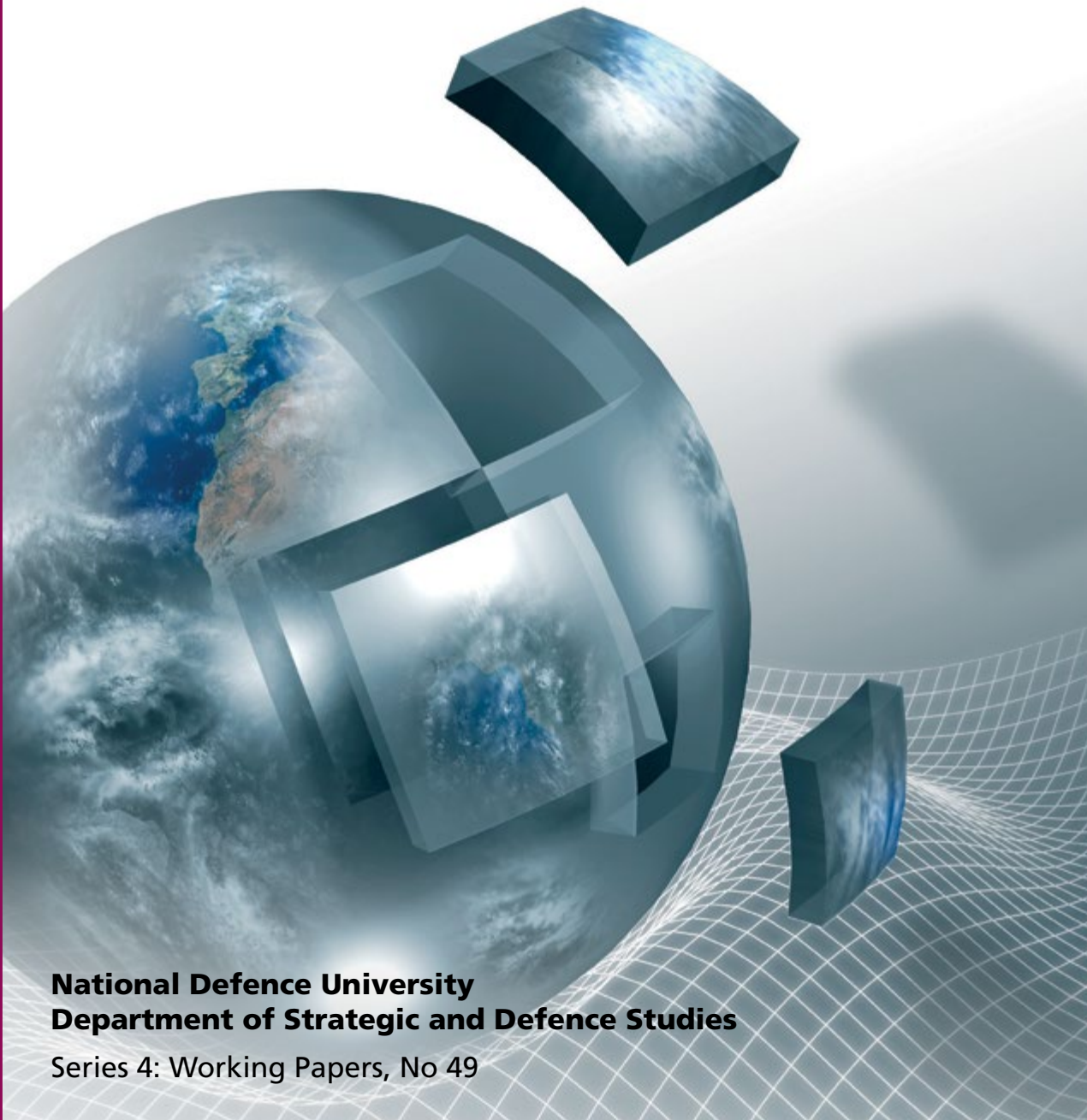




Alan Salehzadeh

Iran's Domestic and Foreign Policies



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IRAN'S DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICIES

Alan Salehzadeh*

Iran has a reputation of being a problematic country. Right now, it is proceeding with its nuclear program despite the opposition of the West and neighboring countries and the massive sanctions inflicted upon it. The country is also struggling with domestic issues. Half of Iran's population belongs to different ethnic or religious minorities. They have poor rights to express their culture in the country, which is a cause of dissatisfaction among non-Shiite and non-Persian citizens. After the Arab Spring, the situation in Iran is getting more topical than ever. In the Syrian conflict, the Shiite Iran is constantly giving support to al-Assad's regime. These are all factors that have aggravated the already irritated relations between Iran and the West.

Introduction

What is nowadays known as Iran was part of the Persian Empire until 1935, when the Empire collapsed and was divided into several different countries. For many years after the Persian Empire collapsed Iran was a secular country, where women dressed as they pleased and both genders mingled freely. Things changed when the West-minded Shah was overthrown and forced into exile in 1979.

The Shah was an autocrat, and ruled the country by himself. He maintained good relations with the West, especially with the United States. That is why he was accused of placing Western needs prior to those of his own people.

This wasn't the only reason why the Iranians were unhappy with him. Under the Shah's regime, the rights of different ethnicities and political groups were trampled on. Political Islam was forbidden. The local intelligence service and the army had major roles in running the society. Secular people, leftists, different ethnic minorities, liberals and religious people all suffered under the Shah and were unhappy under his restricting regime. Iran was torn with political and economic problems, and the people wanted desperately for things to change. So they re-

volted, and finally it led to the Shah being overthrown and forced into exile in 1979.

However, things did not change for the good – quite the opposite. When the regime changed, the political situation became more and more tense, as the new regime started to rule with terror, cutting down civil rights and adopting a hostile attitude towards most foreign nations.

Now Iran is widely thought to pose a threat to its surrounding countries, Israel, and the rest of the world. Iran is known to support terrorist organizations and causes great concern with its urge to build a nuclear weapon. The human rights conditions are in a very bad state according to many international sources, and the relations with most foreign nations are currently strained.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the current situation of Iran and to present possible scenarios that may happen. I will focus i.a. on the country's domestic policy, the relations Iran has with its neighboring countries and some other key nations, and the nuclear question.

But first we contemplate the principles on which the Islamic Republic of Iran lies.

1 The Islamic Republic of Iran

1.1 Principles and Practice

In this chapter, the system of government that was established in Iran in 1979, is briefly presented. What principles is it founded on, and how does it operate?

Below are listed the “seven essential elements” of democracy, as adopted by the UN General Assembly in their resolution dating from 2004¹:

- Separation and balance of power
- Independence of the judiciary
- A pluralistic system of political parties and organizations
- Respect for the rule of law
- Accountability and transparency
- Free, independent and pluralistic media
- Respect for human and political rights; e.g., freedoms of association and expression; the right to vote and to stand in elections

The Islamic Republic of Iran does not follow these criteria. The ruling principles, including legislation, constitution, system of government and practices of Iran strongly differ from the UN’s principles listed above.

The country cannot be thought of as a democratic republic, even though the Supreme Leader tries to convince the opposite – it is a *theocratic* republic. In a theocratic republic, power is thought to belong to God and His representatives. In Iran, the Supreme Leader is Ali Hosseini Khamenei,

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¹ Meyer Michael, “International Consensus: Essential elements of democracy”, 2007, [http://www.democracyreporting.org/files/essential_elements_of_democracy_2.pdf].

also referred to as Ayatollah Khamenei.² Religious organs and institutions have the highest power of decision. The Supreme Leader’s power is spread across the branches of government and he has final say in all matters.

Ayatollah Khamenei has direct control over the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGS). It has a parallel army, navy and air force which are explicitly loyal to the revolutionary regime and answers directly to Ayatollah Khamenei. IRGS’s commanders are key military figures. Khamenei has given them a lot of power over the country’s economy, allowing them to run everything from oil pipelines to construction projects and Tehran’s main airport.³

The Islamic Republic of Iran maintains religious laws and has religious courts to interpret all aspects of law. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran advances the cultural, social, political, and economic institutions of Iranian society based on Islamic principles and norms. All official decision must be in accordance with the Koran and Islamic laws.⁴

Iran’s theocratic system and domestic policy form in fact, an extremely complex system. However, to understand how the system of government works, it is sufficient to know that the Supreme Religious Leader Ali Khamenei is the only ruler, together with his closest inner circle called Beite Rahbari.⁵ Beite Rahbari consists of clerics and

² The office of the Supreme Leader Sayyed Ali Khamenei, 1 July 2013, [<http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/>]

³ Article 91 of the Constitution establishes all the power granted to the Spiritual Leader appointed by his peers for an unlimited duration.

⁴ Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Article 91, 17 February 2010, [http://www.imj.ir/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=583:1388-11-17-15-39-46&catid=84:1388-11-03-08-40-10&Itemid=222].

⁵ Beite Rahbari is formed by influential people, the inner circle of Khamenei, who are involved in decision-making 3 July 2010, [<http://www.peykeiran.com/Content.aspx?ID=19544>].

soldiers, who have especially been designated to protect the clerical members of Beite Rahbari. The exact number of clerics belonging to Beite Rahbari is a close-kept secret, and no one knows their actual number. There are at least dozens of them, all personally chosen by Ali Khamenei. Ali Khamenei and his Beite Rahbari group have all power upon Iran's domestic and foreign policies.

Nonetheless, there are dozens of different political parties in Iran. Their role is to give a pseudo-impression of democracy to the people and foreign observers. However, all political parties must act in accordance with the Islamic laws. Thus, there is no real difference between them, and they differ mainly in the degree of intensity they interpret the Islamic laws. For the people, elections are like having to choose what to eat from different-colored eggs. Whichever you choose, you are still going to have an omelet.

In Iran, Ali Khamenei and Beite Rahbari have divided power to different elite Islamic groups, such as The Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), The Islamic Republic of Iran Army (IRIA), the intelligence services and the Basij (a paramilitary volunteer militia). This is also an attempt to show that power is divided – in fact, all important decisions are made by Khamenei alone. Among these groups that are Khamenei's subordinates, a fierce battle on money and oil income is taking place, each wanting more power than the other group has.⁶ All of the subordinate groups want to preserve the current Islamic ruling system in the country – all together Ali Khamenei and the subordinate groups are like a ship; if one piece breaks, they will all go down and sink. Thus, it is in the interest of all the organs that have access to some kind of power, to

⁶ *Al-Monitor* "Iran's Basij Militia Builds' Resistance Economy", 19 March.2013, [<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/03/iran-basij-militia-combat-sanctions-resistance-economy.html>].

maintain the current political, undemocratic system. This make it even more hard for the people to try and change things.

1.2 Iranians Want Democracy

When Iranians initiated the revolution in 1979, their main wish was for a democratic regime to be installed in the country. However, at that time, religious groups within the country were better organized than anyone else. Some say that they took advantage of the power of religion to turn uneducated people to support their ideology. They maintained rhetoric where democracy and freedom were promised, and so they were able to widely gain the support of the people. The actual revolution itself had been started and carried through by leftist, liberal and secular groups, but now they found themselves excluded from any real power as religious groups took over. However, Islamist groups, led by Khomeini, promised to the nation the same things they were after: democracy and freedom for all. In the first election after Shah was overthrown, 98% voted for the Islamic republic, and so Khomeini stepped into power.⁷

After Khomeini took power, the promises given to the people were unfulfilled. He started almost immediately to rule with terror, executing those who opposed him. Islamists established the Islamic Republic of Iran, abolished non-Islamic political parties, captured and executed people who wanted democracy. They have been ruling the country in an autocrat way ever since.

Iranians have widely protested against their rulers.⁸ The government has answered by capturing and killing dissidents. It can be

⁷ *Press-TV*, "Iran marks Islamic Republic Day", 1 April.2013, [<http://www.presstv.com/detail/2013/04/01/295997/iran-marks-islamic-republic-day/>].

⁸ Daly Brendan, "Regime Change in Iran?", *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2012, pp. 81–86, [<http://www.meforum.org/meq/pdfs/3225.pdf>].

said that the vast majority of Iranians want things to change, but all the attempts they have made to try to implement a democratic government have been in vain so far.⁹

2 The Iranian Political Scene

In Iran the political scene can be divided into reformists and conservatives. However, all parties, no matter the side, must obey the Islamic rules. Thus, there are many similarities between the two sides.

First of all, both are under the subordination of the Supreme Leader Khamenei, they do not have any real power of their own, and they cannot act in discordance with principles set by Khamenei. Secondly, both groups want to act according to the Iranian legislation and to maintain and protect the principles of the Islamic Republic. Thirdly, both groups want to limit the degree of freedom of the people. Fourthly, neither of these two political groups promotes equality and rights of different oppressed groups like women, ethnic or religious minorities and different sexual minorities. Fifthly, neither accepts the existence of Israel, and both groups wish for Iran to continue develop nuclear weapons. Sixthly, whether it was under the government of the conservatives or the reformists, Iran supported different Islamic organizations worldwide, and neither of the groups have been able to challenge or change the domestic and foreign policies set by the Supreme Leader.

Ever since the founding of the Islamic Republic of Iran, there has been this dual division in the political system. These parties operate inside the Islamic regime; the conservatives are religious extremist and members of ultra-religious right-wing par-

ties, while the reformists are moderately religious members of right-wing parties.

The reformist and conservative parties of Iran have been subjects of a lot of political analysis. Most of the experts on Iran's political system agree that the Iranian political system is clearly divided into these two distinct political camps. However, there are other researchers that argue, quite accurately, that no matter which side the ruler claims to belong, Iran is in fact always governed by clerics, who follow the Shiite Islamic principles.

In the following chapter, this latter point-of-view is further explained.

2.1 Conservatives and Reformists

Reformists can win the election when the Supreme Leader allows it. This happens in situations where the national economy is plummeting or the foreign or domestic policy of the country is in a situation of crisis. For instance, when the most famous reformist Mohammad Khatami was elected president in 1997, Iran was facing grave difficulties economically, in its domestic affairs, and with its relations with other countries.

When Mohammad Khatami became president in 1997, the relation between the EU and Iran were in a really bad state. In fact, all relations were stopped. This was due to the fact that in 1997, Iranian authorities were guilty of murdering a Kurdish opposition leader in Germany. After this was found out, the EU countries cut all diplomatic relations with the country, and shortly after Khatami became president.¹⁰

⁹ Farwick Dieter, "Iran's Ex-President Banisadr: "People want Regime Change", 18 February 2010, [<http://www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/Iran/dieter-farwick-1/Irans-Ex-President-Banisadr-People-want-Regime-Change>].

