

# Geopolitical competition in the Middle East

A critical analysis of US-Iran competition for the regional order



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Map I: The United States



Source: NationMaster.com

Map II: The Islamic Republic of Iran



Source: NationMaster.com

Map III: The Middle East



Source: CIA Factbook

Map IV: Location of US Military bases around the Islamic Republic of Iran



Source: Juan Cole, Informed Comment website

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIPAC	The American Israel Public Affairs Committee
ARAMCO	The Saudi Arabian Oil Company
BP	British Petroleum
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
EIA	United States Energy Information Administration
EU	European Union
EU-3	France, Germany and the United Kingdom during nuclear negotiations with Iran
FSA	Free Syrian Army
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IEA	International Energy Administration
LNG	Liquefied natural gas
MI6	British Secret Intelligence Service Section 6
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NOC	National Oil Company
NPT	Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
P5+2	Permanent five members of the United Nations Security Council + EU and Germany
PKK	Parti Karkerani Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers' Party)
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
RDF	Rapid Defense Force
SCIRI	The Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SIF	Syrian Islamic Front
SLF	Syrian Liberation Front
SMC	Syrian Military Council
SOF	The National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces
TAPI	Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Pipeline
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	The United Kingdom
UN	The United Nations
US	The United States
WMEAT	World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers

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## **ABSTRACT**

The geopolitical competition between the United States (US) and the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Middle East has been analyzed in this thesis, with a focus on the post-Cold War era. Using a critical geopolitics theoretical framework, it has been analyzed how the foreign policy actions of the US and Iran have influenced each other, how they interact and how they play out on the ground.

Through this analysis it has been found that, on the one hand, the US has continued objectives of ensuring its energy security and preventing counter-hegemonic forces from gaining influence in the region by consolidating its bilateral relations with Arab states in the region, relying on its strategic alliance with Israel, projecting its military power in and around the region and limiting the increasing influence of contender states like China and Russia in the greater Middle East.

On the other hand, Iran has used a combination of support for non-governmental organizations, like Hezbollah, Hamas and militant anti-western forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, and an intensification of its political and economic relations with neighboring countries and Shia communities in the region to prevent further expansion of US power projection and ultimately remove US influence from the Middle East region altogether.

Although Iran and other contender states are effectively countering US objectives in the region, the attempt to form a united counter-hegemonic bloc has largely been in vain due to the slowly progressing ascension of Iran to full member status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and general distrust among the contender states themselves.

A case study of the Syrian civil war and the geopolitical competition that has arisen between the US and Iran concerning the conflict has found that the outcome of the Syrian civil war will, in part, determine in whose favor the geopolitical competition for the regional order between Iran and the US will be concluded.



## **CHAPTER 1 GEOPOLITICAL COMPETITION IN THE MIDDLE EAST: US AND IRAN**

### § 1.1 Introduction

The subject of this thesis is the regional order in the Middle East. It tries to analyze the role the United States (US) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (hereafter referred to as Iran or Islamic Republic) play and have played in influencing, changing and adapting to the regional order. Since the retreat of British forces from the Middle East in the 1970s and the Iranian Revolution in 1979 a power vacuum was created in the region, which Iran and the US have been competing to fill. This competition for influence and power to 'lead' the region has led to conflicting and competing interests between the two states and has resulted in political and economic tension and even talks of using military force (in the case of the US). The fall of the Soviet Union in 1989 has intensified the competition even more, incorporating now even more international actors (among others, China, Russia and Turkey) that try to gain influence in the most resource rich region of the world.

On the one hand, Iran has regional hegemonic ambitions and tries to gain a better foothold in the region's economic and political environment to become a more important regional player. On the other hand, the US is trying to preserve its influence in the region by consolidating relations with regimes in the Middle East through the use of diplomatic, political, economic and military tools and preventing counter-hegemonic forces from gaining more influence, in order to safeguard its economic and geopolitical interests.

The foreign policy decisions and 'acts on the ground' or foreign policy practice by the US undoubtedly influence the foreign policy decisions by Iran and vice versa. Instead of analyzing the geopolitical situation and environment of the Middle East as a constant in the analysis (i.e. analyzing how the US has acted in the Middle East to maximize their interests), I want to analyze how the foreign policy actions by both states influence and have influenced each other, how they interact and how they play out politically and economically on the ground.

In order to analyze and meet the above research objectives, this thesis will analyze the geopolitical competition between Iran and the US in the post-Cold War period. Its focus lies on Iran's and the US' economic, political and military forms of engagement with the region, analyzed through a geopolitical framework. Also, the geopolitical competition that takes place in Syria will be analyzed, as the outcome of that conflict will affect the stability and geopolitical landscape of the Middle Eastern region. The fact that the current situation in Syria has no clear outcome yet makes it an even more interesting and relevant subject to analyze and will contribute to understanding the consequences of certain outcomes of the Syrian conflict for the regional order in the Middle East.

The relevance of the topic of this thesis lies in the fact that the competition between Iran and the US for geopolitical influence in the Middle Eastern region can have far stretching economic and political

consequences, not only for the region itself, but for the greater part of the world. Most of the world's energy resources are located in the Middle East and any disturbance in the supply of these energy resources will have immediate negative effects on the world economy. The effects of the competition between Iran and the US in the region on (relations with) third parties (among others, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iraq, China and Russia) will therefore be incorporated in the research.

Also, most analyses of the geopolitical environment in relation to Iran and the US are conducted in a 'country A acts on geopolitical interests X and Y in the region'-fashion, but analyses of the type conducted in a 'the effect of country A's actions concerning its geopolitical interests X and Y in the region ON the geopolitical interests V and W of country B' have not been done before too extensively. This thesis' analysis thus contributes to understanding the geopolitical framework of the region and geopolitical competition in the Middle East.

In order to achieve the objectives of this research the following main research question has been formulated: "*How does the geopolitical competition between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran for the regional order influence each other's foreign policy and the regional order in the Middle East?*" In each chapter of this thesis smaller or 'sub'-questions will be answered in order to give a complete and coherent answer to the main research question, which will be elaborated upon in § 1.5 'Organization of Chapters'. The next section will give a short overview of the current sentiments and research concerning the regional system in the Middle East and the geopolitical competition that takes place.

## § 1.2 Literature review

### *Political economy of energy*

More than 50% of global proven oil reserves and more than 40% of global proven gas reserves are located in the Persian Gulf region, which makes control over this region a matter of national security to any developing or developed economy.<sup>1</sup> Energy security is a necessity to maintain economic growth and social welfare and has therefore been a very important component of the foreign policy of states around the world. The emergence of new economic powers, like China and India, in combination with the continued rise in energy consumption in developed western countries, have increased global energy demand drastically, which in turn has caused an increase in the rate of depletion of current fossil fuel reserves around the globe.<sup>2</sup> Maintaining energy supply security and the control of oil and gas producing regions is thus of crucial importance for national economies and, ultimately, the world economy. As Dr. Amir Sajedi states in his paper *Geopolitics of the Persian Gulf Security: Iran and the United States*, the Persian Gulf and Middle Eastern region in general are of special importance because

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<sup>1</sup> Sajedi, A. (2009) 'Geopolitics of the Persian Gulf Security: Iran and the United States', *IPRI Journal IX*, No. 2: 82.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*: 81

only a few countries in the world are capable to maintain a steady energy export in the coming decades, most of which are located in the Persian Gulf.<sup>3</sup> Securing access to energy resources in these countries is thus of significant importance to industrialized countries that are in need of fossil energy. Other countries in this region that are not producing oil are still of geopolitical importance, because most of the transit hubs and transportation infrastructure for oil and other fossil fuels are hosted there. Political and economic stability is a necessity to ensure a constant level of production and to attract domestic and foreign direct investment for the development of new oil and gas sites and diversifying transportation routes. Also, the recent Arab spring has shown that social unrest can have a tremendous impact on the (perceived) availability of oil and its price.

The uprising and civil war of Libya has demonstrated that supporting authoritarian regimes in resource rich countries with the objective of economic and political stability often works in the short-term, but not in the long-term. Muammar Qaddafi's regime (as well as those of Egypt, Bahrain, Iraq and Iran) was supported for a long time by western powers, in order to keep the supply of oil from that country steady and stable. However, political and economic unrest that have arisen because of the extractive institutions present and lack of democratic inclusive institutions have resulted in an uprising and civil war, disrupting a steady supply of oil. Furthermore, the regimes in the Middle East (and North Africa) region often rely to a great extent on the income derived of oil and gas export, which makes their economies extremely sensitive to oil and gas price fluctuations. These authoritarian regimes derive a certain level of legitimacy by financing social welfare programs with petrodollars. The political and economic environment in these countries is thus dependent on the stability of the oil sector and vice versa.

Also of concern to both producer and consumer countries is the stability of three so-called choke points through which a majority of global oil is shipped: the Bab el-Mandab passage, which connects the Gulf of Aden with the Red Sea; the Suez Canal and the Sumed pipeline; and the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20% of the world's oil passes.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the Suez Canal also carries around 8% of the world trade over water.<sup>5</sup> Unrest near these choke points can easily disrupt the transportation of oil and world trade, raising oil and gas prices globally and potentially disturbing the world's economy. Political stability in countries surrounding these choke points and security thereof is of high importance to both consumers and producers of fossil fuels.

The Middle East is thus of great geopolitical strategic importance to international actors. Whoever controls the resources, infrastructure and waterways of the region can to a great extent determine the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.: 81.

<sup>4</sup> Yergin, D. (2006) 'Ensuring Energy Security', *Foreign Affairs* 85(2): pp. 78.

<sup>5</sup> 'Suez Canal, Carrying 8% of Trade, Open Amid Unrest'. *Bloomberg* website. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-01-31/egypt-s-suez-canal-carrying-8-of-world-trade-remains-open-amid-violence.html>

future of many countries.<sup>6</sup> What, however, are the national interests specific to the US and Iran pertaining to the region and what drives the competition between the two actors for geopolitical hegemony in the region?

### *The US in the Gulf region*

The end of the Cold War and collapse of a superpower left the Caspian region and the Middle East open for competition, primarily between Iran and the US.<sup>7</sup> As the world's largest oil consumer, the US is determined to secure and control its access to global energy resources. In the Central Eurasian and Caspian regions, the US is primarily trying to diminish Russia's control and position concerning fossil resources and transport routes.<sup>8</sup> In the Middle East, the US's primary concern is security of supply from the Persian Gulf, which accounts for 25% of US oil imports.<sup>9</sup> As said before, due to the high (and rising) demand for oil and finite nature of fossil resources, most oil producing countries and regions will notice a reduction in energy exports in the future, with few countries left able to maintain current export levels.<sup>10</sup> The Persian Gulf region is thus of vital importance for current and future US national security and this is reflected in the large portion of US foreign policy that is directed to this region. The importance of the Persian Gulf for exporting oil will continue to increase, as other energy reserves grow empty and world energy consumption continues to rise.

Over the past century, the US (and other industrialized countries) has tried to gain and maintain influence and access to the energy resources in the region using various policy tools. Since 25% of US oil imports originate from the Persian Gulf, it is of US' national interest to ensure political and economic stability in both producer countries and neighboring countries that are host to transit hubs, ports, pipelines and other infrastructure that are necessary for the steady production and transportation of energy resources. Furthermore, the industrial countries accountable for a large portion of the world's economy (European countries, Japan, India and China) are dependent on Persian Gulf oil imports as well and have made substantial financial investments in the region. This makes the stability and security of the region of indirect national interest to the US as well.<sup>11</sup>

The first most notable action the US took in respect to maintaining influence and a steady supply of oil was the coup d'état and overthrow of the government of Prime Minister Mossadeq in Iran in 1953.<sup>12</sup> The democratically elected Mossadeq planned to nationalize all oil companies in the country and limit foreign influence in the oil business and Iranian economy. Fearing this would result in higher oil

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<sup>6</sup> Sajedi, A. (2009): 79.

<sup>7</sup> Najj, S., and J.A. Jawan (2011) 'US-Iran Relations in the Post-Cold War Geopolitical Order', *Asian Social Science*, Vol.7, No.9: 103.

<sup>8</sup> Amineh, M. (2003) 'Handout of lecture held on June 19 2003: Globalisation, Geopolitics and Energy Security in Central Eurasia and the Caspian Region': 4.

<sup>9</sup> Sajedi, A. (2009): 83.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.: 82.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.: 83.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.: 83-84.

prices for western countries and higher dependence on the government in power, the secret agencies of the US and Great Britain staged a coup using the MI6 and CIA and the support of opponents of Mossadeq and brought back Muhammed Reza Shah into power. By keeping this Western-friendly government in power, the US and Great Britain secured a steady and cheap supply of oil from Iran.

The withdrawal of British forces from the Gulf region in the 1970s was of great concern to the US because this created a power vacuum in the Middle East.<sup>13</sup> The US did not want to take on security responsibilities in the region itself, because of its engagement in the Vietnam War, and wanted to prevent the Soviet Union from filling the vacuum instead. Because they needed another actor to take on this responsibility, the US started to expand Iran's military might with more advanced weaponry and building military bases across the country. This helped the Shah to control its neighboring states and ensure peace and security in the region.<sup>14</sup>

The fall of the Shah in 1979 and the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran under the anti-Western Ayatollah Khomeini, in addition to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the same year, forced the US to take on another approach to the region. This 'Carter Doctrine' held that any attempt of an outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region would be regarded an "assault on the vital interests of the United States of America" and would be met with any means necessary, including military force.<sup>15</sup> This new approach and previous approaches of the US in regard to the region have led to the superior position in the region that the US holds today, making other world powers dependent on the US for security and stability of the region.

The terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 have led the US to regard terrorism as a threat to the international system.<sup>16</sup> Not only does terrorism threaten US security interests at home and abroad, but terrorism has the potential of destabilizing several countries in the Middle East and eventually the region itself.

In this light, the US has developed intensive relationships and has signed various bilateral agreements with Arab states in the Middle East, among which Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Oman and Pakistan, to consolidate its influence in the region. Many of these Arab states are host to US military, navy and/or air force bases, providing the US with logistical military support in the region. These states receive international political support from the US as well, despite their often undemocratic nature and lack of human right standards.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.: 84.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.: 85.

<sup>15</sup> The State of the Union Address by President of U.S. Jimmy Carter to the Congress on 23 January 1980, cited in *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* (28 January 1980): 197.

<sup>16</sup> Sajedi, A. (2009): 86.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

### *Iran's regional policy*

Iran has a central role concerning the access to gas and oil resources the Middle Eastern region. It possesses the second largest proven gas reserves and the fourth largest oil reserves of the planet and geographically it lies in between the Middle East, the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf, which combined constitute the largest reserves of fossil fuels on the planet.<sup>18</sup> Despite US sanctions imposed on Iran since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, in 2006 Iran was the world's 4<sup>th</sup> largest oil producer and takes its place amongst the biggest exporters, mainly exporting to Japan, China, India and European countries.<sup>19</sup> Iran is suspected to become an even more important supplier of gas in the near future, as gas is gradually replacing oil and coal as the main source of energy. However, Iran's regional ambitions are being hampered by high domestic energy consumption and international sanctions imposed on it.

Iran's rich oil and gas reserves have attracted foreign attention since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and continue to do so until this day.<sup>20</sup> After being subject to 'Great Game' rivalry between the British and Russians in the early 1900s, the Soviet Union and Great Britain invaded Iran in 1941 to prevent it from allying with Germany and took control of the supply line to the Soviet Union and the country's petroleum infrastructure and industry. When in 1951 the newly elected government of Prime Minister Mossadeq nationalized the petroleum industry, the US and Great Britain intervened and overthrew the Iranian government, replacing it with the Western-friendly monarchy of Muhammed Reza Shah, which ruled the country until the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The government of Ayatollah Khomeini, however, pursued a foreign policy which focused on 'exporting' Islamic ideology and resisting influence by western forces in the region, particularly American. Its policies were deemed hostile to American interests by US policy makers and Iran has been target of US containment policy ever since, aimed at isolating Iran and cutting its ties with the international community.<sup>21</sup>

Iran's mainly ideology based foreign policy changed after Khomeini's death in 1989 and the election of president Rafsanjani.<sup>22</sup> Changes in the constitution gave the president more power and the death of the Ayatollah influenced the views of Iranian policy makers on international relations and the geopolitics of the region. This resulted in a more pragmatic foreign policy with a greater focus on Iranian national interests. Rather than 'exporting Islam', Rafsanjani pursued friendly relations with neighboring countries, improved Iran's connections with the global economy and participated in more international and regional organizations. Tehran also aimed to fill the vacuum created in the Caspian and Central Asian region after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which became a region of competition between international actors due to its vast reserves of energy resources. The US has

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<sup>18</sup> CIA – The World Factbook: Iran.

<sup>19</sup> Coskun, B. (2009) 'Global Energy Geopolitics and Iran', *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol.5, No.20: 180-181.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*: 183.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Naji, S. & Javan, J. (2011): 96.

actively tried to prevent Iran from gaining more influence in that region by exploiting energy reserves in Iran's neighboring countries, preventing new pipelines from being built in Iranian territory and sanctioning companies that try to trade with or invest in their Iranian counterparts.<sup>23</sup>

To balance against the US' containment strategy, Iran has tried to connect its economy and improve its political relations with China and India.<sup>24</sup> Iranian oil is attractive to Beijing due to China's rising energy consumption and declining national reserves. Furthermore, the West's policy of sanctioning and isolating Iran has resulted in a situation without competition from US or European actors. Enhancing relations with China is also beneficial for Iran: it gains a market for its oil exports and creates political and economic relations with a permanent United Nations (UN) Security Council Member. The relationship between Iran and China is continuously deepening and getting more significant, evidenced by the increasingly opposed stance China takes towards international sanctions aimed at Iran's nuclear program.<sup>25</sup>

Despite Iran's vast energy reserves, high domestic energy consumption has prevented Iran from exporting more of its natural resources. To counter this problem, Iran has been actively pursuing alternative forms of energy, including nuclear energy, since the 1970s. The US, Great Britain, Germany and France cooperated with Iran to build its nuclear projects until the 1979 Revolution, after which they withdrew from Iran and reversed their stance regarding Iran's right to nuclear energy. The US and other western states claim that Iran is planning to build nuclear weapons when it reaches the needed technological expertise, though Iran has always denied this and stated that the nuclear program is for civilian purposes only.

During president Ahmadinejad's first term (2005-2009), Iran's foreign policy had two main components. On the one hand, Tehran aimed at expanding cooperation with Arab nations, such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and seeking direct talks with the American government to solve the security dilemma between Iran and the US. On the other hand, by building relationships with friendly states in the region (i.e. Syria) and regional political movements (Hezbollah and militant Palestinian groups) and trying to connect the nuclear issue to a wider regional context (Israel's undeclared nuclear arsenal and American involvement in Pakistan's nuclear program), Iran tries to undermine US interests and create a counter-hegemonic force.<sup>26</sup>

Iran's main security challenges after the fall of Saddam Hussein in Iraq are the US military presence in the region, which surrounds Iran with military bases and naval fleets, and domestic instability in Iraq. This could lead to a failed state or break down Iraq into multiple little federations in which Iran's

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Coskun, B. (2009): 184 + Naji, S. & Jawan, J. (2011): 96.

<sup>25</sup> Coskun, B. (2009): 184.

<sup>26</sup> Barzegar, K. (2010) 'Iran's foreign policy strategy after Saddam', *Washington Quarterly*: 173.

adversaries can gain more influence and create anti-Iran pro-West Sunni based governments.<sup>27</sup> For example, Saudi Arabia has been increasingly active in Iraq's Shi'a and Kurdish issues, joined by efforts of Turkey, Jordan and Egypt to prevent a Shi'ite government from arising in Iraq, which could essentially strengthen Iran's geopolitical position in the region. Among other things, Iran has addressed these issues by supporting Shi'ite factions in Iraq to gain influence in the political system and supporting moderate political factions that vowed to improve relations with Iran when elected.<sup>28</sup>

As shown, most of the reviewed literature analyzes the competition between the US and Iran in the Middle Eastern region from a position that the US is trying to maintain its influence in the Middle Eastern region and that Iran is trying to change that order. Political and economic interests are reviewed from both sides, but emphasize US' security issues and national interests in relation to its involvement in the region and portray Iran as an actor that opposes the US for both ideological reasons and its ambitions as a regional hegemonic power. Iran has shown to be very pragmatic in its foreign policy pertaining to the region and its involvement with neighbors and other regional actors. However, Iran's national interests and rationale are underrepresented in the reviewed literature. Its geopolitical and geo-economic rationale can be analyzed the same as is often done for US. Especially the interaction and interconnectedness of US' and Iranian interests in the region has been underexposed in the existing literature. Both actors want stability and security in the region, but prefer different ways of achieving those goals, thus hindering each other in securing their respective interests in the region, while a combined approach of the US and Iran could possibly work best. In this thesis I will analyze through a critical geopolitics' framework the geopolitical competition that takes place in the Middle East.

### § 1.3 The three theoretical frameworks

In order to analyze the competition between the US and Iran in the Middle East, three main theoretical frameworks will be used. To explain and analyze the presence and interest of the US in the Middle Eastern region, the concept of energy security will be explained. Following is a brief overview of the 'scarcity model', which effectively demonstrates in which ways and by which factors resource scarcity is formed. Lastly, the theories of critical geopolitics will be used to find the geo-economic factors that lie at the basis of policy decisions and actions of the US and Iran in the Middle East and analyze the effect of those factors on the regional system and competition therefor in the region.

#### § 1.3.1 Energy security

Energy security is a main integral part of a state's security. To have 'energy security' entails that a state has access to the energy resources it needs and that energy supply can meet domestic demand

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.: 175.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.: 178.

uninterrupted. In contemporary industrialized economies energy security is growing increasingly important still, because it is crucial for the national security of a country. Current capitalist and industrialized economies are dependent on the availability of natural energy resources, such as coal, oil and gas, for maintaining and developing economic growth. However, natural energy resources are not evenly distributed around the globe and instead concentrated in a select number of regions, like the Caucasus and the Persian Gulf. This has been cause for international tension and competition for the control over those resources by states and non-state actors. Control over these natural resources and their modes of transportation yields great political and economic influence and effectively grants the one controlling a great deal of influence over other actors that are dependent on those same resources.

As Daniel Yergin states in his article *Ensuring Energy Security*, relatively ‘new’ developments, like increased globalization, rapid evolution of global energy trade, supply-chain vulnerabilities, terrorism and the integration of major new economies into the world market, further complicate the world’s energy landscape.<sup>29</sup> Yergin lays out a few key principles and methods that states should operationalize to increase and secure their supply of natural energy resources: diversification of supply, meaning to multiply sources of supply to ensure that the impact of a disruption of supply from one source is reduced; resilience or a ‘security margin’, which can entail, among others, saving a strategic reserve of resources, backup equipment and spare production capacity of domestic resources; recognizing the reality of integration of the global energy market and the consequent necessity of the stability of this market; and lastly, the importance of information, which lies at the basis of the functioning of the global energy market and the stability thereof.<sup>30</sup> However, developments in the past years have made it necessary to expand the concept of energy security in two dimensions: the recognition of the globalization of energy security and the acknowledgment that the entire energy supply chain needs to be secured and protected, not just the energy reserves themselves.<sup>31</sup>

### § 1.3.2 Scarcity model

As many other resources, natural energy resources are finite and there is not enough of it to meet total world demand. This has led to tension and competition for access and control over these resources by states and non-state actors. The price of fossil fuels is governed by the general economic principle of supply and demand. However, producing countries have a diverse set of methods ready to influence the price of energy resources when deemed necessary of profitable, such as lowering the actual production of oil in order to artificially ‘lower’ the global energy resource pool. Also, states use existing bilateral ties and agreements with producer countries, or set up new ones, in order to trade energy resources for reduced prices, secure a stable supplier and/or ally, and enhance one’s energy security. The resource scarcity model, developed by M. Amineh and H. Houweling, helps to

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<sup>29</sup> Yergin, D. (2006) ‘Ensuring Energy Security’, *Foreign Affairs* 85(2): 70.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*: 76.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*: 76-77.

understand and analyze the causes and forms of resource scarcity and simplifies the very complex global energy system. The model consists of three main types of scarcity: demand-induced scarcity, supply-induced scarcity and structural scarcity.<sup>32</sup>

*Demand-induced scarcity* is described as the consequence of the global increase in fossil fuel consumption, which leads to a decrease in the per capita availability of those fossil fuels because they originate from a fixed or finite stock. Population growth, rise of per capita income and technological development and change are attributed as causes for demand-induced scarcity, as these factors increase general demand. This leads to conclude that the integration of new industrialized economies into the world economy and the rise of per capita income in industrializing countries heighten the tension on and competition for global energy resource reserves.<sup>33</sup>

*Supply-induced scarcity* is caused by the decreasing size of energy resources, which equates to a lower supply of those resources. General economic logic dictates that the point of intersection between supply and demand of a good determines its consumer price. However, in the case of fossil fuels, supply induced scarcity has not translated directly into gradual price increases. Supply-induced scarcity, or anticipation thereof, may provoke import-dependent states to use hard- and/or soft-power mechanisms to gain control over supply stocks or the territory those stocks reside in. The strength of regimes and military capability of possible 'target' producer countries determine the capability to defend against unwanted intervention by outsiders.<sup>34</sup>

*Structural scarcity* is a form of supply-induced scarcity, but as a result of deliberate action(s) by major powers, by non-state actors such as oil companies, or by producer cartels such as OPEC. Over the past decades there have been many instances of structural-induced scarcity, for example the overthrow of the Mossadeq government of Iran in 1953 and the support for and alliance with Saddam Hussein in Iraq, until he invaded Kuwait. The US is effectively enabling itself to induce structural scarcity for outsiders of its choosing, by extending its military defense perimeter into the heart of resource-rich regions, most notably the Persian Gulf and greater Middle East region.<sup>35</sup>

The resource scarcity model will help in analyzing the reasons and methods of the US for intervening and wanting control over certain states and territories in resource-rich regions, while keeping eye on the ramifications and effects of such actions on the global energy market and possible counter-actions that other actors might pursue to help ensure their own energy security.

