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ISTANBUL AYDIN UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY AS A SOFT
POWER IN THE MIDDLE EAST

THESIS

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İSTANBUL AYDIN ÜNİVERSİTESİ
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DECLARATION

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

Sadruddin EBRAHIMI

FOREWORD

This paper is written in completion of Master's Program in Political Science and International Relations at Istanbul Aydin University. The research is titled "The Role of Religion in Iranian Foreign Policy as a Soft Power in the Middle East".

I, hereby, would like to thank my respected advisor, Dr. Filiz Katman, for her tremendous directions and and guidelines throughout my whole thesis.

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July, 2018   **Sadruddin EBRAHIMI**

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ABBREVIATIONS

EU	**:**European Union
GCC	**:**Gulf Cooperation Cuoncil
ICRO	**:**Islamic Culture and Relation Organization
IRGC	**:**The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
ISIL	**:**Islamic state in Iraq and Levant
JDP	**:**Justice and Development Party *(Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi)*
NIAC	**:**National Iranian- American Council
OIC	**:**The Organization of the Islamic Conference
PLO	**:**Palestine Liberation Organization
TNFJ	**:**Tehreek Nafaz-e-Fiqh-Jafariya of Pakistan
UN	**:**United Nations
UNSC	**:**United Nations Security Council
USA	**:**United State of America
USSR	**:**Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WFPIST	**:**The World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought

İRAN'IN DIŞ POLITIKASINDA MEZHEBIN ROLÜ VE ORTA DOĞU'DA YUMUŞAK GÜÇ OLARAK KULLANMASI

ÖZET

Orta Doğu, tarihsel süreç boyunca jeopolitik konumu gereği bölgesel ve küresel güçlerin odak noktalarından biri olmuştur. Bu bölge, farklı etnik unsurlar ve farklı dinler barındıran bir coğrafyada olmasından ve Asya Avrupa, Afrika arasında bir köprü olmasından ötürü günümüze kadar doğrudan ya da dolaylı olarak sürekli din veya mezhep savaşları altında bırakılmıştır. Bu coğrafyanın böyle bir fıtrata sahip olmasının sonucu olarak politik istikrarsızlık da günümüzde halen devam etmektedir. İslam dini Sünnilik ve Şiilik mezhepleri olarak iki dala ayrıldıktan sonra; bu iki mezhep de yaşam alanı olan Ortadoğu'da birbirlerine karşı adeta hayatta kalma savaşı vererek amansız bir rekabete tutuştu. Savaşlar, istikrarsız ve güvensiz bölgeler bu rekabetin sonucudur. İran İslam Devrimi, İran'ın mezhep yönüyle Şiileşmesinde ve bu mezhebin ülke sathında etkili olmasında önemli rol oynayıp ülkede hızlı bir mezhep evrimine sebep olmuştur. Ülke içindeki devrimini mezhep yayılması ile bir anlamda tamamlayan İran, liderleri vasıtasıyla devrimi ihraç etmeye başladı. Bunun bir gereği olarak hükümetler İran'ın siyasi sınırlarının ötesinde daha fazla yoğunlaşmaya ve Şii grupları mezhep yayılmacılığında kullanmaya başladılar. İranın desteklediği Şii gruplar elde ettiği kazanımlarla da bölgede dolaylı olarak aktif rol oynamaya çalışmaktadır. İran, yaşadığı İslam Devrimi'nden sonra siyasi sınırları içinde Şii mezhebi lehine bir toplum dönüşümü yaşamıştır. Bu dönüşümünü tamamlayınca özellikle Ortadoğuda olmak üzere dünya çapında devrimi ihracı yaparak aktif bir politika izlemiştir. İslam Devrimi'nden sonra İran'ın kendi siyasi sınırları dışında yaptığı farklı eğitim, kültürel ve politik aktiviteler, uluslararası alanda gerçekleştirdiği eylemlerin açık örnekleridir.

Bu tez, İran'ın Orta Doğu'daki etki alanını genişletmek ve bu alandaki nüfuzunu artırmak için kullandığı yöntem ve yaklaşımlara ilişkin araştırmaya dayanmaktadır. Aynı zamanda İran'ın Ortadoğu politikası üzerinde etkili olan araçları ve faktörleri araştırıyor.

Tezin temel konusu İran'ın Ortadoğu'daki dış siyasetini ve siyasetinde mezhebi araç olarak kullanmasını konu almaktadır. Tezde İran'ın dış siyasetindeki araçları ve bu araçların nasıl kullanıldığı araştırılmıştır. Ele alınan konulardan biri de İran ile Ortadoğu"da bulunan diğer ülkeler arasındaki siyasal ve kültürel farklılıklardır. İran'ın dış siyasetinde Şiilik mezhebini araç olarak kullanmasını değerlendirdikten sonra Ortadoğu'daki rolü ve tarihi emellerine ulaşmak için bölgedeki Şii gruplara verdiği siyasi destekler ele alınacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Mezhep, Devrim, Kültürel Mücadele, Yumuşak Güç.*

THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY AS A SOFT POWER IN THE MIDDLE EAST

ABSTRACT

Middle East lies in a geopolitical area which has gained attraction of the regional and the global powers throughout the history. This region is the connecting bridge between Asia, Europe and Africa, which encompasses different nationalities and religions and till today it has been politically unstable mainly because of direct and indirect religious conflicts.

After Islam and its division into two main sub groups by the name of Sunni and Shia, this process continued and till today competition between the two groups Sunnis and Shias has been carried on in the Middle East. Iran Islamic Revolution happened as a remarkable evolution in the Shia-centric community of Iran and after that the leaders of Iran did not focus only in their internal affairs, but rather shifted their concentration on regional politics, particularly through Shia Revolutionists in order to play a considerably active role in the Middle Eastern region.

Iran got an active position in the world, especially in the Middle East, after the revolution as a Shia-centric community. Different educational, cultural and political activities of Iran outside its borders are clear examples of Iran's international actions after the revolution.

This thesis is based on the research regarding the methods and approachs that Iran has used to expand its borders and influence in the Middle East. It also investigates the elements and factors which Iran has used to have influence over the Middle East.

The main objective of this thesis is to investigate and search on foreign politics of Iran and the usage of religion as a soft power in the Middle East. In this essay the religious factors of Iranian politics would be researched and the way it is used. In addition to these, this essay would research about the political and cultural opposition between Iran and other countries in the Middle East. After investigating about the usage of religious factors of Iran in the Middle East, the role of Iran as a regional power and a pro-Shia in the Middle East will be discussed. It will be clarified how Iran has used the Shia factor as a tool in order to reach its political and cultural aims in the Middle East.

Keywords*: Religion, Revolution, Cultural Struggle, Shia, Soft power, Middle East*

1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the Iran's policy in the Middle East and the use of religion as a soft power in the framework of the Joseph Nye's soft power theory.

The thesis has four chapters; first chapter consists of introduction. Second chapter deals with conceptual and historical framework and discusses soft power, the history of religion in Iran, Iranian Revolution and its impacts in the Middle East. Third chapter discusses foreign policy of Iran and focuses on the relations with Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Arabic countries (Yemen, Syria, Iraq and Egypt), African countries and South Asian countries. It also investigates Iran's policy towards the Palestinian issue. The fate of Palestine is one of the major concerns of the Muslim world, Middle East and several other countries in the world, and Iran is one of the main actors from among all. After the Islamic Revolution, Iran started helping the Palestinian people and added this in their foreign policy agenda and has always declared itself to be the protector of the Palestinian people and the enemy of Israelis. Fourth chapter analyzes cultural and religious impacts of Iran over the Middle East and the cnsequences of its nuclear program over this particular region. In the conclusion, findings of research are summarized.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The main objective of this paper is to investigate and search on foreign politics of Iran and the usage of religion as a soft power in the Middle East.

Today's geographic location known as the Middle East has been named based on its long history and the area being as a bridge between different civilizations. In the Middle East, it is not only the trade and goods that has been changed and exchanged, but rather culture, religions and civilizations has been affected as well. Due to this Middle East has an extremely important place in the world and that's the reason that all the powerful countries that want to have control over

specific places of the world tend to firstly deploy their forces over the Middle East, and that's the main reason that till today Middle East has been one of the most unsafe places in the world. Generally, the following aspects are the main reasons of insecurity in the Middle East;

- Presence of different religious spectrums such as Shia and Sunni,
- Absence of democratic regimes and not respecting the basics of rights
- Presence of different ethnicities and bloody conflicts between them
- Existence of huge natural resources such as petroleum, gasoline and the importance of them for the world's extreme powers and the struggle of the world powerful countries to have control over them.

In the framework of these main problems in the Middle East, the role of religion in the Iranian foreign policy towards the region plays a fundamental role.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this thesis is to investigate foreign policy of Iran and its usage as soft power after the revolution in the Middle East. In this research it aims to focus on the religious sources of Iran in its foreign policy and the approaches of using it.

In addition, this topic sheds light onto the cultural and political relations of Iran with other countries of the Middle East. After investigating the usage of religious force in Iranian foreign policy in the Middle East it aims to research on Iran's role in supporting the Shias in the Middle East and the usage of the Shia factor in reaching its cultural and political gains in the Middle Eastern countries.

1.3 Importance

This research topic is one of the important subjects for those who are interested in the political process in the Middle East and specifically in Iran. Iran has a long cultural and political history in the region; therefore, it has always tried to become a model and leader state in the Islamic world. On the other hand, the Shia and Sunni sects have always been in conflict during the history of the political Islam.

The intellectual architects of the Islamic Republic of Iran started to widen the range of their revolutionary ideas outside their borders. However, Sunni world, especially the radical Salafi movements, took a strong position against the expansion of Shia doctrines in the Middle East. Therefore, we can say that the Iranian revolution is one of the reasons for the rise of radical groups in the Middle East. Recently, the Iranian government followed up its foreign policy against the Salafi movements during the Arabic Spring in the Middle East.

1.4 Methodology

Methodologies conducted in this paper are of qualitative nature. Content analysis of both primary sources such as original documents, speeches, multimedia products and secondary sources such as books, thesis, journal articles, newspaper articles, TV products and documentaries are used for the research.

First, in order to understand the topic, the history of Islam and the conflicts between Sunnis and Shia is explored. It investigates the Sunni and Shia diverse views, conflict and their way of governance. Then, it analyzes the views and opinions of the cultural and political architects of Islamic Revolution, the occurrence of revolution and the impact of the Islamic Revolution in the Middle East and the usage of religion as a soft power in Iranian foreign policy by using the library resources and mass media. In this research the sources which have been used are in different languages such as English, Turkish, Persian and Arabic. This research has investigated thoroughly the situation in the Middle East by using daily newspapers and mass media resources.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

Power is one of the main concepts of politics in international platform. Taking into consideration this status, decision makers' and the politicians' main aims are to reach their gains. In fact, this is the actual meaning of power in the international politics. Gain and production of power in the modern world in comparison to the ancient times follow different methods and models. After, the Second World War, following the evolutions especially the 1970s, there has

been changes in the area of theory and practical values. In order to gain power and have influence in international politics actors used different instruments including religious and cultural means.

Therefore, the gain of international prestige and influence over public opinion and expression, access to soft power are among the important objectives and at the same time, is not fully described form of the countries' diplomacy approach in the international politics. Public diplomacy is one of the main mechanisms through which soft power can be used.

1.6 Literature Review

This study investigates the conflicts between Sunni and Shia (the two major sects in Islam) which its historical background goes upto the leadership of Prophet Muhammad and the existence of the real Islam. The Shia community believes in the leadership of Ali Ibni Abi Talib, the cousin of the Prophet Muhammad and the Sunni community believes in the leadership of the four caliphs, namely Abu Bakr, Omar, Osman, and Ali. The main gap between Islam's main religions sects, Sunni and Shia, lies in reality and belief, which exist till now. This difference in belief has been misused by the leaders and politicians through the history and this also includes the differences of nationality, ethnicity, economic and social aspects. After the death of Prophet Muhammad some believed that Ali has been selected as Imam, personally by Prophet Muhammad and after Ali this will continue from offsprings of Ali till the end. Besides, all these Imams are innocent according to these believers. Believers of these theories are called as Shias.

Among the Shias there has always been different other beliefs and politics throughout the history. This issue is the reason that the Shia community has always been controlled by others. Till the year 1501 and the establishment of the Safavid state, small groups represented the Shias in Iran, but after them and by coming of the Safavid Empire main religion of Iran was declared as Shia. Establishment of the Safavid government can be defined as a turning point for the Shia religion to develop and become stronger. In the past, Shias has been the establisher of not only the Safavid Empire but others as well such as the government of Buyid which was established by the Shias in Iraq but this wasn't

as successful in spreading the Shia religion as was the Safavid government. After the collapse of the Safavid Empire in Iran, ideas of the Shia religion declined in the region, specially in Iran. At the end the establishment of the Islamic republic of Iran after the 1979 revolution with the religious and Islamic slogans in the modern history by the Shia doctrine was the reason of major differences in the region, and that is the reason religious confrontation started. Before this, throughout the history the Shia community was always directed by others directly or indirectly. After the revolution of the Islamic Republic of Iran by the leadership of Imam Khomeini which happened by the ideology of Shia and as a result the Islamic Republic of Iran was established, there were major changes and shifts in politics of the Middle East. After the revolution, regional countries and the countries which had common gains including the United States of America broought major changes in the region and followed new politics. Iran also used the Shia element as a major factor in its foreign policy and tried to expand its revolutionist ideas. In this article I try to investigate about the Shia religious perspective of Iran and its influence in the Middle East.

1.6.1 Iranian Revolution and the outcomes of its foreign policy on the Islamic World

Middle East lies in a geographical area which has gained attraction of the regional and World power throughout the history. This region is the connecting bridge between Asia, Europe and Africa that includes different nationalities and religions and till today it has been politically unstable besides continuously being under religious war either directly or indirectly. After Islam and its division into two main sub groups by the name of Sunni and Shia, this process continued and till today competition between the two groups of Sunnis and Shias exist in the Middle East.

Emergence of the Islamic revolution of Iran at the end of 20th century is one of the most important event of the century in the region, which reached to its victory with the slogans of forming unity and convergence among Muslim countries, supporting of deprived nation and under oppressed, and supporting the Islamic and religious movements in the region. However, after three decades of the revolution's victory, Iran in contradiction to its revolutionist slogans has been trying to have its influence over the region with the basis of Shia religion in addition to expanding its ideological

influences in the Middle East. Due to this, Iran with concentration to its national interest, uses the Shia factor in the Middle East countries to influence the region culturally, politically and socially. This paper is based on the research regarding the ways Iran used to expand its border influence in the Middle East after the revolution. It will be clarified how Iran has used the Shia factor as a tool in order to reach its political and cultural aims in the Middle East.

1.6.2 The intellectual influence of Iran on the Middle East after the Islamic Revolution

Iran Islamic Revolution happened as a remarkable evolution in the Shia-centric community of Iran and after that the leaders of Iran did not focus only in their internal affairs, but rather shifted their concentration on regional politics, particularly through Shia Revolutionists in order to play a considerably active role in in the Middle Eastern region.

Iran got an active position in the world, especially in the Middle East, after the revolution as a Shia-centric community. Different educational, cultural and political activities of Iran outside its borders are clear examples of Iran's international actions after the revolution. Shias of the region including in Lebanon, Bahrain, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Caucasus did also come under influence of Iran's activities and the revolution formed different parties and organizations in their own countries. In this part we can give examples of the Hezbollah of Lebanon, Islamic Dawa Party in Iraq, Tehreek Nafaz-e-Fiqh-Jafariya of Pakistan (TNFJ) and other Shia groups. Regarding mass media aspects, Iran was able to expand its cultural influence over the Middle East by networks such as Al-Alam news, Al-kawsar TV, Sahar and Fars news.

In summary, it can be argued that after the Islamic Revolution, Iran's relations with the different groups of Shias in the Middle East progressed well. This relationship was in form of acceptance of foreign Shia students in the universities and educational centers, progress of cultural exchange programs, and increasing number of people coming as religious tourists, creating of cultural organizations such as Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO), Ahl AL-Bayt World Assembly and The World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought (WFPIST). This is a clear example of cultural

existence of Iran besides having an active role in the Middle East. In addition to these, Iran progressed its cultural place by creating educational branches in other countries and by sending missionaries.

This essay investigates the religious effects of Iran using the Shia religion as soft power in the Middle East. In this paper, the evolution of speech, the concept of power and soft power is attempted to define the foreign policy of Iran through the framework of the soft power theory proposed by American scholar Joseph Nye.

1.7 Research Questions

The following questions constitute the main problematic of this study:

- What is the main contradiction between Sunni and Shia and from where does it take root from?
- What are the main factors of creating the soft powers of Iran in the Middle East?
- Through which ways and which groups or organizations are the cultural and religious effects of Iran is imported to other countries of the Middle East?
- Has the Islamic revolution of Iran caused the wakening of other Shiite groups in the Middle East?
- Has Iran been able to expand its influence in other countries of Middle East through Shiite groups?
- Has the religious contradiction between Iran and other countries caused regional instability in the Middle East?

2. CONCEPTUAL AND HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 What is Soft Power?

Soft power elements have been used more in domestic and foreign policy of countries. The basic elements of soft power are a combination of culture, political values and demands of foreign policy. As defined by Joseph Nye (1990, pp:153-171) soft power is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's cultural, political ideals and policies. When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced. The concept of soft power was defined by Joseph Nye in 1989.

According to Nye, the theory of soft power is to force someone into accepting your thoughts and ideas without using physical force and power, but rather ruging them, through using soft power, to follow your path. He believes in the idea that, in politics if you want others to do what you want them to do, you do not need to use physical force or threaten them. According to him, soft power is the way and power which attracts nation's thoughts and theories voluntarily (Nye 2004, pp:70-120). As a result, it can be said that hard power is the product of soft power.

Nye believes that the positive values of a country in both domestic and international aspects can increase the soft power of that country. Domestically; being responsible to the human rights, implementation of justice and ethical accomplice, are all the positive values of a government. Internationally, any country which is far from conflicts, have good relations with foreign countries and international organizations and is in the meantime developed, is improvised with soft power values (Nye 2004, pp:2-26). As a result, it gets trust of others and shows the positive image of that country, and accordingly this causes others to concentrate and attracts other countries focus in foreign policy and makes it stronger.

Soft power has a historical background in human beings' social life. With the development of expanded cultures and improvement of relationships and information through integrated media, countries of the region and the world have put lots of budget in this. The topic of war and soft power in today's circumstances are one of the main issues in which all countries are contained off. The success of soft power depends mainly on the good background, popularity and activities of the actor in international platform. Because of this, the three main issues of the soft power can be summed up in culture, politics and economy. Relations between the countries when based on cultural aspects cannot be loosened or weakened. In cultural aspects architecture, knowledge and education has an import and place in making of the soft power. Formation of educational centers and interchange programs for the students creates strong roots of the soft power, this was the reason that Nye has put special place in theory of soft power, and emphasized over religion and ideology in such that he believes; after the Iraq war, because of religious attachments between Iran and Iraq, soft power and the influence of Iran increased dramatically in Iraq. It's the reason that the political leaders of Iraq focus more on Iran because of having cultural and religious similarities. Joseph Nye in the essay of Soft Power and Higher Education writes that colleges and universities can be beneficial to foreign policy of the United States of America and improvement of soft power through good understanding of debate and dialogue (Nye 2005, pp:1-4). Most of the observers believe that the educational centers of the United States of America are good sources of soft power to be used domestically and internationally.

According to the definition of soft power, the elements of soft power which are presented and mentioned in Islam are much different from the elements of soft power theory presented by Joseph Nye, but practically the foreign policy of Iran is based and followed according to theories of Nye.