¹⁰ In the findings of the Superior Court of Justice in Berlin in the so-called Mykonos case, the involvement of the Iranian authorities at the highest level was established. The European Union condemned this involvement of the Iranian authorities and regarded such behavior as totally unacceptable. [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/cfsp/032E.htm].

In Iran, not everyone can pose as a candidate for the presidential elections. It is the Guardian Council of the Constitution¹¹ that elects who is a suitable candidate, following strict criteria dictated by the Supreme Leader. The election of Khatami in this critical situation was carefully planned in advance.

Nonetheless, the golden ruling period of the reformists was under Mohammad Khatami's period between 1997 and 2005. Under his regime, Iran was able to enhance its economic situation and diplomatic relations, and suggested to open a "dialogue among civilizations and cultures" in the UN. In 2000, following Iran's initiative, the UN named the 5th of September to be the *Day of Dialogue Among Civilizations*.¹² All of this was actually a way to keep everyone happy and thus extend the existence of the Islamic Republic. All the reforms Khatami made were submitted to the control and restrictions of the Supreme Leader.¹³ In the end of his 8-year leading period, Khatami himself stated that his role was to be the right hand of the Supreme Leader, and that he had no possibilities to act beyond the will of Khamenei.¹⁴

¹¹ The Guardian Council of the Constitution: The 12-member Council of Guardians is one of the most powerful, unelected institutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The supreme leader appoints six clerical members. The head of the judiciary, on advice of parliament, appoints six lay members. All 12 members are appointed to six-year terms. The Guardian Council of the Constitution, 6 August 2013, [<http://www.shora-gc.ir/Portal/Home/>].

¹² Unesco, "Round Table: Dialogue among Civilizations United Nations, New York, 5 September 2000 Provisional verbatim transcription", 2000, [<http://www.unesco.org/dialogue/en/khatami.htm>].

¹³ Fisher Max, "How do Iran's supreme leader and president split power? Here's a chart explaining it", Washington post, 14 June 2013, [<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2013/06/14/how-do-irans-supreme-leader-and-president-split-power-heres-a-chart-explaining-it/>].

¹⁴ *The Florida Times Union*, "Khatami Says He is Powerless Hard-Liners Rule, Iran's President Says", [<http://www.questia.com/library/1G1->

In August 2013, another reformist president was sworn in – Hassan Rouhani.¹⁵ The reasons behind his election are largely similar to the ones behind Khatami's. Rouhani is now perceived as the savior of the Islamic Republic, who is going to re-establish good relations with neighboring countries and the West, reflate the economy and prevent large protests and the Arab spring to spread to Iran.

According to his own speeches, Rouhani is prepared to follow the laws of the Islamic Republic, and act as a subordinate of the Supreme Leader. He has also stated that Iran has the right to enrich uranium, but that the country is ready to solve the disagreement over nuclear weapons in a peaceful manner with the West.¹⁶ According to Rouhani, Iran's policy towards Syria will not change under his regime, and Iran has the duty and obligation to support Bashar al-Assad under all circumstances.¹⁷ This shows that even though Rouhani belongs to the reformist side, in all the critical aspects he is ready to agree with the previous, conservative government. This is why some researchers feel that Iran is always ruled by Shiites, loyal to Khamenei. The entire system is built in a way that it does not allow any real political dissidence.

67386539/khatami-says-he-s-powerless-hard-liners-rule-iran-s].

¹⁵ Kamali Dehghan Saeed, "Hassan Rouhani sworn in as president of Iran, urging moderation and respect", *The Guardian* 4 August 2013, [<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/04/hassan-rouhani-sworn-in-president-iran>].

¹⁶ *Fars-News*, "President Rouhani: No Compromise over Iran's N. Enrichment Right", 6 August 2013, [President Rouhani: No Compromise over Iran's N. Enrichment Right].

¹⁷ Dubowits Mark and Badran Tony, "Iran's 'Moderate' New President Still Supports Assad", *The Atlantic* 5 August 2013, [<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/08/irans-moderate-new-president-still-supports-assad/278361/>].

2.2 The Opposition

Since there are no real differences between conservatives and reformists, it is important to stop for a while to analyze the role of the opposition.

For opposition groups, it is impossible to work within Iran, since it is strictly forbidden by the system. The only opposition group that has operated inside the country is the Green Movement, which now has been repressed, too.

All the Iranian opposition groups work from abroad. Most of them have their headquarters in Europe or the United States. There are dozens of this kind of opposition groups that represent all sorts of political goals: leftist, communist, pro-monarchy, minority political parties... These maintain institutes and organizations that all share a goal; to change the regime. However, they lack a common front, since the different opposition groups do not collaborate with each other.

The most powerful opposition groups are the People's Mujahedin of Iran (or the Mojahedin-e-Khalq) and some minority political parties. The Mojahedin-e-Khalq headquarters are located in the Iraqi side of the Iran-Iraq border. These opposition groups fight the government actively and are engaged to armed confrontation with the central government forces. The rest of the opposition groups operate only through Internet and the media, but only few of them take action to change the regime.

Some of these opposition groups would like the help of the international community to overthrow the government, while others do not want outside interference out of fear that Iran becomes divided into several smaller nations in a process called Balkanization.

2.2.1 Iranians Have Massively Protested Against Their Government

It is not possible for the Iranians to change their regime democratically through elections. Since the founding of the Islamic Republic, they have tried everything possible to change the theocratic system into a democratic one – without ever succeeding in their attempts. Since the revolution of 1979, Iranians have tried in a peaceful manner to urge the rulers to fulfill their demands for a democratic system to be formed. The authorities have been answering to these demands by captivating and executing people.

After the government had many times violently suppressed the risings and demands of the people, different political groups tried to overthrow the government by using guns and arms in the late 1990's. Once again, the Iranian regime was able to suppress the democratic urges coming from the people and to disperse the armed groups. Iranians did not give up. Every time a new chance to demonstrate and protest against the regime appeared, the Iranians seized it.¹⁸

In June 2009, mass demonstrations erupted in Iran against the officially declared victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The demonstrators felt the election had been fraudulent. Thousands of protesters marched in Tehran chanting their slogan "Where Is My Vote?".¹⁹ These protests are now viewed as having started the Green Movement.

¹⁸ Ellian Afshin, "Iranians Want Regime Change", *The Wall Street Journal* 30 December 2009, [http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703510304574625713733452476.html].

¹⁹ F. Worth Robert & Fatahi Nazila, "Protests Flare in Tehran as Opposition Disputes Vote", *The New York Times* 13 June 2013, [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/14/world/middleeast/14iran.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0].

2.2.2 *The Green Movement*

Green Movement is the name of the Iranian protest movement, which started when Ahmedinejad was re-elected for presidency in 2009. Although the Green Movement is a real protest movement, a certain paradox remains.

Even though most of the participants of the Green Movement really want a democratic system instead of a theocratic one, the leaders of the movement are firmly a part of the ruling system: Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubui, both currently in house-arrest, were candidates and rivals of Ahmedinejad in the election of 2009.²⁰ Knowing that all the candidates are carefully selected by the Supreme Leader Khamenei, these two men couldn't be anything else than supporters of the system. Under Ahmadinejad's first government, both of these men had high-ranking positions in the parliament. They became the leaders of the Green Movement because they were unsatisfied with the election's result, having hoped to become presidents themselves.

The people, on the other hand, needed someone powerful to be their mouthpiece against the current conditions.²¹ So even though the people knew these two men were part of the system, they accepted them as the leaders of the movement for protection and because it made it possible for them to demonstrate against the re-election of Ahmadinejad.

In February 2010, protesters tried to organize an event in the support of the Arab uprising, but they were brutally suppressed, the Iranian authorities killing many.

²⁰ *BBC-News*, "Iran: Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi 'arrested'", 28 February 2011, [<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12599837>].

²¹ Ellian Afshin, "Iranians Want Regime Change", *The Wall Street Journal* 30 December 2009, [<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703510304574625713733452476.html>].

From that day, the Green Movement was abolished and it went underground. In Iran it would not have been possible to demonstrate unless part of a really large group of people called upon by someone powerful, because the government will not hesitate to open fire. Although the government did open fire during the Green Movement's protests, the people anyway considered it safer than protesting separately. Eventually, the Iranian authorities suppressed the protests violently and imprisoned the activists of the group in a brutal manner.

In 2013, the Green Movement was showing light support to Rouhani, who eventually won the presidential election. The movement's supporters are satisfied their candidate got through, and the election wasn't fraudulent. Many researchers feel that the reason no fraud took place is that it was also the current leaders' wish for Rouhani to be elected; it was a strategic decision from the Supreme Leader.

Some political experts view Hassan Rouhani to be to Iran what Mikhail Gorbats'ov²² was to the Soviet Union – someone who can renew the system politically and economically. However, there are also many that are opposed to this outlook. They – quite accurately – claim that Rouhani couldn't step in those shoes, since he does not have reformist ideas or urges, and because all real power ultimately lies in the hands of Khamenei.

A common view among experts on Iranian politics is that the Green Movement would have been able to change Iran's current political system if the international community would have supported it. The Green Movement asked for international help to stop the government using force against the protesters, but the international community did not want to interfere, and

²² Mikhail Gorbats'ov was the starter of the Perestroika. The Perestroika was a process in the Soviet Union that aimed to renew the political and economic system of the USSR.

that is the main reason why the government was able to suppress the movement.²³

3 Minorities in Iran

Iran is home to approximately 80 million people who are ethnically, religiously, and linguistically diverse. Almost half of the population belong to ethnic minority groups, such as Turks, Kurds, Balochs, Turkmen, Arabs, Armenians and so on. The majority of the population is ethnically Persian and religiously Shiite Muslim. The only official language in Iran is Persian, despite it being the native tongue of roughly only half of the population. Arabic and English are widely taught in schools, but the use of the minorities' native tongue in official contexts, such as schooling, university studies, or litigations, is forbidden.

The rights of all minorities are severely trampled on in Iran, which has caused problems inside the country and to some extent, in its foreign relations as well. For this reason, it is important to contemplate the situation with the minorities.

3.1 Ethnic Minorities

In Table 1, we see the ethnic minorities of the country as reported by the CIA.²⁴

| | |
|-------------|-----------|
| Persian 61% | Azeri 16% |
| Kurd 10% | Lur 6% |
| Baloch 2% | Arab 2% |
| Turkmen 2% | Other 1% |

Table 1: Iranian ethnic groups.

²³ Esfandiari Golnaz, "What Does Iran's Green Movement Want From Obama?", *Radio Free Europe* 6 December 2009, [http://www.rferl.org/content/What_Does_Irans_Green_Movement_Want_From_Obama_/1871445.html].

²⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, the World Factbook, 18 July 2013, [https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html].

Some sources claim the percentage of Persians to be lower than the 61% here presented. Usually it has been agreed that around 50% of the population is formed by ethnic minorities, and the rest are ethnic Persians.²⁵

In Iran, minorities do not have the right to speak their native tongue in an official context or to express their culture in public. The article 15 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran states that

The use of regional and tribal languages in the press and mass media, as well as for teaching of their literature in schools, is allowed in addition to Persian.

However, the same article of the Constitution also clearly defines that Persian is the only official language of Iran²⁶: "Official documents, correspondence, and texts, as well as text-books, must be in this language and script".

In practice, the teaching of minority languages must be conducted in secret. There are also some magazines that are published in minority languages, but they are subjected to severe supervision, as all media in Iran.

The authorities in Iran think that if civil rights are given to ethnic minorities, the country will become divided and lose its unity. However, it is usually in countries like this that the minorities are fighting more forcefully to gain some degree of independence. The harder Iran is restricting the mi-

²⁵ Bolhari Roozbeh and Najibullah Farangis, "Iran's Presidential Candidates Play The Ethnic-Minority Card", *Radio Free Europe* 13 September 2013, [http://www.rferl.org/content/Irans_Presidential_Candidates_Play_The_EthnicMinority_Card/1749461.html].

²⁶ The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 8 July 2013, [http://www.imj.ir/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=583:1388-11-17-15-39-46&catid=84:1388-11-03-08-40-10&Itemid=222] & [http://www.alaviandassociates.com/documents/constitution.pdf].

norities' rights, the more opposed the minorities become to the central government. At the moment, there are thousands of minority activists imprisoned for having demanded the right to teach their native tongue and to practice their culture freely. The international pressures on Iran to deal with its ethnic minority issues, becomes more and more severe as days pass. The political parties of the ethnic minorities, now in exile, are in a state of alert just waiting for the right moment to conquer their territories. If the Islamic Republic of Iran is not ready to accept the civil rights of the minorities, it is very likely that the country will break into smaller territories, in a process called Balkanization.

3.1.1 *The Different Ethnicities of Iran*

Iran's minorities have dozens of political parties to represent themselves. They are all living and working abroad in exile, since in Iran, it is forbidden for minorities to start political parties or other form of activism.

The political goals of these parties differ widely. Some want to gain independence for the territory they occupy in Iran, while others want to form a self-government inside the country. The different parties work together, but they have no common front. In the following, the exigencies of the different ethnic minorities of Iran are presented.

3.1.2 *Iranian Turks*

Azeris or Turks are the largest ethnic minority of Iran. Religiously they are Shiite Muslims. The Turks of Iran (Azeris) formed an independent country, *Azerbaijan*, in 1946 (back then, the country that is now known as Azerbaijan was a part of the Soviet Union). The Azerbaijan formed by the Iranian Azeris existed for about one year, before the Iranian army conquered back the territory and destroyed their republic. After this

episode, the Azeris have been peacefully cohabiting with the Persians.

Ever since the revolution of 1979, the Azeris have maintained close collaboration with the Islamic regime. Even though Turkish and Persian are 100% different languages, the fact that both groups are Shiite Muslims have brought them close to each other. Many of the influential people of modern Iran are in fact Azeris, not Persians, like the Supreme Leader Khamenei himself. During the last decade, however, the Azeris have been increasingly demanding the rights to use their language and manifest their culture publicly. They have protested several times against the government. As a result, dozens of Azeri activists have been imprisoned.

Outside Iran, the Azeris have dozens of political parties. They have different goals and aspirations. Some want to form an independent Azerbaijan county, while others want to have a self-governed region within the country. Others want Iran to become a democratic state, where they would have all the rights same as the majority of the population. Neighboring countries Turkey and Azerbaijan have actively supported some of the exiled Azeri parties, with the hope to promote Pan-Turkish ideology.²⁷ This has worsened the relations between Iran and these two neighbors. In the part "7.5 Iran and Azerbaijan", the relations of these countries are further explained.