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<sup>32</sup> Amineh, M. & Houweling, H. (2007) 'Global Energy Security and its Geopolitical Impediments – The Case of the Caspian Region', *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology*, 6 (1-3): 374.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.: 374-375.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.: 375.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.: 376.

### § 1.3.3 Critical Geopolitics

Traditional geopolitics can be thought of similar to the heritage of Realism in the study of International Relations, in which the nation state is the primary actor and international relations are essentially a balance of power game, played within an anarchical world order.<sup>36</sup> Critical or neo-geopolitics, however, incorporates the discourse of geo-economics as well, which offers a more complex approach to international relations. In this era of enhanced globalization, traditional usage and definitions of ‘geography’ and ‘political’ needed to be revised. Herein, national security is no longer subject only to threats by other states, but states are integrated in a transnational economic power structure which has essentially ‘globalized’ national security itself.<sup>37</sup> The inclusion of transnational organizations and corporations, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction linked to organized crime and radical religious organizations, and the globalization of finance and rise of foreign direct investment in the neo-geopolitical discourse have made it a more complex and potent analytical approach to world politics.<sup>38</sup>

‘Critical’ in critical geopolitics refers to the ‘why’ (causes of policy) and ‘how’ (policies and strategies themselves) questions that have largely been neglected or underexposed in traditional theories of geopolitics. Critical geopolitics does address these questions and analyzes the relative importance of geo-economic and geopolitical variables that lie at the basis of policy making.<sup>39</sup> According to Mercille, geographers have generally conceived of geo-economics in three ways: firstly, as referring to the natural resources contained in a region and the control and exploitation of these resources; secondly, as “discourse closely linked to the economic imperatives of the global economy”; and lastly, “to point to the flows of trade, finance and capital over global space and across borders, taking into consideration the political aspects behind such movements”.<sup>40</sup>

The theory of critical geopolitics is very useful for analyses of Iran-US relations and interaction in the Middle East, because of the large focus on geo-economic logics behind policy making and actions, while not losing track of the (geo)political logics and ramifications as well. These logics have been the base of foreign policy actions of many states in the Middle Eastern region in the past and present. Critical geopolitics does not only look at the national interests of a certain state, but also incorporates fully the integration of the economy of that state in the global economy and tries to analyze the

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<sup>36</sup> Amineh, M. (2003): 2.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Gagné, J.F. (2007) ‘Geopolitics in a Post-Cold War Context: From Geo-Strategic to Geo-Economic Considerations?’. *Raoul-Dandurand Chair of Strategic and Diplomatic Studies*, Occasional Paper no.15: 4. + Hazbun, W., ‘The Middle East through the lens of Critical Geopolitics: Globalization, Terrorism, and the Iraq War’, in Bonine, M, Gasper, M., and A. Amanat (eds.) *Is there a Middle East? The Evolution of a Geopolitical Concept*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011: 214.

<sup>39</sup> Mercille, J. (2008) ‘The radical geopolitics of US foreign policy: Geopolitical and geoeconomic logics of power’, *Political Geography* 27: 570.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.: 576.

interconnectedness of the state and the international system. Using this approach to analyze relations between Iran and the US is most relevant and interesting, because Iran and the US basically have the same objectives and goals in mind for the Middle Eastern region (regional stability and security). However, they take different approaches on how to achieve those aims as a result of their position in the regional and global order and their relative position in the global economy. Also, because the competition between Iran and the US for regional hegemony directly and indirectly impacts third parties - such as other states in the region (among others, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Iraq and Turkey) and 'contender states' that have interests in the region (Russia, China and (members of) the Shanghai Cooperation Organization) –, critical geopolitics' theories will enable me to analyze consequences of American and Iranian foreign policies and practices on third party states. Further, considering the importance and weight of Iran's nuclear energy program on the relations between the US and Iran for the past decades, the focus of geopolitical theories on energy and resources will be useful in analyzing the effects of Iran's nuclear program. Theories of critical geopolitics will help me to determine and analyze the causes of foreign policy actions and national interests pertaining to regional aims and the competition between the US and Iran in the Middle East region.

#### § 1.4 Research method

For this research, multiple methods of data gathering and a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data will be used. Quantifiable data, such as economic data, trade statistics, bilateral and multilateral relations of the countries in question with other global and regional actors, treaties and such will be analyzed to give an overview of contemporary and current relations and developments between the actors and within the region that shape the region's order or system. However, qualitative data will be primarily used in this research. A diverse set and range of literature, academic and scientific papers and articles, official government publications, working papers, international and online resources, will be used to analyze the official foreign policy objectives and tools that the countries in question utilize to secure their interests and objectives in the region in question. Quantitative data, such as trade statistics and energy markups, will supplement the literature in giving a complete and coherent picture of affairs.

Sources that are going to be used in this research are, among others: data of agencies such as the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) and the International Energy Agency (IEA); primary literature from government websites or other forms of publication, official speeches and statements; secondary literature from internationally recognized academic and scientific journals such as Middle East Journal, Asian Social Science, Foreign Policy, Political Geography, Journal of Iranian Studies and others; and general news outlets and services.

## § 1.5 Organization of chapters

This thesis is organized as follows. In the second chapter, the geopolitical interests of Iran and the US in the Middle East will be analyzed. A historical background of both countries' foreign policy and practice concerning the greater Middle East will be given and an overview of their energy security issues in the region will be made. This analysis will be organized in two different parts, focusing respectively on US' and Iran's foreign policy, from the Second World War until present. The third chapter will analyze the geopolitical competition that takes place in the greater Middle East, focusing on the political, diplomatic, economic and military policy tools Iran and the US use to operationalize their foreign policy objectives. In the fourth chapter, I will analyze the geopolitical competition that has arisen in the current Syrian civil war and in what way that conflict can influence the future regional order and geopolitical environment of the region. The fifth, and last, chapter will finalize this thesis with general findings and conclusions.

The next chapter will analyze the foreign policies and geopolitical interests of Iran and the US in the greater Middle East, from the Second World War until present.



## CHAPTER 2 US' AND IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

### § 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter the foreign policies and geopolitical interests of the US and Iran in the greater Middle East will be analyzed. An overview of both countries' foreign policy and practice in the region from the end of the Second World War (WWII) until present will be given. Questions that will be answered in this chapter are: What has been the foreign policy of respectively the US and Iran concerning the Middle East during and after the Cold War? What did US-Iran relations comprise of during these periods? These questions will be answered in a 'US-part' and an 'Iran-part'.

### § 2.2 US' foreign policy in the Middle East

This section will give an overview of US' foreign policy in the Middle East in the Cold War period (1946-1989) and the post-Cold War period (1989-present). The distinction between the two time periods has been made because the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union marked a fundamental shift in the geopolitical environment in the greater Middle East.

#### § 2.2.1 Cold War period (1946-1989): energy security and containment of the Soviet Union

As stated in chapter 1, access to natural energy resources, such as coal, oil and gas, is a key part of a state's national security. Control over energy resources and secure modes of transportation thereof yield great political and economic influence and are crucial for maintaining a functioning modern society and growing economy. As Amineh and Houweling write, the venture of US forces and influence into the Middle East region after WWII, in particular the Persian Gulf, is a result not just of the bipolar structure of the international state system, but can be traced back to state-society relations that have been thoroughly analyzed in critical geopolitics discourse.<sup>41</sup> Introducing affordable automobiles to the market and installing air conditioning systems across country, oil quickly became a commodity that was inherently linked to society's wealth and growing economy. Domestic natural resource reserves not being able to meet domestic demand for energy, the US sought access to fossil fuel beyond its legal national borders and effectively expanded its zone of influence or 'defense perimeter' to the Persian Gulf and other resource-rich regions of the globe. This was necessary to safeguard the way of living the American public was getting accustomed to and to prevent the economy from coming to a halt. Also, control of resource rich regions and the oil price was necessary to not become dependent on decisions made by foreign powers.<sup>42</sup>

The Middle East was put on the fossil resource map in 1908, when a British company, later to become British Petroleum or BP, discovered a sizeable oil reserve in Persia. In 1938, Standard Oil of

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<sup>41</sup> Amineh, M. & Houweling, H. (2007): 357.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.: 358.

California struck a large oil reserve in Saudi Arabia, which marked the entrance of the US in Middle East oil. In addition to oil having a high economic value, oil became important for the running of military machinery in the Second World War and gained a strategic security dimension.<sup>43</sup> As Hudson writes, now both the British and American had “seen the military and economic value of Middle East oil, (...), not only for prosecuting World War II but also as a cheap supplement to declining US reserves, and the West’s oil-driven post-war economic development”.<sup>44</sup> In the words of Hanks and Cortell, “It would not be an exaggeration to say that anyone who controls the waters of this region will have the ability to determine the fate of several countries, especially the powerful industrial countries of the world”.<sup>45</sup>

With these developments and the growing threat of Soviet expansion after the war in mind, the US had two main objectives regarding the greater Middle East: containment of the Soviet Union and access to oil. By 1970, half of the US’ oil was imported, of which half originated from the Middle East.<sup>46</sup> In order to continue Cold War efforts around the globe, ensure a healthy and growing economy domestically and in allied nations, and preventing the Soviet Union from getting foothold in the region, it was key to exclude Soviet influence from the Middle East and to prevent internal nationalist forces from nationalizing Western oil companies, disrupt the flow of oil or toppling friendly West-oriented regimes. In essence, the US pursued the construction of a regional order based on American hegemony and the control over the region’s security through direct military action and indirectly through relations with other regional entities. However, it was not only a matter of securing continued access to the region’s natural resources that lay at the basis of US foreign policy, but also to keep regional economies from turning communist and ensuring investment, trade and other economic relations would continue. The US would be able to shape domestic institutions of nations in the region if their economies followed the same “rules of conduct in the global economy”.<sup>47</sup> American foreign policy was thus also aimed at advocating for the global economy to be policed by international institutions with the US as the most powerful actor. The US pursued these objectives through various ways, among which diplomacy, aid, education, covert operations and military power projection.<sup>48</sup>

The first major action the US took to safeguard its access to oil and prevent Soviet expansion in the region was in reaction to the election of the nationalistic democrat Muhammad Mossadeq to Prime Minister of Iran and his plans to nationalize Western oil companies in the country. Fearing that the access to cheap oil would be endangered and that Mossadeq would steer the country’s international

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<sup>43</sup> Hudson, M. (1996) ‘To Play the Hegemon: Fifty Years of US Policy toward the Middle East’, *Middle East Journal*, Vol.50, No.3: 332.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Sajedi, A. (2009): 79.

<sup>46</sup> Hudson, M. (1996): 332.

<sup>47</sup> Amineh, M. & Houweling, H. (2007): 353-4.

<sup>48</sup> Sajedi, A. (2009): 83.

relations into the Soviet camp, the US and Great Britain engineered a coup d'état that overthrew Mossadeq and brought back the Shah into power in 1953.<sup>49</sup> The US and allies continued to support the Shah of Iran with economic aid, weapons and advanced military and peaceful nuclear technology until the Islamic Revolution of 1979, as will be elaborated upon in section § 2.3.1.

The US showed further interest in the Middle East when it declared the Eisenhower Doctrine official policy in 1957, which stated that the US aimed at aiding nations in the region with economic and military means “to secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of such nations, requesting such aid, against over armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism”.<sup>50</sup> Among other events, the US used the pretext of this doctrine to assist the United Kingdom (UK) in its military intervention in Jordan in 1958 and to position naval forces near the Strait of Hormuz to protect Iranian oil fields from the crisis in Lebanon.<sup>51</sup> While one could not speak of an attack by a nation “controlled by international communism”, nationalist uprisings in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan were however publicly spoken about in terms of “international communism” rather than “nationalism”, while admitting privately that the real cause behind the uprisings was indeed more Arab nationalism related.<sup>52</sup> The Eisenhower Doctrine served in that sense also more as a signal or deterrent to the Soviet Union. However, it was never fully acted upon in the form of a full scale military intervention. The consideration was always made between securing national US interests in the region and ensuring access to natural resources, and preventing a full scale US-Soviet war from arising in the Middle East. This resulted in situations where the US did not directly intervene but rather aided parties of interest with economic, military (as in weapons) and other forms of support, such as, noted above, the American support for the British intervention in Jordan in 1958.<sup>53</sup>

This indirect approach took a more apparent form when the British announced their withdrawal from the Persian Gulf region 1971, leaving the nations under former British influence in a vulnerable position to outside and regional powers' interference.<sup>54</sup> Due to its engagement in the Vietnam War, the US did not want to take over Gulf security singlehandedly and instead pursued a policy of letting local friendly powers – i.e. Iran and Saudi Arabia – safeguard Persian Gulf stability. Under the Nixon administration, Iran's military apparatus was reinforced by supplying American made advanced military weaponry and building military and naval bases in and outside the Persian Gulf. The US considered Iran as a “bulwark against the expansion of the Soviet Union influence” and used the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.: 83-4.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.: 84 + Michaels, J. (2011) 'Dysfunctional Doctrines? Eisenhower, Carter and US Military Intervention in the Middle East', *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol.126, No.3: 472.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.: 473.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.: 477.

<sup>54</sup> Sajedi, A. (2009): 84.

Shah's Iran as a "regional super-power" or 'regional gendarme' to safeguard its interests against the Soviet Union.<sup>55</sup> This changed, however, in 1979, when the Iranian Islamic Revolution took place and Iran was transformed into the Islamic Republic of Iran under the rule of Ayatollah Khomeini. The coup d'état of 1953 and the dictatorial rule under Reza Shah and his son Reza Shah Muhammad had laid the foundations for the Islamic Revolution to arise, which will be elaborated upon further in section § 2.3.1. Suffice it to say, the Iranian Revolution marked a dramatic change in US-Iran relations. From being an allied 'West-friendly' state under the Shah, Iran now pursued a foreign policy of 'exporting the revolution' and 'neither East nor West'. Its foreign policy comprised of both ideological or dogmatic and pragmatic policies and deliberations. It was clear, however, that Iran did not again want to be under the influence of another superpower and began pursuing its own interests in the region. To make matters even worse for the US, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in late 1979 and it was feared that it would push through to states in the Persian Gulf. A new and more direct doctrine was needed for the US to safeguard its energy security and affiliated interests in the Middle East region.

On January 23th of 1980, in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan – which provided "a grave threat to the free movement of Middle East oil" – President Carter stated the following in his State of the Union address: "Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by an outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States. It will be repelled by the use of any means necessary, including military force."<sup>56</sup> The position of the US regarding the Persian Gulf and its rich oil resources was now absolutely clear: any intervention would be met with a direct US military response and the US was willing to deploy its armed forces in the region in order to safeguard the region's oil supplies. Although stressing the importance of the Persian Gulf for national security had been US policy for years, making it official and 'militarizing' policy in an official statement meant that there was now a public commitment to generate the necessary financial resources and military apparatus – the creation of a Rapid Defense Force (RDF) – to be able to act on the statements.<sup>57</sup> Britain immediately supported the Carter Doctrine and planned to create a RDF of its own. Many other US allies, however, were offended that they were not consulted about the new Middle East policy beforehand and resistance to the doctrine was also found in the region itself, fearing that the development of a US military force in the Persian Gulf could just as well be used against them as the Soviets. Therefore the US had to carefully balance their diplomatic, political and military measures to prevent the Gulf states from regarding the US military force as a threat to their oil resources rather than protecting them from the Soviet Union. As Michaels

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<sup>55</sup> Naji, S. & Jawan, J. (2011) 'The US Geopolitical Codes and Its Influences on the US-Iran Relations: The Case of George W. Bush's Presidency', *Journal of Politics and Law*, Vol.4, No.1: 232.

<sup>56</sup> Jimmy Carter: "The State of the Union Address Delivered Before a Joint Session of the Congress," January 23, 1980. <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/speeches/su80jec.phtml> retrieved: 23-4-2013.

<sup>57</sup> Michaels, J. (2011): 483.

writes, one of the key consequences of the Carter Doctrine was that it had shifted the discourse concerning the Persian Gulf from political-economic terms to political-military terms: “(...) [E]arlier notions of the Persian Gulf being a region of little military importance, where the prospect of Soviet invasion was minimal, shifted to one in which hundreds of thousands of troops were essential for its imminent defense, and new capabilities needed to be purchased to allow an RDF to be deployed to the region, operate there effectively, and be sustained.”<sup>58</sup>

### § 2.2.2 Post-Cold War period (1989-present): energy security, emerging powers, rise of political Islam and the Arab Spring

The end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union resulted in the emergence of new independent states in the international arena. However, the foreign policy of the US regarding the Middle East did not need a dramatic overhaul. The same objectives and interests remained after the demise of the Soviet Union, but the introduction of new states to fill the vacuum after the Soviet Union did spark a new rivalry between big powers for the region’s natural energy resources.<sup>59</sup> Among other events, this became apparent with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, when Saddam Hussein tried to annex the oil state into its legal borders.

In reaction to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait and to ensure its oil resources remained available to the global economy, the US initiated the second Gulf War in 1991. The US was relatively easy able to restore Kuwait’s independence and reduce Iraq’s military power and influence in the region, which enhanced the (short-term) security of US’ allied Gulf states, such as Saudi Arabia. After Iraq, with American and Western military and political support, had waged the 8-year war with Iran between 1980 and 1988 and so diminished Iran’s power and influence in the region, now the two main powers in the Persian Gulf region were contained.<sup>60</sup> Also, US allies in the region were now almost fully dependent on the permanent presence of the US military for their security.

Trading in for the ‘containment of the Soviet Union and communism’ now came in the US policy of democratization and liberalization of the economy regarding states in the Middle East.<sup>61</sup> More than ever, the US has followed a foreign policy practice of ‘humanitarian’ military interventions and regional wars to provide a justification for keeping a permanent military presence in the region.<sup>62</sup> This military presence played a key role in President Clinton’s policy of ‘dual containment’, aimed at containing Iran and Iraq and instigating regime change. By democratizing states in the Middle East and opening up closed national economies to the global economy, the US aims to reorganize a

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.: 489.

<sup>59</sup> Ahmadov, R. (2005) ‘The US Policy toward Middle East in the Post-Cold War Era’, *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 4, No. 1&2: 139-140.

<sup>60</sup> Hudson, M. (1996): 340.

<sup>61</sup> Ahmadov, R. (2005): 140.

<sup>62</sup> Monshipouri, M. (2002) ‘The Paradoxes of US Policy in the Middle East’, *Middle East Policy*, Vol. IX, No.3: 69.

regional order that is beneficial to the US economy and political interests. Similar to the Marshall plan after World War II, economically aiding and supporting democratization and liberalization in the region will in the end yield new markets to explore for the industrial economies of the world, in particular for the US, which is regarded as the “hegemonic power of capitalist countries”.<sup>63</sup>

As Iseri states, the main interest of the US is the construction of a global or regional order led by the US in the region, which would enable “US-controlled capitalist modes of production to flourish” in the Middle East without hinder.<sup>64</sup> Regional states and other powers outside the region will remain dependent on US leadership for security, which gives it political and economic power and influence. Allowing other regional economies to take on part of the responsibility would diminish and undermine US leadership and influence in the region and is therefore against US’ national interests. This can be exemplified by the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, which according to Iseri has a direct connection with Saddam Hussein’s plans to give Iraq’s state institutions give full control over the extraction, production and sale of oil and thus effectively nationalizing Iraq’s oil resources. Regime change in Iraq was required not because WMD were supposedly being manufactured (which they were not), but because Iraq’s oil and gas reserves were deemed too large and important to be controlled by an entity out of the US’ direct zone of control, in this case Saddam Hussein.<sup>65</sup> Another example of the US trying to construct a regional order would be the continued efforts by the US to prevent Iran from gaining foothold in Caspian Sea energy resources. US policies in the Caspian region have been largely based on preventing Iran from constructing new pipelines across the country (which would be connected with, among others, resources in neighboring Caspian states) and preventing it from developing new gas and oil resources near its borders.<sup>66</sup> The US is not energy dependent on Caspian energy resources, but as Iseri states: “The political objective of the US government is to prevent energy transport unification among the industrial zones of Japan, Korea, China, Russia, and the EU in the Eurasian landmass and ensure the flow of regional energy resources to US-led international oil markets without any interruptions”.<sup>67</sup> National security interests and energy security of the US in the region are thus largely to be seen as maintaining a political and economic order that ensures uninterrupted access to affordable oil and markets, securement of transportation roots and protection of other US assets in the region.<sup>68</sup>

In addition to regional powers trying to shift the regional order away from the US (i.e. Iraq, before the 2003 war, and Iran), the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of its influence in the

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<sup>63</sup> Iseri, E. (2009) ‘The US Grand Strategy and the Eurasian Heartland in the Twenty-First Century’, *Geopolitics*, 14:129.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*: 29.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*: 30

<sup>66</sup> Naji, S. & Jawan, J. (2011): 233.

<sup>67</sup> Iseri, E. (2009): 34-5.

<sup>68</sup> Salameh, M. (2003) ‘Quest for Middle East Oil; the US versus the Asia-Pacific region’, *Energy Policy*, Vol.31: 1086.

region has sparked the interest of Asian economies, which have endured a spectacular economic growth over the past two decades. For example, China's continued economic growth has resulted in an increasing dependence on foreign energy resources, of which around 40% originates from producer countries in the Middle East.<sup>69</sup> It is now a net importer of oil and is projected to surpass the US as the largest net importer by 2020.<sup>70</sup> In order to deal with these developments, Chinese National Oil Companies (NOCs) have engaged in so-called 'going-out' policy of investing in foreign oil companies and markets in order to acquire equity oil. Chinese NOCs invest in oil production or development projects for which in return they obtain a percentage of the oil produced.<sup>71</sup> Regarding the Middle East, the main target countries of China's NOCs are those that do not have extensive relations with the US, UK or other Western nations. Because China regards the partnerships between the US and Gulf countries like Bahrain as 'entrenched', it instead focuses on neighboring countries where western influence is less or deteriorating, such as Saudi Arabia, or that have severed ties with Western powers, such as Iran.<sup>72</sup> In its relationship with these countries, China has made sure to not only focus on accessing oil supplies, but to incorporate other economic sectors as well, in order to create a level of economic and political interdependence that would ensure China's long-term access to these resources and markets.<sup>73</sup>

China's efforts to form strategic links with resource-rich countries in the Middle East – mainly Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq – threaten US interests in several ways. Firstly, China's venture into Saudi Arabia's oil is a direct challenge to US influence in the country. After the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, which were largely perpetrated by Saudi citizens, Saudi-US relations have been deteriorating. The Saudis feel that if another attack or incident against the US was to be engineered by its citizens, the US would have no other option than to terminate their support to the Saudi monarchy and perhaps even use military force against the country to safeguard its energy interests.<sup>74</sup> This has resulted in the Saudi perception that they cannot fully rely on the US for their security and that it is perhaps necessary to look elsewhere for support and protection. China has taken notice of this development and is pursuing more economic relations with the monarchy and seeks to make their economies interdependent to ensure long-term access to Saudi resources. This undermines US interests in the

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<sup>69</sup> Amineh, M. & Yang, G. (2012) 'Introduction: China's and the European Union's Energy Security Challenges in the Twenty-First Century.' In: Amineh, M. & Yang, G. (eds.) (2012) *Securing Oil and Alternative Energy: the Geopolitics of Energy Paths of China and the European Union*. Koninklijke Brill N.V., Leiden: 26.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.: 2.

<sup>71</sup> Cheng, S. (2011) 'Has China's Foreign Energy Quest Enhanced Its Energy Security?', *The China Quarter* 207: 606.

<sup>72</sup> Lee, H. & Shalmon, D. (2007) 'Searching for Oil: China's Initiatives in the Middle East', *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development*, 49:5: 13.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.: 14.

<sup>74</sup> Luft, G. (20-10-2005) 'Testimony by dr. Gal Luft, executive director, Institute for the Analysis of Global Security (IAGS), co-chair, Set America Free Coalition, presented before Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian affairs, "America's oil dependence and its implications for U.S. Middle East policy": 3.

country, by giving the Saudis an alternative source of protection and reducing US influence with the monarchy. Secondly, China's access to Saudi resources simply reduces availability of those resources to other parties, including the US. Saudi Arabia is not the US' 'private foreign reserve' anymore. Thirdly, fossil resources are finite and with more players that want a piece of the resource pie, demand of those resources on the global market rises and increases oil prices, which in turn harms the economies of countries that are dependent on those oil imports. Also, higher oil prices make it more difficult for the US to influence oil producers, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, and consumers, such as India and China, into the US' 'grand strategy' of a US-led regional order.<sup>75</sup> Fourthly, because Chinese NOCs are largely government-run, they do not have to play by the economic rules that Western non-national oil companies do. Chinese NOCs are subsidized by the state and have a large cash pool at their disposal, which makes it easier to make concessions that Western companies do not want to or cannot make. Lastly, China's economic engagement with Iran has complicated US foreign policy in the region. China is effectively making use of the trade embargos and sanctions that have been directed against Iran: there is no Western competition to worry about. In turn, Beijing's interest in its natural resources has allowed Iran to direct its attention away from the West to the East, which has rendered the sanctions and trade embargos rather ineffective or at least less effective. Furthermore, China provides Iran with arms and other (military) technology and is engaged in large public construction projects that can uplift 'cultural ties' and Iranian citizens' perception of China, which in turn can lay the foundation for a long-term strategic relationship. These include the construction of the world's tallest dam in the Lorestan province, allowing Iran to diversify its energy sources; the Iranian rail network, which could potentially connect China's western provinces to Iran; and the Tehran subway system, which would have been difficult for Iran to complete without China's help and technological expertise.<sup>76</sup> Including mentioned subway system, China is financing approximately 1 billion US dollars' worth of public projects in Tehran.<sup>77</sup> Lastly, having a permanent UN Security Council Member with veto power as an ally could prove to be a trump card for Iran in future negotiations with the West, not least concerning the nuclear program.