The soft power sources of Iran which it considers it as Islamic are values including sacrifice, martyrdom, spirituality, justice believes, Islamic Government (valayat-e fakih), right orientation and independence. Based on these values, the Islamic Revolution besides creating cultural turning point in internal affair, lead to the awakening of Islamic societies, particularly in Shia-

centric regions. Before the Islamic revolution, Iran felt danger from both regional and World Powers. Its main aim was to reserve its borders and independence. After the Islamic revolution and with the passing of time Iran was satisfied and more confident of its independence and now tries to expand its power through diplomatic channels in the region and to introduce itself as a regional power. At the beginning, the leaders of Islamic revolution were following and moving with the slogans of pure Islam and with an idealistic mentality, but with the passing of time, it started followed the politics of reality that includes elements of soft power such as Persian culture, Shia religion and mentality of Islamic Revolution, Leaders of Islamic revolution of Iran used the religion, especially Shiism in its internal and external politics as a soft power value, such that after the 1979 revolution, described themselves as the defenders of all Muslims. Additionally, they added that the revolution does not only belong to Iran but to all Muslim nations; Khomeini even added an article to the Iranian Constitution that Iran is the defender of rights of all the Muslims in the world (Khomeini 1970, pp:90-110).

After the Islamic Revolution, Iran focused on cultural and diplomatic activities and formed a commission in the name of Islamic Culture and Communication Organization in order to make and improve its identity, its belief towards pure Islam, Islamic revolution, basics of Islamic Republic of Iran, and cultural civilizations of Iran's version of Islam in other societies in order to expand and to maintain spiritual values and relations (Jaafarian 1990, pp:80-112). The main aim of this commission is to publicize and earn trust of the pure Islam (Shia's version of Islam), Islamic Revolution, basics of Islamic Revolution of Iran, and cultural civilizations of Iran's version of Islam. Missions are the management and the leadership of cultural relations and policy making in international platforms, support and observe over the cultural activities of the Islamic republic of Iran outside the country in order to maintain values of the system and government.

This Commission's High Council consists of fifteen members of the ministers and the respected educational personalities who are directly selected and placed with the order and selection of religious head of Iran (Imam Khomeini) (Yegin 2016, pp:1-20). Today Iran has cultural branches in almost all Asian and

African countries, mostly Arabic-speaking, and is monitored through this commission (Islamic Culture and Communication Organization). Beside cultural activities, Iran does its religious and political activities through this commission in the region and the world. In addition, Iran does not only has its embassies in almost all over the region, but also cultural and educational centers such as schools and universities, mass media e.g. radio and televisions and through these has delivered its thoughts and mentality across the borders.

As mentioned by Mohammad Javad Zarif, Foreign Minister of Iran, the definition of foreign policy relies on national interest but diplomacy wants to follow it with the minimum budget; though with huge spending you can gain much more but according to me without calculation you cannot reach to any point and gain nothing though it is a reality that sometimes in particular circumstances in order to gain higher and bigger benefits you have to think and calculate everything in longer terms accordingly. Much of the politics of Iran is not based over material gains rather is to defend the values, but calculating and giving importance to budget expenses has given the benefits to Iran to have less budget be expended. One of the main points which have turned us (Iran) to a regional power in the Middle East is the fact that in a particular period of time we helped the oppositions of Saddam Hussein, and the Mujahidin's of Afghanistan in fight against the Soviet Union in addition to support Hezbollah and Hamas. So taking all into consideration, focusing over budget issue does not mean that one should not spend in any international issue, rather it gives you the idea that you have to spend your budget with calculations and according to the planned diplomacy (Mehdi Raji 2015, pp:70-115). So as a result what we get from the sayings of Javad Zarif is that Iran has influenced its values over the region not through hard power such as budget spending but rather by using the religious views of Shias as a soft power which means that Iran did expand the ideology of revolution which is based on values of Shia religion to the region with less expenses and budget.

In addition to these, having common language of Persian with some countries of the region has also helped Iran in expanding the values of the Islamic revolution. Most of the educational, religious and political articles and books are either written or translated in Iran and from there exported to regional

countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and others through which Iran maintains its role and power in the region and also expand its culture.

This is the best way for the foreign policy of Iran in order to maintain its power. Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Foreign Minister of Iran in an interview mentions that public diplomacy means besides having bilateral special relationships which countries have, they must have good relations with all other non-government people and organization as well (Mehdi Raji 2015, pp:70-115). They must have good relations with different citizens of the world and have contact with them in addition to deliver their opinions to them; means that having soft power in a way is to win hearts and minds (Mehdi Raji 2015, pp.358-365). In here, Javad Zarif clearly talks about the importance of soft power and on mentions the importance of its United States of America. In reality, Zarif talked about the role of exportation of the Islamic Revolution. Today, Iran is in a good position of having soft power in the region as a result of strong culture, religious identity and mentality of Islamic revolution, especially after the Iraq crises, and the change of politics in favor of Iran, Iran cold expand and make stronger its soft power through Velayat-e Faqih and cultural and religious activities in the region. This can be clearly observed in Syria Yemen and Iraq. Through these activities Iran has attracted the United States of America of youths to itself and make them dependent, even in the countries with minority Shia community Iran has been able to attract observations of the people through media and educational centers.

Through this religious propaganda, Iran has been able to attract the United States of America of young fighters to its soil and they are currently fighting in Syria, Yemen and Iraq, as claimed by Muhammad Ali Jafary, commander of Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution that we have more than 2000 young fighters in the five countries. In the reality Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution especially Quds Force has been established in order to publish and expand the ideas of revolution and has been working over it successfully with the guidance of the leader of the Islamic Revolution (Ghassemi 2017, p. 1).

 As a result, Iran with its economic and political support wants to gather all Shias under one roof and establish Shia sect from Afghanistan through Yemen

in order to reach its religious and political objectives. Iran forces its influence over the regional people by using ancient Persian culture, slogans of Islamic Union in accordance to Shia theories and revolutionist opinions.

2.2 Religion in Iran

Among the 1.7 billion Muslims in the world, Shias are estimated about 154-200 million from which the majority live in region between Pakistan and Lebanon (Salihi 2011, pp.4-6). Shia communities mainly live in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain and Azerbaijan and Lebanon. The Shiites also have population in the Gulf countries, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Among these countries, the only country which follows completely according to Shis rules and regulations and defends the rights of them is Iran. The Shia community which makes 10-13 percent of the Muslim community has its own sub-groups such as Imamia, Zaydia, Ismailia and others (Salihi 2011, pp:1-5).

The conflict between Sunni and Shia (two major sects in Islam) has historical backgrounds since after the death of the Prophet Muhammad and the emergence of Caliphs of Islam. The Shia communities believe in the leadership of Ali bin Abi Talib, the cousin of the Prophet Muhammad, and the Sunni community believes in the leadership of the four caliphs (Abu Bakr, Omar, Usman, Ali). The main differences between Sunni and Shia lies in realities and believes that has emerged from the very beginning of Islam and they exist upto now. The differences in the belief have been misused by the leaders and politicians throughout the history, that has been backed by other factors such as differences of nationality, ethnicity, and socio-economic aspects. After the death of Prophet Muhammad, some believed that Ali has been selected as Imam personally by Prophet Muhammad and after Ali this will continue with the offspring of Ali till end. It is believed by Shias that these Imams are innocents and sacred (Black 2001, pp:50-90).

This issue is the reason that Shia community always has been controlled by others. Till the year 1501 and the establishment of the Safavid State, a small group represented the Shias in Iran, but after them and by coming of the Safavid government main religion of Iran was declared as Shia. Establishment of the Safavid Empire can be defined as a turning point for the Shia religion that

considerably developed and became stronger. In the past history Shias has been the establisher of not only the Safavid state but others as well such as the government of Buyid which was established by the Shias in Iraq but this wasn't as successful in spreading the Shia religion as was the Safavid government (Altan 2016, pp:140-185). After the collapse of the Safavid government in Iran, ideas of the Shia religion declined in the region, specially in Iran. However, with the establishment of the Islamic republic of Iran after the 1979 Revolution, Shia ideology started to become one of the most important issue in the modern history that has brought a lot of religious debates, tensions and confrantations with itself. Before this, throughout the history, the Shia community was always directed by others directly or indirectly. After the revolution of the Islamic Republic of Iran by the leadership of Imam Khomeini which happened under the ideology of Shia and as a result Islamic Republic of Iran was established, there were major changes and shifts in politics of the Middle East (Akhavi 1983, pp:195-221). After the revolution, regional countries and the countries which had common gains including the United States of America did bring major changes and followed new politics in the region. Iran did also use the Shia issue as a major factor in its foreign policy and tried to expand its revolutionist ideas (Şentürk 2012, pp:22-52). The main aim of Iran's foreign policy lies in the incorporation of Shiism in the region outside its own borders. Because of this Iran created many educational institutions and tried to expand it in the region. As known throughout the history of Islam, the Najaf city of Iraq has been the main religious center of Shias where many scholars of the Shia from all over the world came, trained and were shifted to their countries as trained ambassadors. Similarly, in Iran, the city of Qom, which is known as the instructional center of the Shias, was established by the scholars who were trained in Najaf of Iraq and were under the influence of them until the revolution in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

After the revolution in the Islamic Republic of Iran, considerable importance was given to Qom by the revolutionists. In-addition to that, the war between Iran and Iraq was the reason due to which the active leadership of both sides were against the activities of the Shia scholars in Najaf, which this very reason opened the path for Qom to present itself as an instructional center of Shias not

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only in the region but in all over the world. The main difference in these two hubs lies in the political status of the Imam. The scholars trained in Najaf believe and follow the path of the old Shia ideas; besides, they are not in favor of interfering of the scholars in the political issues. They used to say that scholars must interfere in religious and behavioral aspects of the nation and must try their best to lead these two main aspects. Opposite to this scholars which were trained in the city of Qom, follow and defend the doctrines of Imam Khomeini (Velayat-e Faqih) or in other words scholars of Qom believe in the theory that scholars should play virtual role not only in social aspects but also in political affairs. After the Islamic Republic revolution, all the leaders of Iran played a key role and give priority to the Qom institute (Hawza Ilmiyya Qom) (Tahiry and Nigahdar 2013, BBC). All leaders did not leave any single opportunity in expanding and developing this institute. This is the reason that today Qom city has changed to capital city of Shias in the world which is home to around 70,000 students from all over the world and consequently the upcoming Shias leaders are among these who are serving in their own countries (Ahmadi, Wasiq and Jasim 2012, pp.10-13). This is the true way of expanding Shia theories and believes to all over the world. Joseph Nye (Author of the Soft power theory) believes in educational centers as being an important factor in reaching political aims. This is what Iran truly believes and follows it (Waseq and Jasennejad 2011, pp:18-36).

Besides all of these struggles, still, Iran could not achieve its goals till the 9/11 event in the region but oppositely was facing isolation both in the region and in the world. After the 9/11 event and with the upcoming foreign political changes of the United States of America and the invasion of Afghanistan with the reason of destruction of the Taliban regime and the invasion of Iraq with the reason of having mass destruction weapons, Shias once again gained power in the Middle East specifically in Iraq and used this as an opportunity. This led to anger of the anti Shia Muslim communities especially Salafi who then funded and tried their best to create new armed groups in the region. This led to instability in the countries and regions which included both Shias and Sunnis living together in the same geography.

2.3 Iranian Revolution and its Influence in the Region

Today's geographic location known as the Middle East has been named from the beginning of the history till now bed of the civilization from one side and also as the connecting bridge between different civilizations. In the Middle East, it is not only the trade and goods that has been changed and exchanged beside that culture, religions and civilizations has been affected as well. Due to that, the Middle East has an extremely important place in the world and that is the reason that all the powerful countries, which want to have control over specific places of the world, have to firstly deploy their force over the Middle East, and that is the main reason that until today, the Middle East has been one of the most unsafe places in the world.

Generally, the followings are the main reasons of insecurity in the Middle East:

- Presence of the difference religious sects, namely Shia and Sunni,
- Absence of democratic regimes and not respecting the basic rights,
- Existence of different ethnicities and bloody conflicts between them and ability of huge natural resources such as oil, natural gas and the importance of them for the world's powers and the struggle of the world powers to have control over them (Yurdakurban 2007, pp:10-25*),*
- As mentioned before, there are different ethnic groups in the Middle East. Among them, according to population, Arabs remain as the majority but politically and economically, three countries, namely Turkey, Iran and Israel, must not be forgotten when talking about the Middle East. These three countries though are not Arabs but still since they have economic and political power in the region, they are extremely important in the Middle East (Yurdakurban 2007, pp:25-35*).*

Throughout the history of Islam especially after the death of Prophet Muhammad there have been political and religious differences between Shia whose leadership belongs to Iranian Fars (Persian) and Sunnis which are mostly Arabs and these differences have led to bloody conflicts in the region (Black 2001, pp:90-105). Due to this reason, majority of Iranians are against the formation of different politics and powers and also the differences of cultural, social and religious have made it difficult to get close to the Arab world. But

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after the Islamic Revolution of Iranians the foreign policy of Iran laid down to religious aspects and helping the powerless and considered itself as the guardian of all the Muslim nations specifically the Palestinians and has always tried to force its influence through cultural and political ways (Khomeini 1970, pp:110-117). It must be mentioned that Iran's foreign policy in the Pahlavi term was dependent to the world super powers and was extremely under the influence of the world powers. These relationships had definitely its impacts in the internal affairs as well (Akhavi 1983, pp:210-221). This policy had led to success and improves the relations with the Israel's through kingdom regime besides being opposed by the people and scholars and clerics. But after the Islamic Revolution, the foreign policy of Iran did change from its dependent and inactive form to more active and independent form based on the lessons of revolutions. In the cultural and religious aspects and areas Iran did play vital roles in the region and due to these activities, lots of movements and groups was built-up in the Middle East backed by the Iranian government (Akhavi 1983, pp:210-221).

Some of these movements turned to be radicals and wanted to demolish the present governments of their countries and some of these movements turned to be reformers and soft toned so that they could change the minds of the people through ideology and soft powers and others were the movements who were fully formed by the revolutionists such as Hezbollah movement in Lebanon who has put Iran's Islamic revolutionary ideas into its basic struggle ideologies. Also Iran has used the Palestinians topic and the support of the Palestinians in its foreign policy agendas to get its own benefits and main place in the region. Iran has raised the Palestinian's issue from its geographical and Palestinians nation's aspects into a Muslim world issue and according to this took its political stand against the Israel's opposite of what was done in the kingdom period and even has named a day in its calendar as the day of Quds and want to catch the world's attention to itself through this (Odeh 2015, pp:25-35). Besides, all these performances and activities due to the presence of major cultural religious and ethnical differences between Iran and its Arab neighbor countries, Iran could not hold a strong position in the region which it wanted and could not improve its mutual political cultural and historical relationships with them. Iran failed to

have good relations with any of the Arab countries and in the post Islamic Revolution period Iran faced its most turbulence period of time with the Arab countries and even now most of those negative thoughts and sayings are remaining alive which create a burden for it to have an accepted relation with opposite side also the Iranians do feel strangers with the Arabs as they do have different cultural, ethnical and religious aspects (Şenyurt 2012, pp:22-32). In addition, the legitimacy crises in the Arab world have led to improve the political and cultural gaps. As a consequence, the Arabs also count Iranians as an untrue partner and a neighbor which cannot be believed and in some cases they do even consider the Iranians as their enemy. Due to these, the presence of such cultural and structural gaps creates a burden for the two sides to get closer and lead them to focus on regional gains in their foreign policies and even sometimes had led them ward and caused struggles among them.

The first war after the Islamic revolution of Iran was the border war between Iran and Iraq started in the 16 September 1980 and ended in 1986, in the reality the relations between Iran and Iraq was not very well from the begging due to the presence of islands located between Iran and Iraq. After gaining power of the Imam Ruhollah Khomeini the defender of the Shias, relations of both countries were totally damaged (Kılıç 2015, pp:1-22). In Baghdad the government of Saddam Hussein was scared of the backing of the Shia community by Imam Khomeini. Because of this Iraq supported the region of Khuzestan where mostly Arabs are located to build an independent government and this was the main reason which led to war between the two countries lasted eight years and one million people were killed and also both countries faced extreme damages both physically and spiritually and finished without gaining any result (Kılıç 2015, pp:1-22).

After the war and conflict between Iran and Iraq, the policy of Iran towards the region turned to be according to the Islamic revolutionist's want sand was always trying to force the ideas of the revolutionists by using the Shia communities presents in those specific areas (Zurnaci 2016, pp:25-52). Iran has tried to have influence over the region through its cultural and religious activities rather than using force or through war or conflicts. Iran through sending a lecturer or teacher (Akhund) to specific places where Shias existed

but were far away from Iran could gain the thoughts and ideas of people in favor of itself and the government of Iran.

Simultaneously with the 9\11 incident, especially the political and security changes after the Iraq crises in the 2003 the role playing of Iran increased in the region. These incidences led Iran to increase its influences in the regional countries. In addition to this Iran tried to introduce itself as an independent country and national government in the region to the world and by doing this could gain its place in the world platform (Gök 2005, pp:15-32).

Iran's foreign policy which is based on political security and strategically relies mainly on the importance of terrorism and Al-Qaida and the danger which comes from the extension of the mass war weapons and geopolitical mass in the region, because of all these Iran has gained much more international importance. Formation of these three methods, cultural and historical, improvement and geopolitical, political and security issues and to fulfill these in the foreign policy of Iranian order to improve the regional role of Iran has shown the importance which Iran gives to the regionalism issues. Three main factors which shows the national force of Iran on focusing the issue of improving regionalism has been always a key factor in Iran's foreign policy.

- Nation State

Iran has a powerful national government and this reality has given Iranian priority and special place in the region. Iran is one of the main parts of the Middle East civilization, which connects it to the world civilizations. Iran has a very deep history of being historically and culturally active in the region. Throughout the history Iran did succeeded to maintain its nation state and its authority in addition to these it also did succeed to maintain its cultural and political relationships with the regional states beside having conflicts and difference of views, even it faced a dignified partner facilities and relations from its historical competitors such as Russia and turkey for having an independent and strong nation state (Arjomand and Amir 1987, pp:293-316). In the region, except Russia and Turkey no other country enjoys the characteristics of Iran.

- Geopolitical identity

Iran is the connecting point between places of the central Asia, Caucasus and South Asia the Gulf States and the world. And also it has old historical background and it is the heir of many huge empires Iran is geopolitically and important country. Determination of the geopolitical identity is one of the main parts of Iran's politics and government (Azimi and Hussein 1998, pp:11-19).

During the past decades, different governments in the regions have used the geopolitical identity in order to maintain its position and authority between the nations and to use it in the relations between the world powers. Due to that, Iran claims that the Middle East belongs to one of our civilization places and we do have major historical, political and cultural rights and forces and because of this Iran wants to maintain its geopolitical identity through being connected into south Asia and being near to Indian subcontinent furthermore by forcing its sovereignty in the Middle East.

- Shia ideology and national power

This component has been a main issue in the foreign policy from the very past till today's date, even the past regimes who did not believe in using the ideological issues as a soft power to use in the foreign policy in away used the Shia debate as to have influence over the region. During the revolution and after it, especially after the Iraq crises in the 2003 and simultaneously by entering the Shia component in the power and Middle East politics; Iran's use of these components in its foreign policy has been seen and observed fully and this issue has led to improve the authority of Iran in the issues of security and politics of the region such as having an active role in topics of Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen and generally in the near Middle East (Akhavi 1983, pp:210-221).

By using the Shia component, Iran has been able to maintain the national interest of Iran in the framework of improving regionalism and through this has been able to play a vital political role in the region and even has strengthen sits power. In-addition to this since Iran has main and major power in the region due to these characteristics entered into a mutual deal with the United States of America from a much strengthened view. Using the Shia component in the regulating of the Iran's foreign policy with the Iraq is a good example:

strengthening of the Shia component in the Iraq's governmental structures has played a major role in neutralizing the physical dangers toward the United States of America against Iran during the year 2003-2005 (Zurnacı 2016, pp:25-35).

Also improving of the Shia component in the power formation of Iraq and converting Iraq into a friend and allied country in the region, besides barring from the current and future dangers, could play an important role in improving Iran's stand in Middle East political and security issues and also in issues regarding America and other Arab countries. Because of this Iran has always tried to improve Shia component and also through this Iran has maintained its cultural and political status in the region (Yurdakurban 2007, pp:25-29).

