

IRAN'S SHIITE INFLUENCE BELT POLICY: THE EXAMPLE OF BAHRAINI SHIITES

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Abstract

Along with the Persian perspective inherited from the Persian Empire, Shi'ism has significantly influenced and continues to influence the geopolitical and geo-cultural education of present-day Iran. With its politicization, Shi'ism has become one of the most important factors, perhaps the most important, in the formation and preservation of Iran's national identity. Iran, which is in contact with Shiites living in various regions such as Middle East-Africa-Central Asia, intensified this contact after the Arab Spring process. In this article, Shiites in Bahrain are discussed in the context of Iran's Shiite Influence Zone Policy. In the article, firstly, general information about the sociological and religious structure of Bahrain has been given, and then the characteristics of the Shiite groups and leaders in Bahrain have been mentioned. Then, the level and activities of these groups' relations with Iran, the Shiite militia groups, their characteristics, and their work on behalf of Iran are discussed. The research has carried out based on the literature review.

Keywords: Middle East, Iran, Bahrain, Sectarian, Shi'ism.

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İran'ın Şii Nüfuz Kuşağı Politikası: Bahreynli Şiiler Örneği

Öz

Pers İmparatorluğu'ndan miras kalan Pers perspektifi ile birlikte Şiilik, İran'ının jeopolitik eğitimini önemli ölçüde etkilemektedir. Siyasallaşması ile Şiilik, İran'ın ulusal kimliğinin yaratılmasında ve korunmasında en önemli faktörlerden biri, belki de en önemlisi haline gelmiştir. Çeşitli bölgelerde yaşayan Şiiler ile temas halinde bulunan İran bu teması Arap Baharı süreci sonrası yoğunlaştırmıştır. Bu makalede İran'ın Şii Nüfuz Kuşağı Politikası bağlamında Bahreyn'deki Şiiler ele alınmıştır. Makalede ilk olarak Bahreyn'in sosyolojik ve dini yapısı hakkında genel bilgi verilmiş, akabinde Bahreyn'deki Şii gruplar ve liderlerin özelliklerine değinilmiştir. Daha sonra bu grupların İran ile olan ilişkilerini düzeyleri ve faaliyetleri Şii milis gruplar, özelliklerini ve İran adına yürüttüğü çalışmalar incelenmiştir. Araştırma literatür taramasına dayalı olarak gerçekleştirilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ortadoğu, İran, Bahreyn, Mezhep, Şiilik.

Özet

Kendine has bir kültür ve medeniyet havzasına sahip olan İran, Büyük İskender önderliğindeki Helen, İslamiyet sonrası Arap-Emevi medeniyetlerinin hâkimiyeti ve Türk-Moğol akınları sonrasında farklı kültürlerin etkisinde kalmıştır. Fakat İran, özgün kültürel varlığını korumuş ve coğrafyasına katılan bu medeniyetlerle siyasal, sosyal ve kültürel anlamda nüfuz etmiştir.

Pers İmparatorluğu'ndan miras alınan Farsi bakış açısının yanı sıra Şiilik, günümüz İran'ının jeopolitik ve jeokültürel eğitimlerini önemli derecede etkilemiş ve etkilemeye devam etmektedir. Siyasallaşmasıyla birlikte Şiilik, İran'ın milli kimliğinin oluşturulmasında ve korunmasında önemli rol oynayan faktörlerden biri belki de en önemlisi haline gelmiştir. Bu bağlamda etrafındaki diğer medeniyetlerden farklı sosyo-kültürel bir sistem oluşturan İran Şiiliği, Şah İsmail döneminden itibaren Fars milliyetçiliği ile iç içe geçerek günümüz İran'ının güvenlik ve dış politikası üzerindeki temel belirleyici haline gelmiştir. 1979 Devriminden sonra anayasal olarak mezhebe dayalı bir teokratik yönetim kuran İran, devrim ilkelerine bağlı kalarak ulusal çıkarlarını Şiilik üzerinde tanımlayan bir ülke haline gelmiştir. Devrim ideolojisi, İran'ın kendine özgü yönetim sistemini ve ülke kimliğini şekillendirmesi sebebiyle İran'ın dış politikasını belirleyen ana etmendir. Devrim sonrasında İran tarafından empoze edilen “Şii nüfuz kuşağı siyaseti” kullanılan yöntem ve araçlar vasıtasıyla sistematize edilmiştir. Bu politikanın temelini farklı coğrafyalarda-

ki Şiilerin İran yönetiminin çıkarları doğrultusunda reel politik ve teopolitik bakımdan yönlendirilmesi oluşturmuştur.

İran çeşitli bölgelerde -Ortadoğu-Afrika-Orta Asya- Şii vekilleri aracılığıyla Şii toplulukları etkilemiş ya da siyasi alanda gelecek vaat eden kitleleri Şiileştirme çalışmaları sergilemiştir. 2010 yılında başlayan “Arap Baharı” süreci İran için bazı fırsatlar doğurmuş ve İran bu fırsatlardan yararlanma yoluna giderek “yeniden devrim ihracı” olarak isimlendirebileceğimiz bir sürecin başlatmıştır. İran için bu fırsat alanlarından birisi Körfez bölgesi, bu bölgede de özellikle Bahreyn İran için önemli bir ülke olmuştur.

Nüfusun üçte birini yabancıların oluşturduğu Bahreyn, yaklaşık 1.250.000 (2012) nüfusuyla bir takımada ülkesidir. Bahreyn, gerek petrol rafinerisinden gerekse kıyı bankacılığından önemli ölçüde gelir elde etmektedir. Ayrıca Bahreyn, bölgenin önemli bir ticaret ve bankacılık merkezi niteliğinde olan ve çok canlı sermaye piyasasına sahip bir Körfez ülkesidir. Bahreyn halkı bölgede en fazla politize olmuş topluluklardan birisidir. 1950’lerin ortalarından 1970’lere kadar etkin olan sol hareketler, 1979 Devrimi’yle beraber yerini İran’dan destek gören Şii ayaklanmalarına bırakmıştır. Ülkede oldukça hızlı artan Şii nüfusunun oranı 1980’li yılların başına kadar % 55 iken 2000’li yılların başında % 70’leri bulmuştur. Bahreyn hükûmeti, Şiilerin tepkisine yol açan nüfus politikasıyla yabancı çalışanlara vatandaşlık vererek Şii-Sünni dengesi sağlamak istemiştir. Bahreyn, Şii tehlikesiyle birleşen İran tehdidinin ötesinde ayrıca İran’ın doğrudan egemenlik iddialarıyla karşı karşıya bulunmaktadır.

