

Iran's Involvement with Syrian Civil War: Background, Reasons and Alternatives

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Abstract: Middle East has never been free from battle, conflict, war and change. Hosting these protracted problems Middle East is experiencing the same type of events in the current phase of history. This article will focus on Syrian Civil War which has enlarged its scope since the day of its inception. The countries that are neighboring Syria have taken their positions and assigned specific policies towards the issue. Iran's foreign policy towards Syria will be analyzed in this context. This study has the inquiry of whether there is a separation between Syria and Bashar al-Assad for Iran or these to are perceived as a whole. In this direction the study holds the idea that there can be solutions for Iran without al-Assad. The historical context also has a significant impact in constructing the current circumstances. Syria's value to Iran will be analyzed in the study to indicate that Iran's actions in Syria are not haphazard. Also, this study will try to bridge the historical background with the current situation within the perspective of continuation of previous conflicts and unsettled wars. Additionally, the study will be in the pursuit of alternative policies that will relieve Iran from further loss of prestige and connections with the other parts of Middle East society than Shiite.

Keywords: Middle East, Iran, Syria, Russia, Syrian Civil War, Al-Assad.

Introduction

From the beginning of the world political history there have been some scarce resources that caused conflicts and problems for people and society as a whole. Therefore, some particular areas over the world became more im-

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portant due to abundance of their natural resources. And Middle East with its respectively better resources of water, oil and gas beside with its geographic position were some of the most salient characteristics that made it a treasured piece of land. This particular part of land has experienced some of the biggest and most ancient wars that took place in the world. Some the great commanders and governors like Ghenghiz Khan (d.1227), Alexander the Great (d.323 BC), Julius Caesar (d.44 BC), Cyrus the Great² (d. 529 BC), Hammurabi (d.1750 BC), Ramses II (d.1213 BC), Trajan³ (d.117 AD), Themistocles⁴ (d.462 BC), Khalid ibn al-Walid⁵ (d.642), Qutaiba ibn Muslim⁶ (d.716) etc. as it can be easily perceived Middle East was a place for struggle, war and

2. King of Persia and the founder of the Achaemenid Empire established the mightiest and largest empire ever seen before. By the end of his reign, the Achaemenid Empire stretched from the Indus River in the east to the Mediterranean Sea in the east. In addition to his conquests, Cyrus the Great is also remembered for ending the so-called Babylonian Captivity by allowing the Jews to return to Israel.

3. During the reign of the first Roman Emperor who was not born in Italy, the Roman Empire achieved its greatest territorial extent in history. Trajan conquered Dacia (modern-day Romania and Moldova), the Nabatean kingdom (located between the Arabian and Sinai peninsulas), Armenia, north Mesopotamia and much of Parthia (today's Iran and Iraq). He died on his way to Rome in 117. His successor, Hadrian abandoned the conquest of Parthia but most of Trajan's territorial gains were retained.

4. Athenian statesman and general played the key role in the decisive defeat of the Persians by the Athenian fleet in the Battle of Salamis in 480 BC. He forced the Persians to attack in the narrow waters at Salamis which prevented them from taking advantage of their numerical superiority. Despite his brilliant victory over Persia, he was later ostracized (expelled from Athens for 10 years) and fled to Persia where he died.

5. He is noted for his military tactics and prowess, commanding the forces of Medina under Muhammad and the forces of his immediate successors of the Rashidun Caliphate, Abu Bakr and Umar ibn Khattab.

6. Abū Ḥaḥṣ̣ Qutaiba ibn Abī Ṣāliḥ Muslim ibn 'Amr al-Bāhilī was an Arab commander of the Umayyad Caliphate army who became governor of Khurasan and distinguished himself in the conquest of Transoxiana (Arabic: *Māwarā' al-Nahr*) during the reign of al-Walid I (705–715). A capable soldier and administrator, he consolidated Muslim rule in the area and expanded the Caliphate's border to include most of Transoxiana

conflict. This is because the opportunities that were provided only by holding that particular land under control. From the historical perspective it is obvious that Middle East was regarded as a very important and lucrative piece of property for the ancient empires and dynasties of the world history. This study will take only one part of that particular land in order to enable this study for a qualitative analysis. This particular piece of land will cover Iraq-Syria-Iran triangle and more emphasis will be directed to Iran and Syria in order to present the historical background of the policies of Iran towards Syria for the analysis. Briefly, Iran is a state that experienced an Islamic revolution, and a war that lasted 8 years and comprehensive economic pressures aligned with political tumults during the presidencies of Khatami and Ahmadinejad both. But despite all these limiting and containing experiences Iran did not succumb to the divisive nature of the region or a civil war. Iran has survived through it is freshly established institutions (Farh, 2015: 54). Those institutions brought Iran in one strong piece to the 2011 and yet there was a civil war in its closest ally's soil Iran managed to adopt this situation, as well.

From the beginning of the Syrian civil war in March 2011 Iran has not experienced major shifts in the policies towards Syria. Even after the catastrophes of chemical attacks against unarmed civilians and children. Therefore, Iran is believed to defend the integrity of Syrian state which is very important for the border security and protecting Iran's influence in the region which means a strategic partnership do exist between these two countries (Sadjadpour, 2014). But to understand how the situation has escalated to this level of intensified conflict among ISIS-SLA (Syrian Liberation Army) -Al-Assad Regime Forces-Iran-Russia-Hezbollah-Al-Nusra and YPG and many other actors in that peculiar piece of land that hosts almost 19 million⁷ citizens. The Syrian Crisis and war since 2011 was a total catastrophe for the people who were living there. Almost 4.5 million⁸ was replaced or migrated (to not get murdered, or for living a better life in a broad sense) from Syria to different

7. World Population Review Data at 09.12.2015, *Syria Population 2015*, available at <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/syria-population/>

8. UNHCR Data 17.12.2015, *Syria Regional Refugee Response*, Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal, available at <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

places of the world such as Turkey (3 M), Lebanon (1+ M), Jordan (650k), Iraq (250k), Egypt (110k) etc. and forced those people to face with various difficulties of living in a foreign country which perceives them as dangerous *others*. Of course each country had a different reflection towards those migration movements and some countries were more welcoming than the other such as Turkey and Lebanon. But this study will continue focusing on the Iran-Syria group with timely additions of Turkey and Iraq. The perspective should be even narrower to avoid this study from transforming into a historical summary. Although this should not mean this article will completely omit presenting a historical background for the situation in Syria.