Finally, the main logic of improving the regionalization of Iran's foreign policy lies in the Shia ideology, the main basis of international governments in today's world lies in the reality that parallel to the quantity of being involved in the matters of the regional and world countries you need to improve and have good relations with the allied forces and countries as well, as an example, presence of the united states of America did happened only when the aims and gains of the United States of America after the world war two as a super power did accelerate in the word and consequently it was a natural order for the United State of America to obey and recognize the people and the allies governments in order to succeed. In 2009, simultaneously when the Bush administration failed to succeed in making unique and single leadership style of controlling the world by the United State of America, the Obama administration demonstrated the new strategy of America based on the mutual and bilateral good relations with both the allied and competitor's governments, in order to solve the regional and international affairs, and in other words it has focused on the regionalization.

Other example, improvement of the regionalization in Turkey's foreign policy lies in the form of new Ottoman Empire form. This strategy plays a vital role for Turkey in maintaining its role in dealing with the worlds powerful countries such as America and the European Union and also turkey has tried to use its geopolitical identity towards the world in order to have its main position in regional and international affairs.

The leaders of the Justice and Development Party (JDP-*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) in Turkey believe in the idea that Turkey can maintain good relations both with the United States of America and the European Union but only if Turkey keeps its Islamic and Asian geographical beliefs and independent strategies (Husainy, İbrahimi, and Shah qula 2013, pp:3-7). From this perspective, Turkey through close relations with Iran, Russia and the Arab countries and by believing in being active role in the regional issues in Lebanon, Iraq and Palestinians, after Arab Spring Turkey has improved it's regional and international position after being a side of discuss and matter in Syrian issues and crises. Turkey's strategists do talk and focus over improvising Turkey's soft power in the Middle East and do think that Turkey's benefit lies in improving regionalization in its foreign policies but after the Arab spring especially Syria crises and the presence of the ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq & Syria) militancy did not let Turkey to improve as it wanted (Reza Kahah 2016, p.1).

Since Iran has sensitive geopolitics such as being involved in the crises of the regions like Afghanistan and Iraq and the nature of security and political issues which Iran has to face, its nuclear power case has directly or indirectly involved and interrelated with the international affairs. Iran has come to a point where security and political gains lie within the region and beyond its own boundaries and this has led it to have access and identity of the region especially in the Middle East and surrounding of Iran's own boundaries. Iran's active presence in different places of the world is seen as far as the other countries political, economic and security has common interests and points. The main logic of international relations in today's world is such that it makes the presence of cooperation between allies an accepted need. Without having an active foreign policy, it is not possible to have such a gain.

As far as Iran's issues are interrelated with the world's issues, Iran has expanded its authority and cooperation to different parts of the region and the world and as long as Iran's influence has expanded, this makes Iran safe from the world as well. Improvement of the regionalization of Iran means to have huge cooperation with regional countries, especially Muslim neighbors and Arab countries, many think that having well relations with the south Asia,

central Asia, Caucasus, China and Russia and overall Asia is part of Iran's foreign policy and is related with its focus on regionalization. Due to this Iran after the Islamic revolution especially 9/11 by using the soft power components such as religious cultural and social activities has tried to reach its political gains in the region. Till beginning of the Arab spring seven years before with the upstanding of the Tunisian people and escape of the political leader of the country, up standing of the people which were rare in the past, had started and later were named as Arab Spring (Özyurt 2015, pp:30-45).

After the huge movement by the name of Arab Spring the only reason Bashar al Assad remains is the direct military and political support of the Iranian and Russian leaders which continue until toda y. After the Arab Spring, the war was extended to almost all of the Arab countries and in a way proxy war is still ongoing between the Sunnis and Shias. As an example, the war in Yemen which has costed huge casualties to the Yemenis is due to political struggle between the Saudi Arabia and Iran. As a result, the support of Iran to the Shias in the region and extension of its ideology in the regional countries were confronted with anger of the Salafe communities in the region and that is the reason that in these days' lots of explosions which is causing causalities of the Shias in all over the Middle Eastern countries are observed (Tombaş 2015, pp:25- 35).

3. FOREIGN POLICY OF IRAN

3.1 Relations with Turkey

In order to analyze relations between Iran and Turkey, it is necessary to see a historical gap before the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. Relations between Iran and the Ottoman Empire have been always conflictual. Iran and the Ottoman Empire had several sectarian and ideological wars throughout the history (Shahriari 2010, pp.11-13) Competitions between the two countries in the Safavid period in 1486-1722 were the most serious of the competitions.

After the end of the Safavid Dynasty, which had a political turmoil period in Iran, Qajar dynasty tried to have good relations and secure the borders between the two countries with the Ottoman Empires besides having small competitions. When the Ottoman Empire started the war with Russia, oppprtunity was provided for Iran to make its relations with Ottoman Empire more powerful. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the appearance of Reza Shah and Ataturk, much of the border and religious conflicts were decreased to its minimum level and the relations between the two countries were in a few face (Görçün 2008, pp:12-38). Trip of Reza Shah to Turkey and being affected from Ataturk's ideology made Reza Shah to bring serious reform in Iran.

Mutual relations between the two countries before 1925, especially between 1918 to 1925 were affected from different opinions and as a result, it impacted negatively on the relations of these two countries. However, after the Pahlavi Dynasty, the relations between the two countries proceeded well. Besides having some minor tensions between Iran and Turkey, still Iran and Turkey had its best relations ever since in the Pahlavi period. In the Second World War and with the establishment of bipolar system in the aftermath, Iran and Turkey became closer to each other with the support of the West and they were together in different regional agreements. In fact, having common religious, historical, cultural and joining in the regional agreements such as Organization of Islamic

Cooperation, the non-aligned movement and others, were the reason to have better and friendly relations between the two countries (Görçün 2008, pp:12-38).

During the Cold War, one of the main reasons which made the relations between the two countries more friendly was the fact that Iran and Turkey were under same pole (western block) and the relations between the two countries were affected between the competitions of the two poles (the Soviet Union and the United states of America). With the occurrence of Islamic Revolution in Iran, existing conflicts and cooperation factors continued to play an active role in relations between the two countries after that period as well. These relations were faced with ups and downs in the historical issues; border issues, minorities, business, ideological and religious issues and the outcome of revolution ideas were the main aspects of Iran in relations with other countries. Because of the relations between Islamic Iran and secular Turkey were declined dramatically, such that in the year 1989, due to Islamic policies of Iran towards Turkey, the relations were at its lowest level. The result was such that ambassadors were summoned and the government personalities in Iran publicly condemned Turkey's decision in banning Islamic Hijab in the universities (Nail2016, pp:18-48). This lead to accept the fact that interfering in Islamic issues of the other country did not only bring the government relations to its lowest level, but also increased conflicts in between nations of the two countries. Besides, Iran and Turkey maintained to have good mutual relations du to the fact that Iran in this specific period of time was in war with Iraq and Turkey needed Iran to support her economically. Furthermore, both countries were afraid of the influence of the Soviet Union. Due to these, the two countries did not pay much attention to ideological hostility in order to have fair mutual relations.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, two countries were trying to benefit from new upcoming opportunities. It worth mentioning that Turkey took benefit the most out of these opportunities, mainly through concentration on the independence of the Middle Eastern countries. Mutual relations of Iran and Turkey throughout the 1990s were faced with ups and downs, similarly how it has been throughout a main part of historical course. Relations between the two

countries were unfriendly. The first problem was from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey which blamed Iran to assist and support the PKK group and the second problem was the ideological conflicts between the two countries such that Turkey blamed Iran of supporting the Islamic radicals inside Turkey, named as *(Irancılar)* (Nail 2016, pp:18-48).

It can be concluded that relations between Iran and Turkey are based on historical backgrounds. In fact, this relation has always been named as necessity enemies and natural friends. Both countries enjoy their special strategic places in the region. Iran is a connecting bridge between Turkey and the east and Turkey is a connecting bridge between Iran and the west. No doubt that internal affairs of any country affect the other country as well. By paying attention to the history, one can get to know the fact that much of the evolutions and issues of any country either affects the other country or is directly as a consequence of that country. Occurrence of constitutional revolution in Iran and the Ottoman Empire, appearance of Reza Khan and Ataturk in the two countries, military coups against Mussadiq and Adnan Menderes in Iran and Turkey, strengthening of Islamists in Turkey and reforms in Iran, are the consequences of the last terms (Waseq and Jasenejad 2011, pp:18-36).

After the Islamic Revolution, relations between Iran and Turkey had ups and downs. Similarly, as the Islamic Revolution affected the World, especially in the Middle East, it had a significant impact on Turkey's cultural and political aspects, too. Islamic movements in Turkey under influence of the latest ideas of the Islamic Revolution speeded up its struggle against the government. In Turkey, because of the existence of different thoughts and religious view, Islamic movements are of great importance (Nail 2016, pp:18-48).

Turkey's cultural and social context is such that it provides opportunities for different activist groups, particularly religious groups to act desperately. Among all the political movements in Turkey since 1969, National Movement has been in the top leadership. This movement which was established by Necmettin Erbakan was argued to be under the influence of Muslim Brotherhood. After the Islamic Revolution of Iran, this movement was also affected from the opinion of the revolution, such that resources of the political and ideological architects of

Iranian Revolution were translated by this movement and were distributed among its members (Gonca 2005, pp:22-32).

As a result, many people, especially young generation in Turkey, were under influence of the ideas of the Iran Islamic Revolution and in the political literature of Turkey they are named as *"Irancılar"*. Islamic Revolution had the effect over Turkish people to strengthen their belief in political Islam. Thus, it can be said that Islamist social movements in Turkey were inspired by the Iranian Revolution and therefore in order to enter into political era of Turkey they worked actively. Given the religious and political movements in Turkey thinkers such as Doctor Ali Shariati, Murtaza Motahhari, and the impact of Imam Khomeini works, Leader of the Islamic Revolution, as the supreme leader, made a large impact. The most important reason for the spread of the idea of Shariati among Islamist movements was the interpretations of Islam, which was offered by him (Abrhamian 2011, pp:1-6).

Shariati's interpretation of Islam was such that it associated with modernity discourse and due to this most of his followers were urbanized intellectuals and educated youth having western ideas and knowledge and due to the fact that Turkey was also dealing with modernity and had same situation as Iran, ideas and opinions of Shariati could attract social and Islamic groups' attention. On the other hand, the effects of the Islamic Revolution over the Islamic movements of Turkey in the 20th century can be clearly seen on the activities and point of views of the Turkish intellectuals. Beside the small publications which used to write on the favor and defense of the Islamic revolution, the *"Girişim"* publications also published its first journal in October 1985 in Istanbul. These movements of the intellectuals left lots of positive effects later. Authors and publishers were deeply under the influence of Ali Shariati's opinions; but to some extent, they were interested in Mawdudi's point of view as well. The positive view of this movement towards Iran was the proof of Iran's significance to them, since they believed that Islamic Republic of Iran was the defender of the big promises and values of Islam and it was their duty to support them. In addition to all these, they believed that the Islamic Revolution of Iran was a revolution of the Shias and could not be practiced in Sunni community, which is the majority in Turkey and dreamed of the leadership of

the Islamic world. This view leads them to take a turn and change their approach towards the revolution (Görçün 2008, pp:18-32). Though, they did not directly reject the idea of revolution, but accepted that such a revolution which occurred in Iran cannot happen here in Turkey and is impossible, due to this changed their direction of approach to the people and used seminars and journals to address them. In other words, Turkey's Islamists beside Malaysia and other Islamic countries' Islamists who were following the path of Islamic Revolution reached to a conclusion that the Islamic Revolution of Iran was specifically designated form of revolution for the Iranians which could be practiced only in Iran, not in other countries, since in Turkey , the power of the secular military, and the opposition of the revolution, both in small and huge group forms and movements made it impossible to think about the occurrence of such revolution in Turkey. One of the greatest achievements which were understood by the other Islamist group was the fact that the revolution which happened in Iran cannot represent a true Islamic revolution (Nail 2016, pp:52-72).

The other factor which made stronger the morale of the Turkish Islamists view to have Islamic state was the change in their view towards Palestinian issue. They changed their view practically by attending in the Quds day annual function. The reaction of the government officials towards the Iranians stand in the issue of the Occupied Palestinian. Whenever Iran draw a new politics towards Israel which increased the morale of Islamist groups, government officials tried to decrease the influence of Iran by weakening of the status of Islamic Republic of Iran in Turkish society. On the other hand, Turkish leaders in order to demolish the Islamists influence in Turkey supported and opened the way for the other Islamists group to work here openly who were against the Iran. One of these groups was Wahhabism which started their activities with the economical help of the Saudi Arabia in Turkey. As it is known to all that Wahhabism under the leadership of Saudi Arabia was formed after the success of the Islamic Revolution Iran, in order to work against the Shia Iran, and progressed it's activates in all over the world (Shahi 2008, pp:1-18).

The existence of Wahhabism in the center of the Islamic world and its support from a potential economical source were the main reason of the progress of

Wahhabism in the world. The basic reason of conflict between Shia Iran and Sunni Turkey is the result of the Saudi Arabia's activities and being the ally of the United States of America. The other main result of the Revolution of Iran in Turkey which is very complicated is the issue of supporting economically the Islamic Movement of the Turkish Workers' Union both in Turkey and all over Europe. The revolution of Iran and the mass attraction and activities of the Shias in the Middle East led Saudi Arabia to increase its activities and plans for the development of the Wahhabism form of Sunni (Kahraman 2014, pp:15-35).

As a result, it can be said that with the occurrence of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, social and political movements of the Islamists in Turkey were affected from Iranian Revolution. The movements which were in favor of the revolution were being under control from the government officials and the movements which were against the revolution were being supported and made stronger in order to be against Iran.

Islamic Revolution could create an evolution to the social and political movements in the Turkish society, it means that a huge mass movement such as Alawites which had no political activities before this, came into political affairs of the society. On the other hand, movements which were famous for being Islamists got their new stance and energy after the Islamic revolution and even the leftist Muslim turned their way to the political Islam. These changes of stance had a huge impact on the social environment. Among others, one can point out the issue of Palestine and its place in the agendas of the revolutionist leaders and the nation. In other word, this topic can be a main element and reason for investigating the effects of the Islamic revolution to a specific country. As described earlier, different groups of the Turkish society under the influence of the revolutionist ideas of Iran have taken stance against Israel. Gaining importance of Quds (Jeruselam) day among the social movements of Turkey, establishment of pro-Palestinian organization, moving of the support and aid ships from Turkish ports, Anti-Israel slogans in demonstrations and gatherings of the Turkish people, focusing on the Palestinian issue in the national media and press are the examples of being the impacts of influence of the Islamic Revolution of Iran and has created the spirit of fighting against oppression among Muslims. In other words, Islamic revolution was the reason

and main factor of creating a new generation of intellectuals with Islamic slogans in Turkey (Ahmadi 2010, pp:37-74).

In today's world, Turkey is considered as a dominant player in the region and the world. The importance of Turkey is tied to the fact that Turkey is the first Asian country which is western ally. Importance of Turkey lies in the fact that it has been involved in many issues such as interference in Iraq in order to stop the conflicts and the Kurds issue, in Afghanistan as a main member of NATO, in Iran's nuclear issue as a meddler and after the Arap Spring in the evolution of Libya, Egypt, Syria and Iraq as a main part. Due to all these, relations with Turkey from any aspect is of absolute importance to Iran (Yılmaz 2014, pp:23-33).

Historical background of Iran and Turkey has lots of common points in the last two decades. None of these two countries have been occupied in the 19th century which is known to be the central issue of being occupied specifically for the Muslim countries. These two countries known to be the remaining of the two huge and strong Empires, have both long histories of nations and national identity and because of being neighbors with each other, throughout the history and at the end of the decades, they have relations with ups and downs (Nail 2016, pp:52-62).

Above, the historical relationships between Iran and Turkey are analyzed shortly. Now, the paper will focus on the relations between Iran and Turkey in the period after Justice and Development Party *(Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi),* who gained power in 2002 and introduces itself as a right- wing and moderate party.

After gaining power, Justice and Development Party centralized its foreign policy over having good relationships with its neighbors further more in order to have "zero problems with neighbors" until very recent times. Due to this policy in the recent years, relations between Iran and Turkey improved. Aspects such as increasing amount of business and trade between the two countries, cultural exchange programs of the two countries, fight against terrorism, establishment of natural gas pipeline, issue of Northern Iraq and the issue of the Kurds, made the two countries work together and have good relations (Sargı 2016, pp:23-33).

Justice and Development Party at the beginning of its coming to power gave much more importance to diplomatic ties and bargaining and satisfaction. This was the reason it had progressed successfully in its foreign policy till the beginning of the Arab Spring, however with the start of the Arab Spring, specifically Syrian crises, there happened a gap and interrupted the relations between the two countries, and both tried to gain a regional power by attracting the regional countries' attention. Islamic Republic of Iran, with attention of existence of the Shia factor in the Middle East, following of the religious power and for its the strategic location tries to transform itself into a better regional power (Yılmaz 2014, pp:23-33).

Turkey, also in the reign of the Islamist Justice and Development Party, gave more concentration to the Middle East issue and tried to become a regional power in the region. Besides having common cultural factors, and being near neighbors and having long historical relations, currently both countries are in a serious competition with each other over leadership of the Middle East. Despite the two countries having long historical relations, common cultural ties and extensive economical cooperation, their relations changed into opposite and turned to be confronting each other following the evolutionary movements in the Middle East, the interference of NATO in Libya, the support of the Turkish government to the opposition of the Syrian regime, and the support of Iran to the Syrian regime,

Justice and Development Party follows the following basic principles in its foreign politics and these policies confront with the benefits of the Iran (Tombaş 2016, pp:24-34):

- To maintain central role in the region,
- To have multilateralism policy and to pay attention to Arabic and Muslim countries,
- To have zero problems policy with neighbors,
- To play the role of mediator in various regional issues,
- Trying to have balanced policies in the Middle East and Europe,
- To create a model for Arab and Muslim countries, the pattern is in contrast to the pattern of Islamic Iran.

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As mentioned above, Turkey tried to minimize its problems with the neighbors to zero level and Turkey was trying to cooperate with the less democratic states and countries. In relation to this we focus on the issues of the start of the Syrian crises. Turkey dealt with lots of attentions towards Syria but after a period violated its politics and started to act against Bashar al-Assad, so that even then the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan officially demanded that Bashar al-Assad should step down (Abboud 2016, pp:1-3).

To sum up roughly, the issues which affected the relations of Iran and Turkey and changed the current cooperation status of the two countries into devastating status, can be summarized as follows:

3.1.1 View towards the USA

Being located in a strategic location and playing a major role both in the Midle East and Balkans, being a secular Muslim country, and sharing Asian, Europian, and Middle Eastern values, all have made Turkey and the United Nation State of America fair allies rather than enemies in the international politics. Turkey is also a security asset to America. Presence of "Incirlik" base, America's largest military bases in the region is of considerable importance to both countries and this is not something very pleasant for Iran. After the Arab Spring, position of Turkey and the United Nation State fo America (USA) supporting the opposition of Bashar al-Assad regime and the support of the Iranian government to Bashar al-Assad made Turkish-Iranian relations further strained. The leaders of both countries in international and regional meetings accuse each other for sectarianism. With the advent of the difference in the fight against ISIS and the support of the USA to the Northern Iraq's Kurdish troops during the Obama administration led Turkey to have soft stance towards Tehran, but the policy of Turkey and Iran in the issue of Syria remained unchanged. With the upcoming of Trump in the USA administration and its anti-Iranian policy, Arabic countries and Turkey also accuses Iran for sectarianism and declare it as a danger to the region (Said 2017, pp:1-21).