İran’ın egemenlik iddiası; Humeyni döneminde İran Devrimi’nin önde gelen liderlerinden Ayetullah Sadık Ruhani’nin, 1979 Temmuz’unda bu ülkeyi İran’ın on dördüncü ili olarak nitelendirmesi ile had safhaya ulaşmıştır. Söz konusu açıklamalar karşısında zor durumda kalan İran Başbakanı Bazargan, 5 Ekim 1979’da yaptığı açıklamada, İran’ın Körfez bölgesindeki hiçbir ülke üzerinde yayılcı emelleri olmadığını söylemiş olsa da bu durum iki ülke arasında potansiyel bir sorunun var olduğu gerçeğini değiştirmemiştir.

İran’ın Şii nüfus kuşağı stratejisi için Körfez bölgesi önemli bir sahadır. Bu bölgedeki Arap dünyasında etkinliğini artırması, özellikle bünyesinde önemli sayıda Şii nüfus barındıran Körfez ülkeleri için ciddi bir tehdit olarak algılanmaktadır. Bu bağlamda Şii nüfus, Körfez ülkelerinin güvenlik ve istihbarat birimleri tarafından ciddi bir şekilde gözetim altında tutulmaktadır.

Bahreyn’deki Şii muhalefetin oluşumu, 1979’da gerçekleşen İran Devrimi sonrasında başlamıştır. Bu dönemde Humeyni rejiminin Körfez ülkelerine devrim ihracı faaliyetlerine yönelmesiyle İran Devrim Muhafızları Ordusu

1981'de örtülü faaliyet kapsamında Bahreyn'deki rejimi devirme girişiminde bulunmuştur. BAE ve Kuveyt İstihbarat Teşkilatının bilgilendirmesi neticesinde Manama Havaalanı'nda yakalanan İranlı grubun, Bahreyn yönetimine karşı detaylı hazırlanmış bir darbe planı yaptıkları anlaşılmıştır. Söz konusu başarısızlık akabinde İran devleti, Bahreyn'e yönelik faaliyetlerini ülkede bulunan Şii muhalif gruplar aracılığıyla yürütmeye başlamıştır. Bu kapsamda dini vecibeler, eğitim veya turizm amaçlı olarak İran'da seyahat eden Bahreynli gençler arasından dini yönden manipüle edilebilecekler seçilerek dini, siyasi ve askeri eğitime tabi tutulmaktadır. Bahreyn'deki Şii muhalefet adına faaliyet yürütmek üzere militan olarak hazırlanan bu kişiler, ülkelerine geri gönderilmelerine müteakip deniz yoluyla silah sevkiyatı ile desteklenmektedir.

Günümüz itibarıyla Afganistan'dan Akdeniz'e uzanan bir Şii nüfuz kuşağı oluşturan İran devleti, bu hat boyunca bulunan Şii topluluklarla sıkı bir ilişki içerisinde. Bu Şii nüfuz kuşağı İran'ın güç projeksiyonu açısından kritik önemi haizdir. İran desteklediği ülkelerdeki yönetimlere yardımcı olmak ya da baskı oluşturmak istediği ülkelerin faaliyetlerini sınırlamak amacıyla hem askeri hem de dini faaliyetlerde bulunmaktadır. İran Şiilik eksenli politikasını hayata geçirebilmek için yumuşak güç unsurlarından da faydalanmaktadır. İran yürüttüğü dini mezhebi propaganda faaliyetleri ile birçok ülkede sivil hareketler, gruplar, muhalif kesimler ve Şii toplulukları etkileyerek ve destekleyerek söz konusu ülke yönetimlerine karşı koz elde etmek istemektedir. Bu çerçevede, özellikle genç nesil ya da etkin konumdaki grupları hedef alan Tahran'ın asıl amacı hem reelpolitik hem de teopolitik amaçlarını gerçekleştirmek istemekte ve İran'a müzahir gruplar oluşturmak istemektedir.

Introduction

Iran, with its unique basin of culture and civilization, has been under the influence of different cultures as a result of domination of Hellenics under the leadership of Alexander the Great, post-Islamic Arab-Umayyad civilizations and Turkish-Mongolian invasions. However, Iran preserved its original cultural existence and penetrated politically, socially, and culturally with these civilizations that joined its geography.

Along with the Persian perspective inherited from the Persian Empire, Shiism has significantly influenced and continues to influence today's Iran's geopolitical and geo-cultural education. With its politicization, Shiism has become one of the most important factors, perhaps the most important, in the

creation and preservation of Iran's national identity. In this context, Iranian Shiism, which creates a socio-cultural system different from other civilizations around it, has become the main determinant of the security and foreign policy of today's Iran by intertwining with Persian nationalism since the reign of Shah Ismail.

Iran, which established a constitutional theocratic government after the 1979 Revolution, has become a state that defines its national interests by adhering to the principles of revolution. The ideology of revolution is the main factor determining Iran's foreign policy, as it shapes Iran's unique administrative system and state identity.

The Shiite influence belt policy imposed by Iran after the revolution was systematized through the methods and tools used. The basis of this policy was the reelpolitik and the political orientation of the Shiites in different geographies in line with the interests of the Iranian administration.

Iran has influenced Shiite communities in various regions -Middle East-Africa-Central Asia- through its Shiite proxies or has made efforts to transform the promising masses in the political arena. Due to this sectarian policy of Iran after the revolution, Sunni groups, who were sympathetic to Iran, started to move away from Iran, and this policy of exporting the revolution changed shape and content over time. However, the "Arab Spring" process that started in 2010 created some opportunities for Iran, and Iran took advantage of these opportunities and allowed the start of a process that we can call "re-exporting the revolution". One of these opportunity areas for Iran has been Bahrain in the Gulf region.

Bahrain, where one-third of the population is made up of foreigners, is an archipelago with a population of about 1,250,000 (2012). Consisting of 35 islands in total, Bahrain, as the smallest emirate of the Gulf, was under Portuguese rule in the 16th century and by Safavid during the 17th and 18th centuries. Although the al-Khalifa dynasty that took control of the country in 1783 established its own sovereignty, Bahrain, came under full control of England in 1971, as a result of the process that started in 1861¹.

