieth Session of the UN General Assembly, September 17, 2005, online available at: <http://www.un.org/webcast/ga/60/statements/iran050917eng.pdf>.

this study. Thus, comparisons of these parameters in terms of their consistency or contradictions enable to test the regional role of a country.

In this context, the following chapters test the case of Iran in accordance with these three parameters. In this direction, chapter 3 focuses on how Iran defines its own regional role in relation to the first parameter of regional role conceptualizations. Accordingly, the third chapter initially aims to understand the worldviews of policy makers of IRI through various identities of IRI. Such an assessment about the worldviews of IRI decision makers will provide the necessary ground for reaching reliable results about their self-perception through demonstrating the consistencies between their worldview and definition of their own role in the region. In other words, taking into account the worldviews of decision makers of IRI prevents misinterpretations about their real claims regarding the regional role of IRI. In this respect, the revolutionary, nationalistic and Islamic identities of Iran are evaluated at the beginning of this chapter in order to reach an understanding of the worldviews of the policy makers of IRI. As a result their three related claims about regional role of IRI are depicted in this chapter through examining the related articles of think tanks of IRI and periodicals as well as the statements and interviews of prominent figures of IRI policy making. According to this evaluation the officials of IRI claim that they are “a constructive regional power”, “a role model for other Muslim states in the region” and “a potential regional dominant power”.

After that, as the second parameter of regional role conceptualizations chapter 4 evaluates the perceptions of other regional countries regarding the regional role of IRI. Hence, this chapter tests the validity of claims of political elites of IRI about the role of IRI, according to the regional perceptions towards Iran. For this end, in accordance with the general perceptions of GCC countries, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Turkey and Israel toward Iran and its role in the Middle East, this chapter demonstrates the prevalence of threat perceptions toward IRI. Therefore, the self-perception of IRI regarding its role as a “potential regional dominant power” seems more valid in accordance with the perceptions of regional countries rather than its claims about its constructive role or being a model for other countries in the region.

Lastly, in relation to the third parameter for analyzing regional roles, chapter 5 examines the economic and military capacities of IRI one by one in order to test the consistency between the regional role claims of IRI and its hard power capacities. Hereby, a short examination of IRI's economic and military capacities on the basis of its regional role affirmations this chapter indicates the economic and military potential power of IRI while demonstrating the present insufficiency of Iran's economic and military capabilities for such regional role claims. At the same time, this chapter reveals the validity of IRI's claim of being a regional dominant power together with the limitations of realization of such a regional role.

Finally, the conclusions reached at each chapter will be evaluated to demonstrate the validity of regional role claims of IRI at the conclusion part of this thesis. At the same time, through comparing the three parameters of regional role conceptualizations, consequently this thesis claims the role of Iran during President Ahmadinejad was a potential regional dominant power while it was already a quite influential regional power in Middle East. However, this thesis claims at the same time such a potential inherently restricted in IRI system due to the survival challenge of the current regime in Iran so realization probability of this potential is quite low.

However, it is important to note that this study is lacking the impact of global powers in the regional order so Iran's economic, military and political relations with Russia and China in terms of their impacts on Iran's regional role. At the same time other relations of Iran with extra-regional countries including Latin America and African countries, as well as Afghanistan, Pakistan and India are not taken into account to evaluate Iran's regional role. The reason of such exclusions is the goal of this thesis to be restricted with the three common parameters of regional role conceptualizations to evaluate role of IRI in the Middle East. At the same time, the general features of contemporary Middle Eastern politics also not considered while examining Iran's regional role due to the same restriction. Otherwise, this study would include also the limitations for transformation of the countries into a regional hegemon or dominant power that are specific to Middle

East region so the role of Iran would be evaluated also in relation to such limitations which generally stems from the artificial state formation process in Middle East after colonization era. Therefore, these aspects may provide other frames for future studies regarding Iran's role in the region.

CHAPTER 2

AN ASSESMENT OF REGIONALISM AND REGIONAL ROLE CONCEPTUALISATIONS

Iran's regional role during Ahmadinejad era is a timely topic that is studied by several scholars in accordance with various frameworks. This study aims to approach this topic from an analytical framework that is based on the discussions about regionalism and regional role conceptualizations. Hence, this chapter will provide the conceptual framework of this thesis. This frame will based on a literature review on regional role conceptualizations through highlighting the general tendencies of prominent scholars while evaluating regionalism and the concept of regional power. More clearly, this study will focus on several typologies about the regional role distributions among regional states and then make a synthesis of those typologies. Therefore, the goal of this chapter is to reach a general conceptual framework that offers a method of analyzing possible regional roles of regional states in their respective regions in order to apply this in the case of Iran.

Initially, there is a common acceptance in IR literature that regional politics and regions, especially with their most powerful states, have started to be markedly important in international relations with the end of Cold War which lead the transformation of global international system from a bipolar world order to a unipolar one. In this respect, Andrew Hurrell claims the evolving of the US-centered unipolar world order in the contemporary times to a kind of multi-polar world order in which there is a diffusion of power of US with the newly emerging regional powers by the increasing impact of mutual

interconnection between international order and regional affairs.⁸ Similarly, Sandra Destradi also mentions the changing concern of some of the international relations scholars in the direction of the importance of the regions and the role of the dominant states of those regions in their respective regions.⁹

On the other hand, Amitav Acharya and Alastair Iain Johnston offer a way for advanced study of the design of international institutions so they claim the usefulness of a comparative analysis of regional institutions.¹⁰ By this way, Acharya emphasizes the increasing importance of regionalism after the Cold War with the impact of economic regionalization.¹¹ Primarily concerning the establishment of security order in regions, Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver also mention the decreasing willingness of great powers or US as the superpower to intervene the security affairs of the other regions after the Cold War.¹² In relation to that, they address the emerging relative autonomy of regional security patterns whose impact on international system brings their Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory.¹³ At the same time Miriam Prys also indicates the increasing importance of regions and regional power in IR literature since the end of Cold War,¹⁴ similar to Mohammed Ayoob.¹⁵

⁸ Andrew Hurrell, "Regional Powers and the Global System from a Historical Perspective" in Daniel Flemer (eds.), *Regional Leadership in the Global System: Ideas, Interests and Strategies of Regional*

Powers, (England: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), pp. 26-27.

⁹ Sandra Destradi, "Regional powers and their strategies: empire, hegemony, and leadership", *Review of International Studies*, Vol.36, Issue 4, (October 2010), pp. 903-904.

¹⁰ Amitav Acharya and Alastair I. Johnston, "Comparing regional institutions: an introduction", in Amitav Acharya and Alastair I. Johnston (eds.), *Crafting Cooperation: Regional International Institutions in Comparative Perspective*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.1-31.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.1.

¹² Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver, *Regions and Power: The Structure of International Security*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 3. ; See also Barry Buzan, "From international system to international society: structural realism and regime theory meet the English school", *International Organization*, Vol.47, No.3, (Summer 1993), pp.327-352.

¹³ See Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver, *Regions and Power: The Structure of International Security*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹⁴ Miriam Prys, "Hegemony, Domination, Detachment: Differences in Regional Powerhood", *International Studies Review*, (2010), pp.479-480.

¹⁵ Mohammed Ayoob, "From Regional System to Regional Society: Exploring Key Variables in the Construction of Regional Order", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.53, No.3, (1999), pp. 247-248.

Thus, there is a general acceptance of increased importance of regionalism and regional powers among scholars but they approach to the concepts of regionalism and regional power from different aspects. In this regard, there are two main groups of scholars who are not differentiated totally in every aspect but still have a common different point of view about regionalism and regional powers in terms of their understanding the relationship between regional and global affairs. Actually the basic difference among these two groups is their methods of approaching regional level. First group advocates global level analysis of regions but the second group suggest the regional level analysis of regional affairs.

2.1. The First Group: Global Context Matters More

The first group generally claims regional affairs and the defining factors of regional powers are determined globally. In other words, this group of scholars tends to explain the regional affairs and regional powers as highly dependent on and determined by the external great powers. Moreover, some of the scholars in this group advocate the applicability and usefulness of global level analyses for regional level analyses. In addition to that, there is a common tendency among them to assume regional powers as responsible with leadership duties in the region. In this direction, although some scholars do not assume that regional powers are automatically regional leaders, they suggest such responsibilities for regional powers to become successful and useful in their regions.

2.1.1. Global Determines Regional

Scholars in this group generally assume the greater impact of global context over regional affairs so they give less attention to regional dynamics. In this respect, Lake approaches the regions or RSCs¹⁶ as highly dependent variables to the global system

¹⁶ Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver define RSCs as: “a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritisation or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably analysed or resolved apart

while he does not clearly differentiate the regional level analysis and global level analysis.¹⁷ While, he focuses on the RSCs, his approach to the topic of regionalism mainly concentrates on the creation of order and stability in RSCs. According to him, features of security based interactions among the states within RSCs determine the characteristics of regional orders.¹⁸ For example, unipolar RSCs most probably lead to emergence of stable and autonomous regional order, according to him.¹⁹ Here, existence of single dominant power in unipolar RSCs as the defining feature of them causes this result. However, since bi-polar RSCs are highly competitive and prone to conflicts they lead to conflictual regional orders.²⁰ In addition to that, multipolar RSCs according to him cause relatively autonomous but still conflictual regional orders due to the plurality of regional powers in such RSCs.²¹

Therefore, Lake claims regions with single dominant states or unipolar RSCs are more peaceful and less conflictual due to the responsibility of the dominant state to provide order within the region.²² In return for the responsibility of dominant states to provide regional order, the subordinate states are responsible to fulfil the command of the dominant states.²³ In relation to that, he further explains the hierarchical relationship between dominant and subordinate states in general. That brings his study of regional hierarchies. According to him in regional hierarchies if there is a single dominant power and there are many states that are subordinated at the similar degrees to this dominant

from one another”, see Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver, *Regions and Power: The Structure of International Security*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.44. ; In addition to this original definition of RSC, David Lake defines RSC as: “a set of states continuously affected by one or more security externalities that emanate from a distinct geographic area.” David A. Lake, “Regional hierarchy: authority and local international order”, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 35, Supplement S1, (February 2009), p.35.

¹⁷ See David A. Lake, “Regional hierarchy: authority and local international order”, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 35, Supplement S1, (February 2009), pp. 35-58.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp.36-37.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.36.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., p.38.

²³ Ibid.

state then the regional order becomes considerably peaceful.²⁴ Here, the impact of awareness of such subordinate states about the similar conditions of other subordinate states as being protected and constrained by the same dominant state is important for the emergence of peaceful regional order due to their security feelings under the general control of dominant state.²⁵

Relatedly, Lake examines the social, economic and security related reasons of acceptance of subordinate states to be subordinated to the dominant state in the region. In this respect, he suggests that if “the number of independent alliances possessed by the potentially subordinate states”²⁶ is higher, their security relationships become less hierarchical.²⁷ Similarly, according to him if those potential subordinate states have many trade partners other than the potential dominant state then their economic relationships also become less hierarchical.²⁸ Therefore, he implies the reason of low level of order and stability in some RSCs is their less hierarchical feature of the relationship among the states of them.²⁹

Shortly, his main claim is that regional hierarchy and regional order are mutually constituted so in accordance with the levels of hierarchy of the regions the regional orders may vary as being peaceful or more conflictual. In addition to that, he perceives existence of dominant power in the region as the necessary condition for the emergence of peaceful regional order. Although, he strongly emphasizes the effectiveness of single dominant state in the region for the creation of regional stability and peace, he indicates the ultimate impact of global order for obtaining regional order, independent from regional dominant states. Actually, he claims that if the dominant power of the global

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., p.40.

²⁶ Ibid., p.45.

²⁷ Ibid., p.46.

²⁸ Ibid., p.47.

²⁹ Ibid., p.53-57.

system which is US has higher levels of security and economic hierarchy than the regional orders in RSCs become automatically peaceful.³⁰ Therefore, he approaches the regions or RSCs as highly dependent variables to the global system.

In this direction, Hurrel also suggests regional powers and regional orders are directly impacted by the changes of global order so regional level orders and power statutes are initially depended on the global system.³¹ Moreover, he emphasizes the dependency of the capacities and functions of regional powers to the changing conditions of global context so offers a historical point of view to approach global context in order to understand regional powers.³² For this reason, he mainly focuses on the changes that occurs in international order and reaches to the point that during the Cold War period the superpower competition restricted the capacity of potential regional powers to influence their regional affairs with the permanent interventions of superpowers to the regional affairs.³³

However, with the post-Cold War period instead of a bi-polar world order a unipolar and then “globalized world order” emerged.³⁴ According to him in such a world order the role of “multilateral organizations” in international affairs expanded as the necessary tool for the superpower to employ its control over different parts of the world.³⁵ In short, after the Cold War, the rising institutionalization of global system led the globalization and democratization of the global world order within which now regional powers

³⁰Ibid., p.57.

³¹ Andrew Hurrel, “One world? Many worlds? The place of regions in the study of international society”, *International Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 1, (2007), p. 130.

³² Andrew Hurrel, “Regional Powers and the Global System from a Historical Perspective” in Daniel Flesmes (eds.), *Regional Leadership in the Global System: Ideas, Interests and Strategies of Regional Powers*, (England: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), pp. 15-27.

³³Ibid., pp. 20-21.

³⁴Ibid., p. 23.

³⁵Ibid., p. 22.

became more influential than before but at the same time less ambitious because of the global codes of behavior that are imposed through institutions.³⁶

As a result, in the contemporary times the unipolar world order started to evolve into a kind of multi-polar world order with the creation of emerging powers together with regional powers by the inevitable diffusion of power of US as the superpower.³⁷ Therefore, Hurrel claims that US-led international order is tarnished and the global order is now in an evolving process towards a multi-polar world order in which regional powers are quite important.³⁸ However, this does not mean that this important role of regional powers are determined only by regional dynamics instead the global dynamics primarily effective to determine the importance of regional actors.

In short, Hurrel claims “the interests of regional powers and their foreign policy ideas have been continuously shaped by the development of global forces and by different practices of global ordering”.³⁹ Therefore, understanding the regional powers and regional orders is possible only by giving quite focus and importance to the global context.⁴⁰ Although, he indicates the increasing importance of regional powers so much that they cause the evolving of unipolar world to a multi-polar world he still does not take them as independent actors instead he highlights their dependency on global order parameters. Neither, he does not clearly mention the influence of regions over the global order but mentions only the influence of global order on regional orders. Hereby, it is clear that according to Hurrell regional affairs mainly dependent on global affairs so regions and regional powers are mostly determined by global order.

³⁶Ibid., p. 26.

³⁷Ibid. p. 27.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹Ibid., pp. 26-27.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 17.

On the other hand, Douglas Lemke and Suzanne Werner also indicate the role of global context to determine the regional context while they directly apply power transition theory to the regional level.⁴¹ In this regard, they develop a theory to analyze regional level that is called “multiple hierarchies” model which includes several regional and sub-regional hierarchies.⁴² In short, they claim through this model that the regional level powers behave in the same direction with global level powers since the regional level is almost a small copy of international system.⁴³

However, they indicate the subordination of those regional and sub-regional hierarchies by the global power hierarchy.⁴⁴ Therefore, according to Lemke and Werner the global power may intervene in the regional affairs of regional dominant power whenever the global power considers it necessary for the sake of its own interests in the region. At that point, they suggest that there is not a mutual relationship between global dominant power and regional dominant powers in terms of their influence over each other’s affairs. In this context, they claim that the global dominant power may intervene in the regional affairs in order to preserve status quo by preventing possible conflicts among the local members.⁴⁵ However, regional powers cannot determine the global affairs through intervening in the affairs of global power due to their weaker positions in the face of global powers.

According to their multiple hierarchies model, another sign of the subordinated status of regional systems to the global system is related to the status quo element of local hierarchies which is different from global hierarchy. Lemke and Werner explain this as: “the status quo of local hierarchy must operate within the context of this larger, global

⁴¹Douglas Lemke and Suzanne Werner, “Power Parity, Commitment to Change, and War”, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.40, (1996), pp. 235-260.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 237-240.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 237-238.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 239.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 238.

status quo”.⁴⁶ Such an obligation may limit the local status quo due to the control of global level affairs over regional. However, there is not such a limitation or obligatory situation for global level hierarchy because it does not belong to any other system which is bigger than itself. Thus, they claim that regional hierarchy operates in a very similar vein with international hierarchy but naturally global rules and norms determine and dominate the regional system.⁴⁷ Therefore, according to the multiple hierarchies model of Lemke and Werner regional level is controlled and determined by global level.

2.1.2. Analyzing Regional Level through Global Level

Some of the scholars in the first group are tend to apply global level analyses to regional level analysis or do not make a clear differentiation between regional level and global level analyses. For example, as it is mentioned above, Lake claims that if the dominant power of the global system, US has higher levels of security and economic hierarchy then the regional orders in RSCs become more peaceful.⁴⁸ Actually, he comes to this conclusion through his analysis about regional hierarchy models. In other words, Lake describes a rule of obtaining order and peace in regions through regional hierarchy that has single dominant power and he applies the same rule for global level or vice versa. Therefore, it seems like Lake does not differentiating regional level analyses and global level analyses.

Similarly, Hurrel also applies global context to the regional level analyses in order to explain the roles of regional powers to provide order in their regions. In this direction, he defines the parameters for being a “successful regional power”⁴⁹. According to him, a successful regional power should be able to build institutions in the region it operates

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 238.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 239.

⁴⁸ See David A. Lake, “Regional hierarchy: authority and local international order”, p. 57.

⁴⁹Andrew Hurrel, “Regional Powers and the Global System from a Historical Perspective”, p.22.

and provide public goods in order to guarantee its acknowledgement as a regional power by other regional states.⁵⁰ At the same time, a successful regional power according to him should use the tools of “soft hegemony” and “cooperative leadership” while asserting its power.⁵¹ Therefore, successful regional powers develop “new forms of soft and ideational power” in their respective regions according to Hurrel.⁵² Finally, the last criteria that determines the success of regional powers is their capacity to develop some kinds of coalitions with state and non-state actors that helps them to be able to successfully operate within the global system.⁵³

In short, Andrew Hurrel reminds the importance of approaching to global context through historical point of view and the changing pictures of the international orders from time to time for understanding the regional powers. In this respect, his parameters of successful regional power that are mentioned above as “institution building, providing public good, using the tools of soft hegemony and cooperative leadership”⁵⁴ are all the similar parameters that are suggested as necessary to successfully leading the global order in the global context. Therefore, Hurrel applies the global norms to the regional level with not much interest to differentiating regional context from global context.

In the same vein, Pedersen also approaches regional and global context from the same point of view. He offers the co-operative hegemony for both regional powers and global powers as it is similarly useful for all of them.⁵⁵ Actually, he suggests a typology of the various strategies that “regional great powers” might follow in their regional policy conducts which are “cooperative hegemony”, “unilateral hegemony”, “empire” and

⁵⁰Ibid., p.24.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵ See Thomas Pedersen, “Cooperative hegemony: power, ideas and institutions in regional integration”, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 28, Issue 4, (October 2002), pp. 677-696.

“concert”.⁵⁶ Here, the important point is that, his typology is concentrated on the relation between the strategies of regional great powers and the degree of institutionalization in the region. At the same time it is also important to note that he uses the term of great power in regional context as regional great power in order to indicate the most powerful state in a region which has the same meaning with the regional power conceptions of the previous scholars.

In this direction, Pedersen explains regional or global great powers that choose unilateral hegemonic strategy in their regional or global policies as less concerning the regional institutionalization although their foreign policy behaviors sits on “a strong realist element”.⁵⁷ Similarly, according to Pedersen, regional great powers that prefer imperial strategy as the method of their regional policy also demonstrates considerable signs of realism with various dimensions but different from unilateral hegemony at the same time give quite importance to regional institutionalization as the tool of their regional policy strategy.⁵⁸ The favorite strategy of regional or global great powers for Pedersen which is co-operative hegemony has a more moderate realist aspect but has a considerably strong emphasis on regional or international institutionalism.⁵⁹ Finally, if the big powers of a regional and global system are tend to concert type of strategy then those big powers enjoy various privileges which include specific responsibilities in accordance with those privileges.⁶⁰

However, he does not focus on all kinds of strategies equally. As the most secure and suitable form of strategy for promoting regional institutionalization, he focuses largely on the strategy of cooperative hegemony due to his main concern that is the institutionalization processes in regions. In this respect, according to him institutions

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 682.

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid. p. 683.

⁶⁰Ibid.

may be very helpful for regional big powers for achieving their security and relative gain goals.⁶¹ Thus, he explains institutionalization as a useful tool for regional big powers since it secure the long term legitimacy of the interference of the regional big power to the internal and external affairs of other regional states through providing consent and loyalty of those secondary regional states to some extend towards the regional big power.⁶² Therefore, institutionalization as a precondition against possible adversaries from other regional states is necessary for regional big powers according to Pedersen due to its function of consolidating their power and superior position in the region.⁶³

In this context, Pedersen defines cooperative hegemony as a soft form of domination by means of cooperative institutional arrangements based on long-term strategy.⁶⁴ Then, he states the preconditions of employing a strategy of cooperative hegemony for regional great powers as their skill to transform the secondary states into their followers in political realm and increase the effective contributions of other states to the regional order through depositing their power via well-designed regional institutions as well as their determination to work for durable regional institutionalization.⁶⁵ At that point in accordance with the degree of such capacities he explains different forms of co-operative hegemony. For example, if a regional big power could successfully gain regional followers and properly deposit its power among regional states but it is not that much determined to work for regional institutionalization then an “informal co-operative hegemonic” order occurs.⁶⁶

Hereby, Pedersen offers various combinations of different degrees of capacities of regional big powers in order to analyze the forms of co-operative hegemony which are

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 684-688.

⁶²Ibid., pp. 685-686.

⁶³Ibid., pp. 685.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 683.

⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 688-692.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 693.

applied by regional big powers. Therefore, according to him one can make predictions about the possible future regional scenarios as well as understand the causal relationship between the different capacities of regional big powers and different cases in accordance with the degree of institutionalization in the region.⁶⁷ At the same time, Pedersen claims that “international systems or regions may pass from empire through co-operative hegemony or asymmetrical federations to federations”.⁶⁸ Shortly, it seems Pedersen’s approach to regions is based on the assumption that regional orders are the miniatures of international order which are both in need of institutionalization to achieve stability. Therefore, Pedersen applies global level analysis to regional level with not much emphasize to the distinctions of regional level and global level.

As previously mentioned, Douglas Lemke and Suzanne Werner also does not make a substantial differentiation between regional level or global level powers like Pedersen and suggests a kind of direct application of power transition theory to the regional level systems.⁶⁹ They claim that “local hierarchies function as an international system in miniature”⁷⁰. Therefore they suggest the above mentioned “multiple hierarchies model” as an extension of “power transition theory” to the regional systems.⁷¹

In this respect, just like power transition theory suggests that if the dominant power at the top of the global system is powerful enough then the international system is stable and peaceful, multiple hierarchies model also suggests that the powerfulness of the regional dominant power determines the degree of stability and peace of the region.⁷² Moreover, the members of local hierarchies fight for getting the dominant role

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 692-696.

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 684.

⁶⁹ Douglas Lemke and Suzanne Werner, “Power Parity, Commitment to Change, and War”, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.40, (1996), pp. 235-260. ; see also Douglas Lemke, *Regions of War and Peace*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 237-238.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Douglas Lemke, *Regions of War and Peace*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.49.

in the local hierarchy, just as the major powers fight for control of the international status quo.⁷³ In this respect, just like in the global context, in the regional context some local challengers may occur as a threat to the regional dominant power if the dissatisfaction of the member states of the local hierarchy reaches important levels.⁷⁴

Here, it is important to note that Lemke emphasizes the existence of differences across the regions of the globe and look for the reasons of such differences.⁷⁵ The different levels of economic and political development among the regions bring such persistent differences across the regions.⁷⁶ In other words, Lemke claims that the applicability of power transition theory to the regional level affairs is higher when the regional states generally are more developed economically and politically.⁷⁷ Thus, he indicates that regional level may not always act in the same direction with global level. However, Lemke still emphasizes the quite important similarities among the regions⁷⁸ so ultimately tries to demonstrate that local hierarchies function in a similar vein with global hierarchy. Therefore, it is obvious that Lemke advocates the efficiency of global level analysis for understanding regional level.

2.1.3. Regional Powers are Regional Leaders

Generally, the scholars in this group are tend to perceive regional powers as regional leaders who are responsible for providing regional security and order . In this direction, Lake assumes regional dominant states as automatically responsible for creating peace

⁷³ Ibid., p. 68.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 57.

⁷⁵ Ibid. , p. 2.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid. , 13.

and stability in the region.⁷⁹ Here it is important to note that Lake uses the term “dominant state” within regional hierarchies as “regional powers”. Although he suggests a method of analyzing regional hierarchy in terms of its impact on regional order, he does not focus on the other possible roles that regional powers may assume.⁸⁰ In other words, he focuses on the subordinated states to the dominant state in terms of the reasons and degree of this subordination but not provide a conceptual frame for approaching various regional roles of these subordinated regional states. Thus, Lake perceives regions as composed of dominant state(s) and subordinated states and assumes regional powers (dominant states) as responsible for providing peaceful order in the region.

At this point, previously explained parameters of “successful regional powers” for Hurrel which are “capacity to direct or dominate the region”⁸¹ and “capacity to be able to prevent regional entanglements”⁸² as well as “capacity to act discretionally”⁸³ and “the external recognition”⁸⁴ of regional states that transforms regional actors into regional powers demonstrates that Hurrel also seems to perceive regional powers as automatically responsible for leadership roles in the region. Although, he gives little detail about regional power definition or its variations or other interregional dynamics that determine regional powers, independent from global context he mainly focus on constructive leadership roles and responsibilities of regional powers. Therefore, Hurrel also assumes regional powers as automatically responsible for providing regional order.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ David A. Lake, “Regional hierarchy: authority and local international order”, p.41.

⁸⁰ Ibid. , p.40-58..

⁸¹ Andrew Hurrel, “Regional Powers and the Global System from a Historical Perspective”, p. 20.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid. , p. 22.

In this regard, Pedersen uses the term regional great powers or regional big powers instead of regional powers but he does not make any considerable differentiation between these terms so he implies relatively more powerful states in the region by the term “regional great powers”. At that point, he doesn’t assume that those big powers will automatically behave in the manner of regional leaders who have responsibilities of providing security and order in the region. Instead, he demonstrates various possible strategies of regional big powers in accordance with their several capacities and commitment levels to institutionalizations of their respective regions. As mentioned above these strategies are cooperative hegemony, unilateral hegemony, empire or concert. Here it is important to note that, Pedersen offers cooperative hegemony as the best strategy for the interest of regional great powers since this strategy will enhance and maintain their influence in the region. Therefore, Pedersen approaches the regional power concept from regional institutionalization concerns. In other words, he offers leadership responsibilities to regional powers instead of focusing equally different roles of regional powers.

As it is mentioned above, according to “multiple hierarchy model” of Lemke an increase in the power of regional dominant power means increase in regional stability and peace.⁸⁶ Thus Lemke also assumes the regional powers (dominant power) automatically have responsibilities to provide order and peace. Similarly, Stefan Schirim considers regional powers as automatically pursuing only the role of regional leadership.⁸⁷ He defines regional powers as the dominant state in the region in terms of material resources and at the same time ambitious emerging powers that seeks for leadership role in the regional as well as global level.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Douglas Lemke, *Regions of War and Peace*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.49.

⁸⁷ See Stefan A. Schirim, “Leadership in Regional and Global Politics: Why do Emerging Powers (Sometimes) Fail to Reach Their Goals?”, German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA), Hamburg, December 4, 2006, online available at: http://www.sowi.rub.de/mam/content/lsip/leadership_paper.pdf , (accessed on November 15, 2014).

⁸⁸ Stefan A. Schirim, “Leaders in need of followers: Emerging powers in global governance”, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 16, No.2, (June 2010), pp.197.

Shortly, he suggests that the self-perception of the regional powers regarding their regional role should be automatically regional leadership and such a role conception is in need of regional and global recognition.⁸⁹ Thus, according to Schirm regional powers are the “role models” in their region.⁹⁰ It is in this context that Schirm considers the concept of regional power as including only one form of regional role which is leadership. Thus he uses the “regional power” and “regional leader” as synonymous terms since his criteria of regional power are actually the criteria of regional leadership so he considers regional powers as automatically regional leaders.

Similar to Schirm, Maxi Schoeman also indicates the responsibility of regional powers to ensure the regional stability and order. Therefore, he also describes the regional powers as automatically regional leaders which should voluntarily claim to have regional leadership role and gains regional acknowledgement.⁹¹ Therefore, he also perceives the regional power concept as the same with regional leader concept.

2.2. The Second Group: Regional Dynamics Matters More

The second group, different from the first group claims regional dynamics matters more in the determining regional affairs and the functions of regional powers. In other words, these scholars particularly emphasize the importance of regional dynamics for the regional order and other related regional affairs, rather than the decisiveness of extra-regional great powers.

Therefore, some of the scholars in this category are also against the use of global level analyses in regional level analyses. In addition to that, they generally do not assume

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 197-205.

⁹⁰ Stefan A. Schirm, “Leadership in Regional and Global Politics: Why do Emerging Powers (Sometimes) Fail to Reach Their Goals?”, p. 6.

⁹¹ Maxi Schoeman, “South Africa as an Emerging Middle Power” in John Daniel, Adam Habib and Roger Southall (eds.), *State of the Nation: South Africa 2003-2004*, (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2003), p.353.

regional powers as regional leaders who are responsible for providing regional security and order. Moreover, some take the term of regional power as an umbrella that includes various roles of powerful states in the region.

2.2.1. Regions are Determined in Itself

Scholars in this group suggest the importance of regional dynamics and oppose the first group in their claim of greater impact of global context over the regional affairs. Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver are considered in this group. Although, similar to the tendency in the first group, they automatically perceives regional powers as capable of and responsible for securitization of regions or RSCs, they strongly emphasizes the increasing importance and influence of regional powers in regional affairs.⁹² Thus, they differentiate from the first group clearly in terms of their opposition to the idea that regional affairs are directly determined by global context.

In this regard, Buzan and Weaver suggest that regional level systems (RSCs) are prone to interference of external great powers but this situation does not change the fact that regional level has its own dynamics that are not necessarily dependent to the arrangements of global powers.⁹³ At that point they criticize those who claim that regional level is primarily determined by global and explain the rising primacy of regional powers for regional as well as global affair since the end of Cold War.⁹⁴ Although, Acharya and Johnston do not focus on the defining features and conceptualizations of regional powers, they still emphasize that regions are constructed by internal dynamics rather than external interventions, especially in regard to creation of regional orders.⁹⁵

⁹² See Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver, *Regions and Power: The Structure of International Security*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁹³ Ibid. , p.4.

⁹⁴ Ibid. , p. 41.

⁹⁵ Amitav Acharya and Alastair I. Johnston, "Comparing regional institutions: an introduction", p. 10.

In the similar vein with Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver, while Derrick Frazier and Robert Stewart-Ingersoll consider the impact of extra-regional great powers on the establishment of regional security orders but they claim that their impacts are less determinative than the regional dynamics for the establishment of regional orders, especially after the cold war.⁹⁶ Thus, they agree with most of the other scholars who claim that regional powers have acquired more importance after the cold war.

In this context, it seems like Frazier and Stewart-Ingersoll mainly give more attention to the impacts of regional powers on the formation of the regional security orders. In relation to this, it is important to remind that their main aim is to make some evaluations about the order in RSCs and they claim that the most suitable way to for such an analysis is to focus on regional powers because interests, capabilities and behaviors of regional powers are primarily important for the creation of security orders in regions.⁹⁷ Therefore, they emphasize the importance of regional dynamics to determine regional affairs rather than the impact of global penetration to the regions.

However, it is important to note that similar to the tendencies of Buzan and Weaver to the first group of scholars, Frazier and Stewart-Ingersoll also assumes regional powers as automatically responsible for providing security in RSCs.⁹⁸ Therefore, they claim that rather than enjoying material superiority, providing security is the main precondition for a regional state in order to be assumed as a regional power.⁹⁹ In this context, Frazier and Stewart-Ingersoll describe regional power as an exclusive concept that is not appropriate to use automatically for all the materially powerful states of a region.

⁹⁶ Derrick Frazier and Robert Stewart-Ingersoll, "Regional powers and security: A framework for understanding order within regional security complexes", *European Journal of International relations*, Vol. 20, No.10, (2010) , p. 4.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Therefore, they suggest that the willingness to influence other regional states by using their material capability is a very important capacity of regional actors for being considered as a regional power.¹⁰⁰ In other words, according to Frazier and Stewart-Ingersoll's perspective regional powers are the basic providers of security order in RSCs so the materially powerful states are not automatically regional powers unless they direct this power to create security in the region. Although such a tendency towards first group in terms of such an assumption of regional powers as security and order providers, they mainly differentiates from the first group through their emphasis on the importance and predominance of regional dynamics and regional powers for the shaping of regions.

2.2.2. Regional Level Approaches to Analyse Regions

The second group of scholars differentiates from the first group in terms of their opposition to the application of global level analyses to the regional level. Instead, they offer regional level analysis in order to understand regional affairs. For example, according to the regionalist approaches of Buzan and Weaver a clear differentiation of regional level from global level is a must for scholars to offer proper analysis regarding both regional and global levels.¹⁰¹ In this regard, they suggest that the current unipolar, multipolar or globalization understandings cannot adequately capture the new patterns of international security relations so they offers "regional security complex theory" (RSCT) in order to understand the new structure of international security relations by distinguishing system level interactions of global powers and subsystem level of interactions of lesser powers.¹⁰²

In this direction, they suggest regional powers should be evaluated in regional context since they act on regional boundaries despite they have a lesser degree of impact on

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. p.11.

¹⁰¹ Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver, *Regions and Power: The Structure of International Security*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.26.

¹⁰² Ibid. pp.3-4.

global level. However, according to them superpowers and great powers as a distinct group should be considered in global context evaluations different than regional powers.¹⁰³ Therefore, they claim the relation between global and regional level should be considered by focusing on the overlapping interests of global actors and regional actors since global actors penetrate regional level interactions when it is necessary for their own interests so regional level provides considerable opportunities for global actors in their global level relations.¹⁰⁴

Therefore, they offer to approach world affairs as composed of “mutually exclusive RSCs, insulator states and global actors.”¹⁰⁵ According to their definition, Insulator states are defined as the states that are geographically between the two different RSCs and they are in a difficult position of being responsible for interactions of the two RSCs but not strong enough to unify those two RSCs in one.¹⁰⁶ They define RSCs as “a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritisation or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another”.¹⁰⁷ In this respect, they suggests regional powers define the polarity of the RSC they are belong to and they are recognized by the global powers as influential over and capable of the securitization processes of their region but they are excluded from system level of calculations although they may be treated as if they matters for the global balance of power within the context of global rivalries.¹⁰⁸

In short, Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver emphasize the increasing importance of regions and the necessity to understand the global security concerns by dividing the world into mutually exclusive RSCs, particularly after the end of Cold War. In addition, they claim

¹⁰³Ibid. pp. 34-39.

¹⁰⁴Ibid. p. 47.

¹⁰⁵Ibid. p. 48.

¹⁰⁶Ibid. p.41.buzan

¹⁰⁷Ibid. p.44.buzan

¹⁰⁸Ibid. , p.37.

the necessity to approach regional powers and regional affairs from the regional context so they obviously differentiate regional level analyses from global level.

Frazier and Stewart-Ingersoll also advocates regional level analysis while approaching regions. Their main concern is the creation of security in RSCs so he develops a typology which he calls as “Regional Powers and Security Framework” (RPSF) for analyzing the influence of regional powers on the security formation of regions.¹⁰⁹ Therefore they suggest different regional power roles and various orientations of regional powers within the regional security dynamics in order to understand the order within RSCs.¹¹⁰

In other words, their main aim of developing such a framework is understanding order within RSCs and he does so by focusing on the importance of regional powers for the creation of order in RSCs. Accordingly, they perceive regional powers as the most influential and strongest states in their respective regions who has the biggest interest and capability in the development of security order in the region.¹¹¹ Thus, Frazier and Stewart-Ingersoll argue that regional powers are quite influential on the conflictual or cooperative orientations of their regional order.¹¹² In relation to this, he stresses the type of security order in a region is strongly dependent on the preferences of the regional powers about how to use their capacities.¹¹³

In relation to the impact of regional powers on the emergence of security orders, he demonstrates five possible types of security orders in RSCs which are “hegemonic orders; collective security orders; power restraining power orders; concert orders and

¹⁰⁹Derrick Frazier and Robert Stewart-Ingersoll, “Regional powers and security: A framework for understanding order within regional security complexes”, *European Journal of International relations*, XX(X), (2010) , pp. 1-23.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 9-16.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 4.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

unstructured orders”.¹¹⁴ In this respect, he suggests that the degree of influence of regional powers differs in these security orders. In other words, in hegemonic regional security order the regional system led by only one state which is capable of determining and maintaining “essential rules, norms and modes of operation” in the region.¹¹⁵ Thus, the role of regional power in hegemonic regional security order is quiet influential.

Secondly, in collective security type of regional security order, as a result of the existence of common identity which makes regional states to felt belong to one group against outside threat, there is an effective institutional development that promotes cooperation. Here again regional powers are important but limited with the institutional framework.¹¹⁶ Thirdly, in power restraining power types of regional security orders there is a “suitable and stable distribution of power” among regional states.¹¹⁷ Therefore, regional power is not as salient as in the hegemonic type. Fourthly, in the concert type of regional security orders the most powerful states of the region come together in order to provide security.¹¹⁸

At that point, it seems like that according to Frazier and Stewart-Ingersoll there may be more than one regional power in the same region. Lastly, in unstructured orders there is a lack of effective means of providing security.¹¹⁹ Although, the position of regional powers in hegemonic type or concert type is more salient than the other types, they claim that regional powers have quite important influence on all types of security orders.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p.5

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp.5-6

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.6

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p.6

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p.6

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p.7.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

In this context, they suggest the degree of influence that regional powers exerts on the regional security orders should be evaluated in terms of their power and behavior simultaneously. Hereby, they suggest that the material or power capacity alone is not enough to identify a state as a regional power.¹²¹ In addition to the power capacity, what the regional powers do with their powers also important for identifying a state as a regional power because they claim that a state with enough power capacity for being a regional power should at the same time perform regional power roles in a constant way by applying several foreign policy orientation in order to be considered as a regional power.¹²² Therefore, they evaluate the behaviors of regional powers in terms of both regional power role and regional power orientations.

At the same time, they examine regional powers in accordance with the material capability and polarity dimensions. In terms of material capability, a regional power should possess effective military and economic strength.¹²³ However, as it is mentioned above, being the most powerful state in terms of material capability is a necessary but not sufficient capacity of a regional state to be considered as a regional power according to Frazier and Stewart-ingersoll. Thus, they imply that if a state is among the superior states in the region in terms of its material capacity then the second condition of directing this capacity to provide security is a must for Frazier and Stewart-ingersoll to assume this state as a regional power. In this direction, after analyzing the power capacity of states, they suggest three different roles of regional powers which are “regional leader, regional protector or regional custodian”.¹²⁴

These different roles determined largely by how the regional powers perceive themselves and how other states consider them.¹²⁵ According to their role definitions,

¹²¹Ibid. 9.

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid. p. 8.

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 9-14.

regional leaders are regional powers that quite strongly influence other states to move in specific security direction and they lead the region in the direction that is more compatible with their own preferences.¹²⁶ Regional leaders must have outstanding material capacity and be willing to use this capacity to influence other regional states for their own national interests and at the same time should have been recognized by the other regional states.¹²⁷ On the other hand, regional custodian role necessitates regional powers to maintain the already established regional security order by employing conflict management activities and maintaining the common norms of the region.¹²⁸ They also should have necessary material capability and recognition by the other states.¹²⁹

Lastly, regional protectors are responsible for regional defense against external security threats.¹³⁰ They use this responsibility for themselves by portraying a threat which is especially dangerous for them as if this threat is directed to the whole region.¹³¹ In other words, Frazier and Stewart-Ingersoll point that regional protectors occasionally utilize their responsibility to protect the region as a tool for gaining greater influence over other regional states.¹³² At the same time, they suggest these regional protectors also utilize their responsibility of regional protection in order to shift the focus of other regional states toward external threats to make the other states forget or underestimate the possible threats that will come from the regional protector itself.¹³³

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 9.

¹²⁶Ibid., p. 11.

¹²⁷Ibid.

¹²⁸Ibid., p. 12.

¹²⁹Ibid.

¹³⁰Ibid. p.12

¹³¹Ibid.

¹³²Ibid.

¹³³Ibid.

According to them, among those three roles of regional powers there is not a mutually exclusive relationship, instead if a regional power becomes successful in any of these roles it can simultaneously take other roles as well.¹³⁴ In addition to roles of regional powers, the power orientations of regional powers are considerably important according to Frazier and Stewart-Ingersoll in order to understand how influential regional powers on regional security orders. These orientations are “protective or revisionist”; “tendency towards unilateralism or multilateralism” and “proactive or reactive” orientations.¹³⁵

In regard to first orientation if a regional power is satisfied with the current status quo it may orient in a protective manner and if it is not satisfied it will opt to act in a revisionist manner.¹³⁶ Secondly, if regional powers recognize the regional security issues as being interconnected among RSC members they will orient to multilateralism by developing rules and patterns of interaction among regional states for the long term cooperation aspirations.¹³⁷ Therefore, multilateral orientation will provide greater legitimacy and longevity to regional powers.¹³⁸

However, regional powers that choose a unilateralist orientation prefers making bilateral agreements within state-centric individualistic security concerns and may choose cooperation only for their short-term national interests which make them less legitimate and short time powers.¹³⁹ Thirdly, regional powers may choose to orient to long term oriented security concerns and measures so they are proactive regional powers.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ Ibid. , p.13

¹³⁵ Ibid. , p.14-16

¹³⁶ Ibid. , p.14.

¹³⁷ Ibid. , p.15..

¹³⁸ Ibid. , p.15-16.

¹³⁹ Ibid. , p.15-16.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. , p.16.

However, others may choose to respond to security issues in an immediate manner which makes them reactive regional powers.¹⁴¹

Through such a typology called RPSF, Frazier and Stewart-Ingersoll mainly claim that regional powers are the most important actors to understand and analyze regional orders. Therefore the emergences of various orders in RSCs are quite dependent on the preference of regional powers about their roles and orientations in the region. Hereby, they provide a region-centric method to analyze regional security order so it is obvious that they advocate the usefulness of regional level analyses for regions.

In the same vein with Lemke, Detlef Nolte also uses power transition theory together with the realist balance of power theory in order to understand the regional level relationships by using such international system theories.¹⁴² In a similar manner with Lemke, Nolte also suggests the benefits of adopting the same approaches and methods that are applied in the evaluations of the global power hierarchies to the regional power hierarchies.¹⁴³ Thus, Nolte seems to accept the usefulness of applying global level analysis to the regional level so he tends to the first group of scholars.

However, Nolte comes to conclusion that the direct application of an international system theory to the regional level is not sufficient in order to reach a full understanding of the relationship among the regional states but it is still very helpful to get a point of view on the issue¹⁴⁴ He believes the importance of understanding regional powers, as “the node between global and regional power hierarchies”¹⁴⁵, in order to reach a satisfying understanding of regional level systems and their importance for the overall

¹⁴¹ Ibid. , p.16.

¹⁴² See Detlef Nolte, “How to compare regional powers: analytical concepts and research topics”, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 4, (October 2010), pp. 881-901.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 896.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid 889

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

international system. Therefore, at the center of his concern there exist the regional powers and he aims to reach an analytical concept of regional power. Therefore, Nolte is ultimately considered in second group in this study due to his focus on regional powers to analyze regional affairs through a regional level approach.

In this respect, before explaining his definition of regional power it is important to note that he sees the regions as composed of powerful states on the one hand and minor states on the other hand and among those powerful states there is a constant competition for exercising leadership in the region.¹⁴⁶ In such an environment the importance of regional powers may stems from the decreasing possibility of intervention of great powers on regional affairs that depends on the strength of the regional power.¹⁴⁷ In addition to those he also suggests that secondary regional powers and regional middle powers are quite important for regional powers since they are the necessary followers and partners of the regional powers who are in need of cooperative hegemony as a tool to exert and guarantee their rule in the region.¹⁴⁸ But he does not make a clear definition for secondary regional powers or regional middle powers.