3.1.2 View towards the Europe

As already stated with regard to foreign policy of the Justice and Development Party which has taken a different nature to itself, at the beginning its primary

strategy was the entry of Turkey into the European Union and it stemmed from a positive view of the political elite of Turkey towards the west and the European civilization. Ankara initially wanted to increase its power by implementing western values in the region and transferring European civilization into the Middle East which is contrary to the interests of Iran in the region and this is one of the factors that lead the relations of Iran and Turkey against each other. In the early 21st century, Turkey's bid for membership to the European Union and the determination of America to make Turkey a model in the Muslim world, and the interest of Europe to play a more prominent role in the Islamic world through Turkey, led the Iranian model, which was characterized by Shia values, to a lower position then Turkey which was backed by the west and also emphasized democracy and human rights. Also, Turkey tried to get the leadership of the Sunni Muslim countries in the region and this led to the increasing tension between the two countries, Iran and Turkey in order to be a role model. But the Arab Spring, and political and cultural activities of Iran in the region with the existence of extremist groups resulted in Turkey and its allies not to reach their political goals (Gök 2005, pp:22-42).

3.1.3 View towards Israel

In fact, another factor contributing to the deterioration of relations between Iran and Turkey is their views towards Israel. It is important to note that Turkey was the first Muslim country to officially recognize Israel as an independent country in 1948 and the improvement of the relations between the two countries within the framework of a military contract in 1996 was the reason due to which relations between Iran and Turkey deteriorated. Closeness of Turkey to Iran and Syria was the reason due to which relations with Israel came down to a low level. On the other hand, although Justice and Development Party led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan reacts over Israeli policies in Palestine and always speaks in favor of Palestine, which is apparently in line with public opinion in Turkey, it must be mentioned that these two countries in the long run consider Iran and Syria as their rivals in the region, and in order to have control and put pressure on them, Turkey will never leverage Israel. It worth mentioned that Turkey is not so happy with nuclear power of Iran as well (Kahraman 2014, pp:55-65).

View on Syria: According to the recent developments in Syria, Turkey is accomplished to step-down Bashar al-Assad from administration while Iran has always defended Assad as one of the sides of the resistance (Qurbani dazmiry and Qurbani. 2015, pp:6-12). Turkey played a vital role through the summit of the Syrian opposition in its territory (Istanbul) under the Council of National Liberation of Syria, and somehow tried to separate Syria's alliance from Iran, Hamas and Lebanon's Hezbollah and in this context, Turkey joined to support the opposition group of the Assad regime and established refugee camps for the opposition groups on its border with Syria. In contrast, Iran supports the Alawite minority in Syria under the leadership of Bashar al-Assad with whom it has religious relations. This led to further deterioration of relations between Iran and Turkey (Sargı 2016, pp:44-64).

3.1.4 Positions towards Iraq

In general, one can sum up the competitive fields between Iran and Turkey under the following headings, discuss and investigate them thoroughly: Political rivalries with focus on political role model: Unlike decades ago, Turkey tries to play a pivotal role in the Middle East and the Muslim world; this policy is quite visible under the ruling Justice and Development Party. In this regard, Turkey emphasized its central role as model and tried to introduce itself as political heart of the Middle East and the Islamic World. Many analysts believe this policy which stems from somewhat of a historical identity of Turkey known as neo-Ottoman casting call, but the Islamic Republic of Iran describes the political system of Turkey as a western type government and is against the institutionalization of such a system in the Islamic World, especially in Iraq (Sargı 2016, pp:44-64).

On the other hand, Iran considers its government model consistent with Islamic and native values of the Middle East and the Islamic world, practicing in competent with the Islamic and native values of the people of Iraq. Iran believes to be Umm Al Qura in the area of Islamic civilization and this position and central place is not transferable to any other country and this approach is the assumption of Turkey as well to be the center of the Islamic world.

3.1.5 Turkey's approach towards Shias

Turkey implicitly is apprehensive of the power of the pro-Iranian regime Shias in Iraq. According to Turks, if this group gets power, it will lead to the local and regional conflicts in Iraq. Due to that, Turkish government is trying to support the secular and moderate Shia groups of Iraq who are willing to reconciliate with the Sunnis of Turkey. In contrast, Iran supports the Shia fundamentalist religious groups and considers its progress as useful. This approach to Iraqi Shias, between Turkey and Iran, is regarded as to be against each other (Alamtabriz 2014, pp:35-45).

3.1.6 Competition in the Kirkuk region

Competition for influence over Kirkuk is clearly seen between Iran and Turkey. Turkey's approach towards Kirkuk is not only limited to its geopolitical and geostrategic status, but also a nationalist approach is important there for Turkey. Turkey, by trying to refine ethnic Turkmen in Kirkuk, in a way tries to make their cultural and ethnical identity political and this approach is not only desirable for the Islamic Republic of Iran but rather they consider it as promoting the Turkish ethnicity in the region. Turkey accuses Iran for Shiite sectarianism in the region and Iran accuses Turkey to be trying to foster a revival of the Ottoman Empire in the region. Relations between Iran and Turkey as two important countries in the region have always followed the pattern of cooperation and competition, therefore this relationship is sometimes very friendly and good, and sometimes fluctuating. But it has been a while that competition has become more manifest so that even officials of the two countries have begun to use rhetoric speeches against each other (Çebi 2014, pp:35-56). After when Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Turkish Foreign Minister, at the Munich conference accused Iran for sectarianism in the region to gain over Arabic countries who Iran considers as enemies (BBC Persian 2016, p. 3). The response from Bahram Ghasemi, the Spokesperson of the Iranian Foreign Ministry said that Turkey acts interventionist and illegally support the terrorist groups to increase instability in the region. The Spokesperson for the Turkish Foreign Ministry called this response as incomprehensible. But the war of words between the two sides did not end here and few days later Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Turkish President on his recent visit to the Arabic countries

claimed that Iran's efforts to gain influence outside its borders cannot be ignored. He also announced that Turkey does not intend to increase tensions with Iran (BBC Persian 2016, p. 3).

These words of Erdogan got reaction from Javad Zarif, Iranian Foreign Minister who in response to the latter incidence of Turkish said to Iranian newspaper: "Turkey accuses Iran for sectarianism, but does not remember that we do not sleep for their government at the night of coup until morning." He was referring to Iran's support for the Turkish government against failed coup and his continuous calls to Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu throughout the night of the coup, this was the subject who helped to improve the relations of both countries and a month later when Mr. Zarif visited Ankara, he repeatedly called his Turkish counterpart as brother. However, relations between the two countries was not free of stress after the 15th July coup (BBC Persian 2016, p. 3). Movements of Turkey's tanks into Northern Syria, defection of the Turkey backed militias in Aleppo and Mosul rescue operation form the divergence over conflicted issues (BBC Persian 2016, p. 3).

Today, the Middle East has become a competition ground between Iran and Turkey with the Turkish policy of maintaining the current situation towards Yemen and Bahrain, same as the politics of Joint Cooperation Council of Gulf and Arabic countries, with wise strategy on trying to decrease power of Iran. In contradiction, Iran also tries to maintain its current strong status in the region by politically and economically supporting the Syrian regime and being close to Russia. Supporting the opposition group of Syrian regime and blaming it for not putting in the required reform shows the difference of foreign politics of Turkey towards Syria and this issue represents an unwanted negative image of Iran since according to Iran, current regime in Syria is the main resistance power of the Syria. In summary, it can be said that competition for influence in the Middle East aims to become central role model in the Middle East and in the Muslim world. Differences and religious competitions in Central Asia and the Caucasus, having religious and negative politics in Syria issue and interference in the developments of the country, are all the factors which gradually take the relations of Turkey and Iran into opposite sides.

3.2 Relation with Saudi Arabia

The Middle East and the Persian Gulf as part of the international system due to the geopolitical and special geostrategic position have always been core regions and have always been significantly important throughout the history until today. Economic and energy aspects have contributed to the level of importance of this particular region. Racial and religious minorities; oil, nuclear arms competence, conflict in the area of foreign policy and interference in each other's internal affairs have made the Persian Gulf one of the areas of struggle, strife and regional wars. Iran and Saudi Arabia are two important regional players in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East due to the geopolitical situation and in a way, they are counted as rivals to each other. The two countries enjoy strategic position in the region and are of great importance. Relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia are of serious importance because of the significance of the two countries in the region and the impact they have on the other regional countries.

Relations between the two countries have been varying throughout the history especially after the Islamic Revolution of Iran. According to the latest regional development in recent years, it is witnessed serious competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia. With the nuclear deal between Iran and western countries on the one hand and the influential role of Iran in regional crises such as Syria, Iraq and Yemen in the other areas, the facilities for rising of powers of Iran and Shiite are facilitated and this issue has been the reason due to which regional competitions between Iran and Saudi Arabia have intensified (Salisbary 2015, pp:1-15).

After the fall of Saddam, Iraq was expelled off competition from Iran and Saudi Arabia and this led to the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia in the Persian Gulf traditionally known to be the most important traditional fields of conflict for increasing influence. So, the relations between two major regional powers within the framework of conflictual model of competition or cooperation have many effects over other countries in the region as well. However, during the periods of the Islamic Republic, Iran adopted the policy of *détente* and in some issues, relations improved, but ideological contradictions of the two countries were not that easy to be cleared, because when converted to ideological era

from geopolitical era, in that case, success and effectiveness for both countries will not be easy at all (Akhavi 1987, pp:181-201).

Iran's foreign policy towards Saudi Arabia has been varying during different historical periods. Relations between the two countries after the victory of Islamic Revolution in Iran can be divided into four periods:

3.2.1 First Period

After the Islamic Revolution and the beginning of Iran-Iraq war, which was historically the starting point of radical foreign policy of Iran, during this period, due to the ideological nature of the Islamic Revolution and the struggle to change the current status acquired a regime type which was in opposition to all current international government models and fight against the hegemonic system and arrogant policies is the key to this transformation. Such an approach to the international regime in the best way within the framework of the principle of neither east nor west, in the context of a balanced strategy to deal with two bipolar can be expressed. After the revolution and the collapse of the pattern of regional balance, relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia detrained.

Islamic Revolution gave a new identity to Iran. Accordingly, Iran's relations with the west ended because of the revolutionary and ideological nature of Iran and Saudi Arabia began competing for influence over the Middle East. After the revolutionary period, Iran and Saudi Arabia due to their identity (Sunni and Shiite) their perception to each other changed and the ideology which the two players adopted had made them face each other. After this period, Iran's overall aim in the Middle East was to deliver the ideas of Islam based on Shiite spent of view, in addition to increscent of its influence in the region and to decrease the amount of military presence in the region and ideological competence with the Saudi Arabia (Terrill 2011, pp:14-20).

3.2.2 Second Period

It coincides with the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani and adopting pragmatism in foreign policy which made the two states of Iran and Saudi Arabia relations with each other be stable. Including the invasion of Iraq over Kuwait, collapse of the Soviet Union and end of the bipolar system. During this

period, leaders of Iran changed and the economic, political and security development which happened in the region and the world, Iran made distance from its ideological policies and moved forward towards its economic and political gains. These internal developments beside international developments were the reason for the two countries to have better perception of each other (Kılıç 2015, pp:1-11).

3.2.3 Third Period

It coincides with the rise of the reformist government whose foreign policy was based on *détente* and establishment of close relations with neighbors and the world. Political and cultural principles of developmentalism, relaxation, confidence, pacifism and multilateral foreign policy became the governing principles of Iran during the eight-year reformist government. From international aspect as well, the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, the attack of United State of America over Afghanistan and Iraq, and the beginning of the nuclear crises are the main factors which affected Iranian foreign policy. Efforts to create the right atmosphere of *détente* and to build confidence in the regional and international levels led Iran and Saudi Arabia to have positive perspective related to each other. For the first time, since the revolution, "friendship" period of calm is to be experienced and the Islamic cooperation of the two countries reaches its peak level in the fields of economy, energy, security and politics (Yurdakurban 2007, pp:35-51).

3.2.4 Fourth Period

With the ninth government and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, in the 2005 Iranian foreign policy become separate from his two previous terms and revolutionary radicalism if the 1980 decade was revived once again. Due to this, it is natural that Iran's relations with the world and neighbor countries become distant. During this period, one once again observe the latest model of acute conflict over relations between the two countries (Aflaki 2014, pp:35-55).

3.2.5 Areas of Conflict

Iran and Saudi Arabia, because of having distinct identities (Iranian and Arabian) and competition of the two countries in the Gulf region and Middle

East, led them to never have positive perspective towards each other. Before the Islamic Revolution and during the second Pahlavi term, these two countries were forced to have close relations and work together with each other during the Cold War and in order to prevent the influence of the Soviet Union over them. These two countries worked together once again because of fear of empowerment other regional rival (Iraq) under Nixon-Kissinger policy. After the Islamic Revolution, the two pillars politics lost its efficiency. The victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran did not only lead the geopolitical rivalries to continue, but also with the revival of Shia support the competition between the two countries escalated. After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, USA lost one of its main allies and its strategic region, because of this Saudi Arabia presented itself as a serious alternative instead of Iran to the USA. After that Saudi gradually become one of the USA strategic allies in the region. This coherence and coordination with the USA coincides with the period when the relations between the United State of America and Iran were deteriorated. In other words, the presence and influence of one of the anti-Iran country with the Saudi Arabia was the reason due to which all the common beliefs and mentalities between Iran and Saudi Arabia come to zero level and this led to further increscent of level of disbelief and confidence between the two countries (Terrill 2011, pp:16-18).

On the other hand, with the Islamic Revolution, the revolutionary Shia ideology of the Islamic Revolution was presented as a strong rival against conservative Wahhabism known for Arab identity. In fact, Saudi Arabia monarchy relied on Wahhabi ideology against the Shia Islamic Republic of Iran who was focused centrally on Vilayat-e Faqih and each one of these two claimed the leadership of the Islamic World as well (Shahi 2008, pp:1-18).

3.2.6 Fall of the Taliban and Saddam; in the interest of Iran and against Saudi Arabia

The USA attack over Afghanistan and Iraq after the September 11 attacks and the removal of the Taliban and Saddam Hussein who were main enemies of Iran cleared the path for Iran to extend its strategic influence in Central Asia and the Middle East. The Taliban government who was economically, politically and spiritually supported by Saudi Arabia vanished and this issue was in the interest

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of Iran. The intention of Saudi's support for the Taliban lied in competence with Iran's regional influence in Afghanistan and thus isolates Iran in Afghanistan and Central Asia. After the regime change in Iraq and obtaining government positions by Shias and Kurds through a semi-democratic process, Sunnis' position in Iraq declined and after these developments, strategic equations and balance of power entered a new era in the region. Iran's new political system, as opposed to the Baath regime that was against any friendly relations with Iran, seeked to have nice and improved relations with Iran in all categories (Arı and Özdal 2015, pp:1-3). New conditions created hopes and wishes for establishment of strategic relations between the two countries and this change of traditional strategy made Saudi Arabia is more concerned. Decline of Saddam from one aspect got Iraq out of competition triangle for Persian Gulf area and from other aspect put Iraq into a new field of competition between Iran, the United States of America and Saudi Arabia. Gaining prominence of Shias in Iraq led Iran to have broader control over the region. Iran and Saudi Arabia seek to promote groups and movements who are loyal to them and to limit the influence of opposite side in Iraq (Waseq and Jasenejad 2011, pp:18-36). The main reason of creating Shiite crescent by Saudi Arabia and Jordan was the increased influence of Iran in Iraq. They criticized the developments in Iraq and Iran's role, to express concern about the development of a new influential Shia crescent from Hezbollah in Lebanon to Syria's sovereignty under Alawites and till Iran and Iraq. Saudi Arabia has always known himself as hegemonic power and this leadership has always been challenged by Iran (Casey 2010, pp:35-47). Therefore, according to the logic of aggressive neo-realism, such role playing has always been due to superior motivation over each other. Which means that Saudi Arabia has always been looking itself to be in a regional competition between Iran and thus relations between the two countries is free of confidence building.

3.2.7 Syrian Crisis

The civil war in Syria is also one of the factors due to which tensions between Tehran and Riyadh intensified. Public support for the opponents of the Assad government put Saudi Arabia against Iran who defended Assad. Assad regime due to being enemy of Israel and establishment of central resistance base along

with Lebanon is considered as a main strategic base for Iran and due to this reason and the past relations with Hafez al-Assad Iran supported Assad opposite of Saudi Arabia. In Syrian issue, international and regional actors are looking for their own interest in Syria. Saudi Arabia, being one of the most effective player in the internal crisis in Syria, is of no exception and it seems that due to the massive competition which it has with Iran, it is trying its best to fall down the government of Bashar al Assad and consequently reduce Iran's regional power (Tombaş 2016, pp:36-55). In order to better understand the role of Syria in the region, one must focus on Syria's strategic alliance with Iran and its proxies in the region's role.

Syria is considered as the creator of connection with Hezbollah and as a main channel for the strengthening of resistance group. So, Saudi Arabia, in order to weaken Iran in the region, wants to drop Assad off from power. With political and economic support, Iran and Turkey have practically entered the sectarian war in Syria since Arab Spring 2012 between followers and opposition groups of Bashar al-Assad. Saudi Arabia sees Syria in a regional rivalry position with Iran and this is the reason why Saudi Arabia stands against the Assad regime and helps rebels who fight against Assad regime. Main goal of Saudi Arabia is to decrease the influence of Iran and to control the pattern of infiltration of Islamic Revolution in the Arab world when it was introduced as a Shiite crescent. That is the reason due to which Saudi Arabia tries to decrease the influence of Iran in Syria in coordination with the western approach to Iran's position. Therefore, in such circumstances, Saudi Arabia supported the protest groups in Syria to limit Iranian power in the Middle East (Arı and Özdal 2015, pp:1-3).

The factors which Saudi Arabian policymakers give much importance in its regional politics is the developments and changes such as influence of Shias in Iraq and this itself is very important to Saudi Arabia from the perspective of the interests and regional targets. These developments and changes in the regional environment of Saudi Arabia were indeed in favor of Iran and against Saudis benefits and gains. by supporting the opposition and playing an active role in control and guidance of the crises in Syria, Saudi Arabia is trying to increase and promote its influence among the Sunni population especially Salafist so that

they get power in Syria. But now one witnesses that with participation of Iran in Syria's peace negotiations and entrance of Russia in the battlefield of Syrian civil war, Iran's position was improved against Saudi Arabia. Despite Saudis support for the opposition of Assad regime in order to oust him, still Saudi Arabia was not successful to oust him because of the increased support and aid from Iran to Syria and Assad. Also Saudi Arabia's continuous support to the elected government of Yemen against Houthis who is backed economically and political by Iran is one of the main issues which led the relations of both countries in a fragile state. In summary, it can be said that Iran's relations with Saudi Arabia after the Islamic Revolution was not so good from the beginning and both countries have emphasized much on political and cultural activates in the region. Soft power and its use have led Iran to move and improve Shia minorities in the region (Shahi 2008, pp:1-18).

Cultural and religious activities of Iran after the attack of the United State of America in 2003, which led to topple Saddam Hussein resulted in getting government powers and positions by most of Shias who were in favor of Iran and this caused Saudi Arabia and its allies to be concerned. Iran's nuclear program escalated Saudi Arabia concerns that Tehran under Ahmadinejad's presidency is seeking to dominate the Persian Gulf and Shiite population (Shahi 2008, pp:1-18).

In January 2007, Saudi Arabia told Iran's envoy, referring to the battle with the United States over Iraq and the Islamic Republic of Iran's nuclear issue said that Iran's nuclear program put Gulf States in a dangerous state. Beginning of Arab Spring in 2011 was another reason due to which Iran and Saudi Arabia relations deteriorated. Both countries adopted conflicting policies in order to protect their interests in the Middle Eastern countries and each of them supported different religious and political groups. As an example, in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia supports the government and Iran backs Shia opposition groups who are against Bahrain state. Saudi Arabia remains the main supporter of groups and opposition whose aim is to overthrow Iran's ally Bashar al-Assad, President of Syria. Riyadh accused Bashar al-Assad of genocide and described Iran as an occupying force. Tehran accused Riyadh for supporting terrorism (Terrill 2011, pp:14-20).