Other new challenges to US interests in the region that have arisen after the Cold War are the rise of political Islam and the destabilizing effects of the so-called 'Arab Spring', which began with the public uprisings in Tunisia in early 2011. The US' contradicting policy of on the one hand supporting democratization and economic liberalization, while on the other hand supporting repressive and authoritarian regimes to safeguard access to oil and other geopolitical interests, became even more strained when regional Arab populations began demanding democratic and liberal reform. The tension

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<sup>75</sup> Iseri, E. (2009): 44.

<sup>76</sup> Harold, S. & Nader, A. (2012) 'China and Iran. Economic, Political, and Military Relations'. *RAND Corporation Center for Middle East Public Policy*.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

between these two policy objectives rises especially high when the population of a non-democratic but pro-US regime calls for democratic change.

### § 2.3 Iran's foreign policy in the Middle East

This section will give an overview of Iran's foreign policy in the Middle East in the pre-Islamic Revolution period (1951-1979) and the post-Islamic Revolution period (1979-present), with a focus on its relations with the US during those periods. The distinction between the periods before and after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 has been made, because the experience with Western intervention in Iran during the Cold War and the Islamic Revolution itself lie at the base of the relations the US and Iran have now.

#### § 2.3.1 Pre-Islamic Revolution period (1951-1979): energy security and foreign intervention

Iran became of interest to Western powers at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when a British oil company that would later become British Petroleum or BP struck oil in Iran in 1908. British, American and Dutch companies stayed in control of Iran's oil until newly democratically elected Prime Minister Muhammad Mossadeq began nationalizing oil companies in 1951, including the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company that generated billions of dollars per year for the British.<sup>78</sup> He did this not only for nationalistic reasons or to be free of British rule, but was motivated also by his belief that domestic liberal and democratic reforms would not be possible while the Iranian oil industry, which formed "the backbone of the Iranian economy", was under control of the British.<sup>79</sup> Fearing Iran would possibly come under communist control and afraid of the consequences nationalizing the oil business would have for American and British energy security, the then recently formed American CIA and the British MI6 orchestrated a coup d'état that overthrew Mossadeq in 1953 and brought back Muhammad Reza Shah into power, someone they could control or at least steer into a direction favorable to the US and Britain.<sup>80</sup>

Muhammad Reza Shah ruled the country like a dictatorship. There was a very repressive regime in place, which was led by the Iranian National Intelligence and Security Organization.<sup>81</sup> It was created and endorsed by the US and was an instrument of the Shah to arrest, torture and/or kill citizens that opposed the Shah's rule. In addition, all the oil wealth flowed to families aligned to the Shah or connected to oil industry, leaving the population poor. These factors, combined with the Shah's political agenda of secularization and forcefully 'modernizing' Iranian society, were instrumental in

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<sup>78</sup> Wise, K. (2012) 'Islamic Revolution of 1979: The Downfall of American-Iranian Relations', *Legacy*, Vol.11, No.1: 1.

<sup>79</sup> Ramazani, R. (2004) 'Ideology and Pragmatism in Iran's Foreign Policy', *Middle East Journal*, Vol.58, No.4: 554.

<sup>80</sup> Wise, K. (2012): 1-2.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*: 2.

forming the connection between anti-Shah and anti-US sentiments within Iran and made it possible for Ayatollah Khomeini to ‘hijack’ the revolutionary feelings with his Islamic dogma later on.<sup>82</sup>

The Shah used the American fears of communism to receive financial aid, military support and influence in the UN.<sup>83</sup> Iran received approximately 1.2 billion US dollars’ worth of aid during the first ten years after the 1953 coup.<sup>84</sup> The aid Iran received from the US intensified in the 1970s, when the British announced their withdrawal from the Gulf region. As shown in table 2.1, US arms deliveries to Iran rose dramatically in the 1970s, topping 4.5 billion US dollars in 1977, while coming to an abrupt halt after the 1979 Islamic Revolution (see also Appendix A). Being occupied with the Vietnam War, the US needed another actor to ‘police’ the region now that the British were gone. By posing as a democratic or liberal reformer, the Shah was able to assure a steady flow of aid, financially, politically and militarily, effectively turning Iran into a regional superpower, with a vast and modern army.<sup>85</sup> In 1978, Iran possessed the most advanced and best trained military in the Persian Gulf, the fourth largest air force and fifth largest conventional military in the world.<sup>86</sup> As table 2.1 shows, military spending continuously rose during the 1970s, reaching more than 10 billion US dollars in 1978.

**Table 2.1: Iran’s military expenditures and US’ arms exports to Iran, 1970-1979**

Year	Iran’s military expenditures (million US\$)	US’ arms exports to Iran (million US\$)
<b>1970</b>	2093	1068
<b>1971</b>	2564	1138
<b>1972</b>	3166	601
<b>1973</b>	3808	1321
<b>1974</b>	6451	2248
<b>1975</b>	8850	4248
<b>1976</b>	9733	4238
<b>1977</b>	8960	4575
<b>1978</b>	10996	2182
<b>1979</b>	5907*	242

Sources: WMEAT 1970-1979 + SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Milani, M. (2009) ‘Tehran’s Take: Understanding Iran’s U.S. Policy’, *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2009: 48.

<sup>83</sup> Summitt, A. (2004) ‘For a White Revolution: John F. Kennedy and the Shah of Iran’, *Middle East Journal*, Vol.58, No.4: 560.

<sup>84</sup> Gasiorowsky, M. & Byrne, M. (eds.) *Mohammad Mossadeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran*. Syracuse University Press (2004): 257.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*: 561.

<sup>86</sup> Wise, K. (2012): 3.

<sup>87</sup> United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (March 1982) ‘World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1970-1979 + Stockholm International Peace Research Institute database.

\* Estimate from the 1972-1982 version of the WMEAT publication (April 1984).

Contrary to popular belief, Iran under the Shah's rule was thus less of a 'puppet'-state as one might expect. He effectively used the US' fears of a communist invasion from the north and his agenda of 'westernizing' the country to his advantage and was able to receive substantial amounts of financial aid from the US, while leading a very repressive regime.<sup>88</sup> Also, he effectively persuaded the US administration(s) to view Iran as a geographical buffer to a Soviet invasion of the Persian Gulf, thus 'safeguarding' the energy reserves present in the region.

The coup d'état that was orchestrated by the US and UK in 1953, the Western powers' support of the Shah's dictatorial rule and the policy of 'westernizing' the country led various mullahs, led by Ruhollah Khomeini, to protest about Iran's relationship with the West.<sup>89</sup> He accused the Shah of being an enemy of Iran and rejecting the principles of Islam. Being the leader of a country with a highly religious population, the Shah feared the protests by Khomeini and his followers and decided to exile Khomeini in 1964.<sup>90</sup> Out of country, Khomeini continued to lead the revolutionaries and sparked protests all over Iran during the 1970s. During this period, the US feared that an Iran in the hands of the revolutionaries would be a threat to their energy security and would result in higher oil prices, or would even move Iran into the camp of the Soviets. The US thus stepped up their arms sales to the Shah from 1974 and onwards, as can be seen in table 2.1, and provided various sorts of equipment to the Iranian military to crash down on the protesters.<sup>91</sup> Even when in late 1978 it became clear that the Shah's regime would eventually crumble and fall into the hands of Khomeini's forces, the US continued to oppose Khomeini and support the Shah, contrary to the opinions of some of the US administration's advisors at the time.<sup>92</sup> In January 1979, the Shah fled Iran and the US urged American citizens in Iran to leave the country as soon as possible, and in February Khomeini took power.<sup>93</sup>

### § 2.3.2 Post-Islamic Revolution period (1979-present): energy security, rise of political Islam, emerging powers and the nuclear program

The Islamic Revolution changed Iran dramatically. Now named the Islamic Republic of Iran, the religious leaders of the country now installed Sharia law upon the people and ran the country with Islamic principles in mind. Khomeini advocated a policy of "Neither East, nor West, but the Islamic Revolution" and aimed at creating an international order led by Islamic values and principles.<sup>94</sup> The US was talked about in terms of "the great Satan" and the previous relationship between the US and Iran was compared to that of a hungry wolf and a fat sheep.<sup>95</sup> Although the US wanted to begin

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<sup>88</sup> Summitt, A. (2004): 562.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.: 570.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.: 571.

<sup>91</sup> Wise, K. (2012): 7-8.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.: 7.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ramazani, R. (2004): 555.

<sup>95</sup> Milani, M. (2009): 48.

creating diplomatic relations with the new Iranian government in order to not lose its access and influence over Iranian resources, Khomeini did not want have anything to do with the US due to the hypocritical nature of foreign policy the Americans pursued before and during the revolution. The survival and independence of the Islamic Republic of Iran has been linked to opposing the US ever since and continues to be a political tool to keep the Iranian public on the regime's side.<sup>96</sup>

According to Wise, the deteriorating relations between Iran and the US can be best shown by six major events in 1979.<sup>97</sup> First, after the Revolution, Iran changed from being a key ally of the US in its Cold War with the Soviet Union to being removed from the US' zone of influence. Second, not only the possible spread of communism into Iran's political system was worrying US policy makers, but also the consequences of the Revolution for energy security. Indeed, shortly after coming to power, Khomeini cut back the oil supply, which created a small panic in the oil industry and resulted in a rise of oil price. The US now had to pay for oil and Iran began reaping the benefits. Third, Khomeini cancelled the arms sales that were planned from the US. These arms sales might have been cancelled by the US sooner or later anyway, but what is clear is that the severing of the arms sales had an impact on the US economy, dropping from 4.5 billion US dollars in 1978 to practically zero in 1979. Fourth, the US reversed their stance on human rights abuses in Iran and began criticizing its regime for its internal policies. Fifth, the hostage crisis at the end of 1979 consisted of Iranian students that took American citizens and personnel captive in the American embassy in Tehran. This was a response to the Shah being admitted into the US for medical treatment and the refusal of the US to honor its extradition treaty and returning the Shah to Iran to be tried in a court of law. Furthermore, the Iranians suspected that the Americans were planning another coup d'état against the newly formed government from the American embassy in Tehran. It should be noted that the embassy was the same location where the coup of 1953 was planned by British and American intelligence agencies. The hostage crisis lasted 444 days and was prominently featured in American (and Western) media, which has put its stamp on the American image of both Iran's political elite and the Iranian population and has deepened the rift between the US and Iran. Lastly, the US severed its political relations with Iran during the hostage crisis and instigated a trade embargo on the country, which is still in effect to this day.

Shortly after the Islamic Revolution, president of neighboring Iraq, Saddam Hussein, felt this was a good time to invade Iran and to get control over its resources, to prevent the long oppressed Iraqi Shia majority from starting a revolution, and to replace Iran as dominant power in the region. This started the Iran-Iraq War, also known as the First Persian Gulf War, and lasted from 1980 until 1988. The territory Iraq conquered was regained by Iran by 1982, now on the offensive. What followed was a World War I like 'trench warfare' type of war, where essentially no territorial conquests were made.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid. + Wise, K. (2012): 7-8.

<sup>97</sup> Wise, K. (2012): 8-12.

During the war, the Western powers supported Saddam Hussein with financial aid, arms deals, international political support and the supply of chemical weapons. Western powers (among which the US, UK and the Netherlands) continued their supply of chemical weapons and support of Iraq's aggression when it became clear that these weapons were being used against Iranian military personnel, citizens and Iraqi Kurdish minorities.<sup>98</sup> The war ended in August 1988 with approximately half a million casualties on both sides and has heavily influenced Iran's population's views of Iraq and its image of Western powers for supporting Hussein when it was clear chemical weapons were being used, and has so consolidated Iranian's mistrust of US policy makers. The Iran-Iraq War continues to be a formative episode in US-Iran relations and has influenced current anti-American sentiments and distrust of American policy makers among both Iran's population and political elite.

It was during the Iran-Iraq War that the Reagan Administration secretly sold weapons to Tehran via Israeli shipments, in violation of its own trade embargo, in order to get Hezbollah to free six American hostages they held in Lebanon. The profits of this arms deal were directly used to finance the Contra rebels in Nicaragua, thus later to be known as the 'Contra-scandal'.

The end of the Cold War and the replacement of the deceased Ayatollah Khomeini by Ayatollah Khamenei in 1989 marked a turning point to a more pragmatic approach to Iran's foreign policy.<sup>99</sup> During the presidency of Rafsanjani (1989-1997), Iran's foreign policy focused on post-Iran-Iraq War economic reconstruction and integrating the economy into the international economy. Further, foreign policy was aimed at improving relations with other Gulf countries, such as Saudi Arabia, newly independent states in the Central Eurasian region and Russia, due to the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>100</sup> The regions to the north of Iran became the region where the US and Iran competed for influence and economic relations, primarily due to the vast natural resources in the Caspian region and newly formed markets and economies.<sup>101</sup> The energy sector constitutes around 40% of the Iranian GDP and 80% of the total Iranian export earnings, which made these rather untapped markets a necessary economic target for the development and sustainment of the Iranian economy.<sup>102</sup> The US has since pursued an active policy of denying Iran access to these markets to isolate Iran from the international community, by hindering Iran's exploitation of these resources and preventing Iran's construction of new pipelines across country that would connect to resource rich areas in the region.

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<sup>98</sup> U.S. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs (May 25, 1994) 'Second Staff Report on U.S. Chemical and Biological Warfare-Related Dual-Use Exports to Iraq and The Possible Impact on the Health Consequences of the War'. <http://www.gulfwarvets.com/arison/banking.htm>

<sup>99</sup> Rakel, E. (2007) 'Iranian Foreign Policy since the Iranian Revolution: 1979-2006', *PGDT* 6 (2007): 160.

<sup>100</sup> Najj, S. & Jawan, J. (2011): 96 + Rakel, E. (2007): 160-1.

<sup>101</sup> Najj, S. & Jawan, J. (2011): 96.

<sup>102</sup> 'Iran Economy'. Economy Watch website (30 June 2010). [http://www.economywatch.com/world\\_economy/iran/](http://www.economywatch.com/world_economy/iran/)

This competition is reflected in Supreme Leader Khamenei's statement that Iran is still considering the US to be an existential threat.<sup>103</sup>

During the 1990s, Iran tried to improve relations with emerging powers, mainly China and India, and the European Union. It was during this period that the US' Clinton Administration imposed new economic and financial sanctions on Iran (and on Iraq), because of allegations that WMDs were in construction and Iran's support of militant groups in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.<sup>104</sup> This US' approach came later to be known as Clinton's policy of 'dual-containment'. In addition, the US supported economically and militarily the Taliban to put pressure on Iran's borders in the east, and signed the Iran-Libya Sanction act that prohibited any company to invest more than 40 million US dollars in Iran's petroleum industry, effectively preventing Iran from developing their oil fields and petroleum related technology. Though the Iran-Libya Sanction act was in theory only applicable to American companies, many other Western companies were hesitant to invest in Iran's oil industry to not strain relations with the US.

However, as some scholars note, these sanctions may not have the wished for effect, because Iran is now turning its economy in the direction of emerging powers and improving relations with China and Brazil.<sup>105</sup> On the one hand, China is in dire need of enlarging its energy supply, because of its continued economic growth. Iran is in this sense an untapped market, due to the many sanctions the UN and the US have imposed on Iran since 1979. China does not have to deal with European competing oil companies to get access to Iranian oil. On the other hand, China can provide Iran with several benefits, not in the least providing Iran with a market for its oil and providing the possibility of buying arms and military equipment from the Chinese. Also, the fact that China is a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council and thus has veto-power is of great value to the Iranians, in light of further sanctions that might be imposed on the country via UN and concerning its nuclear program.<sup>106</sup>

Under the presidency of Khatami (1997-2005), relations between Iran and the US warmed up when compared to the years before.<sup>107</sup> He advocated a 'Dialogue among Civilizations' and wanted to improve relations with the West, including the US. Both sides have shown each other signs of good faith during his presidency, for example the earthquake disaster relief that the US sent to Bam city in Iran and the statement of Khatami that the Salman Rushdie affair was "completely finished".<sup>108</sup> Khatami was regarded as a reformist and a liberal in Iran that had plans to liberalize and, to some extent, push for democratic reform. However, when the US invaded Afghanistan under the G.W. Bush

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<sup>103</sup> Milani, M. (2009): 49.

<sup>104</sup> Najj, S. & Jawan, J. (2011): 96.

<sup>105</sup> Coskun, B. (2009): 183.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.: 184.

<sup>107</sup> Najj, S. & Jawan, J. (2011): 97.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

presidency, the relations between Iran and the US plummeted to an all-time low, due to what many Iranians still consider to be the ultimate slap in the face: “Iran condemned equivocally the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon on September, 2001, assisted the Bush Administration in destroying the Taliban regime, helped with the establishment of Hamid Karzai’s interim government, and committed more than \$500 million to the reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. As thanks, President Bush included Iran in his moralistic “axis of evil” phrase, threatened Iran indirectly with a pre-emptive strike as a “rogue” state which might provide terrorist groups with weapons of mass destruction, and worst of all, abandoned the reformist pro-democracy government of President Khatami by trying to play the Iranian people, on more than one occasion, against the entire regime, including the Khatami government.”<sup>109</sup> Meanwhile, the American military was present in almost every bordering country of Iran, having a military presence in Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Iraq, the Central Asian States, and of course has its 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet stationed in the American navy base in Bahrain (see Map IV on page 7 for the locations of US military bases around Iran’s borders). These factors, the fear of Iran being the next target for invasion by the US and the anti-Islam rhetoric after 9/11 of Western governments, have enabled the election of the very conservative and religious Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005. This created a situation in which two conservative leaders with conflicting values and interests were competing for regional hegemony.

Iran recognizes the US strategy of isolating Iran from the international community, imposing economic and financial sanctions and regards it as a potential military adversary after the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. According to Milani, Iran’s foreign policy has since consisted of a strategy of deterrence.<sup>110</sup>

Firstly, Iran tries to put more space between the US and its European allies, for example by agreeing to have negotiations with the EU in 2003 regarding Iran’s nuclear program, but disagreeing to the US’ direct involvement.

Also, in 2007 the EU was still Iran’s biggest trading partner, good for about 24 % of Iran’s total international trade. It has now been surpassed by China as major import, exports and trade partner, as table 2.2 shows (see also Appendix C). Nevertheless, the EU remains responsible for a large portion of Iran’s international trade. However, the main European states, i.e. France, Germany and the UK, tend to stay firmly at the US’ side, especially regarding the nuclear program.

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<sup>109</sup> Ramazani, R. (2004): 558.

<sup>110</sup> Milani, M. (2009): 51-54.

**Table 2.2: Major imports, export and trade partners of Iran, 2011**

The Major Imports Partners				The Major Export Partners				The Major Trade Partners			
Rk	Partners	Mio euro	%	Rk	Partners	Mio euro	%	Rk	Partners	Mio euro	%
	World (all countrie	68,370	100.0%		World (all countrie	90,780	100.0%		World (all countrie	159,149	100.0%
1	United Arab Emirat	20,825	30.5%	1	China	19,770	21.8%	1	China	31,488	19.8%
2	China	11,719	17.1%	2	EU27	14,909	16.4%	2	EU27	25,721	16.2%
3	EU27	10,812	15.8%	3	Japan	8,424	9.3%	3	United Arab Emirat	21,633	13.6%
4	South Korea	4,810	7.0%	4	Turkey	8,113	8.9%	4	South Korea	12,211	7.7%
5	Turkey	2,844	4.2%	5	India	7,531	8.3%	5	Turkey	10,958	6.9%
6	Russia	2,587	3.8%	6	South Korea	7,401	8.2%	6	Japan	9,775	6.1%
7	India	2,029	3.0%	7	South Africa	2,683	3.0%	7	India	9,560	6.0%
8	Brazil	1,836	2.7%	8	Pakistan	1,036	1.1%	8	Russia	2,811	1.8%
9	Japan	1,351	2.0%	9	Sri Lanka	940	1.0%	9	South Africa	2,759	1.7%
10	Ukraine	892	1.3%	10	Syria	910	1.0%	10	Brazil	1,861	1.2%

Source: European Commission DG Trade Statistics.<sup>111</sup>

**Table 2.3: Iran, trade with the European Union, 2008-2011 (million €)**

Period	Imports	Variation (% , y-o-y)	EU Share of total Imports (%)	Exports	Variation (% , y-o-y)	EU Share of total Exports (%)	Balance	Trade
2008	11,604	8.8	29.2	14,488	12.5	18.6	2,883	26,092
2009	9,852	-15.1	27.8	8,526	-41.2	16.5	-1,326	18,378
2010	10,739	9.0	21.5	13,085	53.5	17.9	2,346	23,823
2011	10,819	0.8	15.8	14,940	14.2	16.5	4,120	25,759

Source: European Commission DG Trade Statistics.<sup>112</sup>

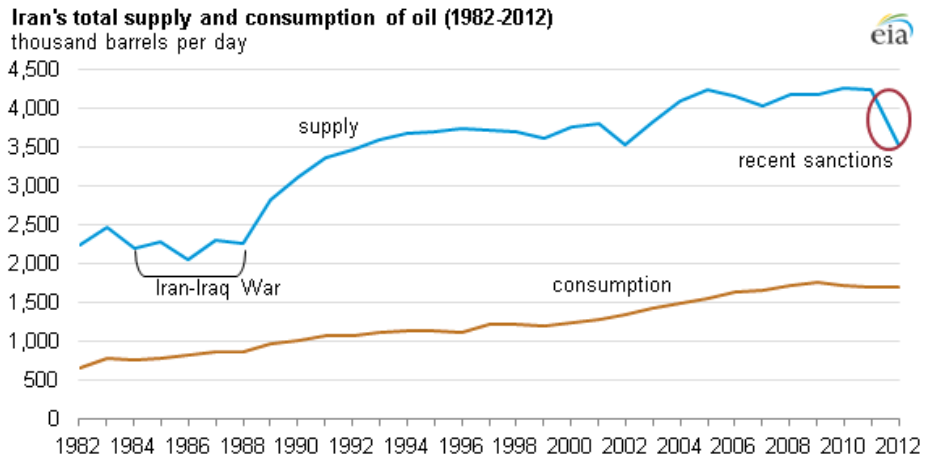
Economic sanctions and trade embargos as result of Iran's nuclear program have led to a decline of the EU's share in Iran's overall international trade, as table 2.3 shows. Furthermore, the more recent sanctions under the Obama Administration have resulted in an intensive decrease of Iran's production and exports of oil and gas, which can be viewed in figure 2.1 and figure 2.2. Because of the fluctuating exchange rate of Iran's national currency, its second largest economic sector, the automobile industry, is now experiencing economic decline as well.<sup>113</sup> Consequently, these sanctions have a profound effect on the general economy of Iran. As shown in table 2.4, GDP growth has been decreasing ever since the 2010 sanctions and is now negative, effectively constituting an economic recession or depression.

<sup>111</sup> European Commission DG Trade Statistics (23 May 2013) 'Iran: EU Bilateral Trade and Trade with the World'. [http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc\\_113392.pdf](http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_113392.pdf)

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

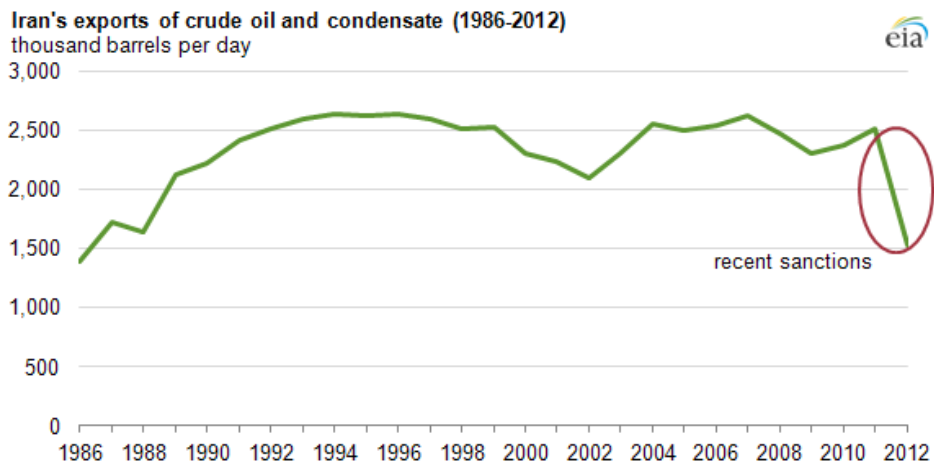
<sup>113</sup> Parszczuk, J. (17-10-2012) 'Iranian car industry suffers as sanctions bite'. *The Jerusalem Post* website. <http://www.jpost.com/Iranian-Threat/News/Iranian-car-industry-suffers-as-sanctions-bite>

**Figure 2.1: Iran's total supply and consumption of oil (1982-2012)**



Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration.<sup>114</sup>

**Figure 2.2: Iran's exports of crude oil and condensate (1986-2012)**



Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>114</sup> U.S. Energy Information Administration (26 April 2013) 'Sanctions reduced Iran's oil exports and revenues in 2012'. <http://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.cfm?id=11011>

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

**Table 2.4: Iran, economic indicators, 2005-2013**

Year	Size of population (million)	GDP (current prices, US\$ Billion)	GDP growth (%)	GDP per capita (current prices, US\$)	Oil exports (US\$ Billion)
2005	69.39	202.94	4.67	2924.63	55.79
2006	70.50	241.70	6.21	3428.52	64.67
2007	71.28	307.36	6.37	4312.05	84.51
2008	72.18	350.59	0.58	4857.14	86.62
2009	73.20	360.63	3.95	4926.50	69.96
2010	74.34	419.12	5.90	5637.93	90.19
2011	75.15	495.89	3.03	6598.59	118.23
2012	76.12	548.90	-1.88	7211.20	67.42
2013	77.10	429.25	-1.25	5567.64	52.67

*Source: Economy Watch database.<sup>116</sup>*

Secondly, Iran tries to drastically improve its relations with other states that could provide a counterbalance to the US, mainly China, India, Russia and Brazil. The accession of Iran to observer status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which is in essence a defensive military organization like NATO, and the continued Russian support and engagement in the construction and running of the Bushehr nuclear reactor in Iran are testaments of this. This will be elaborated upon in section § 3.3.1.