Background of Revolution Iran after 1979

In the near pre-1979 history of Iran the most iconic person was considered to be Shah Reza Pahlavi⁹ (d.1944). Reza Shah had idealistic plans for modernizing of Iran including developing large-scale industries, implementing major infrastructure projects, building a cross-country railroad system, establishing a national public education system, reforming the judiciary, and improving health care. He believed a strong, centralized government administrated by educated bureaucrats would conduce him to accomplish his plans. After his reign his son Mohammad Reza Shah was *brought* to throne mostly by British and German diplomats¹⁰, who wanted him to continue his reforms but he was not able to do so and Iran was getting into a chaotic state in which Iran was going to enter a new era (Balaghi, 2014: 2). Just 4 years before 1979 an American feminist reported these: “My first few days in Tehran were strictly caviar and jet lag and a sense of being strangely at home. Tehran, a Middle Eastern city, seems like an American Western boom town -buildings going up overnight, international banks next to a Persian Wimpy stand, and no

9. Briefly, Reza Shah Pahlavi; Four years after a British-assisted coup, the 1921 Persian coup d'état, in 1925 Rezā Shāh deposed Ahmad Shah Qajar, the last Shah of the Qajar dynasty, and founded the Pahlavi dynasty. He established a constitutional monarchy that lasted until overthrown in 1979 during the Iranian Revolution. Reza Shah introduced many social, economic, and political reforms during his reign, ultimately laying the foundation of the modern Iranian state. For more information see Ann Lambton, as quoted in “*The Pahlavi Autocracy: Riza Shah, 1921–4*,” Cambridge History of Iran, v. 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 243.

beggars". This statement indicates that Tehran was no place that was held back or in chaos (Friedan, 1976: 8). In the Fall of 1977 the Iranian Writers' Association organized a series of poetry readings at the Goethe Institute in Tehran known as "*Dah Shab*" or *Ten Nights*. Towards the end of the ten nights, the writers and some students took to the streets, demanding that Iran should break the lieches of foreign power structures. This is also surprising itself that Goethe Institute was a reflection of the west itself. By the winter of 1978, major demonstrations became increasingly common in Iran's major cities. On January 16, 1979, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi left Iran. On February 1, 1979, the Ayatollah Khomeini returned to power (Nikazemerad, 1980: 350-68). In January 1979 The Council of the Islamic Revolution established by Khomeini as a binding agent for the government. At the end it was Khomeini's decisions which were legitimate in the eyes of the people. The Council of the Islamic Revolutions were composed of clerics close to Khomeini and secular political leaders gathered around Bazargan¹¹ (d. 1995) and two representatives of armed forces. Bazargan left the council to form the cabinet and the cabinet was to serve as the executive authority but the Council of the Islamic Revolution was to wield before supreme decision making and legislative authority. And soon after he resigned from the government in November 1979. Mehdi Bazargan was appointed as the Prime Minister of Iran in February. Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti and some other clerics supporting him established *Islamic Republican Party* (IRP) and Ayatollah Khomeini gained and legitimized more power through this party's actions. As an alternative to this structure, Ayatollah Shariatmadari established *Islamic People's Republican Party* (IPRP) which has its base in Azerbaijan. As it is presented multiple centers of authority emerged within the political structure but Khomeini was acting regardless of the government while increased continued to focus the power under his decisions. Additional to Revolutionary Council there was a judiciary called Revolutionary Courts in Tehran where Ayatollah Khomeini had set up his headquarters. Revolutionary courts were

11. Mehdi Bazargan was a prominent Iranian scholar, academic, long-time pro-democracy activist and head of Iran's interim government, making him Iran's first prime minister after the Iranian Revolution of 1979. He resigned his position as prime minister in November 1979, in protest of the US Embassy takeover and as an acknowledgement of his government's failure in preventing it.

established in provincial centers shortly thereafter. The Tehran court passed death sentences on four of the shah's (Mohammad Reza Shah) generals on February 16, 1979; all four were executed by firing squad on the roof of the building housing Ayatollah Khomeini's headquarters. More executions, of military and police officers, Savak agents, cabinet ministers, Majlis deputies, and officials of the shah's regime, followed on an almost daily basis. The activities of the revolutionary courts became a focus of intense controversy. On the one hand, left-wing political groups and populist clerics pressed hard for "revolutionary justice" for miscreants of the former regime. On the other hand, lawyers' and human rights' groups protested the arbitrary nature of the revolutionary courts, the vagueness of charges, and the absence of defense lawyers. Bazargan, too, was critical of the courts' activities. At the prime minister's insistence, the revolutionary courts suspended their activities on March 14, 1979. On April 5, new regulations governing the courts were promulgated (Iran Chamber Society, 2016: 1).

Additional to Revolutionary Courts there were Revolutionary Committees established in order to support and legitimize the decisions of the revolutionary courts. The committees often served the interests of powerful individual clerics, revolutionary personalities, and political groups, however. They made unauthorized arrests, intervened in labor-management disputes, and seized property. Despite these abuses, members of the Revolutionary Council wanted to bring the committees under their own control, rather than eliminate them. With this in mind, in February 1979 they appointed Ayatollah Mohammad Reza Mahdavi-Kani head of the Tehran revolutionary committee and assigned him with supervising the committees countrywide. Mahdavi-Kani dissolved many committees, consolidated others, and sent thousands of committeemen homes. But the committees, like the revolutionary courts, endured, serving as one of the coercive apparatus of the revolutionary government (Iran Chamber Society, 2016: 2-6). Following these severe developments that have portrayed Iran as a coercive state that can or execute anyone proliferating anti-Iranian doctrines. This was obviously hurting Iran's prestige in the Middle East against Muslims. Since most of the people executed were least but not the last Muslims and most of them were even from Shia. In May 1979 Ayatollah Khomeini authorized the establishment of the Pasdaran (Pasdaran-e Enghelab-e Islami, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps or

Revolutionary Guards). The Pasdaran was conceived by the men around Ayatollah Khomeini as a military force loyal to the Revolution and the clerical leaders, as a counterbalance for the regular army, and as a force to use against the guerrilla organizations of the left, which were also arming. Disturbances among the ethnic minorities accelerated the expansion of the Pasdaran. Because this expansion meant more oppression and discomfort for some peculiar minorities. Two other important organizations were established in this formative period. In March Ayatollah Khomeini established the Foundation for the *Disinherited*. The organization was to take charge of the assets of the Pahlavi Foundation and to use the proceeds to assist low-income groups. The new foundation in time came to be one of the largest conglomerates in the country, controlling hundreds of expropriated and nationalized factories, trading firms, farms, and apartment and office buildings, as well as two large newspaper chains. The Jihad for Reconstruction (Jihad-e Sazandegi or Jihad), established in June, recruited young people for construction of clinics, local roads, schools, and similar facilities in villages and rural areas. The organization also grew rapidly, assuming functions in rural areas that had previously been handled by the Planning and Budget Organization (which replaced the Plan Organization in 1973) and the Ministry of Agriculture (Iran Chamber Society, 2016). There were ethnic conflicts in Iran among Kurds and Arab speaking people that were not Iranian. But the Kurdish problem had lasted longer than the other ethnic issues in Iran history. This was a result of a demand of the Kurdish people from Iranian government which was the autonomy of Kurds in Iran territory. At the end only partially the demands were granted such as accepting the Kurdish language as a local language despite of existing fierce small-battles between Khomeini's Pasdaran and Kurdish militia groups. Following these very important developments in Iran's domestic politics the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88) deserves a place in this study since it has shaped Iran's relations with Syria and shifted Iran's policy towards Al-Assad's / Syria's integrity.