Because of the above mentioned importance of regional powers he focuses on creating an analytical regional power definition in order to analyze regions. Thus, he first suggests that the initial and minimum defining criteria of regional powers are their duty to take some special responsibilities for regional security and stability.¹⁴⁹ At that point he offers some conditions for achieving such a role with important responsibilities. These conditions are, the domestic dynamics of such a state should be suitable to take such a stabilizing and leading role in the region and the state itself should be willing to for such a responsibility as well as having enough capacity to realize such duties of

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.884

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.897.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.896.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.890.

being regional leader, stabilizer and peace maker and it should be recognized as suitable for such a role of provider of regional security by the other states of the region.¹⁵⁰

In other words according to him a regional power should be able to fulfill the responsibilities of stabilizer, peace maker, leadership and provider of the security of the region. At that point he makes comparison of regional powers and middle powers. As a result he suggests that middle powers have not such responsibilities and should be evaluated at the global context rather than regional context.¹⁵¹ Moreover, he claims that depending on the issue under consideration, same country may be conceptualized as a great power or middle power or regional power in different contexts.

After providing an initial picture for the regional powers he makes a broader definition of regional powers. According to his definition, regional powers are states whose self-conception is in the direction of having a leading position in their region, “ they have the necessary material, organizational and the ideological resources in order to employ such a role, they greatly influence the geopolitical delamination and political-ideational construction of their region by means of regional governance structures, providing collective goods for the region they define a common regional identity or vision together with a regional security agenda and they represents the regional interests together with their individual interests in the global or interregional forums as acquiring a leading position in the region that is respected and recognized by the other states in the region.”¹⁵²

After this definition he claims that there may be powerful states in all regions but it does not mean that those powerful states are the regional powers so according to him each region automatically has not a regional power. Hereby, according to his theory there is less conflict and more regional organizations in those regions that have regional

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 891.

¹⁵² Ibid. , pp. 893-894.

powers.¹⁵³ At the same time, he emphasize the difficulty of regional powers as the nodes between global power hierarchies and the regional power hierarchies, having dual concerns which are related to their interests in the regional level and challenging with the global order.¹⁵⁴ As a result of having such a dual role regional powers meet with problems of combining both of the roles that may negatively impact their credibility among other states in their region which are trying to modify the rules of the game by challenging the main rule maker.¹⁵⁵

Lastly, it is important to note that similar to Frazier and Stewart-Ingersoll, Deltef Nolte also assumes regional powers as automatically responsible for providing regional order and security so his approach also tend to the first group like Frazier and Stewart-Ingersoll's. However, he differentiates from the first group due to his approach to regions as importantly shaped by regional dynamics. As a result of this main parameter, he is categorized under the second group.

Different from Nolte, Sandra Destradi does not assume regional powers as regional leaders; instead she offers "empire", "hegemony" or "leadership" as the three different foreign policy strategies that regional powers may tend to apply.¹⁵⁶ In this respect, she claims that regional powers that chose an imperial foreign policy strategy employ means of "coercion" and "imposition" by military intervention or the "threat of military intervention" for reaching their own national interest in the region and they are apparently illegitimate powers in their regions in which neighboring subordinate states have a "great dissatisfaction".¹⁵⁷ Therefore, the power of imperial kind of regional powers mainly stems from their military superiority which they utilize as a tool for

¹⁵³ Ibid., pp. 889

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 901.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 901

¹⁵⁶ Sandra Destradi, "Regional powers and their strategies: empire, hegemony, and leadership", pp. 909-928.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. , pp.911-912.

threatening other parties in the region in order to materialize only their own regional and national interests.¹⁵⁸

Similarly, regional powers that chose a hegemonic foreign policy strategy may employ “means of pressure” but not mainly through threat of military intervention. Instead they employ pressure on subordinate states through “material incentives” as well as “discursive propagation of their own norms and values” in order to reach again their own goal.¹⁵⁹ In addition to that, Destradi offers various kinds of hegemonic strategy which are “hard, intermediate and soft hegemony”.¹⁶⁰ According to her categorization of three different methods to employ hegemonic strategy for regional powers, the common point among them is about the ultimate goals of regional powers to reach only their own interests but they varies in terms of the degree and method of the coercion that hegemons employ.

Therefore, it is clear from the titles that Destradi claims that hard hegemony is the most frightening strategy for the subordinate states and less legitimate strategy for the regional power.¹⁶¹ While the soft hegemony strategy according to Destradi is the relatively most favorite strategy for subordinate states since they already accepts and internalizes the norms and values of soft hegemons and at the same time this is the relatively most legitimate rule of hegemonic regional powers.¹⁶²

Last kind of foreign policy strategy that regional powers may opt to according to her is leadership. The distinctiveness of leadership strategy of regional powers is related to its function to drive regional powers to seek for common regional goals that is necessary

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. , pp.911.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. , pp.913

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. , pp.918-921.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. , pp.918.

¹⁶² Ibid. , pp.920.

for regional peace, stability and development.¹⁶³ Therefore, different from other strategies, leadership strategy offers total legitimacy for the rule of regional powers.¹⁶⁴ Additionally, according to Destradi, there are two kinds of leadership model which are “leader-initiated leadership” and “follower-initiated leadership”, the latter according to her typology is rather than a strategy that a regional power could adopt, it is rather a result of the demands of subordinated states which look for a leader in order to attain common regional goals.¹⁶⁵

Therefore, while she suggests that regional powers are states that has common features of “belonging to a region, having superior power capabilities and exercising some form of influence on the other states in their region”¹⁶⁶, she at the same time indicates the necessity of an in-depth analysis of alternative foreign policy strategies of regional powers in order to properly categorize the regional powers.¹⁶⁷ She additionally suggest that a regional power may pursue a mixture of different kind of strategies at the same time, either depending on the issue that is under consideration or the different neighboring states that is dealt with or the possible evaluation of such strategies from one kind to another kind by the time passing.¹⁶⁸

In sum, Destradi suggests a typology that focuses on regional relationship patterns of regional powers in accordance with their foreign policy strategies. As a general tendency among the scholars of second group her typology seems as lacking of theorizing the impact of global powers for conceptualizing different kind of regional powers. At the same time, this typology is also an example of regional level analysis of regional affairs.

¹⁶³ Ibid. , pp.921-923.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 925.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 908.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 909.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 929.

Therefore, Destradi also suggests the necessity to use regional level analysis while approaching regions.

Similar to Destradi, Miriam Prys also develops a typology for the classification of regional powers.¹⁶⁹ Thus, she also seems to advocate regional level analyses to approach regional affairs and regional powers. In this respect, her primary assumption is that scholars do not pay enough attention to conceptualize different kinds of regional powers as well as to reveal the reasons of different patterns of behaviors between regional powers and global powers which she calls as the “expectation-achievement gap”¹⁷⁰ Moreover she criticizes those who assume the regional power as automatically has constructive role (generally leadership) in their regions.¹⁷¹

In this respect, similar to most of the other scholars she also agrees that the post-cold war situation created the suitable conditions for regional powers to have pivotal roles in the regional and global governance structures.¹⁷² However, Prys suggests that the over using of non-well defined concepts of regional roles such as “anchor states, emerging middle powers, regional big powers or regional leaders” makes the conceptualization and understanding of regional power more difficult.¹⁷³

Therefore, she focuses on the regional power concept and claims that regional powers may act different from global powers as not providing public goods (order and stability) or not having a quite important impact on the behaviors of their neighboring states.¹⁷⁴ At that point she highlights the importance of the self-perceptions of regional powers and

¹⁶⁹ See Miriam Prys, “Hegemony, Domination, Detachment: Differences in Regional Powerhood”, *International Studies Review*, Vol. 12, Issue 4, (December 2010), pp. 479-504

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 484.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 483.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 480.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 481.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 483.

the way that they prefer to use their power.¹⁷⁵ Different from Hurrell, Pedersen and Nolte she does not assume that regional powers always have a positive impact on global and regional order by providing institutionalization of the region. Instead, she claims that regional powers may have both positive and negative impact on global and regional orders as well as they may have “indifferent and insignificant effect” depending on the variations of regional powers.¹⁷⁶

Consequently, similar to Sandra Destradi she perceives regional power as an “umbrella term” which includes three kinds of regional powers that are “regional detached powers, regional hegemonies and regional dominators”.¹⁷⁷ Similar to Pedersen’s priority over cooperative hegemonic type of strategy of the regional powers she takes the hegemonic type of regional power as the center of her analyses in order to reach an understanding of the other two variations by examining the “constitutive dimensions and indicators”¹⁷⁸ of regional hegemonies initially. However, different from Pedersen at the end she reaches the constitutive dimensions and indicators of all of the variations of regional powers so makes a clear definition for all of the variations within her typology.

In this direction, she initially provides the two parameters of being a regional power regardless of the variations which are belonging to the region under consideration and relative material supremacy within its region.¹⁷⁹ After that she explains four dimensions of her typology which are “self-perception, regional perception, exercise of power and type of goods that are provided.”¹⁸⁰ In relation to those four dimensions she outlines the borders between regional detached powers, regional hegemonies, and regional dominators.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 490-492.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 483.

¹⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 483.

¹⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 484.

¹⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 484.

¹⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 490.

According to such four dimensional three categorical typology of Miriam Prys, regional detached powers have “domestic or global priorities” and they are “not recognized” by the other states and they have “no important impact” on the other states and they provide “either private goods or no goods”.¹⁸¹ On the other hand regional hegemons see themselves as “regionally exceptions in a positive manner”, they are accepted by the other states in the region and they have “important impact on the preferences and the values of other regional states” and they “provide public goods.”¹⁸² Lastly, regional dominators see themselves also as “regionally exceptions but in a negative manner”, they are “not accepted by the other regional states” which are afraid of those powers, they have also “important impact on the region but this is reached through force and violence” and they “provide private goods”.¹⁸³

In addition to such defining characteristics of different regional powers, she also adds that the apparent feature of regional domination is its “one-sidedness” which means involuntary obedience of other regional states to the dominator because of the “constant threat of force it poses.”¹⁸⁴ However, regional hegemons in contrast to regional dominators have considerable responsibilities in the region and “in ideal case they respect the external and internal sovereignty of other regional states”.¹⁸⁵ On the other hand, detached regional powers either have “insufficient amount of resources” to act like hegemon or dominator or there is a “lack of identification with the region” and they “largely focus on their domestic affairs and global politics rather than their regional

¹⁸¹Ibid., p. 496..

¹⁸²Ibid., p. 496..

¹⁸³Ibid., p. 496..

¹⁸⁴Ibid., p. 489..

¹⁸⁵Ibid., p. 489..

roles.”¹⁸⁶ She also indicates that regional powers may opt to behave in accordance to all of such three forms depending on the issue under consideration.

Then she focuses on the hegemonic type of regional power and makes further explanations in relation to four dimensions of hegemony in addition to material preponderance. Therefore, this typology demonstrates her concern for regional level analysis of regional affairs and regional powers.

Additionally, she also focuses on the impact of the “regional openness”¹⁸⁷ on regional powers. By “regional openness” she implies “the embeddedness”¹⁸⁸ of regions to the international system which make them open to and the external impact as well as enable them to “alter the regional dynamics” by pursuing “external partnerships”.¹⁸⁹ Because of the impact of “reciprocal and mutual inter-connections”¹⁹⁰ between the global and regional levels on the kind of regional powers she approaches the issue of impact of openness from two dimensions which are “outside-in and inside-out”¹⁹¹ dimensions. In relation to the former dimension, the impact of global powers on the foreign policy choices of regional powers whose behavior is to some extent (depending on the form of the overall international system) dependent on the global power calculations and strategies by altering the options that are available to the regional powers to adopt.¹⁹²

In this context she makes detailed explanation about how global actors may impact regional ones. On the other hand, the latter dimension indicates the “dual role of regional

¹⁸⁶Ibid., pp. 489..

¹⁸⁷Ibid., pp. 498.

¹⁸⁸Ibid., pp. 498..

¹⁸⁹Ibid., pp. 496..

¹⁹⁰Ibid., pp. 496-497.

¹⁹¹Ibid., pp. 496.

¹⁹²Ibid., pp. 496.

powers”¹⁹³ which is negotiating their regional and global ambitions simultaneously. She also gives detailed information about that dimension by indicating the main necessity of taking into account the “global aspirations of regional powers”¹⁹⁴ while categorizing them as regional hegemons, regional dominators or regional detached powers under the title of inside-out dimension. In this respect, similar to Detlef Nolte she also emphasize the possible conflicts that will emerge as a result of such a dual role that must be played by leading regional powers to take “incompatible” foreign policy actions¹⁹⁵ which according to Nolte make them to lose confidence and credibility in their regions.

However, she does not explain clearly the impact of inside-out or outside- in dimension for the categorization of regional powers, instead she just mentions the importance and necessity of taking into consideration of such dimensions in addition to the other four dimensions that she suggested while approaching regional powers. Therefore, this makes her an outstanding figure among the second group but still does not contribute to the general tendency in this group whose regional role categorizations through regional level analyses are lacking the impact of global dimension. If she would provide a well-defined method of analyzing the link between regional power categorization and “openness of the regions” then she would contribute to this lacking point, more than addressing it.

In short, Prys is also in the first group due to her disagreement about directly applying system level analyze to the regional level, as for example Douglas Lemke did by his multipolar hierarchy model which is a diversion of power transition theory. Actually, she explains her disagreement in this issue of applying global context to the regional through addressing the insufficiency of global tools to understand and analyze regional levels that she calls as previously mentioned concept of “achievement-expectation gap”.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³Ibid., pp. 498.

¹⁹⁴Ibid., pp. 498.

¹⁹⁵Ibid., pp. 499.

¹⁹⁶Ibid., pp. 484.

2.2.3. Regional Power as an Inclusive Term

Contrary to those scholars who are generally in the first group that uses the regional power in order to indicate regional leader or regional stability provider, some scholars in this group approach this term as a more inclusive term. According to this approach, regional powers may assume several roles, other than the leadership role in terms of providing security and order.

In this respect, Sandra Destardi claims the insufficiency of approaching regional powers as regional leading powers and she offers a three ideal-typical of foreign policy strategies of regional powers in order to compare different kinds of regional powers.¹⁹⁷ Those strategies are: Empire-Hegemony or Leadership roles that regional powers may play in their respective regions, as it is mentioned above. Here, these strategies according to her may not be always directed to provide order, stability or security in the region. At that point, it is important to remind that according to Destardi, the minimum defining criteria of regional powers are their relative superiority over other states in the region in terms of their power capabilities and their some kind of influence on their regions, as explained in detail before.

Miriam Prys also suggests the concept of regional power as an “umbrella term”¹⁹⁸ for the powerful states of a region. Although, her typology is more functional to analyze whether a regional power is a regional hegemon or not, she still indicates that it is not a must that a state take the responsibilities of regional leadership in order to be called as regional power. Therefore, she claims regional powers may act different from a leader but still recognized as a regional power. Moreover, Prys points that regional powers do not always exert positive influence in the region. Instead, they may act in a negative

¹⁹⁷Sandra Destardi, “Regional powers and their strategies: empire, hegemony, and leadership”, *Review of International Studies*, Vol.36, Issue 4, (October 2010), pp. 903-930

¹⁹⁸Miriam Prys, “Hegemony, Domination, Detachment: Differences in Regional Powerhood”, p. 483.

manner but still be considered as a regional power as her “regional dominator” kind of regional power demonstrates.

2.3. Conclusion as the Conceptual Frame of This Thesis

These two groups of tendencies among scholars in their approaches to regionalism and regional power are important to clearly demonstrate the position of this study among the discussions about regionalism and regional power. In this respect, this study basically follows the direction of the second group. Therefore, this study aims to apply a regional level analyze through advocating that regional dynamics predominantly matters in the determination of regional affairs. At the same time, this thesis approaches the concept of “regional power” in a more inclusive manner similar to Prys and Destardi. Therefore, it is not assumed that regional powers have to perform regional leadership roles in order to be perceived as regional powers.

In addition to that, this study focuses on three parameters for understanding regional powers. These are “self-perception”; “regional perception” and “material capacity” (or hard power) which is generally used among the scholars of the second group like Frazier, Nolte, Destradi and Prys to analyze the concept of regional power. Therefore, this thesis will provide a regional level analyze that is based on three parameters in order to evaluate the regional role of Iran during Ahmadinejad era.

Among these parameters, the first one which is “self-perception” of Iran will be the basic parameter and the other two; “regional perception” and “hard-power capacity” will be used to test the validity of the claims that is reached under the heading of first parameter. In addition to that, these parameters also provide the necessary ground in order to reach some interpretations about the role of Iran in the Middle East region through comparing them in different combinations. Thus, by focusing on Iran during Ahmadinejad Era, the following chapter 3, chapter 4 and chapter 5 will test these parameters respectively.

CHAPTER 3

SELF PERCEPTION OF IRAN REGARDING ITS REGIONAL ROLE

In accordance with the three parameters to analyze the regional role of Iran that is reached at the previous chapter, the self-perception of IRI is the first parameter that needs to be examined adequately in order to reach proper conclusions regarding the role of Iran in the region. However, relatively young Islamic regime that comes to the scene after the 1979 revolution which led to the emergence of competing factions over the direction of the country under the new state structure that consists of again competing appointed and elected institutions¹⁹⁹ makes it hard to understand the self-perception of its leaders as Eva Leila Pesaran clearly addressed.

In this respect, Ali Ansari highlights the fractured nature of Islamic Republic as the inherent source of instability in the politics of IRI²⁰⁰ while Ehteshami indicates this fractured structure of the politics of IRI that consists of competing interests and various perspectives, as the reason for lacking of a consistent foreign policy approach of IRI.²⁰¹ However, the issue of occasional consensus among those competing factions over their

¹⁹⁹Evaleila Pesaran, *Iran's Struggle for Economic Independence: Reform and Counter-Reform in the Post-Revolutionary Era* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p.2.

²⁰⁰See Ali M. Ansari, "Iran under Ahmadinejad: populism and its malcontents", *International Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 4, 2008, p.684.

²⁰¹AnoushiravanEhteshami, "The Foreign Policy of Iran", in *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*, eds. A.RaymondHinnebush and AnoushiravanEhteshami, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), p.307.

loyalties to the main revolutionary ideal of independence²⁰² and their perception of Islamic Republic as an exceptional case that deserve higher status both in the global and regional levels²⁰³, is also indicated. In contradiction to those who claim the absence of a consistent foreign policy of IRI, there are some others who claim the very existence of such consistent foreign policy of the country²⁰⁴ and the exaggerated importance of factional differences in determining the foreign policy of Iran.²⁰⁵

In relation to such discussions, while this thesis confirms the very significance of the differences among various political factions of IRI on the direction of the country, it claims that there is still a considerable persistency in regional role claims of IRI's decision makers since 1979 Revolution regardless of their factional differences. Therefore, unless there is not a crucial need to reference to the issue of factional differences regarding the self-perception of the country this chapter will not highlight the factional differences.

However, it is still important to stress that, although this chapter claims to provide a comprehensive evaluation about the self-perception of Iran, inevitably it will reflect the understandings of the conservative and neo-conservative factions more dominantly hence this thesis focuses on President Ahmadinejad's term. The arguments in this chapter are based on the speeches or interviews of prominent figures in the politics of IRI including Supreme Leader Khamenei and President Ahmadinejad and the related articles that are published in the websites of think tanks and newspapers of IRI, together with various books and articles of experts related to the issue.

²⁰²Evaleila Pesaran, *Iran's Struggle for Economic Independence*, p.2.

²⁰³Frederic M. Wehrey et al. ,*Dangerous but Not Omnipotent*, p.18.

²⁰⁴ See Mahdi Mohammad Nia, "Discourse and Identity in Iran's Foreign Policy." *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs*, Vol 3 No 3, Fall 2012: pp. 29-64.

²⁰⁵See Seyed Jalal DehghaniFirouzabadi, "Societal Sources of Iranian Foreign Policy", *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly*, Vol.6, No.3-4, (Winter-Spring 2005), pp.48-55.

In this context, the claim of this chapter is that; regional role claims of IRI's decision makers are directly related to their worldviews as well as their worldviews are directly related to the identities of IRI. Therefore, this chapter aims at reaching the regional role claims of IRI, particularly during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad era through demonstrating the worldviews of the decision makers of IRI by examining various identities of Iran. In other words, the basic assumption of this chapter is that the identities of IRI determine the worldviews of its decision makers and those worldviews determine IRI's self-perception regarding its regional role. Here, it is necessary to note that this chapter assumes that the revolutionary, Islamic and national identities of IRI are the basic identities of it that determines the worldviews of its decision makers since the 1979 Revolution.

Thus, this chapter consists of three main sections. The first section initially considers revolutionary identity of Iran from two different aspects which are its impacts on the worldviews of Iran's decision makers and the impacts of those worldviews on Iran's regional role claims. At the same time, both parts particularly consider the reflections of related issues during President Ahmadinejad era. In this way, following two sections adopt the same method in respect to Islamic and national identities of Iran. Consequently, this chapter provides some assertions about the self-perception of Iran regarding its regional role that will form the base of the arguments of the following chapters.

3.1. The Impact of Revolutionary Identity of IRI on its Self-Perceptions

3.1.1. How does Revolutionary Identity Determine the Worldviews of Iran's Leaders?

Revolutionary identity of IRI has a considerable influence on foreign policy making of IRI. One of the reasons of such a continuous impact of the revolutionary identity on

foreign policy making of IRI is related to its formalization in the Constitution of IRI.²⁰⁶ Accordingly, Mohsen Halil indicates the constitutional principles of Iran's foreign policy like "regulating foreign policy in accordance with Islamic principles, supporting the oppressed worldwide, defending the rights of world Muslims while working for the unity of Islamic nations, ensuring economic, political, social and cultural independence by avoiding foreign interference, preventing foreign interference at all, securing territorial integrity, avoiding to sign any treaty that would enable foreign dominance over natural, economic, cultural and military resources" and highlights the influential role of these constitutional principles of IRI on the consolidation of revolutionary and Islamic identities of Iran.²⁰⁷

Hereby, the consolidation of the Revolutionary and Islamic identities of IRI through its constitution is interpreted as a barrier for the normalization of Iran's foreign policy.²⁰⁸ In this respect, Halliday indicates the role of revolutionary characteristics of a state in preventing the normalization of its foreign policy, since in such states the impact of radical factions is legitimized through constitution²⁰⁹

Therefore, Revolutionary identity of IRI importantly determines the worldviews of Iran's decision makers. In this respect, Mahmood Sariolghalam suggests that the most explicit feature of revolutionary identity of Iran is its quest for "an end to foreign interference" which he perceives as a feature of Iran's political psyche²¹⁰ Eva Leila Pesaran also mentions the "anti-Westernism" narrative as the synonym of "an end to

²⁰⁶Eva Leila Pesaran, *Iran's Struggle for Economic Independence*, p.2.

²⁰⁷ Mohsen Khalili, "Characteristics of a Revolutionary Foreign Policy from the Viewpoint of Constitution Experts", *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly*, Vol.6, No.3-4, (Winter-Spring 2005), pp. 101-106.

²⁰⁸Eva Leila Pesaran, *Iran's Struggle for Economic Independence*, p.2.

²⁰⁹Maximilian Terhalle, "Revolutionary Power and Socialization: Explaining the Persistence of Revolutionary Zeal in Iran's Foreign Policy", *Security Studies*, Vol.18, Issue:3, October, 2009, p.564

²¹⁰Mahmood Sariolghalam, "Understanding Iran: Getting Past Stereotypes and Mythology", *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol.26, Issue.3, Autumn, 2003, p.71.

foreign interference” which strongly shapes the identity of post-evolutionary Iran.²¹¹ In the same vein, Mahdi Mohammad Nia interprets the “anti-Westernism” discourse of IRI as the “nodal point” (privileged discourse) of its foreign policy discourse.²¹²

In this respect, Nia claims that the post-revolutionary identity construction of Iran is basically shaped around this revolutionary ideal of “anti-Westernism” which includes revolutionary Iran’s non-domination, independence, resistance, anti-arrogance campaign, nationalism, Islamic unity and responsibility, discourses.²¹³ Hereby, the most explicit and influential impact of revolutionary identity of Iran on the worldviews of its decision makers is reveals itself as particularly “anti-Americanism” during post-revolutionary years. This emphasis on the enmity toward America is explicit in the issue of “Hostage Crisis” during the early days of 1979 Revolution of Iran.²¹⁴

Here, Third Worldism as another aspect of revolutionary identity of Iran is strongly consistent with the “anti-Westernism” emphasis of Iran’s revolutionary identity. According to the “Third Worldist” understanding of revolutionary IRI’s decision makers, the problems of the Third World stem from developed countries which are the main obstacles for the development of Third World countries by initiating dependency policies so the only way to development is independence from foreign interference.²¹⁵ In this respect, revolutionary identity of IRI leads its decision makers to have an attitude which assume that it is their revolutionary duty to create a “just world order”.

Relatedly, Maryam Panah demonstrates how such third worldist narratives evoked the hatred of “anti-systemic” activists all over the World due to the perception of the 1979

²¹¹Evaleila Pesaran, *Iran's Struggle for Economic Independence*, p.2.

²¹² See Mahdi Mohammad Nia, “Discourse and Identity in Iran’s Foreign Policy”, p. 37.

²¹³ Ibid. , p. 37-38.

²¹⁴ Mohsen M. Milani, “Iran’s Transformation from Revolutionary to Status Quo Power in the Persian Gulf”, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, November 16-17, 2004, online available at: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/MohsenMilaniFinal.pdf> (accessed on June 15, 2015) , p.4.

²¹⁵Mohsen Khalili, “Characteristics of a Revolutionary Foreign Policy from the Viewpoint of Constitution Experts”, p. 97.

Revolution as a counter-attack to oppressors that created unjust world order.²¹⁶ At this point, this “quest for just world order” is an intersection point of revolutionary identity of Iran with its Islamic and revolutionary identities. However, this point is dominantly seen in its Islamic identity which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Therefore, Third Worldism combined with anti-Westernism, then brings the policy of “Look to the East”²¹⁷. Similarly, another policy as a result of IRI’s revolutionary identity reveals itself in the call of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as: “Neither East nor West”, which considers both superpowers as the components of world arrogance and believes in the necessity of reunification of Muslim world under the Islamic rules.²¹⁸

Consequently, the main impact of revolutionary identity on the worldview of IRI’s decision makers is “anti-Americanism”. However, anti-Americanism is actually a common worldview among all three identities of Iran. In this respect, anti-Americanism reveals itself in Islamic identity of IRI in the form of “Great Satan” definition of US through the impact of its “dichotomous” worldview. At the same time, the main theme of Iran’s national identity which is “independence”, automatically involves anti-Americanism.

3.1.1.1. The Reflections of Revolutionary Identity of IRI during President Ahmadinejad Era

The impact of revolutionary identity of Iran on the worldviews of its decision makers is explicit during President Ahmadinejad era, especially in terms of strengthening anti-Americanism in regional policies of IRI. Here, it is necessary to mention that President Ahmadinejad’s term started in the political atmosphere of the Middle East that has been

²¹⁶Maryam Panah, *The Islamic Republic and the World: Global Dimensions of the Iranian Revolution*, pp. 164-165.

²¹⁷Mahdi Mohammad Nia, "Discourse and Identity in Iran’s Foreign Policy", p.41.

²¹⁸ Mohsen Khalili, “Characteristics of a Revolutionary Foreign Policy from the Viewpoint of Constitution Experts”, pp. 97-98.

shaped after 9/11 attacks, particularly after US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Therefore, anti-Americanism under President Ahmadinejad mainly shaped in accordance with the developments of the post-2003.

At that point, shortly summarizing post-2003 developments in the Middle East after is necessary to understand the development of anti-Americanism under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. In this regard, elimination of two most vital enemies of Iran who are Saddam Hussein of Iraq and Taliban of Afghanistan, settlement of the first Shia ruled Arab country in the Middle East, rising influence of Iran in Iraq, considerably rising power and influence of Hezbollah and Hamas, continuing debate about Iran's Nuclear activities, increasing concerns of regional countries about the risk of the formation of a "Shia-Crescent" that is led by Iran are the general developments that determined the frame of anti-Americanism under President Ahmadinejad. Therefore, Iran under President Ahmadinejad interpreted such developments as its rising power and influence in the region.

In this respect, KayhanBargezar suggests that Iran turned to be a "connecting point"²¹⁹ between the "Middle East security and global politics"²²⁰ due to its rising power and role in the region since the shifting of balance of power after 9/11.²²¹ In the same vein, it is suggested that the proven geopolitical uniqueness of Iran in effecting the crisis in Iraq and Afghanistan during the post-9/11 process, together with its nuclear power program have boosted Iran's importance in regional and international affairs while transforming Iran into an important regional power.²²²

²¹⁹KayhanBarzegar, "Iran's Foreign Policy towards Iraq and Syria", *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 6, Issue 2, Summer, 2007, p.8.

²²⁰Ibid.

²²¹KayhanBarzegar, "Iran, the Middle East, and International Security", *OrtadoguEtütleri*, Volume 1, No 1, July, 2009, p.28.

²²² See Ephraim Kam, "Iran's Regional Status: Expanding Influence Alongside Weaknesses", in *Strategic Survey for Israel*, eds. AnatKurz and ShlomoBrom, (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2011), pp.77-91

At the same time, Iran's decision makers and scholars believe in the declining hegemony of US. This belief is based on their perception of the emergence of a new conception of US in the region regarding its role and position in the Middle East as well as international security system after its clear disability to manage the crisis in Iraq and Afghanistan.²²³ Accordingly, Iran interprets also the inability of US to stop Iran's nuclear activities or to advance Arab-Israeli peace process as the declining power of US in the Middle East.²²⁴

At that point, decision makers of Iran believe that US aims to prevent and control Iran's rising power through balancing against Iran with bilateral economic and military agreements with regional countries or increasing its military presence in the region. At the same time, Iran's decision makers claim that US seeks for creating a security system in the region that excludes Iran as in the case of general logic of GCC settings.²²⁵ Supreme Leader Khamenei declares that US tries to restore its declining power in the region by creating artificial reasons to strengthen its presence and interference in the region²²⁶ in order to reshape the Middle East according to their own designs in the frame of "new middle east" that is designed in accordance with US's own interests only but they will not let them to do so.²²⁷ In this respect Ahmadinejad states, "NATO and United States should change their policy because the time when they dictate their conditions to the world has passed..."²²⁸ In this context, the decision makers of IRI perceive Iran as the

²²³KayhanBarzegar, "Iran, the Middle East, and International Security", 2009, p.29.

²²⁴ Ephraim Kam, "Iran's Regional Status: Expanding Influence alongside Weaknesses", 2011, p.79.

²²⁵Seyed Jalal DehghaniFirouzabadi, "Societal Sources of Iranian Foreign Policy", p. 36.

²²⁶ "We don't allow them to infiltrate", November 3, 2015, online available at: <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/2234/We-don-t-allow-them-to-infiltrate>(accessed on November 5, 2015).

²²⁷ "New Middle East, Islamic Middle East", October 10, 2011, online available at: <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/1530/Video-New-Middle-East-Islamic-Middle-East>(accessed on September 3, 2015).

²²⁸ "Ahmadinejad Says US can no longer dictate policy to world", *Al Arabiya News Channel*, March 26 2012, online available at: <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/03/26/203230.html>(accessed on September 5, 2015).

rival of US and believe in that US also sees Iran as its hegemonic rival in the region.²²⁹ In this respect, President Ahmadinejad believes that the US prevents the emergence of any strong regional power which would challenge its unilateral hegemony over the region.²³⁰ Therefore, this atmosphere strongly strengthened anti-Americanism and relatedly revolutionary identity of Iran during President Ahmadinejad era.²³¹

Relatedly, decision makers of IRI claim that US fears that regional countries may take Iran as a model in terms of its strong “anti-Americanism” so they created the concept of “Shia-Crescent”.²³² In this respect, Supreme Leader Khamenei claims that US promotes Iranophobia in the region through portraying Iran as a threat to the other regional countries in order to curb Iran’s rising influence.²³³ Therefore, political elite of Iran interpret the “Shia-Crescent” assertions among Sunni dominated regional countries as a method of such “Iranaphobia” promotion of US in order to curb Iran’s rising power.

Actually, President Ahmadinejad’s policies to justify Iran’s nuclear activities through anti-Americanism sentiments are based on this perception of US’s efforts to prevent Iran’s increasing power. Consequently, the nuclear activities of Iran and President Ahmadinejad’s harsh rhetoric to advocate such activities ultimately resulted with equally harsh UNSC sanctions on Iran’s economic activities. As a reaction, IRI strengthened its “Look to the East” policy under Ahmadinejad that is apparent in his strong desire for full membership to SCO.²³⁴ Therefore, the policy of “Look to the East” as a reflection of its

²²⁹ See, “IRAN/IRAQ- Iraqi Kurdistan prime minister terms Iran ‘key regional power’ ”, WikiLeaks, October 28, 2011, online available at: https://wikileaks.org/gifiles/docs/17/1703742_re-os-iran-us-russia-irgc-official-us-russia-worried-about.html (accessed on August 5, 2015).

²³⁰ Andrea Ellner, “Iran-Challenge or Opportunity for Regional Security?”, *Perceptions*, Vol.16, No.2, (Summer 2011), pp. 10-12.

²³¹ In this regard, see: Susanne Gratius and HennerFurtig, “Iran and Venezuela: Bilateral alliance and global power projections” ,*Peace,Security& Human Rights Programme-FRIDE*, (April 2009), pp.1-6.

²³² See Amir M. Haji-Yousefi, “Whose Agenda is Served by the idea of Shia Crescent?”,*Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, Vol.8, No.1, (Spring 2009), pp. 114-135.

²³³ “Leader: Iran Not a Threat to Other Countries”, October 6, 2009, online available at: <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/1256/Leader-Iran-Not-a-Threat-to-Other-Countries> (accessed on September 4, 2015).

²³⁴See Mahdi Mohammad Nia, "Discourse and Identity in Iran’s Foreign Policy”, p. 41.

Third Worldism which is another component of its revolutionary identity is explicit under President Ahmadinejad.

Similarly, Iran's quest for alternative allies in Latin American and African countries during President Ahmadinejad is another reflection of this "Third Worldism".²³⁵ In the same vein, President Ahmadinejad's important emphasis on Non-Aligned Movement²³⁶ is also a reflection of Iran's Third Worldist approach that is shaped in its revolutionary identity.

As a conclusion, "anti-Americanism" strongly strengthened during President Ahmadinejad era. Similarly, other components of revolutionary identity of Iran continually reflected in policies of President Ahmadinejad. Therefore, the decline of the impact of revolutionary identity during his predecessors compensated during Ahmadinejad era.

3.1.2. The Impacts of "anti-Americanism" on Regional Role Claims of IRI

"Anti-Americanism" as one of the consistent worldviews of Iran's decision makers leads Iran to seek for a regional design in the Middle East which is lack of American influence. Such independency of the Middle East, according to Iran's decision makers will ultimately bring stability and peace as well as development to the region. The reason of such an assumption is directly related to Iran's perception towards US as "the Great Satan" in the frame of its revolutionary identity that is centered upon anti-Americanism.

²³⁵ Ibid. , p.42.

²³⁶ Ibid. , pp. 41-42.

This conceptualization of US as “the great Satan” by Ayatollah Khomeini leads Iran’s decision makers to claim that the main goal of US in the region is increasing its influence region wide in order to control the flow of oil, while it abuses regional countries through arm sales, rather than bringing democracy, human rights, stability or security.²³⁷ Moreover, Iran accuses US of destabilizing the Middle East region through initiating terrorist groups there in order to utilize them as a pretext for interfering regional affairs.²³⁸

Thus, Iran’s decision makers believe that the sources of all problems of Middle East are US-initiated so they see US as the main obstacle for establishing peace and stability in the region. In this context, according to decision makers of IRI, fighting against such an oppressive regime (US) and defending all the oppressed is the prior mission of IRI²³⁹ since they claim that the initial condition of regional stability is to give an end to American interference in the region. Therefore, Iran’s self-perception regarding its regional role primarily based in the concept of anti-Americanism.

Hereby, demonization of US²⁴⁰ forms a basis for Iran to portray itself as the anchor of stability in the Middle East through claiming that its goal is to bring peace and stability to the region.²⁴¹ This effort of Iran is explicitly seen in Supreme Leader Khamenei’s statement, when he says: “peace, prosperity, and justice are the clear and novel message of the Iranian nation for other nations of the world.”²⁴² At the same time, scholars in Iran indicate the essentiality of stability for Iran’s economic development in order to

²³⁷ See “Iran’s New Foreign Policy”, Center for Strategic Research, Tehran, August, 2006, online available at: <http://www.csr.ir/departments.aspx?lng=en&abtid=07&&depid=106&semid=661>, (accessed on July 15, 2015).

²³⁸ “Iran’s Security Interests and Concerns”, Center for Strategic Studies, March, 2007, online available at: <http://www.csr.ir/departments.aspx?lng=en&abtid=07&&depid=106&semid=659>, (accessed on July 15, 2015).

²³⁹ Shahram Chubin, “Iran’s Power in Context”, *Survival*, Vol.51, No.1, (February-March 2009), p. 166.

²⁴⁰ Vali Nasr, “The New Hegemon”, *New Republic*, December 18, 2006, online available at: <https://newrepublic.com/article/63642/the-new-hegemon> (accessed on September 5, 2015)

²⁴¹ See “Iran’s New Foreign Policy”, Center for Strategic Research, Tehran, August, 2006, online available at: <http://www.csr.ir/departments.aspx?lng=en&abtid=07&&depid=106&semid=661>,

²⁴² “Leader: Iran Not a Threat to Other Countries”, October 6, 2009, online available at: <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/1256/Leader-Iran-Not-a-Threat-to-Other-Countries>

demonstrate that Iran's main goal in the region is to bring stability and peace to the region.²⁴³ Similarly, the political elites of Iran emphasize the indispensability of Iran in the Middle East in terms of sustaining security in the region which is also crucial for Iran's national interests. In this direction, Iran's political elites urge the West, particularly US to recognize Iran's pivotal role in sustaining regional security and express their willingness to ensure particularly the security of the energy routes from Middle East to the rest of the world.²⁴⁴

Moreover, intellectuals and political elites of Iran, particularly emphasize the peaceful intentions of Iran in the Middle East region through explaining its role as a status quo power which is committed to develop its economy and increase deterrence capacities against aggressors.²⁴⁵ Therefore, intellectuals in Iran indicate the transformation of the revolutionary character of IRI after the passing of Ayatollah Khomeini towards the direction of seeking domestic reconstruction and regional stability rather than export of its revolution.²⁴⁶

In the same vein, it is stated that Iran's search for greater role is within the existing regional system rather than based in refashioning the system according to its revolutionary vision.²⁴⁷ From a different point of view, an academician Seyed Hussein Mousavi emphasizes IRI's non-aggression through claiming that Iran has never become a part of any of the wars initiated by foreign powers towards regional Muslim countries since its establishment.²⁴⁸ Therefore, he claims Iran has already prove its peaceful

²⁴³KayhanBarzegar, "Iran and Shiite Crescent: Myths and Realities", *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, , Vol.15, Issue 1, (Fall/Winter 2008), pp. 95-97

²⁴⁴"Iran's New Foreign Policy", Center for Strategic Research, Tehran, August, 2006, online available at: <http://www.csr.ir/departments.aspx?lng=en&abtId=07&&depId=106&semId=661>

²⁴⁵Charles C. Mayer, "National Security to Nationalist Myth: Why Iran Wants Nuclear Weapons", Master's Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, September 2004, p.26.

²⁴⁶Mohsen M. Milani, "Iran's Transformation from Revolutionary to Status Quo Power in the Persian Gulf", p.4.

²⁴⁷ See Frederic M. Wehreyet. al, *Dangerous but Not Omnipotent*

²⁴⁸Seyed Hossein Mousavi, "The New Actors in the Middle East", Institute for Middle East Strategic Studies, Tehran, online available at: <http://en.cmess.ir/default.aspx?tabId=98&ArticleId=259> , (accessed on October 16, 2015).

attitude and constructive role in the region which makes it capable of playing a greater regional role.²⁴⁹ At that point, intellectuals in Iran often emphasize such peaceful attitude of Iran towards other nations in the region and Iran's historical tolerance towards its minority groups in order to portray Iran as a peaceful country that is willing to be part of any type of cultural and economic cooperation with other regional states in a constructive manner²⁵⁰

Therefore, Iran portrays its regional role as constructive and peaceful that is directed towards establishing regional stability. In this respect, according to Iran, while the initial condition of regional stability is elimination of American interference in the region, the other conditions are regionalization and democratization of the Middle East. Regarding the democratization of the region, the political elites of IRI generally indicates the undemocratic nature of the monarchial regimes of the Gulf. They suggests that the ruling elite of these monarchies of the Gulf primarily motivated not to lose their own personal interests so they deprive their own people of the necessary political and social developments that corresponds with the economic and technological developments in these countries.²⁵¹

In this sense, Iran claims that the establishment of democratic rules in such regional countries will contribute the stabilization of the Middle East.²⁵² In this respect, Iran's political elites again indicate US as the reason of undemocratic nature of Middle Eastern countries through expressing US backing of the ruling of these countries. At the same

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰“Approaches to Iranian Foreign Policy in Contemporary International System” Roundtable with Dr. Gholamali Haddad Adel”, *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly*, Vol.7, No.1, (Summer 2005), p.8-9.

²⁵¹ Mohammad Hossein Hafezian, “Prospects of the Middle East in the next Decade”, Institute for Middle East Strategic Studies, Tehran, online available at: <http://en.cmess.ir/default.aspx?tabid=98&ArticleId=278> , (accessed on October 16, 2015).

²⁵² Ibid.

time, they claim that it is Iran who supports democracy, as a role model for others, not America.²⁵³

Regarding the regionalization of the region, the political elites of IRI believe in the necessity of institutionalization of regional cooperation. However, they claim that foreign presence (US) in the region undermines the potential for the establishment of an all-encompassing regional cooperation among regional countries.²⁵⁴ From security aspect, Iran claims that foreign meddling ultimately cause the weaponisation of the region that means allocation of resources for security purposes which means less focus and resource for development projects.

Therefore, in respect to security, Iran perceives regionalism as a key for regional stability and development through enabling the establishment of an indigenous security setting which decrease threat perceptions among regional countries.²⁵⁵ Similarly, economically Iran perceives regionalism as a measure to heal the negative impacts of globalization to some extent through its capacity for preventing the deepening of the inequalities between rich and poor countries in international system.²⁵⁶

Actually another rationale, which is based on anti-hegemonic (anti-Americanism) motivation of Iran, for Iran's strong supporting of regionalism, is related to its suggestion that the hegemonic, pro-Israeli plan of US is seeking for cheap oil through building fake relationships with the regional states.²⁵⁷ Therefore, Iran claims that

²⁵³ See SadeghZibakalam, "Iranian 'Exceptionalism'", in *The Middle East Institute Viewpoints: The Iranian Revolution at 30*, The Middle East Institute, Washington DC, January 2009, pp.85-87.

²⁵⁴ "Iran's Security Interests and Concerns", Center for Strategic Studies, March, 2007, online available at: <http://www.csr.ir/departments.aspx?lng=en&abtid=07&&depid=106&semid=659>.

²⁵⁵ Mahmoud Asgari, "Iran's Defense Diplomacy", *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly*, Vol.10, Nos.1-2, (Winter-Spring 2012), pp.179-184.

²⁵⁶ Hossein Pourahmadi, "Requisites of the Global Economic System and the Necessity of Economic Reforms in Iran", *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly*, Vol.6, No.2, (Fall 2004), pp.38-50.

²⁵⁷ See Mohammad Hossein Hafezian, "Prospects of the Middle East in the next Decade", Institute for Middle East Strategic Studies, Tehran, online available at: <http://en.cmess.ir/default.aspx?tabid=98&ArticleId=278>.

democratization of the Middle East, which will bring regionalization, is necessary for the interest of regional countries since it will bring regional development.²⁵⁸

Ultimately, Iran perceives regionalism as a key to materialize its economic and security interests through deepening its relations with the regional states in the form of security, economic and political coalitions. In this respect, Iran regards regionalism as a method that can enable it to play its economic and political role in the region through reducing the threat against it and strengthening its position in the face of great powers.²⁵⁹

Consequently, Iran under the impact of anti-Americanism, claims that it is the supporter of regionalism and democracy in the Middle East region in order to reach regional stability. In this respect, Iran portrays itself as a peaceful and constructive regional state. Therefore, as a result of anti-Americanism Iran perceives itself as a “constructive regional power”.