Lastly, Iran uses its resources to reward friends of the regime. This so-called ‘oil-diplomacy’ has been a strategy of Iran since the discovery of oil in the country and continues to prove very useful in engaging in international relations with other states, as for example the investments of China in Iran and vice versa show.

#### § 2.4 Concluding remarks

Despite the US’ efforts to contain the country, Iran has still emerged as a regional player.<sup>117</sup> The disposal of Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq and the rise of political parties there that are favorable of Iran, in combination with Iran’s improving relations with emerging powers such as China and Russia, are enabling Iran to compete with the US for the forming of the regional order. The US is trying to rebuild its or maintain its regional order in the Persian Gulf, as to safeguard its energy interests and to prevent other powers, such as China, Russia and Iran, from gaining the upper hand in the region. It does this via various diplomatic, political, economic and military instruments of international politics, focusing on countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel, the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Iran is the main contender state within the region itself and pursues a hegemonic regional role. It does this via diplomatic and economic instruments, for instance with Syria, China and Russia, while also

<sup>116</sup> Economy Watch database (25 June 2013) ‘Iran (Islamic Republic of Iran) Economic Statistics and Indicators’. <http://www.economywatch.com/economic-statistics/country/Iran/>

<sup>117</sup> Milani, M. (2009): 54.

strategically supporting certain non-state actors in the region that undermine the US, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon or Hamas in Palestine's Gaza Strip.

The next chapter will analyze more deeply Iran's and the US' involvement, from the first Bush presidency until present, with countries in the Persian Gulf and other states that have interests in the region, such as Saudi Arabia, Russia, China, and Turkey, as well as non-governmental organizations, such as Hezbollah and Hamas. The focus of the chapter entails the geopolitical competition between the US and Iran in the region, the diverging or converging interests they have, and their relations with other states and organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.



## **CHAPTER 3 GEOPOLITICAL COMPETITION IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

### **§ 3.1 Introduction**

As has been shown in chapter 2, US foreign policy in the Gulf Region, in both the Cold War and post-Cold War periods, has had two key objectives: preventing counter-hegemonic forces (the Soviets in the Cold War and since 1979 primarily Iran) from gaining foothold in the region and securing its energy resources. As China and Russia become more assertive in the region, these contender states too find their power projection efforts limited by the assertion of US strength in the larger Middle East, as well as in Central- and South Asia.

In effect, the US is trying to rebuild the hegemonic order it had in the Middle East during the Cold War, using the diplomatic, political, economic and military tools at its disposal. On the other hand, the region is rapidly changing. In the last decades the US relied on regional cooperative alignment between Israel-Egypt and Turkey. Since the Arab Spring and the reorientation of Turkey, that alignment is in disarray. Efforts of the US to isolate Iran in its region have not been able to prevent energy link-ups between the Islamic Republic and China, Turkey, Armenia and Pakistan, among others, and maybe in the future, with the European Union via an extension of the Nabucco pipeline. At the same time, American power projection in the region is able to build upon the rivalry between Iran, Russia and China. These contenders lack trust among themselves. Iranian foreign policy aiming to remove the US out of its neighborhood has therefore not been able to create a counter-hegemonic force towards the US to prevent it from recreating the hegemonic order it once had. At the same time, the US is able to rely upon the distrust of the newly unfolding states of Central Asia and the Caucasus of Russia and China.

Iran is trying to prevent the US from on the one hand to recreate a hegemonic order like in the Cold War and to extend that hegemony to Central Asia and South Asia. Iran until now, failed to get access for its energy to Afghanistan and India, competing in vain with the US supported TAPI gas pipeline, which deliberately circumvents both Russia and Iran in exporting gas from Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan towards India. However, Iran may succeed to sell gas to Pakistan. Iran trying to build a regional order of its own, by strengthening relations with contender states like China and Russia, undermining US interests in the region via non-governmental organizations like Hezbollah and aligning itself with anti-American (political) groups in, among others, Iraq and Afghanistan, find its limits by the distrust among these regional contenders.

In this chapter, the efforts of both parties to construct a regional order will be more deeply analyzed by examining their relations and engagement with states and (non-governmental) organizations in the region since the end of the Cold War. The chapter focuses on the question: what are the policy tools that the US and Iran use to pursue their objectives in the region and how does their geopolitical

competition takes form ‘on the ground’? This chapter is set up as follows. First, it has separate sections on the US and one on Iran. In this part I study their respective alignments, influence and interests in the region. Where complex or intensive geopolitical competition is present, for instance in Afghanistan and Iraq, this will be elaborated upon in separate sections in order to provide a clear and detailed analysis of their respective objectives and the policy tools at their disposal. The situation in Syria will be examined in Chapter 4.

### § 3.2 Reconstructing hegemonic order: the US in the Middle East

During the Cold War, the US was the first contested dominant power in the Middle East. However, after its defeat in the 1973 war, Egypt under Sadat switched to the US side. After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the US lost their primary ally in the region. At the same time, however, the Islamic revolution created distrust among its neighbors, in particular in Iraq and the Soviet Union, whereas the US, to support the Islamic fighters against the Soviet invasion, created a position of strength in Afghanistan and Pakistan. During the Iraq-Iran War, the US supported Saddam Hussein, including his using of gas as a weapon of war, creating a durable hostility with the Islamic Republic. However, when Iraq tried to build up as a contender force, the US turned against its leader and was forced to fight him after Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1991.

From this episode, I conclude that the US-led hegemonic order in the region had declined to the point that military deterrence was not enough to ensure control over the region and its resources and that military intervention was necessary to secure its interests.<sup>118</sup> Also, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the subsequent independence of three former Soviet states of Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan and the five states of Central Asia, created new opportunities for the US. However, Russia under Putin has become a serious contender in the Caucasus and Central Asia, demonstrating again that the US is one out of several contenders for regional hegemony. America is not able to fire all the shots; it is in competition with China, Russia, and even the European Union.

The following sections will analyze US efforts in the region to ensure its access to energy resources and minimizing the undermining effect of counter-hegemonic forces regarding US interests and influence in the region. Focus lies on the US’ instrumentalization of diplomatic, political, economic and military tools in its relations with regional states and other entities to secure its interests.

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<sup>118</sup> Dizboni, A. (2010) ‘Iran and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO): Counter-Hegemony as Common Purpose’, *Dynamiques Internationales*, No.3 June 2010: 6.

### § 3.2.1 Saudi Arabia

#### *A strategic partnership*

Right from the Second World War, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been one of the most important strategic partners of the US in the Middle Eastern region and the Gulf. The Saudi Kingdom appeared on the US strategic map since the discovery of oil in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ruled by the al-Saud family, the kingdom has been very influential in international politics as the origin of the Wahhabi version of the Islamic faith. Due to its large oil reserves and the relative easy and cheap exploration and exploitation thereof, its oil stock got the stamp of an asset in the Cold War.<sup>119</sup> The current US administration and its predecessors have pursued intensive political, economic and military relations with Saudi Arabia to ensure its access to Saudi resources, promote security of the Kingdom and maintain stable oil prices.<sup>120</sup> This relation, however, has not been without problems due to its highly religious Muslim population, anti-Israel sentiments present in the country and its lack of democratic and liberal norms and values.<sup>121</sup> In the 9/11 terror attacks, the US paid a substantial price for its close engagement with the ruling house.

Saudi Arabia has the world's second largest proven oil reserves (after being overtaken by Venezuela in 2011), possesses little over 22% of the world's oil and is the second largest oil producer country after Russia.<sup>122</sup> Due to its huge oil reserves but initially low domestic energy consumption, Saudi Arabia emerged, as noted above, in the 1970s as the world's so-called 'swing-producer'. However, that did not prevent the nationalization of the oil industry. By maintaining a large spare production capacity, the Saudi Kingdom has the ability to influence global oil prices by regulating the amount of oil barrels available in the global energy market.<sup>123</sup> This has yielded the Saudi government great economic and political influence in the international political and economic system, even more so because the main Saudi oil company Saudi Aramco is now run by the state. The fact that the Bush family has an oil history and has personal business relations with the Saudi family was therefore a strategic asset during the Bush presidencies. This has provided an extra incentive for US administration, despite the 9/11 attacks, to uphold friendly relations with the Saudi family to keep control of the oil price, and the influence that comes with it, out of unfriendly hands. In 2011, it was the largest US trading partner in the Middle East, with Saudi exports (consisting mainly of energy resources) to the US reaching 47.5

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<sup>119</sup> Blanchard, C. (2012) 'Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations', *Congressional Research Service*, November 27, 2012: summary + Hers, J.S. and Touber, F. (2007) 'Olie heeft zijn Prijs: een Kwalitatieve Verkenning van de Wereldoliemarkt'. *Energy Research Center of the Netherlands*, September 2007: 31.

<sup>120</sup> Blanchard, C. (2012): 1.

<sup>121</sup> Pollack, J. (2002) 'Saudi Arabia and the United States, 1931-2002', *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol.6 No.3, September 2002: 81.

<sup>122</sup> 'OPEC Share of world oil reserves 2012' [http://www.opec.org/opec\\_web/en/data\\_graphs/330.htm](http://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/data_graphs/330.htm)

<sup>123</sup> Pollack, J. (2002): 82.

billion US dollars and US exports (mainly weapons, (military) technology and vehicles) estimated at 13.8 billion US dollars.<sup>124</sup>

For a long time, Saudi Arabia has been considered essentially irreplaceable for the US regarding its energy needs due to significant advantages the kingdom enjoyed:<sup>125</sup> very low production costs; small oil consumer; the government has full ownership of the country's oil fields, making maintaining access to the resources less complex; located at the Gulf, the highway for tankers, it has free access to the sea and has a well-developed pipeline system, ensuring easy transportation and lower costs; and it has the world's largest spare oil production capacity, enabling it to fill sudden interruptions of supplies. However, due to high Saudi population growth and domestic energy consumption and the recent shale gas revolution, the US is increasingly disconnecting from Saudi Arabian oil.<sup>126</sup> Still, Saudi Arabia remains one of the, if not the most, important actors in the global energy market and a top policy priority for the US. Saudi Arabia now sells most of its oil to China.<sup>127</sup> Possibly, this is a deliberate strategy of the US to 'wean away' China from Iranian oil. The US has pursued its interests in Saudi Arabia by promoting mutual trade, maintaining a military presence in the country and supporting the Saudi family militarily and politically against domestic and regional threats.

#### *Military relations*

The US military has been present in Saudi Arabia since the 1990s when Iraq invaded Kuwait and the US (and UK) government felt it was necessary to station a military apparatus on Saudi soil to safeguard the security of Saudi Arabia and the world economy.<sup>128</sup> After the liquidation of the regime and the widespread destruction of secular Iraq, US and UK forces remained in the kingdom under the guise of the 'dual containment' policy of the Clinton administration regarding Iraq and Iran, regardless of domestic resistance to a US military presence in Saudi Arabia. In addition to US boots on Saudi ground, US weapon sales to Saudi Arabia have intensified military connections between the countries even further. As table 3.1 shows, the US has been the main arms suppliers to the Saudi Kingdom and has consistently intensified its supplies since 2001. In 2010, contracts were signed to supply multiple F-15 fighter jets, Apache Longbow attack helicopters and sophisticated missiles and missile delivery systems with a combined worth of 60.5 billion US dollars (see also Appendix B).<sup>129</sup>

US representatives made sure to point out that this would make the Saudi military even more compatible with the US military for future operations in the region and would strengthen its 'deterrent

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<sup>124</sup> Blanchard, C. (2012): 8.

<sup>125</sup> Bahgat, G. (2003) 'The New Geopolitics of Oil: The United States, Saudi Arabia, and Russia', *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, published by Elsevier Science Limited: 455-6.

<sup>126</sup> 'Saudi Arabia Analysis Brief' (February 26, 2013). U.S. Energy Information Administration. [http://www.eia.gov/countries/analysisbriefs/Saudi\\_Arabia/saudi\\_arabia.pdf](http://www.eia.gov/countries/analysisbriefs/Saudi_Arabia/saudi_arabia.pdf)

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Pollack, J. (2002): 84.

<sup>129</sup> 'Arms for the King and his Family: The US Arms Sale to Saudi Arabia', Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. <http://jcpa.org/article/arms-for-the-king-and-his-family-the-u-s-arms-sale-to-saudi-arabia/>

position' towards Iran, in addition to the training and modernization programs the US runs for the Saudi military.<sup>130</sup> More recently, a 10 billion US dollar arms deal with Israel, Saudi Arabia and the UAE was confirmed by US officials, including a near 30 billion US dollars' worth of F-15 fighter jets for the Saudi Kingdom to "to counter any future threat from Iran".<sup>131</sup> The purchase of military equipment from the US is financed by petrodollars, effectively intensifying the interconnectedness and interdependence of the US and Saudi economies.

**Table 3.1: Arms exports to Saudi Arabia, 2001-2012 (million US\$)**

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Total
Austria										2			2
Belgium	14	14	15	47		7					7	21	125
Canada	6	5	5	17		8	12	10	3		26	39	133
China								33	33				66
France	7	382	36	768	1	4	26	25	31	95	91	5	1470
Germany (FRG)	1	1	1	1	1			3	3	10	71	71	163
Italy		83		6				5	20	20			133
Netherlands											13	25	38
Pakistan					4								4
South Africa						6	7	1					13
Spain											98	196	294
Sweden										3	3		6
Switzerland								25	35				60
Turkey				15			3						18
UK								29	418	500	404	142	1493
USA	33	89	117	324	151	170	147	237	234	338	395	425	2661
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>574</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>1178</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>369</b>	<b>778</b>	<b>969</b>	<b>1107</b>	<b>923</b>	<b>6679</b>

Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.

<sup>130</sup> Blanchard, C. (2012): 5-6.

<sup>131</sup> Shanker, T., 'U.S. Arms Deal with Israel and 2 Arab Nations is Near'. *New York Times website*, April 18, 2013. [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/19/world/middleeast/us-selling-arms-to-israel-saudi-arabia-and-emirates.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/19/world/middleeast/us-selling-arms-to-israel-saudi-arabia-and-emirates.html?_r=0)

### *Troubled relationship and the Iranian response*

It is clear that Saudi Arabia's huge energy resources have laid the foundations of the long-standing US-Saudi relationship that exists today. The US needs an uninterrupted supply of stably priced energy resources and the Saudis need protection and defensive capabilities against domestic threats and potentially aggressive regional neighbors. Stable oil prices serve Saudi national interests in both the medium and long term, because it prevents too high oil prices from promoting alternative sources of energy, which would undermine the importance of fossil fuels, and prevents the encouragement of the exploration and exploitation of energy reserves in non-OPEC countries, which would have a lowering effect on oil prices due to an increase in supply.<sup>132</sup> Despite the mutual beneficial US-Saudi relations, there have been harsh criticisms from within both countries. In Saudi Arabia the relationship has been controversial and difficult because of Saudi Arabia being the birthplace of Islamic faith and the presence of anti-Israeli sentiments as a consequence and, more recently, the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>133</sup>

The fact that the US have staged multiple missile barrages and utilized military airfields within Saudi territory to launch attacks – sometimes without pre-negotiated consent of the Saudi government – has not helped to stabilize the regime against its contenders at home either.<sup>134</sup> On the other hand, Saudi Arabia's decision to use its oil as a political weapon in 1973 as a reaction to President Nixon's plans to provide more than 2 billion US dollars in military aid to Israel demonstrated that the Kingdom, being in control over pumping oil, has the capacity and willingness to operate against its protector.<sup>135</sup>

However, as noted above, the rise of Iran and the 9/11 terror attacks, alongside domestic contenders, made the Saudis quick to stabilize oil prizes, sever relations with the Taliban and arresting suspected terrorists to appease any anti-Saudi sentiments that arose as a result of the attacks.<sup>136</sup> The government also immediately ruled out that US requests to launch attacks into Afghanistan from bases on Saudi soil would be denied to not strain relations with its neighbors, which was later ignored by US military officials.<sup>137</sup> This has recently changed, however. On February 6, 2013, the BBC News reported that the US has acquired drone bases in the Kingdom, alongside a military training mission with Saudi forces.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Bahgat, G. (2003): 459.

<sup>133</sup> Pollack, J. (2002): 77, 81.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*: 86.

<sup>135</sup> Bahgat, G. (2003): 457.

<sup>136</sup> Pollack, J. (2002): 89.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> 'CIA operating drone base in Saudi Arabia, US media reveal'. *BBC News* website (February 6, 2013) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-21350437>

The usage of petrodollars to promote the spread of radical Wahhabism around the world, construction of Islamic centers and schools and the occasional funding of terrorist organizations has further intensified the conflicting but mutually necessary and beneficial nature of US-Saudi relations.<sup>139</sup>

The recent uprisings and leadership changes in the region have forced Saudi Arabia to change and rethink its policies regarding its neighbors.<sup>140</sup> For instance, the demonstrations in Bahrain and the possible consequences for the stability of the oil market have moved the Saudi government to supply military troops, with US consent, to the small oil state, which it views as a “bulwark against Iranian influence among the majority Shiite population of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Province”.<sup>141</sup> Similarly, the UK signed a defense treaty with Bahrain in 2012 to increase military cooperation to safeguard its oil interests.<sup>142</sup>

The long-term and strategically important relationship between the US and Saudi Arabia has not gone unnoticed in Iran. During the presidencies of Rafsanjani and Khatami, Iran pursued an ‘accommodating policy’ regarding, among others, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, after relations had become strained after the 1979 Revolution. This policy is continued by contemporary Iran under President Ahmadinejad, albeit with a stronger focus on keeping and intensifying relations with its ally Syria and groups like Hamas and Hezbollah. However, Tehran still seeks to mend relations with Saudi Arabia and other states in the region through a strategy of reassurance and cooperation.<sup>143</sup> For example, Iran has been actively participating in regional conferences surrounding the crises in Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon in order to advance regional cooperation and tie regional grievances to Iran’s hegemonic ambitions.

Although religious Sunni-Shia rivalry has put its stamp on Saudi-Iranian relations, the 2007 summit between Ahmadinejad and King Abdullah has shown that both states can be pragmatic in their bilateral relations as well.<sup>144</sup> They promised to warm up relations between their countries and to try counter attempts that aim to intensify Shia-Sunni rivalry in the region. The summit demonstrated that Iran is trying to improve its image in both the Arab world and at home and aims to open up connections to other regional powers that could undermine US interests. The willingness of Saudi Arabia to intensify relations with Iran shows that it is diversifying its connections within the region, creating leeway to loosen its relations with the US and Riyadh’s efforts to step up economic and political relations with China. However, the Saudi Kingdom is very much dependent on both the US

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<sup>139</sup> Luft, G. (2005): 2.

<sup>140</sup> Blanchard, C. (2012): 11.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*: 12, 13.

<sup>142</sup> ‘Bahrain and Britain sign defense treaty to increase military co-operation’. *AlArabiya* website. <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/10/12/243298.html>

<sup>143</sup> Barzegar, K. (2010): 179.

<sup>144</sup> Fattah, H., ‘Saudi king meets with Iranian president’. *WorldSecurityNetwork.com* (05-03-2007). <http://www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/Broader-Middle-East/Fattah-Hassan/Saudi-king-meets-with-Iranian-president>

and Iran to keep the region and the oil price stable. As events in early 2012 have shown, merely Iran's threat to close the Strait of Hormuz as reaction to possible increased sanctions resulted in rising oil prices.<sup>145</sup> Rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran could prevent this from happening in the future, if both countries regard their intensified bilateral relations to be too important to jeopardize. Furthermore, this would provide disincentives for the US to hardening its stance on Iran even further, for it might put Washington-Riyadh relations at risk.

#### *China's involvement in Saudi Arabia*

China has been increasing its economic and political relations with the Saudi Kingdom as well. The 1999 inauguration of a 'strategic partnership' between Saudi Arabia and China created a cross-investment environment in which the Saudis opened up select portions of its upstream market to the Chinese and China opened up its marketing and refining sector to the Saudis.<sup>146</sup> These 'select portions' of the Saudi upstream market consist largely of the 'heavy crude' variant of oil, which is more difficult to refine than normal crude. Saudi Arabia's Aramco has therefore seized the opportunity to invest in a refinery in China that could handle heavy crude, which makes Saudi investments in China's refinery sector total over 6 billion US dollars.<sup>147</sup>

There are clear mutual benefits to the economic relationship of China and Saudi Arabia. The Saudis gain a market for their crude oil and access to China's downstream sector, while reducing political and economic reliance on the US. The Chinese gain long-term oil contracts and higher economic interdependence, enhancing China's supply security. It can be argued that rising Chinese influence in Saudi Arabia's economy and political system reduces US' influence in Riyadh. However, increasing Chinese energy dependence on Saudi crude makes China less dependent on Iran. This could give the US more leeway in dealing with Tehran regarding its nuclear program and containing its regional hegemonic ambitions, and could potentially result in less Chinese resistance to an increase of economic sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

#### § 3.2.2 Gulf Cooperation Council and its member states

Similar to the US' relation with Saudi Arabia, its economic and political relations with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states have been of a conflicting but necessary and mutual beneficial nature. The GCC member states – Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar – have the world's largest proven oil reserves and are part of the largest oil-exporting states.<sup>148</sup> The GCC has

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<sup>145</sup> Gosden, E., 'Oil prices rise on Iran's threats to cut off Strait of Hormuz'. *Telegraph.co.uk* (16-01-2012). <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/oilprices/9018993/Oil-prices-rise-on-Irans-threats-to-cut-off-Strait-of-Hormuz.html>

<sup>146</sup> Lee, H. & Shalmon, D. (2007): 14.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*: 15.

<sup>148</sup> Momani, B. (2008) 'Gulf Cooperation Council Oil Exporters and the Future of the Dollar', *New Political Economy*, Vol.13, No.3: 293.

often expressed its support for the oil pricing in dollars and have accumulated huge dollar-based foreign exchange reserves with which it purchases US (military) goods and technology.<sup>149</sup> This has basically led to a tacit agreement of the GCC states trading oil in US dollar currency in exchange for US military protection, which can be exemplified by the Saudi wishes for the US to contain Iran in the region (fearing Iran was trying to export its revolution to other Gulf countries, which would undermine GCC regimes) and to prevent Iraq from invading Saudi Arabia's oil fields. Again, the US relation with GCC states is based on the US' need for a stable supply of energy resources and the GCC states' needs for military protection against regional threats.

In light of the US naval base in Bahrain, which hosts the US Fifth Fleet, the recent Bahraini's uprising, the calls for political reform (which could jeopardize the continued placing of the Fifth Fleet in Bahrain's capital if a more anti-US government comes to power) and the crackdown on protesters by Bahraini and Saudi security forces have been watched with great interest by US policy makers.<sup>150</sup> Maintaining a naval presence in the Gulf via its Fifth Fleet headquarters is vital for the US control of the Gulf waters through which a majority of global oil trade flows. The challenge for US policy makers is to encourage "royal political concessions without jeopardizing the Fifth Fleet headquarters, a vital and probably irreplaceable regional installation that helps secure energy transit routes out of the Persian Gulf".<sup>151</sup>

The suspected Iranian involvement in the uprisings, consisting mainly of protestors of the Shiite majority in the country, makes these events of even more geopolitical consequence. As in most cases of American involvement in the region, US policy makers have to strike a balance between supporting democratic and liberal reform and safeguarding their national energy security interests, while not bolstering their 'dual-standard' record even further, which could play into the hands of Iran's strategy to connect regional grievances to its ambitions for a greater regional role.

### § 3.2.3 Turkey

#### *A vibrant relationship*

Another important player in the Middle East of geopolitical importance to US strategies and interests in the region is Turkey. During the Cold War, Turkey has been one of the early and important members of NATO, situated on the intersection between the Middle East and the EU and on the periphery of the Soviet Union. Its foreign policy was pursued along western interests, evaluated against Soviet expansionism and was devoid of involvement and interference in the Middle East,

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Henderson, S. (12-03-13) 'Bahrain's Royal Politics and the U.S. Navy Base'. *The Washington Institute website*. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/bahrains-royal-politics-and-the-u.s.-navy-base>

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

despite historical political, economic, religious and cultural similarities with its eastern neighbors.<sup>152</sup> The changes in the international system and political geography surrounding Turkey after the Cold War have moved Turkey to develop a more active foreign policy.<sup>153</sup> Instead of having Soviet expansionism as most prominent threat to its security, Turkey now has to challenge increasing Kurdish separatism, cooperating with the Iraqi Kurds, the future of Iraq and the regional ambitions of Iran. At the same time, domestic regime orientation created a new obstacle for the US-promoted Turkish membership of the EU.<sup>154</sup>

These developments have ‘pushed’ Turkish foreign policy orientation towards the Middle East and Central Asia. Even more important, Turkey has become a transit route for energy supplies to the EU. The government in Ankara has not shown a great taste to bring the transit routes for energy under EU regulatory rules of engagement.

