

SHI'ISM IN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN: ITS MUSLIM WORLD POLICY

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Abstract

Religion and politics are closely linked in the Islamic Republic of Iran, especially their Muslim World policy. The Islamic Republic of Iran policies in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and the Republic of Yemen suggest that it promotes Shi'ite religious doctrinal values in its Muslim World policy. This study argues that the Islamic Republic has mainly provided political, diplomatic, economic, philanthropic and military assistance to the minority Shi'ite population of the Sunnite majority Muslim states with the aim, entailed in its 1979 revolution, of integrating the Shi'ite minority population of the Muslim states into the deep state or political processes coupled with a mission of ultimate control of the politics of the Muslim World. The Islamic Republic's policies are purportedly going to bring about Muhammad Hassan al Mahdi's return to the world to establish a universal divine just political order. The Islamic Republic believes that the Sunnite majority Muslim states are the real threat to its grand design, and hence, undergirded by the principle of taqiyyah (dissimulation) it should cooperate with the West or any other state to achieve its mission and global interests and intentions.

Key Words: the Islamic Republic of Iran, Muslim World, Shi'ite core doctrinal values, *taqiyyah*, foreign policy, grand *imamate*,

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universal divine just political order, Sunnite majority Muslim World/states

Introduction

Foreign policy is formulated in pursuit of national interest. However, the Islamic Republic of Iran's diplomatic practices and behaviour in the Muslim World suggest that its foreign policy is formulated to promote the Shi'ite core doctrinal principles and sectarianism in the predominantly Sunnite majority Muslim states and to politically destabilise them. The ultimate foreign policy making power in Iran rests with the sectarian religious establishment headed by the supreme leader who bespeaks on behalf of or represents Muhammad ibn Hassan al Mahdi; the 12th successor of Prophet Muhammad who is in occultation. The Islamic Republic's sectarian religious establishment has the duty to promote the Iranian style political system and its sectarian interests in the Muslim World until the return of the Mahdi to establish what it calls the universal divine just political order. Thus the Islamic Republic is not a mere ideological Muslim state. It is a sectarian state bent on cooperating with the West or any other power to promote its sectarian policy goals in the Sunnite majority Muslim states. This study therefore examines the role of the Shi'ite belief system and its core principles in shaping the Islamic Republic's diplomatic behaviour in the Muslim World. First, it discusses the historical context of the Islamic Republic's foreign policy by examining its foreign policy behaviour before and after the 1979 revolution. Second, it discusses the Shi'ite core doctrinal principles that have influenced the Islamic Republic's formulation of foreign policy goals and objectives. Finally, it examines the Islamic Republic's diplomatic behaviour in selected Sunnite majority Muslim states. The purpose is to show that the Islamic Republic pursues sectarian policy in the Muslim world in the name of Muslim unity, justice, liberation of oppressed people and nations and struggle against imperialism.

The Historical Context of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Foreign Policy

The Islamic Republic of Iran is the birth place of many ancient

religions such as Zoroastrianism, Mazdakism and Manichaeism. The relationship between the founders of these religions and their contemporary emperors were cordial. It is believed that Ardashir I (224–39 AD), the founder of the Sassanid Empire, which ruled the ancient Persia from 224–651 AD, to have advised his son to “Consider the ‘altar’ and the ‘throne’ as inseparable; they must always sustain one another.”¹ Notwithstanding this, recent studies of the foreign policy of contemporary Iran do not discuss this important link between religion and politics. These studies mainly focus on Iran’s history and its geostrategic importance in the great power rivalry in the region. One would barely find references to any significant link between religion and politics in Carr, Parvin, Zabih and Chobin, Amirsadeghi Candy, and Blake’s writings on Iran’s foreign policy between the 1960s and 1979.² In their view in this period Iran was an emerging pro-Western regional power, preoccupied with socio-economic development and modernization of its military establishment. They argue that Iran’s behaviour in this period was shaped by the principle of *realpolitik* and realist thinking. Iran’s diplomatic history, they argue, was closely associated with its geo-political location in the Middle East and the Persian/Arabian Gulf.

The 1979 Islamic revolution is considered as a watershed in the Islamic Republic’s foreign policy in that it revived the centuries old politics-religion connection. Religion therefore became a prominent force in the Islamic Republic’s foreign policy agenda after

¹R. K. Ramazani, “Iran’s Foreign Policy: Independence, Freedom and the Islamic Republic,” in *Iran’s Foreign Policy: From Khatami to Ahmadinejad*, ed. Anoushiravan Ehteshami & Mahjoob Zweiri, (London: Ithaca Press 2008), p. 3.