In March 2015, Saudi Arabia began military operations in Yemen in order to prevent the Houthis from getting power who are backed by Iran. Riyadh accused Iran of using militants to carry out a coup. Tehran claimed that air strikes targeted civilians. Saudi Arabia in order to prevent Shias influence inside Saudi, accused some Shias in the eastern provinces especially Nimr el-Nimr of supporting with foreign countries which mean Iran after the clashes between police and Shias and as a result executed Shiite cleric Sheikh Nimr el-Nimr for being in favor of Iran. Following the deepening crisis between the two regional rivals for the execution of prominent Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr el-Nimr by Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia cut off its diplomatic relations with Iran over Saudi embassy attack in Tehran (BBC 2016, p. 1). Since then, relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia are at the lowest level ever and each of them accuses each other of disruptive and sectarian divisionsin international platform.

3.3 Relations with Other Arab Countries (Yemen, Syria, Iraq and Egypt)

3.3.1 Relations with Yemen

Since the overthrow of the Iran's Pahlavi regime and reunion of Yemen, the conflict between the central government and the Houthis tribes, has provided the areas of competence and Iranian influence in Yemen. With the onset of chaos and protests under the name of Arab spring in the Arab's countries in the Middle East and North Africa, Yemen was also affected from these undergoing revolutionary changes. Now that more than 5 years have passed since the political developments in the Arab world, Yemen has entered a new period of instability and crisis. The resignation of Ali Abdullah Saleh as a result of the protests of 2012 and the coming of Abdurabbu Mansur el-Hadi as president of Yemen with the decision of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council and the support of America took over developments protests in Yemen did not result to end the demonstrative developments in Yemen and the failure of the new government in power sharing between protective groups also caused Yemeni Shiites' movements to be escalated. At the same time this issue with strengthening al-Qaida forces in the south of the country led to an escalation of insecurity and instability in the country. Before the Islamic Revolution, both North and South Yemen was never specifically defined in Iran's foreign policy

since both Yemen did not have an acceptable position in the region and the world (Salisbary 2015, pp:1-15). Before the Islamic Revolution, Iranian authorities view on South Yemen has been with concerns because of the fact that South Yemen was positioned between in the countries of the former Soviet Union's block. South Yemen occupation over strategic strait of Bab-al Mandab and the possibility of appearance of Russian militaries in the red sea and sea of Oman and the disruption of the military and commercial Arab ships movements in these two seas has been part of Iran's concerns (Şendil 2016, pp:179-188).

For this reason, during the rule of the Shah, Iran on behalf of America and the west deployed parts of its troops to defend the Sultanate of Oman in the Dhofar. Although the presence of Iranian forces in the Sultanate of Oman was faced with dissatisfactions from some countries of the East bloc but the royal regime was trying to force America and the west to prevent Soviet influence in the Bab el-Mandeb and Persian Gulf. Bloody conflict between the former army forces of Iran and the Dhofar communists who were supported by South Yemen occurred and these clashes which took place brought huge financial and military costs to the military organization of royal regime. South Yemen which got its independence in 1968 with the withdrawal of British forces had good relation with Egypt during Jamal Abdel Nasser in the Arab world and at international platform to be part of the soviet bloc (Sharp 2015, pp:6-19).

The leaders of the former South Yemen and Egypt's President Jamal Abdel Nasser, with the help of the former Soviet Union played a vital role in strengthening People's liberation Movement of Dhofar played a pivotal role. This movement was formed in 1962 with the aim of dividing Dhofar and the overthrow of the kingdom of Oman and continued its guerrilla activities by obtaining control over Dhofar Mountains. Iran military presence in the Sultanate of Oman started from 1972 until the total collapse of the People's Liberation Movement in 1975(Sharp 2015, pp:6-19). After the success of the Islamic Revolution and the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war, North Yemen under the Presidency of Ali Abdullah Saleh stood along with the Persian Gulf states and South Yemen under the Presidency of Ali Nasser Mohammed stood along with Iran. Iran's relations with South Yemen was widespread while relations with North Yemen was influenced by the position of the Persian Gulf Cooperation

Council. Former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh who received economical funding from the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council's countries supported Saddam's regime in the Iran-Iraq war. Ali Abdullah Saleh expected that Yemen would be able to join Persian Gulf Cooperation Council in a certain of period of time but these countries refused to accept Yemen in joining the council because of its low per capita income level. After the Iran-Iraq war and the merger of North and South Yemen in 1990, the new Yemeni-Iranian relations were still under influence of policies of Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (Sharp 2015, pp:6-19).

Abdullah Saleh was dependent to Saudi Arabia and therefore coordinated its internal and external policies according to Saudi Arabia. Fighting against the Houthis by the central government leadership under President Ali Abdullah saleh continued until the Arab spring and Houthis was known as a terrorist group. Large number of Houthis was killed in repeated attacks of the Yemeni army. Houthis or Ansar Allah, this group started its activities in the category of youth movement under the name of Muslim youth in 1992(Wyss 2016, pp:15-23). A group which was established to defend the rights of the Zaidi Shiites, who make up a fifth of Yemen's population, the group was in war and struggle with the central government 2003 to 2009. Houthis who had recently been able to get control of Yemeni capital Sana is counted as ally of Iran. Houthis get military training by Iran and get both financial and military support but the Houthis apparently deny getting any help or support from Iran. They consider Sana and most Yemenis successful control to be a victory of all Yemenis revolution. In recent years, the Islamic Republic had little leverage in Yemen. Houthis, unlike imagined, does not have much common faith with the twelve imam's Shiite's of Iran's ruling. When the relations of Yemen were strained with the neighboring Arab countries and Western countries closed their embassies in the country, relations with the Islamic Republic were made warmer day by day. Air flight between Tehran and Sana was started and the Islamic Republic clearly and openly supported the Houthis forces (Wyss 2016, pp:15-23).

Al-Emad who was firstly Sunni religious and later converted to Shiism describes the effects of the Islamic Revolution in Yemen as follows. After the

Islamic Revolution, some events although rare, but have been entered from the Twelve Shiite into Zaydi Shia community such as Ashura. Ashura was not practiced before the Islamic Revolution the Zaidi did not practice such events but now a large number of Shia Zaidi have learned methods of Iranian and Iraqi Shias' and hit their breasts in the day of Ashura, mourns and performs Camille prayer. These cultures have come from Twelver Shias. Trend to Camille prayers, Mafatihul Janan and some Shia prayers has been practiced more after the Islamic Revolution since much more of the Zaidi community has been under oppression. These were endangered. if there was not Islamic Revolution, Zaidi had been collapsed because of the fact that cultural invasion from Egypt and Arabic countries beside television movies, all promote Sunni religion and emphasize over Sunni religion and Arabic nationalism. All these have leaded the total 5/6 population of Zaidis to be Zaidis just by name. Only with the upcoming of the Islamic Revolution and Shiite books, which came from Qom, Zaidi themselves returned to their religion. When asked them why they became Zaidi, they told they read book of Almurajhat written by Allama Sharafuddin. One of the Zaidi leaders in Yemen Mohammed Mansour said if Islamic Revolution did not happen, Zaidis had been collapsed since in any way Shia government had come so they too are Shias (Karnap 2016, pp:27-38). With the upcoming of a Shia government, they have once again revived and have been hopeful of our Shiism. Zaidi scholars have said that if Islamic revolution had not happened even a single Zaidi could have been in Yemen. Fortunately, most of the people who helped in spreading the twelver imam religion in Yemen have been these Zaidis themselves. Most of those who went as a missionary to Yemen were supported by many of the Zaidi characters not only supported but were given permission to build schools and promote their religion even let their children become twelver imam Shia. Zaidis Mufti Allama Muhammad Zbarh in Yemen said that the real Shiism is in Qom (Karnap 2016, pp:27-38).

Saudi Arabia is concerned about influence of Iran in Yemen is concerned and is therefore funding and arming Sunnis in Yemen. Iran and Saudi Arabia both are concerned about getting religious influence of each over in Yemen and that's Iranians help Houthis in northern region and Saudi Arabia supports Sunnis in southern region both politically and financially. From 2004 to 2010, the two

armies both of Saudi Arabia and Yemen have arranged 6 air and ground combats against the Houthis in Yemen and it continues till now today and Saudi Arabia after the recent victories of Houthis tries to convince United Nation Security Council with the help of Persian Gulf countries council to issue a resolution and identify Houthis as a terrorist group. Yemen is now having one of the worst political crises and unrest in its recent decades. Some analysts say that what is happening in Yemen is a mirror between Iran and Saudi Arabia. What will lead Yemen towards civil war is the rivalry Sunni Saudi Arabia with Shia Iran in the region and Yemen is no exception at all (Rizwan, Arshid, Waqar and Saira Iram 2014, pp:1-11).

Thus, Saudi Arabia and its allies in the Persian Gulf consider the control of Sana capital of Yemen as a coup. Yemen's crisis has its roots in complex politics, ethnicity and tribalism in this country, crises which have the potential to inject more tension to bilateral relations of the two major oil producers in the Middle East, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Tension also exists that the Yemen crises will bring these two region compotators face to face. 1/3 of the Yemeni population follows Zaidi religion that is considered to have taken roots from Sunni religion of Islam and have close relations with the Shiites. They normally live in the northern mountainous part of the country and in neighborhood of Saudi Arabia. Followers of Zaidi religion who are known as imam from quite a long time were in the leadership form till 1962. With the increscent of power of the Sunnis in the country, Zaidis lost control gradually but were not happy with this situation and were trying to find a way to attack over central government. One of the influential families by the name of Houthis succeeded to increase the disagreement of the Zaidis and make them together against the government and as result forces belonging to haw this got control of the capital Sana in September 2014 and in January 2015 easily entered the presidential palace. They cancelled the parliament and got access over military command, Hadi the president was forced to transfer the capital to Haden but with the coming of the Houthis forces near the city, he flew to Saudi Arabia (Wyss 2016, pp:15-23). As a consequence, it can be argued that today proxy religious war is in progress between Iran and Saudi Arabia and the end of this war is not known not her the winner of the ground.

3.3.2 Relations with Syria

Relations between Iran and Syria is deep and on the basis of common interests and the mutual relationship between the two countries is quite sufficient and sustainable. Relations between the two countries are strategic, because their founders are Imam Khomeini and Hafez al-Assad. The Middle East region as a strategic region had an important and sensitive position in the competitions of the two super powers of east and west during the cold war and played the role of a stimulant in the interventions of the super powers. After the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, this region did not lose its importance, besides gained more. With regard to this situation, Iran also tried to increase its influence in the Middle East (Azimi 1998, pp:3-17). Syria, due to its geographical and strategic position, is considered to be one of the most important countries in the Middle East that has managed to play an important role in regional developments in the Middle East. Therefore, this country has gained a special place in Iran's foreign policy whose main priority in foreign relations is the cooperation with Islamic and non-aligned countries (Azimi 1998, pp:3-17). Iran and Syria, being the two non-neighboring Middle Eastern countries, have been able to have more coordination on the developments of the region and the Islamic world during the past three decades and became an example of a role model for other countries in regional bilateral cooperation.

Now, the main question is which factors have been effective in the improvement and the development of these bilateral relations? What has been the reason of this harmony in most regional developments that it even has got the degree of a role model in bilateral relations for most of the other countries? This is the question that must be answered. Firstly, the political relations between the two countries before the Islamic Revolution will be reviewed so that the main aspect of the cooperation and the relation as a role model is clear in relationships after the revolution; then, the factors affecting bilateral relations and cooperation with regard to its regional factors will be focused. Bilateral relations between Damascus and Tehran were established after Syrian independence in 1946. Relations between the two countries was at its lowest level in the second half of the 1940s and the first half of 1950 due to different republic regime in Syria and the Kingdom regime in Iran but there isn't any single sign and occurrence of

conflict. In general, one can say that before the Islamic Revolution period, there were chilly relations between Iran and Syria (Katzman2016, pp:12-20). Different political system and different external orientation have been the most important reason of cold relations between the two countries before the Islamic Revolution. While Iran regime was based on kingdom system and dependent on the west and recognized Israel officially as well Syrian government was absolutely against Iran, it had a parliamentary republic system and was closer to the eastern bloc. In addition to that, Syria considered Israel as its primary enemy. However, after the Islamic Revolution, relations between Syria and Iran expanded gradually and the two countries have actually become strategic allies (Katzman2016, pp:12-20).

In the late 1970s, two events caused a profound change in the map of regional alliances and the approach of the Middle East countries. The first event, failure of joint Arabic force in war with Israel and the exit of Egypt from this *joint force* and the second incident was the occurrence of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the collapse of Shah as main ally of America and Israel in the region. Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran and with the end of Iran's relations with Israel and Egypt, relations between Tehran and Damascus was in an absolutely different quality, and by passing of each year, it became deeper. Leaders of the Islamic Republic cut the relations between Tehran and Tel Aviv immediately after the revolution and relations between Egypt was also cut because of signing the Camp David agreement (Pervaneh 2015, pp:27-43).

This event strengthened the fundamentals in the relationship between Iran and Syria in the following decades. With the success of the Islamic Revolution, fundamental changes were brought in the relations of Iran and Syria, in the year 1979, President Hafez al-Assad congratulated the victory of the Iranian government, and after that the desired changes occurred. Because of the fact that Iran who was few days before strategic partner with Israel on the Syrian border, had changed the largest ally in the region to Syria and Palestinian Embassy in Tehran opened. Following the political change, expanding cultural relations was inevitable. Therefore, due to these developments, establishment of a cultural institution was inevitable and with regard to the fact that it gives importance to the Arab World and the fact there are numerous cultural ties of

Iran with the Muslim world especially the Arab world, the Islamic Republic of Iran opened its cultural attaché in the Maza area of Damascus in the year 1980 (Akhavi 1983, pp:195-221).

The first major action since the opening of the Cultural Center was the establishment of Alfqah Alislamia Magazine who published its 100th number today. This journal was considered to be the official journal of the cultural center whose aim was to introduce Islamic culture based on Shiite sect and its ideology was from scholars of Iran and Islamic world. Besides, this Cultural Center gradually became as the biggest think tank of the Shiite ideology among intellectuals and this center had always close ties with such scholars. With the establishment of this center, political and cultural development provided the opportunity to a comprehensive cultural agreement between Iran and Syria since in different meetings such as state visit of Hafiz al-Assad to Iran at the beginning of the revolution and the meeting with imam Khomeini, the official visit of Hashemi Rafsanjani in 1980 as the Head of Parliament to Syria provided the opportunity to increase cultural and political relations and different delegates of the countries travelled to the two states and finally as a result signed an agreement between Iran and Syria in the year 1984 (Maltzhan 2015, pp:25-55).

This agreement was the base of the cultural activities of this center and according to structure was multi-dimensional and materials in the fields of education, higher education and science, culture and arts, sports and tourism and cultural tourism were included which specifies the cultural policies. In the year 1994, in the official visit of the Minister of Culture and Higher Education of Syria to Tehran, Iran and Syria agreed to make the Cultural Agreement of 1995 come into force. Under the cultural agreement between the two countries in 1984, dozens of different educational and academic agreements were signed between different officials who control the issue of cultural and scientific in different fields including relations between the universities. With the victory of the Islamic Revolution, academic relations between the universities has always been on rise and the cultural exchange program of students and teachers had increased, so that now hundreds of Syrian student's study in Iran and hundreds of Iranian student's study in Syria and an average of dozens of Iranian academic

delegation is exchanged annually from both sides. The base of such communications lies in several agreements such as Tehran university agreements, Center for Strategic Research, Expediency Council. This communication forms the basis of academic agreements, including agreements with Tehran University, Center for Strategic Research, Expediency Council, University of Isfahan, Kashan University, Amir Kabir University, Imam Sadiq University, the University of Damascus and many other agreements that have been the basis of scientific and cultural cooperation. Basically, these agreements include issues such as exchange programs for students and teachers, joint research on scientific topics, exchange of scientific journals and with taking in consideration of this important issue, it has always been an important point of lobbying (Maltzhan 2015, pp:25-55).

This cultural activities Iran seems to have more influence in Syria. Relations between Iran and Syria have been strengthened and in progress from the past three years. Relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Syria in the past 30 years suggest the growth of deep political and security relations between the two countries. Regional and international developments, features of the two leaders, common regional friends and enemies of the two countries and domestic needs of the two countries have led the two countries relations to be further increased closely. But apart from regional developments and common enemies and friends that have made Syria closer together there are other basic relations as well such as economic, trade cultural, social and political relations. Economic relations between Iran and Syria in the first two decades after the Islamic Revolution was much lower than expected. But over the past few years, economic cooperation and business relations with a greater perspective have taken the political relations of both countries to a greater extent, it has prompted the government leaders of both countries to put economic relations at top of their work agenda beside political relations (Ansari 2005, pp:5-18).

From cultural and social aspect, Iran and Syria have much more in common than their differences, in fact, apart from state ideological differences between the two countries. Nationalist political system with secular views and ideas in Syria and Islamic theocracy in Iran, the two countries with their common religion of Islam and deep long history of cultural affiliations have lots of common values

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to be taken into consideration (Agha 1995, pp:25-35). In terms of politics and security, Syria has the highest level of relations among any other Arabic countries with Iran and the relations of Tehran with Damascus is of extreme importance than any other capital of the Arabic world. With the onset of the crisis, military and security relations between Syria and Iran has increased. The Iranian Revolutionary Guards, the most important and strongest supporters of Hezbollah in Iran increased its support for the Assad regime. They trained key security forces beside military forces of the Syria and helped the country to develop its military capabilities (Agha 1995, pp:35-55).

Syrian crisis began as a continuation of the social demonstrations in the Arab world with the slogan of Arab spring in January 2011. With coming of the regional and international actors, as well as the emergence of terrorist groups and the immigration issues, this crise have been changed into the biggest socio-political crisis of the world since World War II. The reason of this crisis can be found in socio-political divisions inside Syria, regional countries' competitions and the involvement of the world's super powers. After the beginning of the crisis in Syria, Iran backed Bashar al-Assad both politically and militarilly, and practically Iranian Revolutionary Guards entered the war field inside Syrian territory to defend the current Syrian regime. Today, Iran, known as a full supporter of the Assad regime plays a key role in the region and the world and it is the reason that Iran is invited in all regional and international conferences on Syria crises issue.

3.3.3 Relations with Iraq

Since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the formation of the Iraqi government in the west of Iran, the policies of the governments of both countries have always been regarded as a source of threat to national security of the other country and both countries rarely have friendly relations with each other. Territorial and border disputes beside religious and ethnic issues in Iraq, as well as Arab and non-Arab conflict, presence of Kurds on both sides of the Iran-Iraq border are all the main factors to be considered as subjects of conflicts and dispute between the two countries in the last half century. However, relations between the two countries have not always been at an undesirable level and in the history of Iran and Iraq relations pivot points can also be found. Since

the British mandate on Iraq (1920) and then its independence in 1932 and until the end of the monarchy in 1958, due to British influence in the region and the existence of the monarchy in both countries, relations between the two states, either in the form of Sad Abad Treaty or either Baghdad Pact which was formed to counter the threat of communism had been friendly (Rubin 1983, pp:1-25).

Though border disputes occurred sporadically in this period of time as well, although it was usually resolved without major conflict but what has been remained in minds and memories of people is the strife, conflict beside war and hostility between the two countries. After September 11 attackes and the occupation of Iraq by the USA and the change of regime in Iraq in favor of Iran, relation between the two countries have been improved well.

3.3.3.1 Challenging factors in Iran-Iraq relations

The following factors have a significant effect on relations between Iran and Iraq:

3.3.3.2 Khuzestan crisis

Khuzestan region has always been of great importance due to its special geographical position and economic status. Existence of numerous oil wells, fertile plain of Khuzestan and passing of important rivers such as Karoon and Arvand rivers which ultimately lead to the Persian Gulf led this region to gain its special geopolitical position and is therefore always under concentration of national, regional and trans-regional governments. Important part of the war between Iran and Ottoman Empire has been the border disputes in the region of Khuzestan and Arvand River (Tareq 1982, pp:5-9).