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 has been very influential in relations between the US and Turkey and Turkey’s increased engagement with the Middle East should be viewed in this light.<sup>155</sup> The US’ lack and disregard of multilateralism and world opinion in its move to invade Iraq has left its mark on US-Turkey relations, especially remembering the massive flow of Iraqi refugees towards Turkey after the Second Gulf War in 1991.<sup>156</sup> Also, the removal of Saddam Hussein has, among other things, opened up regional economic and political opportunities for Iran. Furthermore, repeated ignored requests by the Erdogan government for US military assistance in dealing with the PKK training camps in northern Iraq, which borders with southeast Turkey, has resulted in a rising anti-American sentiment within Turkey and has enhanced its ‘double standard’ reputation: the US invades Afghanistan and Iraq to get rid of terrorists, but refuses to aid its NATO partner to do the same.<sup>157</sup>

Turkey now pursues a foreign policy based on mutual respect, recognition of territorial integrity and building trust with countries in the Caspian region on political, economic, military and cultural levels. It has an active policy of constructing foreign relations with states in the Middle East, not least because issues in the Middle East affect Turkey’s economy and security interests directly.<sup>158</sup> The way in which Turkey operationalizes its foreign policy – based on mutual recognition, mutual respect, win-win type of engagement with other actors in the region – give it the potential to become an important and influential player in the Middle East and could fulfill a ‘bridge-building’ role in, for example, US’

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<sup>152</sup> Ari, T. and Piriñçi, F. (2010) ‘Turkey’s New Foreign Policy Towards The Middle East And The Perceptinos In Syria And Lebanon’, *Akademik Bakis*, 4:7: 2.

<sup>153</sup> Larrabee, F. (2007) ‘Turkey Rediscovered the Middle East’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.86, No.4: 103.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.: 104 + Duss, M. (2011) ‘A U.S. Perspective on Turkey in the Middle East’, *TESEV Foreign Policy Program*: 2.

<sup>155</sup> Duss, M. (2011): 2 + Önis, Z. and Yilmaz, S. (2004) ‘Turkey-EU-US Triangle in perspective: Transformation or Continuity?’, *The Middle East Journal*, Vol.59, No.2: 265 + Larrabee, F. (2007): 106.

<sup>156</sup> Onis, Z. & Yilmaz, S. (2004): 78.

<sup>157</sup> Larrabee, F. (2007): 106.

<sup>158</sup> Ari, T. & Piriñçi, F. (2010): 3-6 .

relations with Hamas, Syria and Iran. Compared to the US' history of imperialism in the region and 'double-standard' type of foreign relations, Turkey has potential to attain an even more important regional role than before.

### *Turkey and Iran*

Turkey has been strengthening its relationship with Iran both on the economic and military level.<sup>159</sup> For a large part, the relation between the two comprises of expanding trade – they intend to triple their 10 billion US dollars' worth of trade by 2015 – and preventing complications and tensions that could hurt Turkish economic growth.<sup>160</sup> Also, Turkey-Iran cooperation on security issues has increased considerably as well. In 2004, they signed a security cooperation agreement that branded the PKK as a 'terrorist organization' and they have since increased cooperation in protecting their borders.<sup>161</sup> Furthermore, the energy resources that Iran has to offer have played a big role as well. In 2007, agreements were signed that allowed the Turkish Petroleum Corporation to explore gas reserves in Iran and would allow the transfer of gas from Turkmenistan to the EU (via Turkey) via a pipeline in Iran.<sup>162</sup> However, due to the conflictual nature of American-Iranian relations, these deals are at odds with US' preference to contain Iranian economic expansion and to circumvent Iran altogether.

However, while their economic cooperation has grown, Turkey and Iran have been competing for political influence and economic opportunities in post-2003 Iraq. Turkey sees an economically independent Middle East with Istanbul as its 'hub', but this is not the Iranian vision.<sup>163</sup> Also, the suspicions about the nature of Iran's nuclear program are a strain on increasing relations between Iran and Turkey. This issue is framed as the heart of US discontent with the Iranian regime and is of great interest to the US administration. Here, Turkey could be very useful in providing a bridge-building role in future nuclear negotiations with Tehran.<sup>164</sup> Iran's nuclear ambitions are also of concern to policy makers in Ankara. An Iran with a second-strike nuclear weapons capability could push other states in the Middle East to pursue a nuclear weapons capability of their own, potentially stabilizing the resource rich region. Turkey would possibly have to take countermeasures of its own to safeguard its security.<sup>165</sup>

### *Increasingly active foreign policy*

Turkey's increased involvement in the Palestine-Israel conflict and its intensified relations with Hamas are also very much of interests to the US. Firstly, Turkey's increasing relations with Hamas could be resulting in lowering Iranian influence with the organization. This would serve US interests, because

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<sup>159</sup> Duss, M. (2011): 2 + Larrabee, F. (2007): 107.

<sup>160</sup> Duss, M. (2011): 2-3.

<sup>161</sup> Larrabee, F. (2007): 107.

<sup>162</sup> Larrabee, F. (2007): 108.

<sup>163</sup> Duss, M. (2011): 3.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Larrabee, F. (2007): 108.

Iran would lose one of its main regional assets to destabilize US objectives. Relations between Turkey and Hamas thus effectively undermine Iranian influence in this specific area. Secondly, Turkey could provide a mediating role in future peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine, because of its relatively positive relations with all actors involved in the conflict. However, the actions of the US and Israel for the past seven decades pertaining to the conflict and the reluctance to set up serious negotiations do invite skepticism about whether the US and Israel are actually interested in resolving the conflict.

There are US concerns that Turkey's foreign policy may be subject to 'Islamization' and disregarding western interests. According to Larrabee, however, this is misplaced, because Turkey's increased involvement in the Middle East is a logical continuation of its gradually intensifying engagement with the region after the Cold War.<sup>166</sup> However, the US is probably forced to accept a more independent and assertive Turkish foreign policy, especially after the 2003 invasion of Iraq, also in the light of NATO cooperation. US' reluctance to assist Turkey in dealing with PKK trouble near its eastern borders and the unilateral invasion of Iraq have possibly made Turkey more reluctant itself to sign off on future US instigated NATO missions. The perceived Iranian nuclear threat – and the Iranian missile capability to hit eastern parts of Turkey – can be a restoring factor in restoring US-Turkey relations because there their security interests converge. Notwithstanding current developments, Turkey remains of great strategic importance to the US and other NATO member states. It borders both Iran and Syria, which are perceived by the west as posing threats to the region's stability and US interests and objectives.

#### § 3.2.4 Israel

From its founding in 1948 through the partition plan of Palestine to the current day, Israel has been a regional ally of the US. It has enjoyed the US' support in virtually all matters, be it on moral issues, the occupation of Palestine, arms supplies or its relations with regional states, and continues to be on center stage at American international politics and foreign policy related discussions regarding the Middle East. The Israeli-American relationship has had its ups and downs though. One example would be the Israeli, British and French plan to seize the Suez Canal in 1956. The US fiercely opposed this plan, as any disruption of the trade through the canal would have consequences for the stability and prices of the oil market. They were also concerned that the "Europeans' neo-imperial enterprise would throw the region into the Soviet camp".<sup>167</sup> More recently, the uneasy relationship between the Obama administration and the Netanyahu government concerning the 'Iranian threat' has demonstrated their sometimes diverging preferences for regional engagement.

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Pollack, J. (2002): 80.

Over the years, the US-Israeli alliance has had an impact on US relations with regional states as well. Home to some of Islam's holiest places on earth, Saudi Arabia has been an opponent of a sovereign Jewish presence in the Arab world since Israel's founding.<sup>168</sup> Also, the US' double standards concerning and support of the continued Israeli occupation of Palestine has served as fuel for regional anti-American sentiments and Muslim extremism. Iranian clerical leaders, for example, have a history of using the US-Israeli relationship to show that 'US imperialism' is still present in the Middle East and have connected it to the cause of exporting the Islamic revolution. Muslim extremist groups like Al-Qaeda have repeatedly cited the Israeli occupation and American support thereof as reasons for attacks against the US in and outside of the region. It comes as no surprise that some politicians, government officials and academics have their doubts whether the US-Israeli alliance is actually in the US' national interest.<sup>169</sup> Recently, ex-CIA head of the Bin Laden Unit, Michael Scheuer, expressed his doubts about the alignment of Israeli and American interests in the region in a debate session at the Georgetown University.<sup>170</sup> He argued that pro-Israeli Americans and lobby groups have managed to convince the American public that US national security interests are identical to Israeli interests, which according to Scheuer is untrue. Notions of 'supporting the only democratic state in the region' and promising to aid it in a possible war with Iran are not in American national security interests but are putting it at odds with states in the region.

However, its strategic alliance with Israel remains a vital hegemonic pillar for the US. Israel has shown that it is strong enough to protect US interests in the region and can serve as an extension of US political, economic and military interests regarding the region. Turkey used to provide this role, as did, to some extent, Egypt under Mubarak, but this has changed in recent years, as noted in § 3.2.3. Also, Israeli lobbies like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) are among the most resourceful and influential political interest groups in America. These lobbies have great influence in American politics and economy and are able to steer American politics and politician to align with Israeli interests. Furthermore, as an (ambiguous) nuclear power, Israel provides balance to the region and is therefore inherently connected to US regional interests. It is difficult to predict what would happen to this 'balance' if Israel was not able to fulfill this role any longer and Pakistan and India would be the remaining nuclear weapons powers in the greater Middle East region. In light of Iran's nuclear program, ensuring Israel's 'survival' is therefore perhaps even more at heart to a US-led regional order. Lastly, framing the US relationship with Israel as a 'natural' alliance and rise of Iran as an 'existential threat' to Israel's survival is one of the factors that has enabled the US administration to rally domestic support for its policies against the Islamic Republic. The using of President Ahmadinejad's anti-Israel rhetoric and pointing to its suspected nuclear weapons program continues to

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid.: 81.

<sup>169</sup> Waxman, D. (2012) 'The Real Problem in U.S.-Israeli Relations', *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2012: 71.

<sup>170</sup> 'This House believes it's time for the US to get tough on Israel'. Transcript of debate at Georgetown University, Washington DC (25-03-2009).

be a tactic of both the American and Israeli administrations to demonize Iran and attract support for further economic sanctions or even military action against Iran.

### § 3.2.5 The EU, Iran and the nuclear dossier

European states have long been involved in the Middle East due to their colonial history and geographical proximity to the region. European interests in the Middle East are primarily economically based and are mostly aligned with the US. Financial investment, the interests of European oil companies in the region and (bilateral) economic connections between Europe and states in the greater Middle East have made regional security and stability foreign policy priorities. Although the EU (or European states) and US have cooperated on more issues regarding the greater Middle East region, in light of this research the EU's efforts in nuclear negotiations with Tehran are most relevant to demonstrate converging interests between the EU and US regarding Iran.

With help of the US and other western states under the Atoms for Peace program under President Eisenhower, Iran began developing nuclear technology.<sup>171</sup> After the 1979 Revolution, western parties withdrew from all previous arrangements and began their policy of isolation and sanctioning, forcing Iran to complete billions' worth of unfinished nuclear projects independently. The use of chemical weapons and western support for Saddam Hussein during the Iraq-Iran war led Iran to rethink their security strategy and pursue a domestic enrichment capability to obtain energy supply security, independent from other states. As a member of the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) regime, Iran has the unalienable right to pursue peaceful nuclear technology and the obligation to declare all nuclear related activities to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).<sup>172</sup> Iranian administrations have repeatedly stressed this "unalienable right", but their failure to disclose some nuclear related activities to the IAEA have led western powers to doubt the peaceful nature of the program and have resulted in international sanctions imposed on Iran.<sup>173</sup>

Both the EU and US have stated that Iran has the right to pursue nuclear technology, but feel that it first needs to demonstrate the peaceful nature thereof.<sup>174</sup> Iran, on the other hand, stresses that it cannot rely on the supply of energy and nuclear materials/technology from abroad and wishes to be as independent as possible in its energy supply, as is its right under the reciprocal nature of the NPT regime. Also, since 1974, Tehran has advocated the need for a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the

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<sup>171</sup> Mousavian, H., 'The Iranian Nuclear Dispute: Origins and Current Options'. *Arms Control Association* website (July/August 2012) [http://www.armscontrol.org/2012\\_07-08/The\\_Iranian\\_Nuclear\\_Dispute\\_Origins\\_and\\_Current\\_Options](http://www.armscontrol.org/2012_07-08/The_Iranian_Nuclear_Dispute_Origins_and_Current_Options)

<sup>172</sup> Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear-Weapons 1970: Article IV.

<sup>173</sup> Denza, E., (2005) 'Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons: The European Union and Iran', *European Foreign Affairs Review* 10: 290-1.

<sup>174</sup> 'Iran's nuclear programme'. *European Union External Action Service* website.

[http://eeas.europa.eu/iran/nuclear\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/iran/nuclear_en.htm).

+ Katzman, K., (2012) 'Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses', *Congressional Research Service*: 27.

Middle East, including Israel, to ensure stability and security in the region. High domestic energy consumption but failure to reach adequate supply has further led Iran to pursue nuclear energy technology.

It is in US' (and EU's) interest to prevent Iran from further increasing its nuclear technology expertise, whether peaceful or for other purposes, due to a variety of reasons. First, with a (second-strike) nuclear weapons capability, Iran would have a much higher bargaining position in international politics and would have deterrence against attacks from foreign nations. It would gain more influence in regional affairs and would be an even greater force to reckon with. The US would have to take Iranian interests more seriously, stop or lighten their sanctioning policies and would not be able to continue its unilaterally based foreign policy in the region. Secondly, in addition to Pakistan, India and Israel, Iran will be the fourth nuclear weapons power in the greater Middle East. This could lead other states in the region to doubt their national security and push them to pursue a nuclear weapons capability of their own, potentially destabilizing the region. Lastly, Iran would benefit from nuclear energy greatly. At this moment, the Islamic Republic is unable to export most of its energy resources due to both international sanctions and its high domestic energy consumption. If its nuclear energy projects could supply more energy domestically, Iran would have more spare fossil resources available for export. This would allow Iran's economy to grow and gain more influence in the region, which would undermine US objectives.

The US and European states have common interests regarding a nuclear Iran, whether peaceful or not. However, they disagree which approach to take in order to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapons capability. On the one hand, the US is mainly interested in using economic and political sanctions and the threat of military force to prevent Iran from further developing their (peaceful) nuclear program. EU Member States, on the other hand, feel that this isolating-approach does not help to come to a common Iran-Western understanding of the nuclear issue and could potentially destabilize the region.<sup>175</sup> Instead, the EU pursues an approach of 'conditional engagement'.<sup>176</sup> Due to close political, economic and historic ties between Iran and European countries, in combination with relatively good current relations, the EU has been able to attain a more 'soft-power' and accommodating approach to the Iranian nuclear issue than the US has been since Iran-US relations have been severely strained since the Islamic Revolution.

This approach took form in the EU-3, consisting of France, Germany and the UK, which mediated between US demands and the demands of Iran, with support of EU Member States and the European Council. It largely failed to do so, due to, among other factors, the change of leadership in both the US and Iran and the unwillingness of the US to provide a security assurance to Iran, which is essentially

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<sup>175</sup> Bahgat, G., (2006) 'Nuclear proliferation: The Islamic Republic of Iran', *Iranian Studies* 39(3): 325.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

the requirement for a peaceful resolution to the nuclear ‘problem’. After the EU-3 had been incorporated in the P5+2 (the permanent members of the UN Security Council plus the EU and Germany), the nuclear negotiations came to a standstill when Iran rejected multiple proposals for resolution of the problem due to the lack of security guarantees by the US. Tehran feels that if it should receive concrete security guarantees from the US if it is to give up its right to domestic uranium enrichment, which would endanger Iranian energy security and its survival. Also, the increase of US troop and navy deployment in the region and the American support of Iranian opposition groups during the nuclear negotiations sent an ambivalent message to the Iranian regime. However, the US continues to reject requests for a (negate nuclear) security assurance and demands that Iran gives up its NPT rights practically unconditionally ‘security-wise’.

### § 3.3 Regional ambitions and counter-hegemonic forces: Iran in the Middle East

Since 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran has tried to prevent the US from reconstructing the regional order it had during the Cold War. Instead, Iran pursues a regional hegemonic role of its own and aims to remove the US from its neighborhood. In order to achieve this objective, the Islamic Republic has relied on a policy of attracting alliances with other contender states, primarily China and Russia, and supporting non-governmental organizations and political groups in the region, such as Hezbollah and Hamas, to undermine US foreign policy and interests. However, Iran has not yet been able to create this counter-hegemonic force due to lack of trust among the contender states themselves.

The following sections will analyze the efforts of Iran to create a counter-hegemonic force and prevent the US from recreating a regional order. Focus lies on Iran’s engagement with China and Russia, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and its strategic support for NGOs and political groups that have aligned interests.

#### § 3.3.1 China, Russia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

##### *China*

To meet the increasing energy demand in China, Beijing has been forced to “aggressively venture into the global oil market”.<sup>177</sup> According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), it is estimated that in 2030 China will have a 77% crude oil import dependency, of which half will be derived from the Gulf.<sup>178</sup> It is of vital importance to China to be able to meet its domestic energy demand, which continues to rise dramatically.

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<sup>177</sup> Lee, H. & Shalmon, D. (2007): 10.

<sup>178</sup> ‘2006 World Energy Outlook’. *International Energy Agency (IEA)* (2006): 34, 145.

Relations between China and Iran have existed for more than 2000 years.<sup>179</sup> The ancient “Silk Road” trade route connected China with the Middle East and Central Asia. Intensive trade between the two empires resulted in good diplomatic and political relations, the mutual exchange of knowledge and absence of war and conflict, which left the slate clean to build a mutually beneficial relationship on.<sup>180</sup>

During the Cold War, relations between China and Iran became strained due to US influence in the region, although unofficial trade relations continued during the 1950s and political relations intensified in the 1960, when the centrality of Iran's geopolitical importance in the Middle East diminished in the eyes of US policy makers, allowing Iran to have a more independent foreign policy.<sup>181</sup> China sought relations with Iran (and Pakistan) to counter Soviet ambitions in the region, which resulted in a closer alliance being forged during the 1980s, based on their defiance of the Soviet Union and the US.<sup>182</sup>

China arose as a provider of arms and technology for Iran in the 1990s and became very interested in Iran's market opportunities and its vast resources of oil and gas, which are connectable to the China-Kazakhstan pipeline and therefore allows transport over land and sea, significantly enhancing China's supply security.<sup>183</sup> These developments coincided with Iran's aims to increase relations with contender states like China and Russia during the 1990s. Providing Iran with a reliable buyer of its resources provided both countries with a mutual beneficial, wide-ranging and extensive economic relationship.<sup>184</sup>

China increasingly invests in Iran's oil infrastructure, which is deteriorating due to international sanctions, planning on connecting Iran with China's economy for the long-term.<sup>185</sup> In early 2012, however, China reduced oil imports from Iran with 34% due to a dispute between Sinopec and Iran's national oil company.<sup>186</sup> Oil imports were back at pre-dispute levels in May 2012, after settling the conflict. However, China is expected to continue to diversify its energy imports to ensure its energy security, also in light of uncertainty surrounding oil imports from Iran due to international sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic.

The flow of oil does not go one way. Iran has been struggling to meet domestic gasoline demand, due to a lack of domestic refinery capacity and the inability to import gasoline from other states due to

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<sup>179</sup> Dorraj, M. & Currier, C.L. (2008) “Lubricated with Oil: Iran-China Relations in a Changing World”, *Middle East Policy*, 15 (2): 66.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*: 67.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*: 68.

<sup>182</sup> Dorraj, M. & Currier, C. (2008): 68-9.

<sup>183</sup> Lee, H. & Shalmon, D. (2007): 16.

<sup>184</sup> Dorraj, M. & Currier, C. (2008): 70.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*: 72.

<sup>186</sup> ‘China’. *Energy Information Administration* (04-09-2012). <http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=CH>

international pressures and sanctions. Iran is therefore importing gasoline from China.<sup>187</sup> Generally, Iran depends on imports for around 40% of its refined petroleum and 11% of its diesel.<sup>188</sup>

In line with China's economic tactics in relation to other states in the Middle East, Beijing is not only focusing on Iran's energy sector. It is also investing in non-energy related sectors in order to connect the two economies further. In 2011, trade between Iran and China was estimated at 45 billion US dollar and they have agreed to increase this number to 50 billion by 2013.<sup>189</sup> This trade includes Chinese investments in Tehran's subway systems, cement factories and dams, which shows that Beijing is serious about creating a level of interconnectedness between the two countries' economies.<sup>190</sup> In addition to energy products, Iran is exporting mineral resources like coal, lead, zinc and copper, and is importing computer systems, other electronics, transportation goods and arms from China.<sup>191</sup> According to Ali Akbar Salehi, the former Iranian representative to the IAEA, the two countries complement each other: "They have industry and we have energy resources".<sup>192</sup>

China's policy of 'integrating' or connecting both economies, in both the energy and public sectors, conflicts with US interests and its international sanctions policy. By providing Iran with an import and export trade partner, China is dampening the potentially 'crippling' effects of EU and US sanctions. Furthermore, China has been target to international sanctions itself, due to domestic repression and human rights issues, and pursues a policy of non-interference concerning other countries. In light of China's veto-power in the UN Security Council, Beijing is therefore not likely to vote in favor of sanctioning Iran. In addition, if China would be in favor of sanctioning the Iranian energy sector even further, it would be indirectly sanctioning itself due to China's increasing activities and reliance on that sector.<sup>193</sup> However, China does not want to be regarded as the enabler of Iran becoming a nuclear weapons power either. It needs to make calculated decisions about its relations with Iran, and other states in the Middle East, in order to not too much antagonize or disrupt American interests in the region.

All in all, China-Iran relations are likely to expand, also because Iran possesses enormous gas reserves, which Saudi Arabia, for instance, lacks.

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<sup>187</sup> Downs, E. & Moloney, S. (2011) 'Getting China to Sanction Iran', *Foreign Affairs*.

<sup>188</sup> Kemenade, W. van (2010) 'China vs. The Western Campaign for Iran Sanctions', *The Washington Quarterly*, 33:3: 102.

<sup>189</sup> 'Iran and China to expand trade relations'. *Payvand Iran News* website (04-01-12).

<http://www.payvand.com/news/12/apr/1001.html>

<sup>190</sup> Dorraj, M. & Currier, C.L. (2008).

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> Wright, R. (17-11-2004) 'Iran's New Alliance With China Could Cost U.S. Leverage'. *Washington Post*.

<sup>193</sup> Kemenade, W. van (2010): 100.

## *Russia*

Iran-Russia relations date back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century and have been both turbulent and calm. Before the Islamic Revolution, their relations were formed by the rivalry between the Soviet Union and the US. Iran, portraying a ‘Middle East gendarme’ for the US at the time, therefore had very little relations with Soviet Russia. After the Revolution, the Soviet Union supplied Saddam Hussein with large amounts of weapons in support of Iraq’s secular ideology.

This changed during the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when Iran tried to increase its relations with Russia, in addition to China, India and the European Union. Since, Iran-Russia trade relations have increased and Moscow has emerged as a major supplier of modern arms to Tehran.<sup>194</sup> Also, Iran imports a large portion of aviation technology and aircraft from Russia, because international sanctions prohibit European and American companies from selling aircraft and aviation parts to Iranian companies.<sup>195</sup> Russian planes are not known for their safety and durability to begin with and a lack of aviation supplies and maintenance has resulted in various plane crashes in Iran.<sup>196</sup>

The Russian approach to Iran has been of a similar vein as China’s. Economic and political relations have increased in the 1990s and continue to do so. However, concerns surrounding Iran’s nuclear program have had a dampening effect on the evolvement of relations. In order not to antagonize the US too much, Russia and China cannot blindly ignore the international concerns about Iran’s nuclear program and thus have to make concessions once in a while. In 2011, this was demonstrated by a UN Security Council Resolution that was agreed upon by the five permanent members, which stated their “deep and increasing concern” about Tehran’s possible research of nuclear weapons technology and called for Iran’s acceptance of further IAEA inspections.<sup>197</sup> Most interesting in this regard is Moscow’s direct involvement in the construction of the Bushehr nuclear power plant. Started during the Cold War by German companies but halted after the 1979 Revolution, the Bushehr reactor construction had not progressed for almost 20 years. After the Cold War, however, Russia took over the project and, after some delays, finished constructing it. The Bushehr nuclear power plant has been operational since 2011 and is connected to Iran’s power grid.<sup>198</sup>

A testament to their increased cooperation in the energy sector, however, has been the co-founding of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum by Iran, Russia and Qatar. The organization has progressed from being an “informal and disorganized group of major natural gas exporters and producers” to a more

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<sup>194</sup> Felgenhauer, P. (24-07-10) ‘The ‘unraveling relationship’ between Russia and Iran’. *BBC News Europe*  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-10684110>

<sup>195</sup> ‘Iran to buy five TU 100-204 planes from Russia’. *Payvand Iran News* (31-03-04).

<sup>196</sup> ‘Iran air safety hit by sanctions’. *BBC News website* (06-12-05).

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/4504434.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4504434.stm)

<sup>197</sup> Weitz, R. (19-11-2011) ‘Why China and Russia Help Iran’. *The Diplomat*.  
<http://thediplomat.com/2011/11/19/why-china-and-russia-help-iran/>

<sup>198</sup> ‘Iran launches Bushehr nuclear power plant’. *RiaNovosti website* (12-09-11).  
<http://en.rian.ru/world/20110912/166785925.html>

OPEC-style organization that aims to keep gas prices at a “fair level”.<sup>199</sup> Its members have control over 70% of world gas reserves, 38% of the pipeline trade and 85% of liquefied natural gas (LNG) production.<sup>200</sup>

Although Russia and Iran developed relations after the Cold War, the Islamic Republic has remained skeptical of Moscow’s intentions ever since the czars repeatedly tried to invade Iran and annex a port connected to the Indian Ocean in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>201</sup> After 1979, the policy of keeping Russia at arm’s length continued. During the nuclear negotiations between Iran and the EU-3, so-called nuclear-fuel-swap-deals were proposed, in which Iran would supply uranium to Russia and would receive nuclear fuel rods in return. However, this was unacceptable to Iran because it would become dependent on Russia for its energy supply security, which is exactly what it tries to prevent by pursuing its nuclear energy program. This demonstrates that there are still trust issues among the ‘contender’ states, which until now have prevented them from forming a unified bloc against US hegemonic interests.