²C. D. Carr, “The United States-Iran Relationship 1948-1978”, in *The Security of Persian Gulf*, ed. Hussain Amir Sadeghi (New York: Routledge, first published in 1981, 2001); Talat Parvin, *Iran’s policy toward the Gulf* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Co., 2006); Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabih, *The Foreign Relations of Iran: A Developing State in a Zone of Great Power Conflict* (California: University of California Press, 1974); Hussain Amir Sadeghi *The Security of Persian Gulf* (London: Routledge, first published 1981, 2011); Steven L. Candy, “The Iranian Military: Political Symbolism versus Military Usefulness,” in *The Security of Persian Gulf*, ed. Hussain Amir Sadeghi, (New York: Routledge, 1981) & Kriseten Blake, *U.S-Soviet Confrontation in Iran, 1945-1962, A Case in the Annals of Cold War*, (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc, 2009).

the 1979 revolution. The Shi'ite religious establishment under the leadership of its spiritual guide, Ayatollah Rohullah Khomeini, dismantled the centuries old secular monarchical system of administration and founded one that integrated religion and politics under the tight grip of Shi'ite religious personalities. Ultimately, the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran became more undergirded by theological beliefs and principles, and less by pragmatic appreciation of the real world. This led to the gradual ostracization of the country in the international community to the extent that it was called the 'black ship' of the international community.³ The Islamic Republic's philanthropic and military assistance to religious militias and groups at different times over the last three and a half decades in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Indonesia and to a lesser extent Malaysia has created among the Muslim states particularly the predominantly Sunnite majority Muslim states the feeling that Iran's foreign policy is fundamentally driven by its Shi'ite doctrinal principles and belief system.

It is extremely important to note that the Islamic Republic is an integral part of the Muslim states structure. However, the Muslim states are not homogenous in terms of doctrinal denomination, a fact which is often overlooked by Western academics in their analysis of the Islamic Republic's external behaviour. The motives, intentions and nature of the Islamic Republic' foreign policy are significantly different from those of the Sunnite majority Muslim states. Unlike the Sunnite majority Muslim states, the Islamic Republic's foreign policy promotes only key principles of Shi'ite doctrinal principles and belief system against the religious ethos of the Sunnite doctrinal denomination in the Sunnite majority Muslim states. It is therefore erroneous to argue that the Islamic Republic's foreign policy promotes what Islam is all about.

Analytical Consideration: The Shi'ite Core Principles and Foreign Policy

Scholars concerned with foreign policy analysis discourse have

³ Alidad Mafinezam and Aria Mehrabi, *Iran and Its Place among Nations* (California: Green Wood Publishing, Inc., 2008), p. x.

argued that religion and religiosity have profound influence on the formulation of the foreign policy of nations. The influence of religion on the foreign policy in Goldstein's view can be measured simply by proving its existence.⁴ However, Warner and Walker in their analysis of the influence of religion on foreign policy formulation argue that religion influences foreign policy making in a complex way. A modified and manageable form of Warner-Walker model is composed of three elements: (1) religious doctrine or core principles; (2) pathways and (3) foreign policy outcome.

'Religious doctrine or core principles' refer to profound, fundamental and indisputable values shared and believed by members of a community. Religious doctrine is rooted in a 'belief system' defined as an integrated set of divinely communicated images held by an individual about a particular universe.⁵ Religious doctrine therefore is "the explication and officially acceptable version of a religious teaching"⁶ and "seeks to provide religion with intellectual systems for guidance in the processes of instruction, discipline, propaganda, and controversy".⁷ Men of knowledge or experts in religious text develop doctrine so that it can serve as code of conduct for socio-political activity and behaviour. Religious doctrine thereof is human inspired by and attributed to the divine.

Religious doctrine in Warner-Walker's view needs some 'pathways' for its realization and expressing itself. A pathway is a medium through which data or the real meaning of a doctrine is communicated to its followers and the intended audience. Warner-Walker argue that the pathways can be formal and informal institutions, individuals, groups and even states through which the real intention and meanings of the core principles can be transmitted to the outside world. The real intentions of the religious doctrine communicated by the holder/propagator of the doctrine through the above pathways to the external world or as a response to the

⁴Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 11.

⁵Laura Neak, *The New Foreign Policy: U.S. and Comparative Foreign Policy in the 21st Century*, (Lanham: Rowman & Litterfield Publishers Inc., 2003), p. 58.

⁶*The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th edition, "Doctrine".

⁷Ibid.

behaviour of other sovereign states are often referred to as foreign policy of the doctrine holder/propagator. In the Warner-Walker analysis, the actions of the doctrine holder/propagator and the formal and informal institutions used by the doctrine holder/propagator are interconnected and constitutive elements of the pathways through which religious doctrine can find its expression in the actions and behaviour of other states.