Iraq on the other hand, due to its particular geographical situation, is the only country in the Persian Gulf area, which has the lowest beach with free and independent water; this has been one of the main motivations of Saddam Husain for the capture of Khuzestan and more freedom on the Arvand River. Saddam tried to raise its coast level of around 30-40 miles to 200-300 miles by capturing this region. After the Islamic Revolution, one of the main factors which caused the dispute between Iran and Iraq was Khuzestan region which as a result caused the eight-year war between the two countries (Tareq 1982, pp:9-11).

3.3.3.3 Kurdish crisis

Throughout the history, the Iranian government has always considered Kurdish region as part of Iranian territory besides counting Kurds as Iranian. However, in some historical moments, some political and social dissatisfaction resulted in crises in this region and whisper of autonomy and separatism were proposed. After the fall of the Rezah Shah of Iran, who was associated with the presence of foreign troops in the territory, was considered among the periods in which such a situation was imposed on Kurdish region (Halliday 1986, pp:12-25). After the victory of the Islamic Revolution and the fall of the Pahlavi regime once again there were rumors of breakup. Iraq wanted to use the opportunity to support the Kurds and to use them as a threat to Iran. But Iraq's involvement as happened in Khuzestan did not occur here. Iraqi government was aware of the sensitivity of the issue, thus, it tried not to support Iranian Kurds openly rather preferred to help and support them under more controlled method, since empowerment of Iranian Kurds in the long term was not only helpful for Iraq, but could be dangerous for the government of Iraq beside governments of Syria and Turkey. Iraqi leader's considered the occurrence of Islamic Revolution derived from teachings of Shiism and its leadership headed to a Shiite jurist, as a serious threat. The monarchy in Iran was completely religious and it was confronted by Iraq's regime whose ideology was based on secularism and according to them religion must be separated from politics (Halliday 1986, pp:12-34).

The second reason was the Iraqi Shiites, who were the largest population in Iraq. in addition to demographic factors, existence of numerous holy places for Shias and Najaf educational region, presence of scholars and Grand Shia authorities in Iraq, converted the Shiite issue into a serious challenge for Iraq's rulers; and in particular, the fact that Shias did not have specific place in the infrastructure of the Iraqi's government from political, social and economic aspects and there were many obstacles and pressures facing them (Beeman 2007, pp:35-39). After the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Ayatollah Sadr, the Iraqi Shiite leader sent a letter of congratulation to Imam Khomeini on the occasion of the success of revolution. In the letter sent Ayatollah Sadr had prayed that the victory of Islamic holy revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini

was the beginning of much more consecutive victories in the Islamic world. After the release of this message, Iraqi government started its efforts to stop what they assumed the danger of Iranian Revolution. They prohibited Shiite clergymen and its followers from doing any type of activity and some of them were even incarcerated. As a result, one can say that these three elements led to the eight-year war between Iraq and Iran (Beeman 2007, pp:39-45).

Among Arab countries in the Middle East, Iraq has the highest cultural and religious affinity with Iran. Change of sovereignty in Iraq has put Iran's diplomacy into a situation facing dual status of threats and opportunities. Using cultural tools to achieve foreign political goals has always been an important axis in relations between the two countries. Highlight thinning of these tools in recent decades, and political changes in Iraq after 2003, provided new opportunities for the Islamic Republic of Iran to expand and consolidate its relations with Iraq and to get benefit as much as possible by using cultural and religious relations. As a result, Iran formed a new government whose majority share was Shiits, by using its soft power after the collapse of Saddam Husain's regime and by doing this secured its special place in Iraq.

Iran is now the most influential regional actor is in Iraq. Iraq has always been considered as a security threat for Iran in the past. From Iran's perspective, a major part of threats to its national security was coming from Iraq which was led by Baath regime. But the collapse of Saddam regime and the formation of a democratic political system based on participation of all Iraqi groups in the power structure and especially participation of the Shiite groups in the power structure created new conditions that could end the security threats of Iran and even led to become political and economic partner of Iran. This historical opportunity led Iran to fully support the Iraqi government since 2003 in spite of the fact that Iraq was not being supported by the most countries in the region, Iran tried to help Iraq to gain its political stability and security in the region (Beeman 2007, pp:45-55).

Iran has always helped Iraq both economically and politically, and on the other hand, the fact that it had deep ties during the past three decades with various factions, including Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds led Iran to have its influence in

this country. Geographical neighborhood and especially common religious factors of the two countries made them expand their mutual ties.

3.3.4 Relations with Egypt

Iran and Egypt have always been important and influential countries in the region since ancient times, but it can be said that political and ideological differences between Iran and Egypt have long been moved in opposite and against each other. When Jamal Abdel Nasser's focuses on socialist and revolutionary policies and the fight against imperialism, in Iran a non-revolutionary and pro-West with a liberal economy regime has come into effect and when Iran's monarchy regime collapses and the fight against imperialism take its place instead. In Egypt, there is no news about the revolutionary ideas of Naser and Egypt with the leadership of Anwar Sadat changes into a pro-western regime and a free market economy. Relations between Iran and Egypt as two strategic countries in the Middle East has been affected by many factors including domestic, regional and international factors in recent decades and it has seen lots of ups and downs (Musawee, Toty and Musawee 2012, pp.5-10). In addition to all these, the existence of Shia jurist in Qom, Iran, and the existence of Al-Azhar, the supreme Sunni jurist center in Egypt are among the most important contradicting and opposite points in relation between the two countries. The above mentioned factor has led to increase and expand the relations between the two countries and in some cases has led to the demise of the relationship (Tahiry and Nigahdar 2013, BBC).

Iran and Egypt are two important countries in two corners of the Middle East. The role of Iran in the Persian Gulf, Central Asia and the Caucasus and the role of Egypt in the Arab world and North Africa has been under the special status of the two countries in the world. Geographically, two strategic passageway of the Middle East, known as the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf and the Suez Canal which connects the relationship between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean belongs to any one of these two important countries (Musawee, Toty and Musawee 2012, pp.5-10). This is considered to be of great importance to both countries and at the same time has been under huge foreign aggression of the super powers to have control over one of these two during the last century. Relations between Iran and Egypt back to the 19th century with the

signing of Erzurum agreement between the King of the Qajar and Ottoman Empire (Fellow 2011, pp:1-12).

The agreement stipulated that the Iranian government could open consulates in the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, the Iranian consulate was opened in Cairo. After that many other agreements of friendship and cooperation was signed as well in the year 1928. These relations continued till victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran which happened in 1979 and Egypt also congratulated the people of Iran and Imam Khomeini on the occasion of victory. Iran before the revolution was one of the main supporters of Egypt-Israeli peace treaty signing, but after the revolution, condemned Egypt because of signing the agreement and having relations with Israel and this change of view caused to cut all the ties with Egypt in May 1979 (Musawee, Toty and Musawee 2012, pp.5-10). The Iranian Revolution which was against Israel was a pro-Palestinian in the region due to the ideological differences between the two countries, was not welcomed by the Egyptian government. After signing the Camp David agreement and victory of the Islamic Revolution, the Egyptian government introduced countries such as Sudan, Libya and Iran as security threats instead of Israel (Matthee and Rudi 1986, pp:80-115).

As a result of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the government was formed based on the ideas and slogans of Shiite Islam and this led Iran to have influence in Egypt. Iran and Egypt are the two countries which have affected and being affected from each other both culturally and politically. Islamic Revolution is a turning point in the political life of Iran which had great impact on the regional countries. The Iranian Revolution gave a stronger positive morale to all the Islamic movements particularly the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (Munson 2016, pp:280-320).

Shias are the third of population after the Orthodox in Egypt. Shiism has a long and historical background in Egypt. In Egypt, there is no place for religious intolerance and hostility towards Shia opposite of other Middle Eastern countries. Muslim Brotherhood movement is considered monistic from the day of its formation in the Muslim world and has always tried their best for the unity of the Islamic world. According to Muslim Brotherhood, Islamic land is a single land not divisible and aggression or attack to any part of this single territory is

considered as an aggression to all the territory. Other common characteristics between the Brotherhood and Iranian Shiite movement was the combining of religious values with the politics based on Islamic values, establishment of a government based on religion and the people and anti-colonialism (Arjomand 1988, pp:371-379). The basic reason of having long and historical relation of the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran since Nawab Safavi lies in the fact that the Muslim Brotherhood did not enter any sectarian or religious conflicts. Iran after the revolution tried to expand its influence in Egypt by using soft power resources. After the Arab spring and the change of regime in Egypt Iran had its best relations with the Muslim Brotherhood. But after the coup and the ousting of Mursi from power relations between Egypt and Iran was cold once again.

3.4 Relations with South Asian countries

Existence of the two major nuclear powers (India and Pakistan), Islamic radicalism called as terrorism by the west, Hindu radicalism, rapid economical growth, high population etc. made the region geopolitically important increasingly and that is why today major super powers have somehow turned their attention to the South Asia. The fact is that the South Asia did not have important place in Iran's foreign policy before the revolution but when Iran's relations with the western countries experienced negative developments, Iran tried to have strong and friendly relations with the Asian countries, especially South Asian region in order to create a balance in its relations with the west. This is what was later called as political approach to the east. Iran's relations with the South Asia have faced a complex state. From one perspective, Iran has complicated relations with each and every single country of the South Asia particularly India and Pakistan and on the other hand the fate of Iran has been tied up with South Asian countries within the framework of ECO, Organization of Islamic Conference, Group 77, Third World countries and etc (Ashraf 1994, pp:113-126).

3.4.1 Relations with India

Indian's foreign policy priority is based on security and focusing on the military power. India tries to engage with world major powers so that it can play a

greater role in the management of world affairs. Also, in such a time, when India has become a nuclear power, it wants to be converted to a political power by gaining membership in the Security Council and beside the impact of the current neo-liberal over the economic power of India so that it become a regional superpower. Thus, the foreign policy of India has changed from ideological state to pragmatist state. Indian foreign policy is based on optimized interest. Wherever Indian interest requires, it moves towards it and that is the reason when the issue of Iran's nuclear power is considered, the official position of India is that joining the international code is voluntary and now that Iran has voluntarily joined international regulations, fulfilling these terms and regulations is must and Iran has also maintained close and good relations with India for its own interests. The difference in views of Iran and India towards each other, based on a document released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of India, is as following (Nabizadeh 2012, pp:1-2):

- Iran is a country with a favorable geostrategic position.

- Iran is an important regional power in the west Asia.

- Iran is a country with rich oil and gas resources.

- Iran is an influential country in the Muslim world.

- Iran is a Shiite country with its own religious interests.

- Iran considers America as an enemy and is in an ideological conflict with most of the western countries.

- Iran, being a country of utopia, has put the idea of utopia at top of its foreign policy.

However, Iran has the following perspection towards India (Nabizadeh 2012, pp:2-4):

- India is considered as an aggregation of the eastern countries and Iran considers this characteristic of being eastern country with India as part of its common identity with India.

- Iran considers India as one of the main countries of the Non-Aligned movement and still expects to have same foreign policy in the framework of the Non-Aligned movement.

- From Iran's perspective, India is considered as a country of third world and therefore expects India to have more revisionist policies towards international economical and political regime.

- From Iran's point of view, both countries, Iran and India, have cultural and emotional common ties.

- From Iran's perspective, political and international behaviors of India in the past have shown that it has taken an independent politics and this policy is also aligned with Iran's national interest.

- India and Iran are against unilateral policies of America in the world and this factor is considered to be common among the policies of both countries.

Based on Iran's interior relations and fundamental national interests of both countries, both want to expand its influence in the region to protect their interests. Having good relations with America is considered to be among the major obstacles in the development of relations between India and Iran. Until the end of the Cold War, establishment of friendly political relations with the United States was seen very unlikely. Some of the international issues had placed the two countries at odds with each other. Washington used to support regional rival of India (Pakistan and China) for long time, and consequently, India was aligned with the United States rival of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). After the Cold War, India was inclined towards the United States of America. India, in order to improve its position and interests, moves in line with the United States of America. United States of America tries to give the leadership of regional security issues to India (Cheema 2011, pp:5-25).

Since there is convergence of interests between India and the United States of America in issues such as promoting democracy and combating extremism and terrorism. India not only wants to cut America's influence on regional issues, but rather in order to achieve its regional goals, it wants to have cooperation with the United States and other western countries. This policy of India has endangered Iran's interests. Another obstacle in relations between India and Iran is Pakistan. Iran wants to maintain good relations with both countries and not create tension, but India and Pakistan due to multiple reasons have cool relationships with each other and the competition between them is firm (Prashad 2013, pp:1-22). In this regard, issues such as gas pipelines, distrust of India towards Pakistan because of historical conflicts and the growth of extremism affected the relations between Iran and India.

3.4.2 Relations with Pakistan

With the beginning of the bilateral relations in 1947, Pakistani authorities called Iran an important and geo-strategic country and demanded the two countries to have friendly relations. But several issues at regional or international level have created challenges in relations between Iran and Pakistan which includes issues of Afghanistan India, USA, nuclear weapons, contraband and drugs, inanition to religious issues and insecurity (Ashraf 1994, pp:126-152).

3.4.2.1 Indian Issue

Neighborhood of India and Pakistan and the problems between the two countries caused the relations of Iran between India and Pakistan to be significant. In order to keep the balance, Pakistan has always called for peaceful relations with Tehran. Tehran also seeks a balance in its relations with the two countries, while India is looking to isolate Pakistan. Iran's relation with India causes Iran to take cautious with any relations with Pakistan. Meanwhile, any kind of relations between Iran and India have special meaning to Pakistan and influence on the behavior of the Pakistani authorities (Alam 2004, pp:1-20).

3.4.2.2 Afghanistan

Pakistan considers the strategic depth Afghanistan and takes the conflict over Durand Line issue into consideration, Pakistan wants an Afghan government to be in line with Islamabad or make Afghanistan unstable. Undoubtedly, Afghanistan's instability and insecurity will follow an influx of migration to Iran. Upcoming of a religious government based on Shia will not be possible. As with the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, Pakistan did recognize this government as official. But Taliban considered Shiites as a source of threat (Cornell 2003, pp:1-20).

3.4.2.3 United States of America

Pakistan has a negative trade balance, high inflation and low economic growth and therefore is in need of foreign loans and aid continuously and also in order to have balanced relations with India and maintain its position in the regions needs external support. Therefore, development of relations with the United states of America is under attention of Pakistani authorities but because of existence of a conflict between interests of United State of America and Iran in

the region, development of relation between the United States of America and Pakistan have negative effects over relations of Iran and Pakistan (Cheryl and Khalilzad 1984, pp:150-185).

3.4.2.4 Proliferation of Nuclear weapons

Pakistan's access to nuclear weapons in 1998 although so far has not threatened the interests of Iran, and Iran has not shown any sign of seeing danger from Pakistani nuclear weapons as well. But it has strengthened Pakistan's position in regional issues such as in Afghanistan and also strengthened the balance of relations with India. Also, according to Pakistani officials, the tactical use of nuclear bombs and the danger of access of the Taliban's to these nuclear weapons made Iran's policy towards Pakistan more difficult (Cubin and Shahram 2006, pp:50-85).

3.4.2.5 Religious issues

Shiites in Pakistan since the mid-1970s, inspired by the Iranian Revolution has entered into the social and political achievements. This movement which initially began as a protest movement and then Tehreek Nafaz-e-Fiqh-Jafariya of Pakistan was formed as the first organization of the Shiites with the leadership of Mufti Jafar in Pakistan. Followed by them, other organizations actively began providing distinct political identity for Shiites and their rights in Pakistan and subsequently Iran tried to expand its influence in Pakistan (Ansari 2005, pp:12-18).

Before the 1979 Revolution, people of Pakistan did not know the difference between Sunnis and Shiites. But after the revolution, Shia scholars began to talk a lot about the injustice and the need of force to take the government in Pakistan. Iran tried to establish cultural centers in all major cities of Pakistan, and sent representatives to manage them. Iran also established 300 Shiite areas in different cities of Pakistan (Atai and shahvand 2012, pp.6-10). According to the report, "Middle East" between 2002 and 2013, Iran established 54 religious sectarian Universities in Pakistanan attempt to attract Shiite students in all branches and faculties and give them scholarship programs in Iran. In addition to these, Iran also encouraged and financed the Shiites who controlled the

Pakistani media institutions and as a result now there is more than five pro-Iranian televisions in Pakistan.

3.4.3 Relations with Afghanistan

Cultural, ethnic, linguistic, historical and religious ties have provided Iran to have influence in Afghanistan. But the crisis inside Afghanistan, regional and international powers caused the relations between Iran and Afghanistan to be faced with constraints and challenges.

At the time of the rise of communist rule in Afghanistan between 1979 until 1993, no formal relationship was established between Iran and Afghanistan. Iran did not officially recognize the communist government. Since 1997, with the rise of the Taliban, the two countries relations were still in dark. In the later years, due to the civil wars, absence of a stable government in Afghanistan and in another civil war, it was the same. In Afghanistan, the lack of a stable government beside weakness of diplomacy between the two countries handed the development of a strong program for cooperation between the two countries.

3.4.3.1 Religious issues

Iran wants to maintain its political place in

Afghanistan by using all its cultural and religious influences. Through Imam Khomeini Charity Committee and Tolo Fajer cultural and scientific center beside other cultural centers Iran has been able to expand its political and cultural influences in Afghanistan through Shiites living there (Khalilzad 1980, pp:43-85). The following elements have caused the spread of Iranian influence in Afghanistan (Zahid 2011, pp:1-18):

- Having 855 to 930 common border lines with Afghanistan and being hostile to three million migrants.
- Having relations with some political leaders and the Shiite community religious places.
- Common cultural, historical and linguistic relations with Afghanistan's Shiite community's active presence in civic and political activities.
- Transit dependency and economic relations of Afghanistan with Iran.

In summary, it can be said that the South Asia is considered as a critical and important area in Iran's foreign policy. This area has a great future economically, in terms of security it has high sensitivity and in terms of culture and religion, it has lots of commons with Iran. It is the reason due to which Iran is trying its best to have influence over this region.

3.5 Relations with African Countries

African continent is one of the largest areas and historically it has been the center of conflicts of interests between the super powers. Most of the important trade routes of the world pass lie in Africa and this continent has plenty of natural resources. Thus, Africa has an important strategic position in recent decades and has attracted the attention of several countries, including Iran. Following the Revolution in 1979 which was based on Shia, Iran tried to export revolutionary idea to the regions outside its border, therefore it did its best to expand the extent of its cultural and political activities in Africa.

Exporting the revolution to other countries and minorities is stated in the Iranian constitution in more than one article. This has become, as it claims a moral duty to save people from tyranny and injustice. Therefore, Iran has adopted different strategies and approaches in dealing with these peoples in a way that aligns with their social, religious, economic and political structures to facilitate dominating and turning them into a launch base for its ambitions. Iran used the Islamic religion and common history as a strategy to facilitate the penetration into the Middle East countries. This is evident in Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon and other sectarian groups that alleged loyalty to the Jurist Leadership in Iran (Abdullah 2016, pp:1-4).

Cultural, diplomatic, economic and defense relations are the four main approaches through which Iran wants to increase its soft power in Africa continent. Iran's efforts to enhance its soft power in Africa lies in the fact that it wants to have access to financial markets, basic raw materials, ensure security, providing the perfect environment for Shiites and to reduce the public support of the west Africa for the united states of America and its policies. After the Islamic revolution; Iranian opening to Africa is backing to the era of former President Hashemi Rafsanjani, who had paid much attention for this continent

and that, was after his visit to Sudan in 1991 after overthrowing the government of Sadiq al-Mahdi by Omar al-Bashir.Rafsanjani visit to Sudan represented considerable support for al-Basher's government, which was living in isolation due to the embargo imposed by the international community.