On the other hand, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia has primarily focused on the Caucasus and Central Asia, by trying to prevent the US from expanding its influence in that region. It’s the neighborhood that is directly adjacent to Russia’s borders and harbors great energy resources. Iran, therefore, has been a strategic asset to the Russians, but not necessarily a vital one. The Russia-Iran relationship was to last as long as it was beneficial to the Russians. This appears to have changed, however, now that a ‘strategic partnership’ has been formed over the past few weeks. Moscow and Tehran have signed multiple agreements on social, cultural, security and economic issues, including a Russian training mission aimed at creating a special ‘crowd control’ group in time for the upcoming Iranian Presidential elections in June 2013.<sup>202</sup>

### *Shanghai Cooperation Organization*

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was founded in 2001, replacing the Shanghai Five of 1996. The purpose of the organization is to increase collaboration among its members and reduce military border deployment between their borders.<sup>203</sup> Its members are Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Iran gained observer status in the organization in 2005 and has been actively advocating full membership.

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<sup>199</sup> Dietsch, M. (12-10-09) ‘The Next Global Energy Cartel’. *Forbes* website.  
<http://www.forbes.com/2009/12/10/natural-gas-exporting-trade-opinions-contributors-marcel-dietsch.html?sp=true>

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Taheri, A. (13-02-13) ‘Why Iran is falling into Russia’s arms’. *New York Post* website.  
[http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/why\\_iran\\_is\\_falling\\_into\\_russia\\_ynb2NrixZYgiTmeaYu88KN](http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/why_iran_is_falling_into_russia_ynb2NrixZYgiTmeaYu88KN)

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Dizboni, A. (2010): 2.

The SCO is regarded as a politically and economically influential organization: its members and states with observer status possess roughly 40% of the world population; four of them are nuclear powers and others have control of some of the world's largest energy resource reserves; and it pursues a vision of Asian regional cooperation wherein economic and security objectives are institutionalized.<sup>204</sup> The US has repeatedly been denied requests for observer status, which demonstrates that the SCO is “emerging as a new Euro-Asian power bloc without US interference”.<sup>205</sup> The changing nature of the US' hegemonic order has created opportunities for Iran, China and Russia to increase their influence in Central Asia and the greater Middle East and diminish US hegemony in the region. Also, both China and Russia aim to address domestic security problems, such as terrorism, separatism and religious extremism, through the framework of the SCO. Furthermore, the SCO allows them higher levels of influence over other SCO members and adaptation of a more active counter-hegemonic policy against US expansionism.<sup>206</sup>

Iran, Russia and China thus share a common interest: containing the expansion of US influence in their neighborhood and instead creating their own version of a regional order. For Russia and China, the SCO is a geopolitical asset and allows them to project political and economic power onto Central Asia and, potentially, the greater Middle East. In addition, for China, the SCO is a vessel through which it can attain energy security, by developing its western regions and connecting those to SCO member states, creating what the Middle East is for the US.

For Iran, having observer status in the SCO with the prospect of becoming a full member has offered Tehran a way to attend to its security needs through the SCO framework and avoid further US sanctions for its nuclear program. In combination with China's and Russia's increasing economic activity within Iran's energy and other sectors, the Islamic Republic's involvement in the SCO and the military cooperation which it includes have the potential to create strategically beneficial political and economic opportunities for its regional hegemonic ambitions. In effect, Iran sees the SCO as an organization that counters US' interests and expansionism in its neighborhood and has the potential to de-isolate Iran from the international community. Full membership in the organization and further integration of Iran's economy with China and Russia would provide it with international political and economic support and could provide a credible deterrent for foreign intervention. But, as noted above, trust-issues between Iran and SCO members have slowed down the process of obtaining full member status.

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.: 9.

### § 3.3.2 Non-governmental Organizations: Hezbollah and Hamas

In order to undermine US interests and objectives in the Middle East, Iran has frequently been supporter and sponsor of organizations and political groups that combat US interference directly and indirectly. Contrary to popular belief, these groups are often not under direct control of Tehran. The Islamic Republic supports these groups because they follow a similar ideological and/or political ethos and can serve their own interests as well as Iran's.<sup>207</sup> It supports these groups with financial resources, weapons, political and diplomatic support, but only rarely gives direct operational instructions. However, as Kagan et.al. point out, it is questionable whether these proxy groups could act or even survive without Iran's support.<sup>208</sup> Although Iran is thus not always directly controlling these organizations and groups, their survival does often depend on Iranian political, economic and financial support.

The most commonly and directly associated group with Iran is the Shi'a religious militant group Hezbollah in Lebanon. It has been created by Iranian clerics aligned to Ayatollah Khomeini in 1982 in reaction to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and have been trained by Iran's Revolutionary Guard. Over the years, Hezbollah has evolved as a sophisticated "political-military-social organization".<sup>209</sup> It is a player in the Lebanese government, a trainer of other regional terror groups, a militia to be reckoned with.

Since its war with Israel in 2006, Hezbollah has fully recovered to its pre-war strength. According to Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, Iran has had a big part in that recovery, aiding the group with financial assistance (estimated at 100 million US dollars per year) and arms.<sup>210</sup> These weapons shipments have been increasingly more sophisticated, now including long-range missiles and other weaponry to increase effectiveness near Lebanon's border with Israel. Hezbollah's fighters have been trained in-depth by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard in both Lebanon and Iran.

Even though the connections between Iran's military, Revolutionary Guard and Hezbollah are extensive, the group is not fully dependent on Iran for guidance and is capable of independent operations. Iran should therefore be more seen an enabler and Hezbollah as the willing extension of Iranian objectives and foreign policy. However, after the 2006 war with Israel, it could be argued that Hezbollah's dependence on Iran for assistance and guidance has increased. Furthermore, the war had lethal and devastating consequences for the Lebanese population and infrastructure. As a result,

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<sup>207</sup> Kagan, F., Kagan, K. & Pletka, D. (2012) 'Iranian Influence in the Levant, Iraq, and Afghanistan'. A report of the American Enterprise Institute: 3.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.: 6.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.: 6, 8.

Hezbollah's reputation among the Lebanese population has suffered, as has its position within Lebanon's political and economic sectors.<sup>211</sup>

For Iran, Hezbollah effectively serves the role of a proxy group that destabilizes US interests and objectives in the region. Although its control over the organization has increased since the 2006 war, Hezbollah still enjoys relative autonomy. Because the two have similar standpoints regarding ideology, politics and the presence of the US in the region, however, Hezbollah has served as an extension of Iran's foreign policy and regional hegemonic ambitions.

In a similar vein, Iran has been a supporter of groups and organizations in Palestine. Until recently, the groups supported included the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Fatah. Due to their willingness to make large territorial concessions to Israel, however, Iran now only supports rejectionist groups, like Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.<sup>212</sup> Iran, in this sense, is served by a continued conflict between the Palestinians and Israel and holds no real geopolitical interest in the resolution thereof. The Palestinian cause and anti-Israel rhetoric of these rejectionist groups has served Iran as an example of continued US imperialism in the region and as a rallying tool behind its foreign policy. Since 1979, the Iranian government has connected the Palestinian cause with Iran's revolutionary principles. Tehran has supported these groups with financial aid, weapons, diplomatic support and has advocated a more Hezbollah-style relationship with these groups. Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad themselves want bilateral relationships with Iran as well and do not wish to get their Iranian support through Hezbollah. This makes sense for these groups, as well as for Iran. For Iran, there is no strategic reason to give Hezbollah more control over Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, because that would diminish Tehran's direct and indirect influence over these organizations.

However, Iran's pledges of support for the Palestinian people add up to very little on the ground. Iran gives little or no humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian population and only focuses on sending weapons shipments and financial assistance to the militant groups and training their fighters. From this, it can be concluded that Iran is effectively using the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a source for domestic support for its counter-hegemonic regional policies, but is not truly interested in resolving the conflict. Indeed, a more stable Israel would enhance both Israel's and US' position in the region, for it would be no longer occupied with domestic conflicts. The ceasing of Iranian support for the PLO and Fatah, the groups that have been willing to make more concessions than Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, has demonstrated this as well.

In contrast to Hezbollah or Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hamas is not a creation of Iran and is primarily Sunni. This is a testament to Iran's willingness to put pragmatism before religious ideology in foreign policy matters. Iran is not only supporting Hamas with weapons and financial aid, but is also

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<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*: 9.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*

constructing social and economic connections with Palestinian areas, within both Palestine and Lebanon, to ensure a long-lasting relationship.<sup>213</sup> In contrast, Palestinian Islamic Jihad is believed to be an Iranian creation, has no direct Palestinian roots and is almost fully dependent on Iran.<sup>214</sup>

Iran's relationship with Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad give Tehran many benefits for its foreign policy objectives. First, it supports a key enemy organization of Israel and anti-Zionism has been an important rhetoric part of the Islamic Republic, even more so during President Ahmadinejad's terms. Secondly, increasing connections with the Sunni population under Hamas gives Iran access to the Sunni communities on the base of converging interests and common enemies. Thirdly, supporting these militant groups, including Hezbollah, gives Iran multiple opportunities to open up more fronts against the US. Also, having more proxy organizations that are actively combating Israeli and American interests in the region enables Iran to keep international attention from other matters, for instance its nuclear program or its activities in Iraq to undermine US interests there. Lastly, supporting militant Palestinian groups prevents Israel from focusing its (military) attention abroad, which would serve as an even bigger extension of indirect American power projection in the region.

### § 3.4 Afghanistan and Iraq: competition for geopolitical influence

This section will give an overview and analysis of the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, what the developments have been since regarding their effect on the geopolitical order in the Middle East and how the US and Iran have adjusted their foreign policy operationalization accordingly.

#### *The 2001 invasion of Afghanistan and the removal of the Taliban*

After the terror attacks of 9/11, 2001, the US and NATO forces invaded Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban regime, an extremist Sunni Muslim organization, which was harboring Al-Qaeda fighters and training camps. Under the moderate government of President Khatami, Iran actively aided the US in its invasion of Afghanistan, providing intelligence about Taliban headquarters and ground movement, opening up its airspace for American military aviation and promising to safely return any US air force personnel that might need to land in Iranian territory. For years, Tehran had aided the Afghanistan Northern Alliance in its fight against the Taliban regime, an ideological and political strategic threat to Iran's Shia ruling party and Iranian interests in the region. During the invasion, Iranian Revolutionary Guard personnel fought alongside Northern Alliance and US forces in a cooperative effort to topple the Taliban regime. While the Iranian administration expected this support to fulfill a catalysis role in warming up Iran-US relations, President Bush instead branded Iran an axis-of-evil state in his 2002 State of the Union Address. This, in turn, enabled conservative political forces within Iran to gain support, eventually resulting in the election of President Ahmadinejad in 2005.

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid.: 10.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.: 11.

Currently, Iran is aiding various (militant) groups in Afghanistan, while also intensifying economic and political relations with the Afghan government and people. Though the Taliban are ideologically and politically contrasted to Iran's ruling religious and political elite, Tehran provides them with some military and financial support to fight NATO forces in Afghanistan. At the same time, it also supports the Afghan government that is actively fighting the Taliban.<sup>215</sup> Here, Iran pursues a strategy of, on the one hand, supporting movements within Afghanistan that are fighting Western forces in order to keep them occupied and, on the other hand, supporting the Afghan government in their fight with these same anti-Western movements, in order to prevent the Taliban from rising to power once more. In addition, Iran has pledged almost 700 million US dollars for rebuilding Afghanistan. It has since used these funds to, among other things, (re)build technical and educational infrastructure and services, set up Farsi language learning programs and tried, in vain, to connect parts of its electrical power grid to that of Iran.<sup>216</sup> As a result of its immediate engagement in Afghanistan after the invasion, Iran is pulling the country closer politically, economically and culturally faster than other states, like Pakistan, Uzbekistan and China, are able to do.<sup>217</sup>

For the US and allied states operating in the country, the multipolar NATO command structure in Afghanistan has made it very difficult for allied forces to develop a detailed understanding of what exactly is going on within Afghanistan. As a result, they have not been able to publicly accuse Iran of aiding insurgent forces and anti-NATO movements in Afghanistan.<sup>218</sup> However, weapons and explosives were found that have lead western intelligence services to believe that Iran is actively aiding and supporting these groups.

Ridding Afghanistan of the Taliban regime has removed a neighboring threat for Iranian interests in the region. The Taliban, pursuing a Sunni ideology and international political system that is opposed that of Iran's Shia ruling elite, had been a long-time regional adversary of Tehran. Iran has actively supported the Afghan Northern alliance to try and keep Taliban forces away from the Afghan-Iranian border and prevent Sunni militants from entering and destabilizing the country. By removing this threat to Iranian regional security, the US has inadvertently created opportunities for Tehran to increasingly connect to Afghanistan's political system, economy and population. Although NATO troops are still very much present in Afghanistan, this increase of Iran-Afghanistan relations puts the US in an awkward position, also in light of the increasingly hostile attitude of the Afghan population regarding the Western military presence on their territory and the resulting civilian casualties. In addition to Iraq, as will be elaborated upon below, Iran now has two directly neighboring countries that it can project its power and interests on.

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<sup>215</sup> Nader, A. & Laha, J. (2011) 'Iran's Balancing Act in Afghanistan'. *RAND National Defense Research Institute*: ix.

<sup>216</sup> Kagan, F., Kagan, K. & Pletka, D. (2012): 37 + Nader, A. & Laha, J. (2011): 7.

<sup>217</sup> Kagan, F., Kagan, K. & Pletka, D. (2012): 39.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*: 42.

### *The 2003 invasion of Iraq and opportunities for Tehran*

In 2003, the US invaded Saddam Hussein's Iraq under the guise of it supposedly constructing weapons of mass destruction. However, considering doubts about these claims already arose before the actual invasion, one can argue that the US decision was based on the fact that Saddam Hussein was becoming less and less controllable in its attitude towards the region and that regime change was deemed necessary to stabilize the country's oil resources and regional security. However, with the removal of Saddam Hussein, the US has again removed an obstacle to Iran's regional hegemonic ambitions.<sup>219</sup> As shown, Iraq and Iran had been adversaries for decades, ultimately demonstrated in their eight year long war.

However, now that Saddam's regime is no more, Iran and the US find themselves to have converging objectives regarding the future of Iraq, although the rationales behind them are not. Both have an interest in a politically and democratically stable Iraq.<sup>220</sup> For Iran, an Iraq consisting of smaller and unstable parts would open up possibilities for other regional actors, like Turkey or Saudi Arabia, to gain more influence. A democratically pluralistic Iraq, however, will enable the Shiite majority in Iraq to consolidate their influence in a representative government at the expense of other political and religious groups.<sup>221</sup> The primary objective for Tehran is to prevent Iraq from arising as an ideological and geopolitical threat once more and an Iranian-aligned Shiite Iraqi government would ensure that. Iran has therefore pursued a policy of supporting aligned political groups within Iraq, like the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and Da'wa, which have enjoyed a long-term relationship with Iran since the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>222</sup> It is also continuously expressing its support for the Nouri al Maliki government, since his party has pledged to intensify relations between Iraq and Iran for decades.<sup>223</sup> Tehran is even sporadically supporting fundamentalist groups like that of Muqtada Al-Sadr and his Mahdi Army, although his Arab nationalism is arguably in contradiction to Iran's regional ambitions.<sup>224</sup> In addition, Iran's proxy Hezbollah is training domestic Iraqi insurgent forces and creating 'special groups' inside Iraq to combat US forces. Iran has been trying to organize these groups in a Hezbollah-style fashion, possibly aiming to create a similar situation as in Lebanon, where Hezbollah has political influence at the highest levels.<sup>225</sup> Iran's connection and influence with these

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<sup>219</sup> Haass, R. & Indyk, M. (2009) 'Beyond Iraq: A New U.S. Strategy for the Middle East', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.88, No.1, January/February 2009: 46.

<sup>220</sup> Takeyh, R. (2008) 'Iran's New Iraq', *The Middle East Journal*, Vol.62, No.1, Winter 2008: 14.  
+ Barzegar, K. (2010): 175.

<sup>221</sup> Takeyh, R. (2008): 14.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.: 24.

<sup>223</sup> Barzegar, K. (2010): 178.

<sup>224</sup> Takeyh, R. (2008): 24 + Kagan, F., Kagan, K. & Pletka, D. (2012): 19.

<sup>225</sup> Kagan, F., Kagan, K. & Pletka, D. (2012): 19-21.

militant groups also provides it with a credible retaliatory capacity against possible US or Israeli attacks aimed against target within Iran, including its nuclear installations.<sup>226</sup>

On the other hand, the US is trying to limit Iran's increasing involvement Iraqi politics and insurgency by launching operations aimed at reducing the ability of Shia extremist groups to undermine and destabilize the government and security of Iraq.<sup>227</sup> The US is in a situation wherein Iraq is governed by a Shiite majority government that is favorable to Tehran, which naturally undermines US' interests and objectives both in the country and broader region. Saudi Arabia watches these events with great interest, fearing that the upheaval of Shiite influence in Iraq could expand to other states with a Shia majority population, like Bahrain, or to states that have a Shia minority that call for more rights, like the Saudi Kingdom. Further, the recent recovery of Iraq's oil production capacity and the increasing relations between Tehran and Baghdad have led to a weakening of Saudi influence within OPEC.<sup>228</sup> This is undermining Saudi Arabia's capacity to influence oil prices and increases Iran's regional political and economic influence. In reaction to Iran's increasing involvement in Iraqi's Shia population, regional states have been trying to get more involved in Iraq as well: Saudi Arabia has been trying to meddle in Shi'a and Kurdish issues to undermine Iran; Turkey is now interested in Shi'a-Sunni issues and tries to gain a greater role in shaping Iraq's future structure; Egypt and Jordan have expressed their concerns about a possible 'Shi'a crescent' arising in the region with Iran as its leader.<sup>229</sup> In general, most Arab states fear that Iraq will fall in the hands of Iran, with great consequences for both the regional order and their national populations.<sup>230</sup>

### § 3.5 Concluding remarks

This chapter has analyzed the geopolitical competition between the US and Iran for the construction of a regional order in the greater Middle East.

On the one hand, the US has been trying to recreate the hegemonic order it had during the Cold War and to extend it towards Central Asia and South Asia. As shown, the US has been aiming to achieve this objective through a combination of consolidating bilateral relations with Arab states in the region, relying on its strategic alliance with Israel, projecting its military power in and around the region, isolating the Islamic Republic of Iran from the international community and limiting the increasing influence of contender states like China and Russia in the greater Middle East.

However, the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq have removed two of the primary threats and obstacles to Iranian regional hegemonic ambitions and have consequently created opportunities for

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<sup>226</sup> Takeyh, R. (2008): 28.

<sup>227</sup> Kagan, F., Kagan, K. & Pletka, D. (2012): 17.

<sup>228</sup> 'OPEC: Iran-Iraq alliance weakens Saudis'. *United Press International* website (01-04-2013).  
[http://www.upi.com/Business\\_News/Energy-Resources/2013/01/04/OPEC-Iran-Iraq-alliance-weakens-Saudis/UPI-68701357323613/](http://www.upi.com/Business_News/Energy-Resources/2013/01/04/OPEC-Iran-Iraq-alliance-weakens-Saudis/UPI-68701357323613/)

<sup>229</sup> Barzegar, K. (2010): 175.

<sup>230</sup> Takeyh, R. (2008): 23.

Tehran to increase, diversify and consolidate its influence and power projection in those countries. This shows how US foreign policy directly and indirectly influences Iran's foreign policy and operationalization.

On the other hand, Iran has used a combination of support for non-governmental organizations, like Hezbollah, Hamas and militant anti-western forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, an intensification of political and economic connections to neighboring countries and Shia communities in the Middle East and the attempt to form a counter-hegemonic bloc with other contender states like Russia and China. The slowly progressing ascension of Iran to full member status in the SCO and general distrust between contender states, however, has prevented them from forming a unified front against further expansion of US influence in the region and their aim of removing the US from the neighborhood altogether.

The next chapter will give an overview and analysis of the Syrian conflict since it started in March 2011. It will focus on the different (domestic) groups that are involved in the civil war, with whom they are aligned and which interests outside powers, like Iran, the US and Saudi Arabia, have pertaining to the outcome of the conflict and the possible consequences for the geopolitical environment in the Middle East.

## CHAPTER 4 CONFLICT IN SYRIA AND REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS

### § 4.1 Introduction

At the time of writing, the civil war in Syria continues to tear the country apart and has so far claimed more than seventy thousand lives.<sup>231</sup> Since March 2011, the forces of President Assad have been combatting the opposition forces that try to overthrow the regime. Both politically and militarily highly fractured, multiple opposition groups and factions have organized themselves under the umbrella group named the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (SOF) in November 2012, which has since been officially recognized by more than one hundred countries and most world powers, with the exception of China and Russia.<sup>232</sup> In addition to the SOF and affiliated opposition groups, there are many independent entities fighting in Syria, with different objectives in mind and receiving funding from different donors. Table 4.1 on the following page gives an overview of the main opposition groups and other smaller independent entities involved in the fight against Assad's regime, their objectives, leadership and sources of funding (see also Appendix D). Groups and factions aligned to the Assad regime are not included in the table, but will be elaborated upon in this chapter's text itself.

Many states miscalculated that Assad's days were numbered. Instead, the Syrian civil war is evolving into a protracted conflict, in which neither side is expected to triumph over the other any time soon. External actors – including, but not limited to, the US, Russia, China, Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, Israel and the EU – are supporting different sides in the conflict, supplying arms, financial resources and fighters, aiming at giving their politically, ideologically and geostrategic aligned factions the upper hand. The effects of the civil war, therefore, are not contained to Syria, but have far-reaching implications for most of the region. Furthermore, Syria is increasingly becoming a battleground for the US and Islamic Republic of Iran to continue their geopolitical competition. On the one hand, the US is politically supporting the opposition forces that fight Assad's regime, allows its Arab allies to supply them with arms and financial resources and publicly calls for the ousting of the current Syrian government. On the other hand, Iran and Russia invested in the survival of Assad by diplomatically supporting his regime, supplying weapons and advanced military technology such as fighter jets and missile systems and using Hezbollah to fight alongside Syrian government forces.

In this chapter, an analysis will be given of the internal and external actors that are involved in the conflict, in which way the US and Iran continue their geopolitical competition in Syria and what the broader regional implications of the conflict are.

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<sup>231</sup> Council on Foreign Relations (08-05-13) 'Syria's crisis and the global response'.

<http://www.cfr.org/syria/syrias-crisis-global-response/p28402>

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*

**Table 4.1: Syrian opposition groups, objectives, leadership and sources of funding**

Name	Description	Objectives	Leadership	Sources of funding and support
<b>National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (SOF)</b>	Umbrella group of multiple opposition groups and factions. Recognized as legitimate political representative of Syrian people by majority of international community.	Represent and coordinate political elements of opposition and formation of provisional government if Assad regime falls. Tries to safeguard non-violent character of Syrian revolution.	Made up of 71 representatives of key opposition groups, including Syrian National Council; Muslim Brotherhood of Syria; and Local Coordination Committees.	Financial and political support from Western and Arab states. Main backers: US; UK; France; Italy, Germany; Turkey; Egypt; Jordan; Saudi Arabia; Qatar; UAE.
<b>The Supreme Joint Military Command (SMC)</b>	Formed as Defense Ministry of SOF, but functions on own authority.	To unite armed groups in the rebellion and establishing formal chain of command. In part designed to reduce influence of extremist groups, by functioning as primary channel for international financial and materiel aid.	Various leaders from armed opposition groups, among which the Syrian Liberation Front and the Free Syrian Army. Former General Salim Idriss of Syrian Army is viewed as political leader of SMC.	Financial, materiel and limited lethal support from Western and Arab states. Main backers: US; UK; France; Italy; Germany; Turkey; Egypt; Jordan; Saudi Arabia; Qatar and UAE.
<b>Free Syrian Army (FSA)</b>	Largest group within opposition. Made up of small, localized factions all over Syria, but loosely organized. Less ideologically driven than other groups and primarily fight in small geographic areas.	To facilitate coordination between different localized battalions.	General Salim Idriss is officially the commander of the FSA, but in practice more a political representative.	Financial, materiel and limited lethal support through SMC channels, as well as individual donors and informal funding streams.
<b>The Syrian Liberation Front (SLF)</b>	Second largest group within opposition. Approximately 20 battalions of in total 37.000 fighters that act independently, without strategic or tactical unity. Suqor al-Sham and al-Farouq battalions are part of the SLF.	Ideologically moderate Islamists that have good relations with FSA. Do not consider Syria's revolution as broader battle for broader or global Islamic Jihad.	Largely incorporated into SMC.	Primary backer is Saudi Arabia. Most Saudi aid flows through SMC funding channels.
<b>The Syrian Islamic Front (SIF)</b>	Approximately 11 battalions of in total 13.000 fighters. Subgroups operate independently but are beginning to create hierarchical and structured rebel coalition.	Conservative Salafists who are more religiously motivated than FSA or SLF, but do not share ideological elements of Al Qaeda-affiliated groups and factions.	Largely independent of SMC, but leadership council and subunits have been cooperative with SMC.	Largely financed by wealthy individuals from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other Gulf States.