For Warner and Walker, foreign policy is formal policies and actions of a state intended to affect and direct the military, economic, humanitarian, social, and cultural activities and actions of other state and non-state actors in such a way that it can produce the desired outcome known as foreign policy outcome.⁸ The desired outcome or foreign policy outcome is doctrinal messages, values, norms, and principles originating from the religious doctrine which holder/propagator transmits through appropriate formal and informal institutions and course of actions (pathways) to affect and direct the behaviour of the target state or non-state actors.⁹ Hence, these doctrinal messages, values, norms and principles guide the doctrine holder's foreign policy behaviour with others. The military assistance, political assistance, economic or cultural support by the doctrine holder/propagator will reflect his doctrinal preferences. The doctrine holder/propagator will only offer assistance to those states and groups who conform to the principles of his doctrine or the doctrine holder/propagator pragmatically believes that such an offer of an assistance will help promote directly or indirectly his doctrinal principles. Warner-Walker argues that religious doctrine when the doctrine holder/propagator's actions are viewed in relations with his doctrinal preferences often finds its expression through the military, economic, cultural policies of the doctrine holder/propagator in its relations with other states. Thus, Warner and Walker elucidate that religion can be a "necessary cause, a sufficient cause or play yet a more complicated role in a set of causal relations."¹⁰

⁸Carolyn M. Warner and Stephen G. Walker, "Thinking about the Role of Religion in Foreign Policy: A Framework for Analysis," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 7 (2011): p. 114.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 117.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 116.

The stated and practical objective of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran since the 1978 has been the promotion of Shi'ite doctrinal principles in the Sunnite majority Muslim World. While the pathways of Shi'ite doctrinal values and Iran's foreign policy outcomes are discussed in the following sections, the remainder of this section focuses on the Shi'ite doctrinal values of the Islamic Republic foreign policy in promoting itself in the Sunnite majority Muslim World. Article 12 of the Islamic Republic's Constitution asserts that the state functionaries and policies must be in tandem with the "eternally immutable" Shi'ite doctrinal principles.¹¹ The core Shi'ite doctrinal principles of the Islamic Republic's foreign policy are: (1) the notion of 'succession' (*imamate*), (2) the notion of 'waiting' (*intizār*), (3) the notion of 'political representation' (*vilāyat*), (4) the 'rule of jurist-consult' (*vilāyat-e-faqīh*), and (5) the notion of 'dissimulation' (*taqīyah*).

In Shi'ite political thought, the word *imamate* is a 'position of a divinely-appointed leader' and a pillar of faith. Its holder, the Imam, is an infallible person from the descendants of Prophet Muhammad from the line of his daughter Fatimah, the wife of Ali.¹² *Imamate* is not a public office. The imam appoints his successor by religious ordinance. This view is based on the argument that Prophet Muhammad appointed Ali to succeed him as leader of the Muslim community. Therefore, according to Shi'ite belief, Ali's descendants-Hassan ibn Ali (625-670 CE), Hussain ibn Ali (626-680 CE), Ali ibn Hussain (657-713 CE), Muhammad ibn Ali (677-732 CE), Jafar ibn Muhammad (702-765 CE), Musa ibn Jafar (744-799 CE), Ali ibn Musa (765-817 CE), Muhammad ibn Ali (810-835 CE), Ali ibn Muhammad, (827-868 CE) Hassan ibn Ali (846-874 CE), Muhammad ibn Hassan al Mahdi (Born in 868 CE)-had been divinely appointed and are religiously sanctioned to claim political leadership.¹³ The twelfth imam, Muhammad ibn

¹¹*Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran* trans. Azarshab, (Tehran: Bureau of Planning for Foreign Relations, Ministry of Islamic Propagation, 1986), p. 20.

¹²Mohsen Muhajernia, "Hayāt e siyāsi shī'a dar aṣr e ghaybat", [Shi'ite Political Life in the Era of Absence] *Shī'a Shināsi*, Year 1, No.2, (2003): p. 52.

¹³Abul Ala Maudoodi, "Political Thought in Early Islam," in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. MM Sharif, (Delhi, Low Price Publication, 2004), vol.1, pp. 666-667.

Hassan al Mahdi, 'Imam of the age' (*valī-al-asr* in Arabic / *imam-e-zamān* in Persian) went into occultation. He is purportedly alive and will reappear before Resurrection Day to establish a universal divine just political order.¹⁴ The notion of 'Imam of the age' suggests that he was the effective ruler of the Muslim community before his disappearance, that he is the effective ruler of the Muslim community in his occultation, and that he will be the effective ruler of the Muslim community after his reappearance. He openly or indirectly, through his representative, rules the Muslim community till the day of resurrection. The Shi'ites believe that the earth can never be without an Imam, though he might be invisible in the form of Mahdi.¹⁵ However, the physical absence or invisible presence of Imam Mahdi led to the development of the concept of (*intizār*) in Shi'ite thought.