3.1.2.1. Iran as a “Constructive Regional Power” under President Ahmadinejad

The self-perception of Iran as a constructive regional power during President Ahmadinejad era is apparent in its claim to be the anchor of stability in the Middle East region. Accordingly, Iran’s scholars indicates the national visions of IRI that are stated in its “20 Year Vision” document as to be the top rank in the region in terms of economic, scientific and technological advancement,²⁶⁰ in order to demonstrate Iran’s essential quest for regional stability.²⁶¹

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ KayhanBarzegar, “Regionalism in Iran’s Foreign Policy”, *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly*, Vol.9, No.3-4, (Fall 2010-Winter 2011), pp.49-54.

²⁶⁰ KayhanBarzegar, “Iran and Shiite Crescent: Myths and Realities”, *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, p. 95.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

At the same time Majles Speaker Larjani indicates the pivotal regional role of IRI for attaining regional peace and stability as an indispensable party of the region, as: “The security of the region is a very important issue that can be resolved through negotiations with Iran. Iran is a big power in the region, and all the regional countries know that Iran is influential”.²⁶² In this respect, President Ahmadinejad states that: “the Islamic Republic has always contributed to regional and international security.”²⁶³

At that point, Iran’s decision makers and intellectuals indicates constructive regional role of Iran through generally indicating the role of Iran in attempts for the resolution of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.²⁶⁴ In this respect, Majles Speaker Larjani states that: “In Iraq, Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf , Tehran has maintained a policy of stabilization, balancing and even bordering status quo”²⁶⁵ Similarly, adviser to Supreme Leader, Velayeti also emphasizes Iran’s drive to play a constructive role as he suggests: “Iran never sought to have dominance over any state, never interfere the domestic affairs of any neighboring state so has positive relationships within the region and is willing to use all of its capacity in order to solve regional crises in order to maintain Muslim unity.”²⁶⁶

In addition to that, while decision makers of IRI claim that Iran has a stabilizer role in the region, it increasingly portrays US as the destabilizer in the region, during Ahmadinejad era. In this regard, IRGC Commander Yahya Rahim Safavi suggests that

²⁶²“Interview: Iran’s nuclear negotiator”, BBC News, November 8, 2005, online available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4417028.stm, (accessed on September 23, 2015).

²⁶³“Iran always contributes to regional, global security: Ahmadinejad”, The Iran Project, April 18, 2013, online available at: <http://theiranproject.com/blog/2013/04/18/iran-always-contributes-to-regional-global-security-ahmadinejad/>, (accessed on August 14, 2015).

²⁶⁴KayhanBarzegar, “Iran, the Middle East, and International Security”, p.34-35.

²⁶⁵“Iran’s Nuclear Program: Challenges and Solutions” Roundtable with Dr Ali Larijani”, *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly*, Vol. 7. No. 2-3, p. 5.

²⁶⁶“Iran will tap all power to solve regional crises: Velayati”, *Iran Front Page*, December 20, 2014, online available at: <http://iranfrontpage.com/news/world/middle-east/2014/12/iran-will-tap-power-solve-regional-crises-velayati/> (accessed on October 14, 2015) Actually this statement was after President Ahmadinejad but still demonstrates the consistency of Iran’s self-perception that is suggested throughout this chapter.

US is preventing the stabilization of the Middle East as evident in its Iraq and Afghanistan invasions, while IRI is looking for regional peace and security.²⁶⁷ Similarly President Ahmadinejad also blames US for making trouble in the region when he states: “The presence of foreigners has been the root cause of insecurity in this region.”²⁶⁸ Moreover, Majles Speaker Larjani implies US when he declares his concern about the intentions of big powers which are “acting hand in hand with the terrorist groups in Middle East” by claiming that they seem to destroy the region”.²⁶⁹ In a similar trend President Ahmadinejad also accuses US of destabilizing the region by creating terrorist groups in order to reach its own interests.²⁷⁰

Therefore, Iran under President Ahmadinejad continues to ask for regionalism as it has the capacity to decrease the destructive role of US in the region as well as bring stability there. In this regard, President Ahmadinejad’s attendance to GCC Summit in 2007 was important, since he expressed Iran’s desire for regionalization very clearly by proposing a "breakthrough decision" regarding the "establishment of economic and security pacts and institutions among the seven states" without any foreign influence which will "serve the people of our region" and enable "peace and prosperity for all."²⁷¹ Here, Majles Speaker Larjani stresses the motivation of Iran towards regionalism: “Development of Iran’s relationship with regional countries is not a flattering remark; rather, it is

²⁶⁷ “Iran has become an extra-regional power: general”, Tehran Times, September 24, 2007, online available at: http://www.tehrantimes.com/Index_view.asp?code=153632, (accessed on September 23, 2015).

²⁶⁸“Iran always contributes to regional, global security: Ahmadinejad”, The Iran Project, April 18, 2013.

²⁶⁹“Larjani: Big powers, terrorists intend to destroy Mideast region”, *IRNA*, October 14, 2014. This statement is also a sign of consistency in Iran’s regional claims.

²⁷⁰“Hegemonic powers create terror groups as toll: Ahmadinejad”, Press TV, June 7, 2012, online available at: <http://217.218.67.229/detail/2012/06/07/245011/hegemons-create-terror-groups-as-tool/#sthash.cS7qx8Gg.dpuf>, (accessed on September 23, 2015).

²⁷¹ “Iran proposes regional pacts at Gulf summit”, *usatoday*, March 12, 2007, online available at: http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/2007-12-03-iran-summit_N.htm, (accessed on September 24, 2015).

considered as a long-term strategy. We believe that the security of the region is Iran's security."²⁷²

At the same time, President Ahmadinejad's call for OIC members to form an alliance between Muslim countries, in Mecca in 2006²⁷³, is another attempt of him for regionalization. Similarly, Iran's attempts to initiate joint defense programs with the Persian Gulf Littoral States in the frame of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)²⁷⁴ is another sign of Iran's desire for regionalization of the Middle East. At the same time, in regard to regionalism, Iran's scholars argue about the importance of cooperation between East and West Asian countries that are the major energy consumers of Asia and major producers of the continent. They claim that Iran may play a key role for the establishment of such cooperation through initiating an interdependent Asian dialogue project.²⁷⁵

Apart from regionalism, decision makers of IRI also continue to claim that Iran supports democracy in the Middle East since it brings stability to the region. Hereby, Ahmadinejad's statement in his speech at UN General Assembly in 2005 clearly demonstrates his claim about IRI's contribution to democracy: "The Islamic Revolution toppled a regime which had been put in place through a coup, and supported by those who claim to be advocates of democracy and human rights thwarted the aspirations of the nation for development and progress for 25 years through intimidation and torture of the populace and submission and subservience to outsiders."²⁷⁶ At the same time, this

²⁷²Mahmoud Asgari, "Iran's Defense Diplomacy", *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly*, Vol.10, Nos.1-2, (Winter-Spring 2012), p. 183.

²⁷³AnoushiravanEhteshami and MahjoobZweiri, *Iran and the Rise of its NeoConservatives*, p. 145.

²⁷⁴Mahmoud Asgari, "Iran's Defense Diplomacy", p. 187.

²⁷⁵ Nasser SaghafiAmeri, "The Strategic Interaction between Iran and Europe", Institute for Middle East Strategic Studies, Tehran, online available at: <http://www.csr.ir/departments.aspx?lng=en&abtId=07&&depid=74&semid=714>, (accessed on October 21, 2015).

²⁷⁶ Address by President Dr. Mahmood Ahmadinejad to the Sixtieth Session of the UN General Assembly, September 17, 2005, online available at: <http://www.un.org/webcast/ga/60/statements/iran050917eng.pdf>, p.3

statement summarizes, the rationale of IRI's claim to be the supporter of democracy in the region, which rooted in its belief in undemocratic policies of US (anti-Americanism), that is the major obstacle for regional development(third worldism).

In this respect, the Secretary of Expediency Council Mohsen Rezai emphasize Iran's democratic feature as the first independent country of the region.²⁷⁷ At the same time, he defines the monarchial regimes of the Gulf as undemocratic despotic regimes which serve only US interests in the region.²⁷⁸ Therefore, he implies Iran's support for democracy in the region which will bring regime change in the Gulf Monarchies. Especially in the Arab Spring context, Iran occasionally and opportunistically utilizes this democracy emphasis, for example Hossein Sheikholeslam suggests democracy as the best solution to Middle East crisis.²⁷⁹

In this regard, according to Iran's rationale since Islamists are the major opposition factions among Middle East countries, democracy means establishment of anti-Western and Islamic order so decision makers in IRI suggest that Iran's support for democracy should be understood in this frame.²⁸⁰ This rationale, according to Iran's decision makers is the reason of Iran's "undemocratic" attitude in Syrian crisis.²⁸¹ Here, in accordance with the "expediency principle"²⁸² of IRI Iran may accept the claim about its "conditional" support for democracy since it is not IRI's ultimate goal. However, still

²⁷⁷ "Viewpoints of the Iranian Political Elites towards the Iran-Iraq War", *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly*, Vol.6, No.3-4, (Winter-Spring 2005), pp. 128.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.127

²⁷⁹ PramodSedhain, "Iran's wider role and influence in the Middle East", *The Daily Journalist*, online available at: <http://thedailyjournalist.com/the-strategist/iran-s-wider-role-and-influence-in-the-middle-east/>, (accessed on October 25, 2015)

²⁸⁰ GhasemTorabi, "Arab Revolutions and Iran's Security", *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly*, Vol.10, No.1-2, (Winter-Spring 2012), pp. 115.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² Imam Khamane defines "expediency" as "choosing the most suitable path to wisdom or honor" that necessitates IRI to quest for national interest but this quest should be in accordance with its principles and ideals. It is one of the three principles of IRI's foreign policy, which are "honor", "wisdom" and "expediency". See Seyed Mohammad Marandi, "Ayatollah Khamanei and A Principled Foreign Policy", *Renovation and Intellectual Ijtihad in Imam Khamanei, Beirut*, (June 6-7, 2011), online available at: <http://www.conflictsforum.org/2011/ayatollah-khamanei-and-a-principled-foreign-policy/> (accessed on October 28, 2015).

according to IRI democracy is a means to bring stability to the region in the case of Gulf Monarchies so it supports democracy there.

As a conclusion, Iran's claim that it is a peaceful country which looks for regional stability is apparent during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency. Therefore, its self-perception as a constructive regional power which seeks for regionalism and democracy in the Middle East is also clearly seen during President Ahmadinejad era.

3.2. The Impact of Islamic Identity of Iran on its Self-Perceptions

3.2.1. How does Islamic Identity of Iran Determine the Worldviews of Iran's Leaders?

Islamic Identity of Iran, after the Islamic Revolution in 1979 is strongly shaped by Velayat-e faqih doctrine of Ayatollah Khomeini. Therefore, the strong theme of the Revolution which is "exporting revolution" has considerably impacted the components of the Islamic identity of IRI. In this respect, according to the "exporting revolution" call of Ayatollah Khomeini, IRI is just a starting point of the Islamic Revolution and it will spread throughout the region since it mainly aims at attaining just world order for all Muslims regardless of their sectarian belongingness.²⁸³

In this context, IRI claims to be the vanguard of Islamic world as apparent at least at the title of the official website of Khamanei which is "Supreme Leader of Muslims"²⁸⁴. At the same time, Velayat-e faqih doctrine brings the principle of "proximity among

²⁸³Shireen Hunter, "Iran's Pragmatic Regional Policy", *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.56, No.2, (Spring 2003), pp.133-147.

²⁸⁴ Karim Sadjadpour, "Seven Questions: What Iran Wants", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington DC, July 10, 2008, online available at: <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=20293>, (accessed on October 21, 2015).

hearts”, which mainly indicates the relations between nations is more important than relations between states, that is defined as ideology-driven mission-oriented policy approach of Iran towards Muslims.²⁸⁵ Therefore, in accordance with the principle of “proximity among hearts” and IRI’s claim that “Iran is the vanguard of the Islamic world”, IRI’s clerics claim to have some transnational responsibilities towards the Muslim world.²⁸⁶

In this context, the responsibility of “protecting all Muslims”, is one of those supranational responsibilities of IRI. In this regard, Ayatollah Khomeini stated that “...will remain a haven for Muslims of the World for good and ever, and Iran, as an invincible fortress, will supply the needs of soldiers of Islam and make them familiar with ideological and educational bases of Islam as well as principles and values of fighting infidels and unreligious governments.”²⁸⁷

Therefore, this responsibility to protect all Muslims necessitates supporting Islamic opposition groups in the region and beyond. Hence, IRI harshly criticizes the conservative Arab governments who according to IRI clerics are servants of America,²⁸⁸ because of their inaction in supporting Palestinian cause against Israeli military operations.²⁸⁹ As a result, these clerics of Iran claim the illegitimacy of such Western oriented “corrupt Arab regimes” by accusing them for not being Islamic²⁹⁰.

²⁸⁵See Mahdi Mohammad Nia, "Discourse and Identity in Iran's Foreign Policy", p. 40.

²⁸⁶ Ibid. , pp. 38-40.

²⁸⁷Shahroud Amir Entekhabi, “Role of Religious Texts in Shaping the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran”, *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly*, Vol.6, No.2, (Fall 2004), pp.65.

²⁸⁸“Ali Khamenei’s Speech dealing with the unreasonable behavior of American politicians”, Voltaire Network, Tehran, February 16, 2013, online available at: <http://www.voltairenet.org/article177552.html> (accessed on September 28, 2015).

²⁸⁹KayhanBarzegar, “Iran, the Middle East, and International Security”, p.37.

²⁹⁰Shahroud Amir Entekhabi, “Role of Religious Texts in Shaping the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran”, p. 62.

In addition to that, “promoting Islamic unity” is another supranational responsibility of IRI. In this regard, Supreme Leader Khamenei stresses the vital importance of being committed to unity of Muslims in the face of Western promotion of sectarian conflict among Muslim countries of the region.²⁹¹ In this frame, IRI claims to support anti-sectarianism. Relatedly, Ayatollah Khomeini states: “O you powerful Muslims! Beware! Know yourselves and let the world know you. O Muslims! Keep away from the disunited! Sunni and Shia brothers should avoid all disputes.”²⁹² Here, Ayatollah Khomeini’s special emphasis over the unity between Sunni and Shia is considered as an evident to IRI’s drive for unity among Muslims.²⁹³

However, Sunni Arab regimes generally criticize IRI for being insincere in its emphasis on the unity of Muslims since they interpret its support to Sunni Hamas in Palestine as a pragmatic policy, motivated towards leadership in the region.²⁹⁴ At that point, Supreme Leader Khamenei suggests, “The issue of Palestine is not a political tactic or strategy for the Islamic Republic and the Iranian people. Rather, the issue is rooted in the hearts and faith of the people.”²⁹⁵ Therefore it is claimed that Iran has no intention of leadership in its call for Islamic unity.²⁹⁶ Regarding the transnational duty of IRI about promoting Islamic unity, the Constitution of IRI declares that the foreign policy of IRI should give privilege to its relations with the nations rather than the governments since the duty of ensuring Islamic unity is not about the territorial borders of countries or the sovereignty

²⁹¹“Leader: Islamic Unity an Urgent Need”, October 26, 2009, online available at: <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/1195/Leader-Islamic-Unity-an-Urgent-Need> (accessed on October 14, 2015).

²⁹²“Muslims unity in Imam Khomeini’s viewpoint”, online available at: <http://fa.abna24.com/179968/print.html> , (accessed on October 5, 2015).

²⁹³<http://iranfrontpage.com/news/world/middle-east/2015/02/imam-khomeini-turned-iran-key-regional-power/>

²⁹⁴See BarisDoster, “The Middle East Policy of Iran as a Regional Power”, *OrtadoguAnaliz*, Vol.4, No.44, (August 2012), pp.46-47.

²⁹⁵“Leaders Meets Leaders of Palestinian Resistance Groups”, February 27, 2010, online available at: <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/1250/Leader-Meets-Leaders-of-Palestinian-Resistance-Groups> (accessed on July 3, 2015).

²⁹⁶MehrdadKiaei, “The OIC and Public Diplomacy: Limits and Opportunities”, *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly*, Vol.10, No.1-2, (Winter-Spring 2012), pp.150-152.

of their governments.²⁹⁷ This declaration is the rationale of previously mentioned principle of “proximity among hearts” that is influential on all transnational responsibilities of IRI.

Finally, “promoting Islamic identity”, is also a transnational responsibility of IRI. In this respect, IRI’s decision makers claim that such a consolidation of Islamic identity is only possible through spreading the values like “return to self, anti-colonialism, anti-Westernism, anti-Zionism and true Muslim identity”.²⁹⁸ At the same time, according to Iranian clerics promotion of Islamic identity inevitably necessitates supporting Islamic opposition groups among the region and beyond which is mainly based in the claim of Iranian clerics that IRI is the protector of all Muslims. Here, it is important to note that all these components of Islamic identity including the claim of leadership among Muslims and the principle of “proximity among hearts” as well as the related responsibilities are all formalized in the Constitution of IRI. Accordingly, article 11 of the Constitution of IRI refers Islamic unity; article 152 refers protecting Muslims, article 3 refers the concept of “proximity among hearts”, as the foreign policy principles of IRI for its approach to other Muslim countries²⁹⁹

At that point, it is important to emphasize that the explanations about the components of IRI’s Islamic identity since here are about the impact of velayat-e faqih doctrine of Ayatollah Khomeini on IRI’s Islamic identity. Therefore, the basic worldview of Ayatollah Khomeini, which is the determinant factor of the logic of his doctrine that is his dichotomous worldview, is crucial to analyze the Islamic identity of IRI in order to reach a comprehensive understanding of it.

²⁹⁷Shahroud Amir Entekhabi, “Role of Religious Texts in Shaping the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran”, p. 71.

²⁹⁸SeyedJavadSalehi, “The Applicability of the Turkish Model in Arab World”, *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly*, Vol.10, No.3-4, (Summer-Fall 2012), pp.54-55.

²⁹⁹Shahroud Amir Entekhabi, “Role of Religious Texts in Shaping the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran”, p. 71.

In this regard, the clerics of IRI perceive the world affairs as a struggle between God and Satan in the frame of their dichotomous worldviews so they define enemies and friends in accordance with this belief. In this respect, Khomeini claims that the Islamic Revolution of Iran actually was a war of righteous against the wicked rulers.³⁰⁰ Thus, Iranian leaders perceive Iran's Islamic revolution as an attack of righteous side to the cruelty of present rules and norms in accordance with their dichotomous worldviews that perceive the world as composed of two groups which are "the world of Islam" and "the world of infidels".³⁰¹

Actually, this dichotomous worldview constitutes the core of Shiism through the Karbala incident. In this respect, Shia moral codes mainly based in the "historical persecution" of Shias,³⁰² that is centered upon the narrative of Karbala. In this relation, this narrative brings the "resistance culture" that includes a kind of desire for revenge against unfairness of the world.³⁰³ Therefore, Islamic identity of Iran, ultimately based on the ideal of "seeking for just World Order" through Shiism. In other words, Islamic identity, ultimately leads the decision makers of IRI to seek for Just World order.

At that point, such a quest for justice also has its roots in Iran's Zoroastrian tradition³⁰⁴ which is a component of its National identity. Therefore, such an ideal of justice actually links Islamic Identity of Iran with its national identity through the

³⁰⁰ Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006), p. 435.

³⁰¹Shahroud Amir Entekhabi, "Role of Religious Texts in Shaping the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran", p. 66.

³⁰² Steven R. Ward, *Immortal: A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces*, (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), p.312. (Ward explains the ongoing impact of the "historical persecution of Shias" on the military policy of Iran.)

³⁰³ See Ali M. Ansari, "Iran under Ahmadinejad: populism and its malcontents", *International Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 4, 2008, p.685.

³⁰⁴ See BledarPrifti, "The Security and Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: An Offensive Realism Perspective", Master's Thesis, Department of Government and International Affairs, University of South Florida, December 16, 2009, pp. 10-14.

common dichotomous worldview among Zoroastrianism and Shiism. In other words, this dichotomous approach of Shia clerics in Iran has its roots at the Zoroastrian background of Iran long before Islam.³⁰⁵ Therefore, the core of Shiism seems actually rooted in National identity of Iran. From this point of view, Shiism seems more close to national identity of Iran, rather than its Islamic identity.³⁰⁶

In this respect, Vali Nasr emphasizes the historical interrelation of “Shia identity” and “Iranian Nationalism”.³⁰⁷ However, it is important to stress that, in the frame of this chapter; Islamic identity of Iran is explained in accordance with Ayatollah Khomeini’s velayat-e faqih doctrine which is centered upon Shiism. Therefore, Shiism constitutes the main ground of IRI’s Islamic identity in this chapter, while it still constitutes the religious dimension of IRI’s national identity. In addition to that, regarding the Karbala narrative, Ali Ansari suggests that it strengthen the revolutionary identity through enhancing the revolutionary concept of struggle against oppressors of unjust world order.³⁰⁸ In this respect, this narrative of Karbala as the core of Shiism, connects Islamic identity of IRI with its revolutionary identity on the same issue of “seeking for just world order”.

Consequently, in relation to the direct determining impact of Shiism on Islamic identity of Iran, the main impact of the Islamic identity of Iran on the worldviews of its decision

³⁰⁵ Robin Wright, “Iran Primer: The Challenge of Iran”, *The Iran Primer*, United States Institute of Peace, October 18, 2010.

³⁰⁶ As an ordinary person I also experienced such feelings of belongingness to a community and resistance culture also during the several mourning sessions in different parts of Iran and Ankara where people from all segments of the society come together and cry together for the unfairness of the world if not for the martyrdom of Hussein with an interesting feeling of revenge towards the unjust world order that gives power to struggle against everything...

³⁰⁷ See Christoph Marcinkowski, “Between Iran and Persia: Islam and Nationalism in Iran’s Resurgence as a Regional Power”, *RSIS Commentaries*, (RSIS Commentaries, No. 106), Singapore: Nanyang Technological University, September 27, 2006, online available at: https://dr.ntu.edu.sg/bitstream/handle/10220/3966/RSIS-COMMENT_139.pdf?sequence=1, (accessed on June 16, 2015).

³⁰⁸ See Ali M. Ansari, “Iran under Ahmadinejad: populism and its malcontents”, *International Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 4, 2008, p.685.

makers becomes the ideal of “seeking for just world order”, as a consistent worldview in Iran.

3.2.1.1. The Reflections of Islamic Identity of IRI during President Ahmadinejad Era

Islamic identity of IRI strongly revealed itself in Iran, during President Ahmadinejad. Moreover, Ehteshami emphasizes the increasing impact of the Islamic identity of Iran on the approaches of political elites of Iran with the rise of neo-conservative together with Ahmadinejad.³⁰⁹ In this direction, Karim Sadjadpour indicates the consistent perceptions of Iranian clerics about IRI’s place in the Muslim world as the “vanguard of Islam” during Ahmadinejad’s presidency.³¹⁰

He suggests that Supreme Leader Khamenei regards Iran as the vanguard of the Islamic world while claiming the necessity of Iran’s contribution for the accomplishment of any issue relevant to Middle East and Muslim world as a whole including Arab-Israeli conflict, the issue of Persian Gulf security or the conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon.³¹¹ Similarly Foreign Minister of Ahmadinejad Era Ali Akbar Salehi also claims that IRI has a special position among Muslim countries, at least in the eyes of Muslims of the region due to its unique Islamic state structure that is Islamic which is the only in the region.³¹²

As a result of these consistent claims of IRI’s decision makers about the leadership among the world of Muslims during the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the

³⁰⁹ AnoushEhteshami, “Iran as a Middle Power”, *Public Diplomacy Magazine*, Issue 2, (Summer 2009), pp.54-56, online available at: <http://publicdiplomacymagazine.com/iran-as-a-middle-power/>, (accessed on October 16, 2015).

³¹⁰ See Karim Sadjadpour, “Seven Questions: What Iran Wants”, online available at: <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=20293>.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² HennerFurtig, *Regional Powers in the Middle East: New Constellations after the Arab Revolts*, (US: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2014), p.29.

Islamic transnational responsibilities of Iran are strongly protected by Iran. In this respect, the transnational responsibility of IRI to protect all the Muslims and related its support to Islamic opposition groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas, considerably increases under the President Ahmadinejad.³¹³

In a similar vein, Bayram Sinkaya indicates such leadership claims of IRI's officials during President Ahmadinejad era, as the source of Iran's claim for the leadership of anti-Israeli and anti-American resistance groups among the Middle East region , particularly Hezbollah.³¹⁴ Therefore, he explains the considerable support of Iran to Islamic opposition groups, during the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.³¹⁵ Moreover, the incredibly increasing economic and political power of IRGC ³¹⁶leads to its increasing infiltration activities in the Middle East region through its al-Quds force.³¹⁷ Thus, such increasing military presence of IRI within the Islamic opposition groups in the region is portrayed by IRI as its commitment to its transnational responsibility for the protection of Muslims during Ahmadinejad era.

Similarly, IRI's commitment to its transnational responsibility for promoting Islamic identity which also necessitates automatically the support of Islamic opposition groups, is apparent in Ahmadinejad's "Arab street" policy which made him the most popular

³¹³ See Congressional Research Service, "Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy", 10 January 2010. (The report provides a comprehensive examination of Iran's influence over the Middle East region so it demonstrates increasing relationship between Iran and Hezbollah as well as Hamas.)

³¹⁴ Bayram Sinkaya, *The Revolutionary Guards in Iranian Politics: Elites and Shifting Relations*, (London: Routledge, 2016), p.174.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Alireza Nader, "The Revolutionary Guard" in *The Iran Primer*, United States Institute of Peace, online available at <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/revolutionary-guards> (accessed on September 29, 2015).

³¹⁷ See Zunaira Zaki, "The Al Quds : Iran's Elite Secretive Guard", abc News, February 14, 2007, online available at: <http://abcnews.go.com/International/story?id=2875127&page=1> , (accessed on October 12, 2015) ; Greg Bruno et al., "Iran's Revolutionary Guard", June 14, 2013, online available at: <http://www.cfr.org/iran/irans-revolutionary-guards/p14324>, (accessed on October 14, 2015).

leader of the region together with Hassan Nasrallah according to polls.³¹⁸ In this respect, Gülriş Şen indicates the reason of such increase of the popularities of both President Ahmadinejad and the Secretary General of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah as “The 34 day War”.³¹⁹ Therefore, she emphasizes the effort of Sunni Arab regimes to portray Persian Iran as a dangerous threat to Arabs in order to control Iran’s rising influence on the “Arab street”.³²⁰

In this respect, Ahmadinejad even strongly relies on “Arab Street” in order to prevent such efforts of Arab regimes to emphasize the differences of Persian Shia Iran from Sunni Arab regimes in order to curb Iran’s rising influence. From this point of view, it can be interpreted that the principle of “proximity among hearts” revealed itself in Iran under President Ahmadinejad in the form of “Arab street” policy.

Actually, President Ahmadinejad applied this Arab street policy through mainly his anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli speeches which aim at gaining heart and minds of the people in the Middle East. These statements includes: “As the Imam said, Israel must be wiped off the map” or “ Anybody who recognizes Israel will burn in the fire of the Islamic nation’s fury, while any Islamic leader who recognizes the Zionist regime means he is acknowledging the surrender and defeat of the Islamic world”.³²¹ Moreover, he even denied the Holocaust when he states: “They (Western powers) launched the myth of the Holocaust. They lied, they put on a show and then they support the Jews.”³²² However,

³¹⁸HeshamSallam et al., “Who Rules Ahmadinejad’s Iran?”, United States Institute of Peace, April 1, 2007, online available at: <http://www.usip.org/publications/who-rules-ahmadinejad-s-iran> (accessed on September 10, 2015).

³¹⁹GülrişŞen, “Post-Revolutionary Iran’s Foreign Policy Toward the United States: A Historical Sociological Analysis of State Transformation and Foreign Policy”, *PhD Dissertation*, Department of International Relations, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, September 2013, p.345.

³²⁰Ibid., p.348.

³²¹“Israel should be wiped off map, says Iran’s president”, *The Guardian*, October 27, 2005, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/oct/27/israel.iran> (accessed on August 26, 2015).

³²²“Holocaust a myth, says Iranian President”, *The Guardian*, December 14, 2005, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/dec/14/iran.secondworldwar> (accessed on August 26, 2015).

Ahmadinejad harsh anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli statements are interpreted as an attempt to divert the attention of international public from IRI's suspicious nuclear activities.³²³ Finally, IRI emphasizes its transnational responsibility of "promoting Islamic unity" during President Ahmadinejad's term. Such emphasize may be interpreted as a measure of IRI to weaken the threat perception toward it among the region, that is related to the claims about IRI's designs of "Shia crescent" "which is mentioned previously under the title of anti-Americanism. Therefore IRI needs to demonstrate its commitment to Islamic unity, so defines the claims of "Shia crescent" as a Western designed project to weaken the Islamic solidarity among the Muslims of the region as well as to curb its rising regional influence.³²⁴

To this end, President Ahmadinejad several times mentioned about IRI's mission to unite all Muslims as a block against the West and at the same time emphasized the unity of all Muslims regardless of their Shia or Sunni belongings. Therefore, he accused Western powers and its allies of attempting to curb Iran's spiritual power over the Muslims by creating divergence among ummah in the form of so called "Shia crescent" rumors which is nothing but a mere tactic to create Irano-phobia or Shia-phobia among Muslims.³²⁵ In this respect, Ahmadinejad's effort to prove IRI's commitment to Muslim unity is apparent in his statements during an interview, "The Muslim Ummah is a united one and there is no talk of Shia or Sunni. We have supported Sudan. Is Sudan a Shia state or a Sunni one? We have defended the rights of Palestinian people, are they Sunni or Shia? We don't mind whether they are Sunni or Shia. We say that they are Muslims. The Muslim World should know that the Iranian nation and Islamic Republic of Iran will never take any steps in creating diversity among Muslims"³²⁶

³²³"Israel should be wiped off map, says Iran's president", *The Guardian*, October 27, 2005.

³²⁴ Amir M. Haji-Yousefi, "Whose Agenda is Served by the idea of Shia Crescent?", pp. 122-133.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Amir M. Haji-Yousefi, "Whose Agenda is Served by the idea of Shia Crescent?", p. 122.

At that point, Ahmadinejad's overt anti-Westernism emphasis in his calls for Islamic unity is actually rooted in his belief in the collapse of the Western civilization and appearance of a global "Mahdist government" that would be Islamic and bring justice to the world, under the leadership of Iran.³²⁷ Relatedly, Jahangir Amuzegar suggests that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad perceives that the Islamic Revolution of Iran actually was for his own appearance as the savior of the "righteous from the wicked".³²⁸ In that respect, President Ahmadinejad's advices for President Bush to come the right path of Islam through an open letter³²⁹ and his pray for the appearance of Mehdi during his first speech to UN General Assembly³³⁰ are the well-known manifestations of his self-perception regarding his Messianic mission as the savior of the World.³³¹

At the same time, the main spiritual adviser to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi's suggestion about the constant support of Hidden Imam for the success of President Ahmadinejad seems influential on the President's claim about his Messianic visions.³³² Therefore, the main impact of Mahdism on President Ahmadinejad's policies seems his over self-confidence that leads to his confrontational rhetoric about America and Israel.³³³ In this respect, Dore Gold indicates the belief about necessity of chaos for

³²⁷Gülriş Şen, "Post-Revolutionary Iran's Foreign Policy Toward the United States: A Historical Sociological Analysis of State Transformation and Foreign Policy", p.325

³²⁸Amuzegar Jahangir, "The Ahmadinejad Era: Preparing for the Apocalypse", *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.60, No.2, (Spring-Summer 2007), p.36.

³²⁹Hossein BagherZadeh, "Mahmoud on a mission: Ahmadinejad's grand gestures of defiance and brinkmanship", *Iranian.com*, May 12, 2006, <http://iranian.com/HosseinBagherzadeh/2006/May/Ahmadinejad/index.html>, (accessed on July 11, 2015).

³³⁰ See Mohebat Ahdiyyih, "Ahmadinejad and Mahdi", *The Middle East Quarterly*, Vol.15, No.4, (Fall 2008)

³³¹Hossein BagherZadeh, "Mahmoud on a mission: Ahmadinejad's grand gestures of defiance and brinkmanship", *Iranian.com*, May 12, 2006.

³³²See Kasra Naji, *Ahmadinejad: The Secret History of Iran's Radical Leader*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), p.98.

³³³ See Mohebat Ahdiyyih, "Ahmadinejad and Mahdi"

the arrival of Mahdi among the followers of Mahdism.³³⁴ Therefore he claims that Ahmadinejad chooses to be overtly confrontational in order to fasten the appearance of Hidden Imam.³³⁵ Consequently, this Mahdism of President Ahmadinejad is clearly related to the main worldview of IRI's decision makers which is "seeking for just world order" so it strengthens this ideal and relatedly the impact of Islamic identity on Iran's policies.

As a result, the impact of IRI's Islamic identity on the worldviews of Iranian leaders is obviously seen during the Presidency of Mahmood Ahmadinejad. At the same time, the reflection of Islamic identity of Iran on the foreign policies of President Ahmadinejad is considerably high. In this regard, previously mentioned activities and rhetoric of President Ahmadinejad, clearly demonstrates his commitment to the supranational Islamic responsibilities of IRI as well as the Islamic identity of Iran.

3.2.2. The Impact of the Ideal of "Seeking for Just World Order" on Regional Role Claims of IRI

Within the scope of Islamic identity of IRI, the ideal of "seeking for just world order" leads the political elites of IRI to claim that reaching justice in regional order of the Middle East is only possible through Islamization of the region. In this respect, Banafsheh Keynoush emphasizes the strength of such vision of IRI's clerics to create an Islamic Middle East when she quotes, the statement of Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi, who is one of the leading radicalistic figures of IRI; "Iran could be sacrificed for Islam but that Islam could never be sacrificed for Iran."³³⁶

³³⁴Dore Gold, "The Emergence of Iran's Revolutionary Guards' Regime", Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, January 1, 2012, Jerusalem, online available at: <http://jcpa.org/article/irans-revolutionary-guards/>, (accessed on October 16, 2015).

³³⁵Ibid.

³³⁶BanafshehKeynoush, "Iran after Ahmadinejad", *Survival*, Vol. 54, No.3, (June-July 2012), p. 142.

In this context the way to Islamicize the Middle East which will bring just regional order goes through the rationale of “export of the revolution”.³³⁷ Therefore, in accordance with this call of Ayatollah Khomeini, IRI has the mission of exporting its revolution to other countries in the region in order to Islamicize the region. However, after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini this mission has evolved into being a role model for other countries in the region. Ayatollah Khamenei explains this policy as,

Iranian revolutionaries must prove that Western values and Western way of life are not universally valid, but can be replaced by conscious adherence to Islamic norms. The eyes of other countries are on us, success and failure are being exactly weighed up against each other. It depends on us to make Islam an attractive alternative.³³⁸

Thus, he emphasizes the necessity of Iranians to be strong so that they will provide an alternative model in accordance with Iran’s Islamic duty of bringing just world order.³³⁹ Therefore, IRI’s decision makers claim that providing an alternative model in order to reach initially a just regional order is the Islamic regional role of Iran³⁴⁰ in accordance with the central message of IRI which is “spreading justice for all”.³⁴¹

At that point, the duty of being a “role model” for other countries in the region is actually an alternative to the policy of “export of revolution” provides the necessary tool for IRI in order to Islamicize the region. At the same time, being the “regional role model” necessitates well implementing of the previously explained transnational duties of IRI, which are “protecting all Muslims”, “promoting Islamic identity” and “promoting

³³⁷ Shireen Hunter, “Iran’s Pragmatic Regional Policy”, p.133

³³⁸ HennerFurtig, *Regional Powers in the Middle East: New Constellations after the Arab Revolts*, (US: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2014), p.26.

³³⁹“Leader: Islamic Iran has a Responsibility to Humanity”, February 2, 2010, online available at: <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/1242/Leader-Islamic-Iran-Has-a-Responsibility-to-Humanity> (accessed on September 4, 2015).

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ MehrdadKiaei, “The OIC and Public Diplomacy: Limits and Opportunities”, p. 157.

Islamic unity”. Therefore, according to IRI’s clerics, IRI, as the “vanguard of Islamic revolution in the World”³⁴², automatically (naturally) has the role to be a “regional role model” in the Middle East. In this way, this part demonstrates that the impact of the ideal of “seeking for just world order” on regional role claims of IRI is the suggestion that IRI is “a role model” in the Middle East.

As a result, this part explains how the ideal of attaining just world order shaped within Islamic identity of Iran and brings about the regional role claim of IRI which is being the regional role model. Therefore, to be a “regional role model” is another self-perception of IRI in regard to its role in the region.

3.2.2.1. Iran as a “Regional Role Model” under President Ahmadinejad

Iran’s claim to be the “regional role model” is directly linked to its transnational responsibilities that are directed towards Islamicize the Middle East. Therefore, the evaluation of the developments about this self-perception during President Ahmadinejad is necessitates to examine the respective developments in those transnational responsibilities of IRI, which is already done in the previous section. Therefore, those activities and rhetoric of Ahmadinejad that are previously mentioned are directly demonstrates that Iran envisions itself a regional role model under President Ahmadinejad.

However, it is important to mention that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad exceedingly advocates such regional role model claim of IRI, with the impact of his “Mahdism”, which perceives Iran as the leader of future’s Global Islamic government, as mentioned previously. Moreover, the Arab revolts that are started during the last year of Ahmadinejad’s Presidency clearly revealed the strength of this regional role claim of IRI, one more time. In this direction, the political elites of IRI even proclaimed the

³⁴² See Sami Zubaida, *Beyond Islam: A New Understanding of the Middle East*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), pp.187-188.

success of Iran's regional role as a role model in terms of Islamization of the Middle East since they interpreted the Arab Spring events as an "Islamic Awakening".³⁴³ In this respect, Elizabeth Monier indicates the "supranational responsibility" understanding of Iranian officials and the significance of struggling against the foreign influence in Iran and the whole Muslim world that lead to "Islamic Awakening" interpretations of "Arab Spring" events among Iranian leaders³⁴⁴

Regarding such interpretations, Karim Sadjadpour quotes Ayatollah Khamenei;

A wave of Islamic revival has swept through the Islamic world, and Muslim nations are expressing a strong desire to return to Islam and practice this lofty religion. This awakening has stemmed from the great Islamic revolution of the Iranian people under the leadership of our late magnanimous Imam.... The enemies told us not to export our Islamic revolution! We said that revolution could not be exported, since it is not a commodity! However, our Islamic revolution, like the scent of spring flowers that is carried by the breeze, reached every corner of the Islamic world and brought about an Islamic revival in Muslim nations.³⁴⁵

In this respect, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei claims that IRI's resistance culture, advocated by Ayatollah Khomeini, gives them strength as a brave nation in the face of American initiated sanctions.³⁴⁶ Thus, such a resistance of Iran is the inspiration for the current events in Arab world and also it made Iran famous among Arab World.³⁴⁷ He describes this increasing fame of Iran as, "Now that the Iranian nation and the Islamic Republic have achieved glory, other nations throughout the world learn a lesson from the Islamic Revolution and gain courage when someone discusses the American and

³⁴³Gülrişen. "İran ve 'Arap Baharı': Bağlam, Söylem ve Siyaset", *OrtaDoğu Etütleri*, Vol.3, No.2, (January 2012), p.7.

³⁴⁴ Elizabeth Monier, "The Arabness of Middle East regionalism: the Arab Spring and competition for discursive hegemony between Egypt, Iran and Turkey", *Contemporary Politics*, Vol.52, No.4, (2014), p.427.

³⁴⁵ Karim Sadjadpour, *Reading Khamenei: The World view of Iran's Most Powerful Leader*, (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009), pp. 21-22.

³⁴⁶ "Ali Khamenei's Speech dealing with the unreasonable behavior of American politicians", Tehran, February 16, 2013.

³⁴⁷ Seyed Mohammad Marandi, "Ayatollah Khamenei and A Principled Foreign Policy", *Renovation and Intellectual Ijtihad in Imam Khamenei*, Beirut, (June 6-7, 2011).

Zionist crimes at international gatherings”³⁴⁸and while interpreting such movements among Arab nations as “Islamic Awakening”that “owe their existence to the blessing of the Islamic revolution”³⁴⁹ he stated that “The ultimate goal should be a unified Islamic nation and the establishment of a new Islamic civilization based on religion, wisdom, knowledge and morality”³⁵⁰ that is actually ultimate goal of IRI which leads it to claim responsibility for being a regional role model.

In addition to that, the Secretary of Expediency Council, Mohsen Rezai addresses Syria, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan as composing a “golden belt” on which contrary to US’s hegemonic designs there will appear an “Islamic Awakening” that will consequently turn the region into an Islamic Middle East.³⁵¹ In this direction, President Ahmadinejad speech on the day of the toppling of Mubarak in Egypt demonstrates his interpretation of Arab revolts as an Islamic awakening movement which is inspired the 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran: “In spite of all the (West’s) complicated and satanic designs... a new Middle East is emerging without the Zionist regime and US interference, a place where the arrogant powers will have no place,”³⁵²

At the same time, consistent with Third Worldism of Iran, President Ahmadinejad, even claims that Iran is a successful role model for much of the developing countries. In this

³⁴⁸“Leader Urges Development of Domestic Progress Model”, May 17, 2009, online available at: <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/1126/Leader-Urges-Development-of-Domestic-Progress-Model> (accessed on September 4, 2015)

³⁴⁹“Imam Khamenei: Region at Historical Turn, Not Settled Yet”, *Alahed News*, October 10, 2013, <http://www.english.alahednews.com.lb/essaydetails.php?eid=24561&cid=391#.VrHIHO2LTIW>, (accessed on September 1, 2015)

³⁵⁰Amir M. Haji-Yousefi, “Iran and 2011 Arab Revolutions: Perceptions and Actions”, *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly*, Vol.10, No.1-2, (Winter-Spring 2012), p.32.

³⁵¹ZviBar’el, “In Syria Crisis, Iran Seeks Regional Power Even if It Means Losing Assad”, *Haaretz*, August 19, 2012, <http://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/in-syria-crisis-iran-seeks-regional-power-even-if-it-means-losing-assad-1.459278>, (accessed on September 1, 2015).

³⁵²Barney Henderson, “Hosni Mubarak resigns: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad hails ‘a new Middle East’”, *The Telegraph*, February 11, 2011), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/egypt/8319200/Hosni-Mubarak-resigns-Mahmoud-Ahmadinejad-hails-a-new-Middle-East.html>, (accessed on June 2, 2015).

respect, Ahmedinejad even suggested that developing countries meaning Asian, African and Latin American countries, consulted him about the “methodology and solutions on managing the economy, culture and overall development” of Iran since they perceive Iran as a role model.³⁵³ Similar to Ahmadinejad’s claim, Mehrdad Kiaei, who is a research fellow in Tehran, also claims the increasing respect of Third World nations including Middle East towards Iran as a result of IRI’s honorable support to Palestinians in their independence struggle.³⁵⁴

Consequently, the regional role model claim is considerably apparent under President Ahmadinejad. At the same time, another deep rooted source of this claim, apart from “export of the revolution” which is “Mahdism” becomes exceedingly explicit during President Ahmadinejad era.

3.3. The Impact of National Identity of Iran on its Self-Perceptions

3.3.1. How does National Identity of Iran Determine the Worldviews of Iran’s Leaders?

Iran’s national identity considerably determines the worldviews of its decision makers as the other two identities do. In this respect, Ramazani indicates the importance of interpretations of national history of Iran by its decision makers. According to him, such interpretations of IRI’s political elite constitutes important elements of Iran’s national identity, such as “pride towards Iranian culture” and “a sense of victimization” as well as “a culture of resistance” against foreign domination which result in “a fierce sense of independence” as one of the most strong component of the worldviews of IRI’s decision makers.³⁵⁵

³⁵³Eva Patricia Rakel, *Power, Islam and Political Elite in Iran: A Study on the Iranian Political Elite from Khomeini to Ahmadinejad*, (Leiden: BRILL, 2009), p.178

³⁵⁴Mehrdad Kiaei, “The OIC and Public Diplomacy: Limits and Opportunities”, p. 151.