<b>The Nusra Front</b>	Affiliated with Al Qaeda, made up of approximately 6,000 foreign and domestic fighters. Some are (former) Jihadists and veterans of Iraqi insurgency. Is well-armed and has claimed responsibility for suicide bombings and asymmetric attacks against Assad's regime. Designated as terrorist organization by US.	Fiercely sectarian Sunni group in opposition to Alawite community in Syria and Shiites in general. Is believed to be highly influenced by Al-Qaeda objectives and directives. Pursues strict implementation of Sharia laws and creation of an Islamic caliphate.	Has pledged allegiance to Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.	Significant funding, arms and training from Al-Qaeda and Al-Qaeda-affiliated group, Islamic State of Iraq. Also reports of funding from Kuwait.
<b>Kurdish Groups</b>	Most Kurds had not taken sides in the civil war, but indiscriminate violence of Assad regime and prospect of greater autonomy for Kurdish regions in Syria have led to an increase of Kurdish support for the Syrian rebellion. Approximately 9% of Syria's population is Kurdish.	Priorities are independence and protection of Kurdish communities, but role may grow into a more nationalist or revolutionary type of involvement in the conflict.		
<b>Independent groups</b>	Groups not affiliated with FSA, SLF or SIF. Largest group is Ahfad al-Rasul brigade. Others are Fajr al-Islam Battalion; and Al-Haqq Brigade.			Ahfad al-Rasul Brigade is primarily funded by Qatar.

Sources: Center for American Progress + CSR + others.<sup>233</sup>

<sup>233</sup> Primary sources for the table are: Sofer, K. & Shafroth, J. (14 May 2013) 'The Structure and Organization of the Syrian Opposition'. *Center for American Progress*. <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/report/2013/05/14/63221/the-structure-and-organization-of-the-syrian-opposition/>  
Sharp, J. & Blanchard, C. (2013) 'Armed Conflict in Syria: U.S. and International Response'. *Congressional Research Service*.  
Other sources used: 'Mapping Syria's armed opposition'. *Executive Magazine* website (last retrieved 25-06-2013). <http://www.executive-magazine.com/syrian-rebel-map/syrian-rebel-map.html>  
'Guide to the Syrian opposition'. *BBC* website (29-05-13). <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-15798218>

N.B.: Blank areas in the table indicate that no (reliable) data could be found. Further, it should be noted that the reliability and accuracy of the data and information concerning the opposition forces, their markup and sources of funding are not always clear.

#### § 4.2 Civil war in Syria, US-Iran competition and regional implications

In line with Arab Spring movements in the greater Middle East, public uprisings began in March 2011. However, the popular uprisings soon turned into an armed rebellion, fighting the regime's military forces and militant factions that remained loyal to the side of President Assad. Though hesitant at first, the Obama Administration has been calling for Assad's resignation since August 2011 and is repeatedly trying to condemn the Syrian government by UN Security Council Resolution. Until now, these attempts have failed due to Russian and Chinese opposition to such resolutions, who remain in support of the Syrian government of Assad. The US is not planning on intervening militarily, but aims to broker peace through dialogue between the regime and its opposition.<sup>234</sup> It has, however, stated that the using of chemical weapons by Assad's forces would cross a 'red line' and that direct US military action would become a reality. Although reports that such weapons have indeed been used on Syria's population arose the past weeks and Turkey has been calling for a more active US foreign policy regarding the Syrian conflict, the Obama Administration has stated that it needs more information and confirmation before it would commit to military action.<sup>235</sup> However, there are doubts that the US can sustain yet another war in the Middle East, with resources growing thin due to its engagement in Afghanistan and Iraq and its citizens growing tired of war and US-led 'humanitarian' interventions.<sup>236</sup>

The US has multiple interests in the Syrian conflict and recognizes that the outcome of the civil war will have far-reaching consequences for the region and its objective of leading the regional order. For one, Washington is trying to prevent a failed state from arising in Syria, leaving it for grabs to radical jihadist groups and other counter-hegemonic forces, which would be a threat to Israel and US interests in the region in general. This would pave the way for the construction of a state, (partly) led by (radical) anti-US organizations, similar to the situation in Lebanon, the home-base of Hezbollah. In addition, the Syrian civil war is increasingly fought along sectarian differences and Sunni-Shiite based rivalries. It is feared by both Western and regional nations that this can create spillover effects transcending Syria's borders, igniting sectarian conflicts within Lebanon, reigniting those within Iraq and ultimately dragging the whole region into conflict.

These fears have led various Arab states to support Syria's opposition forces.<sup>237</sup> Washington effectively allows its Arab allies to supply arms and financial resources to the opposition, aiming at enhancing the rebels' military capability and increasing the possibility of overthrowing the Syrian

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<sup>234</sup> Sharp, J. & Blanchard, C. (2013) 'Armed Conflict in Syria: U.S. and International Response'. *Congressional Research Service*, pp. 9.

<sup>235</sup> 'Turkey PM and Obama discuss Syria', *AlJazeera* (17-05-13).

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2013/05/201351617202670486.html>

<sup>236</sup> Walt, S. (22-05-13) 'What is the U.S. REALLY doing in Syria?', *Foreign Policy* website.

[http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/05/22/what\\_is\\_the\\_us\\_really\\_doing\\_in\\_syria](http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/05/22/what_is_the_us_really_doing_in_syria)

<sup>237</sup> Chivers, C. & Schmitt, E. (24-03-13) 'Arms Airlift to Syria Rebels Expands, With Aid From C.I.A.'. *The New York Times* website. [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/25/world/middleeast/arms-airlift-to-syrian-rebels-expands-with-cia-aid.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/25/world/middleeast/arms-airlift-to-syrian-rebels-expands-with-cia-aid.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

government through proxies. Among these Arab states are Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Qatar, who are actively supplying arms to Syrian opposition fighters through Turkish and Jordanian airports and were supposedly covertly assisted by CIA intelligence officers.<sup>238</sup> Both the Arab states and the CIA deny having any involvement in arms shipments to Syria.

Although Saudi Arabia continues to support anti-government forces in Syria, Riyadh is getting more cautious because it worries that the emergence of jihadist rebels could lead to a blowback at home. Jordan also wishes the conflict to be over better soon than later, as an influx of Syrian refugees and resulting strains on the Jordanian economy have added to growing protest movements against King Abdullah. Furthermore, Syrian refugee camps within Jordan could be used by counter-hegemonic forces as a base of operations to target Jordan from the inside.

In addition to allowing its Arab allies to covertly support Syrian opposition fighters, the US is planning to deploy multiple Patriot missile defense systems in Jordan to intercept Syrian missiles aimed at Israel and other regional allies.<sup>239</sup> Israel itself has struck multiple targets within Syria, aimed at preventing (chemical) weapon shipments to reach Hezbollah in Lebanon, which would lower Israel's military tactical edge against the radical Shia organization.<sup>240</sup> In contrast to EU's Catherine Ashton critical reaction to Israeli attack on Syrian territory that risk widening the war to the broader region, the Dutch Foreign Minister, Frans Timmermans, and US officials supported the strikes by referring to the usual 'Israel has a right to defend itself'.<sup>241</sup> However, it can be argued that the attack paved the way for the increased weapon shipments from Russia to Assad, now including S-300 anti-aircraft and anti-ballistic missiles, anti-ship missiles and MiG fighter jets, which Israel regards as a serious threat to its security.<sup>242</sup> It has also led to Assad publicly claiming that there is popular pressure present in Syria to open a front against Israel in the Golan Heights.<sup>243</sup>

Turkey also expressed support for Israel, as they have reconciled their differences since the Israeli raid on the Gaza flotillas which killed multiple Turkish citizens.<sup>244</sup> The reinstatement of Turkish-Israeli relations, brokered by the US, opens up possibilities in creating multiple fronts on Syria's north and

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<sup>238</sup> Walt, S. (22-05-13) + Chivers, C. & Schmitt, E. (24-03-13) + Cockburn, P. (06-06-13) 'Is it the end of Sykes-Picot?', *London Review of Books*, Vol.35, No.11, pp. 3-5.

<sup>239</sup> Fishman, A. (29-05-13) 'Sensing West's weakness'. *YNetnews* website. <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4385779,00.html>

<sup>240</sup> Surk, B. (30-05-13) 'Bashar Assad: First Shipment of Air Defense Missiles Have Arrived From Russia – Al-Manar TV'. *Huffington Post* website. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/30/bashar-assad-syria-president-air-defense-missiles\\_n\\_3357349.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/30/bashar-assad-syria-president-air-defense-missiles_n_3357349.html)

<sup>241</sup> 'Dutch FM: No problem with Israel striking in Syria'. *Times of Israel* website (14-03-13). <http://www.timesofisrael.com/dutch-fm-no-problem-with-israel-striking-in-syria/>

<sup>242</sup> Surk, B. (30-05-13).

<sup>243</sup> 'Syrian president Assad says army 'has balance of power''. *BBC News* website (30-05-13). <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-22713119>

<sup>244</sup> Ertür, C. (29-05-13) 'The Role of Turkey in the US-NATO-Israeli War on Syria'. *GlobalResearch* website. <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-role-of-turkey-in-the-us-nato-israeli-war-on-syria/5336827>

south borders and adds to Washington's objective of ousting the current government. In May 2013, Erdogan and Obama pledged to increase pressure on Assad and the Turkish Prime Minister expressed its wish for a no-fly zone in Syria.<sup>245</sup> Until now, multiple rockets originating from Syria have landed in Turkish territory and have even cost the lives of Turkish citizens. In general, the civil war in Syria has destabilized the Syrian-Turkish border and its national security.

In contrast to the US, Iran has been continuously supporting the Assad regime. They have been main allies for decades and built up intensive economic and geostrategic ties, forming a partnership aimed at countering US and Israeli interests in the region. Before the uprisings, Iran had massive investment plans in Syrian infrastructure, including gas pipelines that would supply Iranian resources to Syria's energy grid.<sup>246</sup> The toppling of Assad's government would be a major blow to Iranian regional hegemonic ambitions and its power projection capability in the Levant. It would lose its most important ally in the region and put Syria in the Western and Saudi sphere of influence, which is why Tehran and Hezbollah see Syria as a battleground where defeat is not an option. The Islamic Republic, therefore, is supporting Assad diplomatically, financially and militarily, in addition to letting Hezbollah fight alongside government forces. It does this in cooperation with other counter-hegemonic contender states, among which, Russia and China.

In a similar vein, Syria is Russia's longest lasting ally in the Arab world and a geostrategic asset for its aims to prevent further US expansion in the region. Russia even has a small military naval base in Tartus, Syria's second-largest port city and a Russian gateway to the Mediterranean Sea. Russia, in addition to the Islamic Republic, is the main weapons supplier of Syria. As noted above, Russia has supplied Assad's forces with anti-ship, anti-aircraft and anti-ballistic missiles and missile systems, which significantly enhance its military capabilities and increases its deterrence against foreign intervention. These missiles have a range of 300 miles, which puts US' naval carriers in the Mediterranean Sea, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Turkey in Damascus' operational range. This makes future military operations against Syria much more difficult. The US has 'scolded' Russia for supplying these weapons, even as it is allowing Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan to supply the opposition with weapons. Furthermore, Washington has repeatedly asked Iraq to do more about the Iranian cargo flights crossing its airspace, which probably carry weapons destined for Hezbollah and other factions that fight alongside Syrian government forces.

The Russian S-300 missiles shipments coincide with the EU's decision to lifting its arms embargo targeted at Syria. The US supports the lifting of the embargo, calling it a sign of the "full support" for

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<sup>245</sup> 'Turkey PM and Obama discuss Syria', *AlJazeera* (17-05-13).

<sup>246</sup> Hashim, A. (28-05-13) 'Iran's foreign policy: issues to watch'. *AlJazeera* website. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/05/20135237261364277.html>

the rebels, though still afraid that the weapons might end up in the hands of anti-Western groups and organizations in Syria and abroad.<sup>247</sup>

In addition, Russia (and China) have been supporting Assad's regime with diplomatic aid, by blocking all Syria-related resolutions put forward in the UN Security Council, effectively preventing the sanctioning of military action.<sup>248</sup> Also, Russia has been involved in the peace conferences regarding the Syrian civil war and has been an advocate of including Iran in these peace talks as well. This has solicited opposition from France, the UK, the US and basically all the US' Arab allies.<sup>249</sup> The Geneva 2 peace conference is therefore likely to fail, because Iran still holds considerable influence over Hezbollah, which is actively fighting alongside Assad. Without Iran at the negotiating table, Hezbollah is not likely to halt its fight against the Syrian rebellion on its own. Also, the opposition is demanding that toppling the current Syrian regime is put at the top of the priority list, but Assad is refusing to participate in the conference when 'unacceptable conditions' are demanded.<sup>250</sup> Another contributing factor is that Al-Nusra, the biggest fighting group aligned to the opposition forces, is not allowed to attend the conference, due to its terrorist designation and founding by and close affiliation to Al-Qaeda.

Iran's main asset in influencing the outcome of the Syrian civil war, however, is Hezbollah. The Shiite organization is fighting alongside Assad's forces, both because of ideological similarities between the Shiite Assad government and Hezbollah's Shiite regional objectives and its affiliation to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Its involvement is primarily focused near the Syria-Lebanon border, currently concentrating on the city of Al-Qusayr. At the time of writing, the city has been captured by Hezbollah and government forces, which constitutes a strategic setback for the Syrian opposition fighters, because Al-Qusayr is part of the key route for rebels bringing weapons and supplies from Lebanon into Syria.<sup>251</sup> Ever since Hezbollah got involved in Syria's civil war, opposition forces have threatened to attack Hezbollah in Lebanon.<sup>252</sup> Its involvement in the Syrian conflict thus risks dragging Lebanon into the conflict without government decision, similar to the situation in 2006, when the capture of two Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah was a prelude to its war with Israel. Also, Hezbollah has supposedly given Hamas 'eviction orders' from Lebanon, because of its support of the Sunni side in the conflict and its fight against Hezbollah's and Iran's interests. Though these reports have not yet been

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<sup>247</sup> Chivers, C. & Schmitt, E. (24-03-13) + 'Israel warns Russia over Syria arms delivery'. *Alljazeera* website, (29-05-13). <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/05/201352954449403614.html>

<sup>248</sup> Fishman, A. (29-05-13) 'Sensing West's weakness'. *YNetnews* website.

<sup>249</sup> Traynor, I. (29-05-13) 'Syria peace talks in doubt over 'credible negotiating partners'. *The Guardian* website. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2013/may/29/syria-peace-talks-doubt-negotiations>

<sup>250</sup> 'Syrian president Assad says army 'has balance of power''. *BBC News* website (30-05-13).

<sup>251</sup> Enders, D. (29-05-13) 'Hezbollah said to control most of Qusayr in major setback for Syria rebels'. *McClathy* website. <http://www.mcclathydc.com/2013/05/29/192511/hezbollah-said-to-control-most.html#.UauLNUQXV8F>

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*

independently confirmed, the notion does add to the geopolitical importance of the conflict for the broader region.<sup>253</sup>

#### § 4.3 Concluding remarks

It has been demonstrated that the civil war in Syria has far-reaching regional implications. It risks dragging other neighboring states directly into the conflict, such as Turkey, Israel and Lebanon, and could possibly ignite a sectarian religious war, engulfing a large part of the Middle East. On the one hand, the US and its allies have been trying to topple Assad's government by strengthening its opponents militarily and financially, while backing them diplomatically and politically. By doing this, the US wants to prevent Syria from becoming a failed state and falling into the hands of counter-hegemonic forces, which would be a threat to Israel and main US' objectives and interests in the region. However, the unstructured nature of the Syrian opposition and the presence of religious extremist elements within the involved groups have created difficulties for international opposition-affiliated third parties to provide financial, political and military support. On the other hand, Iran has been doing the opposite. A long-time ally of Assad, Iran continues to support his government diplomatically, financially and militarily. Tehran seeks the survival of the Assad government, because the alternative, losing its main ally in the region, would be a major geostrategic loss for its regional hegemonic ambitions. Iran tries to achieve its objective by cooperating with its counter-hegemonic partners, Russia and China; supporting Hezbollah in its fight alongside Syrian government forces; aiding them with weapons and advanced military technology and equipment; and supplying Revolutionary Guard personnel as fighters or training officers for the Syrian military. The outcome of the Syrian civil war will, in part, determine in whose favor the geopolitical competition for the regional order between Iran and the US will be concluded.

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<sup>253</sup> Lev, D. (30-05-13) 'Report: Hizbullah Gives Hamas 'Eviction Papers' from Lebanon'. *Israel National News*. <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/168466#.UauMqUQXV8F>

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS AND GENERAL FINDINGS

This thesis has been written with the objective of giving a detailed account of the US' and the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy in the Middle East, an in-depth analysis of the geopolitical competition between them for the construction of a regional order and how this plays out 'on the ground' in various regional states, among which, but not limited to, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. The rivalry between the US and Iran has intensive effects on their political, economic and military relations with other international actors, among which states and non-governmental organizations, and the emergence of a US-led hegemonic bloc and a counter-hegemonic bloc that includes China, Russia and Iran can be identified.

The main research question this thesis set out to answer was: "*How does the geopolitical competition between the US and the Islamic Republic of Iran for the regional order influence each other's foreign policy and the regional order in the greater Middle East?*".

The second chapter has provided an overview and analysis of both the US' and Iran's foreign policy concerning the Middle East from WWII to present. It has shown that the US and Iran have been on each other's center stage for their respective foreign policy making since the Second World War until today.

During the Cold War, Iran was effectively 'used' by US Administrations as an extension of American power projection into the Gulf and the greater Middle East. Military and financial support to the regime of the Shah enabled Iran to 'police' the region and prevent forces allied to the Soviet bloc from gaining foothold in the region. The US main objective was to secure its access to the region's energy resources and keep the Middle East in the US' direct sphere of influence.

However, at the same time, the Shah of Iran was effectively making use of the US' fears of Soviet expansion and dependency on the region's energy resources to obtain financial and economic aid from the US, in addition to arms, advanced military technology and international diplomatic and political support. He was therefore able to suppress the Iranian population, steer Iran's foreign policy along American preferences and extract great personal profits from the country's energy sector.

This arrangement dramatically changed in the 1970s, when popular and religious demonstrations occurred all over Iran, finally climaxing in 1979 in what is known as the Islamic Revolution.

Ayatollah Khomeini and his religious followers transformed the country into the Islamic Republic of Iran and began following its own active foreign policy, steering away and against US interests and objectives in the Middle East and undermining further US expansion in the region.

The end of the Cold War opened up more regions for them to compete for influence and energy resources, among which the Caucasus and the Caspian region.

What has not changed, however, is them still being at each other's center stage for foreign policy making.

For the US, Iran continues to be a main factor in its foreign policy and operationalization regarding the greater Middle East region and it uses all its military, economic, diplomatic and political resources and modes of power projection to contain Iran and prevent it from undermining US objectives and interests in the region, making use of its long-lasting alliances within the Arab world and intervening in other regional states. The US aims to reconstruct or rebuild the regional order it had during the Cold War and to expand it towards Central Asia and South Asia.

For Iran, on the other hand, the US remains a key factor in its foreign policy deliberations as well. Tehran, in cooperation with other so-called counter-hegemonic forces, such as China and Russia, tries to prevent the US from reconstructing its regional order and has regional hegemonic ambitions of its own. The Islamic Republic makes effective use of the common interests between these contender states to undermine US' interests and objectives regarding the greater Middle East and apply its proxies, like Hezbollah and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, to do the same.

The third chapter analyzed more deeply the geopolitical competition between the US and Iran in the Middle East from the first Bush presidency during the 1990s to present. It has been shown that the US greatly relies on its long-lasting relationships with the Arab world, among which, Saudi Arabia and GCC member states, to rebuild and maintain a US-led regional order. It tries to keep its relationships in tact by supporting these Arab states with economic, political and military support, effectively providing them with protection against domestic and international threats for US access to Arab energy resources.

Also, the US aims to keep its power projection capacity in tact by stationing US military personnel throughout the Middle East, making use of the many American military, air force and navy bases present in the region, most of which are located on the territories of those same Arab states. The strategic partnership with Israel, in this sense, has served as an extension of US power projection in the region and continues to be one of the pillars of US hegemony in the Middle East.

However, it has been shown that the US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, with the aims of removing potential threats for its regional interests, has conversely created opportunities for the Islamic Republic of Iran to extend its influence politically and economically into the region. With the removal of two of Iran's biggest regional threats, Saddam Hussein's Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan, Tehran has been able to step up its political and economic relations with Afghanistan and gain a friendly, Shia and Iran-aligned government in power in Iraq. This has provided Iran with a large amount of influence in the region and the ability to extend that influence towards the Saudi peninsula and the Gulf monarchies, using Shia minorities to challenge the monarchies' legitimacy and undermine Western interests in the region. Other contender states, like China and Russia, have also been politically and economically engaging with these states in order to shift them into the counter-hegemonic sphere of

influence. China, especially, has been very active in interconnecting the Saudi Arabian economy with its own and gain access to Saudi energy resources.

Although Iran, China and Russia have common interests in containing US expansion and consolidation in the Middle East, their relationship has been strained by mutual distrust and the effects of international sanctions on Iran's political and economic sectors. The contender states have been effectively countering US' objectives in the region on various levels, but attempts to form a unified counter-hegemonic bloc that opposes the US in an organized fashion, however, until now have been largely in vain. The slowly progressing ascension of Iran to full member status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, with the potential of providing a security guarantee against foreign intervention in the future, in combination with the mutual distrust among Iran, Russia and China, have prevented the contender states from forming a unified front against further expansion of US power projection in the region and their aim of removing US influence from the neighborhood altogether.

In chapter 4, it has been demonstrated that the civil war in Syria has consequences that transcend its territorial borders. Not only is it a conflict between the current government of President Assad and opposition forces, but it has become an international battleground for multiple states and non-governmental actors to compete for influence and support their respective aligned factions.

In relation to answering the research question of this thesis, *“How does the geopolitical competition between the US and the Islamic Republic of Iran for the regional order influence each other's foreign policy and the regional order in the greater Middle East?”*, the following conclusions can be drawn.

In relation to the Middle East region, the US and Iran have been inherently connected. The regional foreign policy and practice of the US influences, both directly and indirectly, the foreign policy and practice of Iran, and vice versa.

- Before the election of Prime Minister Mossadeq and the overthrow of his government in 1953, the bilateral relations between the US and Iran were based on economic and strategic interests pertaining to the Iranian oil industry. The decision of Mossadeq to privatize the oil industry sparked unrest in Western countries that had interests and investments in Iran, which in turn led to the coup d'état of 1953 and Mossadeq's replacement, Muhammad Reza Shah.
- During the following period, Iran functioned as a regional gendarme for US interests and objectives. The change in the regional geopolitical context with the retreat of British forces from the region in 1971 led to a great surge in US financial and military support for the Shah, which enabled him to prevent Soviet influence from entering Iran and keep his domestic and regional enemies in check. Iran under the Shah was less of a puppet-state than one might expect. He effectively used US foreign policy objectives of containing Soviet expansion towards the Middle East and ensuring access to the region's energy resources to secure a

constant flow of economic and military aid, which he used to suppress his population and remain in power. In turn, this enabled him to steer Iran's foreign policy along US-preferred lines, demonstrating how the foreign policies of the US and Iran were inherently connected.

- After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran began pursuing a more active foreign policy that was based on Iranian national interests and aimed at undermining US objectives and interests in the region. This led to Washington's decision to support Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War with political, economic and military aid. Iran's new foreign policy stance and engagement in the war thus directly influenced American foreign policy regarding Iraq, which was previously primarily supplied by the Soviet Union. Iran's foreign policy, engaged in the Iran-Iraq War, had the potential of altering the regional order away from the US, which inclined Washington to change its foreign policy to try and prevent this shift by supporting Saddam Hussein, thus demonstrating that the US' and Iran's foreign policies were influencing each other as well as the regional order itself.

Furthermore, during this period, the Contra-scandal has shown that the US was forced to deal with Tehran as a direct result of Iran's influence over Hezbollah (trading the release of prisoners for US arms shipments), even though it was directly supporting Iran's rival in the war. This again demonstrates that their involvement in regional events influence each other's regional foreign policies both directly and indirectly. It also shows that Iran's foreign policy under Khomeini was not necessarily only ideologically based, but that it was very much influenced by geopolitical and pragmatic reasoning.

This has been made especially clear in post-2003 Iraq. By toppling Hussein's regime, the US have once more removed an obstacle to Iran's regional hegemonic ambitions, in addition to the removal of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001. Now, Iran and the US find themselves to have converging interests regarding a politically stable and democratically pluralistic Iraq, although the rationales behind them are not. Iran aims at preventing Iraq from arising as a geopolitical threat and increasing its regional influence and power projection capability by supporting Shiite and Iran-friendly (political) groups within Iraq's political system. On the other hand, the US is mainly interested in preventing Iranian/Shiite influences from spreading both within and outside Iraq's borders to keep economic and political stability in the country and its Arab neighbors. Again, this has demonstrated that the foreign policy actions of both the US and Iran have profound effects on the regional order and context, and consequently affect each other's foreign policy making concerning the Middle East region.

- In Syria, it has been shown that the geopolitical competition between Iran and the US is even more complex. Supporting different sides of the conflict, Iran is aiding Assad's regime, its long-time regional ally, with financial, political and military support and uses its proxy, Hezbollah, to fight alongside government troops, while the US is supporting various opposition groups with political, economic and limited military support both directly and

indirectly via its Arab allies. In addition, other third party actors have interests in Syria and are involved in the conflict, among which Russia, China, Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia and GCC members. As we speak, the Syrian civil war is more and more evolving into a sectarian based conflict, along Sunni and Shiite religious lines, and has the potential of sparking similar conflicts in Lebanon or reignite those in Iraq. The Syrian conflict and outcome thereof thus has far-reaching effects for the region, potentially destabilizing and undermining both Iranian and US regional interests and objectives. It has become a new international theater where Iran and the US geopolitically compete for influence and try to affect the progression of the civil war. Here, it has been demonstrated that changes in the regional context (the outbreak of the Syrian civil war) has directly led to a change in US foreign policy (from supporting Assad to opposing him) and a change in both Iranian foreign policy (more actively supporting Assad, also by using Hezbollah). As a result of Iran's and Russia's active role in providing Assad's regime with financial and military aid, the US is now tempted to support the Syrian opposition with arms and military technology, both directly and through its Arab allies, in order to prevent counter-hegemonic forces from tilting the regional order away from the US sphere of influence. Iran, on the other hand, aims to prevent losing its primary ally in the region, which would greatly undermine its regional hegemonic ambitions.