Waiting is an aspect of belief in Shi'ism, that Imam Mahdi is alive, and the Shi'ites should be engaged in preparing the ground for his return. Waiting or *intizar* is the highest form of worship,¹⁶ and the waiting person is regarded as an Islamic warrior (*mujāhid*).¹⁷ Therefore, a real waiting person feels the responsibility of allegiance to Mahdi upon his shoulder, and believes that progress, solution to all problems, establishment of global justice, fulfillment of the God's instructions, and the protection of all oppressed people are only possible under Mahdi's leadership.¹⁸ According to Muhajernia, the presence of a revolutionary Shi'ite follower who mindfully employs different tactics in order to prepare the ground for the reappearance of Mahdi is a necessary condition.¹⁹

While the Shi'ite scholars have unanimously maintained that the Shi'ite should wait for the Mahdi, they are divided on how to

¹⁴Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam will Shape the Future*, (New York & London: W. W. Northon and Company Inc., 2006), p. 67.

¹⁵ Muhammad Bagher Majlisi, *Bihārul Anwār* (Tehran: Islāmīyyah Publication, vol. 23, 2006), p. 23.

¹⁶Abu Muhammad al-Hassan bin Ali bin al-Hussain bin Shoba al-Horrani, *Tuhaful Uqūl an āl-Arrasūl*, ed. Hussain Alami (Beirut: Mu'assissah al-Alami lil-Matbu'āt, 1997), p. 33.

¹⁷Muhammad Bagher Majlisi, *Beharul Anwaar...*, vol. 23, p. 141.

¹⁸Ali Meshkini, *Al-Misbāhul Al-Munir*, (Qom: al-Hādi Publication, 1991), p. 465.

¹⁹Mohsen Muhajernia, "Hayāt Siyāsī Shi'ca dar", pp. 52-54.

manage their socio-political affairs during his absence. The Shi'ites have developed two approaches to waiting for reappearance of Imam Mahdi. The advocates of the first approach believe that chaotic conditions on earth will prepare the ground for reappearance of Imam Mahdi. The supporters of the second approach suggest active participation in the socio-political activities, and at times encourage revolutionary ideas.²⁰ The latter introduced the principle of *vilāyat* and its corollary of *vilāyat-e-faqīh* as the most eligible institutions to manage the affairs of the Muslim community while waiting for the reappearance of Imam Mahdi.

Vilāyat is a state of affairs that serves as a link between Imam Mahdi and the believers. It, in Koleni's and Ayatollah Meshkini's view, is an article of faith and the prayers of those confessing Islam will not be accepted without holding a firm belief in *vilāyat*.²¹ The holder of the *vilāyat* is Imam Mahdi's deputy. He is the legitimate leader and representative of Mahdi and mediates between Imam Mahdi and the believers.²² The belief in *vilāyat* led to the emergence of the Fundamentalist School²³ in Shi'ite political thought which promoted the view that *vilāyat* is exercised by a group of religious authorities known as the Source of Imitation (*marā'ji' e taqlīd*) with defined hierarchical structure carrying the title of Deputy of Mahdi (*nāyib-e imām-e zamān*). They claimed that the common Shi'ites are obliged to follow one 'source of imitation' (*marja'*).²⁴ However, despite all these theoretical and institutional developments, the Shi'ite religious authorities remained prudent in claiming any given political responsibility. Even after the 1979 revolution, the focus was

²⁰Ibid. p. 56.

²¹Abu Jafar Muhammad Bin Yaquob Al-Koleni Al-Rāzi, *Al-Kāfī*, ed. Ali Akbar Ghaffari (Tehran: Dārul Kutub al-Islāmīyyah, vol. 2, 2010), p.18; & Naser Makarem Shirazi, *Payām e Quran*, [The message of Quran], (Qom: Madrassah al-Imam Ali Bin Abī Tālib, 1996, 3rd edition) vol.9, p. 117.

²² Abbas Ali Amid Zanjani, *Fiqh e Siyāsī* [Political Jurisprudence], (Tehran: Amir Kabir Publication, 1998), vol.2, 250 & 254. See also, Muhammad Bagher Majlisi, *Behārul Anwār*..., vol. 23, p. 23.

²³There are two schools in Shi'ism: *Usūliyyūn* (fundamentalist) and *Akhbārīyyūn* (traditionalist). While the former believes in interpretation and reasoning, the latter reject all these tools, thus strongly believe on narrations.

²⁴Momen, Moojan, "Usuli, Akhbari, Shaykhi, Babi: The Tribulations of a Qazvin Family," *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 3, (2003): p. 317.

on the charismatic personality of Khomeini rather than a divinely defined position, though initiatives were taken to pave the ground for such a divinely-appointed position.