3.1.3 *Kurds*

All in all, Kurds form a population of 40 million, with their own distinct culture and language. The Kurds live on a stretch of land divided between Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. In the aftermath of the First World

²⁷ *Today's Zaman*, "Iranian Azeris set up national council in Turkey, aspire for independence", 14 May 2012, [<http://www.todayszaman.com/news-280353-iranian-azeris-set-up-national-council-in-turkey-aspire-for-independence.html>].

War, the winner countries draw borders in the Middle-East. Some places with less than 30.000 inhabitants became independent states (such as Kuwait), but the Kurdish area was divided between the four states mentioned above. It is commonly thought that the reason for the unfounded divisions were economic and political interests of the Western countries, who wanted to be able to practice “divide and rule” politics in the Middle-East area.²⁸

Nowadays the Kurds are fighting for their rights in Turkey and Iran. In Iraq, they’ve obtained autonomy which has existed since 1991. Resulting from the civil war in Syria, at the moment the Kurds are governing their own territories and have a *de facto* autonomy.²⁹ In other parts of the Kurdistan area, the situation has not evolved and the conditions are similar to those in the days following the First World War. The situation in Iran regarding the Kurdish minority is also very tense.

Iranian Kurds

There are about 10 million Kurds in Iran. They live mostly near the Iraqi and Turkish borders, in an area that is referred to by the Kurds as “Eastern Kurdistan”. The Iranian Kurds have actively tried to obtain equal civil rights compared to Persians during the last 100 years. Since they have not succeeded in obtaining civil rights in a peaceful manner, the Kurds have been engaging in an armed battle against the Iranian government for over 50 years.

²⁸ For more information see the following report: “The treaty of peace between the Allied and Associated Powers and Turkey signed at SÈVRES 10 August 1920, [<http://www.fransamaltngvon-geusau.com/documents/dl1/h1/1.1.18.pdf>].

²⁹ Burch Jonathon, ” Syrian Kurds take fragile steps towards autonomy”, *Reuters* 2 August 2013, [<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/08/02/us-syria-crisis-kurds-idUSBRE9710B320130802>].

Crisis of 1946, also Known as the Iran-Azerbaijan Crisis

During the World War II, in 1946, the Soviet Union and Great-Britain had occupied Iran in order to guarantee the control and management of Iranian oil. With the help of the Soviet Union, the Kurds and Azeris of Iran were able to form the self-governed regions of Kurdistan and Azerbaijan in Iran. These regions existed for less than a year, until the Soviet Union made a deal on oil trade with the Iranian government. As a consequence, it stopped supporting the Kurds and Turks of Iran. After that, the Iranian army abolished the Kurdish and Turkish governments and executed their leaders, putting an end to the era of self-govern.³⁰

Since then, Kurdish formed armed guerilla groups and started fighting against the central government, represented by the Shah at that time. Now, they mostly wish to establish a self-governed region of Kurdistan, similar to that of modern Iraq. The Kurds are collaborating with other ethnic minorities who have the same wish.

Kurds under the Islamic Republic of Iran

In the early 1980’s, Kurdish representatives started negotiations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, in order to obtain basic civil rights. The negotiations did not last long, since the government flatly refused any form of self-government to be formed in the Kurdish region. Since then, a war has been going on between Kurdish guerilla fighters and the Islamic government, causing thousands of casualties in both parties.

At the present moment, the base for the Kurdish guerilla fighters is located in the Kurdistan federation of Northern Iraq. Out of all the Kurdish political parties, PJAK

³⁰ McDowall David, “A modern history of the Kurds”, p. 231, I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd 2007 London.

(The Party of Free Life of Kurdistan) is the only one to have had armed confrontations with the Iranian government during the past couple of years.³¹

3.1.4 Iranian Arabs

Approximately 2% of the Iranian population are Arabs, most of them Shiite Muslims. Same as the other minorities, it is forbidden for the Arabs to be educated in their native tongue. However, since the Koran is written originally in Arab, the language is widely taught in all Iranian schools.

Most Iranian Arabs live in the coastal regions of southern Iran by the Persian Gulf, which is rich in natural resources. This is one of the reasons why Iran is strictly trying to “Persianize” the Arab minority, in order to have secure access to the riches. The Arabs in Iran are fighting for their rights as the other minorities are, against the Iranian government. Parties such as al-Ahwaz Arab People's Democratic Front are striving to get the Arab region independent from the rest of the country.³²

3.1.5 Iranian Baloch

The Baloch are a people whose territory is now divided between Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan. They form about 2% of the Iranian population. In Iran, most of the Baloch population lives in southern parts of the country, near the Pakistan border, in a region called Balochistan.

The Baloch are mostly Sunni Muslims, which causes a lot of trouble for them in a country ruled by Shiites. For the Balochs, religion is reported to have more importance than their ethnicity. Nonetheless, Ba-

lochs remain one of the most discriminated minorities of Iran. Their region is said to be the poorest and underdeveloped of the whole country, with a higher infant mortality rate and lower life expectation than anywhere else in Iran.

The Balochs are fighting for their rights against the Iranian government. Most of the death penalties attributed between 2004 and 2009 have been to Balochs. Political parties such as People's Resistance Movement of Iran (PRMI) are fighting to establish a self-governed region to the Balochistan.³³ There have been suicide bombings and violent confrontations between Balochs and Persians.

Most of the Iranian minorities have similar hopes; they are against a strong, central government, and demand power to be shared to include also real representation of ethnic minorities. Iran cannot become a democratic country as long as the minorities wishes are not taken into account. With the situation going on like this, Iran is constantly on the verge of a civil war. The situation of religious minorities is far from being any better, as we shall see in the following.

3.2 The Religious Minorities in Iran

Contrary to what is commonly thought, Islam is not the only tolerated religion in Iran, although Muslims do form 98% of the Iranian population. Out of these, some 89% are Shiite, the rest being Sunni. Christian, Zoroastrian³⁴, and Jewish communities constitute 2% of the population.

When studying these figures one must keep in mind that every Iranian must belong to one of the groups mentioned above according to the Iranian law. It is impossible to declare to be atheist, Hindu or Buddhist,

³¹ Ken Timmerman, “Iranian Troops Attack Kurdish Camps in Iraq”, 19 July 2011, [http://www.newsmax.com/kentimmerman/nourial-maliki-iran-iraq-kurds/2011/07/19/id/404082].

³² Ahwazi People's Democratic Front, 1 August 2013, [http://www.adpf.org/AR/].

³³ Zurutuza Karlos, “Inside Iran's Most Secretive Region”, *The Diplomat*, 16 May 2011, [http://thediplomat.com/2011/05/16/insideiran%E2%80%99s-most-secretive-region/].

³⁴ Yarsan, [http://www.ahle-haqq.com/intro.html].

for instance. Thus, inside these religious groups are many non-believers, and the number of real believers would be much lower. Also members of some other religious minorities might be forced to declare themselves as something else, distorting the figures even more. For instance Baha'is, presented in the CIA's table below, is now a forbidden religion and they do not have the right to declare to be practicing it.

| | |
|---|--|
| Muslim (official) 98% (Shia 89%, Sunni 9%) | Other (includes Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, Yarsan and Baha'i) 2% |
|---|--|

Table 2: Iranian religious groups according to the CIA.³⁵

Iran is known for its strict attitude towards the practicing of religion. Especially the situation of those who do not belong to any of the officially accepted religious groups (Shiite, Sunni, Jewish, Christian and Zoroastrian) is one of concern.

The International Human Rights Federation FIDH (*la Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme*) has expressed their concern over the poor situation of religious minorities in Iran in their report dating from 2003. Although ten years have passed since the publication of "Discrimination against religious minorities in Iran", little has changed since in the country in the field of religious freedom, with the constitution remaining unaltered during this decade. FIDH's report states the situation of religious minorities in Iran to be "alarming". According to the document, they "are victims of discrimination on a daily basis both in law and in practice".³⁶

The situation of those belonging to the religious minorities of the country is difficult. They face severe, direct discrimination. For instance, an Iranian being anything other than Shiite Muslim has no right to run for presidency, and their access to any other key-position is restricted. Only Shiite Muslims have the right to propagate their religious ideology. It is forbidden to convert from Islam to other religions, but according to the law religious minorities are allowed to convert to Islam. If a Shiite Muslim would convert, he would be named a *Mortad* (Apostasy in Islam), would face execution and after that, his possessions would be divided among the Islamic community.

The legislation is different depending on whether a crime has been committed by a Muslim or a representative of another religion. They can also vary in accordance of the religion of the victim. Non-Muslims are treated as second-class citizens, and there are many laws proving this. For example, if a Muslim man commits adultery with a Muslim woman, he is punished by 100 lashes. However, if the man is non-Muslim, he faces death penalty according to the Article 88 of the Civil Code. This clearly indicates that the life of a Muslim is perceived more valuable than that of a non-Muslim. And there are plenty more examples. In cases of homicides, there is "blood money" that should be paid to the victim's family. The sum is twice as high if the victim has been a Muslim man, compared to a member of the recognized religious minorities, or of a female victim. The Civil Code forbids the marriage between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man, but a Muslim man is allowed to take a non-Muslim wife.³⁷ These

³⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, the World Factbook, 18 July 2013, [https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html].

³⁶ Discrimination against religious minorities in IRAN, FIDH (*la Fédération Internationale des*

Ligues des Droits de l'Homme), August 2003, [http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/ir0108a.pdf].

³⁷ Discrimination against religious minorities in IRAN, FIDH (*la Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme*), August 2003, [http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/ir0108a.pdf].

are just a couple of examples from a vast array of discriminative laws.

The Iranian government is controlling the media and Internet. Through them, it targets regularly the religious minorities with negative campaigning. The Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) supervises closely the religious minority groups and their relations with foreign countries. They are especially interested in knowing if anyone is collaborating with Israel or the West. According to FIDH, the Iranian authorities have closed down dozens of churches and other holy places of the religious minorities of the country. They also have imprisoned thousands of non-Muslims. FIDH urges the international community to put pressure on the Iranian authorities in order to ameliorate the situation of the religious minorities and to free their imprisoned members.³⁸

The theocratic system in Iran leans on the rules of Islam, according to which members of other religious groups are infidels and Islam is the only religion everyone should be following or convert into. As long as Iran is governed in a theocratic way, it is impossible to change the policy they are conducting against religious minorities. The rulers now are convinced that theocracy is better than democracy. They are justifying this by claiming that Islam guarantees a good life also after this one, if followed to the letter. For over 30 years now, different international organs have been questioning the policy led by Iran on ethnic and religious minorities.

Doctor Ahmed Shaheed, the UN reporter specialized in human rights issues, revealed a document in February 2013 reporting the human rights violations that are taking place in Iran. The report states that situation regarding human rights is alarm-

ingly poor, the civil rights of ethnic and religious minorities are continuously trampled on, and prisons are filled with political dissidents. Doctor Shaheed calls for the international attention to be brought on these matters and a response towards these violations.³⁹

It is hard to believe that the situation of the minorities could ameliorate as long as the system is theocratic, because structural change remains impossible. All current rules draw from the Koran; and it is strictly forbidden to contest what is written in the holy book or “update” the content, even on an ideological level. The theocratic rulers are strictly against any discussion on democratizing the country and any attempt to guarantee safe and peaceful existence for the minority groups. Calls for democracy simply cannot be met in a theocracy.

4 Women in Iran

94 percent of Iranian women attend school, and women comprise over 60% of all university graduates. Yet, the women of the country are systematically discriminated against, and are unequal to men in regards of the legislation. In the Article 21 of the Iranian Constitution, it is stated that “the government must ensure the rights of women in all respects, in conformity with Islamic criteria”.⁴⁰ It is that *Islamic criteria*, however, that allows to discriminate against women.

First of all, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic does not treat women as in-

³⁸ FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights) Resolution on human rights violations, 2 August 2013, <http://www.fidh.org/iran-resolutions-on-human-rights-violations-13754>

³⁹ “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran”, 28 February 2013, [http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session22/A-HRC-22-56_en.pdf].

⁴⁰ The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 8 July 2013, [http://www.imj.ir/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=583:1388-11-17-15-39-46&catid=84:1388-11-03-08-40-10&Itemid=222] & [<http://www.alaviandassociates.com/documents/constitution.pdf>].

dependent human beings, but as dependent of their husbands. The man is the leader and can make decisions about the woman's life. When an Iranian woman is born, her faith has already been decided since according to the Koran and thus the Islamic Republics laws, she is inferior to the man.

According to Islam, the primary role of the woman is to take care of the household and children and serve her husband. Children should be brought up according to the Koran's principles. Koran is an advocate for the men, since it is written that women should be proper wives and mothers and submit themselves to their husband's will. It is also written that if the woman is unable to fulfill her husband's needs and desires, the husband is allowed to take a new wife, and can be married to up to four women at the time. Women are of course allowed only one husband, no matter the circumstances. To divorce is a decision the man can take alone, regardless of the woman's opinion. It is also possible for the woman to file for divorce, but the process is much more complex and they are more unlikely to be granted it. Regarding inheritance, women in Iran are entitled to half of what the men will get.

There are many more gender-discriminating restrictions in Iran. Most of the restrictions draw from the Koran, and the ideology according to which man is superior, listed as follows⁴¹:

- Married women require their husband's permission to apply for a passport. An unmarried woman below 40 years old can only have a passport with the written consent of her parents.

- Women must wear the Islamic Hejab⁴² when outside, otherwise she will be strictly punished.
- Women cannot run for presidency nor act as priests.
- Women cannot be the head of the justice department. Their access to most of the key-positions in the country is restricted.
- The age of criminal responsibility for women is 9 years, compared to 15 for men.
- The husband is allowed to ban his wife from working in any technical profession if he is able to prove that his wife's job affects their family life or his wife's character.
- In 2013, a new regulation was passed, banning women the possibility to study certain subjects. The justification was that these subjects "are not compatible with the general character of women". These banned subjects include courses on petroleum engineering, data management, communications, emergency medical technology, mechanical engineering, law, political sciences, policing, social sciences, and religious studies.
- Women cannot transfer nationality and citizenship to their husbands or children, which has rendered stateless thousands of children of Iranian women who have married Afghan or Iraqi refugees, as well as expatriate Iranian women married to non-Iranians.

Besides these legislative restrictions, women are discriminated in softer ways in the employment market. For instance, women are overrepresented in lower skilled jobs and vastly underrepresented in higher skilled jobs. Besides, women cannot hold public office above the municipal level and tradi-

⁴¹ United Nations Human Rights Council, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran", 28 February 2013, [http://www.iranrights.org/english/attachments/doc_4249.pdf].