After the British withdrawal from the region in 1968, Bahrain, like other emirates, gained its independence in 1971. With the independence declared on August 15, 1971, Bahrain signed a friendship agreement with England to re-

1 Tayyar Arı, "20. Yüzyılda Orta Doęu: Sömürgecilikten Baęımsızlıęa", *Orta Doęu'da Siyaset*. ed. Davut Dursun and Tayyar Arı. Eskişehir: Anadolu University, 2013), 30-67.

place the previous agreements and became a member of the UN and the Arab League immediately afterward.

Bahrain generates significant income from both oil refineries and offshore banking. In addition, Bahrain is a Gulf state that is an important trade and banking center of the region and has a very vibrant capital market.

The people of Bahrain are one of the most politicized communities in the region. From the mid-1950s to the 1970s, left movements were effectively replaced by the Shiite uprisings, which received support from Iran, with the 1979 Revolution. While the rate of the Shiite population, which increased quite rapidly in the country, was 55% until the early 1980s, it reached 70% in the early 2000s.

The Bahraini government wanted to provide a Shiite-Sunni balance by granting citizenship to foreign workers with the population policy that caused the reaction of Shiites. Iran's claim of sovereignty over Bahrain reached its peak in July 1979 when Ayatollah Sadiq Rouhani, one of the leading leaders of the Iranian Revolution during the Khomeini period, perceived this state as Iran's fourteenth province.

Iranian Prime Minister Bazargan, who was in a difficult situation in the face of the aforementioned statements, said in his statement on 5 October 1979 that Iran did not have expansionist ambitions on any state in the Gulf region, but this did not change the fact that there was a potential conflict between the two states.

The Gulf region is an important area for Iran's Shiite influence belt strategy. Increasing its influence in the Arab world in this region is perceived as a serious threat, especially for the Gulf States that have a significant Shiite population. In this context, the Shiite population is under serious surveillance by the security and intelligence units of the Gulf States².

While the Shiite population in Bahrain is the majority (70%), Yemen (35%), Kuwait (30%), UAE (16%), Saudi Arabia (10%), Qatar (8%), and Oman (5%) have Shia populations³. From the past to the present, Iran has had activities aimed at penetrating these Shiite communities⁴.

2 Joseph Albert Kéchichian, "Can Conservative Arab Gulf Monarchies Endure a Fourth War in the Persian Gulf?", *Middle East Journal* 61/ 2 (Spring 2007), 287.

3 Esra Pakin Albayrakoğlu, "ABD-Körfez İşbirliği Konseyi İlişkilerinde İran Faktörü", *International Relations* 8/ 31 (2011), 95 – 116.

4 Edward Gordon, "Resolution of the Bahrain Dispute", *the American Journal of International Law* 65/ 3 (July 1971), 560–568.

Against Iran's activities in the Gulf region, Saudi Arabia desires to transform the Gulf Cooperation Council into the Gulf Union. In this way, Saudi Arabia will be an effective member of this union with its economy and population, and by this means, it plans to increase its influence over the Gulf States. However, the other Gulf Cooperation Council states do not welcome this project of Saudi Arabia warmly, and they are worried that it will harm their sovereignty. Bahrain is the only GCC state that has officially declared that it supports the Gulf Union project. The Bahraini administration needs the support of the Saudi administration in order to maintain its power against the Shiite population, which is the majority in the country⁵.

Bahrain gained its full independence on August 15, 1971, after over 150 years of the British presence and protection. Like other Persian Gulf states, the family that rules Bahrain keeps its control over important positions in the national security structure. The Bahrain Armed Forces (BDF) is primarily dedicated to maintaining the internal security and protection of the Bahrain islands coast. In addition to its police functions in general, the Bahrain national police force also carries out the duties of preventing sectarian violence and terrorist activities⁶.

Bahrain has a 65-70 percent Shiite population. Bahrain has all the characteristics of the Gulf States in terms of its ethnic and historical ties with the Arab geography, its common history with the Ottoman Empire and the United Kingdom, its Shiite population and state structure. The state is constantly experiencing internal security problems due to the ethnic and religious structure of the state and the state order created by the forces of England.

The biggest threat to the national security of the state is the radical and active Shiite cells that have emerged within the Shiite population and are getting stronger with the support of Iran. The Bahrain Islamic Freedom Front, which was responsible for the 1981 coup attempt and has ties to Iran, consists of militant Shiites who support revolutionary violence. Another group affiliated with Iran is the Islamic Call Party. This group is more moderate compared to the other Shiite group and demands social and economic reforms⁷.

5 Bayram Sinkaya, "Arap Baharı'nın İran'ın Ortadoğu Politikalarına Etkileri", *Ortadoğu Etütleri* 6/ 2 (January 2015), 54-78.

6 Muhittin Ataman- Gülşah Neslihan Demir, "Suudi Arabistan 2011", *Ortadoğu Yılığ* 7 (2012), 183-212.

7 See: Kenneth Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict Between Iran and America* (New York: Random House, 2004)

The 2011 events that have been deemed peaceful at the start turned into a civil war that played a decisive role in increasing sectarian tension within the state. The idea that the Shiite opposition would not reach its goal with peaceful methods and that success could be achieved by displaying a radical attitude towards the administration, as in the 1990s, was influential in the growth of the said events⁸.

Tensions continue in the relations between the Bahraini administration and the Shiite opponents, and the administration's attitude towards oppositional discourse and actions has been to reduce the problem of the fight against terrorism. Bahraini authorities have focused on neutralizing the Shiite opposition within the scope of counter-terrorism discourse. In 2015, simple crimes within the scope of terrorism were given heavy prison sentences, regardless of the age of the suspects⁹.

At times, demonstrations and protests by Shiite dissidents in Bahrain are not covered in the state's press, and they are tried to be announced inside and outside the state through social media. In addition, according to the statements of Bahraini authorities, many terrorist cells were uncovered during the operations organized by the Bahraini security forces in 2015. Many explosives, bomb devices, and weapons were seized in the cell houses and warehouses. In their statements, the defendants linked to these terrorist cells admitted that they received weapon/bomb training and material and financial aid from the "Iraqi Hezbollah" and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Army abroad¹⁰. Also, this Shiite opposition in Bahrain started to take up arms in the period before 2011. In particular, the types of weapons used by the recently identified cell structure, the way it works, and the training they receive match exactly with the Lebanese Hezbollah. In addition to these, there are claims that there is a separate Hezbollah camp in Lebanon dedicated to the education of Bahraini Shiites.