From this, it can be argued that the outcome of the Syrian civil war will, in part, determine in whose favor the geopolitical competition for the regional order between Iran and the US will be concluded.

In spite of what is commonly and academically asserted, the relationship between Iran and the US is much more complex than is apparent at first glance. Publicly pre-occupied with the Iranian nuclear program and the 'conflict' that has arisen between the US and Iran as a consequence, the geopolitical competition between the two powers is much more intensive and reaches beyond national borders. It reaches into Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel and Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Syria and influences political, economic and military relations beyond regional borders with, among others, China and Russia.

The geopolitical competition between the US and the Islamic Republic of Iran has influenced the shaping of the regional order in the Middle East, and will continue to do so, and should be continuously thoroughly analyzed by both academic scholars and other authors, for it has effects that reach far beyond the region and affect the global political and economic system.

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### **Maps:**

Map I of United States: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/us.html>

Map II of Iran: [http://images.nationmaster.com/images/motw/middle\\_east\\_and\\_asia/iran\\_pol01.jpg](http://images.nationmaster.com/images/motw/middle_east_and_asia/iran_pol01.jpg)

Map III of Middle East: <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Image:Middle-east-graphic-2003.jpg>

Map IV of US military bases around Iran: <http://www.juancole.com/images/2011/12/usbasesme.jpg>

**APPENDIX A: Value of Arms Transfers, Cumulative 1975-1979, by Major Supplier and Recipient Country**

This table shows data concerning arms transfers during the period 1975-1979, sorted by major supplier and recipient country. It is included in this appendix to show that Iran was the main receiver of arms transfers in the Middle East during this period, of which the main supplier was the United States.

**TABLE III. Value of Arms Transfers, Cumulative 1975-1979, By Major Supplier and Recipient Country — continued**  
(Million Current Dollars)

RECIPIENT \ SUPPLIER	TOTAL	SOVIET UNION	UNITED STATES	FRANCE	UNITED KINGDOM	WEST GERMANY	CZECHO-SLOVAKIA	ITALY	POLAND	CHINA	CANADA	OTHERS
<b>LATIN AMERICA</b>	<b>5,500</b>	<b>1,500</b>	<b>725</b>	<b>775</b>	<b>675</b>	<b>440</b>	-	<b>350</b>	-	-	<b>20</b>	<b>1,000</b>
ARGENTINA	975	-	90	270	60	110	-	80	-	-	-	360
BARBADOS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
BOLIVIA	110	-	10	5	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	90
BRAZIL	725	-	160	50	400	20	-	80	-	-	-	30
CHILE	380	-	110	5	40	30	-	-	-	-	-	190
COLOMBIA	70	-	20	-	-	40	-	-	-	-	-	10
COSTA RICA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
CUBA	875	875	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	5	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
EL SALVADOR	30	-	5	30	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5
ECUADOR**	575	-	40	280	70	110	-	5	-	-	10	60
GUATEMALA	50	-	20	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	30
GUYANA	10	-	-	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
HAITI	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
HONDURAS	50	-	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	40
JAMAICA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
MEXICO	70	-	10	10	40	-	-	-	-	-	-	10
NICARAGUA	30	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20
PANAMA	10	-	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
PARAGUAY	20	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20
PERU	1,100	650	100	110	10	40	-	80	-	-	-	100
SURINAM	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
TRINIDAD & TOBAGO	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
URUGUAY	40	-	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	30
VENEZUELA**	410	-	110	10	60	80	-	110	-	-	-	20
<b>MIDDLE EAST</b>	<b>32,900</b>	<b>10,300</b>	<b>13,700</b>	<b>2,200</b>	<b>2,100</b>	<b>925</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>650</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2,400</b>
BAHRAIN	20	-	-	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5
CYPRUS	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10
EGYPT	1,500	250	250	490	110	180	20	60	-	60	-	80
IRAN**	8,700	650	6,600	200	310	430	-	340	-	-	-	240
IRAQ**	6,800	4,900	-	410	20	160	80	70	30	10	-	1,100
ISRAEL	4,200	-	4,200	10	60	-	-	30	-	-	-	-
JORDAN	600	-	500	-	20	5	-	-	-	-	5	60
KUWAIT**	800	50	350	150	210	20	-	-	-	-	-	10
LEBENON	60	-	30	5	20	5	-	-	-	-	-	10
OMAN	370	-	10	-	330	-	-	-	-	-	-	30
QATAR**	70	-	5	50	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	10
SAUDI ARABIA**	3,600	-	1,800	290	900	20	-	130	-	-	-	450
SYRIA	4,500	3,600	-	190	30	100	310	-	10	-	-	260
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES**	410	-	10	350	30	-	-	20	-	-	-	10
YEMEN (ADEN)	600	575	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5
YEMEN (SANAA)	625	210	110	80	-	5	-	5	100	-	-	110
<b>NORTH AMERICA</b>	<b>1,800</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>825</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>240</b>
CANADA*	1,000	-	825	-	10	190	-	-	-	-	-	10
UNITED STATES*	775	-	-	5	230	70	-	5	-	-	250	230

Source: World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1970-1979.

## APPENDIX B: Transfers of major conventional weapons from the US to Saudi Arabia, 2001-2012

This table shows detailed information about the arms transfers that took place from the United States to Saudi Arabia, during the period 2001-2012.

### Transfers of major conventional weapons: sorted by supplier. Deals with deliveries or orders made for year range 2001 to 2012

**Note:** The 'No. delivered/produced' and the 'Year(s) of deliveries' columns refer to all deliveries since the beginning of the contract. Deals in which the recipient was involved in the production of the weapon system are listed separately. The 'Comments' column includes publicly reported information on the value of the deal. Information on the sources and methods used in the collection of the data, and explanations of the conventions, abbreviations and acronyms, can be found at URL <[http://www.sipri.org/contents/armstrad/at\\_data.html](http://www.sipri.org/contents/armstrad/at_data.html)>. The SIPRI Arms Transfers Database is continuously updated as new information becomes available.

Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database

Information generated: 18 June 2013

Supplier/ recipient (R or licensor (L)	No. ordered	Weapon designation	Weapon description	Year of order/ licence	Year(s) of deliveries	No. delivered/ produced	Comments
USA R: Saudi Arabia	(1748)	6V-53	Diesel engine	(1990)	1991-2004	(1748)	For 1748 Piranha (LAV) APC from Canada and Switzerland; 6V-53T version
		523	M-113A3	APC	1997	2003-2006	(523) \$413 m deal; Saudi M-113 rebuilt to M-113A3
		(2)	RE-3	SIGINT aircraft			(1998) 2004 (2) Saudi KE-3A tanker aircraft rebuilt to RE-3 ELINT/SIGINT aircraft
		500	AIM-120C AMRAAMBVRAAM			2000	2003-2006 (500) \$475 m deal; for F-15 combat aircraft
		1827	BGM-71 TOW	Anti-tank missile		2000	2001-2002 (1827) Part of \$416 m deal; BGM-71E TOW-2A version; for National Guard
		27	M-60A3 Patton-2	Tank	(2000)	2001	27 Ex-US
		105	AGM-65 Maverick	ASM	2001	2002-2003	(105) \$21 m deal; 98 AGM-65D and 7 AGM-65G version
		(16)	Bell-412	Helicopter		2001	2002-2003 (16) Bell-412SA or Bell-412RSAF version; from Canadian production line
		(562)	BGM-71 TOW	Anti-tank missile		2001	2002-2003 (562) BGM-71E TOW-2A version
		(48)	M-109A5 155mm	Self-propelled gun		(2001)	2002-2004 (48) Probably ex-US
		1	RE-3	SIGINT aircraft		(2004)	2007 1 Ex-USE-8B AGS aircraft rebuilt to RE-3
		(75)	AIM-9L/M Sidewinder	SRAAM	2005	2006	(75) Part of \$17 m deal; AIM-9M version
		(75)	AIM-9L/M Sidewinder	SRAAM	2005	2007	(75) Part of \$17 m deal
		4	Cessna-550 Citation-2	Light transport ac		(2005)	2005-2006 4
		(132)	6V-53	Diesel engine		2006	2006-2009 (132) For 132 Piranha (LAV) APC from Canada
		(10)	6V-53	Diesel engine		2006	2007 10 For 10 ACV-S APC from Turkey; 6V-53T version
		(14)	AIM-120C AMRAAMBVRAAM			2006	2008 (14) AIM-120C-5 version
		(100)	LAV-25 turret	IFV turret		2006	2006-2009 (100) For Piranha (LAV-25) IFV from Canada
		65	F110	Turbofan	2007	2008-2009	(65) \$300 m deal; F-110-GE-129C version; for modernization of F-15S combat aircraft
		16	S-92/H-92 Superhawk	Helicopter		2007	2008-2010 (16) For police; incl for civilian police use
		(350)	6V-53	Diesel engine		2008	2008-2009 (350) For modernization of 300 Saudi M-113 APC to M-113A3 by Turkish company and spares; 6V-53T version
		12	AH-64D Apache	Combat helicopter		2008	2011 (12) Incl 11 Saudi AH-64A rebuilt to AH-64D version
		(6)	CF-6/F-103	Turbofan	2008	2011-2012	(6) For 3 A-330 MRTT tanker/transport aircraft from Spain
		91	F110	Turbofan	2008	2009-2010	(91) Part of \$750 m deal; F-110-GE-129C version; for modernization of F-15S combat aircraft
		900	JDAM	Guided bomb		2008	2010-2011 (900)
		(373)	M-1A2S	Tank	2008	2012	(50) \$2.9 b deal; 58 ex-US M-1A1 and 315 Saudi M-1A2 version rebuilt to M-1A2S
		22	S-70/UH-60L	Helicopter		2008	2010-2011 (22) \$286 m deal; delivery 2010-2011
	(724)	6V-53	Diesel engine		2009	2011-2012 (250) For 724 Piranha (LAV) APC from Canada; 6V-53T version	

14	AAQ-33 Sniper	Aircraft EO system	2009	2010	(14)	\$40 m deal; for F-15S
(150)	AIM-9X Sidewinder	SRAAM 2009	2010	2010	(150)	combat aircraft
(6)	CF-6/F-103	Turbofan2009				For 3 A-330 MRTT tanker/transport aircraft from Spain
72	ETS	Anti-tank AV turret	(2009)	2011-2012	(45)	ETS Mk-2 version; for 72 Piranha (LAV-AT) tank destroyers from Canada
2	ISR King Air-350	AGS aircraft	(2009)	2011	(2)	
264	LAV-25 turret	IFV turret	(2009)	2011-2012	(90)	For 264 Piranha (LAV-25) IFV from Canada
(18)	M-198 155mm	Towed gun	(2009)	2010	18	Ex-US
100	Paveway	Guided bomb	(2009)	2010-2011	(100)	GBU-10 and GBU-12 Paveway-2 versions
9	Schweizer-330	Light helicopter	2009	2009	(9)	S-434 version
(312)	6V-53	Diesel engine	2010	2011-2012	(312)	Part of \$324 m deal for modernization of 312 Saudi M-113 by Turkish company; 6V-53T version
(21)	AAQ-33 Sniper	Aircraft EO system	2010	2011-2012	(21)	\$40-42 m deal
(2742)	BGM-71 TOW	Anti-tank missile	(2010)	2011	(700)	\$177 m deal; BGM-71E TOW-2A version; for National Guard
13	S-70/UH-60L	Helicopter	2010	2012	(6)	Saudi UH-60A rebuilt to UH-60L
3	S-70/UH-60L	Helicopter	2010	2011	3	S-70i version; from Polish production line; for police
(200)	6V-53	Diesel engine	2011			Part of \$200 m deal for modernization of Saudi M-113 by Turkish company; 6V-53T version
(155)	6V-53	Diesel engine	2011			For 155 Piranha (LAV) APC from Canada; 6V-53T version
(2592)	AGM-114L HELLFIRE	Anti-tank missile(2011)				AGM-114R version; for AH-64 combat helicopters; for National Guard
(600)	AGM-88 HARM	ARM (2011)				AGM-88B version
(36)	AH-64D Apache	Combat helicopter	(2011)			For National Guard
(36)	AH-68	Combat helicopter	(2011)			For National Guard; delivery 2014
(500)	AIM-120C AMRAAMBVRAAM		(2011)			AIM-120C-7 version
300	AIM-9X Sidewinder	SRAAM (2011)	2012	(120)		For F-15SA combat aircraft
(193)	AN/AAQ-13 LANTIRN	Combat ac radar(2011)				CBU-105D/B version
(1300)	CBU-97 SFW	Guided bomb	(2011)			Part of \$29 b deal; F-15SA version
84	F-15SG	FGA aircraft	2011			Part of \$29 b deal; Saudi F-15S rebuilt to F-15SA
68	F-15SG	FGA aircraft	2011			GBU-31B version
(1000)	JDAM	Guided bomb	(2011)			For modernized Patriot SAM systems; contract probably not yet signed
..	MIM-104F PAC-3	SAM (2011)				\$1.7 b deal; Saudi Patriot SAM systems rebuilt to Patriot-3 version
21	Patriot PAC-3	SAM system	2011			Incl 1100 GBU-24 Paveway-3 and 2000 Dual Mode Paveway
(3100)	Paveway	Guided bomb	(2011)			
2	S-70/UH-60L	Helicopter	2011	2012	2	\$27 m deal
12	S-70/UH-60L	Helicopter	2011			Saudi UH-60A rebuilt to UH-60L
(158)	AAQ-33 Sniper	Aircraft EO system	2012			For F-15SG (F-15SA) combat aircraft
10	DB-110	Aircraft recon system	2012			\$183 m deal; for F-15SA combat aircraft
(25)	F110	Turbofan(2012)				Spares for F-15SA combat aircraft
(12)	MD-500E	Light helicopter	2012			\$41 m deal; MD-530F version; for National Guard; delivery by 2013
(400)	RGM-84L Harpoon-2	Anti-ship MI/SSM	(2012)			AGM-84L version
24	S-70/UH-60L	Helicopter	2012			For National Guard; UH-60M version

Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.

## APPENDIX C: Iran's trade with main partners, 2011

This table shows the main imports, export and trade partners of Iran during 2011. The table has been presented in smaller form in the thesis' text itself, from rank 1-10. The table has been included in the appendix to provide more information about Iran's trade partners, from rank 1-50.

IRAN'S TRADE WITH MAIN PARTNERS (2011)												
The Major Imports Partners				The Major Export Partners				The Major Trade Partners				
Rk	Partners	Mio euro	%	Rk	Partners	Mio euro	%	Rk	Partners	Mio euro	%	
World (all countries)				World (all countries)				World (all countries)				
1	United Arab Emirates	20,825	30.5%	1	China	19,770	21.8%	1	China	31,488	19.8%	
2	China	11,719	17.1%	2	EU27	14,909	16.4%	2	EU27	25,721	16.2%	
3	EU27	10,812	15.8%	3	Japan	8,424	9.3%	3	United Arab Emirates	21,633	13.6%	
4	South Korea	4,810	7.0%	4	Turkey	8,113	8.9%	4	South Korea	12,211	7.7%	
5	Turkey	2,844	4.2%	5	India	7,531	8.3%	5	Turkey	10,958	6.9%	
6	Russia	2,587	3.8%	6	South Korea	7,401	8.2%	6	Japan	9,775	6.1%	
7	India	2,029	3.0%	7	South Africa	2,683	3.0%	7	India	9,560	6.0%	
8	Brazil	1,836	2.7%	8	Pakistan	1,036	1.1%	8	Russia	2,811	1.8%	
9	Japan	1,351	2.0%	9	Sri Lanka	940	1.0%	9	South Africa	2,759	1.7%	
10	Ukraine	892	1.3%	10	Syria	910	1.0%	10	Brazil	1,861	1.2%	
11	Argentina	853	1.2%	11	United Arab Emirates	808	0.9%	11	Pakistan	1,369	0.9%	
12	Malaysia	830	1.2%	12	Indonesia	700	0.8%	12	Indonesia	1,319	0.8%	
13	Kazakhstan	828	1.2%	13	Saudi Arabia	677	0.7%	13	Malaysia	1,206	0.8%	
14	Thailand	755	1.1%	14	Philippines	504	0.6%	14	Sri Lanka	1,083	0.7%	
15	Indonesia	619	0.9%	15	Malaysia	376	0.4%	15	Syria	937	0.6%	
16	Switzerland	600	0.9%	16	Russia	224	0.2%	16	Ukraine	922	0.6%	
17	Pakistan	333	0.5%	17	Turkmenistan	198	0.2%	17	Saudi Arabia	896	0.6%	
18	Oman	293	0.4%	18	Hong Kong	169	0.2%	18	Argentina	864	0.5%	
19	Saudi Arabia	219	0.3%	19	Armenia	142	0.2%	19	Kazakhstan	851	0.5%	
20	United States	182	0.3%	20	Oman	129	0.1%	20	Thailand	846	0.5%	
21	New Zealand	169	0.2%	21	Tajikistan	118	0.1%	21	Switzerland	622	0.4%	
22	Turkmenistan	163	0.2%	22	Azerbaijan	105	0.1%	22	Philippines	542	0.3%	
23	Hong Kong	146	0.2%	23	Thailand	91	0.1%	23	Oman	422	0.3%	
24	Sri Lanka	144	0.2%	24	Sudan	77	0.1%	24	Turkmenistan	361	0.2%	
25	Australia	123	0.2%	25	Qatar	71	0.1%	25	Hong Kong	315	0.2%	
26	Azerbaijan	115	0.2%	26	Vietnam	59	0.1%	26	Armenia	225	0.1%	
27	Kuwait	105	0.2%	27	Kenya	54	0.1%	27	Azerbaijan	220	0.1%	
28	Belarus	103	0.1%	28	Australia	47	0.1%	28	United States	182	0.1%	
29	Canada	102	0.1%	29	Senegal	43	0.0%	29	New Zealand	172	0.1%	
30	Uzbekistan	86	0.1%	30	Georgia	42	0.0%	30	Australia	170	0.1%	
31	Bangladesh	85	0.1%	31	Lebanon	32	0.0%	31	Tajikistan	155	0.1%	
32	Armenia	83	0.1%	32	Ukraine	30	0.0%	32	Vietnam	134	0.1%	
33	South Africa	76	0.1%	33	Bangladesh	26	0.0%	33	Canada	127	0.1%	
34	Vietnam	76	0.1%	34	Brazil	25	0.0%	34	Qatar	115	0.1%	
35	Egypt	74	0.1%	35	Canada	25	0.0%	35	Bangladesh	111	0.1%	
36	Lebanon	61	0.1%	36	Croatia	23	0.0%	36	Belarus	108	0.1%	
37	Tunisia	60	0.1%	37	Kazakhstan	23	0.0%	37	Kuwait	105	0.1%	
38	Bahrain	55	0.1%	38	Switzerland	23	0.0%	38	Egypt	96	0.1%	
39	Paraguay	50	0.1%	39	Egypt	22	0.0%	39	Lebanon	93	0.1%	
40	Qatar	43	0.1%	40	Algeria	14	0.0%	40	Uzbekistan	86	0.1%	
41	Iraq	39	0.1%	41	Tunisia	13	0.0%	41	Sudan	77	0.0%	
42	Philippines	37	0.1%	42	Tanzania	13	0.0%	42	Tunisia	73	0.0%	
43	Tajikistan	37	0.1%	43	Argentina	11	0.0%	43	Kenya	57	0.0%	
44	Syria	27	0.0%	44	Ivory Coast	8	0.0%	44	Bahrain	55	0.0%	
45	Norway	25	0.0%	45	Kyrgyz Republic	7	0.0%	45	Georgia	55	0.0%	
46	Guatemala	17	0.0%	46	Morocco	7	0.0%	46	Paraguay	50	0.0%	
47	Georgia	13	0.0%	47	Jordan	7	0.0%	47	Senegal	43	0.0%	
48	Jordan	12	0.0%	48	Venezuela	6	0.0%	48	Iraq	39	0.0%	
49	Ecuador	12	0.0%	49	Yemen	6	0.0%	49	Norway	30	0.0%	
50	Afghanistan	11	0.0%	50	Belarus	6	0.0%	50	Croatia	27	0.0%	

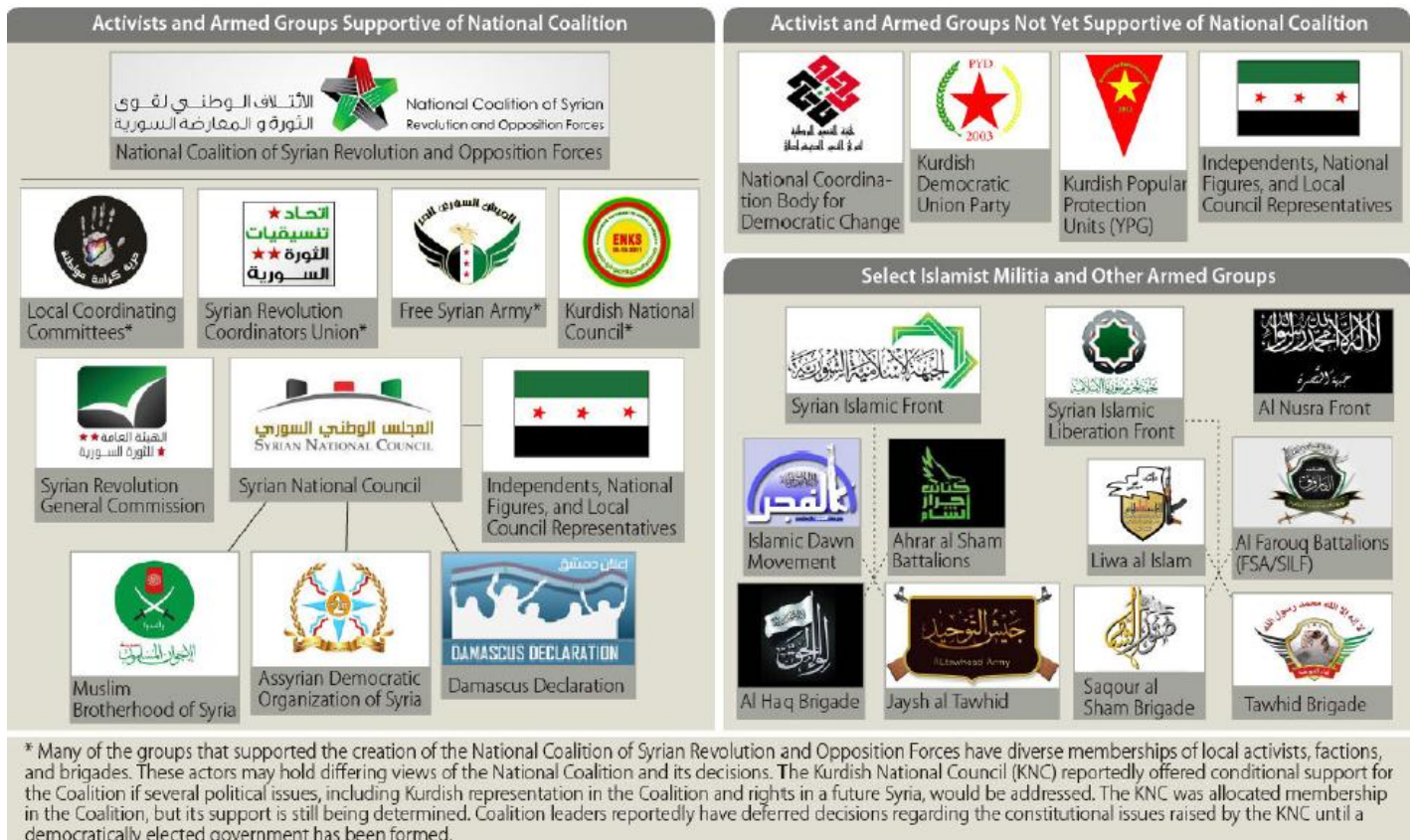
  

Iran's Imports from ...			Iran's Exports to ...			Iran's Trade with...		
Partner regions	Mio euro	%	Partner regions	Mio euro	%	Partner regions	Mio euro	%
ACP	94	0.1%	ACP	2,910	3.2%	ACP	3,005	1.9%
Andean Community			Andean Community			Andean Community		
ASEAN	2,317	3.4%	ASEAN	1,732	1.9%	ASEAN	4,049	2.5%
BRIC	18,171	26.6%	BRIC	27,550	30.3%	BRIC	45,721	28.7%
CACM	17	0.0%	CACM	0	0.0%	CACM	17	0.0%
Candidate Countries			Candidate Countries			Candidate Countries		
CIS			CIS			CIS		
EFTA			EFTA			EFTA		
Latin American Coun			Latin American Coun			Latin American Coun		
MEDA (excl EU and T			MEDA (excl EU and T			MEDA (excl EU and T		
Mercosur	2,742	4.0%	Mercosur	38	0.0%	Mercosur	2,780	1.7%
NAFTA			NAFTA			NAFTA		

Source: European Commission DG Trade Statistics.

## APPENDIX D: Syrian opposition groups, relationships and factions

This table shows the general connections and affiliations of some of the opposition groups involved in Syria's civil war. It has been included in this appendix to clarify the structure of relations between those different groups and factions, which could not be incorporated in table 4.1.



Source: Sharp, J. & Blanchard, C. (2013) 'Armed Conflict in Syria: U.S. and International Response'.  
Congressional Research Service.