⁴² *BBC News*, "Hijab", 3 September.2009, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/beliefs/hijab_1.shtml].

tionally earn less than their male counterparts in similar jobs. In fact, it has been reported that only 32% of Iranian women are actively engaged in the labor market, compared to 73% of men.⁴³

Until recently, Iranian universities have been a place where women and men have been studying together, after having followed schooling in segregated groups. However, in 2013, the decision was made to segregate women from men also in the universities.⁴⁴

The status of women in Islamic countries, especially Iran, cannot be changed unless the Islamic laws are abolished. Most of the Iranian women are extremely unhappy with the current situation and are demanding their rights at all possible turns.⁴⁵ Many liberal people are condemned in Iran, and prisons are full of both men and women who have been trying to change the women's status.⁴⁶

5 Iran's Nuclear Power

Iran's nuclear power program begun under the Shah Reza Pahlavi's regime in the 1960's, and rapidly developed during the following decade. Since the Shah was an ally of the West, the nuclear program did not

cause international disapproval or indignation back then.⁴⁷

Things changed when the anti-West Islamic government took over. For decades now, the enriching of uranium in Iran has been drawing the attention and concern of the international community.⁴⁸ Since 2003, the enriching has driven Iran into an ongoing conflict with the international community, because there are severe suspicions that Iran is enriching uranium for the purpose of building a nuclear weapon. What is causing these suspicions is the fact that Iran wants to enrich uranium itself, even though enriched uranium can be purchased abroad for a low price. Iran is claiming that it is producing only uranium that is enriched to a low-level, suitable for reactors and medical research. However, the exact same techniques can be used to enrich uranium to a high-level, needed in the manufacturing of atomic weapons.

5.1 The Cat-and-Mouse Game Against International Authorities

The Iranian authorities claim that enriching uranium up to 20% is an international right.⁴⁹ They state that they have no intention of breaking international laws by enriching uranium for the procurement of nuclear weapons.⁵⁰

However, according to the Institute for Science and International Security, Iran is

⁴³ United Nations Human Rights Council, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran", 28 February 2013, [http://www.iranrights.org/english/attachments/doc_4249.pdf].

⁴⁴ FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights) Resolution on human rights violations, 2 August 2013, [<http://www.fidh.org/iran-resolutions-on-human-rights-violations-13754>].

⁴⁵ *The Voice of America*, "Iranian Women Wait for Freedom, 30 Years After Islamic Revolution", VOA 2 November 2009, [<http://www.voanews.com/content/a-13-2009-01-29-voa52-68711712/409584.html>].

⁴⁶ Esfandiari Golnaz, "Women's Rights Activists Tell Rohani What They Want", Radio Free Europe 14 September 2013, [<http://www.rferl.org/content/iran-rohani-women-demands/25045159.html>].

⁴⁷ The nuclear program of Iran, June 2013, [<http://www.nti.org/country-profiles/iran/nuclear/>].

⁴⁸ Iran watch, "A History of Iran's Nuclear Program", 1 March 2012, [<http://www.iranwatch.org/our-publications/weapon-program-background-report/history-irans-nuclear-program>].

⁴⁹ George Marcus and Hosseinian Zahra, "Iran will destroy Israeli cities if attacked: Khamenei", *Reuters* 21 March 2013, [<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/03/21/us-iran-khameneiidUSBRE92K0LA20130321>].

⁵⁰ *Presses-TV*, "Ahmadinejad: 20% enrichment, Iran's right under intl. law", [<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/05/30/243877/iran-20-enrichment-legal-right/>].

expected to achieve a “critical capability” to produce sufficient weapon-grade uranium by mid-2014, without being detected. Iran has firm plans to install thousands of new centrifuges in its centrifuge sites, which is thought to be because it needs more enriched uranium for building a nuclear weapon. The same report also urges for more sanctions, negotiations and “increased frequency of international inspections”, in order to stop Iran from building nuclear weapon.⁵¹

The P5+1 group (USA, France, UK, Russia, China and Germany) have gathered many times in order to find a suitable solution to the Iranian nuclear problem. In September 2013, the negotiations have not led to any results. Most of the Western negotiators and experts on nuclear programs have stopped believing that the issue could be solved through negotiations. Iran is playing a cat-and-mouse game with the P5+1 countries and the monitors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Iran allows for the monitors to visit some of its nuclear power plants, but denies access to some others. In addition, Iran is believed to have dozens of secret nuclear power plants, which are under the direct control of Iran’s Supreme Leader.

5.2 Is Iran Really Building Nuclear Weapons?

Iran is in fact pursuing its capability to manufacture nuclear weapons, because the local authorities feel it is their “religious duty”. They also see it as a way to have forever control over Iran and become an uncontested Great Power in the Middle East.

⁵¹ Albright David & Walrond Christina, “Priority is limiting the number and type of centrifuges at Natanz, Fordow, and any other centrifuge site Iran may now be constructing”, Institute for Science and International Security 30 May 2013, [http://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/critical_capability_op-ed_30July2013.pdf].

In the following, these ideas are further developed.⁵²

In its pursuit for a nuclear weapon, Iran is leaning to the Koran’s verses, which urge to prepare oneself against enemies, and to better equip oneself compared to them. Iran is interpreting this as a request to obtain a nuclear weapon, since its enemies the U.S. and Israel also have one. Iran’s Supreme Leader repeats often the following verse of the Koran, especially when he tries to speed up the process of building the weapon⁵³:

Against them, make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies, of Allah and your enemies.

Thus, according to Khamenei, the Islamic Republic of Iran needs to acquire the newest weapons, in order to be able to defend itself. Khamenei claims that even the late founder of the Islamic Republic, Khomeini, had decided to reactivate the nuclear program.⁵⁴

Israel, India and Pakistan are all close to Iran and have nuclear weapons. Khomeini does not see why Iran shouldn’t have one as well. The idea is that if Iran has its own nuclear weapons, no one would be able to attack the country. Of course all other Middle-Eastern states are against the idea of Iran having its own nuclear weapons.

⁵² W. Sherrill Clifton, *Nonproliferation Review*, Vol. 19, No. 1, March 2012, [http://cns.miis.edu/npr/pdfs/npr_19-1_sherrill_iran_bomb.pdf].

⁵³ Quran, chapter: al-Anfal, evidence:60, [http://library.islamweb.net/newlibrary/display_book.php?flag=1&bk_no=132&ID=2700].

⁵⁴ International for Science and International Security, 20 April 2012, [http://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/Khamenei_1984_statement_20April2012.pdf].

Israel is especially against Iran having a nuclear weapon.⁵⁵ Since Iran does not approve of the existence of Israel, the nuclear weapons might pose a real threat to Israel. In 1981, Israel attacked Iraq and destroyed their nuclear facilities. Experts believe that if Iran acquires nuclear weapons, Israel would repeat the scenario of 1981 and would attack to destroy the nuclear equipment.⁵⁶ Iran is not deaf for these threats; it has stated that if Israel attacks its nuclear facilities, it is going to attack back until Israel is completely destroyed.⁵⁷

The general opinion is that Iran is not going to stop enriching uranium, and wants to build nuclear weapons no matter the cost. The opposing side formed by the international community, especially the U.S., U.K., France, Israel and Arab states and all their allies, are strongly against Iran's ambitions. If Iran was to build an atomic bomb, it could jeopardize the whole world, and especially the Middle East. Dealing with a theocratic state with nuclear weapons is not something the international community wants.

There are two ways to solve the problem caused by Iran's nuclear program: A) The rest of the world must accept Iran as a nuclear power, B) The international community puts an end to Iran's nuclear program with political and ultimately military means. All the signs are pointing towards the fact that scenario A just is not an op-

tion. In this case, it is likely that scenario B shall come true.

5.3 Sanctions against Iran

After the negotiations with Iran on their nuclear program failed to bring results, the West has imposed massive sanctions upon Iran. These sanctions affect all areas of life, regarding the normal people as well as the state. The purpose of the sanctions is to pressurize Iran to give up enriching uranium and to stop the country from developing nuclear weapons. The sanctions target especially the import and export of oil and gas, which are areas that the economy of Iran relies heavily on.

Since Iran's biggest income comes from selling oil and gas, the sanctions have a huge impact on the state economy. As a result, Iran's economy is facing its biggest crisis in a long time. The Iranians have to deal with an extraordinary high percentage of unemployment, while the prices of everyday goods are rocketing.

The U.S. authorities claim that the sanctions are not targeted towards the people, only towards the rulers. The economy of Iran is completely in the hands of the political elite and their close inner circle. While the sanctions are aimed at them, they also have a major impact on the everyday life of the local people.

One of the reasons President Rouhani was elected, was that he should find through negotiations a common path with the West and thus the international community would lighten or cease the sanctions. However, a common path is likely to be found only when Iran stops enriching uranium. Iran is not likely to do that. It remains to be seen whether Rouhani, an experienced diplomat and negotiator, is able to persuade the West to abolish the sanctions. That is likely to be the only way to save Iran's economy. In addition, Israel has

⁵⁵ Shmulovich Michal, "Most Mideast countries do not want a nuclear Iran, poll finds", *Times of Israel*, 6 March 2013, [<http://www.timesofisrael.com/most-mideast-countries-dont-want-a-nuclear-iran/>].

⁵⁶ H. Kahl Colin, "Before attacking Iran, Israel should learn from its 1981 strike on Iraq", *Washington Post* 2 March 2012, [http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-03-02/opinions/35450430_1_nuclear-weapons-israeli-strike-tuwaitha].

⁵⁷ Press-TV, "Iran will raze Tel Aviv to ground if Israel attacks: Ayatollah Khamenei", 21 March 2013, [<http://www.presstv.com/detail/2013/03/21/294655/iran-will-raze-israel-to-ground-in-war/>].

vowed to attack Iran if the country does not put an end to its nuclear program.

6 Iran and Terrorism

The U.S. and many other countries accuse Iran of supporting terrorists and fundamental Islamic groups. Iran is also accused of killing members of its own opposition. For instance, Condoleezza Rice stated in March 2006 that Iran has been actively supporting terrorist groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon. For this reason, in October 2007, the U.S. added Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to its list of foreign terrorist organizations and has kept on demanding for the international sanctions to be respected and tightened.

According to the Council on Foreign Relations, the link between Iran and terrorism dates back to 1984. Among Iran's alleged terrorist activities have been the following⁵⁸:

- Observers say Iran had prior knowledge of Hezbollah attacks, such as the 1988 kidnapping and murder of Colonel William Higgins, a U.S. Marine involved in a UN observer mission in Lebanon, and the 1992 and 1994 bombings of Jewish cultural institutions in Argentina.
- Iran still has a price on the head of the Indian-born British novelist Salman Rushdie for what Iranian leaders call blasphemous writings about Islam in his 1989 novel *The Satanic Verses*.
- U.S. officials say Iran supported the group behind the 1996 truck bombing of Khobar Towers, a U.S. military residence in Saudi Arabia, which killed nineteen U.S. servicemen.
- Military officials say numerous attacks since 2001 on U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan, and coalition forces in

Iraq, have been attributed to Iranian-made weapons.

- A set of classified documents leaked by the website WikiLeaks.org in July 2010 reports extensive collaboration between Iran and the Taliban, Afghan warlords, and al-Qaeda, but all the claims have not been corroborated (Guardian).
- Iran has also been blamed for attacks in Balochistan in Pakistan.
- In April 2011, the United States and the European Union accused the Quds Force of providing equipment and support to help the Syrian regime suppress revolts in Syria.
- In October 2011, Washington accused the Quds Force of plotting to assassinate the Saudi ambassador (NYT) to the United States, and plotting to bomb the Israeli Embassy in Washington and the Saudi and Israeli Embassies in Argentina.

Iran denies strictly all of these accusations. It claims to be itself a victim of international terrorism, and to be an actor in the war against terrorism.

In November 2011, two Iranian men were caught in the United-States for their intent to murder the Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, causing a stir in the press. This event led to the US wanting tighter sanctions against Iran, asking all of their allies to join them in their request. Two days after the men were caught, Ahmadinejad, who was president of Iran at that time, denied in a TV show that the men had any intentions of killing the ambassador, claiming that only uncivilized nations practice acts of terrorism, claiming that Iran has never committed any terrorist acts. According to President Ahmadinejad, the U.S. only tries to frighten Iran and prepare for war. He also stated

⁵⁸ Bruno Greg, "State Sponsors: Iran", Council on Foreign Relations 13 October 2011, [<http://www.cfr.org/iran/state-sponsors-iran/p9362#p2>].

that Iran is strong and will "cut the arms" of those who try to attack the country.⁵⁹

According to the TV show in question, it seems that the president Ahmadinejad has conveniently "forgotten" that Iran has supported terrorism many times in the past. The best-known example of this took place in Europe. It was the murdering of an Iranian Kurdish party leader in Berlin in 1992. The European authorities revealed that Iranian diplomats were behind the murder, which led to the EU cutting all diplomatic ties with Iran. Another act of terrorism committed by Iran happened in August 1981, when Iranian agents murdered a former Iranian prime minister, Shapour Bakhtiar, in his own heavily guarded house outside of Paris.⁶⁰ This led to the worsening of the Iran-France relations. One must bear in mind that for many solved cases that prove the link between an act of terrorism and Iranian authorities, there are many cases that remain unclear or unsolved that are likely to have been executed by Iran.

7 Iranian Foreign Policy

When the Islamic Revolution took place in 1979, the spirit of the Cold War was still strongly present in the area. Most of the countries belonged either to the East's or the West's ideological camps. In 1979, the Iranian rulers were led by Khomeini's Islamic principles, and tried to create a foreign policy for Iran that was "Neither East nor West; [but] Islamic Republic". This never materialized, because Iran has good

relations with the East camp, especially Russia (or U.S.S.R. at the time of the revolution) and China. These two countries remain the major allies of Iran to this day, even if the country has also a political agenda of its own.

It is been reported that Khamenei's viewpoints on the Iranian foreign policy include⁶¹:

- Principle of exporting the revolution
- Principle of "no domination"
- Defending the integrity of Islam and Muslims
- Principle of mutual respect and non-interference in other countries' affairs
- Principle of negating oppression and supporting the oppressed
- No East, No West principle
- Helping liberation movements
- Unity of the Islamic ummah
- Relations based on Islamic and human principles

In reality, many of these viewpoints have not been pursued at all and have been claimed by Khomeini for cosmetic purposes. Out of these viewpoints, the Islamic Republic has been focusing on spreading its own ideology and suppressing dissidents, i.a. by focusing on the following acts:

- Supporting Islamist groups⁶², especially Shiites, in their efforts to spread the Islamic revolution and implementation of the Sharia law around the world.⁶³

⁵⁹ "The Iranian president talks to *Al Jazeera's* Tony Harris about the latest diplomatic spat with the US and Saudi Arabia, the Arab spring, and Iranian politics." *Al-Jazeera* 6 June 2012, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gQoLJR6Sbj8].