After the Islamic revolution having the support from other states was extremely vital for Iran to re-establish itself with its new identity. And especially support of other Arab states was incredibly important since Iran needed allies that had common interests and enemies and could share the ideological stance and political identity (Mohns & Bank, 2012). And Syrian dic tator

President Hafez al-Assad was the first Arab leader to recognize the new Iran after the revolution. Since Iran recognized Alawis as one of the strands of Shiism as a first step (Piotrowski, 2011: 596). Although there were respected ayatollahs in Lebanon and Iraq that strongly denied and condemned this action Iran was in need of having a close ally in the region at the time.

Factors of Iran's Foreign Policy

There are many factors that dictate and direct Iran's foreign policy towards this peculiar way. Those can be gathered under the frame of three main categories. *The Iranian Public*, Iranian society wants good, stable relations between Iran and Iraq because of their cultural and religious priorities, which include having the freedom to visit the sacred cities of Karbala and Najaf. This strong interest exists on the Iraqi side too. As an example, in summer 2006, some 3000 visas were issued daily by Iranian consulates (Baghdad, Basra, Najaf) for Iraqi pilgrims to visit Mashhad and Qom and other sacred places inside Iran.¹² Secondly, *Elite structures*, given the historical background and the record of threats from Iraq, these segments of society have maintained their traditional stance on that Iraq can be a strategic threat again if its political issues are not handled well. Since they believe that Iran needs to work with the new Iraqi government -whether dominated by Shiites, Sunnis, or Kurds- in order to counter the threat of a potentially hostile and re-armed neighbor. According to this view, Iraq's economic, geopolitical, and cultural significance is such that it will always present a potential threat to Iran's national security. Thus, the intellectuals believe that it is critical for Iran to establish the type of relations with Iraq that will make it as little disposed as possible to endanger Iran's regional interests (Nag-hibzadeh, 2002: 85-100). Political, Military, and Religious Elites believe that new Iraq presents both challenges and opportunities simultaneously. Iran's Iraq policy is made in Iran's National Security Council, where all government bodies have representatives and seek to balance and out-power one another. Obviously, the Iranian government would enjoy a secure, stable, balanced, and united

12. Interview with Asghar Khaji, ex-representative of Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Iraqi affairs. For further information in this respect see also Baztab site(in Persian) at: www.baztab.com September 2006.

Iraq that is not in a position to threaten its eastern neighbor. (Barzegar, 2007: 6). The third and the last part of these factors is the *Principles*, Iran's delicate geopolitics forces Iran to act pragmatic in its policy towards Iraq (Ramazani, 2004: 550). It is almost completely accepted by the politicians and intellectuals that stabilizing Iraq needs Iran's assistant or at least a balancing role to make the process less painful for the Iraqi citizens. There is another approach that explains Iran's foreign policy in a broader sense, as well. Bazoobandi argues that Iran's foreign policy bases on 3 main factors which are sovereignty, influence and balance of power. She assumes that Iran by its constitution's 9th article Irani government has to protect the sovereignty from other states. And Iran diligently tries to increase its influence in the region. Lastly, Iran aspires to balance Israel in the long run (Bazoobandi, 2014: 3). Iran's foreign policy and engagements should be analyzed with the contributions of explanations.

Iran-Iraq War and Its Aftermath

The process of escalation begins with a hostage crisis between Iran and US which lasted for 444 days (Totten, 2015: 6). Iranian students stormed the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, taking hostage 52 American employees and demanded shah's return from the United States to face trial in Iran. The hostage crisis sparked a conflict between the United States and Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran and the United States severed diplomatic ties over the hostage crisis, and the U.S. Embassy was used as a training ground for the Revolutionary Guards Corps. America in response supported and encouraged Iraq to wage war against Iran. Iraq invaded Iran after years of disagreements over a territory, known as the Shatt al Arab waterway. When Iraqi President Saddam Hussein announced his intention to reclaim the Shatt al Arab, an eight-year war broke out. This may indicate for Iran it was the sovereignty factor that influenced the foreign policy most at the time due to Iraq's claims about Iranian territories. After fierce negotiation mediated by Algeria the hostages were released to Carter government. But shortly after an American navy ship, the USS Vincennes, shot down an Iranian commercial plane, killing all 290 passengers and the crew. The United States later apologized and agreed for financial compensation for the victims' families, saying the civilian plane was mistaken for an attacking military jet. This severed Iran's relations with United States once again. In 1988, Iran accepted United Nations Security

Council Resolution 598, leading to a cease-fire in the Iran-Iraq War. This 8-year war have costed Iran 500 Billion \$ which was a huge capital for Iran. The war drained Iran's economy may be at a time when Iran needed it most (Goodarzi, 2006). That capital that spent during the war would have been used for modernizing the country and importing technology and starting innovative scientific studies. Since Iran possesses the biggest proven gas reserves and 3rd biggest oil reserves and thanks to Russian companionship it still survived after the war. But for Iraq it was not the same story. Iraq had never been able to redeem itself after Saddam Hussein's aggressive policies and the wars he put Iraq into. The data also proves this claim as Iraq's GDP per capita is 7100\$ whereas Iran's is 12800\$ in 2013. It is also very obvious in terms of GDP as Iraq's is 249 billion \$ whereas Iran's is 511 billion \$ which is more than twice the capacity of Iraq as a whole. During the time of war, in 1982 Assembly of experts were established in order to select the successor Khomeini and during 1983-4 there was no consensus but in 1984 Montazeri was the *qoem maqam* (deputy chair). In 1984, Revolutionary courts were transformed into the regular court system and second Majlis was established with only IRP individuals under Mir-Hossein Mousavi¹³ as PM and Ho-jatol-Islam Khamenei¹⁴ as President. And the constitution was re-organized and amended in 1989.