After the demise of Khomeini in 1989, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was elected by the Assembly of Experts as the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic. However, Ali Khamenei lacked that charismatic personality which Khomeini enjoyed.²⁵ Therefore, the Shi'ite religious authorities concentrated their efforts to promote the principle of *vilāyat-e-faqīh*. According to the principle of *vilāyat-e-faqīh*, during the occultation of Mahdi, the religious and political affairs of the society should be managed by the most learned jurist of the time.²⁶

Therefore, the idea of *vilāyat-e-faqīh*, in essence, was introduced to resolve the problem of political legitimacy, a key issue in Shi'ite political thought. According to Shi'ism, authority belongs to the Imam and his true representative who by definition is a religious authority, and non-Imam rulers are no more than pretenders.²⁷ The Shi'ite theologians believe that *vilāyat-e-faqīh* can be practiced in a place or territory that is under active control of the hidden Imam. This territory is known in Shi'ite terminology as the 'territory under the control of Imam Mahdi' (*mamlakat-e imam-e zamān*). The Iranian establishment believes that the Islamic Republic is under the active control of Imam Mahdi, and therefore, it is where the rule of *vilāyat-e-faqīh* can be established. The territory under the active control of Imam Mahdi serves as a springboard for the spread of Shi'ite doctrinal values and the establishment of the rule of Imam Mahdi around the world. Therefore, the Islamic Republic of Iran has the responsibility of spreading Shi'ite ideas as an essential step for the reappearance of Imam Mahdi.

The policies of promoting Shi'ite ideas and doctrinal principles as essential conditions for the reappearance of Mahdi may not be acceptable to the followers of mainstream Sunnite Islam. The resistance to the Islamic Republic's messianic policies could be even

²⁵Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual Revolution* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 79-80.

²⁶Articles 5, 105, and 107 of *the Constitution of the Islamic Republic...*, p. 18.

²⁷Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival...*, p. 72.

stiffer in the Sunnite majority states. In such a situation, the state can exercise what is known in Shi'ite practice as 'dissimulation' (*taqīyyah*). The *taqīyyah* principle urges the Shi'ite believers to wait for the right time to disclose their real intention. Practicing *taqīyyah* is obligatory for all Shi'ites, and its non-practice is akin to abandoning of the five-time obligatory daily prayers.²⁸ Mutahari argues that *taqīyyah* means hiding one's real intentions and faith. It is a "rational tactic in the battle for the sake of that which is better and more security of the forces".²⁹ Ayatollah Harandi argues that "those who don't practice *taqīyyah*"³⁰ are not believers at all. The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei, equates *taqīyyah* with 'opposite installation of horseshoes' (*na'l wārūnih*) in order to mislead the army of the enemy.³¹ In Ayatollah Makerm's view *taqīyyah* is one of the most important revolutionary instrument of the attainment of the objectives of the Islamic revolution. He argues that *taqīyyah* is like an iron box which keeps the secrets of the revolutionary plans safe. For him *taqīyyah* requires situational changes of position.³² There are four types of *taqīyyah*: (1) Expedient Lie (*drūgh-e maṣlahatī*) that is making a statement opposed to reality; (2) Neutral Statement (*turiyah*) that is making a statement with dual meaning in a such way that attracts the audience to its favourable meaning while the intention is otherwise; (3) Silence (*sukūt*) that is not to disclose a known reality; and (4) Conformity (*ham-nawā'ee*) that is conforming or getting along with the enemy even if it requires insulting or ridiculing one's own sacred symbols and beliefs. This form of *taqīyyah* also includes practical engagement in prohibited acts.³³ However, *taqīyyah*, in retrospect, has been

²⁸ Abu Jafar Muhammad Bin Ali bin al-Hussain Bin Baboyah al-Qomi, *Itiqādāt*, ed. Pārsā Center Research Group (Qom: Dār al-Mujtabā, First Edition, 2008), pp. 110-113.

²⁹ Ali Mutahari, *Sayrī dar Zindagī a'Immiye at'hār* [A Journey to the Life of the Holy Imams] (Tehran: Sadra Publication, 1989), p. 185.

³⁰ Muhyeddin Fazel Harandi, "Taḳīyih Siyāsī" [Political *taqīyyah*], *Ulūm e Siyāsī*, Year. 7, No. 25 (2004): p. 102.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Makarem Shirazi, *Taqīyih, siparī barāy-e mubārizeh-e amīghtar* [Taḳīyyah: A Tool for Deep Struggle] (Qom: Matbu'at e Hadaf, n.d), pp. 50-51.