⁶⁰ Dickey Christopher, "Analysis: Iran's spies are losing the shadow war with US and Israel", *The Telegraph* 7 August 2012, [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/the-dailybeast/9460370/Analysis-Irans-spies-are-losing-the-shadow-war-with-US-and-Israel.html].

⁶¹ Mir-Khalili Seyed Javad, "Imam Khomeini's Viewpoints on Iranian Foreign Policy", *Iranreview* 28 May 2008, [http://www.iranreview.org/content/Documents/Imam_Khomeini%E2%80%99s_Viewpoints_on_Iranian_Foreign_Policy.htm].

⁶² The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, article 152–155, [http://www.alaviandassociates.com/documents/constitution.pdf].

⁶³ Islamic Revolution in Leader's message to Bashar al-Asad, Shafaf March 2013, [http://shafaf.ir/fa/news/184361/%D9%BE%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B7%D8%B9-

- Gaining more influence and power in the Islamic world by spreading anti-Israel ideology.⁶⁴
- Stopping the principles of democracy from spreading in the Middle-East and North-Africa by spreading negative propaganda⁶⁵ on the Western principles.⁶⁶
- Being a partner of Russia and China: Even though Iran officially is a member-state of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)⁶⁷, in practice Iran is a partner of China and Russia.⁶⁸ Iran's interest in this alliance is to block or diminish the flooding of Western influences in the Middle East and North Africa region, and to carry on with its nuclear pro-

gram. China and Russia on the other hand have economic interests in keeping Iran as their partner.

- Bringing chaos to neighboring countries: Iran tries to bring chaos in its surrounding countries in order to fool the international community. If there are many crises, focus will not be placed on the discontentment of the Iranians towards their rulers.⁶⁹
- Wanting to become a nuclear power by developing its own nuclear program – Iran sees this as a means to become an invincible Great Power.⁷⁰
- Scaring and silencing dissidents and enemies in all corners of the world through acts of terrorism.⁷¹
- Practicing double standards in regards of its nuclear program.⁷²

%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B8C-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AF].

⁶⁴ Erdbrink Thomas, "Khamenei: Iran will back 'any nations, any groups' fighting Israel", *Washington Post* 3 February 2012, [http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-02-03/world/35445760_1_supreme-leader-resumption-of-nuclear-talks-nuclear-facilities].

⁶⁵ *Khabar Online*, "Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's speech about the democracy", June 2012, [http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/173749/].

⁶⁶ *Rasa News Agency* "Ayatollah Khamenei led the Liberal Democracy bases into passivity", 10 June 2013, [http://www.rasanews.ir/En/NSite/FullStory/News/?Id=292].

⁶⁷ The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM): [http://www.nam.gov.za/background/members.htm].

⁶⁸ Nazemroaya Mahdi Darius, "Confrontation between military blocs: The Eurasian 'Triple Alliance.' The Strategic Importance of Iran for Russia and China", *Globalresearch* 23 January 2012, [http://www.globalresearch.ca/confrontation-between-military-blocs-the-eurasian-triple-alliance-the-strategic-importance-of-iran-for-russia-and-china/28790].

Leverett Flynt and Hillary Mann Leverett, "Towards a Russia -China -Iran Military Alliance?", *Globalresearch* 5 February 2010, [http://www.Globalresearch.ca/towards-a-russia-china-iran-military-alliance/17471].

During the almost 40 years of the Islamic republic, Iran has strived to gain influence and stuck with its principle not to collaborate with the West. In the following, the policy Iran adopts towards some key countries is briefly presented.

7.1 Iran and Israel

Iran argues that Israel is behind all the problems in the Middle East, and would⁷³ happily see the country being erased off the world's map.⁷⁴ The feeling of hate is mu-

⁶⁹ For more information, see chapter 7.1. of this document

⁷⁰ W. Sherrill Clifton, [http://cns.miis.edu/npr/pdfs/npr_19-1_sherrill_iran_bomb.pdf], *Nonproliferation Review*, Vol. 19, No. 1, March 2012, [http://cns.miis.edu/npr/pdfs/npr_19-1_sherrill_iran_bomb.pdf].

⁷¹ For more information, see chapter 6 of this document.

⁷² For more information, see chapter 5 of this document.

⁷³ *Ynet-News*, "Khamenei: 'Tumor' of Israel is world's biggest problem", 19 August 2012, [http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4270418,00.html].

⁷⁴ Keinon Herb, Paraszczuk Joanna, "Khamenei:

tual, as Israel sees Iran as the mother of terrorist groups and a country that keeps on adding to the political conflicts of the Middle East. The roots of the Israeli-Iranian conflict are religious and historical, but it is also a conflict on who can be the “supreme leader” of the region and who has the most powerful friends. In the following, these reasons are explained a little further.

Religious reasons

Ever since Islam was born, there have been problems between Muslims and Jews. In many different parts of the Koran, it is written that Jews have betrayed God, and that they are enemies of Islam, Allah and Prophet Mohammed. According to Muslims, Koran has been directly sent from Allah to all humans. Those who follow the Koran to the letter believe that everyone should follow Islam, Koran, and the rules of the religion. Thus some Islamic groups, rulers and fervent believers have a difficult time accepting Jews, who they consider as their enemy by default.⁷⁵

The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is in accordance to Prophet Mohammed’s words in the Koran. This foreign policy does not accept Jewish people. This is one of the reasons why Iran does not approve the existence of Israel and wishes to see it destroyed.

Zionist regime will disappear from map”, *Jerusalem Post* 15 August 2012, [<http://www.jpost.com/Iranian-Threat/News/Khamenei-Zionist-regime-will-disap-pear-from-map>]. See also, Ayatollah Seyyed Ahmad Alam a-Hoda, member of the Assembly of Experts of the Supreme Leader: Our goal is to erase Israel from the world map, *Raja-News* 30 September.2013, [<http://www.rajanews.com/detail.asp?id=156163>].

⁷⁵ Quran, [<http://www.barkati.net/quran/Translation/holyquran017.htm>].

Historic reasons

Before the Islamic revolution of 1979, the ruler of Iran Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi maintained good relations with Israel. They formed together a coalition that was the counterforce to the Pan-Arabic Nationalist movement that raised its head in that times, and collaborated peacefully on various topics. Shah was the enemy of Khomeini, so when he took power all the allies under Shah’s regime were considered as enemies.

Before the revolution, Iran used to be an ally with Israel, the U.S.A. and the West. Shah’s government worked in collaboration with its allies to help combat Islamist groups. So when Khomeini took power, he was especially resentful of this fact and saw this as one more reason to hate Israel and Iran’s past Western allies. Khomeini claimed that Israel ran under the Shah’s approval an Intelligence Service organ called SAVAK that he stated to have committed all kinds of criminal acts on Iranians, especially liberals that were opposed to the Shah. According to present Iranian rulers, before the revolution of 1979, Israel and the U.S. gave their support to the Shah’s supporters, who were against the forming of the Islamic Republic. Present rulers of Iran blame the U.S. and Israel on having stolen Iranian natural resources such as gas and oil when they were collaborating with the Shah’s regime.

After the Islamic Republic of Iran was founded, Israel immediately lost its ally and saw it turn into an extremist Islamic state that wishes to see Israel destroyed.

The relations between Israel and Iran after 1979

After 1979, the good relations between the countries stopped to a halt. With its oil money, Iran revived all Shiite extremist groups and started to pose a real threat to the existence of Israel. The Islamic Republic of Iran is the ally of al-Assad’s Syria, and

together they support anti-Israel groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas. Israel is especially concerned about the nuclear weapons Iran might have in the future.

Iran also blames Israel of supporting several antirevolutionary groups, including Mujahed's Khalq Organization (MKO), the Kurdish Free Life Party of Kurdistan (PJAK) and the Baluchi group Jundullah, which are fighting against the Iranian government. Israel denies these accusations.⁷⁶

Iran feels that Israel together with U.S. and their allies want to overthrow the Islamic government. The cold war has been going on for 34 years between Iran and Israel. Until now (2013) it has not turned into proper military action yet, but has been fought through Hezbollah and Hamas.

Israel has good relations with the neighboring countries of Iran. Although it is not a NATO member state, it has good relations with Turkey, Azerbaijan, the Gulf countries and the Kurdish Federation in North-Iraq because it is a strong ally of the United States. Saudi-Arabia, which is the number 1 enemy of Iran among Arab countries, is ready to support Israel by all means if Iran would attack it.⁷⁷

Now the priority for Israel is to stop Iran from building an atomic weapon. The Israeli authorities have firmly stated many times that if it looks like Iran is about to get a nuclear weapon, the Israeli forces would be forced to act.⁷⁸ The Iranian authorities on the other hand have threatened to wipe

Israel off the map if it ever tried to attack Iran.⁷⁹

What are the options for Iran and Israel?

There are two likely scenarios between Iran and Israel: a peaceful one, or a one that involves military action. The current situation reminds that of India and Pakistan some years ago, when they almost ran into war because of their disagreement over who should own nuclear weapons. A power balance was finally established between both nuclear countries and their relations were stabilized. This can also happen between Israel and Iran, if Israel approves of Iran's nuclear program, and Iran would accept the existence of Israel and stop supporting Hezbollah and Hamas. If this happens, the two countries would contribute to a more peaceful atmosphere in the Middle East and they could have normal relations with each other. However, this scenario is extremely unlikely.

There are several reasons why the cold war between Israel and Iran could turn into a military war:

- A peaceful problem solving is not in accordance with the foreign policy principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as Iran can't accept the existence of a Jewish state.
- Iran does not have the intention of giving up its nuclear program, and Israel on the other hand does not want Iran to have a nuclear weapon.
- Israel does not want to see Iran to become a Great Power in the region of the Middle-East.
- Iran is not likely to stop supporting Islamic groups.

⁷⁶ Dassa Kaye Dalia, Nader Alireza, Roshan Parisa, "Israel and Iran, A Dangerous Rivalry", RAND (National Defense Research Institute), 2011, p. 61–62. Santa Monica, [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2011/RAND_MG1143.pdf].

⁷⁷ Jewish Press Staff, "Saudis Might Support Israeli Strike on Iran", 26 February 2012, [http://www.jewish-press.com/news/breaking-news/saudis-might-support-israeli-strike-on-iran/2012/02/26/].

⁷⁸ *Al-Jazeera*, "Israeli PM threatens to strike Iran", 17 July 2013, [http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/07/2013714214528446397.html].

⁷⁹ Ahren Raphael, "Iran would barely retaliate if its nuclear program were attacked", Times of Israel 21 August 2013, [http://www.timesofisrael.com/iran-would-barely-retaliate-if-its-nuclear-program-were-attacked/].

- The allies of Iran are getting weaker, while Israel's allies are becoming stronger.

For these reasons, it is possible for the two countries to get caught in an armed conflict at some point. Compromises between Iran and Israel in this context look extremely unlikely.

7.2 Iran and Syria

As the leader of the international Shiite community, Iran never fails to support the Shiite Muslims in Middle-Eastern conflicts, regardless of whether they are part of the government or the opposition. The country supports Shiites in Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi-Arabia, Sudan and Syria, and is opposed to Sunni Muslims' uprisings in Iran, Iraq and Syria. A good example of this is the country's different positioning towards uprisings in Bahrain and in Syria. In Bahrain, Iran supports the Shiites who are against the Monarch, who himself is a Sunni. In Syria on the other hand, Iran supports the current ruler, the Alawite Bashar al-Assad against the opposition, because the opposition mainly consists of Sunnis. This is a clear indication that Iran shows its support only to Shiite Muslims.

Ever since the uprising started in Syria, Iran has been the strongest supporter of Bashar al-Assad, claiming that in reality, the majority of Syrians support al-Assad's regime. The commander of the Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution Mohammad Ali Jafari has announced that Iran supports al-Assad financially, politically and diplomatically.⁸⁰ Jafari also stated that Iran's special Quds army has long been present in Syria because of the conflict. He

⁸⁰ Black Ian, "Iran confirms it has forces in Syria and will take military action if pushed", *The Guardian*, 16 September 2012, [http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/sep/16/iran-middleeast].

claims however that the army's role is solely consultative and non-military.

If the international community decides to attack Syria, Iran has proclaimed to interpret the attack as one against itself. This has been clearly stated i.a. by Ali Akbar Velayati, the highest counselor regarding Iran's foreign affairs,⁸¹ and Saqfi Amiri⁸², a researcher at Iran's strategy department. As for the commander of the Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution Mohammad Ali Jafari, he declared that if such an attack should occur, Iran will defend Syria with all its might.⁸³

For a long time now, Syria has been a strategic ally to Iran. The countries' ties began to tighten already in 1979, after the Iranian revolution. In the Iran-Iraq war, Syria was the only Arab country to support Iran. In the recent times, the economical bond has also tightened between the two countries. As is well known, numerous international sanctions fall upon Iran. As a result, Iran is trying to figure out new ways to pursue international trade despite the sanctions. Now, Iran is using Syria as a channel to enter the international markets. In February 2013, Iran, Iraq and Syria signed a contract according to which a gas pipe would be ready in 2015, through which the natural gas of Iran can be transported through Iraq until Syria, where it then can be sold to European markets.⁸⁴

⁸¹ *Press TV*, "Attack on Syria, strike against Iran, allies: Velayati", 07 August 2013, [http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/01/26/285606/attacking-syria-is-attacking-iran-velayati/].

⁸² Saqfi Ameri Naser, "Iran and Syrian relations," Center for Strategic Center, 13 February 2013, [http://www.csr.ir/departments.aspx?lng=fa&abtid=07&&depid=44&semid=2462].

⁸³ *Fars News Agency*, "IRGC Blasts Fabrication of Commander's Remarks on Syria," 19 September 2012, [http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9106241164].

⁸⁴ The Free Syrian Army, which belongs to the Opposition, kidnapped 48 Iranian citizens in August 2012. The chairman of the opposition claimed that amongst the hostages, there were soldiers of the

On the other hand, Iran's relations with the Syrian opposition are reciprocally tense. According to the Syrian opposition, Iran is involved in training the Syrian army of al-Assad, and providing them with weapons.⁸⁵

Iran sees Syria as its strategic extension. That is one of the reasons why the country is so interested in the current events of Syria and the outcome of the uprising. Since Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, Hamas and the Islamic Jihad are allies, the leaders of Iran feel that the strategic borders of Iran reach up until the Mediterranean coast. Even Barack Obama's security adviser Thomas Donilon has stated that Syria is a strategic bridge for Iran. If Iran loses Syria, the influence and authority the country has in the region will crumble. Donilon added that if the current regime in Syria is overthrown, Iran will no longer be able to threaten Israel, its arch-enemy.⁸⁶

All in all Iran has a major role in the Syrian conflict. Without Iran's support, al-Assad couldn't have had enough power to continue his battle against the opposition, and the conflict would most likely already have ended to the victory of the opposition. To truly solve the problems Syria, it is necessary to first solve the problems in Iran, otherwise Iran will keep on fuelling the conflict.

Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution, supporting al-Assad against the people. Iran assured that the persons were just normal pilgrims. In the end, the Iranian hostages were released as part of an exchange of prisoners, during which the Syrian government released 2.130 prisoners in total. *Al Arabia News*, "Iraq green lights gas pipeline deal with Iran, Syria", 20 February 2013, [<http://www.alara-biya.net/articles/2013/02/20/267257.html>].

⁸⁵ *CBCNEWS*, "Syrian opposition forces free 48 Iranians in prisoner swap," 9 January 2013, [<http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2013/01/09/syria-iran-prisoner-swap.html>].

⁸⁶ Saqfi Ameri Naser, "Iran and Syrian relations," Center for Strategic Center, 13 February 2013, [<http://www.csr.ir/departments.aspx?lng=fa&abtId=07&&depId=44&semId=2462>].

7.3 Iran and the Gulf Countries

Apart from Syria, Iran has extremely bad relations with Arab countries. The Arab and Sunni Muslim countries of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates form together the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (CCASG), and are close allies of the United States and the West.

Since the Islamic Republic of Iran was established in 1979, the relations between Iran and the CCASG have drastically worsened. Nowadays, they are conflicted due to the following reasons:

- The Shiite vs. Sunni conflict,
- The Iranian nuclear program that causes fear in the CCASG countries,
- The collaboration of the CCASG countries with the West and especially the United States, the worst enemy of Iran,
- The ownership of oilfields located in the Persian Gulf,
- Territorial disputes over some islands between UAE and Iran,
- CCASG countries' involvement in Iran's domestic policy, and Iran's involvement in CCASG countries' domestic policy.

As the leader of the Shiite world, Iran is trying to spread the Shiite religion and is supporting the Shiite minorities in the CCASG countries. This works both ways: Saudi Arabia, the leader of the CCASG countries, is supporting Iranian Sunnis, especially Balochis and Arabs in Iran. The fact that both groups are intervening in each other's domestic affairs has caused tension, disputes and threatening on both sides. The situation is especially tense between Iran and Saudi Arabia, who are fighting on who is the leader of the Muslim world. Below, some of these factors that are worsening the relations of Iran and the CCASG countries are further clarified.

7.3.1 *The Conflict between Sunnis and Shiites*

Under Prophet Mohammed's successor Ali's regime around 650 AC, raged a civil war in the Arabic Peninsula that eventually led to the murder of Ali. The deep conflict between the Shiites and Sunnis started precisely from this murder almost 1,400 years ago.

The history of Islam is full of wars that have been fought between the two schools. The bloodiest period was between the 1600s and 1900s, when the Ottoman Empire and the Shiite Safavidi Dynasty cross swords. These battles deepened the differences between the two schools even more.⁸⁷ There is no end in sight for the battles between Shiites and Sunnis, because both camps believe they are right.

In Iran, where Shiites are ruling, the minority Sunnis can't express their religion freely. Shiite is the only official religion in a country where 89% of the population, are Shiites.⁸⁸ Thousands of Sunni activists are in prison, and the whole system is discriminative against them. This is actually a quite frequent tendency in the Middle East, where Sunnis have poor conditions in Shiite countries and vice versa. For instance in Teheran - a city of 13 million inhabitants with thousands of Shiite mosques - Sunnis do not have but one mosque for themselves.⁸⁹ In Pakistan and Iraq, dozens of people die every day in confrontations between the two schools.

⁸⁷ For more information see the book: F. Dale Stephen, "The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals (New Approaches to Asian History)".

⁸⁸ World Factbook, 19 March 2013, [<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>].

⁸⁹ Kamali Dehghan Saeed, "Sunni Muslims banned from holding own Eid prayers in Tehran", *The Guardian*, 31 August 2011, [<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/aug/31/iran-forbids-sunni-aidprayers>].

In Sunni countries such as Egypt or the CCASG countries, Shiites are not tolerated. Especially the Salafist movement in the CCASG countries sees Shiites as infidels. In 1987, during the pilgrimage to Saudi-Arabia, Iranian pilgrims gathered up for a peaceful demonstration, when Saudi policeman attacked the crowd opening fire and killing hundreds.⁹⁰ Even though it happened more than twenty-six years ago, it is a good example of the hostility that is today still underlying between the two schools. In fact, the whole Middle East is divided into two camps.

In the Iraq-Iran war (1980–1988) and the current Syrian conflict, this division has been clearer than ever. During the Iran-Iraq war, Sunni countries Saudi-Arabia and Kuwait supported Saddam Hussein against Iran, and Shiite countries and groups supported Iran. The Iraq War of 2003 was exceptional, because Shiites and Sunnis collaborated and formed one front against Saddam Hussein.

In the current conflict of Syria, Sunni majority countries like CCASG countries, Egypt, Turkey and Lebanon, as well as smaller Sunni groups from other countries, are supporting the opposition in its efforts to overthrow Bashar al-Assad's regime. Respectively, Shiite leader Iran and its allies such as Lebanon's Hezbollah, Jihadist groups from Palestine, Iraqi Shiites, Turkish Alawites and Shiites from Oman and Bahrain are supporting al-Assad's regime. Most of the Western countries support the Sunni camp and consider them as their allies. China and Russia on the other hand support the Shiite camp, led by Iran.

⁹⁰ Kifner John, "400 die as Iranian marchers Saudi police in Mecca; embassies smashed in Teheran", *The New York Times*, 2 August 1987, [<http://www.ny-times.com/1987/08/02/world/400-die-iranian-marchers-battle-saudi-police-meccaembassies-smashed-teheran.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>].

7.3.2 Iran's Nuclear Program

The efforts of Iran to acquire the technology necessary for the development of nuclear weapons has caused great fear in CCASG countries. The concern of the CCASG countries is awoken especially for two reasons. First of all, CCASG countries and especially Saudi Arabia do not want to see their biggest enemy, Iran, to acquire the high technology that is necessary to build a nuclear bomb. If this would happen, the influence Iran has in the region would highly increase, and CCASG countries are prepared to do everything it takes to prevent this. According to the report of the Atomic Kingdom⁹¹, if Iran builds a nuclear weapon, it will put pressure on Saudi-Arabia to build one too.⁹²

Second of all, the Iranian nuclear power plant of Bushehr is located in the southwest of the country, near the border with the CCASG countries. Bushehr is located in a zone that is geographically liable to earthquakes, and the big concern is that something similar to Japan's Fukushima disaster will take place in Bushehr. If this happened, most of the victims will likely be inhabitants of the CCASG countries. This concern is not unfounded; the earthquake of 2012 in Iran caused widespread devasta-

⁹¹ "Atomic Kingdom" is a part of a broader project at the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) analyzing the consequences of Iranian nuclearization. The project examines how the United States and its allies should better prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and, should these efforts fail, mitigate the consequences of a nuclear-armed Iran. CNAS gratefully acknowledges the Ploughshares Fund, United States Institute of Peace and the Carnegie Corporation of New York for their generous financial support.

⁹² For more information see the following report: H. Kahl Colin, G. Dalton Melissa and Irvine Matthew, "If Iran Builds the Bomb, Will Saudi Arabia Be Next? Atomic Kingdom", Atomic Kingdom, February 2013, [http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/CNAS_AtomicKingdom_Kahl.pdf].

tion.⁹³ All the CCASG countries have actively supported the sanctions inflicted upon Iran that aim to stop them to further develop the technology necessary for building a nuclear bomb.

7.3.3 Quarrels Over Territories

Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunb have been a territorial dispute between Iran and the United Arab Emirates for a long time now. Abu Musa and the Greater Tunbs and Lesser Tunbs are small islands located in the Persian Gulf. Notwithstanding of their small size, they are located strategically in the middle of the Persian Gulf, and they have huge strategic importance to what shipping and oil tanker traffic are concerned.⁹⁴

At the present, Iran has control of the islands. The Federation of American Scientists claims that Iran has built up a military presence on the islands that includes anti-aircraft and anti-ship missiles.⁹⁵ The UAE are unhappy with the situation, claiming that Iran has been occupying the islands that actually belong to the Emirates. This has caused tension between the two countries; since Iran firmly states the islands belong to its territory.

7.3.4 The Cooperation between the CCASG Countries and the West

The alliance between the CCASG countries and the United States has irritated Iran and

⁹³ Taffline Lailin, "Gulf Countries Fear Leaks from Iranian Nuclear Plant", Greenprophet 22 July 2013, [<http://www.greenprophet.com/2013/07/gulf-countries-fear-leaks-from-iranian-nuclear-plant/>].

⁹⁴ Hilleary Cecily, "Iran-UAE Island Dispute Could Escalate", *Voice of America* 18 October 2012, [<http://www.voanews.com/content/iran-uae-island-dispute-could-escalate/1528869.html>].

⁹⁵ EIA (US Energy Information Administration), "World Oil Transit Chokepoints", 22 August 2012, [http://www.eia.gov/countries/analysisbriefs/World_Oil_Transit_Chokepoints/wotc.pdf].

worsened the relationship between Iran and the CCASG countries.⁹⁶ USA is a major ally of the CCASG countries, and one of its key tasks is to protect them from any external attacks, notably from Iran. In exchange, USA gets to buy cheap oil, sell military equipment to the countries and supervise the safety of oil traffic on the Persian Gulf. USA has dozens of military bases in the CCASG countries.⁹⁷ In that way USA can be thought to be one of Iran's "neighbor countries", who has supervising the domestic and foreign affairs within the CCASG region, including Iran's relationship with its neighbors. This fact irritates Iran very much, but on the other hand it has brought some kind of stability to the region, since now Iran cannot freely interfere with the inner affairs of the CCASG countries.

As an ally of the USA, Saudi Arabia, the leader of the CCASG countries, is also indirectly an ally of Israel. It would be ready to support any military action that would take place against Iran. In addition, Saudi Arabia has been supporting the Syrian opposition. It wants to weaken the Shi'ite axis of the Middle East, and to see a Sunni leader step into power in Syria.

7.4 Iran and Turkey

If Iran's relations with the CCASG countries are bad, its relations with Turkey are somewhat better. Several factors are bringing the two nations closer to each other:

⁹⁶ Waezi Mahmoud, Relations between Iran and The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (CCASG), Center for Strategic Research 2007, [<http://www.csr.ir/Pdf/Content2237/Pages%20from%20No.28-shoraye%20khalije%20fars-farsi-2.pdf>].

⁹⁷ Degang Sun, "The US Military Bases in the Gulf Cooperation Council States: Dynamics of Readjustment", Middle East Studies Institute, Shanghai International Studies University 2010, [<http://research.shisu.edu.cn/picture/article/13/ad/24/7fc5a2764fe39852c873b566005f/ba1a738c-5ac3-4e40-aa80-52603f103057.pdf>].

common economic interests, political Islam, and collaboration against the birth of a Kurdish federation.

However, the relations all but roseate, with the Syrian civil war bringing additional chill. The relations between Iran and Turkey have been negatively influenced by many factors:

- The conflict between Shi'ites and Sunnis,
- Turkey's NATO membership and its relations to Israel,
- Iran's nuclear program,
- The Kurdish question in Turkey and Iran's Turkish minority (Azeris),
- Syria's civil war.

In the following, some key factors in the Iran-Turkey relations are further explained.

7.4.1 Background

Iran and Turkey are both influential countries in the Middle East. They share a border of almost 500 km. To this day, the bloody battles that were fought between the Ottoman Empire's led by Turkey and the Shi'ite Safavidi Dynasty led by Iran between the 1600s and 1900s still have a negative impact to the countries' relations.

But there is more than that. 20% of the Turkish population is Alawites. These people have tense relations with the Sunni rulers of Turkey, but good relations with Iran. Nationalist and secular governments ruled Turkey until the Justice and Development party (AKP) stepped into power in 2001. Until that, Iran had been supporting Islamists in Turkey against the nationalists and secular groups and parties, which was one thing that influenced the countries' relations in a negative way.⁹⁸

During the 1990s, the Turkish government wanted to limit the amount of in-

⁹⁸ Makovsky Alan, "How to Deal with Erdogan", Middle East Forum, March 1997, [<http://www.middleeastforum.org/335/how-to-deal-with-erbakan>].

teraction between its citizens and Iranians, out of fear that Kurdish separatism ideology would spread in the country. Iran, much for the same reasons, also tried to limit the interactions.

However, since the AKP party took power in 2001, the relations between Turkey and Iran have been ameliorating. They kept on getting better until the civil war in Syria started in 2011. During the past five years, Iran and Turkey have actively promoted bilateral investment and trade in their shared border regions. This proves that the governments are taking steps to build better relations between them. Now, since the civil war started in Syria, the relations are no longer warm, but the countries keep on maintaining good trade relations for the benefice of both countries.⁹⁹

7.4.2 Turkey's NATO Membership

Since 1952, Turkey has been a NATO member and an ally of the US. In a recent statement, the country's authorities claimed that¹⁰⁰

Ever since our NATO membership [...], the North Atlantic Alliance has played a central role in Turkey's security and contributed to its integration with the Euro-Atlantic community. Turkey, in return, has successfully assumed its responsibilities in defending the common values of the Alliance.

Turkey holds its NATO membership and companionship with the West very high, as this statement demonstrates.

In Iran's point of view, Turkey's NATO membership and close connections with Israel are irritating. Iran also wants and

needs allies; otherwise Turkey would win the power battle. Thus, Iran has tightened its relations to China and Russia.

Turkey is worried about Iran's nuclear program and especially about the fact that Iran might build a nuclear weapon. If this happened, Turkey would interpret it as an immense threat.

During the Syrian conflict, NATO moved a missile defense system to Turkey for protection in case Syria or some other country would attack Turkey.¹⁰¹ Iran perceives the missile defense system as a threat and has expressed its concerns over it to the Turkish authorities.¹⁰²

7.4.3 Minority issues

From the 80 million people living in Turkey, 20% are ethnic Kurds. Respectively, from the 80 million Iranians, 20% are ethnically Azeris and Turkmens, which mean that they have Turkish roots.¹⁰³

Whether it is in Turkey or Iran, both minorities' civil rights are disrespected. Neither can study in their native language nor express their culture freely. Iran aims to "Persianize" all of its minorities, and Turkey respectively wants to "Turkicize" its Kurdish population.