In the modern history of Iran-Iraq relations there are different ties and reciprocities between these two states now. Iran has two primary purposes, first one is obviously about the security of Iraq. This is very important for Iran since Iranians have a threat perception of Iraqi state and Iran wants to eliminate it. In order to eliminate this issue, Iranian elites supports a Shia friendly

13. Mir-Hossein Mousavi Khameneh Mīr-Hoseyn Mūsavī Khāmené; born 2 March 1942) is an Iranian reformist politician, artist and architect who served as the seventy-ninth and last Prime Minister of Iran from 1981 to 1989. He was a reformist candidate for the 2009 presidential election and eventually the leader of the opposition in the post-election unrest. Mousavi served as the president of the Iranian Academy of Arts until 2009, when Conservative authorities removed him.

14. Hojatoleslam Hadi Khamenei (born 1947) is an influential Iranian reformist politician, mojtahed and linguist. He is a key member of the reformist Association of Combatant Clerics, and a former deputy of the Majlis of Iran representing a district in Tehran.

Iraqi state that is going to create political and economic opportunities for Iran. Another reason is because of the chaos in Iraq's domestic political tensions. The power struggle that perishes Iraq piece by piece caused by sectarian conflicts, faction rivalries, possible civil war although Iraq has not the potential to pose a threat to Iran in terms of military capacity these kinds of problems and anarchy in the borders of Iran is not a desired situation for Iranian politicians. Last part of this issue is the American influence in Iraq. Iran has defined its regional goals for many times and she wants to be strongest influential actor for all of the states in Middle East let along Turkey and Israel. Since 2003, in this sense there is tense competition between US and Iran for getting a grip of Iraq's policy making structures. In this sense the civil violence in Iraq since the invasion has had a polarizing impact which made Iran and Iraq become closest allies. (Kinninmont, 2015: 1). The second tenet in Iran-Iraq relations for Iran is about creating economic and cultural opportunities for Iranian elites. This is a result of Iraq's central position in the region after 2003-US's invasion of Iraq following Iraq-Kuwait war. Since then Iraq has been the most inconsistent state and it has the potential to create opportunities for Turkey and Iran in the long run. Iran is expecting a return of the favor which was Iran's assistance of securing Iraq. Additionally, Iran has always desired a Shiite friendly government around Iran or states under direct influence of the Shiite political elites (Bargezar, 2007:4). It was also argued that the real reason behind Syria's re-approach to Iraq was Iran itself. Tehran's moderate initiatives to re-conciliate with Iraq conducted to parallel attempts by Damascus as Syria welcomed successive delegates of Iraqi notables (Lawson, 2007: 39).¹⁵ This was also supported by the re-establishment of commercial and transportation links to Iraq.

While Iran and Iraq was getting closer, Iran's relations with Gulf States were going into the opposite direction. Rouhani promised to make "moderation" the centerpiece of his government, but breaking out of isolation has proven to be a much more difficult task than the reform-inclined Rouhani government expected (Akbarzadeh, 2015: 44). As in December 2004, King

15. For additional information see Fred H. Lawson, *Implications of the 2011-13 Syrian Uprising for the Middle Eastern Regional Security Complex*, Occasional Paper No. 14, Center for International and Regional Studies

Abdullah of Jordan publicly warned the world of a Shia “crescent” emerging in the region, connecting Hezbollah in Lebanon to the rising Shia power in Iraq and the Islamic Republic of Iran.¹⁶ In a 2008 address¹⁷, Supreme Leader Khamenei presented Iran as a challenger to this divide: It had become conventional for some states to use technology, science, weaponry and trickery to dominate and subjugate other states. Although elected President Hassan Rouhani made a fresh effort to renew and develop the relations with Gulf states in 2013 which was actually one of the steps of the road map that Mohammad Khatami drew in his writings of “The 20-Year Book” (Khatami, 2004: 47)¹⁸. In the study Khatami argued that Iran had the responsibility of becoming the Islamic leader of the region but there were outsiders in the region that deteriorated Iran-Gulf States relations. Since Iran was very disturbed by the US bases in this region, it aspired new security arrangement among only the Arab countries. But GCC states always tended to consider this as an early sign of Iranian domination of them and they strongly opposed to these new arrangements. This is understandable since GCC states’ population was only half of Iran’s which is more than 80 million. And Iran had a battle tested army with a large population behind with extending weaponry and capabilities. And there were substantial Shirazi communities, particularly in the Eastern cities of Saudi Arabia mostly led by Hassan Al-Saffar who was an influential cleric and other smaller communities including Zaydis, Shaykhis and Īsmailis (Kinninmont, 2015: 4-11). With this diversifications Saudi understanding of Islam is quite different than Iran’s (Taheri, 2014). Iran’s relations with its neighbours are one of the most important subjects that defined Iran’s position in the region. Therefore Iran’s relations with Syria before and after the civil war is very significant in explaining Iran’s current defensive position in Syria.

16. See Robin Wright and Peter Baker, “Iraq, Jordan See Threat to Election from Iran,” *Washington Post*, December 8, 2004, available at: [<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A43980-2004Dec7.html>.]

17. See the original text, Office of the Leader, March 20, 2008, available at: [<http://www.leader.ir/langs/fa/index.php?p=bayanat&id=3744>.]

18. The Persian text of the document can be found via the following link: Mohammed Khatami, “Iran 20-Year Outlook”, [<http://old.maslahat.ir/Contents.aspx?p=67ee04aa-7171-4f72-bdf7-e6f68c3547e5>].

Iran-Syria Relations

There is a bifurcation in the perceptions of Syria for Iran. One side believes that Iran and Syria have to be allies on the basis of that these two countries have fundamentally common interests which force them to work together. Since Syria was the only country that sided with Iran in the capital-consuming Iraqi war which brought these countries closer than ever. Additional to this, Syria was the first Arab country to recognize the Islamic republic of Iran (Piotrowski, 2011). And the common anti-Sunni ideology of religion is another reason that pushes Iran and Syria to closer positions. Iran and Syria also seem to have corresponding interests in the region alongside with Lebanon. Syria has been the center that facilitated the growth of Hezbollah. Totten defines the meaning of Assad as: *“The overthrow of Assad is the worst thing that can happen to Iranian government and Hezbollah. Iran will lose its only ally in the Arab world, and Hezbollah will lose one of only two patrons and its entire over-ground logistics network.”* (2012: 15-21). Although he is correct about the thick functional ties between Iran and Hezbollah and Al-Assad as the connector this study suggests that a Syria without Al-Assad does not mean Iran losing the whole Syria. As long as the Ba'ath party is there it is suggested that Iran would continue to enjoy the political leverages it established over three decades. The other main perspective about this problem is the idea that Iran and Syria have very different enemies and any kind of alliance or functional ties are doomed to be temporary and contextual. In this perspective Syria is considered to have unique security and geo-political concerns that Iran should get involved with. Let alone these two main perspectives there are various ideas about Iran's foreign policy of Syria. For instance, there are scholars and researchers, believe in a regime change is the sole resolution to this conflict. These ideas were developed during the three Geneva I (Geneva Communique) in 2012, Geneva II in 2014 and Geneva III in 2015. The main idea was to establish a transitory government in Syria which is going to prepare the political structure for a democratic transition. This idea is also supported by the United States as Secretary of State John Kerry said: *“We agree on the right of the Syrian people to choose a leadership through free and transparent elections.”* in a speech at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington. And also *”Surely we can*

find a place where one man does not stand in the way.” He said ending Syria’s civil war is a key component to U.S. policy to defeat the Islamic State militants threatening the entire Middle East. Kerry said Syrians should not have to choose between a dictator or terrorists (Dorell, 2015). With this Kerry articulated that U.S. was in search of alternative solutions.