In this context, the most well-known but not only historical experience which Iranian leaders interpreted as a national cause against foreign intervention was the CIA orchestrated coup against Iran's most adorable national leader Mossadegh that caused to development of a strong opposition to US in Iran as a whole.³⁵⁶ The Tobacco Protests of 1891 that pave the way towards 1906 Constitutional Revolution is also important to remind in order to show the deep historical roots of Iran's "fierce sense of independence".³⁵⁷

Here, this fierce sense of independence is interpreted as a strong drive to "territorial integrity"³⁵⁸ by Ehteshami. He suggests that this drive is the other strong component of national identity of Iran in addition to "the fear of foreign meddling" and claims that both of these components of Iran's national identity result in an Iran-centric worldview among decision makers of IRI.³⁵⁹ Consequently, according to Ehteshami the Iran-centric worldview inevitably causes "a sense of exaggerated importance of Iran", which he interprets as "the arrogance of nonsubmission" which has explicitly reflected in the famous phrase of Khomeini, "America cannot do anything!"³⁶⁰

Thus, according to Ehteshami, the national identity of Iran conduces to Iran-centric worldviews of Iranian officials which lead them to make miscalculations about the capabilities of IRI by exaggerating Iran's power and importance, while undermining their adversaries'.³⁶¹ Such misperception of Iran's side is explained by Macmillan as

³⁵⁵Mahdi Mohammad Nia, "Discourse and Identity in Iran's Foreign Policy", p.43.

³⁵⁶ Mahmood Sariolghalam, "Understanding Iran: Getting Past Stereotypes and Mythology", *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2003, p. 74.

³⁵⁷ImadSalamey and Zanoubia Othman, "Shia Revival and Welayat Al-Faqih in the Making of Iranian Foreign Policy", *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, Vol.12, No.2, (June 2011), p.200.

³⁵⁸AnoushiravanEhteshami, "The Foreign Policy of Iran" ,pp.284.

³⁵⁹Ibid., pp.284-285.

³⁶⁰Ibid., pp.285.

³⁶¹Ibid., pp.284-285.

inaccurate self-perceptions of the leaders of IRI regarding their regional and global roles. He claims that the Iranian political elites perceive Iran as regional and global power even when it lacks material resources necessary for such assertions.³⁶² Similarly, Christoph Marcinkowski also indicates the misperceptions of Iran's leaders about IRI's power and role in the region or globe through explaining their conceptions of Iran as "the centre of universe".³⁶³ Therefore, such Iran-centric worldviews of the decision makers of IRI ultimately seems to be the root cause of their conception of "Iranian exceptionalism" in relation with their sense of "historical superiority" or their emphasis on "the glorious history of Iran", which are the strong components of Iran's national identity.

In this context, the claim of Iranian leaders, about Iran's natural hegemony in the Gulf region as the "uniquely qualified" country of the Gulf to take decision for the future of region³⁶⁴, seems determined by their Iran-centric worldviews which brings the sense of historical superiority among IRI's decision makers that is based on the concept of "Iranian exceptionalism". At this point, it is important to note that the same components of national identity of Iran had resulted with the same worldviews and related regional policies in the Gulf during the reign of the Shah who had believed that Iran is the only state that capable of bringing peace and stability to Middle East region.³⁶⁵ Hereby, all these components of Iran's national identity that is based on "Iranian exceptionalism" are actually rooted in the concept of "Iran-Zamin", which still determines the worldviews of IRI's leaders.

³⁶²ArshinAdipMoghaddam, "Global Grandeur and the Meaning of Iran: From the Shah to the Islamic Republic" in HennerFurtig (eds.), *Regional Powers in the Middle East: New Constellations after the Arab Revolts*, (US: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2014), p.43.

³⁶³Christoph Marcinkowski, "Between Iran and Persia: Islam and Nationalism in Iran's Resurgence as a Regional Power", September 27, 2006, p.2. Here, Marcinkowski refers Fuller's famous phrase, see Graham E. Fuller, *The Center of the Universe: The Geopolitics of Iran*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991).

³⁶⁴AnoushiravanEhteshami, "The Foreign Policy of Iran", p. 286.

³⁶⁵TritaParsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran and the US*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 39.

This concept of “Iran-zamin” is used for describing the “historical lands of Iran” that was once the large territories of the first Persian Empire starting from the Caucasus, going through Mesopotamia, Central Asia, Pakistan, Afghanistan in addition to the current day Iran.³⁶⁶ Actually it is because of this imperial history that Barry Buzan categorized Iran as countries with old and ancient identity.³⁶⁷ In this respect, the pride of Iranian leaders for Iran’s contribution to the civilizational history of world by introducing the most influential and creative “scientists, physicians, mathematicians, architects”³⁶⁸ and so on is also a common approach of Iranian exceptionalism. Therefore, such a deep rooted understanding of Iranian exceptionalism explains the emphasis of Iranian leaders about “the glory of Persian Empire”³⁶⁹ as well as their perception of themselves as the natural leader of Gulf or even Middle East as mentioned above.

However, it is not only the politicians but also the ordinary Iranians naturally have such perceptions of glorious history and Iranian exceptionalism as Robert Bear clearly stated: “An Iranian will tell you about points of history few of us think about how the major Iron Age nomads spoke early Iranian, and about the Kimmerians, the Scythians, the Sarmatians, and the Alans. How Central Asia’s major cities once were all Iranian-speaking.”³⁷⁰ At that point, it is important to emphasize Fred Halliday’s reminding that nationalism in Iran brings about “a sense of disdain, sometimes bordering on arrogance, for other people of the region”³⁷¹ to Iranians as a consequence of their belief of historical

³⁶⁶Christoph Marcinkowski, “Between Iran and Persia: Islam and Nationalism in Iran’s Resurgence as a Regional Power”, September 27, 2006, p.1,

³⁶⁷ Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.20.

³⁶⁸ Robin Wright, “Iran Primer: The Challenge of Iran”, October 18, 2010.

³⁶⁹ See Sadegh Zibakalam, “Iranian ‘Exceptionalism’”, pp. 85-87

³⁷⁰ Robert Bear, *The Devil We Know: Dealing with the New Iranian Superpower*, (New York: Crown Publishers, 2008), pp. 283-284.

superiority. Therefore, it seems that the main impact of national identity of Iran on the worldviews of its decision makers is their “senses of superiority”.

In relation to above mentioned sense of historical superiority as an important component of the worldview of Iran’s decision makers, they have a strong belief that they are unjustly deprived of their natural place in the world which they define as a “natural disposition”.³⁷² In this respect, Ehteshami indicates Iran’s ongoing quest for reaching its natural role in the region.³⁷³ This natural role, from the point of Iranians, is regional superpower status as it is the righteous role of Iran.³⁷⁴ According to the decision makers of IRI, Iran’s unfair deprivation of its natural and righteous role is related to US’s fear of Iran and its belief that recognizing Iran’s natural status would have a devastating influence over its own long-term interests in the region.³⁷⁵

At this point, the previously mentioned “sense of victimization” among IRI’s decision makers makes sense as a result of their belief in such an unjust deprivation of Iran from its righteous place. Therefore, this sense of victimization comprises a kind of grievance among IRI’s decision makers which brings the sense of “historical humiliation”³⁷⁶ that motivates them to ask for equal status with the world powers and demand respect as well as the recognition of their natural dominant status in the region. At the same time this senses of victimization and humiliation again strengthen their strong anti-foreign interference stances.³⁷⁷

³⁷¹ Fred Halliday, “Iran and the Middle East: Foreign Policy and Domestic Change”, *Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP), Middle East Report*, No. 220, (Autumn 2001), p.45.

³⁷² Simon Mabon, *Saudi Arabia and Iran: Soft Power Rivalry in the Middle East*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), p.92.

³⁷³ Anoushiravan Ehteshami, “The Foreign Policy of Iran” , p. 286.

³⁷⁴ Gawdat Bahgat, “Iran and the United States: The Emerging Security Paradigm in the Middle East”, *Parameters*, (Summer 2007), p.9.

³⁷⁵ Kayhan Barzegar, “Roles at Odds: The Roots of Increased Iran-US Tension in the Post-9/11 Middle East”, *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs*, Vol.1, No.3, (Fall 2010), p.86-88.

³⁷⁶ Mahdi Ahoiie, “Developments of Iranian Political Discourse on Israel: From Past to Present”, *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly*, Vol.9, No.3-4, (Winter 2011), pp. 57-70.

In addition to that, Iran-Iraq War strengthened such senses of victimization and humiliation as a result of Iran's natural disposition, among decision makers of IRI and added the "sense of loneliness in a dangerous neighborhood" to their worldviews. The reason of this is Iranian leaders' interpretation of Iran-Iraq War as a struggle of Iran against the World³⁷⁸ due to the support of almost all countries for Iraq while they have left alone.

Such support of Iraq against Iran made Iranian leaders even more determined not to rely on UN or the West.³⁷⁹ Therefore, the war doubtlessly led to strengthening of the notion of independence among whole nation³⁸⁰ so strengthened national identity of IRI and helped consolidation of the new regime. At the same time, such perception of outside world as a hostile place compelled the decision makers of IRI to cultivate alternative allies through portraying themselves as a role model for other states in order to reach regional and global recognition.³⁸¹ Here lies the root of Iran's strong presence in Lebanon and its support for the creation of Hezbollah as its proxy or partner, in the region.³⁸²

Therefore, there is a "common concern of attaining justice in international arena"³⁸³ among IRI's decision makers as a result of such perceptions of superiority, deprivation, victimization, humiliation and loneliness, which are all rooted in Iran's national identity.

³⁷⁷ Volker Perthes, "Ambition and Fear: Iran's Foreign Policy and Nuclear Programme", *Survival*, Vol. 52, No. 3, (June-July 2010), pp. 96-97.

³⁷⁸ Amir M. Haji-Yousefi, "Iran's Foreign Policy during Ahmadinejad: From Confrontation to Accommodation", p. 4.

³⁷⁹ Amir M. Haji-Yousefi, "Whose Agenda is Served by the idea of Shia Crescent?", p. 121.

³⁸⁰ Maximilian Terhalle, "Revolutionary Power and Socialization", p.564.

³⁸¹ Patrick Clawson, *Iran's Strategic Intentions and Capabilities*, (Washington DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, 1994), pp.82-84.

³⁸² Hadi Semati, "Rising Power: Domestic and Strategic Factors of the Iran-Hizbullah Connection and their Regional Implications", Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Middle East Program Occasional Paper Series, (Fall 2006), online available at: https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/MEP_fall06.pdf (accessed on June 15, 2015), pp. 14-15.

³⁸³ See Mahdi Ahoie, "Developments of Iranian Political Discourse on Israel: From Past to Present", pp. 57-82

Hereby, as it is mentioned in previous section, such a quest for justice is a common point between the moral codes of Iran's Zoroastrianism and Shiism. In this respect, "Zoroastrianism" seem considerably influential on "Shiism" of Iran in terms of "dichotomous worldviews" of Iran's Shia clerics. Therefore, Shiism constitutes the religious dimension of Iran's national identity. At the same time, Ali Ansari claims that the worldviews of especially Iran's intellectuals are shaped with the imaginary of an authentic hero within the Zoroastrian tradition³⁸⁴ which is also a sign of the influence of the glorious past perception of Iran's decision makers on the determination of their worldviews.

As a result, the main impact of national identity of Iran on the worldviews of its decision makers is the "senses of superiority" of Iran's leaders. Here, the intersection point of Iran's Islamic and revolutionary identity, which is "export of the revolution" policy, also includes signs of such sense of superiority. In this relation, IRI's decision makers perceive IRI as the "vanguard of Islam". Therefore, this "sense of superiority" is almost equally important in all three identities of Iran so it is a consistent worldview in Iran, which is mainly based in its National identity.

3.3.1.1. The Reflections of National Identity of IRI during President Ahmadinejad Era?

National identity of Iran is strongly emphasized by Iran's political elites with the emergence of "principlists camp" with the Presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in IRI. In this respect, "sense of superiority", as the most explicit impact of national identity of Iran on the worldviews of its decision makers, reveals in the form of "chauvinism" under President Ahmadinejad.

³⁸⁴See Ali M. Ansari, "Iran under Ahmadinejad: populism and its malcontents", *International Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 4, 2008, p.684.

Actually, such an extreme emphasis on Iran's national superiority and glory by President Ahmadinejad, is interpreted as an "eclectic and paradoxical" attitude of him, given his over focus on Islamic identity of Iran.³⁸⁵ In relation to that, Suzane Maloney and Ray Takeyh suggest that a "war generation", who have imperial designs in their mind and are strong supporter of strict Islamism, emerges in the politics of IRI together with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.³⁸⁶

Similarly, Farideh Farhi emphasizes "Janus-faced" feature of Iran's identity which means "being the children of both Cyrus the Great and Mohammed"³⁸⁷ simultaneously. Therefore, Ahmadinejad's "chauvinism" is explicit in his speeches and general policies in the region. In this respect, President Ahmadinejad's speech at UN General Assembly in 2005 demonstrates his belief in the superiority of Iran nation as he states, "Today, my nation calls on other nations and governments to move forward to a durable tranquility and peace based on justice and spirituality".³⁸⁸ In the same speech, President Ahmadinejad also states, "if some try to impose their will on the Iranian people... we will reconsider our entire approach to the nuclear issue."³⁸⁹

At that point, it is important to mention that President Ahmadinejad overtly utilizes this "chauvinism" as a mean to gain domestic support for nuclear activities of IRI in order to avoid popular discontent about the severing UNSC sanction on the economy of the country. In this respect, President Ahmadinejad evokes "the senses of deprivation" and humiliation of Iranian nation in order to grasp the attention of Iranian public, through statements like, "[t]he superpowers [...] are trying to deprive Iran of its own legal

³⁸⁵See Ali M. Ansari, "Iran under Ahmadinejad: populism and its malcontents", *International Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 4, 2008, p.684-686.

³⁸⁶Ray Takeyh and Suzanne Maloney, "The self-limiting success of Iran sanctions", *International Affairs*, Vol.87, No.6, (2011), p.1396.

³⁸⁷Simon Mabon, *Saudi Arabia and Iran*, p.92.

³⁸⁸Address by President Dr. Mahmood Ahmadinejad to the Sixtieth Session of the UN General Assembly, September 17, 2005, online available at: <http://www.un.org/webcast/ga/60/statements/iran050917eng.pdf.p.3>.

³⁸⁹Ibid.

right.”³⁹⁰ Thus, BayramSinkaya incisively describes President Ahmadinejad’s effort to portray the nuclear issue as a national cause: “..Ahmadinejad likened maintenance of the nuclear program to the nationalization of oi industry by the Iranian national hero, Mohammad Musaddeq, in the early 1950s”.³⁹¹ Similarly, Hossein Bagherzadeh indicates this attempt of President Ahmadenejad to portray nuclear issue in the same vein with Musaddeq’s oil nationalization cause.³⁹²

In addition to that, the severing sanctions as the result of President Ahmadinejad’s nuclear policies are portrayed as a satanic plan of US in order to deprive it from its righteous place in regional affairs as a major regional power. Therefore, the decision makers of IRI accuse US for not accepting and recognizing the role of Iran in the region as a major regional power. At the same time, IRI blames US for consciously portraying Iran as a threat to other regional countries in order to prevent the expanding regional influence of it through economic and political sanctions³⁹³. However, Iran perceives its recognition as the key to the regional peace, stability and development.³⁹⁴

Therefore, national identity under President Ahmaddinejad generally shaped around his “chauvinism” in the frame of his nuclear policies. By this way, the impact of nationalism on the worldview of IRI’s political elites reveals itself explicitly under President Ahmadinejad.

³⁹⁰ Diane Bos, “Identity in Speech: An Analysis of Ahmadinejad’s words”, *Platform for Iranian-Dutch Academic Dialogue, University of Amsterdam*, Presented at the School of International Relations, Tehran, (May 2007), p.11.

³⁹¹ BayramSinkaya, *The Revolutionary Guards in Iranian Politics*, p.173.

³⁹² Hossein BagherZadeh, “Mahmoud on a mission: Ahmadinejad’s grand gestures of defiance and brinkmanship”, Iranian.com, May 12, 2006, <http://iranian.com/HosseinBagherzadeh/2006/May/Ahmadinejad/index.html>, (accessed on July 11, 2015).

³⁹³ KayhanBarzegar, “Roles at Odd:”, p. 90.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

3.3.2. The Impact of the “Sense of Superiority” on Regional Role Claims of IRI

The “sense of superiority”, as one of the strongest worldviews of IRI’s decision makers, has considerable impact on IRI’s regional role claim. In this respect, initially it is necessary to remind that, apart from previously mentioned sources of “sense of superiority” in Iran, according to Iran’s self-depiction its power is rooted in its regional location as well as its hard and soft power capacities.

Regarding the geographical capacity of Iran, intellectuals and political elites emphasize Iran’s unique position at the crossroads of “East-West and North-South energy transit routes”³⁹⁵. At the same time, related to its soft and hard power capacities, Iran’s decision makers and academics indicate “Iran’s 3000 years of civilizational history”; its young, dynamic and huge population; the existence of important Iran-Islamic cultural geography in southwest Asia; its huge resources of oil, gas, water and coal ; it is unique geopolitical and geostrategic position in the Persian gulf and Caspian sea and its important military and political experience to manage domestic, regional and international crisis.”³⁹⁶ Thus Iran indicates that it deserves to be treated as a major regional player that naturally has a dominant role in regional and international affairs.³⁹⁷ Therefore, the automatic impact of “sense of superiority” on Iran’s regional role claims is the assertions of IRI’s decision makers about Iran’s superior and vital regional role.

Actually, the reason for Iran’s emphasis on its vital regional role is strongly related with the insecurity perceptions of its leaders, regarding the survival of its regime. In this

³⁹⁵Ibid. 97.

³⁹⁶ “Iran’s New Foreign Policy”, Center for Strategic Research, Tehran, August, 2006, online available at: <http://www.csr.ir/departments.aspx?lng=en&abtId=07&&depId=106&semId=661>.

³⁹⁷Seyed Jalal DehghaniFirouzabadi, “Societal Sources of Iranian Foreign Policy”, pp.35-36.

respect Ehteshami indicates “the fear of foreign meddling” as a component of Iran’s national identity, is rooted in the decision makers of IRI’s interpretation of the national history of Iran.³⁹⁸ Similarly, Suzanne Maloney and Ray Takeyh also mention about the perceptions of Iranian leaders regarding that IRI undergo an American designed domestic insurrection.³⁹⁹ Ali Ansari also highlights this paranoia of the leaders of IRI related to their belief of being under constant siege of domestic insurrection that is planned by western powers.⁴⁰⁰ Thus, the decision makers of IRI are highly sensitive about US interference to Iran’s domestic affairs in the frame of “civil society promotion” or its “support for ethnic activities” within the country.⁴⁰¹ In this respect, IRI’s harsh stance against Israel also interpreted as a drive for securing the survival of the regime.⁴⁰² Therefore Iran’s policies in general ultimately aim at securing the survival of its regime.⁴⁰³

In this direction, such “fear of foreign meddling” reveals itself as fear of “velvet revolution” inside the mindset of Supreme Leader Khamanei since 1989 Czechoslovakian experience of it.⁴⁰⁴ In this respect, Karim Sadjadpour while indicating “resistance against US and Israel” as one of the four unchanged foreign policy tendencies of IRI since 1979, he mentions the strong belief of Supreme Leader Khamenei about the “velvet revolution” attempts of US against Iran’s regime through

³⁹⁸AnoushiravanEhteshami, “The Foreign Policy of Iran” in A.RaymondHinnebush and AnoushiravanEhteshami (eds.), *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*, (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), pp. 284-285.

³⁹⁹Ray Takeyh and Suzanne Maloney, “The self-limiting success of Iran sanctions”, *International Affairs*, Vol.87, No.6, (2011), p.1396.

⁴⁰⁰See Ali M. Ansari, “Iran under Ahmadinejad: populism and its malcontents”, *International Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 4, 2008, p.699-700.

⁴⁰¹Frederic M. Wehreyet. al, *Dangerous but Not Omnipotent*, p. 15-22.

⁴⁰²TritaParsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran and the US*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 201.

⁴⁰³ See David Mindell, “A Nuclear Iran: Nuclear Warfare or Regional Hegemony”, *Yale Israel Journal*, (Fall 2008), online available at: SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1691913>, pp.67-78.

⁴⁰⁴ Mehdi Khalaji and Patrick Clawson, “Velvet Revolution Trumps Nuclear Negotiations”, (2009), online available at: <http://en.mehdikhalaji.com/archives/tag/velvet-revolution>

political and cultural campaign.⁴⁰⁵ Moreover, increasing US presence in Iran's neighborhood after 9/11 and increasing rumors about US plan for regime change in Iran, especially after President Bush's 2002 state of union address⁴⁰⁶ when he emphasizes Iran as a threat to regional peace and stability leads to the fear of direct military attack of US, in Iran. Thus, Iran perceives the US as an existential threat to its survival.⁴⁰⁷

Therefore, decision makers of IRI need to emphasize and exaggerate their power capacities in order to deter the threat from US. In this context they overtly indicate their influence in the region in order to prove their vital regional role. However, IRI is aware about the essentiality of the acknowledgement of their power for the materialization of their potentials. Consequently, IRI perceive itself as "a potential regional dominant power" so ask for acknowledgement of its power status while it claims equal status with other world powers.

3.3.2.1. Iran as a "Potential Regional Dominant Power" under President Ahmadinejad

IRI's self-perception as "potential regional dominant power" gains a new momentum during the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, as a result of increasing tensions with US in the frame of the nuclear policy of IRI.

⁴⁰⁵ Karim Sadjadpour, "Seven Questions: What Iran Wants", online available at <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=20293>

⁴⁰⁶ "Text of President Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address", *Washington Post*, January 29, 2002, online available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/onpolitics/transcripts/sou012902.htm> (accessed on June 10, 2015).

⁴⁰⁷ Kayhan Barzegar, "Iran's Foreign Policy towards Iraq and Syria", *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol.6, Issue.2, (Summer 2007), p.80.

Here, it is important to emphasize that sanctioning of Iran reached at its peak under President Ahmadinejad.⁴⁰⁸ However, the decision makers of IRI interpreted the nuclear related sanctions of US as directed to their regime's survival.⁴⁰⁹ Therefore, these severing sanctions further intensify the belief of Iranian political elites that the ultimate goal of US is the regime change in Iran.⁴¹⁰ This interpretation is apparent in Supreme Leader Khamenei's statement, "In spring 2010 they intensified their sanctions against Iran according to their agenda.[...] They assumed that they could place a burden on the Iranian nation with the instrument of sanctions and tighten the noose on the Iranian nation so much that it would protest against the system and the Islamic Republic. This was their aim"⁴¹¹. In addition to that, the "fear of velvet revolution" reaches at its peak with the "Green Movement" which comes to the scene as a result of the victory of Ahmadinejad, which is claimed as an election fraud.⁴¹² Thus, Iran under President Ahmadinejad feels extremely insecure in terms of "regime survival".

Therefore, as a counter response to such existential threats from the US, IRI officials emphasize Iran's influential power that has considerable potential to dominate the region and ask for recognition in order to guarantee its survival. As such, IRGC Commander Yahya Rahim Safavi did, by indicating the influence of IRI over regional countries and its oil related economic capacities, he urged US about the vitality of recognizing Iran as

⁴⁰⁸Oliver Borszik, "Sanctions against Iran under President Ahmadinejad: Explaining Regime Persistence", GIGA Research Programme: Violence and Security, No.260, November 2014, online available at: https://giga.hamburg/de/system/files/publications/wp260_borszik.pdf, (accessed on June 26, 2015), p.4.

⁴⁰⁹Ray Takeyh, "A Profile in Defiance", *The National Interest*, (Spring 2006), online available at: <http://www.cfr.org/iran/profile-defiance/p10324>, (accessed on June 4, 2015).

⁴¹⁰Oliver Borszik, "Sanctions against Iran under President Ahmadinejad: Explaining Regime Persistence", November 2014, p.12-16.

⁴¹¹Ibid. 14.

⁴¹²Abbas Milani, "The Green Movement" in *The Iran Primer*, United States Institute of Peace, online available at <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/green-movement> (Accessed on June 12)

a power.⁴¹³ In the same vein, Ahmadinejad claims even “the future belongs to Iran” therefore he also ask for recognition of Iran’s status as a major world power by US.⁴¹⁴

At the same time again Ahmedinejad by indicating the vitality of Iran’s role for the security of Middle East, through stating, ‘Powerful Iran is the best friend of the neighboring states and the best guarantor of regional security’, indirectly asks for regional recognition of Iran’s role that will ensure survival of the regime.⁴¹⁵ They even directly demanded from US to give up their regime change plans about IRI and acknowledge Iran’s historical and cultural ties with Iraq which necessitates them to seek for stability there during the meeting with US in Baghdad in 2007.⁴¹⁶ Moreover, an editorial in Hedayat declares that "we need to prepare for ruling the world" and "carrying the flag of Islam to the hands of the Mahdi."⁴¹⁷

At that point, such assertive claims about Iran’s role in the region under President Ahmadinejad seem as means to deter the increasing threat towards Iran, in the frame of deterrence policy of Iran.⁴¹⁸ Actually, Stephan Walt perfectly depicts IRI’s attitude for gaining recognition which is crucial for its survival,” I’m now a regional power, I produce security and in this context I can help in Iraq, Afghanistan and in Lebanon”⁴¹⁹ Here, academician Haji Yousufi claims that Iran is misinterpreted by West as seeking for hegemony by aiming to reach nuclear power status and suggests that all forms of extremists policies of President Ahmadinejad are actually motivated to secure survival

⁴¹³ “Iran has become an extra-regional power: General”, *Tehran Times*, September 24, 2007, online available at: http://www.tehrantimes.com/Index_view.asp?code=153632 (accessed on August 6, 2015).

⁴¹⁴ Thomas A. Johnson, *Power, National Security, and Transformational Global Events: Challenges Confronting America, China, and Iran*, (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2012), p.217.

⁴¹⁵ Diane Bos, “Identity in Speech: An Analysis of Ahmadinejad’s words”, p. 10.

⁴¹⁶ Thomas A. Johnson, *Power, National Security, and Transformational Global Events*, p.

⁴¹⁷ MohebatAhdiyyih, “Ahmadinejad and Mahdi”

⁴¹⁸ Iran always contributes to regional, global security: Ahmadinejad”, *The Iran Project*, April 18, 2013.

⁴¹⁹ KayhanBarzegar, “Stephan M. Walt on the U.S., Iran and the New Balance of Power in the Persian Gulf”, *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly*, Vol.8, No, 3, (Spring 2009), p. 5.

of Iran's regime.⁴²⁰ However, the best explanation of IRI's ultimate goal of survival, at least for the first instance, through demanding regional superior role is addressed by the authors of "Dangerous but not Omnipotent" as "What seems like a drive for hegemony may in fact be a form of deterrence or the manifestation of an ambition for increased stature and "indispensability" in the midst of isolation and encirclement"

Consequently, IRI under President Ahmadinejad actually claims that IRI has more than enough capacity and experience to be regional dominant power, however for the moment it is a vital "potential regional dominant power" in the Middle East.

3.4. Conclusion

Consequently, in the light of above mentioned evaluations, IRI has three main regional role claims as its self-perceptions regarding its role in the Middle East. These perceptions are:

- 1) As an indispensable part of Middle East, Iran perceives itself as "a constructive regional power" through its support for regionalization and democratization of the Middle East and contribution to the regional peace and stability.
- 2) As the protector of Muslims and supporter of Muslims' unity in accordance with its Islamic identity, Iran perceives itself as "a role model" for other Muslim states in the region
- 3) Since they are the natural dominant power of Middle East whose goal is to attain a just world order they see themselves as "a potential regional dominant power".

Thus following two chapters will test respectively the validity of these claims in terms of the perceptions of regional countries towards Iran and the hard power capabilities of Iran.

⁴²⁰ Amir M. Haji-Yousefi, "Iran's Foreign Policy during Ahmadinejad: From Confrontation to Accommodation", p.19.

CHAPTER 4

PERCEPTIONS OF REGIONAL COUNTRIES TOWARDS IRAN'S REGIONAL ROLE

As the second parameter to reach a conclusion about the regional role of Iran, this chapter focuses on the perceptions of regional countries towards Iran. By this way this part generally concentrates on the perceptions of Middle Eastern countries towards Iran, particularly in terms of Iran's regional claims that have been revealed at the previous chapter. Thus, this chapter mainly tests the validity of Iran's self-perceptions regarding its regional role in terms of the perceptions of regional countries towards Iran's status in the region during President Ahmadinejad era.

At that point it is necessary to emphasize that the two most prominent issues, which strongly determines the perceptions of regional countries during the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, were about the continuous skeptical nuclear activities of Iran and relatedly rising rumors among the Sunni dominated regional countries, about Iran's ambitions to form a "Shia crescent" in the region. Actually, these two main topics of Middle Eastern politics regarding Iran's regional role under President Ahmadinejad era have already been discussed at the previous chapter in terms of Iran's related policies about these issues.

In this regard, this chapter will provide the policies of other regional countries regarding these main topics, while it evaluates the regional perceptions towards Iran's regional role during Ahmadinejad's time. In addition to the topics of nuclear issue and the so called Shia crescent designing of Iran, the Arab Uprising that starts towards the end of the

Presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is also influential for the perceptions of regional countries towards Iran's role in the region.

At the same time, it is important to note that such timely topics about Iran in the Middle East has its roots actually at the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, after 9/11 terrorist attacks which has become a mile stone for the Middle Eastern politics. Iraq's crucial importance for the regional countries is obvious in regard to its huge oil reserves as well as the political importance so its centrality for Middle Eastern countries is quite understandable after the toppling of Saddam Hussein which leaves a considerable power vacuum in the country. However, the main concerns of regional countries regarding the new picture in Iraq is about the emergence of a Shia dominated Arab regime there which has become the sources of the much issues regarding the relationship between Iran and other regional countries.

In the light of such general discussion about Iran's regional role under President Ahmadinejad, this chapter will focus on primarily the two sub-regions of Middle East which are Gulf and Levant. Hereby, this study examines the perceptions of the regional countries which belong to these sub regions, separately. Then this chapter will provide the perceptions of Egypt and Turkey towards Iran's regional role. Therefore, the chapter begins with the perceptions of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries as well as Iraq's towards Iran.

4.1. The Perceptions of Gulf Countries towards Iran's Regional Role

4.1.1. The Perception of GCC Countries towards Iran

Initially, it is important to stress that one of the underlying reasons of the creation of GCC with the membership of small Gulf States and Saudi Arabia was about providing a

kind of precaution against Iran's influence in the Gulf region.⁴²¹ This represents the traditional mindset of these Gulf States regarding Iran since the 1979 Revolution or even before. The danger these countries perceive from Iran is related to their rulers' fear of losing their authority over their respective countries due to the monarchial nature of their rule⁴²² and the risk of uprising among their considerable size of Shia population as a result of revolutionary call of Ayatollah Khomeini⁴²³, who accused the monarchies of being un-Islamic.⁴²⁴ In this regard, Vali Nasr states: "Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf monarchs – all of whom are Sunnis ruling over sizeable numbers of Shiites – worry about the spread of an aggressive Iranian hegemony over their domains"⁴²⁵ so GCC countries tend to believe that the enhancement of Iran's influence over the Shia populations in the region is an attempt of IRI to become an "imperialistic hegemon".⁴²⁶

Therefore, most of the small Gulf states especially those who have sizable Shia communities like Bahrain and Kuwait as well as Saudi Arabia, who has the leadership claim in Gulf region and at the same time among the world's Muslims,⁴²⁷ perceives Iran as a threat toward their domestic stability as well as the status quo of the Gulf region.⁴²⁸ Saudi Arabia believes that, the turmoil among its Shia population during 1979-

⁴²¹See Michael Barnett and F. Gregory Gause III, "Caravans in Opposite Directions: Society, State and Development of Community in the Gulf Cooperation Council" in Emmanuel Adler and Michael Barnett (eds.), *Security Communities*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p., 1.

⁴²² Ely Karmon, "Iran's Role in the Radicalization of Sunni-Shia Divide" in Michel Korinman and John Laughland (eds.), *Shia Power: Next target Iran?*, (London: Vallentine Mitchell & Co, 2007), p. 290.

⁴²³ Patrick O'Neil, "Everywhere is Karbala: Shia Ritual Politics in Iran and Beyond", p.15.

⁴²⁴ Adnan Tabatabai, "Time to Foster Iran-Saudi Relations", *Payvand*, April 22, 2014, online available at: <http://www.payvand.com/news/14/apr/1141.html>, (accessed on July 2, 2015).

⁴²⁵Ely Karmon, "Iran's Role in the Radicalization of Sunni-Shia Divide", p. 290.

⁴²⁶ Rusty Trevino, "Is Iran an Offensives Realist or a Defensive Realist? : A theoretical Reflection on Iranian Motives for Creating Instability", *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol.6, No.5, (Fall 2013), pp. 384.

⁴²⁷ Andrea Ellner, "Iran-Challenge or Opportunity for Regional Security?", p. 10.

⁴²⁸ Kenneth Katzman et al. , "Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy", pp. 1-21.

1980s was initiated by Iran.⁴²⁹ Similarly, Saudi side regards Iran responsible for the coup attempts in Bahrain in 1981 and Qatar in 1983.⁴³⁰ Moreover, Iran's irredentism about the possession of Greater and Lesser Tunb and Abu Mousa islands⁴³¹ or Bahrain as a whole, enhanced such threat perception of Iran among the GCC countries especially for UAE and Bahrain since the 1979 Revolution in Iran.⁴³² As a result, such kinds of existential threats perceived by the GCC countries led them to support Saddam in his aggression against Iran during Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988). Actually, that was one of the reasons for Iran to feel victimized in a dangerous neighborhood as a lonely revolutionary country. On the other hand, the GCC countries perceived Saddam's Iraq as a counterbalance towards the newly established expansionist IRI⁴³³, which was seen at the first instance as an expansionist revolutionary and Islamic state with its export of revolution policy.

However, the major turning point began with the toppling of Saddam Hussein in 2003 that is believed to have benefited Iran most, not only because of the replacement of an enemy state with the first Shia dominated Iranian friendly Arab regime⁴³⁴, but also by providing a role model of such an empowerment of Shia Arab community across the Shia communities of the region, who are faced discrimination in the hands of Sunni rulers throughout the history. Such reactions of GCC countries to the increasing role of Iran in Iraq is expressed for the first time, by King Abdallah II of Jordan with a claim of emergence of a "Shia Crescent" that is led by Iran.⁴³⁵

⁴²⁹ Shimon Shapira and Daniel Diker, "Iran's 'Second' Islamic Revolution: Its Challenge to the West", The Jerusalem Center, August 30, 2008, online available at: <http://jcpa.org/article/irans-second-islamic-revolution-its-challenge-to-the-west/>, (accessed on October 16, 2015), p. 52.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Mohammad Hossein Hafezian, "Iran's Relations with the Persian Gulf Arab States under President Ahmadinejad's First Term", Institute for Middle East Strategic Studies, Tehran, online available at: <http://en.cmess.ir/default.aspx?tabid=98&ArticleId=279> (accessed on October 17, 2015).

⁴³² John C. Shenna, "The Case Against the Case Against Iran: Regionalism as the West's Last Frontier", *The Middle East Journal*, Vol.64, No.3, p., 350.

⁴³³ Ephraim Kam, "Iran's Regional Status: Expanding Influence alongside Weaknesses", p., 28.

⁴³⁴ Ely Karmon, "Iran's Role in the Radicalization of Sunni-Shia Divie" pp. 276-283.

⁴³⁵ KayhanBarzegar, "Iran and Shiite Crescent: Myths and Realities", p., 87.

In this regard the fears of the past as a reflection of creation of IRI was renewed among GCC countries under the impact of such a new concept of “Shia Crescent” after 2003 Iraqi invasion of US. Actually , the centrality of “Iraq” issue is not only stems from sectarian conflicts but also the vast energy sources of Iraq demonstrates the reasons of Saudi Arabia’s strong opposition of Iran’s involvement in the country as it is the major rival of Saudi Arabia in OPEC which has obviously great impact over international economy.⁴³⁶ Therefore, apart from an “Arab-Sunni (Wahhabism)” vs “Persian-Shia” conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran, there is also an economic competition for influence over OPEC⁴³⁷.

Moreover, simultaneously revealed nuclear ambitions of Tehran greatly increased the skepticism about Iran’s intentions in the region among GCC countries who generally do not perceive a threat from Iran’s nuclear bomb but still consider the incalculable capacity that Iran will reach through its nuclear-related plans that will shift the balance of power of the region towards the benefit of Iran.⁴³⁸ Therefore, smaller Gulf countries, despite the differences in their tolerance towards Iran’s nuclear activities, generally support US’s concerns about the nuclear ambitions of Iran.⁴³⁹ However, Saudi Arabia and Bahreinno doubt condemn the nuclear activities of Iran.⁴⁴⁰ In this sense the Saudi King even asked US for a military operation against Iran in order to stop its nuclear activities.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁶ See, JaafarAlloul, “Sectarian Discourse in the Middle East’s Post-Saddam Order: A Marker for Intra-OPEC Rivalry and Humanitarian Catastrophe”.

⁴³⁷ Frederic M. Wehrey et al., *Saudi-Iranian Relations since the Fall of Saddam: Rivalry, Cooperation, and Implications for U.S. Policy*, (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2009), p., 13.

⁴³⁸ AnoushiravanEhteshami and MahjoobZweiri, *Iran and the Rise of its NeoConservatives*, p., 103-140.

⁴³⁹ John C. Shenna, “The Case Against the Case Against Iran: Regionalism as the West’s Last Frontier”, p., 351.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ “Saudi Arabia urges US attack on Iran to stop nuclear programme”, *TheGuardian*, November 28, 2010, online available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/nov/28/us-embassy-cables-saudis-iran> , (accessed on November 3, 2015).

Apart from such worries of GCC countries about Iran's ambitions, they criticize Iran for "stealing Arab issues"⁴⁴² from Arabs in order to reach its own interests through its involvement in the Arab region at the expense of the stability of the region.⁴⁴³ Therefore, rising prestige of Hezbollah and Hamas who are perceived as Iran's proxies and the spoiler of the peace process between Arabs and Israel is also a source of concern for the GCC countries.⁴⁴⁴ In this respect, the GCC countries feel threatened from the rising influence of Iran in the region at the expense of their prestige in the eyes of their own people who are tend to accuse them for being illegitimate US-supported regimes⁴⁴⁵ that are inclined to non-Muslim US even in the case of Palestinian issue, as a result of Arab Street policy of Iran. Thus GCC countries in general perceive Iran as the source of the disability in the region due to its activities through such proxy groups that are motivated to prevent an agreement between Palestinians and Israelis.⁴⁴⁶

Thus this deep sources of competing interest between Saudi Arabia and Iran especially after the emergence of the power vacuum with the removal of Saddam⁴⁴⁷ explains the overreaction of Saudi Arabia, whose clerics even have declared the legitimacy of murdering Shias⁴⁴⁸ to the increasing involvement of Iran in Arab Spring events which is perceived by GCC countries generally as an hegemonic attempt of Iran, that has started in less than a decade after the Iraqi invasion of US in the Middle East. In this regard, the particular opposition of Saudi Arabia to the Iranian involvement in the Arab Springs events is due to its belief that Iran wants to organize Saudi Shia community who reside

⁴⁴²Marina Eleftheriadou, "The Shia protocols: The Iranian project of Shiite proselytism", *NegociosEstrangeiros*, No.14, (April, 2009), p., 19.

⁴⁴³Ibid. 20.

⁴⁴⁴Kenneth Katzman et al. , "Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy", p., 1.

⁴⁴⁵Shimon Shapira and Daniel Diker, "Iran's 'Second' Islamic Revolution", p., 52.

⁴⁴⁶ See Kenneth Katzman et al. , "Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy, pp. 1-21.

⁴⁴⁷ See Simon Mabon, *Saudi Arabia and Iran* ", p. 55.

⁴⁴⁸ Frederic M. Wehreyet. al, *Dangerous but Not Omnipotent*, p.138.

in the east of the country where Saudi oil lies that is the basis of the entire economy.⁴⁴⁹ At the same time, GCC countries strongly believe that Iran funded the Shia radical groups in Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia for their insurgencies⁴⁵⁰ in accordance with its hegemonic designs.

At that point, the attitude of Tehran as if these revolts are all inspired by 1979 Iranian Islamic revolution as the starting point of such an Islamic awakening movement throughout the region is strengthened the perceptions toward Iran regarding its hegemonic ambitions, especially in the case of Bahrain. In this regard, Saudi Arabia directly interfered the Bahraini revolts through its military forces in order to support the government of Bahrain whose Shia community is higher than 60% of the population.⁴⁵¹ At the same time, other GCC countries reacted in the same direction with Saudi Arabia since they believe the reason of such an attempt of Iran in Bahrain is mainly based on Iran's desire for disturbing the status quo of the region in order to increase its own status in the region.

Despite these tensions between GCC countries and Iran, President Ahmadinejad made several attempts similar to his predecessors Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami to improve IRI relation with the Gulf countries through building regional institutions, especially seeking all-inclusive security arrangements that will include Iran, Iraq and all six countries of GCC. Nevertheless these kinds of attempts from Iran for regionalization are generally not accepted by the GCC countries despite various reactions among smaller Gulf states about such an idea of including Iran officially in Gulf security arrangements, as in the case of Qatar's invitation of Ahmadinejad to 2007 GCC Summit in Doha, where he repeated the necessity of forming regional cooperation

⁴⁴⁹ For the details of Saudi Arabia's sensitivity about the same oil-rich Eastern provinces in the frame of nuclear programme of Iran before Arab Spring, see Jonathan Cook, *Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake Middle East*, (London, Pluto Press, 2008), p. 144.

⁴⁵⁰ Shimon Shapira and Daniel Diker, "Iran's 'Second' Islamic Revolution", p. 52.

⁴⁵¹ Reza Solat and Hooshang Azizi, "Rivalry and Cooperation in the Iran Turkey Relations in the Light of the Arab Spring", p. 138.

among Gulf states that reduces US presence in the region as the main source of all conflicts between regional countries.

Here, Qatar and also Oman seems to be more willing to include Iran in regional security arrangements⁴⁵² since they tend to accept the indispensability of Iran as a regional power. However, GCC countries rather than adopting the regionalization formula of Iran generally turn to US for their security needs,⁴⁵³ so they aim at strengthening US position in the Gulf against Iran due to their perception of Iran as a threat, especially in regard to its nuclear ambitions.

At that point it is important to note that GCC countries in general including even Saudi Arabia traditionally do not want to alienate Iran totally⁴⁵⁴ due to their concerns over Iran's capacity to destabilize Gulf, which is vital for smaller Gulf states, whose economies are vulnerable to conflictual environment due to foreign investment issues and at the same time their fear of any possible rapprochement between Iran and US. Therefore, they want to secure the status quo of the region in which Iran is isolated to some extent. So they do not prefer Iran to become a more influential regional player with the impact of any possible rapprochement between US and Iran, since they feel insecure about their future authority, particularly UAE.⁴⁵⁵

In this respect, rather than any threat regarding conventional military operations of Iran, Iran's possible emergence as a nuclear power country apparently disturb UAE, but they need to preserve their silence about this issue. At the same time UAE avoid to see any type of rapprochement between Iran and US which is their main disadvantage in terms

⁴⁵²Andrea Ellner, "Iran-Challenge or Opportunity for Regional Security?", p. 14.

⁴⁵³James M. Lindsay and Ray Takeyh, "After Iran Gets the Bomb: Containment and its Complications", *Foreign Affairs*, (March-April 2010), p.3

⁴⁵⁴Eva Patricia Rakel, "The Iranian political elite, state and society relations, and foreign relations since the Islamic revolution", *Dissertation*, Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Universiteit van Amsterdam, Amsterdam, 2008.p. 180.