For dozens of years, Kurds have been fighting the Turkish government alongside the Kurdistan's Workers Party PKK. In 2013, the Turkish government accepted to pursue peace negotiations with the Kurds. Both wish to find a way to stop the bloody

⁹⁹ *Fars-News*, "Iran Warns Turkey to Stay Away from War on Syria", 27 August 2013, [Iran Warns Turkey to Stay Away from War on Syria].

¹⁰⁰ Republic of Turkey, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, "Turkey's Relations with NATO", 9 August 2013, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/nato.en.mfa].

¹⁰¹ NATO, "German, Dutch, Turkish and American officials from NATO in Brussels visit Patriot deployments", January 2013, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_98936.htm].

¹⁰² *Haaretz*, "Iran warns Turkey against deploying NATO missile defense system", 8 September 2011, [http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/iran-warns-turkey-against-deploying-nato-missile-defense-system-1.383241].

¹⁰³ Central Intelligence Agency, *World Factbook*, 9 August 2013, [https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html].

battle that has cost more than 40,000 lives during dozens of years. In September 2013, the negotiations are still taking place and no permanent agreement has been reached.¹⁰⁴

The Kurdish question has been a source for ongoing confrontation between Turkey and Iran. Turkey blames Iran for supporting the Turkish Kurds' separatism ideology. In Turkey's opinion, Iran tries to sabotage Turkey's unity. Ironically, Iran says the exact same thing about Turkey. It is a fact that some headquarters of the PKK, who fights for the rights of the Kurds in both countries, lie on Iran's side of the border. Turkey sees this as a reason to support the Turkish minorities of Iran, providing their political parties the possibility to assembly in Turkey and putting pressure on Iran to give the Turkish minorities their full civil rights.¹⁰⁵ Despite their different point of views, Iran and Turkey collaborate in their anti-Kurdish efforts. However, this is a fact that causes friction in their relations.

7.4.4 Iran and Turkey's Relations and the Syrian Civil War

Iran has had a major role in the Syrian civil war. Without the support of Iran, the opposition forces would probably long ago have overthrown al-Assad's regime. But since Iran – alongside many others – keeps fueling the crisis, it has protracted considerably. Here we contemplate the relations between Iran and its neighbor Syria.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Letsch Constanze, "Kurds dare to hope as PKK fighters' ceasefire with Turkey takes hold", *Guardian* 7 May 2013, [http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/07/kurds-pkk-turkey-peace-talks].

¹⁰⁵ Today's Zaman, "Iranian Azeris set up national council in Turkey, aspire for independence", 14 May 2012, [http://www.todayzaman.com/news-280353-iranian-azeris-set-up-national-council-in-turkey-aspire-for-independence.html].

¹⁰⁶ George Marcus, "Iran's Khamenei warns of U.S. loss over intervention in Syria", *Reuters* 5 September 2013, [http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/09/05/us-syria-crisis-iran-idUSBRE9840CQ20130905].

As seen in the previous chapter, Syria's civil war has caused the relations between Iran and Turkey to deteriorate. Turkey has been showing massive support to the opposition forces. For instance, the headquarters of the opposition lay in Turkey's side of the border. International jihadist groups coming from several different countries first gather in Turkey before entering Syria and the war scene to fight in the rows of the opposition.¹⁰⁷ On the other hand, Iran is the biggest supporter of Bashar al-Assad's regime – and intends to stay that way. In a recent interview, Iran's newly elected President Hassan Rouhani stated that "*no force in the world would shake the alliance between the two countries*".¹⁰⁸

7.4.5 Economic Relations

Despite all the discords listed in this chapter, Iran and Turkey maintain good economic relations. Turkey is one of the biggest buyers of Iranian oil and gas. For Iran, these purchases are more and more valuable, since the economic situation of the country keeps on getting worse due to international sanctions. Iran is not only in a sellers role; each year, more and more Iranians choose to spend their holidays in Turkey, bringing money to the country's tourism industry.

The U.S., who has been one of the most eager countries to inflict sanctions upon Iran, is not pleased about the trade that is taking place between the two nations. It has threatened its good partner Turkey with limited access to the U.S. market if

¹⁰⁷ Alkac Firat, "Al-Qaeda Militants Travel To Syria Via Turkey", *Almonitor* 23 July 2013, [http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2013/07/al-qaeda-militants-syria-turkey-border.html].

¹⁰⁸ *Fox news*, "Iran's new president vows support for Assad regime", *Associated Press* 5 August 2013, [http://www.foxnews.com/world/2013/08/04/iran-new-president-says-no-force-in-world-will-shake-tehran-alliance-with-syria/].

Turkey do not stop trading with Iran. So far, the threats have led to no action.

Turkey, Iran and Pakistan form a trade union called Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)¹⁰⁹ that has been trying to facilitate trade between them for decades now.

All the factors presented in this chapter influence the relations between Iran and Turkey. Right now there are less binding factors than there are divisional ones. Iran has a difficult time accepting that it is neighbors with a NATO membership country that is an ally with all its enemies. On the other hand, Turkey will not accept Iran to become a nuclear power. These factors will keep on chilling their relations, until power and the whole political system has been changed in Iran.

7.5 Iran and Azerbaijan

Iran and Azerbaijan are culturally close but ideologically very far apart. Azerbaijan tries to maintain good relations to the West and wants to act itself as one of the Western countries. This irritates the Iranian regime, since it would like all countries to be Islamic. The fact that Azerbaijan once belonged to Iran only makes the ideological differences more irritating for Iran.

The majority of the Azerbaijanis people are Muslims and belong to the Shiite branch. The government, however, is secular. Ideologically, the Azerbaijanis identify with Turkey. This identification is stronger for the Azerbaijanis than the identification with the Islamic community. They are in

¹⁰⁹ Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), is an intergovernmental regional organization established in 1985 by Iran, Pakistan and Turkey for the purpose of promoting economic, technical and cultural cooperation among the Member States. ECO is the successor organization of Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) which remained in existence since 1964 up to 1979. [<http://www.ecosecretariat.org/>].

fact part of the Pan-Turkism movement, which Iran finds worrying.¹¹⁰

After the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Iran strove to support the Caucasian countries, especially Azerbaijan.¹¹¹ But instead of reaching towards Russia and Iran for support, Azerbaijan established relations with the West, Turkey and Israel. Now, the two biggest trading partners for Azerbaijan are Turkey and Israel. As for Iran, it views the relationship between Azerbaijan and Israel as a threat.

Israel has been among Azerbaijan's top five trade partners in recent years. Baku is Israel's top oil supplier, providing around 40 percent of its annual consumption, while Israel is the sixth highest importer of Azerbaijani oil exports.¹¹² Israel purchases oil and gas from Azerbaijan, and sells military equipment such as arms to the country. Israel has also trained the army of Azerbaijan. In the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh land, Israel is supporting Azerbaijan.¹¹³

As the high-ranking official in Azerbaijan's President's Ilham Aliyev's administration put it, "Iran wants Azerbaijan to become friends with its friends, and enemies with its enemies". He also stated that Azerbaijan will keep on forming its relation in the framework of the country's own interests, not at all in regards to what Iran has in

¹¹⁰ Panorama, "Iranian ambassador to Azerbaijan: Turkey spreading pan-Turkism", 11 February 2013, [<http://www.panorama.am/en/politics/2013/02/11/ambassador-iran-azerbaijan/>].

¹¹¹ Kotecha Hema, "Islamic and Ethnic Identities in Azerbaijan: Emerging trends and tensions, Development Researcher – *Anthropologist* 2006, [<http://www.osce.org/baku/23809>].

¹¹² Shaffer Brenda, "Azerbaijan's Cooperation with Israel Goes Beyond Iran Tensions", Washington Institute 16 April 2013, [<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/azerbaijans-cooperation-with-israel-goes-beyond-iran-tensions>].

¹¹³ Ter-Sahakyan Karine, "Armenia has no place in triumvirate Israel-Turkey-Azerbaijan", 15 April 2011, [<http://www.panarmenian.net/eng/details/67325/>].

mind.¹¹⁴ According to Grove Thomas' report for Reuters, if Israel was to attack Iran, Azerbaijan would allow Israel to use its air-space, air bases and spy drones to help Israel fight Iran.¹¹⁵

The interfering of both countries to each other's internal affairs has definitely worsened their relations. Iran supports the Shiite groups of Azerbaijan who are fighting against the government. Reciprocally, the Azerbaijani government supports Iran's Azeris who are also fighting for their rights in Iran. In 2012, the Azerbaijan parliament discussed the possibility of changing the name of the country from Republic of Azerbaijan to Northern Azerbaijan.¹¹⁶ In the same time, they started to urge the Iranian Azeris to strive to gain independence, with the idea that this area would be called Southern Azerbaijan once detached from Iran. In response, the Iranian member of parliament Kamal Aladeen Firmouza underlined the need for a referendum, where Iranians could vote for the returning the country of Azerbaijan to Iran. He claimed that "there is a real desire and interest among Azerbaijani citizens to rejoin Iran".¹¹⁷ Azerbaijan was part of Iran until it was annexed to Russia in the Russo-Persian War of 1826-1828.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Resneck Jacob and Guluyev Zaka, "Azerbaijan's tense ties with neighbor Iran cause concern", *The Washington Times* 25 May 2012, [http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/may/25/azerbaijans-tense-ties-neighbor-iran-cause-concern/?page=all].

¹¹⁵ Grove Thomas, "Azerbaijan eyes aiding Israel against Iran", *Reuters* 30 September 2012, [http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/09/30/us-iran-israel-azerbaijan-idUSBRE88T05L20120930].

¹¹⁶ Giorgi Lomsadze, "Will Azerbaijan Change Its Name?", 2 February 2012, [http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64942].

¹¹⁷ *Irاندailybrief*, "Majlis member calls for referendum on return of Azerbaijan to", 8 April 2013, [http://www.irandailybrief.com/2013/04/08/majlis-member-calls-for-referendum-on-return-of-azerbaijan-to-iran/].

¹¹⁸ Islamic Revolution Document Center The Treaty of Turkmenchay, 2013, [http://www.irdc.ir/en/default.aspx].

The relations between Iran and Azerbaijan are heading to a worsening direction. Both countries keep on interfering in each other's business, and the warming relations between Israel and Azerbaijan, especially regarding military affairs, gravely irritates Iran. On the other hand, the influence of Iran, Armenia and Russia in the former Soviet Union countries, especially in Caucasus, is increasing.

7.6 Iran and Iraq

The Iran-Iraq border is almost 1.500 km long from the Shatt al-Arab (known as Arvand Rud in Iran) waterway to the Turkish border. Culturally, the two countries are not far apart from each other. For instance, the best-known cultural heritage sites of Shiite Muslims are scattered on both sides of the border. At the present moment, both countries are ruled by Shiites. This has led to warmer relations than ever before, and now these two oil-rich countries are close trade partners.

In the following, we contemplate the relation between Iran and Iraq.

7.6.1 Relations Under Saddam Hussein's Regime

Until 2003 and the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime, the relations between Iran and Iraq were bad. The Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988), which lasted for almost eight years, was one of the bloodiest conflicts of the century with more than a million killed and a million wounded on both sides. Chemical weapons were used against civilians and the army.

Although there were many reasons why the war started¹¹⁹, the most important mo-

¹¹⁹ Another reason for the eruption of the Iran-Iraq war was the conflict between Shiites and Sunnis. Khomeini stated that every country should follow Iran's example of the Islamic revolution. His statements such as "we shall confront the world

tives are considered to be a border conflict and a conflict between two different ideologies.¹²⁰ Even though the war ended in 1988, the conflict between the two countries did not cease then. Both kept on interfering in each other's internal affairs, and kept on supporting the opposition in the rival country until 2003, when the U.S. troops and their allies attacked Iraq and overthrew Saddam Hussein's regime.¹²¹

with our ideology and "we shall spread Islam everywhere in the world" evoked fear everywhere in the world, especially in the countries ruled by Sunnis. These countries were mostly allies of the West. The historical reasons stated above, the worrying speeches Khomeini made and the support Iran showed to the Iraqi Shiites (that formed 60% of the Iraqi population but had bad relations with the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein) were the three reasons that drove Saddam Hussein to attack Iran. The war lasted eight years, causing many thousand casualties in both sides. Actually, Saddam Hussein was ready to start peace negotiations after one year of warfare, but at this point Khomeini was determined to keep on going until Saddam Hussein would be out of the picture, and he would be free to mold Iraq into a Shiite state. However, the war kept going for so long that Khomeini had no choice but to accept the UN's peace treaty. The war ended, and Iraq wasn't turned into a Shiite nation.

¹²⁰ The Iran-Iraq War's roots go back to the era of the Persian and Ottoman Empires; when a peace and border agreement was signed between these two empires in 1639 but the border disputes exploded again in 1818 and another agreement was signed in 1823. After Britain and Russia intervened in 1837, another border agreement was also signed. In the Twentieth Century, the dispute centered around the Shatt Al Arab River. The river forms the border between Iraq and Iran until it empties into the Arabian Gulf. The Shatt and the region around it have strategic and economic importance for both countries, but particularly for Iraq since it is Iraq's principle maritime window to the world.

¹²¹ For more information about the Iraqi War see article: Wong Leonard & A. Kolditz Thomas & A. Millen Raymond & M. Potter Terrence, "Why the fight: combat motivation in the Iraq War", SSI, Strategic Studies Institute (United States Army War College), July 2003, [<http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/pub179.pdf>].

In the Iraq war, Iran showed some support to its enemy the U.S. for several reasons:

- They had a common enemy. As is said "My enemy's enemy is my friend". Saddam Hussein was an enemy to both U.S. and Iran, and both countries contributed to his overthrowing. Iran wasn't able to overthrow him, despite having tried to do it for eight years under the Iran-Iraq war. But now U.S. did what both countries had been trying to do, and put an end to Hussein's regime.
- Iran was afraid U.S. would attack it. Iran wants to contradict or stand in the way of U.S. attacking Iraq also because it was afraid that if that was the case, U.S. could attack Iran after it had finished its business in Iraq.
- Iran did not stand in the way of the collaboration between U.S. and the Iraqi opposition. During the Iraq war, most of the influential Iraqis and the countries opposition had their headquarters in Iran. The Iraqi opposition had a major role in helping the U.S. overthrow Saddam Hussein.
- Iran had a collaborative role in the stabilization process of Iraq after the war was over. First, right after Saddam was overthrown, Iran tried to interfere in the internal affairs of Iraq and support the Shiites in the country. Quickly, it adopted a different attitude and started – out of fear – to collaborate with the U.S. in efforts to bring stability to the country.