The visited marked a new era in the Iranian relations with Africa also a starting point to expand its concern in this continent, as this expansion extended to include other African countries such as South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, Senegal, Comoros, Somalia, Djibouti, and Ghana.Among succession of the Iranian presidency, Africa was on the state agenda. After Rafsanjani's visit to Sudan, which followed by another one in 1996, Mohammad Khatami's visits to some African countries gave a new impetus of new relations with these countries through establishing frameworks and joint committees which have been handled the task of following up agreements between Iran and these countries. Then Ahmadinejad, who has made several visits to Africa that marked mostly by an ideological character. After that, President Hassan Rouhani dispatched his foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif in several visits to East Africa in the winter of 2014, and another visit to North African countries in the summer of 2015, in addition to his recent trip to West Africa in July 2016. Perhaps those successive visits reflect the desire of the Iranian regime to move forward in consolidating relations with the largest number of African countries (Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center 2009, pp:1-26). These consecutive visits of Iranian officials appeared in joint committees between these countries and Iran which resulted in bilateral treaties and agreements in dam construction, automotive industry, energy, as well as financial and banking affairs.

Furthermore, added to the cultural and educational cooperation, Iran also provided attractive economic promises through which many African nations forced to make concessions in strategic and security files. The Iranian regime motives varied behind the incursion in Africa from one country to another economically, politically and religiously. Moreover, in order to achieve the objectives of the Iranian regime in the African continent, it had to search for strategic areas from which begins and uses primary pathway to reach the desired targets. The focus was on Sudan and Nigeria clearly because of their

extraordinary features compared to the countries of the region. Iran's vast openness and focus on Sudan and Nigeria has an adverse impact on social and cultural fabric of these countries, as reflected negatively on the relationship between Sudan and Arab surroundings. Iran has given Sudan a great concern because of its geostrategic background Arabian location, at the same time, Sudan is a gateway to East Africa, so Iran has sought to make it a platform for its influence on the rest of the African countries Nigeria has its high population density, and more than half of them are Muslims, also has strategic and economic importance as one of the most important oil-producing countries in Africa (Directorate of Intelligence 2011, pp:5-18). Nigeria supports and sympathizes with the Iranian regime, as well as the existence of thousands of Shiites, who have been affected by Shiism movement adopted by Iran after the revolution's victory Promote of Shiism is the Iranian target in Sudan and Nigeria and in the whole African continent. Ways of expanding Shiism in Africa are as follows (Directorate of Intelligence 2011, pp:18-30):

- Embassies,

- Cultural Centers,

- Revolutionary Guards,

- Companies and Institutions,

- Clergies.

Iran put spreading Shiism as a priority in its strategy in all Africa including Sudan, through their religious institutions and cultural centers. The role of attachés and cultural centers of literature and arts fields, in identifying its culture, inherited tourism features and civilization. However, Iran veered by these centers from the announced diplomatic and cultural purpose; it became a platform for promoting ideas and books related to Shiism. These centers also worked hard over the past years to deepen cultural relations with all relevant authorities such as newspapers, universities, public libraries, the Ministry of Guidance, federations of women, youth and students, organizing Shiite ceremonies; these centers were able to extract customs exemptions, benefiting from agreements concluded between the two countries to enter books, audio, and visual tapes. Iran also has published and distributed large quantities among

people. These centers are mainly governed by clergymen influential among young people, students and educators in the development of Iran's soft power in Africa and they have done well. Iran exploited the cultural, social and even political vacuum, caused by Arab's being away the African arena, by taking advantage of one of the main principles of the revolution and to "Support the Oppressed" in various parts of the world. So, in some African countries, such as Sudan and Nigeria, it found a fertile and suitable ground for diffusing Shiite doctrine which represents one of the most important strategies in the continent. Iran has also sought through its relations with Sudan, Nigeria, and the other African countries to achieve its objectives as following (Directorate of Intelligence 2011, pp:18-30):

- First: Exporting the revolution,

- Second: Exiting the imposed international isolation before and after the nuclear deal,

- Third: Achieve some economic gains,

- Fourth: Pursuing intelligence activity in the continent by sending elements of the Revolutionary Guards and intelligence to a number of African countries as businessmen and investors to carry out intelligence work provided soft power of Iran in Africa.

3.6 Political Position of Iran on Palestinian İssue

After the victory of the Islamic Revolution led by Imam Khomeini, Iran and Palestine relations entered a new phase, because the government of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, one of the supporters of Israel in the region, collapsed and in returned the new system announced their support for the Palestinians.

In addition to these, continuous support of the revolutionary leaders to the Palestinians and being opposed to Israeli and America policy in the region attracted the attention of the nation. One week after the victory of the revolution in Iran, Yasser Arafat, the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization arrived in Iran as the first foreign personalities and was welcomed warmly by the revolutionary forces. During the meeting, Imam Khomeini said that in the following day, Palestinian Embassy would be opened in place of former Israeli

Embassy. Finally, Palestinian Embassy was opened and as a sign of solidarity with the Palestinian people, a single day was named as Quds Day, and every year on that day mass protests are held in support of the Palestinian people in Iran. During the past three decades, Islamic Republic of Iran has tried to restore and defend the rights of Palestinian people as a nation with full identity (Amec 2015, pp:1-15).

Palestinian resistance movement who lost three of its most important leaders was practically faced with different crises in the domestic arena as well as in resistance against Israel. The assassination of Sheikh Ahmed Yasin, the spiritual leader of Hamas in the beginnings of that year, followed by the assassination of Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi, Hamas leader in Gaza suddenly increased violence in the occupied Palestinian territory and these incidents were faced with intense response from leaders of different countries including Iran. Some leaders asked for an end to the ongoing violence. After these events and with the diversion of international community towards the Palestinian combat groups, including Hamas and Islamic Jihad, some foreign resources accused Iran for its military and political support to Hamas. Iran's effort to maintain its power and influence in the Middle East using these conditions was one of the few cases brought against Iran. But Iran's Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi stated about Iran's support for Palestine as "The Islamic Republic of Iran has always supported the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people in the fight against the occupation and establishing a justified and long lasting peace in the region and these support will continue and in addition to these insisted that the solution to the Palestinian problem is through negotiations" (Ergul 2012, pp:35-55).

Iran emphasized the need to create a unitary state in Palestine and recover the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Iranian authorities had repeatedly announced that the solution to the Palestinian crisis is to create a single unitary state. At the same time, Yasser Arafat, the President of the Palestinian Authority faced an unexpected illness and died. This sudden death in generally changed the entire and Iran's policy towards this issue was Iranian authority's particular position. Although Arafat's death came a day before the International Day of Quds which is known as Day of Solidarity of the Muslim world with the Palestinian people, Iran did not have a specific reaction to his death. Although Arafat's death did

actually bring a great change in Palestinian society and the future of this country. In the last months of 2004, travel and visit of Farouq Al- Qadoumi, the Foreign Minister of the Palestinian Authority and the Head of Fatah's Central Committee led another part of Iranian policy to be determined after Arafat's death. At the same time, Kharazi met with Al-Qadoumi and emphasized the people power as the real power and the big capital in the struggle of the Palestinian people against the occupants (Juneau 2009, pp:10-35).

Rafsanjani believed that after Arafat, there were great personalities among the Palestinian people who could fulfill the aspirations and dreams of the Palestinian people. Haddad Adel, the Chairman of the Parliament also declared that the liberation of the Palestine and Jerusalem as one of the main goals of the Islamic Revolution which must be seen as a fundamental issue but there was no doubt that Arafat's death created huge developments in Palestine and in its relations with foreign countries. In such circumstances, the position of Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Palestine had changed. From one perspective, there was a possibility for them to take the government in charge inside the Palestine and on the other hand, the reactions of these groups to some policies of Mahmud Abbas had created doubts about the success of all Palestinian groups to achieve the necessary unity in fight against Israel. Some Palestinian officials focused on the need for a political solution instead of a military solution and in this regard emphasized that regional powers play a very important and decisive role in this position (Ünal 2011).

Iran, as an active player in the region brought the Palestinian issue as an important component of its foreign policy into account, too. Without any doubt, the Islamic Republic of Iran never ignored the Intifada, "the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip" issue of the Palestinian people in any way, but at the same time, Iranian authorities, meanwhile, expressed hope that the effective cooperation of Iran and the countries of the Organization of the Islamic Conference would lead to a fine solution to the Palestinian issue. Although the future of Palestine, especially in the current situation and considering some internal conflicts in the country, is not predictable (Koçgündüz 2011, pp:1-11).

After the beginning of the Arab Spring, a gap was formed between Hamas and Iran.

Hamas was sided with Qatar and because of that, in 2016, Hamas once again wanted to be close with Iran. Moussa Mohammed Abu Marzouk was responsible for this mission. He firstly headed to Beirut, where he privately met with Iranian officials and Hezbollah. In Beirut, Abu Marzouk spoke with one of the officials of Hamas movement in Gaza about the Iranian support and denied any support from Iran but intelligence agency of Lebanese recorded this conversation (Farsnews 2015, pp.1-2) According to the informed security sources, this recording was given to the one side of the conflict and he took a few days before the Hamas delegation's visit to Tehran to attend the ceremony marking the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution decided to reveal. At this moment, one of the members of Hamas who was close to Iran tried to solve this problem so that the gap between the two countries relations is filled. As a result, a delegation including "Mohammad Nasr" and "Osama Hamadan" headed towards Tehran in order to participate in the Mazbor ceremony. The delegation met with lots of Iranian officials in Tehran and one of the meetings was a private visit with Qasem Soleimani. The upbringings of the meeting indicated that the Hamas delegation in their meeting with Soleimani proposed a complete picture of the future steps and referring to the situation before 2011 declared that, these relations cannot continue with previous rules and regulations (Farsnews 2015, pp.1-2)

The delegation explained iran policy has changed in the palestinain issue and neither Iran nor Hamas is like previous but both sides are willing to make stronger the resistance in Palestine in the fight against Israeli aggression and because of it, new principles must be established for this relationship (Farsnews 2015, pp.1-2). According to a source in the Hamas this delegation in Tehran said that in recent years, many faults occurred, some from Hamas and some from Iran, but Iran and Hamas knew that resistance was at stake and they knew that the only country that could support the resistance was Iran (Farsnews 2015, pp.1-2) Qasem Soleimani said that he insisted that their support for the Palestinians would continue because this issue was the basically ideological stand between them and God. (Farsnews 2015, pp.1-2) After the meeting, a new

era in relations between Iran and Hamas began. In summary, it can be said that the policy of Iran's support to the Palestinians led Iran expand its influence in the entire region.

4. RELIGION AS A SOFT POWER IN THE IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY

4.1 Cultural Influence of Iran in the Region

Iran managed to maintain its language and culture throughout the history as independent, and with the embrace of Shiism, it could even create a unique place for itself in the Muslim world. Although Iran is alone in terms of language and religion in the region but it has managed to rule Shiite religious minorities in other countries and in some cases through common language and culture, to expand its policies.

Around and its neighbors, Iran does not have any unified and natural ethnic kind. Even countries that are closer to Iran as part of this order, such as Afghanistan and Tajikistan, are quite far away from Iran religiously and those who are religiously close with Iran, such as Azerbaijan and Iraq, are quite far away from Iran by ethnicity and language differences but beside all such religious and linguistic differences, it has been able to expand and increase its influence in the region through revolutionary slogans and cultural activities (Arjomand 1984, pp:10-44).

One of the developments in the global system has been the change in nature and forms of power, and influence to promote soft power over hard power. Countries that have wisely used the elements such as culture, civilization, history and geography as a form to impress others have more authority in national and global politics (Nye 1990, pp:153-171).

Iran, historically, exists in the world politics as a country that has a very sophisticated civilization. From one side, having history, culture and civilization and from the other side as a country with largest Shiite population and heir of the first religious revolution in the modern world, has been the center for soft power. In reality "soft power, is the production of a positive image and reputation in the view of others, using tools such as culture, history, ideals and human values indirectly affect the interests and behaviors of other countries. So,

soft power is a social phenomenon and related to the peripheral components compared to other instruments of foreign policy and has the greatest influence (Nye 2004, pp:95-115).

Several factors are involved in the development of the country's soft power, which if managed properly, can also create internal cohesion, lead to the growth of the country's prestige and position in international political arena. With features that culture has on one hand, it can be used as a threatening element, and on the other hand, as a booster to social order aside from economy and politics which are introduced as one of the important elements of soft power resources. Governments in the soft power give much attention to the cultural foundation and try to reach their targets by using the cultural element. Iran's Islamic Revolution with the slogan of Islamic union and supporting oppressed people were the reason due to which Iran could improve and expand its soft power in the region.

Soft power is the product of a positive image and gaining reputation in the domestic and foreign opinion of the people. The Islamic Republic of Iran, for many reasons (religion, language and export of revolutionary ideas), has provided the necessary conditions for its soft power in the region to be expanded. From one aspect, the development of soft power has led the development of cultural identity in the Islamic Republic of Iran. On the other hand, this increscent of soft power has led Iran to face threat from global and regional powers that are against the Islamic Republic (Ahmadi 2010, pp:37-64).

This refers to the concept of 'soft power' developed by the American Professor of Political Science Joseph Nye in the 1990s to describe the ability of a country to use economic or cultural influence to achieve its objectives peacefully without military force (Ahmadi 2010, pp:64-74). Soft Shiism refers specifically to the promotion of the Iranian regime's hard-line 'Twelver' Shiite ideology in the targeted countries through economic or cultural influence. This strategy is separate to the use of military power, being pursued by means as given below (Alsulami 2016, pp:1-31):

- Establishing centers and conducting conferences to eliminate psychological barriers and eradicate hostility from Sunnis toward Shiites.

- Establishing charity organizations under the pretext of assisting the needy through building schools and hospitals where this can be used to promote Shiite ideology.

- Offering scholarships to attract students to Qum city and its 300 religious institutes run and financed by the Universal Islamic Center, which is controlled by the Iranian regime's intelligence service. More than 50,000 students from 70 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas are educated, or more correctly, indoctrinated in these institutes on an annual basis, before being sent back to their countries to proselytize on behalf of the regime.

- Producing heavily sectarian movies and TV series using state-of-the-art technology targeting the beliefs of the audience in an effort to eradicate Sunni hostility toward Shiites and convince the audience to embrace Shiite ideology and concepts.

- Launching dozens of satellite propaganda channels and websites such as Al-Alam channel to promote false and fabricated 'news' reports in support of the Iranian project.

- Organizing religious tourist groups in the targeted countries to influence other people and make them accept Shiite ideology. For example, religious tourism has enabled Shiites to establish a presence in predominantly Sunni Syria. Around 1.5 million Iranians visit Syria every year, particularly the Sayeda Zainab shrine in Damascus, which has been ranked the third holiest Shiite shrine in the world after Najaf and Qum, giving the Shiite clergy a pretext for a permanent presence in Syria.

- Using the relatively free environment in some countries such as those in Europe and the Americas to preach Shiite ideology and convert Sunni Muslims in these countries to Shiism, particularly targeting those who face financial problems. The Shiite centers in the Netherland, Belgium, Italy, and America play a major role in this field, using financial inducements to attract people to the Shiite ideology, despite the massive poverty in Iran itself.

Besides all these efforts, still, Iran could not achieve its goals until the 9/11 incident in the region, but oppositely was facing isolation both in the region and in the world. After the 9/11 incident, with the upcoming foreign political changes of the United States of America, the invasion of Afghanistan with the

reason of the destruction of the Taliban regime and the invasion of Iraq with the reason of having weapons of mass destruction; Shias once again gained power in the Middle East, specifically in Iraq, and they used it as an opportunity. This led to anger of the anti-Shia Muslim communities, especially Salafi, who then funded and tried their best to create new armed groups in the region. This led to the instability in the countries and regions which included both Shias and Sunnis living together in the same geography.

4.2 Political Influence of Iran in the Region

Iran's Islamic Revolution is considered as one of the most important political events in the second half of the 20th century in the world. This revolution happened in a country in which before the revolution existed Pahlavi government which was an ally of America in the Persian Gulf. Victory of Iran's Islamic Revolution in Iran led Iran to be against America's policies. After the revolution, the political leaders attempted to export revolution to other countries.

In order to fulfill this aim, they headed towards cultural and political activities. This led Shiites who lived in the Persian Gulf states be inspired by the Islamic Revolution of Iran and stood against the regime in their country and demanded their political power. The 1979 Revolution which led to the creation of an Islamic State in Iran brought fundamental changes in its foreign policy as well like other areas. The new supreme leader of Iran's revolutionary regime declared the base of Iran's foreign policy and Iran's identity on slogan of ("neither east nor west, the Islamic Republic") and it finalized that the slogan should be the base of Iran's foreign policy (Tareq 1982, pp:5-11).

But the question was what this slogan meant for the policy formers of new emerging states. Abolhasan Bani-Sadr, the first President of Iran, mentioned about the definition of the slogan neither east nor west and how they could define it in their foreign policy, as "this means that you should not give an opportunity and time for foreign forces to intervene in your internal affairs" (BBC Persian,2004). Export of the revolution was one of the main goals of the leaders among the Iranian revolutionaries, after the formation of the Islamic Republic and pushing of the nationalists from power, slowly adopted which was

named as export of revolution to other countries. Based on this policy, closeness towards the Islamic movements and support for revolutionary movements in Muslim countries and then support for liberation movements (even non-Muslim) were on the agenda (Esposito 1999, pp:35-55). In addition to these, support of revolutionary leaders to the Palestinian people and being against Israeli and American policy in the region attracted the interests of nations of the region (Şenyurt 2012, pp:20-35).

This refers to the politicization of the Shiite doctrine, which takes place after Shiite communities have been established in the targeted countries, with Shiite minorities in these nations being used to achieve Iran's ambitions. With Shiites indoctrinated to regard Iran as their spiritual homeland and the center of their religion, they are induced to betray their original countries and act as agents for Iran and its expansionist ambitions. In other words, the Iranian regime has adopted a strategy of isolating Shiite communities in other nations from their wider societies and changing their loyalties to be primarily to Iran rather than to their original homelands. These Shiite communities have adopted hostile behavior toward their own nations and compatriots who hold other ideologies (Alsulami 2016, pp:1-15). The Iranian regime's strategy of politicizing Shiism in the targeted countries is achieved by use of the following techniques (Alsulami 2016, pp:15-31):

- Establishing loyal political parties and movements in the targeted countries to change the domestic political landscape in favor of the Iranian project; consequently, a significant number of Shiite parties and movements have emerged in many countries of the world, especially in the Arab world, including Amal Movement and Hezbollah in Lebanon; the Higher Council, Da'wa Party, Al-Sadr current and others in Iraq; the Islamic Labor and Da'wa Party, and the Shiite Reconciliation Association in Bahrain; the National Islamic Coalition and Peace and Justice Gathering in Kuwait; Al-Haq and Umma Party, the Believer Youth Movement (now Ansarollah) in Yemen; the Unity Party in Tunisia; Al-Sabireen Movement in Palestine; the Islamic Unity Party in Afghanistan; Applying Al-Ja'fari's Beliefs Movement in Pakistan; the Shiite Islamic Movement in Nigeria; and the National Iranian-American

Council (NIAC) in the United States. The aforementioned parties and movements are dedicated to promoting the Iranian regime's interests in their own countries either by exerting pressure on their governments as with the Lebanese Hezbollah or by bringing down any political movements which challenge Tehran's interests like the Houthi rebels in Yemen, who, backed by Iran, have frustrated the GCC countries' initiative for a political solution in Yemen since occupying the capital Sana'a in 2014.

- Establishing alliances with other Shiite sects in the country, more particularly in predominantly Sunni nations, despite their differences, in order to form a homogenous Shiite core group loyal to the regime under the false pretext of protecting Shiite communities in these nations. In fact, these groups are part of the Iranian regime's effort to acquire new spheres of influence and to establish proxies to promote its interests in these countries, such as the group formed to call for the "restoration of the Alawi branch to its Ja'fari Shiite origin" in Syria. The work of the prominent Iraqi Twelver Shiite cleric, Hassan Shirazi, in the 1960s played a major role in building Iranian links with the Syrian Alawis and encouraging their talented sons to study in the Iranian city of Qum. In addition, Shirazi succeeded in making the Sayeda Zainab shrine in Damascus the third holiest shrine in Shiism after Najaf and Qum. Other Shiite clerics such as Mousa Al-Sadr, Muhsin Al-Hakim, and Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah followed in Shirazi's footsteps and established the Al-Khusaibi movement among Nusairi people in Syria.