⁴⁵⁵Karim Sadjadpour, "The Battle of Dubai", p. 30.

of their interests so they do not prefer strengthening of Iran's position in the Gulf⁴⁵⁶. Similarly, Saudi Arabia avoids any kind of inclination between Iran and US so it occasionally tries to improve economic relations with Iran as a tactic for making Iran to move away from US.⁴⁵⁷

Here the trade relations between Iran and smaller Gulf states, to whom Iran approaches separately rather than a united body,⁴⁵⁸ gains importance in order to understand the reasons of their different reactions to Iran under different circumstances. In this regard, Gulf region is suggested as the "backbone of Iranian economy"⁴⁵⁹, which shows the level of dependency among them. For example, the trade volume between Iran and UAE, as the main transport route of Iran's trade in the face of sanctions is at a considerable level that is more than \$10 billion annually.⁴⁶⁰ Especially, Iran's heavy investment in Dubai is important to mention.⁴⁶¹ At the same time the dependency of Bahrain's economic performance on its security to attract investors also important to mention since it shows the vulnerability of Bahrain's relationship with Iran since the latter's destabilization capacity over its majority Shia population.⁴⁶²

Similarly Qatar, also vulnerable to any confrontation with Iran due to its shared natural gas field with Iran, allegedly had to invite Tehran to GCC summit in 2007⁴⁶³. Therefore,

⁴⁵⁶ Mohammad Hossein Hafezian, "Iran's Relations with the Persian Gulf Arab States under President Ahmadinejad's First Term", Institute for Middle East Strategic Studies, Tehran.

⁴⁵⁷ John Duke Anthony et al., "War with Iran: Regional Reactions and Requirements", *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 15, No.3, (Fall 2008), p. 6.

⁴⁵⁸ "Iran: Relations with Regional Powers", *U.S. Library of Congress*, online available at: <http://countrystudies.us/iran/103.htm> (accessed on September 5, 2015).

⁴⁵⁹ R. K. Ramazani, "Iran's Foreign Policy : Both North and South", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 46, No. 3, (Summer 1992), pp. 393-412

⁴⁶⁰ Karim Sadjadpour, "The Battle of Dubai: The United Arab Emirates and U.S.-Iran Cold War", *Carnegie Papers*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (July 2011), p. 5.

⁴⁶¹ John Duke Anthony et al., "War with Iran: Regional Reactions and Requirements", p. 5-6.

⁴⁶² Kenneth Katzman et al. , "Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy, pp. 10-12.

⁴⁶³ Kenneth Katzman, "Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses", p. 40.

the economic relationship between Iran and smaller Gulf States have started to be reestablished since the end of war with Iraq as a result of Iran's reintegration efforts.⁴⁶⁴ In this context, it is seen that some GCC countries still maintain or even expand their economic and political ties with Iran regardless of their threat perception.⁴⁶⁵ Therefore, the attitude of UAE towards Iran is the most interesting among GCC countries due to its uniquely close strategic relationship with US as if the agent of US in the region to scrutinize the steps of Iran and at the same time equally strong economic and social ties with Iran.⁴⁶⁶

However, it is necessary to note that even the smaller emirates of UAE differs in their approaches to Iran as Dubai and Sharjah on the one hand relatively more positive to Iran; Ras Al Khaymah and Abu Dhabi, on the other hand have more negative approaches to Iran but in general they avoid any occasion that would cause regional conflicts due to relatively more vulnerable situation of their economy to regional security and stability.⁴⁶⁷

Similarly, Oman as the closest Gulf country to Iran, conceives no inconsistency between its alliance with the United States and friendship with Iran while this close friendship with Iran lies in its perception of Iran as a balancer against aggressive Wahhabism policies of Saudi Arabia while it has no sizable Shia population that Iran would meddle in addition to its historical ties with Iran.⁴⁶⁸ Moreover it is suggested that there is mutual security cooperation between Oman and Iran through the IRGC.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁴Charles C. Mayer, "National Security to Nationalist Myth: Why Iran Wants Nuclear Weapons", p. 27.

⁴⁶⁵ Andrea Ellner, "Iran-Challenge or Opportunity for Regional Security?", p. 20.

⁴⁶⁶ Karim Sadjadpour, "The Battle of Dubai: The United Arab Emirates and U.S.-Iran Cold War", p. 3.

⁴⁶⁷ Kenneth Katzman et al. , "Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy", pp. 12-15.

⁴⁶⁸ Kenneth Katzman et al. , "Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy", p. 17

⁴⁶⁹ Jamsheed K. Choksy, "Iran Takes on the World", *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol. 11, (April 2011), p. 67.

In the same vein, Kuwait also has normal relations with Iran and they have formed a Kuwait-Iran Higher Committee in 2008 to strengthen their relations and regarding the nuclear issue Kuwait has a relatively modest approach. In addition to that Kuwait did not view Iran an aggressive hegemonic ambitious country instead it was Saddam's Iraq for them so they actually used Iran as a counterbalance to Saddam during 1990s but before that Kuwait was similar to other GCC countries had perceived Iran as a threat with its hegemonic plans, especially the tanker war was influential in Kuwait's perception.⁴⁷⁰ However, after the toppling of Saddam Hossein, Kuwait again started to become more distant from Iran and worry about Iran's influence over its Shia community similar to other GCC countries.⁴⁷¹ But, Kuwait still perceives that the strong relations with Iran will contribute the regional peace and stability.⁴⁷²

In short, GCC countries mainly perceive Iran as a major rival in the Gulf and Middle East region. At the same time, they perceive Iran as a threat to the security of Gulf region due to its alleged irredentism, its nuclear ambitions and its over involvement in affairs of Arab Gulf States, particularly Iraq⁴⁷³. However, there are various perceptions among smaller Gulf Countries towards Iran as a result of their economic vulnerabilities to any instability in the region as well as their trade relations with Iran. But, they still maintain good relations with US in regard to their security dependence.⁴⁷⁴ Contrary to Iran's call for regional security arrangements they tend to ask for US presence in the region as the security guarantor of them. Therefore, GCC countries despite their various

⁴⁷⁰Kenneth Katzman et al. , "Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy", pp. 15-16

⁴⁷¹Kenneth Katzman, "Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses", p. 41

⁴⁷²"Iran, Kuwait stress unity among regional countries", *PressTV*, October 23, 2014, online available at: <http://iranfrontpage.com/news/world/middle-east/2014/10/iran-kuwait-stress-unity-among-regional-countries/> , (accessed on July 12, 2015).

⁴⁷³ Hani Ahmed Al-Shboul and Mohammad Salim Al-Rawashdeh, "Iran's Foreign Policy and the Balance of Power in the Region", *Journal of Politics and Law*, Vol. 6 No. 4, (2013), pp. 205-206.

⁴⁷⁴See KayhanBarzegar, "Balance of Power in the Persian Gulf: An Iranian View", *Middle East Policy Council*, Vol. 17, No. 3, (Fall 2010), online available at: <http://www.mepec.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/balance-power-persian-gulf-iranian-view> (accessed on September 11, 2015).

views with different concerns, in general perceives Iran through the lenses of worries and skepticisms as a result of their fears to lose status in the region or within their own borders.⁴⁷⁵

Consequently, according to their point of view Iran's claim about its constructive role is not very valid or even Iran's claim regarding its Islamic responsibility to protect Muslims or Muslim unity actually perceived as a threat by the GCC countries. Moreover, such a claim of Iran about the leadership among Muslims increases the tensions and rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia which perceives itself as the "birthplace of Islam as the de facto leader of Sunni communities"⁴⁷⁶. However, the memories of GCC countries about the imperial past of Iran during Shah era, are still alive since Iran continuously repeats that it is the natural dominant power of Gulf already. Therefore, Iran's claim to have sufficient potential to be the regional dominant power seems valid from the point of view of GCC countries in the form of a kind of fear that reveals itself in their threat perception towards any attempt of Iran to raise its status in the region.

4.1.2. The Perception of Iraq towards Iran

The perception of Iraq under its Shia leadership towards Iran is quite complicated. In this regard, it is very vital that after the collapse of Saddam Hussein, while the paramilitary force of IRI, al-Quds force became very influential in Iraq,⁴⁷⁷ Iran is suggested to replace US as the most influential element in Iraqi affairs⁴⁷⁸ as Chatham

⁴⁷⁵Gawdat Bahgat, "Iran and the United States: The Emerging Security Paradigm in the Middle East", *Parameters*, (Summer 2007), p. 11-12.

⁴⁷⁶ Maximillian Terhalle, "Are the Shia Rising?", p. 80.

⁴⁷⁷"Iraq: goodbye and good luck", *Current Affairs/USA*, The Middle East (December 2011), pp. 15-16.

⁴⁷⁸Fawaz A. Gerges, *Prospects for reform?: the Iranian elections: Iran after presidential elections: international prospects*, LSE IDEAS reports- strategic updates, Kitchen, Nicholas (ed.) SU002. (UK, London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 2009), p.20.

House reports are also validated.⁴⁷⁹ However, the kind of influence Iran would exert in Iraq is concerned by all regional countries as well Iraqi authorities themselves.⁴⁸⁰ Therefore, the focus needs to be directed toward Iran's social connection with Iraq and its activities in Iraq in order to analyze Iran's goal in the country which will enable the evaluation of Iraq's perceptions towards Iran.

Thus, in regard to Iran's historical and cultural ties with Iraq,⁴⁸¹ it is important to note that there are deep and strong relationships between Iranian clerics and Iraqi clerics, many of whom are Iranian originated as well as many of the Shia population in Baghdad and also Southern Iraq are.⁴⁸² This Shia community in Iraq before ultimately came to the power, has long been suppressed during the rule of the secularist Ba'ath regime with the leadership of Saddam who banned the Ashura ceremonies during which a failed Shia uprising took place right after his defeat in the Gulf War.⁴⁸³ Moreover, the activities of Shia clerics of the country, including the most influential Shia cleric Ayatollah Sistani, strongly restricted if not resulted with assassinations of these Shia clerics.⁴⁸⁴

At that point Iran has been home to such suppressed Shia clerics as well as the opposition groups⁴⁸⁵ which is one of the most important sources of the strength of Iran-Iraq relationship in the frame of solidarity among the Shia communities of two nations. At the same time the most holy places of Shia Islam are located in Najaf, Iraq to where thousands of Iranian pilgrims flood after the collapse of Saddam Hussein as well as

⁴⁷⁹GawdatBahgat, "Iran and the United States: The Emerging Security Paradigm in the Middle East", Parameters, (Summer 2007), p.10.

⁴⁸⁰ Ephraim Kam, "Iran's Regional Status: Expanding Influence alongside Weaknesses", pp. 81-82.

⁴⁸¹Mohsen M. Milani, "Iran's Transformation from Revolutionary to Status Quo Power in the Persian Gulf", pp.8-9.

⁴⁸²Ibid.

⁴⁸³ Patrick O'Neil, "Everywhere is Karbala: Shia Ritual Politics in Iran and Beyond", (August 15, 2011), online available at: <http://ssm.com/abstract=2162217>, (accessed on July 21, 2015), p.32.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

those who were exiled by Saddam Hussein or the ones have been working for Iranian government during long years.⁴⁸⁶

While keeping in mind, the sociocultural linkages between Iraqi and Iranian nations that has deep historical roots⁴⁸⁷, Iran's practical activities in Iraq are also important to be focused in order to understand the reach of IRI over Iraq and better evaluate the perceptions of Iraqi government regarding Iran's functioning in the region. First of all, Iran in order to guarantee its presence and influence in the emerging new order of Iraq, is building strong trade relations with the country. To this end, in addition to Iran's increasing trade volume with Iraq that reached to over \$4 billion in 2009, Iran made several funding to Iraqi government that reaches to several billions dollars for building a new airport near Najaf, rebuilding Basra and repairing ancient Persian historical sites in southern part of Iraq and more.⁴⁸⁸

At the same time, it is suggested that 1500 Iranian pilgrims are traveling to holy Shia places in Iraq on a daily base means a serious amount of income for Iraq also⁴⁸⁹ since these Iranian pilgrims together with Iranian businessmen are shopping there, making investments in southern Iraq through buying hotels, restaurants, lands or other related assets.⁴⁹⁰ Moreover, Iraq is importing“electricity, refined oil products and Iranian made cars” from Iran.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁶Mohsen M. Milani, “Iran's Transformation from Revolutionary to Status Quo Power in the Persian Gulf”, p. 9.

⁴⁸⁷KayhanBarzegar, “Iran, the Middle East, and International Security”, p. 36.

⁴⁸⁸ Kenneth Katzman et al. , “Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy”, p. 20.

⁴⁸⁹Eva Patricia Rakel, “The Iranian political elite, state and society relations, and foreign relations since the Islamic revolution”, *PhD Dissertation*, Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Universiteit van Amsterdam, Amsterdam, 2008, pp. 180-181.

⁴⁹⁰“Iran: The New Claimant to Regional Power? An Interview with Vali Nasr”, *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, Vol.31, No.2, (Summer 2007), p.16.

⁴⁹¹Eva Patricia Rakel, “The Iranian political elite, state and society relations, and foreign relations since the Islamic revolution”, p. 181.

Secondly, for consolidating its power in the country, apart from economic activities, politically while Iran was pursuing the constructive role for the formation of peace and stability after Saddam under the new Shia administration by supporting the process of general elections or participating actively in all regional and international conferences on the future of Iraq⁴⁹², it at the same time secured and even strengthened its linkages with any power groups of the country including Dawa Party and SCIRI ((The Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council ,the most powerful Shia political party in Iraq) ⁴⁹³ Beside Shia parties, Iran also built linkages with militia groups in Iraq like Badr Brigade and Mahdi Army of Muqtada al-Sadr as “the most feared militias in Iraq.”⁴⁹⁴

To this end, Iran is funding and training such militia groups in Iraq since its establishment.⁴⁹⁵ However, as Vali Nasr indicated there is still not a direct patron-client relationship between those groups and IRI.⁴⁹⁶ Additionally, Iran also strengthened its ties with Kurdistan Democratic Party.⁴⁹⁷ Therefore, Iran’s strategy in Iraq centered upon not to be on the losing side in the future of Iraq. Thus, it supports all related groups in order to keep its options open while avoiding anatomization of any Iraqi actor with its high attention for the “public opinion in Iraq.”⁴⁹⁸ Thus, Iran aims to guarantee its high influence under any occasion in any part of the country.

⁴⁹²KayhanBarzegar, “Roles at Odds”, p.94.

⁴⁹³Mohsen M. Milani, “Iran’s Transformation from Revolutionary to Status Quo Power in the Persian Gulf”, p.9.

⁴⁹⁴Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ Kenneth Katzman, “Iran-Iraq Relations”, *Congressional Research Report (CSR) for Congress*, RS22323, August 13, 2010, online available at: <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS22323.pdf>, (accessed on June 4, 2015), p. 1.

⁴⁹⁶PreethiNallu, “Foreign Policy ambitions of Iran in the Levant: influences, constraints and the plausibility for cooperation”, *Master’s Thesis*, Department of International Relations, Webster University, London, May 2009, p.36.

⁴⁹⁷Mohsen M. Milani, “Iran’s Transformation from Revolutionary to Status Quo Power in the Persian Gulf”, p.9..

⁴⁹⁸Ibid.

Apart from funding and training of Shia militias in Iraq, Iran also provides some civilian help in Iraq while maintaining its trade relations with the country at the highest levels.⁴⁹⁹ At the same time Iran seeks to maintain its ideological influence in Iraq through joint educational seminars among the students and clerics of both countries.⁵⁰⁰ Therefore, in addition to its historical, social and cultural connections with Iraq, Iran is trying to be an influential part of the new order of Iraq through strengthening trade relations and supporting central authority as well as the any influential parties in Iraq through its civilian aids, as a constructive regional power.

In this regard, other regional countries perceived Iran's goal in the country as a part of its hegemonic ambitions in the Gulf and beyond. On the contrary to accusations about hegemonic drives of Iran, Iranian side suggests that their ultimate goal in Iraq just to guarantee the stability of the country and a Iranian friendly regime which is the only rational option for them while they indicating Sistani's declaration about his rejection of Velayate-faqih which makes them unable to pursue such a goal even if they would be willing to do so.⁵⁰¹

However, there is still a paradoxical relation between Iran's claim to be seeking for stabilization of Iraq and its support for various groups there since the formation of stability means at the same time less dependence of such groups to financial and military support of Iran but this means decreasing Iran's influence in the country.⁵⁰² Here, the goal is evaluating Iraqi perspectives so such debates over Iran's ambitions in Iraq are sufficient to go further about the main topic.

⁴⁹⁹ Ephraim Kam, "Iran's Regional Status: Expanding Influence alongside Weaknesses", p., 81.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid. pp., 80-81.

⁵⁰¹ Amir M. Haji-Yousefi, "Whose Agenda is Served by the idea of Shia Crescent?", p. 120.

⁵⁰² Ephraim Kam, "Iran's Regional Status: Expanding Influence alongside Weaknesses", pp., 81-82.

At this point, the limits of Iranian power which may be interpreted as strength of the indigenous authority should not be ignored. In this context, the first limitation of Iranian influence in Iraq is related to ethnical differences since Iraqi Shias is suggested to feel Iraqi or Arab first rather than Shia which is the connection point so nationalism in Iraq led Iraqis to be suspicious about the Persian cause.⁵⁰³ Hereby, the memories of the devastating war between Iran and Iraq from 1980 to 1988, make sense while securing its influence for both nations to some extent.⁵⁰⁴

At the same time the rejection of Khomeini's doctrine of Velayat-eFaqih among Iraqi clerics, particularly Ayatollah Al Sistani who supports separation of religion from politics, is another major limit for Iranian influence in Iraq⁵⁰⁵ due to lack of acceptance about Iran's spiritual role. Moreover, 80% of Shia community is believed to adhere Ayatollah Al-Sistani not which positions Sistani in a powerful position among Shia communities in terms of social and economic influence as a result of religious tax payments goes to him.⁵⁰⁶

Furthermore, the competition between Najaf and Qom is an important issue since it may limit Iranian influence over Shia communities⁵⁰⁷ due to the historical domination of Najaf and Karbala over Qom in terms of Shite discourse.⁵⁰⁸ On the other hand, it is regarded that Iraqi people are not yet to reach to a point to call Iran as their ally since they still perceive Iran as a source of sectarian conflict in their country as a poll indicated in 2007. According to this poll, 67 percent of Iraqis still perceive Iran as not a constructive force in their country.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰³ Kenneth Katzman et al. , "Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy", p. 20.

⁵⁰⁴ Mohsen M. Milani, "Iran's Transformation from Revolutionary to Status Quo Power in the Persian Gulf", p.1.

⁵⁰⁵ Imad Mansour, "Iran and Instability in the Middle East: How preferences Influence the Regional Order", *International Journal*, Vol.63, No.4, (Autumun 2008), p.954.

⁵⁰⁶ Maximillian Terhalle, "Are the Shia Rising?", *Middle East Policy*, Vol.14, No.2, (Summer 2007), p. 78.

⁵⁰⁷ Kenneth Katzman et al. , "Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy", p. 20.

⁵⁰⁸ Frederic M. Wehreyet. al, *Dangerous but Not Omnipotent*, p. 110-11.

While, some officials of Iraq declared their concern about terrorism related activities of Iran in their country as well as in the whole region whereas some others also declared that Iran is seeking to export its revolution into Iraq and whole Arab world since 1979,⁵¹⁰ the new government in Iraq also inclined towards Iran through accusing Saddam regime about the chemical weapons that it used against Iran during Iran-Iraq war.⁵¹¹ Moreover, regarding nuclear activities of Iran, Iraqi side supported such activities while stressing their belief about the peaceful nature of such activities.⁵¹² Thus, the new government in Iraq is suggested as holding its independency from Iran while indirectly serving Iranian interest in the region as it inevitably became a pro-Iranian government.⁵¹³

Through evaluating Iran's activities in the country in order to understand its function in Iraq and keeping in mind that Iran was the biggest enemy of Iraq before that led the eight years of war between two country and at the same time it see Iran as the biggest rival in Gulf for years, the perception of Iraqi government towards Iran's role in the country may be suggested as threatening to some extent due to Iran's support for all groups which results in further destabilization there, but at the same time supportive due to its financial and to some extent political backing of the government, apart from their identities' commonalities and differences. Nevertheless, Iraq is actually and inevitably skeptical towards Iran's role.

⁵⁰⁹Pat Proctor, "The Mythical Shia Crescent", *Parameters*, (Spring 2008), pp.34.

⁵¹⁰ "Iran Defence & Security Report: Include 5-Year Forecasts to 2017", *BMI Industry Report & Forecasts Series*, (Business Monitor International, 2013), p.53.

⁵¹¹ Kenneth Katzman et al. , "Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy", p. 18.

⁵¹² Ibid.

⁵¹³ Ibid.

4.2. The Perceptions of the Countries in Levant towards Iran's Regional Role

4.2.1. The Perception of Israel towards Iran

Actually it is not hard to evaluate Israel's perception of Iran which is at the first sight; an existential threat that needed to be isolated. Especially after Ahmadinejad who had denied the holocaust, Israel's anxiety toward IRI evoked which led to the strengthening of sanctions towards Iran.⁵¹⁴ However, in order to reach more comprehensive point of view about Israel's perceptions towards Iran's role in the region, it is necessary to focus on the perceptions of both parties towards each other.

Initially, Iran has never recognized Israel officially⁵¹⁵ and at the same time Iran is the only state that reject two-state solution of Arab-Israeli dispute which is interpreted by US as a strategic rejection of IRI in order to reach deterrence capacity through exerting influence over anti-Israeli groups with a leadership attitude.⁵¹⁶ However, Iran perceives Israel's expansionism as the biggest obstacle for reaching any kind of solution about the Palestinians issue.⁵¹⁷ In this context, Ayatollah Khamenei similar to his predecessor Ayatollah Khomeini calls Israel as a "cancerous tumor",⁵¹⁸.

Thus, according to Iran's perspective Israel was created by West in the Middle East as an instrument of US in order to achieve and guarantee its long term hegemonic plans in

⁵¹⁴ John C. Shenna, "The Case against the Case against Iran: Regionalism as the West's Last Frontier", p. 360.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ Mahmood Sariolghalam, "Understanding Iran: Getting Past Stereotypes and Mythology", p. 71. ; In this regard "strategic competition" evaluation of TritaParsi through Power Cycle Theory of Charles Doran provides a similar understanding , see TritaParsi, "Israeli-Iranian relations assessed: Strategic competition from the power cycle perspective" in HomaKatouzian and Hossein Shahidi (eds.), *Iran in the 21st Century: Politics, Economics and Conflicts*, (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 136-157.

⁵¹⁷ "Iran's Security Interests and Concerns", Center for Strategic Research, March, 2007, online available at: <http://www.csr.ir/departments.aspx?lng=en&abtId=07&&depId=106&semId=659>, dilek

⁵¹⁸ Ali Akbar Dareini, "Ayatollah Ali Khamenei: Obama On 'Same Wrong Path' As Bush", *The Huffington Post*, May 25, 2011, online available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/03/04/ayatollah-ali-khamenei-ob_n_171737.html, (accessed on June 12, 2015).

the region.⁵¹⁹ Similarly, President Ahmadinejad stated that: ‘the establishment of the ‘fake’ Zionist regime was masterminded by Western states a hundred years ago with the aim of gaining domination over the sensitive Middle East region, the heart of the world of Islam.’⁵²⁰ At the same time there is a strong belief among IRI leaders that the occupation of Palestine will soon come to an end.⁵²¹ In this relation, President Ahmadinejad described Israel as “a dried, rotten tree that will collapse with a single storm”.⁵²²

Therefore, it is claimed that Iran is pursuing a policy of “attrition until implosion,” means Iran aims at bringing forward numerous challenges against Israel in order to make Israelis too much fed up with those conditions that they will prefer to leave the region.⁵²³ However, Trita Parsi explains that according to Ray Takeyh such an approach of Iran towards Israel is only a survival tactic which “drive from a self-defeating ideological calculus”⁵²⁴ In this sense, for example Trita Parsi points the weapon purchases of IRI from Israel during Iran-Iraq war⁵²⁵ when the time Iran felt “lonely in a dangerous neighborhood”.

Moreover, Israel still remembers the “cancerous tumor” definition of Khomeini that is repeated by Supreme Leader Khamenei,⁵²⁶ so still feel the existential threat from IRI,

⁵¹⁹ See Mahdi Ahooue, “Developments of Iranian Political Discourse on Israel: From Past to Present”, pp. 65-82.

⁵²⁰ Diane Bos, “Identity in Speech: An Analysis of Ahmadinejad’s words”, p. 11.

⁵²¹ Simon Maboon, Saudi Arabia dilek

⁵²² Elihu D. Richter and Alex Barnea, “Tehran’s Genocidal Incitement against Israel”, *The Middle East Quarterly*, Vol.16, No.3, (Summer 2009), p., 48.

⁵²³ Emanuel Adler, “The House is on Fire: NATO’s Regional Security Dialogue and Iran’s Power Projection”, *Strategic Assessment*, Vol. 11, No. 3, (January 2009), pp., 46-47.

⁵²⁴ Trita Parsi, “Israeli-Iranian relations assessed: Strategic competition from the power cycle perspective” in Homa Katouzian and Hossein Shahidi (eds.), *Iran in the 21st Century: Politics, Economics and Conflicts*, (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 137.

⁵²⁵ “Country Studies-Iran: Relations with Regional Powers”, *U.S. Library of Congress*, online available at: <http://countrystudies.us/iran/103.htm>

⁵²⁶ Shimon Shapira and Daniel Diker, “Iran’s ‘Second’ Islamic Revolution”, pp., 44-61.

while defining it as a “fatal menace”⁵²⁷ and at the same time the decision makers of Israel perceives Iran as the only country that is capable to pose a military threat for Israel ⁵²⁸since its military domination in the region for the first time challenged by a country through its proxies.⁵²⁹Therefore, Israel believes that Iran is trying to eliminate Israel’s military domination in the region first, if not eliminate it as a whole.⁵³⁰

In this context, especially Iran’s rising presence and influence in Iraq during post-2003 process perceived as the main threat by Israel.⁵³¹ In this sense, Trita Parsi indicates the statement of Shimon Peres in 1993 when he suggested that defeat of Iraq by US in Gulf War has made Iran a strategic superpower while claiming Iran is “insane” that is determined to destroy Israel.⁵³² Therefore, Israeli officials believe that a nuclear Iran is an existential threat for not only Israel but also for whole region so the primary goal of Israel is to give an end the nuclear activities of Iran.⁵³³ Here, according to Gawdat Bahgat Israel’s approach to Iran’s nuclear activities seems consistent with Bernard Lewis’s explanation about the main factor that differentiates Iran from others who have nuclear weapons: “the apocalyptic worldview of Iran’s present rulers”⁵³⁴.

According to Israel, IRI is the main obstacle for the success of peace process. In this regard, Netanyahu is sure that Hamas is totally a tool of Iran.⁵³⁵ At the same time, Israelis believe that Iran’s strategy to enhance its influence over the Shia communities in

⁵²⁷ Muhammed Saleem Mazhar and Naheed S. Goraya, “Geneva Deal: Beginning of a New Era between Iran-US Relations”, *A Research Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol.29, No.1, pp.83.

⁵²⁸ Trita Parsi, “Israeli-Iranian relations assessed”, p.137.

⁵²⁹ Gawdat Bahgat, “Iran and the United States”, pp. 13-16.

⁵³⁰ Robert Lowe and Claire Spencer, “*Iran, Its Neighbors, and The Regional Crises*”, Chatham House, A Middle East Programme Report, (London: Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2006), pp. 29-31.

⁵³¹ Trita Parsi, “Israeli-Iranian relations assessed”, p.145-146.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁵³³ Kenneth Katzman et al. , “Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy”, p. 40.

⁵³⁴ Gawdat Bahgat, “Iran and the United States: The Emerging Security Paradigm in the Middle East””, p. 15.

⁵³⁵ Kenneth Katzman et al. , “Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy”, p. 41.

the region is motivated by the desire to become an imperialistic hegemon.⁵³⁶ Therefore, according to them Iran should be isolated forever.⁵³⁷

Different from these explanations of the perception of Israel towards Iran, TritaParsi suggests that Israel, through the same rationale with Iran, is utilizing Radical Islamism threat as a reason for continuing close relations with US which according to them started to cool after the end of Cold War so its perception of threat towards Iran is suggested an ideological self-defense mechanism not very serious that is directed to maintain its privileged status in the region.⁵³⁸ In other words, according to the explanation of TritaParsi about the relationship between Iran and Israel in accordance with Charles Doran's "power cycle theory", Iran and Israel actually became rivals after 1993 due to their competition for the same relative power share.⁵³⁹

Thus, TritaParsi suggests that according to Peres's vision of "New Middle East" Iran's isolation and threat perception is necessary since Iran's aggressiveness leads Israel more close to Arab neighbors that bring peace treaties which enable Israel to achieve full recognition so that Israel could become the "economic engine of the middle east" which will make it prosperous and dominant power in the region as well as regain its strategic importance in the eyes of US which it lost after the end of cold war.⁵⁴⁰ Therefore, he emphasize Israel is not serious about its perception of threat towards Iran.

Moreover, TritaParsi claimed that IRI officials secretly met with American counterparts for reaching a deal for the post-Saddam era in which they might acknowledge Israel, since IRI does not need to isolate Israel in order to reach its regional role perceptions but Israel does so it is Israel that make the situation difficult not Iran or it is Israel to make

⁵³⁶Rusty Trevino, "Is Iran an Offensives Realist or a Defensive Realist? : A theoretical Reflection on Iranian Motives for Creating Instability", p. 384.

⁵³⁷Muhammed SaleemMazhar and Naheed S. Goraya, "Geneva Deal: Beginning of a New Era between Iran-US Relations", *A Research Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol.29, No.1, p. 84.

⁵³⁸ See TritaParsi, "Israeli-Iranian relations assessed", p.146.

⁵³⁹Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰Ibid., 146-149.

the region keep chaotic due to its own interest.⁵⁴¹ In the same vein, it is suggested that Israel actually feels threatened from the risk of Iran's transformation to a regional hegemon so that it is utilizing the existential threat perception towards Iran in order to prevent such a transformation of Iran, in accordance with its strategical and economic worries⁵⁴²

As a conclusion, Israel recognizes Iran's perception regarding its potential to be dominant power which is apparent in its threat perception regardless of the strategical calculations but obviously does not accept the role model claim of Iran which is inherently contradictory to its identity. Lastly about Iran's claim of being a constructive regional power, Israel is totally disagree since as explained above according to Israeli perspective Iran is the biggest source of conflict in the region.

4.2.2. The Perception of Syria towards Iran

Apart from above mentioned countries, Syria is the sole ally of IRI since almost the foundation of the Islamic Republic. However, this alliance is totally strategic for both side due their deep differences in their worldviews as secular and Islamic but this does not change the fact that this alliance is still enduring today due to both parties' lacking of alternatives maybe or their deep common strategic interests. Therefore, at the first sight, it may be claimed that Syria does not perceive Iran as a threat.

Actually, the alliance between two states originated from rivalry of Baathist Syria to the other Baathist regime in Iraq controlled by Saddam Hussein who is the biggest enemy of Iran also so both countries in respect to their common strategic interest aligned with

⁵⁴¹Ibid., 153-154.

⁵⁴²Stella Saliari, "Ahmadinejad's visit to Lebanon: The Power of Fears and Hopes", Center for Mediterranean, Middle East and Islamic Studies, University of Peloponnese, November 28, 2010, http://cemmis.edu.gr/images/policy_papers/ahmadinejad_visit_to_lebanon.pdf, (accessed on October 14, 2015), pp.4.

each other⁵⁴³. Moreover, Syrian backing of Iran during the Iran-Iraq war as the only country in the region is seen very adorable and unforgettable from Iranian side.⁵⁴⁴

Their political and economic alliance officially began in 1982, when Iran helped Hafiz al-Assad for suppressing the rebellion of the Muslim Brotherhood who were struggling against the secularizing attempts of Assad.⁵⁴⁵ However, such an action of Iran against Muslim Brotherhood is considered as paradoxical to the Islamic nature of Iranian regime since Muslim Brotherhood is said to be inspired by Iranian Revolution in its rebellion against Assad regime.⁵⁴⁶ Therefore, Syria supported Iran against Iraq through sending Soviet-made weaponry equipment to Iran during Iran-Iraq War.⁵⁴⁷ Actually, the military cooperation between two countries still continues. Although such relationship is now reversed to a great extent in terms of who provides weapons to who but the external source is still same.

However, there are also some sources of tension between two countries which include their competition for controlling Lebanese affairs and Syrian tendency to sacrifice Palestinian cause for the sake of territorial gains through sitting the negotiation table with Israel during 1990s.⁵⁴⁸ Actually, such a negotiation attempt took place when Syria participated the US-backed Annapolis peace conference for reaching some agreements with Israel in 2007. In this respect, Iran's Supreme Leader strictly urged Syria to consider the consequences of such a peace in terms of its relations with Iran.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴³ Christopher Hobbs and Matthew Moran, "Looking Beyond a Nuclear-Armed Iran: Is Regional Proliferation Inevitable?", *The International Spectator: Italian Journal of Foreign Affairs*, Vol.47, No.4, (2012), pp.138-139.

⁵⁴⁴ Pat Proctor, "The Mythical Shia Crescent", *Parameters*, p.31.

⁵⁴⁵ "Iran: Relations with Regional Powers", *U.S. Library of Congress*, online available at: <http://countrystudies.us/iran/103.htm>.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁸ Christopher Hobbs and Matthew Moran, "Looking Beyond a Nuclear-Armed Iran:", p. 139.

⁵⁴⁹ Kenneth Katzman et al. , "Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy", pp. 31-32.

At the same time it is indicated that it is Israel that binds Iran, Syria and Hezbollah together while an occasional lacking of such a common enemy actually Syria would perceive Hezbollah as a direct threat to its interest in Lebanon in terms of controlling the country.⁵⁵⁰ Therefore the alliance is perceived by some as only strategic and not strong as much as it is seen instead vulnerable.

Although such tensions that originated from their ideological and practical differences their alliance surprisingly endured. The reason of this is first of all their common opposition to Israel and US which they perceive as a military threat.⁵⁵¹ In this regard it is suggested that Syria and Iran are the only remaining two regimes in the region that still continue to criticize oil-related policies of US by accusing US for solely looking for its own interest and the aggressive policies of Israel.⁵⁵² In regard to their opposition to Israel, from Syrian point of view this is actually stemming from its "Greater Syria" understanding, according to which Syria saw Lebanon, Jordan, Israeli and Palestinian territories are all belong to "greater Syria"⁵⁵³

Regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict, both countries define their position as an "axis of resistance" and together with the increasing influence of their anti-Israeli proxy groups, Hamas and Hezbollah their alliance also strengthens.⁵⁵⁴ In this context, it is suggested that the alliance between Syria and Iran is rooted in strong common geopolitical interests that cause strong linkages among them which is hard to be broken.⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid. , p.32.

⁵⁵¹ Christopher Hobbs and Matthew Moran, "Looking Beyond a Nuclear-Armed Iran:", p. 139.

⁵⁵² Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Raymond Hinnebusch, *Syria and Iran: Middle Powers in a Penetrated Regional System*, (London: Routledge, 1997), p.206.

⁵⁵³ Abbas William Samii, "A Stable Structure on Shifting Sands: Assessing the Hizbullah-Iran-Syria Relationship, *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 62, No. 1, (Winter 2008), pp.38.

⁵⁵⁴ Kenneth Katzman et al. , "Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy", p. 30.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

Here, it is important to emphasize that Iranian material support to Hezbollah goes through Syrian territories due so Syria is also crucial for Iran in terms of its geographical positioning.⁵⁵⁶ However, the Hezbollah's victory is not a main goal for Syria; its regional policy is rather framed by the vision of "Greater Syria".⁵⁵⁷ Therefore, as it is mentioned above Hezbollah is inherently a threat and rival for Syria regarding its goal of ensuring control over Lebanon. At the same time in the frame of Shia-Crescent, their common religious identity also important for the strength of their alliance despite the secular regime of Syria.⁵⁵⁸

Additionally, Syrian regime's acknowledgement of Iranian nuclear activities as a lawful right of Iran also strengthened the relationship between two countries.⁵⁵⁹ This is because Syrian regime does not feel threatened by nuclearized Iran as the other countries do due to their strong alliance as a result of common interests and Syrian perception of a nuclearized Iran as a counterweight towards Israeli aggression and excessive military presence of US in the region⁵⁶⁰ At the same time Iran also supported Syrian acquisition of WMD and missile technology from North Korea through its attempt to play a mediator role between Syria and North Korea in this regard.⁵⁶¹

Most recently, the strength of such an alliance is seen in Iran's military assistance to Assad regime for the still ongoing Syrian crisis.⁵⁶² Actually Iran's strong and direct support of Assad is seen as its desire not to lose its only aligned country in the region

⁵⁵⁶Kenneth Katzman, "Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses", *Congressional Research Report (CSR) for Congress*, RL32048, March 4, 2011, online available at: http://informationiran911case.com/Exhibit_35.pdf (accessed August 12, 2015), p. 44.

⁵⁵⁷Abbas William Samii, "A Stable Structure on Shifting Sands: Assessing the Hizbullah-Iran-Syria Relationship", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 62, No.1, (Winter 2008), p. 38.

⁵⁵⁸Pat Proctor, "The Mythical Shia Crescent", p. 31.

⁵⁵⁹Christopher Hobbs and Matthew Moran, "Looking Beyond a Nuclear-Armed Iran", p. 139.

⁵⁶⁰Ibid.

⁵⁶¹Kenneth Katzman, "Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses", p. 44.

⁵⁶²Christopher Hobbs and Matthew Moran, "Looking Beyond a Nuclear-Armed Iran", p. 139.

since after Assad the new picture most probably will be so risky for Iran.⁵⁶³ In this regard, Ahmadinejad clearly declared its position by stating, “the security of Syria is the security of Iran.”⁵⁶⁴ In other words, the support of Iran for Assad regime is considered as a fear of Iran for the emergence of a pro-US Syrian regime which will lead to further US presence in the region as well as a further isolated Iran.⁵⁶⁵

Therefore, it seems that the crisis in Syria causes to further strengthening of alliance between two countries while leading to increase of Syria’s dependency to Iranian economic, military and technical support so Syria is still the main strategic ally of IRI in the region.⁵⁶⁶ In this regard some claim that eventually Iran will cut off its support for Syrian regime in return for increasing its chance to gain a higher status in global level through a rapprochement with US.⁵⁶⁷ Actually this is a short-sighted and already falsified estimate. Therefore Syria perceives Iran as the only supporter in the region and of course believes in its potential to be a dominant regional power which is totally preferable for it.

However at the same time regarding Lebanon case, even Syria is sceptic to Tehran who may be an obstacle for Syria in the longer term for its vision of greater Syria. Actually, such an explanation not very valid after Syrian crisis which makes Assad totally focus on its own survival so Iran rather than a threat is a supporter and friendly regime for Assad if he is still representing Syria. At that point the position of Hezbollah in Lebanon and in the region gains much importance in terms of its ties with Iran and Syria as a

⁵⁶³Ibid., 139-140. (burayaekleiranikaybetnakistememsi)

⁵⁶⁴Feisal Abukshiem, “The Iranian Government’s Ambitions Represented in Their Nuclear Weapons Program and Its Impact on Security in the Arab Gulf Region” *Master’s Thesis*, US Army Command and General Staff College, Kansas, 2012, p.74.

⁵⁶⁵ Christopher Hobbs and Matthew Moran, “Looking Beyond a Nuclear-Armed Iran”, p. 140.

⁵⁶⁶Oleg Kuznetsov, “Political Influence of Iran in the Middle East after 2003”, *Bachelor’s Thesis*, Department of International Relations and European Studies, Masaryk University, Brno, 2012, p.43.

⁵⁶⁷Feisal Abukshiem, “The Iranian Government’s Ambitions Represented in Their Nuclear Weapons Program and Its Impact on Security in the Arab Gulf Region”, p. 74.

Lebanese political party and Shia opposition group. Therefore, Lebanese perception towards Iran is needed to be evaluated through Hezbollah's ties with Iran and the reflection towards this tie by the other segments of Lebanese politics.

4.2.3. The Perception of Lebanon towards Iran

The Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 and particularly Syria's withdrawal from the country in 2005 seen as a turning point in terms of Iran's incredibly increasing influence in the country.⁵⁶⁸ In other words, the power vacuum that is left behind after Syrian withdrawal from country is filled by Iran through Hezbollah. Actually such increased role of Iran in Lebanon which was parallel to its rising influence in Iraq first disturbs Syrian as mentioned above but at the same time such a situation is perceived as threatening by Saudi Arabia as well. Thus Saudis through their support to Sunni factions increased the intensity of their competition with Iran over Lebanon.⁵⁶⁹

Moreover, Iran started to become more willing to exert its influence over whole country not only South Lebanon, so that Hezbollah's position in Lebanese affairs will be strengthened at the same time, in this regard Iran declared its readiness to support also the armed forces in Lebanon other than Hezbollah.⁵⁷⁰ Actually such statements and projections disturb Syria intensely since it threatens the main vision of Syria over Lebanon, so Syria became more sceptics about Iran's role in Lebanon.

However, this increased role of Iran in Lebanon is not only disturbing for Syria but it is also highly criticized by several factions in Lebanese politics, especially after the 2006 victory of Hezbollah against Israel that destroyed the southern part especially but had a lot of negative influences for all segments in terms of living standards. Here, it is

⁵⁶⁸ Kenneth Katzman et al. , "Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy", p. 33

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 5

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid. 34.

important to note that apart from direct presence of al-Quds force in Lebanon and the military support of IRI during war with Israel, according to some sources it is claimed that Supreme Leader Khamenei sent 2500 suicide bombers to Lebanon by Khamenei.⁵⁷¹ Therefore, 2006 was admired on the one hand at the first instance but later it became a source of criticism for Hezbollah because of its dependent relationship with Iran. Moreover, the success of Hezbollah in domestic politics of Lebanon in 2008 is interpreted as Iran is gaining further influence in Lebanese politics and led to criticisms that Hezbollah represented Iran's interests, as the representor of Iran it is seeking for implementing the Iranian agenda first rather than seeking Lebanon's interests.⁵⁷² Therefore, such increasing criticisms led Hezbollah to worry about its prestige in the country and legacy in domestic politics of Lebanon.

Consequently, Hezbollah started to declare contradictory statements about its relationship with Iran since 2005. The following statement from Hezbollah Deputy Secretary General Na'im Qassem demonstrates such contradictory explanations of Hezbollah who does not want to lose its legacy in domestic politics. Thus Hezbollah tries to portray its relationship with Iran not a patron-client relationship but at the same time, it also tries to secure its image for Iranian side as a loyal body. Thus Na'im Qassem in 2005 stated: "Hezbollah maintained substantial independence at the practical level - There is no connection between the internal administration of the Iranian state and Hezbollah's administration. These are two separate issues, each having its own particularities and bodies of administration, despite the commitment of both to the commands and directions of the Jurist-Theologian"⁵⁷³

In March 2007, he stated: "Hezbollah requires permission for operations from Iran's supreme leadership."⁵⁷⁴ However, in September 2007, deputy Secretary of Hezbollah

⁵⁷¹Shimon Shapira and Daniel Diker, "Iran's 'Second' Islamic Revolution", p., 50.

⁵⁷²Preethi Nallu, "Foreign Policy ambitions of Iran in the Levant: influences, constraints and the plausibility for cooperation", p. 9.

⁵⁷³Rola El Husseini, "Hezbollah and the Axis of Refusal: Hamas, Iran and Syria", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 5, (2010), p. 810.

⁵⁷⁴Shimon Shapira and Daniel Diker, "Iran's 'Second' Islamic Revolution", p., 50.