8 Tariq Ramadan, *The Arab Awakening: Islam and the New Middle East* (London: Penguin, 2012), 245.

9 Policy Media Center, "116 Suspects Arrested in Counter-Terror Operations" (11 August 2022).

10 Ephrahim Kam, "Iran's Shiite Foreign Legion", *The Institute for National Security Studies* (2017), 24.

1. Main Elements of the Shiite Opposition

The formation of the Shiite opposition in Bahrain started after the Iranian Revolution in 1979. In this period, when the Khomeini regime turned to the activities of exporting the revolution to the Gulf States, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Army attempted to overthrow the regime in Bahrain in 1981 as a covert activity¹¹. As a result of the information provided by the UAE and Kuwait Intelligence Agency, it was understood that the Iranian group that was caught at Manama Airport, made a detailed coup plan against the Bahraini administration.

Following this failure, the Iranian state started to carry out its activities against Bahrain through the Shiite opposition groups in the country. In this context, among Bahraini youth traveling to Iran for religious obligations, education, or tourism, those who can be manipulated religiously are selected and subjected to religious, political, and military education. Prepared as militants to carry out activities on behalf of the Shiite opposition in Bahrain, they are supported by the shipment of weapons by sea following their return to their country¹².

These Shiite militia groups act under the guidance of the Iranian regime and receive training and military material support from Hezbollah in Lebanon and various Shiite militia organizations in Iraq. It is also claimed that there is a detached Hezbollah camp in Lebanon devoted to the education of Bahraini Shiites only¹³.

The main Shiite militia organizations currently operating in Bahrain under the direction of Iran are *Saraya Al Ashtar*, *Saraya Al Mukhtar*, *Saraya Al Kerrar*, *Saraya Al Muvakeme Al Şabiyye*, *Asayib Al Muvakeme Al Bahreniyye*, *Liva Abis*, *Jaish Al-Iman*. These groups were organized by taking the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Asaib Ehlul Gak and the Ketaib Hezbollah groups as an example. In addition, the recruitment and propaganda methods of these groups are inspired by the Shiite militia organizations in Iraq and use similar symbols even on their flags¹⁴.

11 Veysel Ayhan, "Bahreyn'de Arap Kışı: Bahreyn'deki Şiilerin Demokrasi Mücadelesi", *Journal of Mulkiyes* 35 (2011), 272.

12 Ayhan, "Bahreyn'de Arap Kışı: Bahreyn'deki Şiilerin Demokrasi Mücadelesi", 272.

13 Kevin Downs, "A Theoretical Analysis of the Saudi Iranian Rivalry in Bahrain", *Journal of Politics and International Studies* 8 (Winter 2012/ 13), 10.

14 Downs, "A Theoretical Analysis of the Saudi Iranian Rivalry in Bahrain", 10.

The main elements of the Shiite opposition in Bahrain are registered and unregistered political societies established by the Shiite majority in the country, Bahrain-linked human rights associations operating abroad, and Shiite cells and the clergy class under the control of Iran¹⁵.

The Shiite political societies operating in Bahrain are divided into two different camps, primarily hardness against the existing monarchy and pro-dialogue. of these, the pro-dialogue group is led by the Al Wafaq Political Society (Jamiyat Al-Wafaq Al-Watani Al-Islamiya) led by Sheikh Ali Salman¹⁶.

The key elements of the pro-hard facade are the leader of the London-based Bahrain Islamic Freedom Movement (Haraka Al Ahrar al Bahrain Al Islamiyya) S. Al Shahabi, who left Al Wifaq in 2005, the founder of the Al Haq Movement (Haraka Hakku Harakat-al-Hurriya wa alal-Demokratiya) Hasan Mushayma, who also left Al Wifaq, and the leader of the Al Vaad Political Society, which includes left-wing Shiite and Sunni opposition Ibrahim Sharif Al Sayed¹⁷.

In the 2011 incident, which started as peaceful demonstrations, an oppositional group emerged that was far from acting in line with the unity, solidarity and common goals of the 1990s. The opposition movements in the 1990s and the 2011 incidents have different characters from each other. As a result of the incidents that took place within the framework of the rebellion in the 1990-1996 period, the Al Khalifa Dynasty accepted all the rights and freedoms of today's Shiites, the political prisoners in the prisons were released and all the politicians living in exile were returned to the country¹⁸.

The 2011 Incidents were tried to be suppressed more harshly by the Bahrain administration. The political line of the Al Vifak Society, that intends to reach rights and freedoms by establishing a dialogue with the Bahraini administration, has remained in the background due to the attitudes and approaches of the Al Vaad Society, which represents the Shiite and Sunni left bloc and advocates the complete abolition of the monarchy with much harsher rhetoric. As a result, the discourse put forward by Al Vaad about the overthrow of

15 Mitchell Belfer, *Small State, Dangerous Region: A Strategic Assessment of Bahrain* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Publishing, 2014), 202–240.

16 Downs, "A Theoretical Analysis of the Saudi Iranian Rivalry in Bahrain", 10.

17 Ala'a Shehabı and Marc Owen Jones (ed.), *Bahrain's Uprising* (London: Zed Books, 2011), 34.

18 Shehabı vd., *Bahrain's Uprising*, 12-13.

the Al Khalifa Dynasty and the establishment of a pluralistic democracy and republican order in the state brought the ongoing negotiations between Al Wefaq and the Crown Prince to a stalemate, and the demonstrations were harshly suppressed with the support of the Saudi and UAE armed forces¹⁹.

After the breaking point in question, a rapid radicalization trend emerged in the Shiite opposition, and in this process, Iranian educated and guided clerics, led by Ayatollah Isa Qassim, came to the fore²⁰.

Even the pro-dialogue Sheikh A. Salman partly changed his line and started to emphasize the political gains of Hezbollah and Iran, and as a result, the trial and imprisonment process began. The Al Vaad Society, on the other hand, could not show any political presence and stance after the 2011 Incidents, and experienced weakness in terms of leadership and organization²¹.