³³ Muhammad Hussain Pojhoohandeh, "Taḳīyyah sipar-e muhafiz-e jaryān-e

perceived by Shi'ites not as a technique for simple survival, rather as an effective strategy. It has helped the Shi'ites to penetrate into hostile systems and wait for the right time to advance Shi'ite doctrinal ideals and mission. For instance, Ayatollah Harandi has argued that Imam Jafar, the sixth Shi'ite Imam, had designated some people to penetrate into political systems through *taqīyyah* in order to learn the art of government.³⁴ It is not misplaced to argue that *taqīyyah* has made Shi'ism a pragmatic religion providing it with a sacred tool to justify any means for the achievement of its prime goal. For instance, Khomeini believed that his Islamic government could defer any other Islamic laws on the ground of *maslahat* (expediency). For Khomeini, the Islamic government was superior to Islamic rituals such as praying, fasting, paying, zakat, etc. Therefore, the state could suspend all such rituals when it deemed fit.³⁵

Iran's Foreign Policy Goals and Objectives

The Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy is geared towards promoting Shi'ite doctrinal ideals on a global scale. Yet, the ideological undertone of its foreign policy is even greater in its Muslim World policy. The Islamic Republic's political elites perceive Tehran's intentions and interests in the Sunnite majority Muslim World and globally as some sort of manifest destiny of an apocalyptic deluge that the rise of Mahdi's global *imamate* requires in the creation of conditions essential for his reappearance.³⁶ Therefore, it is incumbent upon the Islamic Republic to rise to the occasion and prepare the stage for this event. Guided by this ideological and messianic tendency, the Islamic Republic's constitution reflects the understanding that its foreign policy is bent on the grand design of "a new and perfect world, the beginning of an

tashayyō' ithnā ashārī [Taqīyyah: the Protecting Shield of Twelver Shi'ite Movement], *Andāshih*, Year 16, No. 85, (2010): pp. 146-148.

³⁴Muhyeddin Fazel Harandi, "Taqiyah siyāsī", p. 103.

³⁵Rouhollah Khomeini, *Sahifih Imam*, (Tehran: Foundation for Collection and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Thoughts and Ideas, 1999), vol. 20, p. 170.

³⁶Shmuel Bar. "Iranian Terrorist Policy and Export of Revolution" *Herzliya working paper: February 2009*, <http://www.herzliyaconference.org/_Uploads/2903Iranian.pdf> (accessed 5 January 2013).

age when all would be different”.³⁷

This new and perfect world is the one which will be under the political tutelage of *vilāyat-e-faqīh* until the reappearance of Mahdi, in which the Shi'ite doctrinal ideals will be dominant and in which Shi'ism is considered as the standard Islamic way of life or pure Islam of Muhammad (*Islām-e nāb-e Muhammadī*). The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic will deputize the Imam Mahdi to be the leader of the entire Muslim World (*'valīyy-e amr-e muslimīn e jahān*) until the rise of Mahdi's universal *imamate*.³⁸ All Muslim communities will ultimately confess the legitimacy of the Shi'ite doctrinal ideals and be ruled by the Imam or his deputy. This is referred to in the Islamic Republic's constitution as a struggle for creation of a single Shi'ite-dominated Muslim nation. Ayatollah Khomeini in describing the ultimate goal of the 1979 revolution argued that it “is the starting point for the grand revolution in the Muslim world under the leadership of Imam Mahdi” and it is the mandate of the post-revolutionary Iranian state to do all that it can towards the realization of the universal *imamate*.³⁹ According to Article 11 of the Islamic Republic's constitution, the creation of a single Shi'ite-dominated Muslim community is the Islamic Republic's mandate and it has the “duty of formulating its general policies with a view to cultivating the friendship ... of all Muslim peoples, and ... to bring about the political, economic, and cultural unity of the Islamic world.”⁴⁰

However, the Islamic Republic's political elite used narratives quite different from what their real intentions were. Not disclosing ones real intention until the right time is a rational tactic having its origin in and permitted by the principle of *taqīyyah* in Shi'ite political thought. The purpose of using narratives other than the creation of a single Shi'ite-dominated Muslim community was to both pacify the anti-Shi'ite sentiments as well as to garner the

³⁷Ziba Moshaver, “Revolution, Theocratic Leadership and Iran's Foreign Policy: Implications for Iran–EU Relations,” *The Review of International Affairs*, Vol.3, No.2, (2003): p. 285.

³⁸Rainer Brunner & Warner Ende, *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times* (Leiden: n. p., 2001), p. 335.

³⁹Rouhollah Khomeini, *Sahīfih Imām*, Vol. 20, p. 118.

⁴⁰*Constitution of the Islamic Republic*, pp. 19-20.

support of at least some groups of the mainstream Sunnite communities in the Muslim World. The Islamic Republic's political elites since then have used narratives such as 'Islam' and 'Muslim' instead of 'Shi'ism' and 'Shi'ite', justice and global justice, that Iran's foreign policy aims were to create a single Muslim community (Article 11), the Islamic Republic's fraternal commitment to all Muslims and unsparing support to the freedom fighters of the world (Article 3), the defense of the rights of all Muslims (Article 152), and struggle for the liberation of all deprived and oppressed peoples in the world (Article 154). The narratives as such were used by the Islamic Republic's Founder, Spiritual Guide and Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, even before the 1979 revolution. The narratives of struggle against oppression and liberation of oppressed and deprived people which were subsequently enshrined in the Islamic Republic's post-1979 revolution constitution were more prominent in Khomeini's speeches and utterances before the revolution. It is rare to see that the Islamic Republic's foreign policy in the Sunnite majority Muslim World reflected in these narratives. Islamic Republic's policies in the Sunnite majority Muslim World rather reflect the ideological orientation of its foreign policy aimed at consolidating Tehran's influence.