Qassem stated: “The state that comes under attack is responsible for responding to the attack and defending itself”⁵⁷⁵ as an answer to the question about the possible reaction of Hezbollah to an attack on Syria or Iran. Therefore it is hard to make any suggestions about the exact position of Hezbollah vis a vis Iran. However, it is important to point that Hezbollah started to gain much more strength after Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon in 2000.⁵⁷⁶ The rhetoric of Hezbollah is mainly shaped by the sentiments that call for Arab unity, elimination of Israel as well as the change of leadership among Arabs and at the same time it cooperates with Hamas in the context of its support to Palestinian cause.⁵⁷⁷

Additionally, 2010 visit of Ahmadinejad was a clear sign of strict ties between Hezbollah and Iran as it is revealed in Hassan Nasrallah description of Iran as “the biggest source of solidarity” in the Islamic World” during Ahmadinejad’s visit in 2010.⁵⁷⁸ Here, it is important to note that IRI paid incredible amount of money for the rebuilding of the country after the war with Israel⁵⁷⁹ that is regarded by the people as an admirable support from a friendly country who supported them more than the central government, so Iran’s image as a regional power has grown⁵⁸⁰ At the same time Ahmadinejad’s visit in 2010 was a state-to-state visit from Iran to Lebanon, not from Iran to Hezbollah only, which brought extra hundreds of millions dollar to Lebanon for reconstruction and other several needs. Therefore, Syria felt even more threatened to lose its future status in the country so visited the country together with Saudi king in order to give a message to Iran about its alternative options.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁵Abbas William Samii, “A Stable Structure on Shifting Sands”, p.53.

⁵⁷⁶Ibid., p.43.

⁵⁷⁷Graham E. Fuller, “The Hizballah-Iran Connection: Model for Sunni Resistance”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol.30, No.1, (Winter 2006-07), pp.147.

⁵⁷⁸Stella Saliari, “Ahmadinejad’s visit to Lebanon: The Power of Fears and Hopes”, p.4.

⁵⁷⁹Kim Ghattas, “Regional powers fight over Lebanon”, *BBC News*, April 27, 2007, online available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6595909.stm, (accessed on August 21, 2015).

⁵⁸⁰Stella Saliari, “Ahmadinejad’s visit to Lebanon: The Power of Fears and Hopes”, p.4.

⁵⁸¹Ibid., pp. 6-7.

At the same time, this same visit is regarded by some others as a sign of shifting position of Lebanon as a whole towards Iran while distancing itself to US's position.⁵⁸² Here the speaker of the Parliament of Lebanon, Beriri's welcoming speech of Ahmadinejad is important to show growing centrality of Iran in Lebanese politics;

Prior to landing of your plane, I said this visit is very important with respect to friends, but it gained more importance thanks to our enemies, for the enemy sometimes serves more than a friend ... Thank God for your safety. Lebanon, all Lebanon, especially the South is longing to see you⁵⁸³.

However, the same 2010 visit of Ahmadinejad was still regarded as if "a high commander visiting his frontline" by 250 Lebanese politicians and the leader of the Christian faction Samir Gaegae as they accused Iran for meddling too much to the internal affairs of Lebanon.⁵⁸⁴

Therefore, some stresses that Hezbollah was not came into existence in order to pursue Iran's agenda so despite the close links it is not the client of Iranian patron.⁵⁸⁵ However, this does not change the centrality of Iran in Lebanese politics through its deep ties with Hezbollah.⁵⁸⁶ In this regard 2010 Prime Minister of Lebanon, Said Hariri's visit to Iran is considered as an attempt of him to prove that he is not a spoiler for the relationship between Iran and Hezbollah as well as their regional agendas.⁵⁸⁷ Actually, this attempt was not sufficient to prevent Hezbollah's withdrawal from Lebanese Cabinet in order to

⁵⁸² Matthew Cassel, "Ahmadinejad in Lebanon: shifting regional power balance", *The Electronic Intifada*, October 21, 2010, online available at: <https://electronicintifada.net/content/ahmedinejad-lebanon-shifting-regional-power-balance/9079>, (accessed on July 20, 2015).

⁵⁸³ Stella Saliari, "Ahmadinejad's visit to Lebanon: The Power of Fears and Hopes", p.2.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵⁸⁵ Graham E. Fuller, "The Hizballah-Iran Connection: Model for Sunni Resistance", *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 1, (Winter 2006-2007), pp. 143.

⁵⁸⁶ See Patrick O'Neil, "Everywhere is Karbala", p. 14.

⁵⁸⁷ Kenneth Katzman, "Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses", p. 43.

cause the fall of Hariri government and replacement him with NajibMiqatiwho was the preference of Hezbollah.⁵⁸⁸ Actually this demonstrates the intensity of Iran’s influence through Hezbollah over the Lebanese politics.

In addition to that, although there are increasing statements that claims Hezbollah became more independent from Iran in term of economic and operational activities, this does not change the fact that the Shia community in Lebanon has strong cultural, political and intellectual strong ties with Iran for centuries and Iran has a strong drive to pursue its strong support for Hezbollah as a counter response of its loneliness in a dangerous neighborhood so the alliance between them seems so hard to be broken.⁵⁸⁹ Moreover, the Lebanese government declared that Iran has the right to develop peaceful nuclear energy as they did not officially state any concern about Iran’s nuclear activities as a threat to the region or the country, yet there are some concerns about the spreading impact of such activities through Iran to Hezbollah which will have devastating effect for regional stability which will make Lebanon again a “theater of regional conflict”.⁵⁹⁰

As a conclusion, in accordance with confessional system in Lebanon there are quite various perceptions regarding Iran’s role or profile in the region. Actually, 25 years of civil war till 2000 that took place in the country and only in 2005 with the Syrian withdrawal the ending of a foreign occupation in the country makes their perceptions even more complicated and sceptic but it can be assumed that Lebanon to some extent perceives Iran as a threat to its domestic affairs, but at the same time they see IRI as a loyal supporter in case of emergency. At the same time, particularly Hezbollah perceives Iran as a role model but to some extent and at the same time perceive Iran as a strong regional power if not already a regional dominant power. Hezbollah still has worries about securing its independence from Iranian politics in general. Therefore, Lebanon as

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁹HadiSemati, “Rising Power”, pp. 14-15.

⁵⁹⁰ Kenneth Katzman et al. , “Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy”, p. 34.

a whole is sceptic towards Iran's intentions and its outreach in their country or in their organization as far as Hezbollah is concerned.

4.2.4. The Perception of Palestine towards Iran

In the case of Palestine, the perceptions toward Iran are actually divided between Hamas's and Fatah's point of view, since these two groups are struggling for influence in Palestine while the former was not recognized by international community despite its 2006 electoral victory due to its rejection of acknowledging Israel's right to exist and giving an end to violence which is contrary to the efforts of peace talks between Palestine and Israel and is controlling Gaza Strip, the latter is controlling West Bank with the backing of international community.⁵⁹¹

In this respect, the non-recognition of Hamas led it to turn increasingly towards Iran due to its financial and political hardships in the face of Israel's closures, which made it hard for Hamas to govern the Gaza strip. However, such a turn toward Iran does not mean that Hamas became a proxy of Iran, instead Hamas leaders are suggested as being well aware of this risk so, they secured their distance from Iran, although it does not change the fact that Iran's influence in Gaza certainly increased with Hamas's control over Gaza after 2006.⁵⁹² At this point, it is suggested that Hamas is aware the importance of keeping its distance towards Iran in order to avoid to lose its status among Sunni communities.⁵⁹³

In addition to this awareness for securing their independence they also have sufficient alternative resources also, those include funds from Saudis and several other Muslim

⁵⁹¹Frederic M. Wehreyet. al, *Dangerous but Not Omnipotent*, pp. ,124-128.

⁵⁹²Ibid.

⁵⁹³Kenneth Katzman et al. ,“Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy”, p. 36.

countries.⁵⁹⁴ Although Hamas has such alternative financial sources, Khaled Meshaal still stated: “Other Arab and Islamic states also support us ... but the Iranian backing is in the lead, and therefore we highly appreciate and thank Iran for this.” in 2009.⁵⁹⁵ Actually such statements from Hamas and their inclination towards Iran is regarded as an attempt of Hamas to utilize Iran as a regional leverage to make other Arab states fear of its increasing influence in the Arab-Israeli conflict, it is because of this, that these Arab states are believed to provide more financial support to Hamas while decreasing their support to peace process through PLO. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia and Iran through financial support claimed to have used Hamas in order to reach leadership status while gaining credibility and respect among the Muslims.

However, Hamas is claimed to secure its independency from such supporters including Hezbollah and many others while focusing on its own struggle for independence.⁵⁹⁶ The ultimate goal of such a struggle is claimed as liberating Palestine and turning into a totally political organization through disarmament, thus Hamas leaders emphasize that “resistance is not an end in itself”.⁵⁹⁷ In this respect, although the leaders of Hamas emphasize their independence vis a vis Iran they at the same time stress the strength of their relationship with Iran. For example, Osama Hamdan while explaining the relations of Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran as based on salvation of Palestinians from the oppression of Israel, he stated that: “the enemy Israel is the same enemy and the tactics of contending with it are the same tactics and therefore we are working to exchange expertise. There is on-the-ground cooperation and coordination.” - “the relations with Iran are better than what people are prepared to believe and with Hezbollah, much better than what the enemy hopes and believes.”⁵⁹⁸ (However, such a teamwork kind of

⁵⁹⁴Oleg Kuznetsov, “Political Influence of Iran in the Middle East after 2003”, p. 29.

⁵⁹⁵Kenneth Katzman et al. ,“Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy”, p. 37.

⁵⁹⁶Frederic M. Wehreyet. al, *Dangerous but Not Omnipotent*, pp. , 158-159.

⁵⁹⁷PreethiNallu, “Foreign Policy ambitions of Iran in the Levant”, p. 46.

⁵⁹⁸Michael Segall, “Iran: The Regional Power behind the Hamas War Effort”, *Jerusalem Issue Briefs*, Vol. 14, No.23, (July 15, 2014), online available at: <http://jcpa.org/article/iran-the-regional-power-behind-the-hamas-war-effort/>, (accessed on August 5, 2015)

alliance as Hamdan defined started to change since the Syrian crisis.⁵⁹⁹ Before the crisis headquarter of Hamas was located in Damascus but after it is moved to Doha as a result of crisis in Syria.)

Hereby, there are some criticisms against Iran's Palestinian policy since Iran is regarded as seeking to enhance its position in Gaza strip through its support to Hamas and ultimately disturb any peace process between Palestinians and Israelis while become the most influential actor in Palestine.⁶⁰⁰ At the same time there are some interpretations of Iran's support of Hamas as provoking civil war among Palestinians and directed against the unification of Palestinians and Israelis.⁶⁰¹ Therefore, there is a tendency to regard Hamas as the same with Hezbollah in terms of its proxy relationship with Iran but such assumptions suggested as not accurate, even Hezbollah's position as a proxy is debatable as mentioned above. This is because Hamas was not built by Iran and has not intimate connections with Iran as in the case of Hezbollah whose cultural, religious and social connections with Iran rooted in long centuries.⁶⁰²

In addition to Hamas, Iran is exerting its influence over Palestine, through Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ). This is also regarded another strong relationship of Iran in Palestine but the dependency of PIJ on Iran is higher due to its not being a mass organization like Hamas but PIJ still has sufficient resource to destabilize the Gaza Strip⁶⁰³ Actually it is suggested that PIJ was always closer Iran than Hamas which always tries to secure its distance from Iran but since 2007 this situation changed because of the hardships of Hamas for realizing its responsibilities towards the population who elected them , in the face of its international boycotting campaign which make Hamas in need of financial

⁵⁹⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰⁰ Ephraim Kam, "Iran's Regional Status: Expanding Influence alongside Weaknesses", p., 86.

⁶⁰¹Frederic M. Wehreyet. al, *Dangerous but Not Omnipotent*, p. 140.

⁶⁰² Ephraim Kam, "Iran's Regional Status: Expanding Influence alongside Weaknesses", pp., 85-86.

⁶⁰³Oleg Kuznetsov, "Political Influence of Iran in the Middle East after 2003", P.29.

and operational support which Iran is providing either directly or through Hezbollah more than any of the other regional actors.⁶⁰⁴ Therefore, it is suggested that Iran is utilizing PIJ as the transferor of its military and economic as well as ideational support of Hamas.⁶⁰⁵

On the other hand, the President of Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas is totally against Iranian meddling in Palestinian politics due to above all he perceive Iran as the spoiler of the peace process between Israel and Palestinians.⁶⁰⁶ Therefore, Fatah perceives Iran as a destabilizer in the region rather than a constructive power. Similarly, Hani al-Hasan, adviser of Abbas, states: “Iran’s imperial interest in transforming the entire region into an Islamist trust threatens the Palestinian Authority no less than it threatens Israel”⁶⁰⁷. Thus, Fatah obviously criticize Hamas for serving Iran’s ends in Palestine.⁶⁰⁸

Therefore, Fatah perceives Iran as a threat to any possible peace with Israel and unity of the Palestinians. So Iran’s self-perceptions are not accepted by Fatah but only its potential to become dominant power is indirectly accepted by Fatah through its fears of rising power of Iran. On the other hand, Hamas doesn’t perceive Iran as a direct destabilizer, but it is worries about the unpredictability of the future events. So according to Hamas Iran may be a strong constructive regional power, but may also turn into a major destabilizer suddenly. Shortly, Fatah is sure about its perceptions, but Hamas is not yet so.

⁶⁰⁴ Ephraim Kam, “Iran’s Regional Status: Expanding Influence alongside Weaknesses”, pp., 85-86.

⁶⁰⁵ See Michael Segall, “Iran: The Regional Power behind the Hamas War Effort”.

⁶⁰⁶ Kenneth Katzman et al. , “Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy”, pp. 35-36.

⁶⁰⁷ Shimon Shapira and Daniel Diker, “Iran’s ‘Second’ Islamic Revolution”, p., 54.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

4.3. The Perception of Egypt towards Iran's Regional Role

Similar to positions of GCC countries, particularly Saudis', Egypt perceives Iran above all as a threat from various aspects because of different reasons. In this respect, first of all Egypt's self-perception as the leader of all Arabs and vanguard of Arabism due to the experience of Nasserist era is very influential for it to perceive Persian Iran is nothing but an obstacle for the well-being of Arabs.⁶⁰⁹ Therefore, Iran's increasing influence in the region makes Egypt to threaten in terms of its long claimed regional role as the leader of Middle East.⁶¹⁰ Both countries are competing for influence over region.⁶¹¹

Here, quoting Ahmadinejad will be imperative for the depth of such a competition between two countries: "those who recognize the Zionist regime will burn in the fire of the Islamic Umma".⁶¹² As the first Arab country in the region that recognized Israel through Camp David Accords in 1979 during Anwar Sadat era as a result of its devastating economic situation following its devastating defeat during Six-Day war by Israel⁶¹³, Egypt's leadership came to an end, so did the Arabism. While this recognition caused Egypt to lose its prestige among Arab communities who accused it with exchanging the victory of Palestinians with its own economic interests,⁶¹⁴ it is also a source of enmity of Iran towards Egypt, as the above-mentioned statement of Ahmadinejad, clearly demonstrates.

⁶⁰⁹See Kenneth Katzman et al., "Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy", p. 27.

⁶¹⁰ See Eddie Bulls, "A Nuclear-Armed Iran", pp. 23-24.

⁶¹¹ "Iran and Egypt to resume flights", *BBC News*, October 4, 2010, online available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-11465266>, (accessed on August 1, 2015)

⁶¹²Shimon Shapira and Daniel Diker, "Iran's 'Second' Islamic Revolution", p., 55.

⁶¹³ Frederick W. Kagan et al., "Iranian influence in the Levant, Egypt, Iraq and Afghanistan", p. 57.; Christopher Hobbs and Matthew Moran, "Looking Beyond a Nuclear-Armed Iran", p. 134.

⁶¹⁴Frederick W. Kagan et al., "Iranian influence in the Levant, Egypt, Iraq and Afghanistan", p. 57.

Moreover, similar to the GCC countries and most of the other Arab countries, Egypt also supported Iraq against Iran after signing the peace treaty with Israel, which also started its strategic partnership with US,⁶¹⁵ is another major source of enmity for IRI towards Egypt. Furthermore, as a reaction to Egypt's hosting the Shah of Iran after his toppling by the revolutionaries, the new regime named a street in Tehran for the memory of the murderer of Anwar Sadat.⁶¹⁶ Therefore as a result of such deep enmities and competing interests there has not been full diplomatic relations between Egypt and Iran since the revolution.⁶¹⁷

Therefore, Hobbs and Moran claim that Egypt is totally against Iran's acquisition of nuclear power since it perceives this as a "strategic and existential threat" for Egypt which necessitates Egypt to acquire the similar power.⁶¹⁸ This is evident in Mubarak's direct declaration about Egypt's projections for peaceful nuclear energy program.⁶¹⁹ However, Eddie Bulls explains that Bradley L. Bowman suggests: "Egypt sees Iran as a political and strategic threat and not an existential or military one" since the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution⁶²⁰ so such a threat perception actually seem more like an excuse from Egyptian side to legitimize its own similar ambitions with Iran in terms of turning to a nuclear power state.

Nevertheless, it does not change the fact that Egypt felt threatened as a result of Iran's nuclear ambitions, either existentially or strategically, and from Egyptian point of view such an effort of Iran will lead to regional destabilization and if Iran achieves its nuclear

⁶¹⁵ Christopher Hobbs and Matthew Moran, "Looking Beyond a Nuclear-Armed Iran", p. 133.

⁶¹⁶ John C. Shenna, "The Case against the Case against Iran: Regionalism as the West's Last Frontier", p., 317.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

⁶¹⁸ Christopher Hobbs and Matthew Moran, "Looking Beyond a Nuclear-Armed Iran", p. 133.

⁶¹⁹ Kenneth Katzman et al. , "Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy", p. 27.

⁶²⁰ Eddie Bulls, "A Nuclear-Armed Iran: The Middle East Nuclear Proliferation Enigma", American Military University, Charles Town, West Virginia, January 2010, p.24.

ambitions then Egypt's regional position will decrease.⁶²¹ However, there has been neither a significant military conflict nor an alleged irredentism dispute between Egypt and Iran, as Iran had with GCC countries⁶²². So its nuclear threat-related security concern is weaker than those of GCC countries.

On the other hand, similar to GCC countries, Egypt perceives Iran as an obstacle to its peace efforts in Arab-Israeli conflict because of Iran's support for Hamas and Hezbollah.⁶²³ Here, it is important to note that Egyptian point of view is similar to Saudis, they both perceive Hezbollah as an Iranian proxy, created by Iran to pursue its alarming ambitions in the region and one of the most important actors within the strengthening Shia block in the region.⁶²⁴ In this regard, Mubarak's Egypt prioritization of the development of a US -backed Arab-Israeli peace process⁶²⁵ became the target of IRI whose Arab Street policy is another source of concern for Mubarak as it is challenging his authority in the eyes of his people.⁶²⁶

Actually as in the case of GCC countries the root cause of Egypt's increasing perception of threat toward Iran lies in the issue of the power vacuum that is left in Iraq after Saddam. So the reflections on both the nuclear issue and proxy war activities of Iran are related to the centrality of Iraq, whose energy resources have the capacity to shift the regional balance of power. In this respect, increasing Iranian influence in Iraq may result with a strong alliance between Iraq and Iran, so Egypt will be considerably weakened against such an alliance which is quite threatening for its leadership ambitions within Arab World.⁶²⁷

⁶²¹ John C. Shenna, "The Case against the Case against Iran: Regionalism as the West's Last Frontier", p., 347.

⁶²² Christopher Hobbs and Matthew Moran, "Looking Beyond a Nuclear-Armed Iran, p.133.

⁶²³ John C. Shenna, "The Case Against the Case Against Iran", p. 347.

⁶²⁴ Graham E. Fuller, "The Hizballah-Iran Connection", p. 139.

⁶²⁵ Kenneth Katzman et al. , "Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy, p. 29.

⁶²⁶ John C. Shenna, "The Case against the Case against Iran: Regionalism as the West's Last Frontier", p., 347.

⁶²⁷ Robert Lowe and Claire Spencer, "*Iran, Its Neighbors, and The Regional Crises*", p. 35.

In this respect, Kagan et al. indicate that Egyptian foreign minister urged Iran as he argued, “Iranian interventions in the internal affairs of the Gulf must not be allowed; We say to our brothers in Iran, Iraq must be left alone and Lebanon must be left alone and Iran should not intrude in Bahrain in any way.”⁶²⁸ The answer from Iran side was, ““We recommend that AbulGheit pay more attention to unity within the Islamic world instead of pursuing the interests of the region’s ill-wishers who seek to divide the Islamic nations. “⁶²⁹ Therefore, it is apparent that Iran perceives Egypt as another puppet regime of the region as the protector of American interest in the region together with Israel and several other GCC countries, while Egypt perceives Iran as an outsider for Arab affairs whose regional role is centered upon ill-intensions.

At the same time, with regard to the Shia Crescent issue when was revealed in relation to the Iraqi crisis and Iran’s role in Iraq, Egypt’s President Mubarak encouraged his Jordanian counterpart in 2006 stating his concern that, “The Shiites are always loyal to Iran. Most of them are loyal to Iran and not to the countries in which they are living.”⁶³⁰ At that point, although Egypt has not sizable Shia community, it still accuses Iran for misleading the Shia population in Egypt who are propagating Shiism inside Egypt.⁶³¹

At the same time Egyptian authorities also accuses Hezbollah for its Shia propagation inside Egypt.⁶³² The enmity of Egypt towards Hezbollah and Iran actually severed after Hezbollah’s call for overthrowing Mubarak regime due to his lack of support for Palestinian cause.⁶³³ This is also perceived by Egypt as an Iranian backed call of

⁶²⁸Frederick W. Kagan et al., “Iranian influence in the Levant, Egypt, Iraq and Afghanistan, p.57.

⁶²⁹Ibid.

⁶³⁰Barry Rubin, “Iran: The Rise of a Regional Power”, *Middle East Review of International Affairs-MERIA*, Vol.10, No.3, September 2006, p.146.

⁶³¹ John C. Shenna, “The Case against the Case against Iran: Regionalism as the West’s Last Frontier”, p., 347.

⁶³² Kenneth Katzman et al. , “Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy”, p.29.

⁶³³Ibid., p. 29.

Hezbollah. Shortly, Mubarak's Egypt feels itself as the obvious target of Iran's aggression, so it promote anti-Iranian policies among more moderate Arab states while distance itself from Iranian allies like Syria, Hamas, Hezbollah and to some extent Qatar.⁶³⁴

Although there were some proposals from Iranian side to develop a new approach to the relationships of Iran and Egypt, since both state support the Palestinians but only with different methods, such kind of attempts of Iran are perceived with skepticism from Egyptian side since the main threat for Egypt is Iran's support for Hezbollah and Hamas and its nuclear ambitions⁶³⁵ so unless these activities go on Egypt perceives Iran's activities in the region as a direct threat to its own regional role. Therefore, Egypt policy towards Iran is centered upon a kind of counterbalancing strategy through organizing other Arab states with a leadership attitude against Iran's regional activities⁶³⁶

At the same time, there was a process between 2007-2008 that Egypt and Iran seem like inclined to each other but this was just a strategic tactic of Mubarak as most of the other GCC elites use to address Iran in order to attract the attention of US when it was during this period concerning with the human rights violations of Mubarak's regime,⁶³⁷ after the fall of Mubarak, the relationships between Iran and Egypt for the first time since 1979 revolution seems seriously strengthen with the emergence of short-lived Muslim Brotherhood rule over Egypt when Iran was removed from the list of "enemy state" of Egypt and by the way the first Iranian ambassador to Egypt after 30 years was appointed.⁶³⁸

⁶³⁴ Ibid., p. 27.

⁶³⁵ Ibid.

⁶³⁶ Ibid.

⁶³⁷ Ibid., p. 28.

⁶³⁸ Christopher Hobbs and Matthew Moran, "Looking Beyond a Nuclear-Armed Iran", p. 134. (parapherese)

However, the concern of Egyptian side about the Shia-related activities of Iran kept its heat during Muslim Brotherhood administration. As Yusuf al-Qaradawi, accused the Shiite “attempts to invade the Sunni community... [through] missionary work”.⁶³⁹ This is because the new Egyptian politicians from the Muslim Brotherhood have a religious and nationalist attitude towards Iran similar to Mubarak’s. They also consider Iran’s motives as promulgating Shiism in Egypt.⁶⁴⁰ Thus, similar to Mubarak’s era, Muslim Brotherhood also perceives Iran as a rival country as a result of the historical regional power rivalry with Iran.⁶⁴¹

In this respect, the claim of IRI as it is the source of inspiration for Egyptian revolution during the Arab Spring process is rejected both popularly and officially.⁶⁴² In this direction, Monier points an official from Muslim Brotherhood administration who stressed that “Egypt never be Iran”⁶⁴³ so the sectarian and ethnic barrier is apparent between Egypt and Iran regardless of the regime type of the former.

However, it was not only the sectarian tension continuing during Morsi’s administration, the tradition of utilizing Iran for their strategic gains also goes on, as Morsi did by indicating the risk of a possible Egypt and Iran alliance in order to prevent Gulf states to support the opposition groups in Egypt during his short-lived administration.⁶⁴⁴ In this respect Egyptian officials from Muslim Brotherhood declared that Iran is an undeniable regional power while still stressing the principled approach of Egypt towards Iran which is strict about not to let any kind of Iranian interference in domestic affairs of Egypt or

⁶³⁹Marina Eleftheriadou, “The Shia protocols”, p., 18.

⁶⁴⁰Reza Solat and HooshangAzizi, “Rivalry and Cooperation in the Iran Turkey Relations in the Light of the Arab Spring”, *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly*, Vol.10, No. 3-4, (Summer-Fall 2012), p. 137.

⁶⁴¹Ibid.

⁶⁴²Feisal Abukshiem, “The Iranian Government’s Ambitions Represented in Their Nuclear Weapons Program and Its Impact on Security in the Arab Gulf Region”, p. 79.

⁶⁴³ Elizabeth Monier, “The Arabness of Middle East regionalism”, p. 428.

⁶⁴⁴Abdel Bari Atwan, “Ahmadinejad, Morsi and a thaw in Iran-Egypt relations”, February 6, 2013, online available at: <http://www.bariatwan.com/english/?p=1331> , (accessed on September 12, 2015).

any kind of Shia propaganda in Egypt and prioritize the security of Gulf as equal to security of Egypt.⁶⁴⁵

Consequently, the essence of relationship did not change during the short-lived new regime also so Egypt perception towards Iran through sectarian and nationalistic lenses inevitably based on a threat perception and rivalry as perfectly suggested by Hobbes and Moran that the competition between Iran and Egypt is a kind of “natural regional rivalry” actually originated from their distinct imperial past, similar geographical size and sectarian conflicts.⁶⁴⁶ Therefore, Iran’s self-perceptions regarding its constructive role in the region is not acknowledged by Egyptian side neither its claims about its Islamic duties to unite all Muslims and protect them as a role model. However, its claim about its potential to be a regional dominant power seems accepted even if it is interpreted as an obvious threat to their regional role aspirations.

4.4. The Perception of Turkey towards Iran’s Regional Role

Before AKP government, Turkey perceived Iran as a threat to its security by promoting Islamism in the country in relation to its “export of the revolution” policy to destabilize the country through assassinations of political figures and at the same time Turkey perceived Iran as the supporter of PKK.⁶⁴⁷ Moreover, contrary to Erbakan’s visit to Iran, Iran was perceived officially as a threat to Turkey as it is stated in 28 February 1997 ultimatum.⁶⁴⁸ However, after 2000 Iran’s support for PKK started to decrease and

⁶⁴⁵“Iran Live Coverage: Revolutionary Guard Challenge ‘Narcissist’ Ahmadinejad”, *EAWorldView*, February 23, 2013, online available at: <http://www.enduringamerica.com/home/2013/2/23/iran-live-coverage-revolutionary-guards-challenge-narcissist.html>, (accessed on August 2, 2015).

⁶⁴⁶ Christopher Hobbs and Matthew Moran, “Looking Beyond a Nuclear-Armed Iran”, p. 133.

⁶⁴⁷NasuhiGüngör, “Ahmadinejad’s Visit to Turkey: Two Neighbors Oscillate between Threat and Friendship”, *SETA Policy Brief*, No.23, September 2008, p.2.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid.

bilateral relations starts but the real new era seem begins with AKP government.⁶⁴⁹ Here, it is important to note that different from Erbakan, Erdogan was pursuing to integrate Iran to the international system⁶⁵⁰

However, Turkey is an ally of US in the region and at the same time supporting the peace process between Israel and Palestinians so Turkey's policy inherently challenging with IRI's. However, they still have a common interest in reaching regional security, stability and development so there is also cooperation between them to some extent.⁶⁵¹ Therefore, Turkey and Iran both support the territorial integrity of Iraq while encouraging the strengthening of the position of Iraqi Kurds to play a greater role in Baghdad. From Turkey's point of view such strengthened positions of Iraqi Kurds will serve also its domestic policies by providing a role model its own Kurdish community as an engagement model rather than a separatist one. At the same time Kurds' strength in Iraq means balancing of Iran's influence in Iraq according to Turkey's point of view.⁶⁵²

Similarly, Turkey and Iran cooperation on economy is at the considerable levels. In this respect, it is important to taking into consideration that Turkey is importing 70% of its energy needs from Iran which means Iran's energy resources are important for Turkey's economy especially for decreasing its energy dependence to Russia (68% gas).⁶⁵³ At the same time, the Congress Report in 2010 explains the rationale of Turkey's opposition to the imposition of economic sanctions on Iran. According to the report, "Turkey and Iran signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) regarding the condition of Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) in 2007 as well as the two country have formed a joint

⁶⁴⁹Ibid., p.3.

⁶⁵⁰Ibid., p.3.

⁶⁵¹ Mohammad Hossein Hafezian, "Iran-Turkey Economic Ties: Prospects for Improvement", Center for Strategic Research, October 2007, online available at: <http://www.csr.ir/departments.aspx?lng=en&abtId=07&&depId=74&semId=959>, (accessed on August 15, 2015).

⁶⁵²Kenneth Katzman et al. , "Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy", p.22.

⁶⁵³ Kenneth Katzman et al. , "Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy", p. , 22.

company to transfer the gas to Europe, although European partners declared not to accept Iranian petrol until the nuclear issue is resolved.”⁶⁵⁴ Additionally the report also indicates the high numbers of Iranian tourists that visits Turkey annually and demonstrates the important degrees of trade relation between two countries which exceeds \$10 billion in 2008.⁶⁵⁵

Additionally, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan condemned international community for their discriminatory attitude towards Iran about its nuclear activities in 2009.⁶⁵⁶ At the same time Turkey opposed to further sanctioning of Iran by UNSC resolutions when the international community ignored the success of the Tehran Declaration in 2010. Therefore, Turkey different from his Arab counterparts did not blame for forming Shia crescent but still criticized Iran by attempting to become regional power through mobilizing Shia communities.⁶⁵⁷

Here, it is important to note that Turkey after AKP government as a reaction to long years of rejection from EU directed its focus to Middle East different from the previous governments of Turkey. In this context, AKP government together with Davutoğlu’s foreign policy approaches began to have ambitions for being a global power which according to Davutoğlu necessitates first being a regional power. In this context, Turkey started to pursue a policy of zero problems with neighbors, which has failed in Syria crisis, while particularly in Iranian case criticizing Iran’s isolation policies by West and at the same time criticizing Iran’s destabilizing acts in the region so pursued to reach an all-encompassing regional cooperation and security system in which all parties are present that will lead Turkey to be a global power as in the time of Ottoman Empire.⁶⁵⁸ At that point, Turkey tried to play a role of mediator between Iran and international

⁶⁵⁴Ibid., p. 23.

⁶⁵⁵Ibid.

⁶⁵⁶ Christopher Hobbs and Matthew Moran, “Looking Beyond a Nuclear-Armed Iran”, p. 141.

⁶⁵⁷BarisDoster, “The Middle East Policy of Iran as a Regional Power”, p. 49.

⁶⁵⁸EminSalihi, “The New Balance in the Middle East and the Discourse of ‘Shiite Crescent’”, *Bilge Strateji*, Vol.2, No.4, (Spring 2011), p. 197.

community due to its need for stability in the region.⁶⁵⁹ At the same time such a mediator role would encourage Turkey for its new regional role claims.

In this context, Turkish officials several times acknowledged Iran's power and rights while pursuing to build much more strong relations with Iran. For example, Davutoğlu called for expanding the bilateral ties with Iran while acknowledging Iran's pivotal role in the region.⁶⁶⁰ At the same time, the same Congressional Report in 2010 explains that: "Erdogan interpreted the idea of a military attack on Iran to be "an insanity" and has warned Israel of "a response equal to an earthquake" if it used its relationship with Turkey, referring to Turkish airspace to "wage aggression on a third party,"".⁶⁶¹

Turkey also opposed the imposition of sanctions on Iran which might harm Turkey's interests because it is a neighbor and economic partner of Iran as mentioned above. Most importantly, Turkey perceived Iran as an influential and potentially constructive regional actor and reminded in international arena Iran's need to be recognized⁶⁶² that is the ultimate goal of Iran as it is mentioned several times before. However, Iran does not accept such a role of Turkey since it perceives itself as a rising power as mentioned in previous chapter so the mediating role would strengthen Turkey's role as its rival.⁶⁶³ Therefore, it seems like there is a serious and strategic competition over regional power status between Turkey and Iran.

This competition obviously revealed during Syria crisis when Turkey supports opposition groups against Assad, the sole ally of Iran in the region. Thus, Syrian crisis was a major turning point for the relations of the two countries but this is at the first

⁶⁵⁹ Andrea Ellner, "Iran-Challenge or Opportunity for Regional Security?", p. 16.

⁶⁶⁰ "US seeks to tip regional power balance", *KhabarOnline*, May 1, 2012, online available at: <http://english.khabaronline.ir/detail/181342/Iran-Israel--United-State/Politics/English>, (accessed on July 18, 2015).

⁶⁶¹ Kenneth Katzman et al. , "Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy", p. 22.

⁶⁶² Andrea Ellner, "Iran-Challenge or Opportunity for Regional Security?", p. 20.

⁶⁶³ Andrea Ellner, "Iran-Challenge or Opportunity for Regional Security?", p. 16.

instance in practice did not impact the overall relationships much⁶⁶⁴ Actually this support of Turkey was based on Turkey's Arab Revolts policy which lead it to seek for the emergence of a Western order in the region in accordance with a Turkish style of democracy⁶⁶⁵

Therefore, it is suggested that Iran perceives Turkey as a US project for transforming other countries to liberal democratic regimes in order to guaranteeing its control over them and for its long term interests by transforming Turkey into a role model for the region⁶⁶⁶so according toDoster, Iran perceives Turkey's attempt as seeking to become the leader of the Islamic World with the help of US and its Arab allies in the region.⁶⁶⁷ While, this attempt of Turkey to become a role model for other Arab regimes totally contradicting Iran's own role model claim, Iran at the same time criticizes Turkey's cooperating with US as it is promoting Western-imperialism in the region and believes that the missile shield radar of NATO in Malatya is actually directed to Syria and Iran as a protection attempt of Israel.⁶⁶⁸Therefore, it is suggested that according to Iran the biggest mistake of Turkey is not to support "regionalism" in the region⁶⁶⁹ which is the first necessity for stabilization and peace in the region for Iranian point of view as it is explained at the previous chapter.

However, there is important cooperation between two countries but at the same time there are major sources of concerns which include their different approaches to US and Syrian crisis⁶⁷⁰ and their competition over the influence in Middle East and energy

⁶⁶⁴Christopher Hobbs and Matthew Moran, "Looking Beyond a Nuclear-Armed Iran", p.141.

⁶⁶⁵GhasemTorabi, "Arab Revolutions and Iran's Security", pp.107-108.

⁶⁶⁶Ibid., p. 102.

⁶⁶⁷ See BarisDoster, "The Middle East Policy of Iran as a Regional Power", p. 49.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁹ See "The Iran-Turkey Relations in Post-Arab Revolutions' Middle East" Roundtable with Dr. StileymanSensoy", *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 3-4, (Summer-Fall 2012), pp. 3-4.

⁶⁷⁰BarisDoster, "The Middle East Policy of Iran as a Regional Power", p. 49.

sources of Caspian Sea basin as well as the Iraqi issues.⁶⁷¹ At the same time, they are both struggling for the influence over Central Asian states that are liberated after the collapse of USSR between Iran and Turkey.⁶⁷²

In addition to these rivalries between two countries, they are also competing for the leadership of the Muslim community. At that point, similar to Ahmadinejad, Erdogan strictly criticized Israel in order to portray himself as the protector of all Muslims.⁶⁷³ Shortly, it is suggested that both Turkey and Iran seek to establish “regional stability” but while Turkey follows the way of negotiations in order to reach regional stability, Iran choose to adopt resistance against “unjust regional ordering patterns” of the Middle East.⁶⁷⁴

As a conclusion, although Turkey clearly acknowledged Iran’s constructive and “pivotal” role in the region, it seems like Turkey perceives Iran first of all as a rival so threat perception is valid for Turkey also as in the case of Egypt , Turkey actually does not trust Iran so Iran’s self-perception regarding its constructive regional role seems not accepted by Turkey or its role model claim totally not accepted since Turkey has its own model that seeking to expand and Iran’s claim of potential dominant power actually accepted by Turkey.

4.5. Conclusion

Therefore, this chapter provides data about the approaches of various regional countries towards Iran while also addressing Iran’s perceptions towards them but the main goal

⁶⁷¹ Ephraim Kam, “Iran’s Regional Status: Expanding Influence alongside Weaknesses”, pp., 86-87.

⁶⁷² Aylin ÜnverNöi, “Iran and The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Is it Possible for Iran to Become Full Member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation under Pressure of Nuclear Issue”, *Perceptions*, (Autumn-Winter 2006), pp. 89.

⁶⁷³ Oleg Kuznetsov, “Political Influence of Iran in the Middle East after 2003”, p.29.

⁶⁷⁴ Seyed Hossein Mousavi, “The New Actors in the Middle East”, p. 6-7.

was to find an answer to the question of: “do the regional countries agree or not agree about the self-perceptions of Iran regarding its own regional role?” In this sense, it is seen that almost every state in the region either felt threatened by IRI’s regional activities. Some of them fears to lose their legitimacy in the eyes of their own people because of their relations with Iran while others fears to lose their regional position as a result of Iran’s rising position. Moreover, some of them has existential concerns regarding Iran’s intentions in the region.

Actually, such threat perceptions of regional countries vary in accordance with the relations of these countries with Iran and their own self-perceptions so this threat perception may not be sincere, instead more strategic in every case or some cases. However, it still demonstrates the concrete existence of such a negative image of Iran in the region. At that point, the reason of such threat perceptions of regional countries towards Iran is generally about its relations with militia groups which Iran think essential for ensuring the survival of the regime in the frame of their deterrence policy.

Therefore, the ultimate goal of the regime that is revealed in the previous chapter is an obstacle for them to realize their regional role perceptions in terms of the approaches of regional countries towards them. However, Iran has an undeniable influence over any part of the region which shows the success of their policy of deterrence if not their goals about their regional roles. Thus, Iran’s claim to be a regional model and constructive regional power is not acknowledged by the regional countries.

Consequently, this chapter suggests that the most acknowledged role of Iran among the regional countries is its potential to be a regional power while its claim about constructive role almost totally disagreed or rejected. Thus, the second parameter indicates that Iran’s self-perceptions partly acknowledged, partly not but in order to reach a conclusion these results will be compared with its hard power capacities also, at the conclusion part. Therefore, following chapter will focus on the economic and military capacities of Iran in order to test its claims about its regional role in terms of its hard power capacities.

CHAPTER 5

HARDPOWER CAPACITIES OF IRAN

As the third component for the evaluation of Iran's regional role the hard power capacity of the country needs to be explained as it is necessary to reach a conclusion about Iran's role in accordance with the theoretical framework that is drawn at the second chapter of this thesis. Therefore, this chapter tests the validity of Iran's regional role claims that have been previously revealed, in terms of its hard power capabilities.

At that point, hard power is traditionally defined as “the capacity to get what you want through the use of economic power or through the use of military force...”⁶⁷⁵ Accordingly, this chapter composed of two parts which focus on the economic and military capacities of Iran, separately. Therefore, this chapter searches for whether Iran's claims regarding its regional role matches with its economic and military capacities or not.

5.1. Economic Capabilities of Iran

As far as the issue is economic capabilities of Iran as the first component of its hard power capacity is concerned, the main topic becomes normally Iran's rich oil and gas reserves. Iran is the second largest oil producer in OPEC after Saudi Arabia with almost

⁶⁷⁵Matteo Pallaver, “Power and Its Forms: Hard, Soft, Smart”, *Master's Thesis*, Department of International Relations, London School of Economics, London, October 2011, p. 81.

10% of world oil reserves⁶⁷⁶ and at the same time it has the second largest natural gas reserves of the world after Russia.⁶⁷⁷ Moreover, according to World Bank observations Iran is the second largest economy in MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region after Saudi Arabia and the most populated country of the region after Egypt.⁶⁷⁸ This oil-related economic potential of Iran combined with its high density of population whose majority is composed of dynamic and young members of the country is expected to bring high level of economic growth and welfare but it has not materialized in Iran case as in most of the other oil-rich countries of the Middle East.

In this regard, as ShahramChubin and many others addressed this oil-related economic power of Iran seems paradoxically is at the same time the biggest vulnerability of its economic power.⁶⁷⁹ Therefore, the reasons of Iran's failure to transform its huge potential of economic power into the economic development of the country bring the issue of weaknesses of Iran's economy. Thus the structural deficiencies of Iran in general and the hardships of Iran's economy as a results of the nuclear-related "sanctions" imposed on Iran, particularly during President Ahmadinejad era will be examined under following sub-titles.

5.1.1. Structural Deficiencies of Iran's Economy

In this regard, Hossein Pourahmadi suggests insufficiency of political structures and political culture that leads to conflicts among the elites about the scope and principles of public and private ownership as well as blurred borders among social, cultural and economic goals of the country under the control of inefficient political attitudes of policy

⁶⁷⁶"Iran Facts and Figures", OPEC-Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, http://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/163.htm (accessed on September 1, 2015).

⁶⁷⁷ "Iran-Overview", The World Bank, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iran/overview>, (accessed on September 1, 2015).

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁹ShahramChubin, "Iran's Power in Context", p. 176.

makers and statesmen as the weaknesses of Iran's economy are the obstacles for economic growth in Iran.⁶⁸⁰ He also emphasizes the lack of “economic dynamism” and “competition” within the country as a result of “centralized administrative structure” of the country that directly controls investors and at the same time the insufficient administration of the country as other related weaknesses of IRI's economy.⁶⁸¹

Therefore he suggests the necessity of the “political reforms” that are “parallel to the economic ones” which enable the competitiveness, privatization and economic power in IRI.⁶⁸² This comprehensive explanation of Pourahmadi about the weaknesses of Iran's economy emphasizes the importance of globalization for economic growth so initially IRI's resistance to structural economic reforms for globalization of its economy as a result of its revolutionary characteristics, particularly its anti-Western stance that is mentioned before in detail is one of the most important structural obstacles for the growth of Iran's economy.

Actually this issue is perfectly explained by Eva Leila Pasaran as she initially explains the necessity of globalization through related structural reforms as the key for economic development.⁶⁸³ Hereby, she indicates that those structural reforms are not materialized in MENA countries due to their resistance to the concept of globalization that is rooted in their perception of globalization as a new method of establishing foreign domination in their countries so as done before by European imperialism, which for them full of negative experiences.⁶⁸⁴ In the case of Iran the revolutionary quest for prioritizing economic independence even exaggerates such a resistance to globalization. Moreover, as she indicated the “of the revolutionary call of Khomeini for economic independence”

⁶⁸⁰ Hossein Pourahmadi, “Requisites of the Global Economic System and the Necessity of Economic Reforms in Iran”, pp. 53-54.

⁶⁸¹ Hossein Pourahmadi, “Requisites of the Global Economic System and the Necessity of Economic Reforms in Iran”, pp. 53-54.

⁶⁸² Ibid., p. 58.

⁶⁸³ Evaleila Pesaran, *Iran's Struggle for Economic Independence*, pp. 7-39.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 7.

cause inefficient conflicts among various factions of Iranian politics due to their different interpretations of materializing such a revolutionary goal of economic independence while securing national interest that seems according to them is survival of the regime.⁶⁸⁵

Ultimately, a paradoxical situation emerges in the Iran's clerical regime whose primary goal is for certain to ensure the regime's survival, that surely necessitates a simultaneous economic growth which is suggested as possible by globalization but this is perceived as against to their main revolutionary goal of economic independence. Such conflictual perceptions and understanding among the elites of Iran seems one of the biggest obstacles to economic development of Iran.