Current circumstances, the most important leader of the Shiite opposition in the country is Ayatollah Isa Qassim, and the political power of Sheikh A. Salman and Al Wefaq is gradually eroding. Besides, Ayatollah Isa Qassim, although initially on the same line, is gradually moving away from Al Wefaq with his radicalized attitude²².

1.1. Registered and Unregistered Representatives of the Shia Opposition

Shiite political formations in Bahrain are legal institutions and operate in the political party order. Al Wefaq and Al Amal, led by Muhammad Ali Al Mahfut, are officially registered Shia political societies. Al Amal is the political successor of the Bahrain Islamic Liberation Front, a disbanded Shiite-based armed organization. The legal status of the group, also known as the "Shirazis" due to its ties to Ayatollah Muhammad Al Shirazi, was terminated²³.

19 Al-Wafa, "Full Text: 'Stability and Resilience'" (نصّ الكامل: وثيقة 'الثبات والصمود. تيار الوفاء) (الإسلامي, ٤ (November 2018).

20 Shehabı vd., *Bahrain's Uprising*, 69.

21 Amani Al-Masqati, "The Interior Ministry: Rida Al Ghasra, Mahmoud Yahya, and Mostafa Abedali were killed during their failed attempt escaping to Iran" (مقتل رضا الغسرة : الداخلية) (ومحمود يوسف ومصطفى يوسف خلال إحباط محاولة هروبهم لإيران Al-Wasat News (09 February 2017).

22 Shehabı vd., *Bahrain's Uprising*, 72.

23 Shehabı vd., *Bahrain's Uprising*, 114

Al-Hakk²⁴ (Haraka Haqq Harqkqal Hurriya wa al-Demokratiya), one of the political societies that are not officially registered, was founded by H. Mu-shayma, who left the Wafaq Movement²⁵. He is on the line of extremist Shiism and is in favor of transitioning to the Republic with regime change. There is information that it is under the control of Iran within the framework of street demonstrations and violent actions²⁶.

Another non-officially registered Shiite group, Al Wafa'a (Tayyar al Wafa'a Al-Islami), was founded by Abdul Wahab Hussein, taking advantage of the vacuum that emerged after the leadership of the Hakk Movement was detained. Al Ikha Al watani, led by Musa Al Ansari, is the political movement of the Persian-origin Shiites living in Bahrain. It is not officially registered²⁷.

1.2. Shia Population in Bahrain

The Shia population living in Bahrain is divided into three main groups within itself. Chief among these is the indigenous Shiite Arab population called Bahraini, which constitutes the majority. (Local Sunni Arabs are called Bahraini.) This group is religiously under the direct supervision of Sheikh Isa Qassim, the most senior Shiite leader in Bahrain. The second group, known as Ecmi (Persian), is of Persian origin and settled in Bahrain, mostly from Shiraz/Iran in the historical process. The mother tongue of this group is Persian, and they accept the Iranian Guide, Ayatollah Khamenei, as the imitation authority. The third group, consisting of the Shiite Arab population who came from Iraq and other Arab states and settled in Bahrain, acts according to the fatwa of Ayatollah Sistani, who is a resident of Najaf²⁸.

1.3. Shia Ulama (clergy) Class

The ulema class in Bahrain draws attention as a group caught between the peaceful opposition in the form of human rights defenders supported by western states and the violent Shiite opposition supported by Iran. The Shiite

24 Gulf States Newsletter, "Iranian threat focuses minds of GCC leaders", *Issue 888* (29 October 2010).

25 J.E. Peterson, *Bahrain: Reform - Promise and Reality, In Political Liberalization in the Persian Gulf* (London: Hurst & Company, 2009), 168.

26 Najmeh Bozorgmehr and James Blitz, "Khamenei Dismisses Pressure on Iran", *Financial Times* (3 February 2012).

27 Shehabī vd., *Bahrain's Uprising*, 77

28 Brian Maynard, *The Role of the Ulama in Shute Social Movements: Bahrain, Lebanon, and Iraq*, (Monterey: California, Naval Postgraduate School, 2005), 56-58.

ulama class, which has similar political discourse-links with both groups from time to time and has a certain hierarchy among itself, constitutes another pillar of the Shiite-based political movement. This group differs from each other in terms of their opinion leadership qualifications, the centers where they receive religious education, and the imitation authority they are affiliated with²⁹.

Prominent Shiite ulama (clergy) leaders;

Sheikh Isa Qassim: It is of Arab origin. He is the most senior Shiite cleric in the state and the founding chairman of the Ulama Council. The Ulama Council was established in 2004. In the context of religious doctrines and practices, the members of the Council, which the Shiite population in the country adopts as a guide, hide from whom they receive financial support, and by whom they make decisions. However, the Shiite community in Bahrain already believes that the Ulama Council is an extension of Najaf. Although they claim that they are out of politics, the Council's statements have important effects on the political developments in the state. Sheikh Isa Qassim is in favor of the continuation of the dialogue with the Bahrain administration, as long as it protects the rights of the Shiites. He is the religious and spiritual leader of the Al-Vifak Political Society. Isa Qassim, who received training in the Sadr Movement in Najaf, gained the title of Ayatollah in Qom. The Bahrain administration announced in 2016 that it had stripped the Shiite leader Ayatollah Sheikh Isa Qassim of citizenship 2016³⁰.

Sheikh Hussein Necati: He is of Persian origin. Unlike other important ulama, his effectiveness is based on his religious knowledge, not his family. It takes Najaf as a reference and operates in Muharraq Island. Sheikh Mohammed Sanad: He comes from a well-known Manama family. He spends a significant part of his life in Qom. The Haqq Movement, which was declared illegal by the Bahrain administration, accepts Sheikh Sanad as its religious leader³¹.

Sheikh Abduljalil Al Muqdad: Al Muqdad was born in Bilad Al Kadeem and resides here. He takes Najaf as a reference. His name was heard in 2006 when the Haqq Movement broke up with the Vifak Movement. In general,

29 Maynard, *The Role of the Ulama in Shute Social Movements: Bahrain, Lebanon, and Iraq*, 25-29.

30 Maynard, *The Role of the Ulama in Shute Social Movements: Bahrain, Lebanon, and Iraq*, 69-114.

31 Rori Donaghy, "Bahrain Expels Prominent Religious Cleric", *Middle East Eye* (12 February 2015).

he accuses the Wifaq Movement of being passive and unresponsive. Sheikh Abdul Hussein El Sitri: He is a member of the Ulama Council. He is loved by the Shiite people for his humble life and personality. Since he was educated in Najaf, he does not adopt the Velayet-i Faqih view of Iran. He operates in Sitra³².