Since the Iraqi dictator was overthrown, a new phase has begun in the relations between Iraq and Iran. Now the two consider each other as allies. In this way, Iran benefited massively from the Iraq war, gaining good relationship with a neighbor it had had bad relations in the past with.

After Turkey, Iran is the second most important trade partner for Iraq. Iran exports massively to Iraq, and tries in this way to go round the sanctions the international community has inflicted upon it.

Iran has good relations with the Iraqi Shiite parties. Through them, Iran has been able to suffocate the Sunnis of Iraq and to control the Iraqi opposition groups, whose headquarters were located in Iran. The Iranian Quds army finances and trains the Shiite militants of Iraq.¹²² Through them, Iran gets to have some influence and authority in Iraq. Iran has also used the Shiite militants to attack the most well known opposition group MEK's (Mujahidin-e-Khalq) headquarters, killing dozens of its supporters.¹²³

Iran has been able to influence Iraq's foreign and domestic policies in all possible areas. Iran had a major role in composing the Iraqi government and choosing the key authorities, such as the president and prime minister. Nowadays, it is almost impossible for Iraqi politicians to work independently without Iran interfering.

7.6.2 *The Iraqi Sunnis Are Discontented*

The Sunnis and secular people of Iraq feel like Iran is conquering Iraq, pretty much like the U.S. did. The Sunnis of Iraq have protested several times against Iran interfering in the country's domestic affairs. For instance, in December 2012, the city of Falluja, Iraqi Sunni protesters set fire to the flag of Iran, shouting "out, out Iran! Baghdad stays free" and "Maliki you coward, do not take your advice from Iran".¹²⁴

¹²² Fantz Ashley, "What is the Quds Force?", *CNN* 11 October 2011, [http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2011/10/11/what-is-the-quds-force/].

¹²³ *Reuters*, "Mortar attack on Iranian dissident camp in Iraq kills three", 15 June 2013, [http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/06/15/us-iraq-mek-idUSBRE95E0HO20130615].

¹²⁴ Naama Kamal and Salman Raheem, "Thousands of Iraq's Sunnis demonstrate against PM Maliki", 28

The chaotic situation and daily bomb explosions in Iraq are due to the discontentment of the Sunnis. Under Saddam Hussein's regime, the Sunnis were ruling as a minority the whole country, Kurds and Shiites included. But now, Sunnis are ruling only the Sunni territories of Iraq, which make them unhappy with the current situation.

Many¹²⁵ claim that it was a mistake for the U.S. to attack Iraq.¹²⁶ They say that the war has been claiming far too many lives and has cost a fortune, while Iraq is in a state of complete chaos and has not stabilized.¹²⁷ However, some feel that despite the current problems Iraq is facing, the U.S. intervention of 2003 brought many positive elements.¹²⁸ They justify their claims with the following¹²⁹:

- Overthrowing Saddam brought peace to these ally countries, who now maintain good relations with the current Iraqi regime. The Iraqi dictator was a threat to the allies of the West in the Middle East. For instance, Hussein conquered Ku-

December 2012, [http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/12/28/257459.html].

¹²⁵ Thompson Loren, "Iraq: The Biggest Mistake In American Military History", *Forbes* 15 December 2011, [http://www.forbes.com/sites/lorenthompson/2011/12/15/the-biggest-mistake-in-american-military-history/].

¹²⁶ Blix Hans, "Hans Blix: Iraq War was a terrible mistake and violation of U.N. charter", *CNN* 19 March 2013, [http://edition.cnn.com/2013/03/18/opinion/iraq-war-hans-blix/index.html].

¹²⁷ Nowicki Dan, "10 years later, many see Iraq War as costly mistake", *USATODAY* 17 March 2013, [http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/03/17/iraq-war-10-years-later/1993431/].

¹²⁸ Hanson Victor Davis, "Why Did We Invade Iraq?", 26 March 2013, [http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/343870/why-did-we-invade-iraq-victor-davis-hanson].

¹²⁹ *The Washington Post*, [Transcript: President Bush and Iraqi President Jalal Talabani], 13 September 2005, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/13/AR2005091300906.html].

wait, a U.S. ally, and was a dangerous threat to the Arab States of the Gulf (CCASG).

- After Saddam was overthrown, fundamentalist Islamic groups lost their biggest supporter. Iraq under Saddam's regime was the most important supporter of the al-Qaida and different terrorist groups. Now they have to deal with the U.S. and the Iraqi army fighting against them.
- Overthrowing a dictator who has been involved in the murdering of thousands of Iraqis has provided the Iraqis with the opportunity to establish democracy in their country. Nowadays the different ethnic and religious groups of Iraq are ruling the country together. Even though it is not working so well, this would have been completely unimaginable in Saddam's time. Now Shiites are ruling over Shiite territories, Sunnis over Sunni territories and Kurds over Kurdish territories. If they all found a common melody, Iraq could become an example to follow for the other Middle-Eastern countries.

At present, the system in Iraq is divided into three. Shiites have good relations with Iran and bad relations with Sunni countries. Sunni Arab nationalist groups have good relations with Sunni countries and very bad relations with Iran. The North-Iraqi Kurdish area is more democratic and secular than the rest of the country. This is despite the fact that Barzani, the leader of the Kurdish Federation, is actually fighting his own clan's case, not those of the Kurdish population.¹³⁰ He wants to implement a similar political system than in the Gulf countries, where only his family members can have

¹³⁰ Rubin Michael, "Dictatorship or Democracy in Iraqi Kurdistan?", 18 May 2010, [<http://www.micha-elrubin.org/7407/dictatorship-or-democracy-in-iraqi-kurdistan>].

access to power.¹³¹ Barzani has good relations with Iran as well as the Sunni countries. However, he is been collaborating with Turkey and Iran to fight *against* the Kurdish population in those countries, which has gravely irritated the Kurdish population.¹³²

7.6.3 *The U.S. Is Not Happy About the Warm Relations Between Iran and Iraq*

Despite the conflict on the borderline and the pressure the U.S. puts, Iran and Iraq's political and economic relations keep on ameliorating. This irritates the USA that now hopes that the Iraqi government will cut its relations with Iran or at least diminish them, as well as the influence Iran has in the country. However, it is very unlikely that U.S. could get the relations to deteriorate, at least as long as the Shiites are ruling the country. Iraq is now part of the Shiite axis, which ideological leader is Iran. Iraq supports Shiite groups in Lebanon and Syria.

Yet, Iraq is not a unitary country. The Iraqi Kurds have their own federation, which is like a state within a state. The leaders of the wealthy Kurdish federation do not comply with the legislation of Iraq's central government. They maintain good relations with the West. Through the Kurdish Federation, the U.S. and other Western countries are able to have a non-military presence in the country, and in some way to reduce Iran's influence over Iraq.

¹³¹ Abdulla Mufid, "Barzani's latest move to dictatorship", *Kurdistantribune* 2 July 2013, [<http://kurdistantribune.com/2013/barzanis-latest-move-dictatorship/>].

¹³² Rubin Michael, "Is Barzani really a nationalist?", 8 November 2012, [<http://kurdistantribune.com/2012/barzani-really-nationalist-redux/>].

Conclusion

In almost every country of the Middle-East and North-Africa region, historically as well as in the present times, there are three systems of government that prevail: the theocratic, securocratic, or monarchic system (or often some kind of mixture of these). When a system is changed, the new system almost invariably also belongs to one of these three categories.

For instance in Iran, the monarchic system was changed for a theocratic and securocratic system. In Saudi-Arabia, a mixture of the theocratic, monarchic and securocratic systems prevails. In Egypt, Syria, Algeria, Azerbaijan and Libya, the system is securocratic. As for the Persian Gulf countries, Jordan and Morocco, the ruling system is monarchic and securocratic. In the Middle East and North Africa region, a democratic system is a strange notion and almost unknown system of government so far. The implementation of democratic systems has until now never succeeded, notwithstanding the fact that that has been the peoples' ambition.

So why does it seem impossible to see a democratic state in the Middle East or North Africa (Israel being an exception)? After the World War I, the Western winners of the war drew the borderlines of most of the Middle-East region, dividing and mixing different ethnicities and religious groups together. They supported different ethnicities and religious groups against each other, as a part of their "divide and rule" policy. Instead of supporting democracy, the Great Powers have been supporting theocratic, monarchic and securocratic systems of government.

The Great Powers are aware that these forms of government do not have the people's support – that makes the rulers dependent of them. The Great Power's support for the ruler does not come for free. In exchange, they get cheap access to natural

resources and get to direct and control their foreign policies. In this game, the Great Powers and undemocratic rulers are winners, while the people and democratic principles are losers.

The best way to bring peace and stability to the Middle-East, North-Africa, or any developing country, would be through these principles:

- To stop supporting and selling arms to dictators and securocratic, monarchic and/or theocratic governments,
- Instead, focusing on supporting the forming of confederation political systems¹³³ in the region,
- Supporting the pro-democracy organizations in the region, and trying to spread the model of Western democracy, i.e. by trying to export the model of North-European welfare states (this would obviously be a long process stretching over many decades).

Since the Great Powers benefit from the Middle-East region not being stable, it is no wonder many feel no real change is possible until the Great Powers also adopt a new attitude.

Ever since 1980, the Iranians have tried many times to overthrow the current ruling system, and protested against it, without being able to catalyze change. In the massive demonstrations of 2009, hundreds were killed by the government, and many other protests have been smothered as well. Barack Obama recently claimed that the Arab Spring begun in Iran, but it died down because the foreign powers did not show

¹³³ A confederation governing system is a political system where its constituents decide to delegate some powers to a central governing body. Usually it is limited to certain specific policies, like foreign affairs or military co-operation. One of the features of a confederation is that a participating state has a right to withdraw from a confederation.

any support.¹³⁴ Many Iranians also feel that "Arab spring" in their country would be almost impossible without the help of foreign powers.

Building nuclear weapons, violations against human rights, supporting terrorism, the international community's sanctions, and the bad relations Iran has with most of the foreign powers – these are five signs that indicate that the "Iranian Spring" is dawning. Can Iranians change their political regime by themselves, or will they need international help?¹³⁵

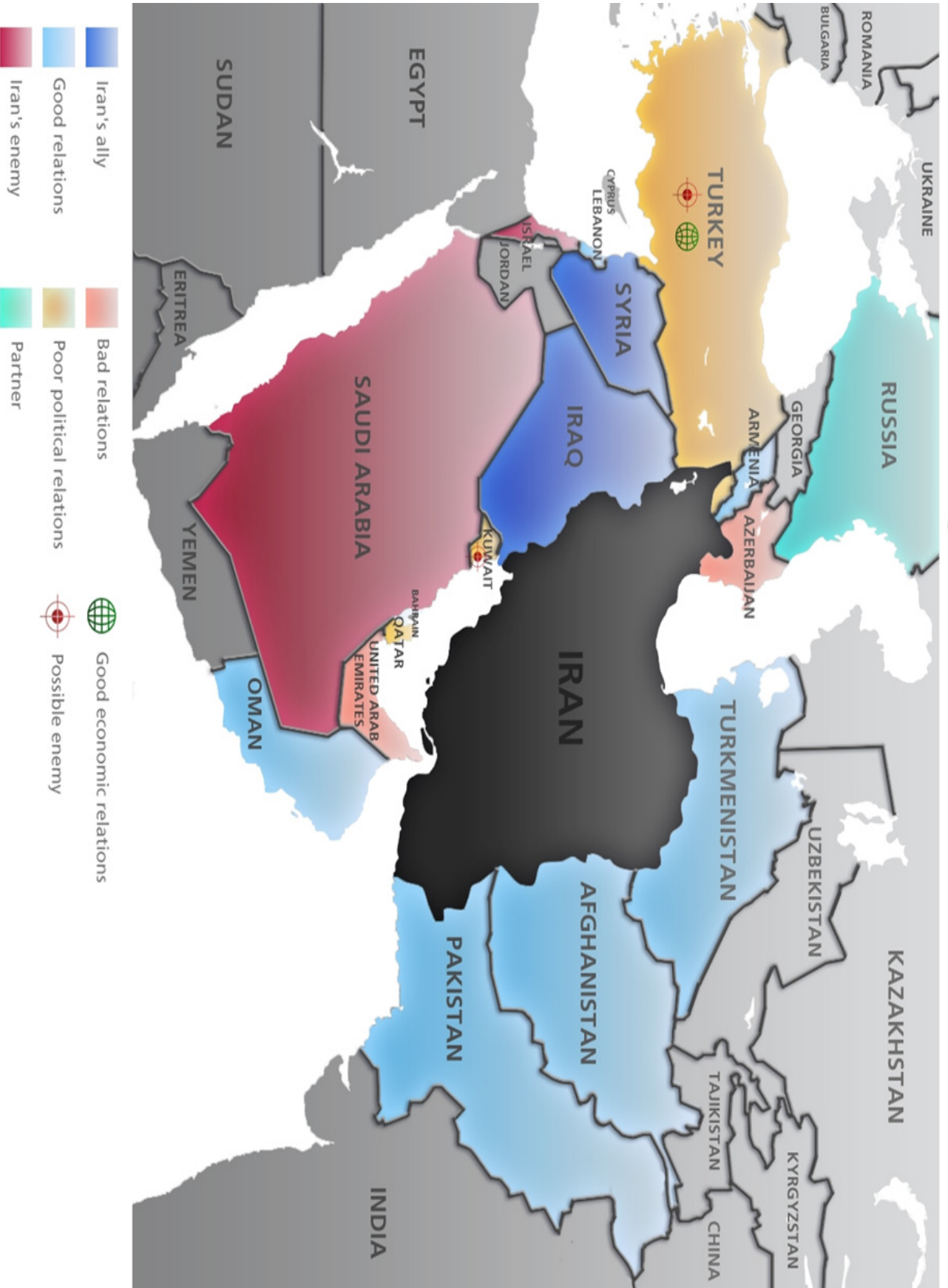
According to some experts, if the power system is changed in Iran, peace is likely to prevail in the Middle-East, since there would be no one left to support Islamic extreme-right parties, Hezbollah, or the Syrian regime, nor to threaten Israel and the Persian Gulf countries.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Obama Addresses 'Arab Spring' In Keynote Speech, *Radio Farda*, 2 September 2013, [http://www.radiofarda.com/content/o2_obama_speech_on_middel_east/24180208.html].

¹³⁵ For more information, see chapter "7. Iranian foreign policy" of this document.

¹³⁶ Farwick Dieter, "Iran's Ex-President Banisadr: "People want Regime Change", 18 February 2010, [<http://www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/Iran/dieter-farwick-1/Irans-Ex-President-Banisadr-People-want-Regime-Change>].

Iran's relations with its neighbors.



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