A classic example of the narratives used by the political leaders of the Islamic Republic that are interpreted quite differently in Shi'ite literature from their common meanings is the narratives of justice and global justice. Justice is one of the five core principles of faith in Shi'ite theology. While common narratives of justice is used to mean removal of exploitation and oppression, in Hadi Gamshadzehifar's view, 'justice' in Shi'ism refers to punishing those (i.e. the mainstream Sunnites) who usurped power from Ali, and deprived him from succeeding Prophet Muhammad, and the establishment of global justice by Imam Mahdi after his reappearance includes redressing Ali's grievance and that of his followers by punishing his enemies (i.e. the mainstream Sunnites).⁴¹ Moreover, the word 'oppressed' in the Islamic Republic's constitution refers to the so-called ordeal of the members of the household of Prophet

⁴¹Hadi Gamshadzehifar, interview by authors, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 1 June 2013.

Muhammad in the hands of the first three caliphs, and the Umayyad rulers. It also refers to the persecution of Shi'ites in the hands of Sunnites.⁴² Mehdi Khalaji in this regards notes that for Shi'ites a fundamental motivation for the Mahdi to rise is to seek vengeance on the Umayyad for killing the third Imam. In Khalaji's view, the danger of the Sunnites to Islam is considered to be more acute than Christians and Jews, and therefore Shi'ite apocalyptic tradition lays little stress upon killing them or fighting over holy lands.⁴³

The Islamic Republic's vision for the Muslim World outlined above constituted the core of Iran's 1979 revolution. In other words, the 1979 Iranian revolution entailed the Shi'ite doctrinal ideals and the vision for the Sunnite majority Muslim World. While Khomeini perceived the ultimate goal of the revolution as that of bringing of the Muslim World under the leadership of Imam Mahdi,⁴⁴ Syed Abid Ali argued that the idea of 'exporting the revolution' and *imamate* are closely linked. In his view, "once we accept the fact that the imams are divinely ordained to rule the faithfuls, we must accept the fact that the state as envisaged by the Shi'ite theologian is a theocracy in the most rigid sense of the word.... All persons, sovereigns, rulers and pontiffs, wherever they may be, are usurpers if they do not drive their right to rule from the command of the Imam or his representatives."⁴⁵

Ayatollah Khomeini in the immediate days of the revolution in 1979 albeit intentionally using different narratives vowed to 'export' the ideals of the revolution. The revolution was grand and transnational and, therefore, needed to be propagated to all Muslim states and communities.⁴⁶ Its ideals must be reflected in the value system and belief of all Muslims. Khomeini argued that "we will

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Mehdi Khalaji, *Apocalyptic Politics: On the Rationality of Iranian Policy*, (USA: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy (Policy Focus 79), January 2008), pp. 35-36.

⁴⁴Rouhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh Imam*, p. 118.

⁴⁵Syed Abid Ali Abid, "Political Theory of the Shiites," in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. MM, Sharif, (Delhi: Low Price Publication, 2004), vol. 1, pp. 736-737.

⁴⁶Fariba Katebifar, "Interview by Muhammad Baqer Khur'ramshad", *Kherad'nāmih Hamshahrī*, No. 32, (2009): pp. 102-104.

export our revolution to the four corners of the world because our revolution is Islamic and the struggle will continue until the cry ... [that] there is no God but Allah is echoed in the four corners of the world.”⁴⁷ Khomeini spoke loud and clear that “we want the government of God (*hukūmat e Allāh*) in our country (i.e. the Islamic Republic of Iran) and God willing to dominate in other countries”.⁴⁸ Khomeini’s call for exporting revolution provided the basis for the Islamic Republic’s foreign policy.

According to Khomeini’s successor and the ruling Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khamenei, the goals of the Iranian foreign policy are those outlined by the founder of the Islamic Republic.⁴⁹ In 1980, Ayatollah Beheshti, one of the architects of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s constitution wrote that “Islam recognizes no borders.... The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, therefore, cannot be based on isolation. Our policy must tell us what to do beyond the borders and what relations to have with the people beyond these borders.”⁵⁰ On October 5, 1981, the then Iranian Prime Minister, Hussain Moosavi, in his speech in the United Nations Generally Assembly stated that “we are determined to build a new world on the basis of the sublime teaching of Islam for the salvation of mankind.”⁵¹ On February 4, 2012, Khamenei reminded his audience that “the slogans of the revolution today are those of the early days of the revolution” adding that “like the indicator finger, the slogans of the revolution are directed towards the goals of the

⁴⁷Cited in William Millward, “The Principles of Foreign Policy and the Vision of the World Order Expounded by Imam Khomeini and the Islamic Republic of Iran” in *The Iranian Revolution and the Islamic Republic: Proceedings of the Conference*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie & Eric Hoogland, (Washington: Middle East Institute, 1982), p. 196.