Sayyid Javad Al Wadai: He is a member of the Ulama Council. According to the claims, its effectiveness stems from being a descendant of the Prophet. He consistently rejects the tasks and dialogue demands proposed by the Bahraini administration. He runs his own religious school and or has studied with Ayatollah Sistani. He operates in Ras Raman. Sheikh Hamid Al Mubarak: He is a member of the Ulema Council and his effectiveness comes entirely from his family. He serves as a senior Shiite judge in sharia courts and has been criticized for his ties to the Bahraini government. He is known as a liberal clergyman for his views. It is noteworthy that he is in contact with Shiite clerics who stand against Lebanese Hezbollah, which carries out important activities in other states. He carries out religious activities in the A'ali region. Sayyid Abdullah Al Ghurafi: He is the vice-president of the Ulama Council. Its effectiveness is allegedly due to the fact that it is a descendant of the Prophet. He stands out with his pro-dialogue, calm and persuasive character³³.

2. Iran-backed Shiite Cells in Bahrain

Shiite cells operating in Bahrain basically act under the guidance of Iran, and also they receive training and material support from organizations such as Lebanese Hezbollah, Hezbollah Battalions in Iraq and Asayib Ehlul-Hak. Apart from these, there are also Shiite organizations and hard-line armed groups and groups directly linked to religious organizations outside of Bahrain³⁴.

2.1. Saraya Al Ashtar

It started its activities with the statement it made on the Facebook social networking site on 27.04.2013 against the Al Khalifa dynasty, which dominates the Bahrain Administration. It is understood from the statements and shares that this group aims to eliminate the Al Khalifa dynasty and its administration³⁵.

32 The Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy, "Biography of Mohammed Habib AL-MUQDAD" (1 April 2021).

33 Shehabı vd., *Bahrain's Uprising*, 89- 97.

The organization, named after his close friend Malik Al-Astar, whom Hazrat Ali appointed as the Governor of Egypt, has carried out numerous bomb attacks against Bahrain security forces since 2013. Describing the members of the group as "Men of Allah (Rijal Allah)", Saraya al-Ashtar embraces the Velayet-i Faqih belief but denies that he is directly affiliated with Hezbollah or the Revolutionary Guards Army³⁶

Ahmed Yusuf Sarhan codenamed Abu Muntadhar and Cassim Ahmed Abdullah, codenamed Thualfaqr, who are currently residing in Iran, engaged Fadil Al-Muhammad Ali, codenamed Abu Haydar who is the current leader of Saraya Al Ashtar, and Hussein Jaffar Abdullah, codenamed Sacid to break the organization. The members of Saraya al-Ashtar, who allegedly received financial aid and military material support from Iran, receive training in Iraq and Lebanon³⁷.

Saraya El Astar shares the bomb attacks they carried out in 2013 by sharing various posts on Facebook and Twitter. In the posts made, it is emphasized that they are hostile to the state administration under the Al Khalifa Dynasty, not Sunnis. As part of the operations carried out by the Bahrain administration in 2015, the seizure of all senior executives of Saraya Al Ashtar, except for those located in Iran, caused the group to lose its effectiveness to a large extent. Saraya Al Ashtar is known as the most dangerous armed group among the Shiite organizations in the country in terms of its organizational capability³⁸.

34 Mitchell Belfer and Khalid Alshaikh, *Iran's Clandestine War on the Kingdom of Bahrain: Saraya al Ashtar and the Military Wing of Hezbollah Bahrain* (King Faisal Center for Research Report, 2019), 11.

35 Belfer and Alshaikh, *Iran's Clandestine War on the Kingdom of Bahrain: Saraya al Ashtar and the Military Wing of Hezbollah Bahrain*, 13.

36 Kyle Orton, "Iran Escalates its Subversive Activities in Bahrain", *Henry Jackson Society* (19 November 2017).

37 Michael Knights and Mathew Levitt, "The Evolution of Shia Insurgency in Bahrain", *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel* 11/ 1(January 2018), 18-25.

38 Caleb Weiss, "Iranian-backed terror groups in Bahrain: Part Two", *Illini Journal of International Security* (2017).

2.2. Saraya Al Mukhtar

Saraya Al Mukhtar, which has a similar ideological and religious approach to Saraya Al Ashtar, was founded in 2013. They announced that they would carry out "effective operations" against the Al Khalifa Dynasty and its security units³⁹.

When compared to other Shiite militia structures, Saraya Al Mukhtar stands out in terms of effectiveness and strategy in the media. They published videos of bomb attacks and sniper attacks on Bahrain security forces in 2013-2014. It is claimed that they received the order to attack the security forces from Saraya Al Ashtar. In this context, the Bahrain administration has added Saraya Al Mukhtar to the list of terrorist organizations⁴⁰.

Saraya Al Mukhtar, active in Manama, is also known as the Bahrain Islamic Resistance (El Mukaveme Al Islamiyye Al Bahrania), which is used by many Iranian-backed Shiite militias⁴¹.

2.3. Saraya Al Kerrar

The organization was established in 2014. It is claimed that Saraya Al Kerrar⁴², which has a small cell structure compared to other Shiite groups, is connected with other Shiite organizations. It is mostly mentioned with bombing actions, and it carried out various bomb attacks against the Bahrain Police Service in 2014. It is also known as Bahrain Islamic Resistance (Al Mukaveme Al Islamiyye Al Bahrani⁴³).

2.4. Saraya Al Mukaveme Al Şabiyye

Saraya Al Mukaveme Al Şabiyye (People's Resistance Brigades) is an active Shiite group since 2012. It is claimed that the group is affiliated with the

39 "Saraya al-Mukhtar: A Bahraini Militant Group with Regional Goals, Hizballah Cavalcade, Jihadology, March 6, 2014; Phillip. S. Phillip, "Asa'ib al-Muqawama al-Bahrainia: An Emerging Militant Group in Bahrain?" Hizballah Cavalcade, *Jihadology*, (18 April 2014).