But this option is not welcome by Tehran government since it could lead to a situation in which the Iranian supported Assad would have to step aside. Within Iran, however, the different political factions have not reconciled their views on the fate of Assad. Iran’s Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), which leads much of the Iranian political and military involvement in Syria since the eruption of the civil war, insists that Assad should remain in power. Following the Vienna round of negotiations, for instance, a major general of the IRGC Ground Forces, Mohammad Ali Jafari stated that, while Moscow does ‘not care if Assad stays in power as we do’, Tehran sees no better option than him. On the other hand, the foreign ministry seems to have a more flexible view on Assad’s fate. Deputy foreign minister and delegate to the Syrian talks, Amir-Abdollahian, for instance, recently conceded that ‘Iran does not insist on keeping Assad in power forever’ (Naziri, 2015). There a question lies under these statements what exactly is the reason of Iran’s comprehensive support for Syria. These countries after Iraq war, Cedar Revolution¹⁹ and 2006 Lebanon war have come closer than ever. One of the main reasons is that Syria’s position next to Lebanon that gives Iran direct access to Hezbollah (Goodarzi, 2006; Sadjadpour, 2014). But this does not only benefit Iran. In Syria, Iran’s money and arms, and Hizballah’s military tactics, provides the regime with an advantageous position against the “rebels.” (Ospina & Gray, 2014: 45). It is also important to say that rebels have their main support from Saudi Arabia and Qatar (Hokayem, 2014: 64).

In terms of political and military developments there was a new one in 2006 which was the establishment of military cooperation and common threats of Israel and United States. Syrian Defense Minister Najjar one stated

19. The Cedar Revolution (Arabic: *intifādat al-istiqlāl*) was a chain of demonstrations in Lebanon (especially in the capital Beirut) triggered by the assassination of the former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri on 14 February 2005. The popular movement was remarkable for its avoidance of violence and its reliance on methods of civil resistance.

that: "Iran considers Syria's security as its own security." which means that Syria even pragmatically is a really important state for Iran in terms of geopolitics. And Revolutionary Guard commanders seem to be cohesive with Najjar as they argue that if terrorism is not stopped in Syria it will spread to the streets of Tehran (Naji, 2015). At the same year Iranian officials were trying to distance themselves from Hezbollah and Palestinian ally Hamas since it would harm Iran even more to blame as the supporter of non-state actors to increase its influence in those states (Lawson, 2014: 106).

Another influential person in Iran's foreign policy Ali Akbar Velayâfi as a former Foreign Minister and a senior advisor of supreme leader Khamenei indicated that: "*Syria is the golden ring of the chain of resistance against Israel that must be protected*"²⁰ which articulates the position of Iran about Syria and the faith of Assad in the most diacritic way possible (Milani, 2013: 84). Another close ally of Iran's Supreme Leader, Hojjat al-Eslam Mehdi Taeb, a former IRGC official and current head of the pro-Khamenei think tank, Ammar Base, also shared this sentiment in a mid-February gathering of university Basij units: "Syria is the 35th province [of Iran] and a strategic province for us. If the enemy attacks us and seeks to take over Syria or [Iran's] Khuzestan, the priority lies in maintaining Syria, because if we maintain Syria we can take back Khuzestan. However, if we lose Syria, we won't be able to hold Tehran."²¹ These both statements are almost enough to clarify the position of Iran about Syria and obviously its governor Bashar Al-Assad (Fulton and others, 2013: 26). Iran seeks primarily preserving the Assad regime for as long as possible. Syria has historically been an independent ally of the Islamic Republic, and the interests of these two allies have sometimes diverged. The regime's deepening dependence on Iranian support has made

20. As quoted in Jubin Goodarzi, "Iran and Syria at the Crossroads: The Fall of the Tehran-Damascus Axis?" Wilson Center, Middle East Program, Viewpoints series, no. 35, August 2013, http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/iran_syria_crossroads_fall_tehran_damascus_axis.pdf.

21. "Treasury Designates Syrian Entity, Others Involved in Arms and Communications Procurement Networks and Identifies Blocked Iranian Aircraft," US Department of the Treasury, September 19, 2012, <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1714.aspx>.

Assad increasingly beholden to Tehran. Public outcry from Assad regime supporters over the recent prisoner swap deal that included Iranian nationals, including IRGC-GF commanders but not captured pro-regime Syrians, indicates the extent to which Syria has been forced to prioritize Iranian interests (Mohammad, 2013). While trying to preserve Assad, Iran is actively preparing to ensure a permissive environment post-Assad. As an Iraqi official who met with Qassem Suleimani explained, “The mission of Suleimani in Syria is complicated. It is not limited to protecting the regime from collapsing, rather it also has to preserve Iranian interests in Lebanon and Syria should the regime fall.” (Mushreq, 2013). Iran is performing an extensive, expensive and integrated effort to keep Assad in power as long as possible while setting conditions to retain its ability to use Syrian territory and assets to pursue its regional interests. Iran’s usage of Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, Ground Forces, Quds Force, Intelligence Service and Law Enforcement Forces deserve an anecdote in this study.

Iran’s Boots *in Syria*

Iran has made a diligent effort to advise the Syrian military in order to preserve Bashar al-Assad’s hold on power. Both the IRGC and Quds Force (IRGC-QF) and elements of the conventional IRGC Ground Forces (IRGCGF), as well as several Iranian intelligence organizations, have trained and advised elements of Assad regime’s military and security services. These organizations all have distinct operational strengths that complement one another in support of Assad. A more detailed analysis of Iran’s support of Syria will articulate the statement that Syria would not survive without Iran’s very vital support (Fulton, 2013: 10).