In other words , given the main motivation of Iranian revolution was centered upon the idea of "an end to foreign domination" narrative, one of the basic goals of 1979 Revolution was "independence", which surely includes "economic independence", which is also as a reaction to Western domination and control over the region. Therefore, Iran's resistance to such economic reforms, that will lead the country to integrate with the global capitalism which is interpreted as totally contrary to the essence of the revolutionary regime and at the same time a main threat to the survival of this regime, is not very surprising and is understandable actually. However, this resistance to economic globalization still creates a danger for Iran's long-term survival within such a competitive global economy so the main problem seems to find an alternative economic model if possible that is in conformity with the identities of Iran and ensuring the goal of survival of the regime but the tendency in Iran is seen that they are sure about what is "NO" for them but they don't know or they are not sure about what is "YES" for them.

⁶⁸⁵Ibid., p.4.

In relation to this, Ahmadinejad's attempts to achieve economic independence through a new Islamic revolution⁶⁸⁶ by applying a kind of Islamic economic model that tend to socialism of 1970s,⁶⁸⁷ faced serious challenges coming from different rival factions in Iran. Additionally, Supreme Leader Khamenei also as well aware of the deficiencies of Iran's economy⁶⁸⁸ addressed the resistance economy⁶⁸⁹ as the necessary well-planned economic model for Iran that is capable to curb oil-dependency of the economy⁶⁹⁰ hence ensure the future of the country through enabling a well-functioning independent economy⁶⁹¹ while securing country's anti-western and anti-globalization stance.⁶⁹² However, even if it is assumed that Ayatollah Khamenei's suggestions regarding the implementation of a well-defined alternative economic model that is based on resistance economy is a valid and effective solution for handling the above mentioned paradoxical relationship between regime's survival and country's economic development, it is still nothing more than a suggestion that needs to be analyzed and transformed into practical economic policies and structural reforms.

In this regard, Supreme Leader Khamenei criticizes the economist and related officials or academicians for their inactivity regarding the development of such a resistance

⁶⁸⁶Ibid., pp.161-189.

⁶⁸⁷ Kenneth M. Pollack, "Iran: Three Alternative Futures", *The Middle East Review of International Affairs-MERIA*, Vol.10, No.2, (June 2006), p.7.

⁶⁸⁸ Supreme Leader Khamenei explains such deficiencies of Iran's economy: "...the chronic and long-lasting problems as inflation, unemployment, dependence on crude oil, excessive imports, defect of financial structures, low productivity and improper consumption patterns cannot be removed unless through a well-planned program, on the basis of the resistance economy.". See "Resistance economy will help nation develop independent economy", *IRNA*, March 11, 2014.

⁶⁸⁹ For a detailed analysis of resistance economy, see Amir Toumaj, "Iran's Economy of Resistance: Implications for Future Sanctions", Critical Threats Project, American Enterprise Institute, Washington DC, online available at: http://www.irantracker.org/sites/default/files/imce-images/ToumajA_Irans-Resistance-Economy-Implications_november2014.pdf, (accessed on August 3, 2015).

⁶⁹⁰See "Resistance economy will help nation develop independent economy", *IRNA*, March 11, 2014.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid. Supreme Leader Khamenei suggests that "the resistance economy is a long-term and dynamic policy which will guarantee the future of the country".

⁶⁹²Ibid.

economic model that suits Iran⁶⁹³ which is regarded to make Iran top regional power⁶⁹⁴ so further analyzing of this suggestion is not necessary for reaching some results about the capabilities of Iran's economy, as it is only at the rhetoric, at least for now. However, this does not mean Iran does not make any kind of initiation for generating such kind of economic models as it is reflected in 20-year vision document but again it is still a kind of strategy.⁶⁹⁵ In this sense as Ehteshami indicated, Iranian state as “the biggest economic actor in the country” followed a kind of “import-substitution industrialization strategy” that prioritizes expansion of domestic economy through indigenous industries after the revolution, as an economic strategy which is not still a well-defined economic alternative model to the globalization.⁶⁹⁶

Therefore with the lack of well-defined alternative economic model Iran's main revolutionary goal of regime survival on the one hand and on the other hand its ambition for economic growth seems as paradoxical to each other in their essences hence “ the ambiguity of revolutionary call of Ayatollah Khomeini for economic independence that leads to ineffective factional disputes”. In that regard, KjetilBjorvatan and KjetilSelvik mention about the impacts of resource richness of Iran and its fractious nature on Iran's economy through analyzing the concept of “resource curse” in the case of Iran.⁶⁹⁷ Hereby, they emphasize the inefficient institutional setting of IRI that they suggest as the result of the inherent features of IRI's state structure which is mainly composed of multiple power centers. In this way, they explain how such inherent structural features of

⁶⁹³“Universities should play their part in shaping the new Islamic civilization”, November 11, 2015, online available at: <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/2396/Universities-should-play-their-part-in-shaping-the-new-Islamic>, (accessed on November 12, 2015).

⁶⁹⁴See “Oil minister: Resistance economy will turn Iran into a top regional power”, *IRNA*, March 4, 2014.

⁶⁹⁵ “Iran-Overview”, The World Bank, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iran/overview>, (accessed on September 1, 2015).

⁶⁹⁶AnoushiravanEhteshami, “The Foreign Policy of Iran”, p. 286.

⁶⁹⁷ See KjetilBjorvatn and KjetilSelvik, “Destructive Competition: Factionalism and Rent-Seeking in Iran”, *World Development*, Vol. 36, No. 11, (2008), pp. 2314-2324. (They explain the concept of “resource curse” as it suggests that “the quality of institutions determines a country's ability to transform resource wealth into economic development”)

Iran give way to the “destructive competition” among various factions over influence and wealth maximizing.⁶⁹⁸

Consequently, it is the revolutionary state structure of Iran which is highly fractured among competing factions in a “destructive competition”⁶⁹⁹ manner that does not allow the occurrence of the necessary environment for such a quest of Iran for “YES” ways. At that point, the patronage networks of the political factions of Iran come to the scene. In this respect they demonstrate the reformists as representing intellectuals and students while pragmatists are the representative of technocrats and businessmen in Iran. Relatedly, they suggest that conservatives support the interests of bazaar and clergy, while neoconservatives represent “the soldiers, war veterans and socially deprived”. In this context, the political elites of IRI seem more inclined to secure the gains of their interest groups rather than to reach economic development.

Thus they demonstrate how such a fractious state system in which arbitrary rule and regulation implementations cause inherently and inevitably the rent-seeking activities among the state or quasi-state enterprises. As it is demonstrated above each of these enterprises are represented by definite political factions whose success is strongly dependent upon to the success of their patronage networks. As a result, such a linkage between political factions and their patronage networks discourages the private investment and productive entrepreneurship while supporting rent-seeking. Therefore, Iran’s economy demonstrates clear signs of the characteristics of rentier states. In the same vein Katouzian also stresses the inefficient patterns of rentier characteristics of Iran’s economy that does not contribute the economic development instead exerts a consumption culture.⁷⁰⁰

⁶⁹⁸Ibid., pp. 2316-2319.

⁶⁹⁹Ibid., pp. 2314.

⁷⁰⁰Homa Katouzian and Hossein Shahidi, *Iran in the 21st Century: Politics, Economics and Conflict*, (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 285-286.

At that point, the above mentioned oil wealth of the country which is at the same time the main source of rent-seeking activity cannot be transformed into economic development in Iran instead corruption becomes endemic, with widespread bribery among the official for conducting the affairs.⁷⁰¹ Therefore, corruption is seen as a structural deficiency of Iran's economy. In this respect, "bonyads" take preeminence in Iran's economy as according to Kenneth Pollack, the most corrupted bodies of IRI that controls almost forty percent of GDP but lacking of economic scrutiny regarding their economic activities.⁷⁰² When taken into account that the "bonyads" are generally associated with traditional conservatives which is the most powerful and dominated faction of IRI, it is not surprising that they can remain under such a privileged condition through corruption. However, during Ahmadinejad's presidency IRGC as the main interest group that Ahmadinejad and neo-conservatives are representing became the biggest beneficiary by gaining considerable amount of state assets through "no-bid secret deals".⁷⁰³

Additionally, it is important to note that on the contrary to above explanation about the necessity of a well-prepared economic model for the long-term survival of the regime, Elliot Hen-Tov indicates Eva Bellin's study of Middle Eastern authoritarianism which she proves that "discretionary patronage" and a "strong coercive apparatus" guarantee the survival of authoritarian regimes.⁷⁰⁴ In this respect Elliot Hen-Tov explains how bonyads are crucial for the survival of the regime hence they are providing "social mobility, social security and popular mobilization".⁷⁰⁵ Therefore he claims corrupted patronage system is more preferable for the political elites of the Islamic regime hence it

⁷⁰¹ "Iran: Countries at the Crossroads 2007", Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/countries-crossroads/2007/iran>, (accessed on November 1, 2015); see also "Iran: Countries at the Crossroads 2012", Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/countries-crossroads/2012/iran>, (accessed on November 1, 2015)

⁷⁰² Kenneth M. Pollack, "Iran: Three Alternative Futures", p. 2.

⁷⁰³Yassamine Mather, "Iran's Political and Economic Crisis", *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory*, Vol.38, No.3, (August 2010), pp.506.

⁷⁰⁴Elliot Hen-Tov, "Understanding Iran's New Authoritarianism", *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol.30, No.1, (Winter 2006-07), p. 175.

⁷⁰⁵Ibid. 174.

ensures the survival of the regime.⁷⁰⁶ This mutually strengthening relationship between regime's survival and corruption actually provides the prior reason of Iran's resistance to globalization rather than factional competition or revolutionary goal of economic independence that is discussed above because structural reform means decreasing corruption at the same time but this will limit the arbitrary rule of the political elites over economy that will endanger the survival of the regime.

Thus, rather than, corruption, rentier-state characteristic of IRI, its resistance to globalization or its lacking of a well-examined economic model, the regime itself seems the biggest obstacle for Iran to reach economic development hence the survival is prior for Political elites of the regime as mentioned before. However, this explanation may seem like as it is lacking the reformists' struggle for change and reforms but as Eva Leila Pesaran also indicated that all factions have a consensus over the independence of their economy although they are not sure how to reach such an independency and what this independency really means so reformist quest as she depicted is about "facilitating the inflow of foreign capital" but not about radical structural rebuilding of the economy of IRI for reaching globalization.⁷⁰⁷

Therefore this explanation actually seems valid regardless of the factional differences of Iran as IRI act like in the same vein addressed in the Eva Belili's study which demonstrates the mutual strengthening relationship between corruption and regime survival. Nevertheless, here the aim is to examine the economic capability of Iran hence the underlying reasons of the weakness do not change the fact that Iran's economy is embedded in severe weaknesses despite its huge potential.

Consequently, regardless of the reasons Iranian economy is lacking a well-designed economic system and related structural reforms and its rentier characteristic, corruption

⁷⁰⁶Ibid. 175.

⁷⁰⁷Evaleila Pesaran, *Iran's Struggle for Economic Independence*, p. 2.

and patronage relationships and relatedly the tendency of their leaders to give priority to their own survival together with the severe impact of sanctions are all obstacles for the economic development of the country that will provide sufficient capability to the country to realize its goal of dominating the region. In this sense, such structural deficiencies of the present economic capabilities of Iran seem not sufficient for regional dominance although Iran has the second largest oil revenues and the largest natural gas reserves in the Middle East region. However, the economic capabilities of Iran are still sufficient for making Iran an undeniable regional economic power due to its relative economic superiorities in term of material capacities, within such a region that consists of mostly oil rich rentier states.

In that respect, Supreme Leader Khamenei himself perfectly indicates the illnesses of Iran's economy as : "...the chronic and long-lasting problems as inflation, unemployment, dependence on crude oil, excessive imports, defect of financial structures, low productivity and improper consumption patterns cannot be removed unless through a well-planned program, on the basis of the resistance economy."⁷⁰⁸In addition to this explanation Ayatollah Khamenei, corruption, counter-reformism, prioritization of survival of the regime, arbitrary rules and regulations, state-centered economy and most recently thesevered sanctions during the presidency of Mahmood Ahmadinejad are responsible for preventing of the transformation of the oil money into economic growth. Thus the economic potential of the country does not turn to economic power that enables Iran to become regional dominant power so Iran's large economy is not proper to dominate region but the potential dominant power claim is inherently valid due to its huge economic potential

⁷⁰⁸<http://theiranproject.com/blog/2014/03/11/resistance-economy-will-help-nation-develop-independent-economy/>
("...the chronic and long-lasting problems as inflation, unemployment, dependence on crude oil, excessive imports, defect of financial structures, low productivity and improper consumption patterns cannot be removed unless through a well-planned program, on the basis of the resistance economy.")

5.1.2. The Impact of Sanctions on Iran's Economic Capacity during President Ahmadinejad Era

Therefore, such structural obstacles of Iran's economy were especially discussed throughout 1990s as the reasons of economic underdevelopment in IRI. However, in addition to these structural problems, the issue of "sanctions" rises to prominence as the basic handicap of Iran's economy, during President Ahmadinejad era. In this respect, Iran under President Ahmadinejad experiences the heaviest sanctioning of its economy in its history since 1979.⁷⁰⁹ This is the result of "nuclear policies" of Ahmadinejad's government, as mentioned previously. Therefore, the effect of "sanctions" during President Ahmadinejad's term is particularly vital in order to evaluate economic capacities of Iran.

In this direction, in addition to tens of IAEA resolutions, various multilateral US, EU and UNSC sanctions were imposed on Iran during the Presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The unconformity of the government of President Ahmadinejad with IAEA resolutions⁷¹⁰ through lifting the suspension of uranium enrichment activities of IRI⁷¹¹ which is considered as an attempt of IRI to develop nuclear weapons⁷¹² increases suspicions regarding the issue. Furthermore, the confrontational attitude of Iran's

⁷⁰⁹Oliver Borszik, "International Sanctions against Iran under President Ahmadinejad: Explaining Regime Persistence", *GIGA Working Papers: Violence and Security*, No:260, German Institute of Global and Area Studies, November 2014, online available at: https://giga.hamburg/de/system/files/publications/wp260_borszik.pdf, (accessed on June 26, 2015), p. 4.

⁷¹⁰ See, Implementation of NPT Safeguards Agreements in the Islamic Republic of Iran, September 24, 2005, online available at: <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/gov2005-77.pdf>

⁷¹¹"Iran Informs the IAEA That It Intends to Resume Nuclear R&D", January 3, 2006, online available at: <http://www.acronym.org.uk/news/200601/iran-informs-iaea-it-intends-resume-nuclear-rd> (accessed on August 3, 2015). ; "Iran To Resume Suspended Nuclear Research and Development", January 3, 2006, online available at: <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/pressreleases/iran-resume-suspended-nuclear-research-and-development> (accessed on August 3, 2015).

⁷¹² Jason Starr, "The U.N. Resolutions", *Iran Primer*, United States Institute of Peace, online available at: <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/un-resolutions> (accessed on November 5, 2015).

nuclear policies including Ahmadinejad's Holocaust denial⁷¹³ and call for elimination of Israel⁷¹⁴ leads the US to push EU 3- Britain, France and Germany to send Iran's file to the UNSC in 2006.⁷¹⁵ Therefore, UNSC imposed six critical sanctions on Iran during the presidential term of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in order to convince IRI to stop its uranium enrichment activities.⁷¹⁶

These UNSC sanctions initially prohibit the sales of nuclear proliferation related items to Iran and freezes assets of several persons and entities.⁷¹⁷ These people and entities rise up to a total number of 80 which includes Bank Sepah of IRI and several corporate that have linkages with IRGC through the other UNSC sanctions.⁷¹⁸ Following rounds of sanctions⁷¹⁹ also brought a ban on arm sales to Iran, inspection of Iran's cargoes by respective countries who trade with Iran, travel ban to some of those whose assets were already frozen and prohibits Iran's investments for developing ballistic missiles that are capable to use for nuclear weapons.⁷²⁰ At the same time, those sanctions targets

⁷¹³ Karl Vick, "Iran's President Calls Holocaust 'Myth' in Latest Assault on Jews", *Washington Post*, December 15, 2005, online available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/12/14/AR2005121402403.html>, (accessed on September 23, 2015).

⁷¹⁴ Sean Yoong, "Ahmadinejad: Destroy Israel, End Crisis", *Washington Post*, August 3, 2006, online available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/08/03/AR2006080300629.html>, (accessed on September 23, 2015).

⁷¹⁵ "Security Council Imposes Sanctions on Iran for Failure to Halt Uranium Enrichment, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 1737", December 23, 2006, online available at: <http://www.un.org/press/en/2006/sc8928.doc.htm> (accessed on September 23, 2015).

⁷¹⁶ Jason Starr, "The U.N. Resolutions", *Iran Primer*, online available at: <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/un-resolutions>.

⁷¹⁷ UN Security Council Resolution 1737 is online available at: <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9F9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Iran%20SRES%201737.pdf>, (accessed on September 23, 2015).

⁷¹⁸ Congressional Research Service, "Iran Sanctions", January 26, 2012, online available at: http://www.parstimes.com/history/crs_sanctions_jan_12.pdf, (accessed on September 24, 2015), p.32.

⁷¹⁹ UN Security Council Resolution 1747 is online available at: <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9F9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Iran%20SRES1747.pdf>, (accessed on September 23, 2015) ; UN Security Council Resolution 1803 is online available at: <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9F9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Iran%20SRES%201803.pdf>, (accessed on September 23, 2015) ; UN Security Council Resolution 1929 is online available at: <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9F9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/IRAN%20SRES%201929.pdf>, (accessed on September 23, 2015).

specifically Iran's financial sector through calling on other parties to put an end to do business with Iranian Banks.⁷²¹

However, the strictest sanctions, which mainly target Iran's oil exports and banking sector, including Central Bank of Iran, are imposed by the US.⁷²² In this respect US Congress imposes Iran Freedom Support Act (IFSA)⁷²³ in 2006; Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act (CISADA)⁷²⁴ in 2010; Iran Freedom and Counter Proliferation Act (IFCPA)⁷²⁵ in 2012 and Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act (ITRSHRA)⁷²⁶ in 2012.⁷²⁷ Thus, these US sanctions aim at making Iran to put an end its attempts for reaching nuclear weapon capacity, by directly damaging Iran's economy through particularly imposing oil embargo and isolating it from global financial system.⁷²⁸ In addition to UN and US, EU also imposed sanctions and arms embargo on Iran that are on the same direction with UNSC sanctions in order to convince it to continue negotiations with the P5+1.⁷²⁹ Ultimately, EU also followed the footsteps of US and imposed oil embargo on Iran and put restrictions on

⁷²⁰ Kenneth Katzman, "Iran Sanctions", *Congressional Research Report (CSR) for Congress*, RS20871, January 26, 2012, online available at: http://www.parstimes.com/history/crs_sanctions_jan_12.pdf, (accessed on September 24, 2015), pp. 30-32.

⁷²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁷²² Zachary Laub, "International Sanctions on Iran", July 15, 2015, online available at: <http://www.cfr.org/iran/international-sanctions-iran/p20258>, (accessed on October 14, 2015)

⁷²³ "Text of the Iran Freedom Support Act", September 28, 2006, online available at: <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/109/hr6198/text#>, (accessed on September 3, 2015).

⁷²⁴ "Text of the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010", August 25, 2010, online available at: <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/111/hr2194/text>, (accessed on September 3, 2015).

⁷²⁵ "Fact Sheet: Iran Freedom and Counter-Proliferation Act of 2012", online available at: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/208111.pdf>, (accessed on September 3, 2015).

⁷²⁶ The official document of "Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act" is online available at: https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Documents/hr_1905_pl_112_158.pdf, (accessed on September 3, 2015).

⁷²⁷ Oliver Borszik, "International Sanctions against Iran under President Ahmadinejad", pp. 8-15.

⁷²⁸ See, Zachary Laub, "International Sanctions on Iran".

⁷²⁹ Kenneth Katzman, "Iran Sanctions", pp. 32-43

Iran's financial activities in 2012⁷³⁰, after guaranteeing the security of its energy needs by Saudi Arabia's commitment for compensating oil export from Iran.⁷³¹

Consequently, these sanctions cost Iran's economy more than 400 billion US dollars.⁷³² As a result of oil and financial embargos, Iran oil exports declined by almost one fourth of its previous amount to 1 million BPD due to the "severe tightening of sanctions"⁷³³ towards the end of President Ahmadinejad era.⁷³⁴ Therefore inflation rates increased from 11.9 percent in 2006, to 30 percent at the end of President Ahmadinejad's term⁷³⁵ due to the sharp declining of Iran's currency value by 56 percent after 2012 as a result of severe tightening of sanctions.⁷³⁶

Thus the sanctioning of Iran under Ahmadinejad quiet badly affected the oil and gas sectors as well as financial, shipping, automotive and other sectors due to the unpredictability of the market that discourages the investors to invest for long-term production projects in addition to the hardships that stem from embargos.⁷³⁷ Here, it is necessary to emphasize the high levels of unemployment towards the end of President

⁷³⁰Ibid., p. 33.

⁷³¹ Paul Stevens, "An Embargo on Iranian Crude Oil Exports: How Likely and with What Impact", Chatham House, EEDP Programme Paper, (London: Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2012), p. 3.

⁷³²Oliver Borszik, "International Sanctions against Iran under President Ahmadinejad", p. 17.

⁷³³ "The Ahmadinejad Period (2005-Present)", *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran*, April 29, 2013, online available at: https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2013/04/the-ahmadinejad-period-2005-present/#_ftn40, (accessed on August 26, 2015).

⁷³⁴Oliver Borszik, "International Sanctions against Iran under President Ahmadinejad", p. 17.

⁷³⁵ See the graph of inflation rate in Iran between 2006 and 2014, "Inflation, consumer prices (annual %)", online available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG/countries/1W-IR?display=graph>, (accessed on November 2, 2015).

⁷³⁶ "Iran's Economy, By the Numbers", *The Iran Primer*, United States Institute of Peace, online available at: <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2015/may/11/irans-economy-numbers>, (accessed on June 5, 2015).

⁷³⁷Ismail Hossein-Zadeh, "Economic Crisis in Iran: The Impacts of Sanctions and Uncertain Outcome of Nuclear Talks", *Global Research: Center for Research on Globalization*, May 23, 2015, online available at: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/economic-crisis-in-iran-the-impacts-of-sanctions-and-the-uncertain-outcome-of-nuclear-talks/5451396>, (accessed on August 27, 2015).

Ahmadinejad era, which is suggested as 10%⁷³⁸ officially while unofficial observations claim it is almost 20%.⁷³⁹ But more alarming data about the unemployment is about the amount of unemployment amongst the young which is claimed to be 60 %⁷⁴⁰ and high inflation within an unstable economy results with growing inequality to the levels that 40% of Iranians are claimed to be living under the poverty line.⁷⁴¹ Thus, as Trevor Gosselin also claims, it seems that the resource rich Iranian economy cannot meet the expectations of its own people.⁷⁴²

In this respect, Gulriz Sen explains steadily declining living standards of the middle class in Iran as a result of sanctions that opens the way for black marketing and strengthens IRGC's position in Iran's economy.⁷⁴³ At the same time she also indicates the worsening conditions of the workers in Iran, particularly after 2010, during when company owners cannot even afford their wages as a result of sanctions, despite the special care of Ahmadinejad government through providing handouts.⁷⁴⁴ Moreover, rising cost of rents as well as food and medicine shortages in Iran especially by late 2012⁷⁴⁵ with the severe tightening of the sanctions, demonstrate how the sanctions badly affects daily life of Iran's peoples. Thus, those sanctions are claimed to make Iran's

⁷³⁸“Iran's Economy, By the Numbers”, *The Iran Primer*, United States Institute of Peace, online available at: <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2015/may/11/irans-economy-numbers>

⁷³⁹BijanKhajehpour, “Decoding Iran's economic indicators”, *AL Monitor*, October 22, 2014, online available at: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/10/economic-indicators-iran.html#>, (accessed on August 27, 2015)

⁷⁴⁰Yassamine Mather, “Iran's Political and Economic Crisis”, p. 506.

⁷⁴¹“Persian Power: Can Iran be stopped?”, *The Economist*, June 22, 2013, online available at: <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21579835-west-should-intervene-syria-many-reasons-one-stem-rise-persian-power-can>, (accessed on August 26, 2015).

⁷⁴² Trevor P. Gosselin, “Iran in Perspective: Menacing or Misunderstood?”, *Master's Dissertation*, Canadian Forces College, Toronto, April 24, 2009, p. 58.

⁷⁴³Gülriz Şen, “Post-Revolutionary Iran's Foreign Policy Toward the United States: A Historical Sociological Analysis of State Transformation and Foreign Policy”, p. 363.

⁷⁴⁴Ibid. , p. 366.

⁷⁴⁵ “Sanctions and Regime Policies Cause Growing Crisis in Iran”, *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran*, April 29, 2013, online available at: https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2013/04/growing_crisis/, (accessed on August 26, 2015).

economy even more vulnerable while give way to more corruption and mismanagement.⁷⁴⁶

However, it is important to note that the huge increase in oil revenue of Iran especially between 2005 and 2008 as an “oil shield”⁷⁴⁷ substantially compensates the negative impact of the sanctions for the state during the first term of President Ahmadinejad.⁷⁴⁸ Therefore, such an oil power initially gave over self-confidence to President Ahmadinejad to maintain his assertive approach to the nuclear program of Iran. Thus, Iran under President Ahmadinejad dealt with sanctions through occasionally threatening the other parties, rather than developing a serious and long-standing accommodative approach. In this respect, closing the Strait of Hormuz⁷⁴⁹ and decreasing the production level of oil⁷⁵⁰ that could increase the oil prices which will crucially affect the international economy are the main themes of IRI’s threat to the global energy market.

Moreover, Iranian leaders especially Supreme Leader Khamenei instrumentalized the issue of sanctions through using them as a mean to integrate the elites from various political factions in Iran.⁷⁵¹ In this sense, similar to the positive impact of Iran-iraq war on the consolidation of the power of Islamic regime, Iran’s decision makers opportunistically use the sanctions as a mean to consolidate national unity of Iran through while they sincerely or not sincerely undermining the impact of such sanctions over Iran’s economy.⁷⁵² At this point, there are some studies to show this undermining is

⁷⁴⁶ Trevor P. Gosselin, “Iran in Perspective: Menacing or Misunderstood?”, p. 28.

⁷⁴⁷ See, Christopher Dickey, “The Oil Shield”, *Foreign Policy*, April 25, 2006.

⁷⁴⁸ Gülriç Şen, “Post-Revolutionary Iran’s Foreign Policy Toward the United States: A Historical Sociological Analysis of State Transformation and Foreign Policy”, p. 300.

⁷⁴⁹ James F. Jeffrey, “Moving to Decision: U.S. Policy toward Iran”, *Strategic Report*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, February 10, 2013, p.2.

⁷⁵⁰ Yossi Malman and Meir Javedanfar, *The Nuclear Sphinx of Tehran: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the State of Iran*, (New York: Carroll & Graff Publishers, 2007), p. 61.

⁷⁵¹ Oliver Borszik, “International Sanctions against Iran under President Ahmadinejad”, pp. 17-19.

⁷⁵² Suzanne Maloney, “The Economics of Influencing Iran”, *Middle East MEMO Series*, No.16, The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, March 2010, p.4.

not just a political tactic but have valid reasons. For example, Roger Howard explains increasing oil demand in the world lead American allies to strengthen their ties with Iran even it is against the sanctions which cause tensions between US and its allies while at the same time American businesses to lose considerable amount of money that is earned by other powers like China, Japan, India or Pakistan so these sanctions could not really impact Iran's purchasing power.⁷⁵³ Actually, the lack of consensus among world powers regarding the oil-sanctions directed to Iran undermined the legitimacy of such sanctions, and gave more courage to Iran in its nuclear policy.⁷⁵⁴

In this sense, Chinese, European and Japanese oil markets becomes crucial for Iran hence they enable Iran to endure in the face of the sanctions.⁷⁵⁵ Therefore, Iran with a motivation to find "alternative financiers"⁷⁵⁶ directs its attention more to the Eastern countries that are emerging as influential power centers in the world like China, Russia and India in order to handle its sanction-based problems⁷⁵⁷ in the frame of its "Look to the East" policy.⁷⁵⁸ Additionally, as those countries share the idea of resisting American unilateralism; Iranian authorities give considerable importance to the balancing capacity of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) against the US hegemony.⁷⁵⁹ Thus, IRI under President Ahmadinejad seeks for full membership to the SCO.⁷⁶⁰ At the same

⁷⁵³ Roger Howard, *Iran Oil: The New Middle East Challenge to America*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), p.2-5.

⁷⁵⁴ James F. Jeffrey, "Moving to Decision: U.S. Policy toward Iran", p. 2, see also:ShabnamMirsaeeedi, "Iran's Flourishing Regional Influence", *Science & Diplomacy*, July 15, 2013, online available at: <http://www.sciencediplomacy.org/article/2013/irans-flourishing-regional-influence>, (accessed on July 21, 2015).

⁷⁵⁵ Luke Patey, "Iran and the New Geopolitics of Oil: An Annotated Bibliography", *DIIS Working Paper*, No.24, 2006, p.3.

⁷⁵⁶Suzanne Maloney, "The Economics of Influencing Iran", p. 4.

⁷⁵⁷ Luke Patey, "Iran and the New Geopolitics of Oil", p. 3.

⁷⁵⁸ Nasser Saghafi-Ameri, "Iran Finds Common Grounds with BRICS", Center for Strategic Research, April 7, 2013, Tehran, online available at: <http://www.csr.ir/Center.aspx?lng=en&subid=-1&cntid=2684>, (accessed on August 23, 2015).

⁷⁵⁹SanamVakil, "Iran: Balancing East against West", *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol.29, No.4, (Autumn 2006), pp. 61-62.

⁷⁶⁰Jahangir Karami, "Iran-Russia Relations: Expectations and Realities", *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly*, Vol.9, No.3-4, (Winter 2011), pp.7-36.

time growing need for energy in the world also helpful for Iran to handle the problems of sanctions by making Japan, European Union, Pakistan or China to prioritize their links with Tehran which cause a tension between America and its less powerful allies⁷⁶¹ as it is addressed above as a legitimacy problem stems from the lack of consensus among countries worldwide regarding the oil-sanctions targeted to Iran. However, such a consensus among world powers is started to emerge after 2009 with the impact of the revealing of the suspicious nuclear facility near the city of Qom.⁷⁶² Therefore, the above mentioned severe sanctions and their harsh impacts on Iran's economy become inevitable for Iran during the last year of President Ahmadinejad.

At that point, it is still important to remind that given Iran's considerable presence in Gulf Countries especially Dubai as a crucial investor that considerably contribute their economy as well as Iran's economic contribution to Iraq regarding the huge numbers of people's pilgrim activities and investments of Iranian businessmen in the country and its considerable amounts of trade relationships with Central Asian countries, Turkey apart from Russia and China , the sanctions seem not very sufficient in terms of isolating Iran.⁷⁶³ However, their devastating impact on Iran's economy cannot be ignored, especially in terms of their role to enhance the structural deficiencies of Iran through opening the way for further black marketing that strengthens the afore-mentioned prioritized status of IRGC in Iran's economy⁷⁶⁴ as well as in politics which contributes the "rise of authoritarianism" in Iran.⁷⁶⁵

Therefore, in addition to the material damage of the sanctions, their contribution to the structural deficiencies of Iran's economy is the reason that prevents transformation of oil

⁷⁶¹Roger Howard, *Iran Oil*, pp. 2-5.

⁷⁶²"UN Sanctions Against Iran", *Global Policy Forum*, online available at: <https://www.globalpolicy.org/security-council/index-of-countries-on-the-security-council-agenda/iran.html>, (accessed on October 3, 2015).

⁷⁶³ See PramodSedhain, "Iran's wider role and influence in the Middle East", *The Daily Journalist*, <http://thedailyjournalist.com/the-strategist/iran-s-wider-role-and-influence-in-the-middle-east/> .

⁷⁶⁴Gülriş Şen, "Post-Revolutionary Iran's Foreign Policy Toward the United States: A Historical Sociological Analysis of State Transformation and Foreign Policy", p. 364.

⁷⁶⁵ See Bayram Sinkaya, *The Revolutionary Guards in Iranian Politics*, pp. 177-181

money into economic growth in Iran. Nevertheless, Iran's economic capacity endures as a big potential under President Ahmadinejad despite shortcomings and deficiencies.

5.2. Military Capacities of Iran

As the second component of Iran's hard power capabilities, its military power will be under consideration in this section. Here, the goal is to reach an overall understanding about the military capabilities of Iran in the Middle East region. Such an evaluation of military capabilities of Iran is mainly directed towards to examine the consistencies or inconsistencies of its relative military power in the region with its regional role assertions. At that point, it is important to note that this study does not provide an in-depth analysis of Iran's military capacity; instead it provides sufficient data that to reveal Iran's position in the region in terms of its military capacities which is enough to offer the answer to the main question.

To begin with, there is again a similar duality in the military structure of Iran as its dual state structure.⁷⁶⁶ Thus, conventional army "Army of the Islamic Republic"(Artesh) and "Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-IRGC" (Pasdaran) together with MOIS and LEF constitutes the military and security system of Iran.⁷⁶⁷ This dual security structure which has inherently overlapping missions among different groups of the security apparatus is suggested to be created for consolidation of Islamic regime domestically by strictly controlling the domestic insurgencies⁷⁶⁸ through especially Basij Militia whose manpower reaches to almost 1 million as a reserve force of IRGC⁷⁶⁹ but paradoxically this duality prevents Iran to reach its potential military power because of the ineffective competition

⁷⁶⁶ Frederic M. Wehrey et. al, *Dangerous but Not Omnipotent*", pp. , 44-45.

⁷⁶⁷ See Anthony H. Cordesman and Martin Kleiber, *Iran's Military Forces and Warfighting Capabilities: The Threat in the Northern Gulf*, (Westport CT: Praeger Security International), pp. 30-134.

⁷⁶⁸ Frederic M. Wehrey et. al, *Dangerous but Not Omnipotent*, p. , 40.

⁷⁶⁹ Anthony H. Cordesman and Martin Kleiber, *Iran's Military Forces and Warfighting Capabilities*, p. 81.

among the groups for their conflictual interests⁷⁷⁰ that is at the same time a sign of highly politicized nature of the Iranian security structure. Nevertheless, Iran still has important advantage over most of the other regional countries, especially over small gulf countries in terms of its military manpower capacity which is totally more than 545.000 personnel excluding the huge manpower of BasijMillita.⁷⁷¹ As Anthony Cordesman illustrated this number is for Saudi Arabia is 199.500 as the biggest rival of Iran in the gulf.⁷⁷²

Although Iran has a relative advantage in terms of the number of personnel in its security structure, it has important deficiencies about modernizing its military forces. The relative weakness of Iran to reach modernized military equipment and systems is based on the eight years of devastating war with Iraq which cause Iran to lose important degree of its military arsenal⁷⁷³ and the simultaneous sanctions that restricts the military sales to Iran. Given the huge amount of military spending of Gulf States that is much more than Iran's and their high-technologic military capabilities, the relative weakness of Iran in the region in terms of advanced military arsenal causes a tendency towards asymmetric warfare in Iran whose military strategy is suggested to be based on deterrence.⁷⁷⁴ In this respect, IRGC Commander Yahya Rahim Safavi states,

Currently, at a time when we feel the threats of extra-regional powers such as the U.S. against the Islamic Republic of Iran, we have revised the structure of Iran's armed forces. The training methods, war strategy, and military doctrine of the armed forces, and especially of the three branches of the IRGC, have been revised. We have designed arms and equipment suitable for extra-regional warfare. We have named this strategy comprehensive defense, Alavi battle, and asymmetrical warfare,⁷⁷⁵

⁷⁷⁰ Frederic M. Wehrey et. al, *Dangerous but Not Omnipotent*, p. , 44.

⁷⁷¹ Anthony H. Cordesman and Martin Kleiber, *Iran's Military Forces and Warfighting Capabilities*, p. 196 (see the figure for comparing man power capacities of Iran and Gulf countries at page 38)

⁷⁷² Ibid. , p. 3.

⁷⁷³ Anthony H. Cordesman and Martin Kleiber, *Iran's Military Forces and Warfighting Capabilities*, p. 103.

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 199- 210.

Therefore, Iran focuses on to strengthen its asymmetric war capacities in relation to its deterrence policy which includes also its proxy war efforts and the “Arab Street” policy also as mentioned before. In this context, Iranian regular forces and IRGC are trained for unconventional war and their focus turned to develop “long-range strike systems and weapons of mass destruction (WMD)”.⁷⁷⁶ Additionally, the IRGC force established strong ties with proxy kind groups in order to utilize them during possible unconventional asymmetrical wars as General YahyaSafavi emphasizes during an interview:

if the Zionist regime or the Americans make problems for us and organize attacks against us... [they should remember that] The Zionist regime is about 1,300 kilometers from our centers. If we have a missile range of 2,000 kilometers, it is only natural that a distance of 1,300 kilometers is within this range. I’d [also] like to say something else. If the Zionist regime was defeated by a group of Hizbullah in Lebanon.. After all, Hizbullah is a small group in Lebanon, which defeated the Israeli army in this 33-day war. How can Israel withstand a great nation that numbers 70 million, 90 percent of which are Shiites? As for the IRGC and the Basij –we have 10 million Basij members and strong Revolutionary Guards. There is no comparison⁷⁷⁷

At that point, the polemical issue of the missile capacities of Iran gains much attention. In this respect their Iran-centric worldviews come to scene as Cordesman indicates the widespread tendency of Iranians to exaggerate their missile capacities and their attempt to emphasize the unpredictability of Iran’s military power by addressing the so-called “secret weapons” or new missiles while he also accepts to some degree of unpredictability of Iran’s real reach to shabab3-4 or 5 kinds of missiles.⁷⁷⁸ He still provides some detailed data about the missile power of Iran. Thus, it seems there is a general consensus and perception about the reality of Iran’s important missile power but

⁷⁷⁵ “Iran has become an extra-regional power: General”, *Tehran Times*, online available at: http://www.tehrantimes.com/Index_view.asp?code=153632.

⁷⁷⁶Anthony H. Cordesman and Martin Kleiber, *Iran’s Military Forces and Warfighting Capabilities*, p. 199.

⁷⁷⁷AnoushiravanEhteshami, “Iran’s Politics and Regional Relations: Post-Détente”, *Perceptions*, Spring 2007, pp. 38-39.

⁷⁷⁸Anthony H. Cordesman and Martin Kleiber, *Iran’s Military Forces and Warfighting Capabilities*, p. 66.

the degree of its reach is simply unknown.⁷⁷⁹ Actually, this unpredictability itself is what Iran wants because it ultimately enhances its deterrence capacity as in the case of their unpredictability about which methods they will use to reach their regional role claims.

Here it is important to mention about desire for self-sufficiency of Iran's officials for attaining independent domestic defense industries in order to reduce Iran's dependence to foreign supplies. In that respect the decision makers of Iran claim that Iran's defense industry has reached a point to export more than 50 countries with \$115 million worth of military arsenal.⁷⁸⁰ In this respect, the capacity of domestic defense industries of Iran is estimated to be even potentially challenge USAF⁷⁸¹ Thus, there is not very reliable concrete data about the reach of Iran's defense industries which is claimed to be composed of 250 sites 50.000 workers⁷⁸² but it is a fact that the indigenous defense industry enhances Iran's relative military capabilities in the region.

At that point, as a component of its deterrence strategy and as an asymmetric warfare strength, Iran's proxy war capability is also important to reach an understanding of its military power. Here comes the importance and activities of al-Quds force as a branch of IRGC. It is estimated that the force is composed of 15,000 well trained soldiers.⁷⁸³ Although there is not concrete data regarding the activities and reach of this special force, its active presence and support of non-state actors such as Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic jihad, various Shia militant groups in Iraq ,Afghanistan and Persian Gulf and its "directorates in Jordan, Pakistan, India, Turkey, Asian countries, North American and European and African countries is known."⁷⁸⁴The so-called Iranian proxies Hezbollah,

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid., p.92-102

⁷⁸⁰ Mahmoud Asgari, "Iran's Defense Diplomacy", p. 187.

⁷⁸¹ Frederic M. Wehrey et. al, *Dangerous but Not Omnipotent*, p. , 40.

⁷⁸² Steven R. Ward, *Immortal: A Military History of Iran and Its Armed Forces*, (Washington DC : Georgetown University Press, 2009), p. 310.

⁷⁸³ See Anthony H. Cordesman and Martin Kleiber, *Iran's Military Forces and Warfighting Capabilities*, p. 79.

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid. , p. 80.

Islamic Jihad, Hamas and Shia militant groups in Iraq is claimed to be trained armed and funded by al-Quds force.⁷⁸⁵

However, the loyalty of such so called proxy groups to Iranian causes is a debatable issue⁷⁸⁶ while the influence of Iran over them is undeniable, as it is discussed in previous chapter. Therefore, through this influence, if not control, Iran aims to gain strength and increase its influence in the region although the regional perception toward it is badly effected as it increases its image as a threat to regional peace and stability. Actually, it seems like as a reflection to high degree of US presence and its military bases in neighboring countries Iran is taking precaution against particularly a possible US attack through enhancing its presence in the wider region in order to increase its deterrence capacity by building effective links with those non-state actors in the region. As a result, those proxy groups or proxy kind groups gives Iran a degree of power but this is not a reliable capability for Iran as the loyalties of those groups are not unconditional and as their own interests are suggested as coming first for them.

In addition to those capacities and weaknesses, IRGC should be separately examined in order to reach a whole sight of its military designing. While, IRGC of IRI, that has its own ground, naval and air forces in addition to special al-Quds force and basij militia, as a creation of Khomeini after the 1979 revolution to protect the Islamic regime, providing internal security and countering external threats by focusing on intelligence services and unconventional asymmetric warfare activities, it turns to be an influential political, economic and military actor within the IRI system as a whole during the process.⁷⁸⁷

Therefore, compared to regular army of IRI, IRGC is suggested to be much more ideological and political driven⁷⁸⁸ and has so much close links with hardliners of the

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid. , p.79.

⁷⁸⁶Frederic M. Wehrey et. al, *Dangerous but Not Omnipotent*, p. , 40.

⁷⁸⁷ See, Frederic M. Wehrey et. al, *Dangerous but Not Omnipotent*”, p. 45

⁷⁸⁸Anthony H. Cordesman and Martin Kleiber, *Iran’s Military Forces and Warfighting Capabilities*, p. 73.

regime that it proclaims to have the duty of intervening in the politics when it see a necessity for the sake of regime's survival.⁷⁸⁹ Moreover, given their over presence in political and economic spheres IRGC has strong control over the nuclear activities of Iran, ballistic missiles, similar unconventional military arsenal of the country which makes it to behave overly self-confident that causes on the one hand "corruption and careerism",⁷⁹⁰ problems and on the other hand misuse of such an amount of power through financial abuses in the "defense, oil and construction sectors" (especially with its rising status in Iran's politics together with the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad).⁷⁹¹ Therefore, as Cordesman indicated IRGC seems more like an economic and social power that abuse its military nature for interest maximizing rather than being a military force that ultimately create a strong motivation in IRGC to secure the status quo of the country for the continuation of their advantageous status in the system that is at the interest of mainstream of Iran also.⁷⁹² In other words, IRGC seems one of the biggest obstacles in front of the political reformation and economic development process of IRI which is addressed in the previous section while analyzing the structural deficiencies of Iran's economy.

As a conclusion, IRI has a clear superiority over the other regional states in terms of its size of manpower, but it is in an inferior position to most of the other regional states including small Gulf States in regard to advanced military technologies and modernized military equipment. To compensate this conventional military power inferiority Iran's focus on unconventional asymmetrical warfare capabilities seems to provide it an advantageous position in the region in terms of its relatively less dependence upon foreign military supply because of its indigenous defense industry or various sources other than US supply. Moreover, its influence over almost every parts of the region

⁷⁸⁹ Steven R. Ward, *Immortal: A Military History of Iran and Its Armed Forces*, (Washington DC : Georgetown University Press, 2009), p. 307.

⁷⁹⁰ Anthony H. Cordesman and Martin Kleiber, *Iran's Military Forces and Warfighting Capabilities*, p.76.