40 Namo Abdulla, "What Is Bahrain's Saraya al-Mukhtar Militia?", VOA (19 December 2020).

41 The Daily Tribune, "Al Ashtar, Al Mukhtar Brigades Added to UK Terror List" (23 December 2017).

42 Phillip Smith, "Saraya al-Karar: Bahrain's Sporadic Bombers", *Jihadology* (4 November 2014).

43 Phillip Smith, "Saraya al-Mukhtar: A Bahraini Militant Group with Regional Goals", Hizballah Cavalcade, *Jihadology* (6 March 2014).

political formation called “February 14 Youth Movement”⁴⁴, which came to the fore with protest demonstrations against the Bahraini administration.

This group, which initially carried out political protests without resorting to violence, declared in a statement published in 2012 that they would “use their right of self-defense to protect their rights, overthrow the illegitimate Bahrain Regime and that they are not responsible for what happens to the mercenaries”. Three months after this statement, the group released images encouraging the use of poison gas at the police by protesters at a Formula 1 race. But this call has not been implemented.

This group, which is claimed to have links with Shiite activists in Saudi Arabia and ideologically follows Saraya Al-Mukhtar, was included in the list of terrorist organizations by the Bahrain administration on the grounds that it received military training and financial support and carried out small-scale bombings in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon⁴⁵.

2.5. Asayib Al Mukaveme Al Bahraniyya

Asayib Al Mukaveme Al Bahraniyya (Bahrain Resistance Alliance) was established in 2014 to engage in an armed struggle against the government in Bahrain. They continue their propaganda against the Al Khalifa Dynasty on social media forums⁴⁶.

Announcements were made on Twitter under the name Asayib El Mukaveme that a bomb attack would be carried out against the Formula 1 races held in April 2012. Afterward, three hand-made bombs were found in the race area, Molotov cocktails were thrown at foreigners who were in Bahrain for the races, and in 2012, seven Bahraini policemen were injured in bomb attacks⁴⁷.

2.6. Jaish Al-Imam

Jaish Al-Imam was formed by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Army within the Shiite population of Bahrain to carry out terrorist acts throughout

44 Phillip Smith, “Bahrain’s Saraya al-Muqawama al-Sha’biya: Militants of the February 14 Youth Coalition”, *Jihadology*.

45 The Daily Tribune, “Al Ashtar, Al Mukhtar Brigades Added to UK Terror List” (23 December 2017).

46 Phillip Smyth, Tim Michetti and Owen Daniels, “Bahrain: Proliferating Proxy Networks”, *Atlantic Council* (2017), 26-29.

47 Al Arabiya, “After Three Executed in Bahrain, a Look Back into Their Deadly Attack” (16 January 2017).

Bahrain. Cell members allegedly received military training in the camps of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Army in Tehran and Iraqi Hezbollah Brigades in Baghdad and Karbala. As a result of the cell house raids organized by Bahrain security units in January 2013, eight members of the organization were arrested and important evidence regarding the organization's plans was seized. In this context, it has been determined that the majority of the detainees are related to Ali Yusuf Ali Samaheji and that the aforementioned person was recruited to the organization by the Bahraini Shiite Mullahs Mirza Muhammed Ali Eissa and Akif Cafer Afimed Radhi while he was in Iran⁴⁸.

As part of Iran's covert operations against Bahrain, in July 2015, a small but well-trained Shiite militia cell consisting of two Bahraini citizens was captured on a boat loaded with weapons and explosives off the Bahrain territorial waters. It has been stated that the tape and plastic bags used to waterproof the seized weapons and materials are largely similar to the method used by the Shiite militia cell of Jaysh al-Imam, who was caught trying to smuggle weapons into Bahrain via Oman in 2013. The level of cooperation is unknown, but it is possible that Lebanese Hezbollah is in contact with Bahraini Shiite militias. Since the February 2011 uprising, the Bahraini Government has blamed Hezbollah for minor attacks on the security forces and accused it of providing training to opposition groups with explosives. In turn, Hezbollah has regularly criticized the Bahraini monarchy, citing its treatment of the country's Shiite majority⁴⁹.

In January 2015, Hasan Nasrallah accused the Bahraini government of allegedly changing the state's demographics by granting citizenship to Sunni settlers, and condemned the arrest of opposition leader Sheikh Ali Salman⁵⁰. It is estimated that the activities of Hezbollah in Bahrain were limited due to the small scale of the attacks alleged to have been carried out by Hezbollah and the "responsibilities" of Hezbollah in Syria⁵¹.

Liva Abis started its activities in 2014. It has a similar ideology and organization to other Shiite organizations. They directed their attacks toward infrastructure and economic targets. In this context, it has been stated that cash

48 Alex Mackdonald, "Rise of Jaish al-Islam marks a turn in Syria conflict", *Middle East Eye* (7 May 2015).

49 Crispin Smith and Hamdi Malik, "Profile: Unite 10.000,' Militia Spotlight Profiles", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, (25 April 2021).

50 Shehabi vd., *Bahrain's Uprising*, 30.

51 The European Pressphoto Agency B.V. (epa), "Jaysh al-Islam Military Academy" (2022).

machines and factories of Saudi origin are primarily among their targets. In 2014, it was announced that there was a bomb attack against the police station in Sitra⁵².

3. The Importance of Bahrain in Iran's Shia Influence Zone Politics

Bahrain, which gained its independence in 1971 with the withdrawal of Britain from the Gulf Region, was recognized as an independent state by Iran in the same year, although it caused controversy in its domestic policy⁵³. However, the new administration that came to power in Iran with the 1979 Islamic Revolution tried to export revolutions to the states of the region. With this policy, Iran has seen Bahrain, which is under the rule of Sunnis, as one of the important states where the exportation of the revolution is planned, although Shiites make up approximately 70% of its population. As a matter of fact, Bahraini authorities have claimed that Iran is behind many internal conflicts in Bahrain since the Iranian Islamic Revolution. However, Iranian authorities have never accepted such claims⁵⁴.

Iran announced its strategy on Bahrain with the reaction shown in Riyadh after Saudi Arabia's violent response to the demonstrations organized by the Shiite population in Bahrain in 2011⁵⁵. Iran expressed that the legitimate demands of the people should be met and that instead of deploying troops to Bahrain, Saudi Arabia should show a common reaction to Israel. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia pursued a conflictual policy toward Iran, due to its closeness to Egypt and its ability to provoke Bahrain and the Shiites within its own territory against it. Therefore, Saudi Arabia established a shield against the uprisings.