Advisory Mission, Iran’s primary foreign military arm, IRGCQF, appears to be leading this effort. The U.S. Department of the Treasury (USDOT) designated IRGC-QF Commander Major General Qassem Suleimani and Operations and Training Commander Mohsen Chizari in May 2011 for their role in “the violent repression against the Syrian people.” The Quds Force is responsible for Iran’s external operations, and Commander Suleimani played a prominent role managing Iranian activity in Iraq, so it is not surprising that he has taken a leadership role in Iran’s Syria policy (Gordon, 2013). There are many things that proves this situation as the lat-

est new about Suleimani was lightly wounded because of the assaults in Syria. This is an obvious point that Iran supports Syria and Assad even by risking their generals on the ground. As noted: “*Syria is occupied by the Iranian regime. The person who runs the country is not Bashar al-Assad but Qassem Suleimani, the head of Iranian regime’s Quds Force.*” Iranian existence in Syria perceived as harmful for the stability in the country but it is de-stabilizing the state even more instead by the researchers and individuals who are strongly opposing Iran as an Islamic state and defend that a democratic country should take the situation under control.

Intelligence Support, Iranian organizations have been involved in the process, including Law Enforcement Forces (LEF), the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), and the large defense contractor Iran Electronics Industries (IEI). LEF provided material support to the Syrian General Intelligence Directorate (GID) and dispatched personnel to Damascus to assist the Syrian government in suppressing the Syrian people. (Fulton, 2013: 15).

Military Support, Iranian military support for Syria consists of Air, Ground and Sea dimensions (Nerguizian, 2015). The aerial support is the most important aspect of Iran’s help to Syria in order to keep Assad in power. But the Iranian aerial support has not only date back to Syrian civil war but long before that Iran has been using Syria’s airport for supporting Hezbollah and Lebanon (Fulton, 2013: 16). Although there are other ways of supporting Syria and Assad the reason that Iran chose to support Syria from the air is mostly a result of security concerns. However, throughout the years Iran has lost three of the main four paths of logistics transfer. First, historical Sunni militant activity in Sinjar area suggests that this route would not be useful for government forces due to security concerns. Assad’s withdrawal from Syria’s northeastern Kurdish areas left this northern route unsuitable for a principal overland support channel (Caves, 2012). Third, the Syrian rebel’s seizure of the Al Qaim-Abu Kamal border crossing point in early September 2012 closed the Euphrates River belt to ground resupply from Iraq. Iran has been accelerating seeking alternatives after ISIS’s movements on these paths which endangered the security of the arms supply of Syria. Transitions through Suez Canal. Two vessels of Iran Alvand, and Kharg has docked at Latakia which now is used as an air basis for Russia. Despite having limited opportunity sea lines seem to be the most feasible routes for Iran for supply-

ing Assad since it is much cheaper (Fulton, 2013: 19).

As it is demonstrated above Iran has been supporting Syria's integrity with almost every method possible even if this means material costs that would create problems to compensate. The costs of these actions vary from travel restrictions to trade restrictions, diplomatic and cultural restrictions and air traffic constraints are other examples (Moret, 2015: 122).

Consequences of this support will be discussed in the following section in the study and potential alternative ways of dealing with Syrian Civil War and keeping Syria at Iran's side. This study has to use the perception of Iranian politicians in order to be able to think pragmatically for Iranian national interests. Under this frame of thought, the 33-year old alliance between Syria and Iran has formed a key strategic axis in the region. The relationship is formed by pragmatic concerns and is based on common strategic goals. If the Assad regime falls, this will be seen as a sizeable strategic and foreign policy setback for Iran. Syria provides its ally with access to Lebanon and Israel, but also it has provided assistance and arms to Hezbollah, commonly seen as an Iranian ally. Since Iran's role in Lebanon is intimately interconnected with Tehran's alliance with Damascus (Venetis, 2011: 18) Syria has evolved into a position of a vein that transfers the vital goods to Hezbollah. Hezbollah's survival is seen as one of Iran's most vital interests in the region. Iran's reaction to the Syria crisis has revealed the difficult position in which it found itself at the beginning of the Arab uprisings. By supporting Assad, Iran has fallen into a trap from which it cannot escape without substantial costs (Milani, 2013: 84). Iran had initially indicated its support for revolutions against the pro-Western regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, portraying them as part of an Islamist Uprisings sweeping the region. However, the outbreak of demonstrations in Syria appears to have taken the Iranian leadership by surprise, presenting the dilemma of whether to stand against the demonstrations and risk being perceived as hypocritical, or to watch from the sidelines and hope that future political elites will choose to maintain the existing alliance. Iran prefers the former option. Iranian assistance to the Syrian regime has taken various forms such as: providing crowd control weapons to the security services; guidance on surveillance and internet monitoring; and financial resources to circumvent sanctions. Although Iran's support for the Assad regime has remained constant throughout the crisis, it has nevertheless been

subject to subtle shifts in motivation and strategy. By the summer of 2011, the inability of the Syrian regime to bring the nationwide unrest under control had become a source of great discomfort in Tehran, and sections of the political elite were concerned that they had positioned themselves on the wrong side of the story. During this period, Iran reached out to members of Syria's freshly developing opposition groups, in order to sound out their positions on relations with Iran, Israel and the United States. However, these talks do not appear to have been fruitful. As Assad's hold on power grows increasingly tenuous, there are now signs that Iran is reaching out to the Syrian opposition once again. As Iran seeks measures to salvage the situation in Syria, it seems likely that it would support a solution in which Assad steps aside as other trusted elements within the Syrian political elite take his place. Its priority will be to maintain military and intelligence cooperation (Chatham House, 2012: 4). But according to some scholars it is Hezbollah that Iran has acquired as the big prize out of Syrian conflict instead of Syria (Milani, 2013: 85). It is known that Iran does not have an advantageous position on supporting Syria's integrity as much as Turkey does as result of lack of borders with Syria (Chatam House, 2012: 5). But also Turkey is reluctant to have a unilateral military operation on a unilateral basis. The reasons of AKP's certain shift on its policies toward Syria and Al-Assad can be summarized as following, a deep sense of prestige and national dignity, unbearable massacres of civilians, maintaining Turkey unharmed by from security threats, Al-Assad's reported relationship with the Kurds and the PKK, Turkey's political aims in Syria, respect toward democracy, idea of establish Turkey as a role model, learning from the Libyan case, reducing the influence of Iran in the region, Shii-Sunni conflict and Turkey's Sunni stance, (Islam, 2016). From a bird's eye review the states in the region are United States, Israel, Russia, Iran, Turkey and Lebanon who will be involved till the resolution of this problem let alone contemporary pragmatic states such as France, Germany, Canada United Kingdom etc. From all of these various states that are trying to be influential in Levant²² Iran was the focus of this study and it is going to hold that fo-

22. In the 13th and 14th centuries, the term Levante was used for Italian maritime commerce in the eastern Mediterranean, including Greece, Anatolia, Syria-Palestine, and Egypt, that is, the lands east of Venice. Eventually the term was restricted to the Muslim countries of Syria-Palestine and Egypt.

cal point. For Iran, loss of Syria pins directly to less ability to reflect her power in Levant. Such loss would tighten the influential zone of Iran to only parts of Iraq and Yemen's rebel forces under al-Houthi command. Iran is supporting Yemeni rebels with shipments of anti-aircraft missiles, arms, ammunitions in order to keep them strong so that Iran would continue projecting its power. Iran has also not changed its commitment to preserving Assad's regime. Earlier on in the conflict, Western leaders underestimated how far Iran would go to preserve its Syrian ally. That strategic imperative has not shifted. Even if Iran's military plans are running into new obstacles, setbacks are likely to only result in re-evaluation and re-strategizing (McInnis, 2015). At the beginning of the civil war some scholars were arguing that Russia wouldn't get involved with the civil war decisive enough to change the situation but it was understood this was not the case shortly after (Gambill, 2016).