- These figures argued that the only theological differences between Twelvers and Nusairis are minor issues and do not touch the essence of Shiism. Consequently, a decision was taken in 1980 in the Syrian city of Qardaha, the center of the Nusayri sect and hometown of the Assads, to dispatch 500 young Alawi students to study at the holy sites in Qum to become experts in the Ja'fari sect. Hence, a long-term strategic alliance was established between the Nusayri regime in Syria and Khomeini's clerical followers in the wake of the 1979 revolution. This relationship turned into effective Iranian hegemony over Syria after the inauguration of Bashar Assad president of Syria in 2000, which recently turned into

complete control following the outbreak of the so-called Arab Spring Revolutions in 2011 and Assad's brutal efforts to maintain power in which he soon became completely reliant on Iran. Due to this, Iran with paying concentration to its national interest, by using the Shia factor in the Middle East, countries it did make mass cultural, political and social influences, and this religious politics of Iran led to huge evolution in the Middle East.

4.3 Iran's Nuclear Program and İts Impacts in the Middle East

The decision-making method in foreign policy of countries, especially powerful and influential countries in international politics, is a topic that has always been of interest to international scholars and enthusiasts. The Persian Gulf with geopolitics, geostrategic importance and the characteristics of joining the three continents of Europe, Africa and Asia in addition to be the supplier of more than 75 percent of the world's oil and a huge percentage of world's gas has a special value and status in United states of America and European Union's foreign policy. It is expected that by the year 2030, the dependency of the world's nations especially the United States and the European Union to Middle East's oil and reserve will increase dramatically as other area's oil and gas reserves will be decreased. Meanwhile, Iran has a special place among the countries of the Persian Gulf, especially to the West. The acquisition of nuclear technology will be a threat to the interests of the United States and Arab countries in the Persian Gulf region. The Arab countries of the region who suffer from weaknesses in the political structure, the economic system and the social division do not want Iran which they count as their political and religious rivals to achieve nuclear technology thus they want to prevent Iran from achieving nuclear technology through the United States of America and the European countries (Mohammadi, Ghobashi and Abadi 2010, pp:1-20).

The regional and international developments in recent years, including Iran's role in the Iraqi-Syrian crisis and its presence in Yemen, and on the other hand, nuclear deal between Iran and western countries increased the regional power of Iran, causing regional rivals of Iran, especially Saudi Arabia, to be in concern and worry. Considering the realistic situation of the Middle East and Persian

Gulf region, Saudi Arabia considers Iran's power in the region to be disadvantage to it and tries to confront the regional power of Iran. On the other hand, the region of the Middle East and the Persian Gulf known to be a part of the international system due to its geopolitical and geostrategic characteristics reasons has always been an important issue throughout the history, especially in the present era, the economic and energy issues have been added to its role. The Persian Gulf is one of the areas that have always been marked by conflicts, threats and regional wars. The collapse of Saddam Hussein led the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia to increase in the Persian Gulf region which was traditionally the most important rival very area for both of them to expand their influence. Thus, the relationship between two major regional powers is also controversial in the framework of the conflicting competition model or cooperation with other countries in the region (El-Hokayem and Legrenzi 2006, pp:1-26).

Saudi Arabia is one of the actors that is not pleased with the situation after the nuclear deal and the prospects for the future of the Middle East are not in the interest of the country. This dissatisfaction according to some analysts is to such an extent that Saudi Arabia's hidden and negative role in the Geneva agreement. This view is presented by some since Saudi Arabia describes its political game with Iran as a completion of win and loses. The win-loss means that Saudi Arabia sees Iran as its rival in the region, and sees Iran's role and influence in the regional development as a threat to its own interests. The intensification of the challenge of Iran and the west over Iran's nuclear activities and the development of sanctions, including in the field of oil, has led Saudi Arabia and Arabs to exploit the conditions prevailing in pursuing their goals and interests, especially in confrontation against Iran. Examples of this include the diplomatic engagement of the West with the Arabs against Iran, including in the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly on the assertion of the assassination of the Saudi ambassador, or the Arab-Saudi accompaniment to the west in enforcing sanctions in Iran, including the promise of filling the Iranian oil vacuum in the market in order to advance Iran's oil sanctions. In fact, a nuclear deal has blown up the disputes between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia sees this agreement as a positive movement of Washington towards Iran. This

movement of Washington does not only strengthen the position of Iran, but also increases the Shia's position in the region. Iran's first attempts to achieve nuclear technology backs to the 1950s. Iran began its nuclear program since the mid-1960s under the United State-backed authoritarian and pro-American regime, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (Pasha 2016, pp:5-13).

With the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the United States declared its opposition to Iran's nuclear program and imposed economic sanctions and shortly afterwards cute its diplomatic ties with Iran. These sanctions imposed on Iran by Clinton were later extended by Bush as well. After reaching power in 2001, Bush considered Iran, along with Iraq and North Korea, as the axis of evil, a danger to the United States and blamed them for encouraging terrorists. Since 2003, when the United States accused Iran of attempting to acquire a nuclear weapon, nuclear activity became the centerpiece of Iran's foreign relations. Today, Iran continues to use the same argument of the 1970s, namely, the need for nuclear energy due to increased domestic consumption of energy and the desire to keep oil and gas available for foreign currency. Attentions to Iran's nuclear program, which began in 2002 and by 2015, become a major international political issue among all the countries, and talks begun between Iran and European countries. Saudi Arabia and some other Gulf Arab countries have also expressed concerns over Iran's nuclear facilities between 2002 and 2015 (Pasha 2016, pp:13-17). According to the reports by some credible media, Saudi Arabia and some other Arab countries from the Persian Gulf region, after Rouhani's presidency and the start of talks at the level of foreign ministers of Iran and the United States, Zarif and Kerry, tried their best to prevent the nuclear deal between Iran and world powers. Eventually, after signing a nuclear deal between Iran and the six world powers, Saudi Arabia and its allies did not appear to be seriously opposed (BBC Persian 2015, pp.1-2). Although the nuclear agreement between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the 5+1 (the US, China, Russia, France and the United Kingdom) and Germany (+1) group, called the World Summit, has several regional consequences, the most important of them clearance of the Middle East from weapons of mass destruction, the weakening of the Iran-Iraq war project and the promotion of

Regional cooperation in the areas of trade, economic and security, especially in the fight against terrorist groups (Pasha 2016, pp:17-20).

Today, with regard to the conditions and components of power in the new world, soft power has become as important as the hard power and attracted the attention of policy makers and government, including the Islamic republic of iran. But in controversial region such as where Iran is situated, having military equipment and nuclear weapons is considered a must for Iran and pays whatever price needed in order to achieve it(Mehdi Raji 2015, pp:45-50).

There are significant differences in the views expressed by different countries in the region regarding Iran's nuclear program, which cannot be analyzed in details in here, because each and every country took unique position over various historical, geographical, economical and political variables. However, the positions of the countries of the region regarding Iran can be divided into three general categories.

4.3.1 Position of the Allies of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the region

Some of Tehran's regional allies, including Syria and Iraq, welcomed Iran's nuclear program and achievements (Shirazi 2015, pp.29- 35) Because this agreement will not only increase the economic power of Iran to help friendly states in the region, but also it will create a good atmosphere for defense cooperation against the opposition groups and countries. Indeed, developments and instabilities over the last few years, especially in the region, such as sanctions, decrease in the oil prices, the rise of ISIL-Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and terrorist groups, caused Iran to reach its financial and logistical power support to its allies to a low level. Therefore, the current agreement can be counted as a favor and advantage for the allies of the Islamic Republic of Iran as well, including the countries and groups of the axis of power.

4.3.2 Turkey's position

Turkey, as one of the poles of the region, agreed to Iran's nuclear talks and world powers, and even tried to mediate in the talks at some points. So, after signing a comprehensive joint action plan, P5+1 (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – JCPOA), officials from the country, including the Turkish Foreign

Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, welcomed the agreement and expressed hope for an increase, meant in bilateral economic a cooperation after the clearance of internationals actions against Tehran. Turkish people also hope that the deconstruction of Iran and the west in the nuclear issue will affect the Middle Eastern issues, especially the Syrian civil war, and Tehran will play a more constructive role in resolving these cries (BBC Persian2015, pp.1-2) Turkey's welcome is more economical in nature and it considers Iran a good market for the prosperity of its growing economy. But politically and strategically, Turkey, as one of Iran's serious rivals in the Middle East, has concerns about the future of Iran's nuclear program; although its intensity is lower than the Arab countries of the region, but it cannot be ignored (Burkhard et al. 2017, pp:1-18).

4.3.3 The position of the countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council

Gulf Cooperation Council countries have publicly welcomed the signing of the nuclear agreement, but have also concerns over its consequences, such as the expansion of the Islamic Republic of Iran's influence in the region. Because this agreement will allow Tehran to have Access over its blocked funds, and this is not acceptable for some Arab countries in the region.

In reality, according to some Arab World leaders, the United States and Iran's nuclear talks is the continuation of the then President of the USA, Barrack Obama's soft policy towards Iran, which began with the withdrawal of united states troops from Iraq in 2011, and continued with the agreement of no military intervention in Syria, according to this view it was a complete backstop of the united states towards Iran by accepting of the right to enrichment in Iran. There has been clearly a difference of position between the 6 member countries and also the rear significant differences in Iran's nuclear negotiations and the resulting document.

While Oman hosted several rounds of nuclear talks and played a mediating role between Iran and the United States in the nuclear issue, Saudi Arabia from the very beginning declared its opposition to the fuller solution of Iran's nuclear crisis. Indeed, Washington dependent allies in the Persian Gulf eared that Iran's nuclear deal could facilitate a shift in United States strategic direction from the Middle East to Asia-Pacific. For this reason, before reaching its conclusion, the

then President of the USA, Barrack Obama was forced to summon Arab leaders of the Gulf states to the Camp David Summit and promised them for more struggle and the sale of more advanced military equipment. However, some analysts claim that because of the maintenance of Iran's nuclear infrastructure and the enrichment of the country's energy sources, it is likely that Saudi Arabia and some other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council will gradually try to build a nuclear program for their country due to the fact that they are dissatisfied with the United States' double standard of denial of enrichment by the Gulf states (such as the United Arab Emirates), but its tacit acceptance for the Islamic Republic of Iran(Shirazi 2015, pp.35-45). Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia is worried that a nuclear agreement, regardless of its subject and content, if successful is considered to be a success in each and every other regional crises and would surely increase the role and the status of Iran in the regional and international arena. This is a matter of concern for the Arabic countries such that according to them Iran's access to nuclear capability make clear the way for Iran to have nuclear power beside other powers such as expansion of the land area, population, young and professional human resources, ancient history and culture and place it in a unique geopolitical scope and led otherwise of Iran as a superior regional power (Burkhard et al. 2017, pp:18-42).

With the coming of Donald Trump in the US administration as the President of the United States of America, anti-Iranian policy was clearly seen in America's policy and Trump administration took near stand with Saudi Arabia who is Iran's rival in the region and they both declared Iran as a danger and threat to the region. On the last trip of the President of the United States of America, Donald Trump, to Saudi Arabia and attendance in the one-day conference which was host to over 40 Islamic countries, Saudi King and President Trump stance about Iran was that King Abdullah in his speech referred to Iran as the "vanguard of terrorism" and said "our responsibility before God, our people and the whole world is that we fight against extremism and forces of evil through our alliances". King Salman accused Iran of exporting Islamic extremism to the world. In another part of his speech, the King said "the Iranian regime since the Khomeini Revolution in 1979 has become the forefront of global terrorism". Donald Trump also said in his speech at the summit the "I want to talk about

Iran since Iran is responsible for instability in the region, Iran trains terrorists and it has been Decades since Iran has been in lighting the flames of sectarian wars" (BBC, 22 May 2017).

So in conclusion, it can be said that, Persian Gulf states, especially in the leadership of Saudi Arabia, in addition to security concerns as well as regional balance, try to get favor from the Americans during this process. Because of the economic needs of the Saudi Arabia in the upcoming years and the need of nuclear technology in the electrical industry, in addition to solve and supply their needs in this way and seek concessions on the issue of regional security and make aware the disadvantages of a bad nuclear deal for the Westerners and insist over much more responsibility and partnership of the United states of America over the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council.

5. CONCLUSION

In this paper; the conceptual, historical and theoretical contexts of soft power in Iran's foreign policy have been discussed. Iran, through its history, religion, language, and culture, has been able to expand its soft power throughout the Middle East, especially after the Islamic Revolution, and through this could achieve its political and social goals in the Middle East.

Power as one of the main concepts of political science means the ability to influence the change in the behavior of others in order to achieve the desired outcome. The aim of power directed in any manner is to make others obey your path. All countries in the field of international relations seek to increase their power and influence. Any nation's ability to increase its power can further guarantee its survival and security; on the other hand, it will moreover be able to fulfill its goals. In the meantime, the military and economic potential that may have been formed on the basis of a betrayal or threat is often forces others to change the subject; therefore, one form of power is military and economic power which is called hard power. In the late 20th century, due to the change in the nature of international politics, power sources have evolved, and uncertain forms of power have become more important. After the main power this is the second face of power or soft power, which is the product of gaining international credibility and indirect impact with satisfaction on others. Soft power is concerned with the occupation of the mental space of other citizens' communities through persuasion, and its purpose is primarily the public opinion outside the country.

Since soft power indirectly affects the interests or behavior of other countries and societies through the use of tools such as culture, ideology, ideals and ethical values so the success of the soft power is different from each and every aspect depending on the specific cultural, religious, political and social characteristics of each country or region. The geopolitical extension of each

country's soft power means investigating the degree of that country's influence in other countries and geopolitical regions.

Alongside the hard power that most realists pay attention to, the aim of soft power is also raised. Each political and revolutionary system has always used the indicators of soft power to promote its regional and international status. By using the slogan of Muslim unity and defending the oppressed people of the world and issuing a revolution, Iran has also been able to expand its influence in the region. Soft power is called the ability to influence other people and governments to achieve the desired results through encouragement and attraction rather than the use of force.

Each country has an interest in expanding its sphere of influence and increasing its role in the region or countries in the region, based on its level of power. One of the sensitive geopolitical areas to Iran is the Middle East. The Middle East region is the bedrock of Iranian culture and civilization. The ancient and unbreakable ties of the people of these regions with the Iranian culture and civilization in terms of religion, language and literature, music, art, architecture, public culture and lifestyle are such that no opposition and confrontation has not been able to make a burden in the expansion of its influence throughout the history. After the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran and the transformation of the geopolitical structure of the Middle East, Iran also played a pivotal role in the geographical area of the Shiites, and the Middle East Shiite lands became a strategic issue that caused opposition between the Islamic Republic of Iran and other countries of the region.

Sunni and Shia, Islam's two main sect's followers, despite great differences, have for centuries lived together relatively peaceful but the Islamic Revolution in Iran in the late 20th century is one of the main events of the century which led to the followers of both religions be against each other. Iran's Islamic Revolution with slogans such as unity and convergence among Islamic countries support the deprived and the oppressed nations, the protection of religious and Islamic movements around the world reach the victory, but after three decades of revolution, Islamic Iran in its foreign policy, always uses the Shia elements in other Middle Eastern countries to seek political influence and its cultural and this politic of Iran has caused a huge gap between religious groups in the region.

The current level of sectarian is a new phenomenon whose root must be searched in political opportunism, the spread of extremism and religious beliefs deviation in Middle East countries. This has caused insecurity in the region. 1979's Islamic Revolution in Iran lead to the establishment of the first Shiite government in the region. After the establishment of the Shiite government in Iran and it's expanding of the cultural and political activities outside the borders of Iran, in some Islamic countries fear arose that some of the Islamic group which was created on the basis of the Shia religious may be affected from this revolution inside their country. Because of this the Gulf states adopted anti-Iran policy. Following the religious policy of Iran in the Middle East caused King Abdullah of Jordan to utter about establishing a Shiite government loyal to Iran in Iraq in the year 2004. He warned that if this happens, with the inter-connections of the governments of Iran, Iraq and Syria with Lebanon's Hezbollah a "Shiite crescent" will be formed. King Abdullah besides presenting this concept added that the main aim of Iran having relation with Iraq after Saddam Hussein is to pursuit the formation of Shiite Crescent. After King Abdullah, the king of Saudi Arabia also expressed thoughts to follow the process of (attracting Sunnis of Arab into Shia sect). In 2006, former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said: Shiites in the Arab world are more loyal to Iran than to their own countries and also warned about the formation of the Shiite Crescent and its impact on regional relations in favor of Iran, but for the first time in the year 2014 exactly 10 years after the statement of king Abdullah, Iranian Revolutionary Guards Quds Force Commander Qasem Soleimani expressed that; Shiite crescent is not political but rather an "economical crescent". All these led to further increase tension in the Middle East.

After the Islamic Revolution and the slogans of the Islamic alliance and the defense of the oppressed people, Iran, through the use of Shiite geopolitics, was able to play an effective role in the developments of the region, thereby extending its influence and territory in the Middle East. The progress of regional power of Iran began on the basis of soft power. Hezbollah and Iran were among the most popular words on the regional level in the early years of the 21st century. The normative system transformed the basic concepts of resistance and oppression into a significant influence on the regional level. At

that time, Iran's soft power had surpassed its hard power. In the last two decades, Iran's regional power has reached to an unexpected level. Iran's performance in supporting Syria and Iraq was successful. In addition to this, Iran's support for the Kurdish regional government prevented ISIL-Islamic State in Iraq and Levant from gaining control. Iran also plays a central role in the Middle East as the main sponsor of Lebanon's Hezbollah and the Hamas movement. In the war against regional terrorism, Iran and its allies and friends are active in the battle against Iraqi Kurdistan to Yemen. Therefore; there should be no doubt about the rise of regional power of Iran. But the concept of power is not just hard power. By modeling the soft power theory of Joseph Nye, an American political scientist in the nineties of the last century; Iran is promoting and expanding the ideas of twelve Shiites in the target countries. The soft penetration approach utilizes cultural tools, far from militarism and weaponry, to promote Shiism.

İran has using the establishing centers and holding conferences to bring Islamic religions closer to each other and establishing charities under the pretext of helping the needy, including building schools and hospitals and also grantig scholarships for foreign student in Qom university to promote their religious politics in the world specifically in the Middle East.

In addition, producing artistic and dramatic movies and drama series featuring advanced technologies, at least, led the other nations and host countries think it as a disruption of their constitutional and intellectual principles. In this situation, the psychological wall between the Shiites and the Sunnis collapsed and provided the basis for accepting the concepts of Shiism between the audiences of these programs. Launching dozens of satellite channels and various sites with a biased approach, the Al-Alam network is an example of these satellite channels broadcasting news for the benefit of Iran.

Religious tourism for target countries. This program is aimed to influence the mentality of the people of these countries and the acceptance of Shiism. For example, religious tourism in Syria is for Shiites. Iranian people go to Syria each year. They, in particular, go to Damascus' Zimbabiyah area. This has created an excuse for the Shia clerics to stay there forever, upto the extent that

Zainabiyah religious educational center is located in the third place after Qom and Najaf.

Situations changed during the Arab Spring. The regional power of Iran was promoted to a level where Iran's soft power was not accompanied by it. Developments in the region itself contributed to the decline of soft power in Iran, since it challenged the assumptions of the previous normative system. In addition to this, the rise of Iran's hard power led its rivals to mobility. It also undermined the position of the normative system of Iran and led its regional influence to decline and, in general, undermined its soft power. Therefore, in the new era, a completely different equation was formed: Iran's hard power was upgraded, while its soft power fell slightly in the region but the result was the same, the balance between soft power and hard power was not established.

The element of soft power has always been a part of Iran's foreign policy from the past. Some believe that even the past regime, despite the lack of belief in using the ideological tool in advancing foreign policy, has used some kind of Shiite instrument to increase its influence in the region.But after the Iraq crisis in 2003, and with the entry of Shia elements into building Middle Eastern power and politics, the issue of using this component in the Iranian foreign policy has been seriously raised, which has led to an increase in the role and influence of Iran in the political-security issues of the region, including an active and decisive presence in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and some other parts of the Middle East.

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