⁷⁹¹ See, Frederic M. Wehrey et. al, *Dangerous but Not Omnipotent*, p. 45

⁷⁹² See Anthony H. Cordesman and Martin Kleiber, *Iran's Military Forces and Warfighting Capabilities*, p.76; Frederic M. Wehrey et. al, *Dangerous but Not Omnipotent*, p. 45.

through its close linkages with non-state actors if not proxy relationships, also gives it a kind of extra capability despite the vulnerability and dependence of this capability on its oil money.

As a result, despite Iran's claims, Iran's potential to reach superior or dominant role in the region seems not totally valid in terms of its military capabilities. But at the same time it cannot be assumed as invalid. Moreover, Iran's claim of being an indispensable constructive regional power seems quite unconvincing in relation to its support to various militia groups or its proxy groups in the region, since this increases the threat perceptions towards Iran in the region as it is mentioned in the previous chapter. Actually this again brings the issue of regime survival which Iran needs to maintain militarily also that led them to use unconventional methods in the face of their incapability in terms of conventional power apart from their military manpower. Therefore their constructive regional role seems inherently inconsistent with their military activities across the region.

5.3. Conclusion: Validity of Iran's Self-Perception in terms of its Hard Power Capabilities

Therefore, Iran has an enormous potential for economic growth due to its rich oil and natural gas reserves, geographical advantages and relatively higher density of population in the region⁷⁹³ but as a result of the contradictory nature of the necessities of economic development with the essence of the regime itself that includes its institutional and revolutionary characteristics together with its prioritization of regime survival makes this potential still endures as just a potential in Iranian case. The result is IRI's claim to be an indispensable and undeniable regional power seems economically valid and they are right also when they claim that they have sufficient capacity to become a regional

⁷⁹³ Robin Wright, "Iran Primer: The Challenge of Iran", October 18, 2010.

dominant power in terms of their energy resources but not much in terms of economic structure or general economic policies during Ahmadinejad Era.

In the light of above mentioned data about Iran's economic and military capacities in the region, it can be suggested that above all the issue of "regime survival" together with other several structural and material deficiencies seems generally inconsistent with Iran's constructive regional role. Similarly, Iran's claim to be a regional role model seems also not very valid economically since it does not offer an alternative economic model for the other regional states or its economic growth is not in a position that will be modeled by other states. However, militarily Iran may be a role model in the region to some extent but not in the sense that the decision makers of IRI imply due to the unpredictability of the loyalty of the militia groups that is trained and funded by Iran. Nevertheless, Iran's claim of having the potential to become a regional dominant power seems materially valid, although it is theoretically problematic due to above all the regime survival issue. Therefore, only the third claim of Iran regarding its role in the region seems valid in terms of its hard power capacities.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This thesis offers three parameters to approach the regional role of Iran during Ahmadinejad era. These are: “regional perception of Iran”, “regional perceptions towards Iran” and “hard power capacities of Iran”. In relation to the self-perception of Iran, this study has reached three different regional role claims. According to the decision makers of IRI, as an indispensable part of Middle East region Iran is a “constructive regional power” and Iran is a “role model” for other Muslim states in the region. Finally, the officials of IRI suggest that IRI is a “potential regional dominant power”.

Therefore, these three regional role perceptions of authorities in IRI have been tested by the following parameters. Initially, this thesis demonstrates that there was a general threat perception towards Iran in the region. In this respect, the states or non-state actors that are known with their close relationship with Tehran seem also feeling threatened by Iran in terms of their independency from IRI or their legacy in the eyes of the people in their countries. Thus, the first claim of Iran which is “a constructive regional power” not acknowledged across the region in general. Similarly its second claim which is “a role model” for the other Muslim countries in the region generally not accepted across the region that includes Shia communities in general also. However, it still has considerable influence over Shia communities and movements. Lastly, the third claim of Iran which is “potential regional dominant power” is considered as the only claim that is acknowledged by the regional states due to the interpretation of their threat perceptions as an acknowledgement of the potential power of Iran.

Secondly, the self-perceptions of IRI are tested in accordance with its power capacities. In this respect economically the relatively superior position of Iran due to its revenues from rich energy sources, its size and its demographic superiorities over other regional countries is confirmed. However, such big economic potential in IRI seems has not been utilized through well-functioning and effective economic system and patterns. Therefore, economically the claim of “potential regional dominant power” seems possible in terms of resources and opportunities but during the Presidency of Ahmadinejad there was no materialization of this potential. However, according to its economic capacities, Iran is still in a superior position in the region.

Similarly, the military capacity of IRI seems also superior in the region in terms of manpower capacity and its size but that does not make IRI automatically militarily superior in the region. However, Iran’s relation and impact on the militia groups across the region as a deterrence capacity actually makes IRI powerful in term of military capacity. In relation to such linkages, Iran’s claim of “constructive regional power” seems not very valid but the same capacity to influence opposition groups actually gives Iran an important level of deterrence capacity which enhanced its claim of “potential regional dominant power”.

Therefore, among the claims of IRI, only its claim of “potentially regional dominant power” seems valid in terms of other two parameters. Thus this thesis reaches the conclusion that Iran is a potential regional dominant power. However, this study demonstrates the prioritization of regime survival by IRI elites as the ultimate goal of the country makes difficult of materialization of such a potential of Iran. In other words, the vital importance of regime survival itself shows Iran is not prepared to dominate the region even if it would have the sufficient capabilities.

However, IRI surely an influential regional power due to its relative military strength, oil resources and influence over almost any part of the region. In this respect, according to Buzan Iran is automatically a regional power due to its material superiority. At the same

time according to the minimum necessities of regional powers for Destardi's typology Iran is regional power also. However, the results reached in this study indicate the "regional dominator" concept of MrymPrys as the most suitable definition of Iran's regional role during the Presidency of Ahmadinejad. According to Prys, regional dominators see themselves as "regionally exceptions but in a negative manner", "they are not accepted by the other regional states" which are "afraid of those powers", they have also important impact on the region but this is reached "through force and violence" and they "provide private goods".⁷⁹⁴ In addition to such defining characteristics of different regional powers, she also adds that the apparent feature of regional domination is its "one-sidedness" which means involuntary obedience of other regional states to the dominator because of the "constant threat of force" it poses.⁷⁹⁵

⁷⁹⁴Miriam Prys, "Hegemony, Domination, Detachment: Differences in Regional Powerhood.", pp. 496.

⁷⁹⁵Ibid., pp. 489..

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APPENDICES

A.TURKISH SUMMARY

CUMHURBAŞKANI AHMADINEJAD DÖNEMİNDE İRAN'IN BÖLGESEL ROLÜ

Bu çalışmanın amacı İran'ın Ahmedinejad döneminde Orta Doğu bölgesindeki asıl rolünü tespit etmektir. 11 Eylül saldırılarını takiben Amerika'nın Orta Doğu Bölgesi'nde önemli oranda artan siyasi ve askeri varlığı, özellikle 2003 Irak işgali sonrasındaki dönemde bölge ülkelerinin rolleri ve genel olarak bölgedeki güç dengeleri üzerinde farkedilir şekilde değişimlere sebep olmuştur. Bu değişen roller ve güç dengeleri çerçevesinde İran'ın bölgedeki rolü oldukça tartışmalı bir konu haline gelmekle birlikte, özellikle Cumhurbaşkanı Ahmadinejad'ın İran'ın nükleer faaliyetleri çerçevesindeki sert ve iddialı söylemleriyle daha da popüler bir tartışma haline dönüşmüştür. Böylelikle İran'ın hegemonya arayışında olduğuna dair iddialar oldukça artmıştır. Dolayısıyla bu artan tartışmalar ve iddialar bu çalışmanın konusunun İran'ın Orta Doğu Bölgesi'ndeki rolü olmasında bir tür motivasyon kaynağı oluşturmuştur.

Bu bağlamda cevabı aranan temel soru İran'ın sözü edilen bu dönemde bir "bölgesel güç" olarak sınıflandırılabilip sınıflandırılmayacağından hareketle ne tür bir bölgesel

role sahip olduğudur. Bu soru doğrultusunda öncelikle uluslararası ilişkiler literatüründeki “bölgecilik” ve “bölgesel rol” kavramları üzerine yapılan çalışmalar ışığında bu tezin kavramsal çerçevesi oluşturulmuş ve bu soruya ne tür bir metodla cevap aranacağı belirlenmiştir. Bu kavramsal çerçeve temel olarak üç parametreden oluşan bir tür tipoloji yardımıyla İran’ın bölgesel rolüne dair çıkarımlar yapılabilecek bir yöntem öne sürmektedir.

Bu noktada bu üç parametreyi belirtmek gerekirse, bunlar; “İran’ın bölgesel konusundaki öz algısı”, “bölge ülkelerinin İran’ın bölgesel rolü konusundaki algıları” ve son olarak “İran’ın sert gücü” dür. Burda belirtmek gerekir ki birinci parametre esasen tüm çalışmanın temelini oluşturur bir konumdadır. Diğer iki parametre ise birinci parametrenin geçerliliğini tespit etmek amacıyla birinci parametrede ulaşılan sonuçlar ışığında düzenlenmiştir. Diğer bir deyişle, bu çalışma İran’ın kendi iddialarının geçerliliğini bölge ülkelerinin tasdiği ve İran’ın sert güç kapasitesi açısından değerlendirme yolu ile İran’ın bölgesel rolü konusunda bir takım sonuçlara varmaktadır.

Böylelikle bu çalışma öncelikle kavramsal çerçeveyi oluşturma üzerine odaklandıktan sonra temel olarak bu kavramsal çerçevenin ışığında ulaşılan, yukarıda sözü edilen üç parametreye denk gelen üç bölüm üzerine odaklanarak oluşturulmuştur. En nihayetinde sonuç bölümünde İran’ın bölgesel rolü konusunda bir takım çıkarımlar yapılmıştır. Dolayısıyla bu çalışma giriş ve sonuç bölümü de dahil olmak üzere toplam altı bölümden oluşmaktadır.

2. Kavramsal çerçeve bağlamında “bölgeselcilik” ve “bölgesel rol” kavramsallaştırmaları üzerine bir değerlendirme.

Çalışma kavramsal çerçeve bölümünde, İran’ın bölgesel rolünü incelemekte araçsallaştırılabilecek bir metoda ulaşma hedefinden hareketle Uluslararası ilişkiler literatüründe “bölgeselcilik”, “bölgesel güç” ve “bölgesel roller” üzerine yapılan

çalışmaları incelemektedir. Dolayısıyla, tezin bu bölümünde çalışmalarını bölgeselcilik üzerine yoğunlaştırmış akademisyenlerin konuya nasıl yaklaştıkları incelenmektedir.

Böylesi bir inceleme sonucunda, “bölgeselcilik” ve bölgeselcilik ilişkili kavramlara yaklaşımları açısından ele alınan akademisyenlerin genel olarak iki gruba ayrıştırılabileceği tespit edilmiştir. Bu tespite göre, bu iki grup akademisyen birbirinden temel olarak küresel sistem ve bölgesel sistem arasındaki ilişkiye yönelimleri açısından ayrılmaktadırlar. Bu bağlamda, her iki grup da Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde oluşan tek kutuplu dünya düzeni içerisinde bölgelerin ve bölgesel güçlerin önemini giderek arttığı konusunda hem fikirlerdir. Fakat birinci grup olarak nitelendirilen kümedeki akademisyenler temelde küresel sistemin önemini koruduğu konusunda hemfikirken; ikinci grup bölgesel sistemlerin de en az küresel sistem kadar önemli olduğunu savunmaktadır

Böylelikle bu iki grubu birbirinden ayıran bu temel yaklaşımlar irdelendiğinde, aslında bu ayrışımın üç nokta üzerinden değerlendirilebileceği sonucuna varılmıştır. Bu üç noktadan birincisi bölgesel sistemlerin işleyişinin küresel sistem kontrolü altında olduğu yönelimine karşı bölgesel dinamiklerin kendi içinde bölgesel sistemi belirlediği yönelimidir. Bu açıdan bakıldığında birinci grup bölgesel sistemlerin doğrudan küresel sistem dinamikleri tarafından belirlendiğini savunurken ikinci grup bölgesel dinamiklerin bölgesel sistemi belirlemedeki baskın rolünü savunur. Bu bağlamda aslında küreselcilik ve bölgeselcilik arasındaki geleneksel çatışmaya bir kere daha vurgu yapılmış olur.

İki grubu birbirinden ayırıştıran ikinci nokta ise bir tarafın küresel sistem analizleri ışığından bölgesel sistemlerin anlaşılabilmesine olan savına karşı, diğer tarafın bölgesel sistemleri incelemek üzere bölgesel ölçekli analizler kurgulama çabasıdır. Dolayısıyla bir taraf küresel sistem analizlerini doğrudan bölgesel sistemler üzerine uygularken diğer

taraf böylesi bir uygulamanın bölgesel sistemlerin kurgusunu anlamak için yetersiz olduğunu dolayısıyla bölgesel temelli yeni yaklaşımların gerekli olduğunu savunur.

Son olarak ise, birinci grup bölgedeki bir ülkeyi “bölgesel güç” olarak nitelendirebilmek için bu ülkenin bölgesel lider özellikleri taşıması koşulunun olduğunu ileri sürmektedir. Bu yaklaşıma göre bölgesel lider veya onun eş anlamlısı olan “bölgesel güç” bölgede istikrar ve güven ortamı yaratmakla sorumludur. Aksi takdirde, herhangi bir devlet görece olarak ekonomik ve askeri anlamda bölgede üstün konumda olsa dahi “bölgesel güç” olarak tanımlanamaz. Diğer yandan, ikinci grup ise bir ülkenin, bölgesel lider sorumluluklarını taşımakla motive olmuş olmasa da “bölgesel güç” olarak nitelendirilebileceğini öne sürer ve çeşitli bölgesel güç tanımlamaları yapar.

Bu noktada belirtmek gerekir ki bu çalışma temel olarak ikinci grup yönelimin bölgesel sistemleri incelemede daha etkili olduğunu savunmaktadır. Bu bağlamda ikinci grup üzerine odaklanarak, bu çeşit “bölgeselci” yaklaşımların bölgesel rolleri gruplandırmakta işlevselleştirdikleri ortak noktaları tespit etmeyi hedeflemiştir. Böylece, “öz-algi”, “bölgedeki diğer ülkelerin incelenen ülkenin bölgesel rolünü nasıl algıladıkları”, “sert güç kapasitesi” noktalarının temel olarak ikinci gruptaki akademisyenlerin bölgesel roller tanımlamakta kullandıkları ortak noktalar olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Bu tespit ışığında bir ülkenin bölgedeki rolünü belirlemekte bu üç parametrenin kullanılabilmesi çıkarımı yapılmıştır.

Sonuç olarak bu bölüm yukarıda sözü edilen üç parametre çerçevesinde İran’ın bölgedeki rolünün tespit edilebileceğini öne sürmektedir. Bu sava göre, birinci parametre olan “öz-algi” öncelikle incelenerek İran’ın bölgede ne çeşit bir rol oynadığı konusundaki kendi iddiaları tespit edildikten sonra diğer iki parametre yardımıyla bu iddiaların geçerli olup olmadığı analiz edilmektedir. Böylelikle, bu çalışma İran’ın iddiaları ışığında Ahmadinejad dönemindeki bölgesel rolünü tespit etmeyi hedefler. Dolayısıyla, takip eden üç bölüm sırasıyla bu üç parametreyi değerlendirmektedir.

3. İranin bölgesel rolü konusundaki “öz algisi”

Bu bölüm İran’ın bölgesel rolü açısından kendi kendisini nasıl tanımlandığını tespit etmeyi hedeflemektedir. Böylelikle yukarıda sözü edilen birinci parametre İran’a uygulanmış olacaktır. Bu noktada İran’ın kendi kendisini nasıl tanımladığının anlaşılabilmesi için öncelikle ülkenin “kimlik”lerine odaklanılmıştır. Daha sonra bu kimliklerin ne tür iddialar doğurduğuna ulaşılması hedeflenmektedir. Diğer bir deyişle bu bölüm kendi içinde bir yöntem ışığında İranin “öz –algılarını” veya “öz-tanımlamalarını” tespit eder. Bu yöntemle göre İrandaki karar alıcıların İran’ın kimlikleri etkisiyle ne tür bir dünya görüşüne sahip oldukları ve bu dünya görüşü çerçevesinden İran’ın bölgesel rolünü nasıl tanımladıkları tespit edilecektir. Dolayısıyla, bu bölümün temel iddiası kimliklerin bakış açılarını ve bakış açılarının da öz tanımlamalarda doğrudan etkili olduğudur.

Bu iddia ışığında öncelikle İran’ın kimlikleri konusuna odaklanılmıştır. Bu bağlamda, ilgili akademisyenlerin tespitlerine dayanılarak İran’ın ‘devrimci’, ‘İslami’ ve ‘milli’ kimlikleri üzerinden bir değerlendirme yapılabileceği varsayımına ulaşılmıştır. Bu çerçevede bu üç kimlik de ayrı ayrı ne tür ‘dünya görüşlerini’ doğurdukları açısından incelenmiştir. Daha sonrasında ise bu dünya görüşlerinin İran’ın liderlerini bölgede ne tür iddialarda bulunmaya yönelttiğini inceleyerek, İran’ın bölgesel rolü konusundaki öz algıları tespit edilmiştir. Bu düzlemde, her bir kimlik dört alt başlık yardımıyla incelenmektedir. Birinci olarak her bir kimliğin ne tür bakış açılarına sebep olduğu incelenmiş, ikinci olarak ise bu bakış açılarının Ahmedinejad dönemi özelinde ne tür evrimler geçirip geçirmediği irdelenmiştir. Ardından üçüncü olarak bu açıların ne tür bölgesel rol iddiaları doğurduğu konusunda çıkarımlar yapılmış ve dördüncü olarak bu bölgesel rol iddialarının Ahmedinejad döneminde nasıl şekillendiği gösterilmiştir.

Bu noktada belirtmek gerekir ki bu üç kimlik, temel olarak İran’da üç bakış açısının oluşmasına sebep olmuştur. Bunlar ‘Amerika karşıtlığı veya genel olarak Batı karşıtlığı’, ‘adil bir dünya düzeni arayışı’, ve ‘üstünlük hissi’dir. Aslında bu üç temel görüşün

İran'ın her üç kimliğinin de sonucu olduğu dolayısıyla istikrarlı ve güçlü temel görüşler oldukları tespitine varılmıştır. Fakat 'Amerika karşıtlığı'nın baskın olarak devrimci kimliğin bir sonucu olduğu, 'adil dünya düzeni arayışının' temelde İslami kimliğin bir sonucu olduğu ve 'üstünlük hissi' nin ise milli kimliğinde temellendiği vurgulanmıştır. Dolayısıyla bu öncelikli tespitler ışığında bu bölüm, İran'ın daha çok devrimci kimliği çerçevesinde oluşan "Amerika karşıtlığı" etkisiyle ülkenin akademisyenleri ve karar alıcıları arasında yaygın olan görüşe göre, İran Orta Doğu bölgesinde bölgesel ve demokrasiyi savunan, bölgenin ayrılmaz bir parçası olan ve dolayısıyla "yapıcı bir bölgesel güç" olarak tanımlandığı tespit edilmiştir. Diğer yandan baskın olarak İran'ın İslami kimliği etrafında şekillenen 'adil dünya düzeni arayışının' etkisiyle ülkede İran'ın bölge ülkelerine bir 'rol model' teşkil ettiği inancının yaygın olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Son olarak ise İran'ın öncelikle milli kimliğinin bir ürünü olan 'üstünlük' hissini etkisiyle ülkede İran'ın Orta Doğu Bölgesi'nin 'potansiyel baskın gücü' olduğuna yönelik güçlü bir iddianın varlığı tespit edilmiştir.

Bu iddiaları Cumhurbaşkanı Ahmedinejad dönemine ilişkin özel vurgularla incelemek gerekirse İran'ın devrimci kimliği Mahmud Ahmedinejad'ın 1979 İran Devrimi'nin değerlerini ülkede yeniden pekiştirmek motivasyonu ile güçlendiğini belirtmek gerekir. Bu bağlamda Cumhurbaşkanı Ahmedinejad'ın 'nükleer politika' çerçevesinde İranın devrimci kimliğinin bir ürünü olarak varsayılan Amerika karşıtlığı oldukça güçlenmiştir. Dolayısıyla İran'ın 'yapıcı bir bölgesel güç' olduğu iddiası Mahmud Ahmedinejad'ın başkanlığı döneminde baskın bir şekilde görüldüğü çıkarımı yapılmaktadır.

Diğer yandan özellikle Cumhurbaşkanı Ahmedinejad'ın baskın Mehdeviyat inancı çerçevesinde İran'ın İslami kimliğini dolayısıyla İran'daki 'adil dünya düzeni arayışının' ve bunların bir sonucu olarak İran'ın 'bölgesel rol' model olduğu iddiasının da aynı şekilde var olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Bu iddia özellikle Cumhurbaşkanı'nın ikinci döneminin sonlarına doğru başlayan Arab Ayaklanmaları veya Arab Baharı olaylarının ülkede yaygın bir şekilde 'İslami Uyanış' hareketleri olarak tanımlanmasında açıkça görülür.

Son olarak ise Cumhurbaşkanının şovenizm boyutuna varan milliyetçiliğinin kendisi döneminde İran'ın miili kimliğinin pekişmesinde etkili olduğu ve bunun doğrudan İrandaki "üstünlük hissi"ni besleyerek "potansiyel bölgesel baskın güç" olma iddiasını bölgenin süpergücü ve hatta küresel super güç olma boyutlarındaki iddialara kadar taşımış gibi görüldüğünün tespiti yapılmıştır. Fakat bu noktada Cumhurbaşkanlığı Ahmedinejad döneminde aşırıya kaçan böylesi söylemlerin İran liderlerinin daha çok nükleer mesele çerçevesinde İran'a yönelik artan askeri ve politik tehditlere karşın bir tür ülkenin caydırıcılığı artırma çabası olarak nitelendirilebileceği de vurgulanmıştır. Bu vesile ile, Mahmud Ahmedinejad döneminde İran karar alıcılarının İran'ın 'potansiyel bölgesel baskın güç' olduğu konusundaki iddialarının arkasındaki rasyonel bir kere daha açıklanmaktadır.

Böylelikle bu bölümde varılan sonuca göre İran'ın Mahmud Ahmedinejad döneminde Orta Doğu bölgesinde üç ayrı bölgesel rol iddiasının olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Bunlar sırasıyla İran'ın 'yapıcı bir bölgesel güç' olduğu; 'bölgesel rol model' olduğu; ve 'potansiyel olarak bölgesel baskın güç' olduğudur. Bu iddiaların geçerli olup olmadığı, bu bölümü takip eden iki bölümde ayrı ayrı incelenmektedir.

4. Bölge ülkelerinin İran'ın bölgesel rolüne yönelik algıları

Bu tezin metoduna uygun olarak bu bölüm daha önce belirtilmiş olan ikinci parametre etrafında şekillenmektedir. Bir başka deyişle, bu bölümde İran'ın bir önceki bölümde tespit edilen üç ayrı bölgesel rol iddialarının geçerliliğinin tet edilmesi hedeflenmektedir. Bu amac doğrultusunda, İran'a yönelik bölgesel algılar incelenirken bölge ülkeleri dört grup altında değerlendirilmektedir. Buna göre, bu bölümde bölge ülkeleri Körfez Bölgesi ülkeleri; Levant Bölgesi ülkeleri; Mısır ve Türkiye olarak gruplandırılmıştır ve bu sıralamayla her bir ülkenin İran'ın bölgesel rolüne yaklaşımı değerlendirilerek daha önce tespit edilen iddialarını onaylayıp onaylamadıkları araştırılmaktadır.

Bu noktada belirtmek gerekir ki Cumhurbaşkanı Ahmedinejad döneminde İran'ın bölgedeki amaçlarına yönelik yaygın görğşler temelde iki önemli olay etrafında çevrelenmiştir. Bu olaylar, giriş bölümünde de işaret edildiği üzere İran'ın artarak ve iddialı bir biçimde devam eden nükleer faaliyetleri ve bununla doğrudan alakalı olan 'Şii Hilali' söylemleridir. Dolayısıyla bu dönemde bölge ülkelerinin İran'a yönelik algıları temelde bu iki konu üzerinden değerlendirilmektedir. Ek olarak vurgulamak gerekirse daha önce de söylenildiği gibi bu iki konu da doğrudan 2003 sonrası dönemde Irak'ta meydana gelen güç boşluğunu İran'ın dolduracağına yönelik artan sinyallere karşın bölge ülkelerinin aldıkları tutumların bir yansıması olarak öne sürülmektedir.

Dolayısıyla Körfez ülkeleri kendi arasında Körfez Arab lkeleri İş Birliği Konseyi ülkeleri ve Irak olarak iki başlık altında incelenmektedir. Öncelikle Körfez Arab İş Birliği Konseyi ülkelerinin İran'ın yaygınca bilinen Körfez Bölgesi'nin doğal baskın güücü olduğu iddiasından kaynaklanan İran'a yönelik temel kaygıları ve çekinceleri vardır. Buna ek olarak, bu ülkelerin coğrafi konumları ve mezhepsel hassaiyetleri açısından İran'ın nükleer faaliyetleri konusunda fazlaca endişeli oldukları belirtilmiştir. Bununla ilgili olarak, ülkelerinde oldukça yoğun bir oranda var olan Şii nüfusu açısından da 'Şii Hilali' konusunda endişelerinin oldukça fazla olduğu vurgulanmaktadır.

Buna karşın, İran ve Körfez bölgesi ülkeleri arasındaki yoğun ticaret hacminin yanı sıra kültürel, tarihsel ve sosyolojik derin bağlarının olduğu da vurgulanmaktadır. Fakat varılan sonuca göre Körfez Arab İşbirliği ülkelerinin İran'a yönelik aşırıya varan tehdit algılarının ve hali hazırda Körfez Arab İşbirliği Konseyinin İran'ın yayılmacılığına karşı bir önlem olarak ortaya çıkmış olması durumunun bu üşlelerin İran'ın yapıcı bölgesel güç olma iddiasını kabul etmediklerinin göstergesi olduğu yönünde değerlendirilmiştir. Diğer yandan Körfez İşbirliği ülkelerinin özellikle İran'ın öncülüğünü çekeceği şii bloğuna yönelik kaygıları ve özellikle Suudi Arabistan'ın İran'ı doğrudan kendi bölgesel rolüne yönelik bir tehdit olarak algılamasından ötürü bu ülkelerin İran'ın 'bölgesel rol model' iddiasını da net bir şekilde kabul etmemedikle tespit edilmiştir. Buna karşın bu ülkelerin İran'a yönelik bu denli yoğun tehdit algılarının aslında dolaylı bir biçimde İran'ın bölgenin baskın gücü olma konusunda ciddi bir potansiyele sahip olduğunun

kanıtını teşkil ettiği öne sürülmüştür. Dolayısıyla Körfez Arab İşbirliği ülkeleri İran'ın tespit edilen bölgesel iddiaları arasından sadece üçüncüsünü kabul ettikleri iddia edilmektedir.

Diğer bir Körfez ülkesi olan Irak'ın ise hali hazırda Suudi Arabistan kadar yoğun bir şekilde olmasa da kendisinin bölgede oluşabilecek etkin rolüne yönelik İran'ın bir tehtid unsuru oluşturduğuna dair algıları açıklanmıştır. Bu bağlamda, bu iki ülke arasında diğer körfez ülkelerine benzer şekilde derin baağların olduğu vurgulanırken, Irak'ta yeni oluşan Şii yönetimin temelde İran'I bir rakip olarak görme eğilimlerinin olduğu ve bu çerçevede Irak'taki yönetimin İran'ın askeri, siyasi ve ekonomik olarak ülkedeki yoğun varlığından aslında ragatsız olduğu açıklanmıştır. Dolayısıyla varılan sonuçta Ayatollah Sistani'yi de kapsayacak biçimde Irak'ın en etkili Şii din adamlarının Ayatollah Khomeini'nin velayeti fıkıh doktrinine temelde karşı oldukları da göz önüne alınarak Irak 'ın , İran 'ın bölgesel rol model olma iddiasını kabul etmediği açıklanmıştır. Benzer şekilde, Irak'ın yukarıda vurgulanan rekabet unsuru da göz önüne alınarak, İran'ın ülkedeki neredeyse bütün askeri ve siyasi gruplarla olan yakın temasından ve orantısız desteğinden ötürü İran'ın yapıcı bölgesel güç olma iddiasını da kabul etmedikleri açıklanmaktadır. Fakat diğer körfez ülkeleri ile aynı rasyonelden Irak'ın da İran'ın bölge de baskın güce dönüşebilecek potansiyelini kabul ettiği öne sürülmektedir.

Öte yandan Levant Bölgesi'nde ise İsrail'in tartışmasız biçimde İran'I varoluşsal bir tehtid olarak gördüğü açıklanıp, iki ülke arasında özellikle Cumhurbaşkanı Ahmedinejad'ın aşırı Yahudi karşıtı söylemleri de göz önüne alındığında derin temellere dayanan düşmanlık ve rekabetten ötürü İran'ın bölgede ne bir yapıcı rol oynadığını ne de bir rol model olabileceğini kabul etmediği açıklanmıştır. Fakat, İsrail'in yukarıdaki ülkelere benzer şekilde ve hatta onlarda daha yoğun olan İran'a yönelik tehtid algıları çerçevesinde İran'ın potansiyel bir bölgesel baskın güç olduğunu dolaylı yoldan kabul ettiği de öne sürülmektedir.

Lübnan'ın ise çok unsurlu devlet yapısını açıklamakla birlikte Hizbullah üzerinden İran'ın ülkeye yaptığı ekonomik yardımların yadsınmadığı açıklanmış ve fakat Hizbullah da dahil olmak üzere İran'ın ülkede doğrudan bir yapıcı unsur veya rol model olarak kabul edilmediği açıklanmıştır. Bu bağlamda, Hizbullah'bölgede artan siyasi gücünü koruma güdüsünden ötürü İran'ı daha önceki dönemlerdeki şekilde doğrudan bir lider olarak görmediğini kanıtlama çabasının varlığı da vurgulanmıştır. Öte yandan, İran'ın bölgedeki ekonomik ve askeri varlığını doğrudan hissedilen bir ülke olan Lübnan'ın İran'a yönelik tehdit algılarından doğan dolaylı bir şekilde İran'ın potansiyel bölgesel baskın güç olma özelliğini kabul etmesinden ziyade doğrudan da bu özelliği kabul ettiği öne sürülmektedir.

Filistin'de ise İran'a yönelik algıların Gaza ve Batı Şeria bölgelerinde ayrılmış olması vurgulanmıştır. Bu bağlamda Batı Şeria'da kontrolde olan Ftah örgütünün İran'ın İsrail ile varılabilecek her hangi bir mutabakatın önündeki temel yıkıcı unsur olduğuna yönelik inancı göz önüne alınarak İran'ın yapıcı bir bölgesel güç olduğuna ilişkin iddiasını kesinlikle kabul etmediği açıklanırken aynı sebebin sonucu olan İran'a karşı düşmanlık hislerinden ötürü de İran'ın rol model olma iddiasını da kabul etmediği açıklanmıştır. Fakat diğer çoğu ülkeyle benzer şekilde yoğun tehdit algıları ve ayrıca düşmanlık hislerinin de verdiği faladan bir vurguyla İran'ın bölgede potansiyel baskın güç olma 'riskini' dolaylı yönden kabul ettikleri de öne sürülmektedir. Öte yandan İran'ın kedisine verdiği ciddi ekonomik ve askeri desteğinden mütevellit, Hamas'ın İran'ın yapıcı güç olma iddiasını kabul etmeye daha yakın bir aday olduğu açıklanmıştır. Fakat, Hizbullah'ın durumuna benzer şekilde ve üstelik daha yoğun olarak İran ile olan bağlarından ötürü kendi toplumu neznindeki meşruiyetini kaybetme endişesi içinde olan Hamas'ın İran'ı aynı zamanda meşruiyetine yönelik bir tehdit olarak gördüğü açıklanırken mezhepsel farklar da göz önüne alınarak İran'ı rol model olarak görmediği açıklanmıştır. Aynı zamanda, Hizbullah ile benzer bir rasyoneld üzerinden hem dolaylı hem de doğrudan bir şekilde, Hamas'ın İran'ın potansiyel olarak bölgedeki baskın gücünü tanıdığı ileri sürülmektedir.

Suriye'nin ise bölgedeki tek ittifak halinde olduğu devlet olmasından da anlaşılabilirliği gibi kendi yorumladığı bir biçimde İran'ın bölgede yapıcı bir güç olduğunu kabul etmeye aday olabileceği açıklanırken, Lübnan üzerinde kontrol kurma vizyonu bağlamında Suudi Arabistan ve Irak ile benzer şekilde İran'ı aynı zamanda kendisi için tasarladığı bölgesel role bir tehdit olarak görmekte olduğu açıklanmıştır. Bu bağlamda İran'ın rol model olma iddiasının Suriye tarafından kabul edilmediği açıklanmıştır. Fakat, Hizbullah ve Hamas'a benzer şekilde İran'dan aldığı ekonomik ve askeri yardımlar çerçevesinde dem doğrudan hem dolaylı olarak İran'ın bölgede potansiyel baskın güç olma iddiasını ise kabul ettiği öne sürülmektedir.

Mısır'ın ise Suudi Arabistan ile neredeyse aynı şekilde olan İran'ı rakip ve tehdit olarak görme eğiliminde olduğu vurgulanırken, Mısır'ın İran'ın sadece üçüncü iddiasını kabul ettiği açıklanmaktadır. Suudi Arabistan'dan farklı olarak iki ülke arasındaki rekabet sadece dini ve ekonomik temellere değil aynı zamanda milli bir temele de dayandığı göz önüne alınarak İran'ın rol model ve yapıcı bir bölgesel güç olma iddialarını kısa süren Müslüman Kardeşler döneminde dahi kabul etmediği de vurgulanmıştır. Fakat Mısır'ın İran'a yönelik bu yoğun rekabet ve tehdit algısının diğer ülkelere benzer şekilde dolaylı yoldan İran'ın bölgesel baskın güç olma yolundaki potansiyelini kabullenişinin bir göstergesi olduğu öne sürülmektedir.

Türkiye'nin ise İran'a yönelik tehdit algıları özellikle AKP yönetimi döneminde diğer ülkelere nazaran oldukça az olmakla birlikte İran'ın bölgede yapıcı bir güç olduğunu kabul etmeye en yakın aday olduğu açıklanmıştır. Fakat Türkiye'nin nükleer mesele çerçevesinde İran ve uluslararası camia arasında arabuluculuk rolü oynamaya yönelik istekli tutumunun İran tarafından rekabet unsuru olarak algılandığına değinilmiştir. Dolayısıyla Türkiye'nin mezhepsel unsurlar da göz önüne alınacak olursa İran'ı bir rol model olarak kabul etmese de bir anlamda potansiyel bir yapıcı bölgesel güç olarak kabul ettiği açıklanmıştır. Bu noktada İran'ın tutumu ve rekabeti arttırmaya yönelik adımları sonucunda Türkiye'de de İran'a yönelik tehdit algılarını çoğalttığından Türkiye diğer ülkelerle benzer şekilde ama oldukça az yoğunlukta İran'ın baskın bölgesel güç

olma potansiyelini özellikle ekonomik kaynakları açısından kabul etmiş gözüktüğü açıklanmıştır.

Sonuç olarak bölgede yoğunlukla İran'a yönelik tehdit algılarının olduğu ve bu tehdit algıları çerçevesinde İran'ın yapıcı bir bölgesel güç olma iddiasının ve aynı zamanda da rol model olma iddiasının önünde engeller olduğu açıklanırken, aynı tehdit algısının dolaylı olarak İran'ın bölgedeki üçüncü iddiası olan potansiyel bölgesel baskın güç olma iddiasını doğruladığı tespit edilmiştir. Bir sonraki bölümde ise bu üç rolün İran'ın sert gücü açısından geçerliliği irdelenmektedir.

5. İran'in sert güç kapasitesi

Bu bölümde ser güç'ün geleneksel tanımından hareketle İran'ın bölgesel rol iddialarının ekonomik ve askeri açıdan geçerli olup olmadığı tespit edilmektedir. Bu doğrultuda, ekonomik açıdan İran'ın bölgede görece üstünlüğü sahip olduğu petrol kaynakları ve doğal gaz rezervleri çerçevesinde, demografik ve coğrafi avantajları üzerinden açıklanmıştır. Fakat bu bölümde uluslararası ilişkiler literatüründeki “kaynak laneti” kavramı üzerinden İran'ın bölgedeki bu baskın ekonomik gücünü ekonomik büyümeye sebep olacak şekilde kullanamadığı açıklanmaktadır.

Bu bağlamda İran'ın devlet yapısı etkisiyle şekillenen ekonomik yapısının nasıl olup da ülkenin ekonomik büyümesinin önünde engel olduğu açıklanmıştır. Yapılan bu detaylı açıklamada İran rejiminin küresel ekonomiye dahil olmak için gerekli yapısal reformlara karşı süregelen direnci vurgulanırken, ülke ekonomisinin yapısal reformlar eksikliğinde nasıl kötü bir yönetimle idare edildiği ve üstelik bu ekonomik etkisiz yönetimin değişik gruplar arasında rant yarışına sebep olduğu da açıklanmıştır. Bu çerçevede ülkede yaygın olan yasadışı ticaret faaliyetleri ve rüşvetçiliğe vurgu yapılmıştır. Ayrıca sosyal yardım kurumları kisvesinde faaliyet gösteren sivil toplum cemiyetlerinin ekonomideki kayıt dışı ticaret ve rant faaliyetlerindeki etkin rolü de göz önüne alındığında sonuçta bu yapısal sorunların ülke ekonomisinin gelişmesi önündeki temel engel olduğu

vurgulanmaktadır. Buna ek olarak uluslararası normlara uygunluk çerçevesinde gerekli olan yapısal reformlara hegemony karşıtlığı çerçevesinde küresel ekonomiye dahil olmama ve ekonomik bağımsızlığa ulaşmayı hedefleyen İran'ın alternatif ve iyi işleyen bir ekonomik model de sunmadığı vurgulanmıştır.

Öte yandan Cumhurbaşkanı Ahmedinejad döneminde baskısı oldukça fazla biçimde artan uluslararası yaptırımların da ekonomik büyüme önünde önemli bir engel olduğu vurgulanmaktadır. Bu bağlamda Cumhurbaşkanı AHmedinejad'ın İran'ın nükleer faaliyetlerine ilişkin iddialı ve tehdidkar söylemlerine ek olarak bir önceki Cumhurbaşkanı Khatami döneminde Ulaslararası Atom Enerjisi Ajansı'ı ile varılan anlaşmaya karşın İran'ın askıya aldığı nükleer faaliyetlerine devam edeceğini açıklaması Birleşmiş Milletler'den ardı ardına gelen yaptırımların dışında Amerika'nın ve Avrupa Birliği'nin de ayrıca açıkladıkları yaptırımlar özellikle ülkenin petrol gelirleri üzerindeki ciddi olumsuz etkisi açısından ele alınmıştır. Fakat aynı zamanda bu şiddetli yaptırımların kayıt dışılığı arttırmakta da oldukça etkili olduğu vurgulanmıştır. Bu bağlamda, Cumhurbaşkanı Ahmedinejad döneminde politik ve ekonomik güç bakımından en çok nemalanan grup olan "Devrim Muhafızları"nın bu kayıt dışılığı nasıl kendi çıkarları çerçevesinde kullanıp daha da güçlendikleri dolayısıyla ülkede artan otoriterizmin nasıl hali hazırdaki yapısal noksanlıkları pekiştirdiğine vurgu yapılmaktadır.

Sonuç olarak ülke ekonomisinin yapısal noksanlıklarının Cumhurbaşkanı Ahmedinejad dönemindeki uygulamalar ve uluslararası yaptırımların etkisiyle ekonomik büyümenin içinden çıkılmaz bir sarmal oluşturduğu ve ülkenin herhangi bir alternatif ekonomik system sunmamış olduğu çıkarımları yapılmaktadır. Bu bağlamda ekonomik olarak İran'ın bölgede öne çekebilecek bir pozisyonda olmadığı gibi bölge ekonomisine yapıcı pek bir katkısının da olmadığı açıklanmıştır. Fakat potansiyel olarak baskın bir ekonomik gücünün verili olarak var olmasından ötürü ekonomik olarak İran'ın potansiyel bölgesel baskın güç olduğunun doğrulanabileceği öne sürülmüştür.

Öte yandan askeri olarak İran'ın 'askeri insan gücü' olarak bölgede tartışılmaz bir üstünlüğü olduğu vurgulanırken, bu üstünlüğün devrim sonrası dönemde Irak ile yapılan sekiz yıllık yıkıcı savaşın ve de İran'a askeri muhimmat satışı önündeki ambargoların da etkisiyle modern askeri teçhizat konusunda geçerli olmadığı da vurgulanmaktadır. Bu askeri ambargolar ve modern muhimmat konusundaki eksiklikle İran'da yerel savunma sanayiinin gelişmesi yönünde büyük bir motivasyon oluşturduğu da açıklanmaktadır. Bu bağlamda yerel savunma sanayisi ile bölgedeki askeri muhimmat bakımından alçakta olan durumunun bir oranda telafi ettiği açıklanmıştır. Buna ek olarak bir sonucunun ise İran'ın gelenekselden ziyade asimetrik savaş tekniklerine yönelmesi ve gerilla savaşı konusunda bölgede ciddi baskın bir rol oynuyor olması da açıklanmıştır.

Dolayısıyla askeri olarak özellikle Devrim muhafızlarına bağlı Kudüs Güçleri aracılığıyla bölgede çeşitli direniş örgütleri nezdinde rol model olduğufakat devletler nezdinde bu rolün geçerli olmadığı gibi, bu direniş örgütlerinin de İran'a bağlılığının bağımlılık boyutunda olmadığı, aksine stratejik bir önderlik kabulü olduğu açıklanmaktadır. Diğer yandan tam da bu silahlı gruplarla alakası bakımından İran'ın askeri gücünü bölgede yapıcı değil, tersine yıkıcı olarak kullandığı çıkarımı yapılmıştır. Fakat askeri anlamda İran'ın bölgede ciddi şekilde baskın güç olmaya yetecek potansiyelinin olduğu da doğrulanmıştır.

Sonuçta hem ekonomik hemde askeri anlamda, tıpkı ikinci parametrede ulaşılan sonuçtaki gibi üçüncü parametre de sert güç kapasiteleri açısından İran'ın bölgedeki iddialarının sadece potansiyel bölgesel güç olduğu noktasında geçerli olduğu ileri sürülmüştür.

6. Sonuç

Bu tez İran'ın bölgesel rolünü tespit etmek amacıyla üç parametreden oluşan bir tipoloji çerçevesinde, İran'ın bölgesel rolü konusundaki öz-algılarını; bu bağlamda bölge

devletlerinin İran’I nasıl algıladıklarını ve İran’ın sert güç kapasitelerini incelemiş ve sadece İran’ın bölgede potansiyel baskın güç olduğuna ilişkin iddiasının diğer iki parametre çerçevesinde doğrulandığını göstermiştir.

Bu bağlamda bu tez İran’ın kendi iddiaları çerçevesinde bölgedeki rolünün “potansiyel baskın güç” olduğu sonucuna varmıştır. Ek olarak ise, bu tez İran rejiminin doğal olarak önelediği varoluşsal kaygıların sebep olduğu caydırıcılık gücünü arttırmaya yönelik olan yatkınlığının bölgede genel anlamda tehdit olarak algılanmasına sebep olduğunu ve tam da caydırıcılık bağlamındaki bu tehdit algısının ülke rejimi tarafından bilinçli olarak tercih edildiğini öne sürerken İran’ın bu “potansiyel” gücünün active olma şansının oldukça düşük olduğunu öne sürmektedir.

Aynı zamanda bir başka çıkarım olarak, yapılan bu çalışmada İran’ın bölgedeki rolünün bu çalışmadaki kavramsal çerçeveden bağımsız olarak, ikinci bölümde irdelenen tipolojilerdeki tanımlar arasından en çok Miriem Prys’in tipolojisindeki “bölgesel baskıcı güç” tanımına uygun olduğu sonucuna da varılmıştır.

B. TEZ FOTOKOPİSİ İZİN FORMU

Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü

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Uygulamalı Matematik Enstitüsü

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