With the entrance of Russia to Syria from Latakia now Iran feels more confident about pushing the rebel forces and ISIS back to their *graves*. But this also makes Iran reliant on Russia more and more on the daily basis. Whether the person who is going to favor Shiite Iranian regime is going to be Assad or someone else is a hard question to answer but it seems that Iran is determinant on protecting Assad and indebteding him to Iran for future decentralizations and follow this method even with other individuals who has the potential to govern Syria one day which is called *Assadism* (Milani, 2013: 85). However, it would not be very unreliable to say that Iran would prefer Assad than anyone else since he is already indebted very much to Iran for holding the power for 4 years of support. But there are alternatives in politics and this means not only Assad and but Syria as well is not dispensable for Iran as long as they have the support of Russia.

The Russian Factor

Russia remains as the focal actor on determining both Syria's and Iran's' foreign policies about the formation of the future of Syria's integrity. This is a result of Russia's pre-involvement with Afghanistan and Russia's support for Assad and Iran in shaping their states as decision makers in their domestic policies. Russia's support for Homeyni during the Tehran revolution created a bond between these countries against the most important rival of Russia which is the United States. As Russian deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogo-

zin on Thursday urged greater efforts to build relations with Iran. He said *“You can't exactly say that all political forces in Iran fully share the view that Russia should become a strategic partner. Therefore, we still have to do some serious work on that”* (Barker et. al., 2015). This situation has not experienced major shifts towards the opposite direction since Russia and Iran has also common economic interests as a consequence of their Oil and Gas rich territories and nuclear enrichment studies of Iran supported by Russia. As an anecdote the reason why Turkey and Russia got closer which then reflected to Iran-Turkey relations were nuclear energy opportunities provided by Russia and Iran since Ankara aspires to enlarge its capacity to balance Iran in the region in the nuclear competition (Bleek and Stein, 2012: 28).

However, Iran's close relationship with Russia has important implications for the Syria crisis. Both share a settled interest in ensuring that a post-Assad Syria would not fall directly into a Western sphere of influence. Although there are states who would even prefer ISIS to Assad such as Israel as the Israeli Defense Minister at the time Moshe Ya'alon expressed that Iran was a bigger thread than ISIS which according to Javad Zarif is the product of two things and these are the US invasion of Iraq, and the foreign presence that creates a dynamic of resistance align with the feeling of disequilibrium, which has prevailed in some countries in the region since the fall of Saddam (Efsandiary & Tabatabai, 2015) and he would prefer Daesh to Iran in Syria.²³ As the situation has worsened and Iran has struggled to exert direct influence over events in Syria, it has become increasingly dependent on Russia. As a result, Russia has called many of the shots over the strategy towards Syria, publicly continuing to honor existing arms contracts with the Syrian regime, as an example. However, since neither Russia nor Iran wishes to lose any more political capital than it has already expended on managing the crisis, both have continued to participate in broader multilateral negotiations while simultaneously offering sufficient support for Assad to maintain his grip on power. Questions remain over the possible Iranian strategy, should Russia turn against Assad. Iran remains under a great deal of pressure, owing to in-

23. See the original new from here, An Israeli minister says he'd prefer Daesh to Iran in Syria Published January 20th, 2016 <http://www.albawaba.com/loop/israeli-politician-says-hed-prefer-daesh-iran-syria-795588> 02.08.2016

ternational sanctions, and finds itself increasingly isolated. If one of its closest allies were to perform a multi-face in its policy towards Syria, Iran would have to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of continuing to support very carefully. Although both Russia and Iran would suffer in a post-Assad Syria on account of their previous support for the regime, sectarian narratives in Syria make it likely that Iran would be the greatest loser since it would be perceived as being directly allied with the Shi'a elements that had been forced from power.

Recently, Russian Defense Minister's visit in June 2016 to Syria and the meeting²⁴ he attended with Al-Assad, and Russian jets facilitating the Iranian air base of Hamedan to use it aerial raids by Tupolev/TU-22M3s and Sukhoi/SU-34s to Syria²⁵. Even though this was designated as a temporary situation by Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Ghasemi (Khalaj and Hille, 2016), Russia from time to time continues to use the air base which shows how close Russia and Iran are and how influential Russia is on Iran. Although for now Assad and Russia are on the same page it seems likely that Russia would co-opt Iran if it wants Assad to leave in a real manner (Keohane & Posh, 2015: 64). In this sense it is argued that there is an informal patronage network between Russia, Iran and Syria. Richard Sakwa argues that the loyalty demanded by informal networks can solve the problem of uncertainty (Sakwa, 2011). Ledeneva points out that trust relies on internal loyalty tests and information-gathering (Ledeneva, 2013). Andrew Monaghan develops on these ideas and argues such a system leads to policy conservatism (2012). Philip Hanson explains the resulting hidden competition over policy between informal network members as "*dogfights under a carpet.*" As Marten comprehensively brought these explanations about informal patronage she points out that there are informal political networks that administrate Syria sometimes better and faster than diplomacy itself (Marten, 2015: 72).