Iran, in particular, wants to be influential in Bahrain politics by influencing and supporting the Shiite communities that are in the majority in the country but also sends a message to states with which it is in political and geopolitical rivalry, such as Saudi Arabia. This message is also given to countries with

52 The European Pressphoto Agency B.V. (epa), "Jaysh al-Islam Military Academy" (2022).

53 Mitchell Belfer, "The Fourteenth Province: The Irano-Bahraini Conflict in Perspective" *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies* (18 July 2011).

54 Krisztina Justh, "Protest, Oppression and the Politics of Citizenship in Bahrain and Kuwait" (Central European University Nationalism Studies Program, Budapest: Hungary), 2013, 12-14.

55 F.Gregory Gause III, "Saudi Arabia in the New Middle East" (Council on Foreign Relations *Special Report* No: 63, 2011), 5.

Shiite populations and to the Shiites there and sees Bahrain as a springboard to take on the role of the protector of Shiism in the region.

The sectarian borders of Shiism in the region do not coincide with the borders of Iran. By taking advantage of these sectarian borders of Shiism, Iran demand to expand its borders by developing a cross-border Shiite policy⁵⁶. In addition, Iran wants to develop this "enlargement strategy" not only through Shiite Muslims but also through Shiitization efforts through Sunni Muslims. Iran wants to be permanent in the Middle East region in order to maintain order and reshape states and communities according to its own interests and Shiite ideology. The ruling elites of Tehran desire to shape the political and religious landscape of the entire Middle East with the help of these allies of Iran by making their proxies a part of the political system that will arise from the remnants of the war in Syria and Yemen, as they did in Iraq and Lebanon. With this strategy, Iran demand to sit strongly at the diplomatic table on global and regional issues and wants to open up diplomatic and geopolitical maneuvering areas for itself.

Conclusion

Those who are trying to understand what is happening in the Middle East need to analyze both the structural and political actors of the region, as well as the regional and global dynamics. In political science, politics is generally associated with actors. However, when it comes to the Middle East region, states, non-state organizations, various ethnic, religious-sectarian identities, and international and regional powers play a role in the scene.

Ethnic and sectarian tensions have started in the region, as the regional balance was shaken by the September 11 attack and the subsequent interventions of the US and its allies in Afghanistan and Iraq. And after that, the status quo of the region was seriously shaken by the influence of the popular movements that started in almost all of the region with the Arab Spring wave in 2010. With the international intervention in the region, the ethnic and especially the sectarian fault lines have been broken, and the sectarian differences have turned into a conflict element. Especially after the USA invasion of Iraq in 2003, the establishment of a Shiite-dominated government in this state and the Shiite-Sunni conflicts that arose here brought a sectarian difference to the

56 Edward Wastnidge, "The Modalities of Iranian Soft Power: From Cultural Diplomacy to Soft War", *Political Studies Association* Volume 35/3-4 (2015), 364-375.

agenda of regional politics. In addition, the increase in Iran's influence in the region and the increase in the power of Hezbollah, a Shiite political organization in Lebanon, and the rise of the political demands of the Shiites in the Gulf States, led to discussions that sectarian differences emerged as an effective factor in regional politics. It is seen that the effect of sectarianism at the regional level has increased due to the sectarian ties between the groups fighting in the current conflicts in Syria and their supporters.

As of today, the Iranian state, which has formed a Shiite zone of influence stretching from Afghanistan to the Mediterranean, is in close relations with the Shiite communities along this line. This Shiite zone of influence is critical to Iran's power projection. Iran engages in both military and religious activities in order to help the governments in the states it supports or to limit the activities of the states it wants to exert pressure on. Iran carries out weapons, financial resources, consultancy services, and religious sectarian education and propaganda activities to the groups in question. In this context, the Jerusalem Forces affiliated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Army play an important role. Shiite militias under the control of Iran have been engaged in intense sectarian and military activities in countries such as Iraq, Syria, Bahrain, and Yemen, especially with the Arab Spring.

Iran also makes use of soft power elements in order to implement its Shiite-oriented policy. Iran wants to gain leverage against the governments of the states in question by influencing and supporting civil movements, groups, opposition groups, and Shiite communities in many states with its religious sectarian propaganda activities. In this framework, Tehran's main aim, which targets especially the younger generation or active groups, is to realize both its real political and political goals, and it wants to form groups that support Iran.

While the Iranian state determines its foreign policy and strategy for the spread of Shiism, it also benefits from the change in global and regional balances. With the effect of the Middle East strategy of the USA that changed during the Obama era and the effect of the DAESH factor afterward, Iran seized the opportunity to develop the "Shiite zone of influence" (Shiite influence belt policy) policy in the Middle East. In addition, with the signing of the nuclear agreement in July 2015, the normalization processes of relations with Western states have further eased Iran's hand in the region.

In this context, with the effect of the Arab Spring process and the nuclear agreement, Iran has accelerated its activities in the region, especially its activi-

ties to build a "Shiite influence zone". Under the direction of Iran, it pursues an intense policy of Shiitization and recruitment of Shiite militias in states such as Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, and Kuwait. When carrying out Shiite politics and activities to create a "Shiite influence zone" in these states, the people recruited in these states were sent to places where civil wars took place after the Arab Spring, such as Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, under the name of Shiite militias, thus creating Iran's military presence in the field. As a result, Iran has used Shiism and its "lebensraum" for its expansionist foreign and religious policy and has benefited from the power of the religious sect in the struggle for power and influence.

Meanwhile, this strategy of Iran pursued the aim of spreading Shiism, it also caused an increase in the Shiite-Sunni tension. As a result, Iran followed an expansionist foreign policy strategy with its "Shiite influence zone" policy, and while using Shiism as an instrument for this policy, it also wanted to accelerate the spread of Iran's Twelve Imam Shiism and Velayet-i Faqih ideology the apolitically. In this respect, Bahrain, which we discussed in this article, is an important state in terms of Iran's strategy mentioned above.

Iran's activities in Bahrain and the region are an essential part of Iran's long-term strategy. The effort to create a "Shiite zone of influence" is a process that is closely followed by regional powers such as Israel, Turkiye, and Saudi Arabia. Knowing the factors shaping Iran's strategy, the methods it follows, the tools it uses, and the dynamics of the target regions/communities are important in terms of shedding light on the Middle East policies of states such as Turkiye, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and global actors.

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