24. See the original new on Rûdaw, "Russian defense minister talks military cooperation in Syria and visits airbase", [<http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/19062016>], [21.06.2016]

25. The original article about "Syria's civil war: Russian jets bomb rebels from Iran" retrieved in 17 Aug 2016 available at: [<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/08/syria-civil-war-russian-jets-bomb-rebels-iran-160816091400652.html>], [03.08.2016]

Conclusion and Alternatives

Middle East and Levant poses various opportunities for states that can grasp even a small amount of influence as one of the most prosperous piece of land in the earth soil. Throughout the history and now this scarce resources were bound to proliferate conflicts among the people who desired those goods for their peculiar interests. This is exactly what is happening in the regions and the true reason behind this conflict. This study never had the idea of revealing the *true* reasons lying behind this comprehensive conflict but analyzing the results and predictions of potential future developments. Since it is very ambiguous the study restrained itself from making bold guesses but insisting on scientific predictions deriving from interpretations and data received. This may be the reason why this study did not have a vast amount of future predictions. After a historical perspective and presentations Iran's history with both Iraq and Iran sometimes involvements of Turkey and Lebanon as well the study argued that without a good level of knowledge about Levant's history it would be very risky and probably misleading to make inferences about the Syrian crisis. Although the author wanted to include Turkey more into this study the context limited the study to Iran and its close allies and unfortunately for this study Iran and Turkey relations are not in their best conditions if not these two countries have very enchanting relations in the history ever. Iran's lethal support in Syria has been demonstrated under three categories of air, ground and sea with different pros and cons. Iran's risky investments by sending high level military personnel to the ground was a focal point in explaining the position and ambitions for defending Syria which was considered the 35th province and the sole opportunity for Iran to get Khuzestan back. Although foreign policies would differ on Syria, Russia was the determining factor and the most powerful decision taker in Syrian crisis. Iran's reliance of Russia was the result of this situation which was an egg-chicken situation that produced the former situation. Russia with its military base in Latakia certainly wants Syria and Assad to survive as it clearly supported Assad regime's and Iranian military forces on the ground with very strategic air strikes even on Turkomans in Kızıldag region which made Turkey government very upset and may be this was part of the puzzle in the formation of Turkey's downing a SU-29 air-to-ground type warplane. This

situation has intensified the tension even further among Turkey siding with NATO and Iran and Syria backed by Russia. Since Russia is the most influential actor in this crisis it would not be incorrect to say that Assad's regime will be at the hands of Russian government and especially Putin. But the problem in Levant seems to deepen with the resolution about fighting ISIS by United Nations Security Council which signals that any country even China can now easily enter the picture with only arguing that China is eager to fight with ISIS which was exactly the discourse of Russia even though in the following 39 airstrike operations only 4 ISIS targets were hit as Barack Obama stated that these kind of Russian operations making the ISIS even stronger (BBC, 2015).

Throughout the history of military conflicts after WWII the military solutions did not prove to be permanent or benevolent except Bosnia (1995) and Kosova (1999) to be hopeful. Therefore, defending the idea that Syrian civil war will end by a military operation would not be satisfying. The hardliners support the idea that Iran won't stop defending Syria and its borders alongside with its internal integrity even though Iran's loss of a strong ally that is to be Assad (Milani, 2013: 89). And even though Assad was fallen this would not mean a radiant resolution to the conflict immediately proven with the experience of NATO and UNSC with Libya and Coronel Qaddafi. Therefore, dethroning Saddam Hussein or Coronel Qaddafi does not certainly mean to a resolution to the armed conflicts. Armed conflicts tend to require complex, multi-layered and time consuming solutions let alone social and cultural transformations occur during these internal armed conflicts. But this armed conflict may be working best for the countries that are fighting with it. For aggressive states like Russia and Iran armed conflicts may serve very much various advantages since security politics and politics of fear usually tend to promote state influence and increase state capacity over social capital. This should be an alternative explanation for the Syrian crisis that has to be considered. However, this study tried to show that Iran needs at least partial changes in terms of foreign policy since one day Russia may decide that Assad is usable for no more. Thus shaping the foreign policy around Assad who is a Shiite friendly governor might become adverse by the coming since the situation in Syria is very dynamic and it has changed direction from 2011. What is suggested for Iranian politicians is to

select very carefully on which method that is going to be used in supporting Assad. Transfers through sea have proved to be the most secure way of transporting very dangerous and expensive military logistics. In this frame of thought Iran may need to prepare herself for a very fast change in the course of this crisis. If Iran cannot adopt herself to a fast shift in Levant this could tear apart Iran's influential ties and organizations which will lead those organizations to fall under western influence. Iran would benefit supporting Hezbollah in the field even more and reducing the actual number of personnel from IRGC which has potential to hurt the prestige of Iran resulting from military failures and unsuccessful military operations. On the other hand the war situation in Syria does not seem to promoting Iran's influence in Levant since it gives the decision making ability mostly to Russia as the strongest actor in the region. Iran should take immediate action in terms of de-escalating this situation and take back the empowerments that are transferred to the Russian forces. It may seem like Russia and Iran cannot have diverse interests in Syria but Russia may disregard the Shiite influence and this may hurt Iran's political capacity in the Middle East. Iran would benefit the most from a truce or a peace treaty that will secure Assad's position in Syria which is under constant threat and danger in the current situation. Iran should restrain herself from supporting Assad at all costs. Iran would have a say to the western world if Iran had regarded Assad guilty of chemical attacks. Because any politician in world politics will compensate defending a murderer who prefers to use chemical mass destruction weapons against unarmed citizens and children. The study was only an alternative way of presenting the crisis and it sought alternatives that are feasible and practicable with considering the historical backgrounds and perceptions of each state that is involved in this crisis from the perspective of Iran.

İran'ın Suriye Sivil Savaşına Müdahalesi: Arkaları, Sebepleri ve Alternatifleri

Özet: Ortadoğu tarihi boyunca savaş ve çatışmalar ile değişime uğrayan bir yapıya sahiptir. Köklü problemleri içinde barındıran bu bölge günümüz itibarıyla de savaş, çatışma ve değişim içinde olma halini sürdürmektedir. Bu makale başlangıç gününden itibaren çapı genişlemekte

olan Suriye sivil savaşını konu etmektedir. İran'ın Suriye politikası bu çalışma çerçevesinde incelenecek ve Suriye devletinin bekası ile Beşar Esad'ın kalıcılığı arasındaki bir ayrışma olup olmadığı ve böyle bir durum varsa bunun temelleri irdelenecektir. Tarihsel bağlam da bu tarz çatışmaların oluşumunda ve gelişiminde etkili olduğu için İran'ın devrim sonrası tarihi özet olarak verilecek ve bu tarihsel sürecin etkisi de incelenmeye çalışılacaktır. Bu çalışmada Suriye'nin İran için ne ifade ettiği, İran'ın Suriye'deki operasyonun altyapısız olmadığı savını sağlamlaştırarak için, incelenecektir. Makale geçmişte yaşanan olaylar ve günümüzdeki gelişmeler ile köprüler kurma çabasına girmeyecek ve daha çok günümüzdeki yapıya odaklanacaktır. Son olarak bu çalışma İran'ın Ortadoğu'nun Şii olmayan kesimiyle olan bağlantılarını ve bölgedeki prestijini kaybettirmeyecek alternatifler sunmaya çalışacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ortadoğu, İran, Suriye, Rusya, Suriye İç Savaşı.

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