⁴⁸Farhang Rajaei, *Islamic Values and World View: Khumaini on Man, the State and International Politics* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983), p. 83.

⁴⁹Bizen Izadi, *Darāmadī bar siyāsāt-e khārijī jumhūri Islami Iran* [An Assessment of Iran’s Foreign Policy], (Qom. Bustan e Kitab, 1992), p. 111-112.

⁵⁰Cited in Maziar Behrooz, “Trends in the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran 1979-1988,” in *Neither East nor West: Iran, the Soviet Union and the United States*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie & Mark Gasiorowski, (Yale: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 14.

⁵¹Robin W. Carlsen, *The Imam and His Islamic Revolution*, (British Columbia: The Snow Man Press, 1980), p. 119.

revolution”⁵² contemplated by the founder of the Islamic Republic.

The Islamic Republic’s Diplomatic Behaviour in the Muslim World

Diplomatic behaviour of the Islamic Republic of Iran is undergirded by core Shi’ite doctrinal values. The external policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Muslim World, in general, and the Middle East, in particular, are aimed at creating what King Abdullah of Jordan in an interview with *Washington Post* in 2004 termed as the ‘Shi’ite crescent’ in the Middle East.⁵³ Control of Damascus, Baghdad, San’a and Lebanon will enable the Islamic Republic to influence the politics of the Sunnite majority Muslim states as well as weaken effective leadership of Sunnite states such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to challenge Tehran’s grand design and mission in the Sunnite majority Muslim World.⁵⁴ The advocates or ideologues of exporting the 1979 revolution have since then maintained that the Islamic Republic’s policies should destabilize the geopolitical balance of the Sunnite majority Muslim World and promote sectarianism. These two policies will enhance the Islamic Republic’s influence in the politics of the Muslim nations. Political crises and instability in the Muslim states will provide Tehran with the opportunity to provide political, military, economic and cultural assistance to Shi’ite minorities in these states so that they can

⁵²*Kayhan*, “Text of the Supreme Leader of the Muslims’ Historic Speech in Tehran Friday Prayer sermon”, 4 February 2012.

⁵³Robin Wright and Peter Baker, “Iraq, Jordan See Threat to Election From Iran” *Washington Post*, 8 December 2004.

<<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A43980-2004Dec7.html>> (accessed 23 February 2014).

⁵⁴The Islamic Republic considers the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as the leader of the anti-Mahdi movement in the Sunnite majority Muslim World. It believes that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia protects and supports Sunnite majority Muslim states against its sectarian policies. Ayatollah Jannati, head of the Islamic Republic powerful Guardian Council, in his 30 January 2015, Friday Sermon congratulated all Shi’ites of the world on the death of the late King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. This shows the Islamic Republic’s attitude and fear of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. For the text of Jannati’s speech see, Iran’s *Kayhān* daily, 31 January 2015.

integrate into the political system and become part of the deep state.

According to Shi'ite thoughts, all Sunnite-dominated political establishments or governments in the Muslim World are not legitimate deputies of Imam Mahdi. They are illegitimate rulers and should be removed from public office. Political instability in the Muslim states can provide the Islamic Republic with the opportunity to enhance its influence and support the Shi'ite minority population of the Muslim World. The Islamic Republic, however, believes that it should cooperate with the West or any state or power in the attainment of its objective of destabilizing the Sunnite majority Muslim states. The ideologues of the Islamic Republic justify its policy of collaboration with the West against the Sunnite majority Muslim World on the basis of the Shi'ite core principle of *taqiyyah*.

Exporting of the revolution ultimately entailed some degree of political change and instability. However, since the beginning of the new millennium, two main causes of political instability in Muslim states have enabled the Islamic Republic to increase its influence. The political elites in the Islamic Republic have found the 2011 home grown political uprisings in the Muslim World and the US invasion of Iraq (2003) and Afghanistan (2001) convenient tools to aggressively promote the ideals of the revolution: the Shi'ite core values. The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic was quick to claim that the Arab Spring was the continuation of the 1979 revolution. In Khamenei's view, the Arab uprising provided the Islamic Republic with the opportunity of intervening in the affairs of the Arab states and integrating the Shi'ite minorities into the political processes to become part of the deep state.⁵⁵ The Islamic Republic's policies in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and the Republic of Yemen are briefly discussed below to show its foreign policy orientation in the Sunnite majority Muslim states.

Officially, the Islamic Republic openly supported the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. In return, Tehran expected greater influence, which it got, in the decision making processes and politics of Afghanistan and Iraq. The minority Shi'ite population of

⁵⁵Woodward, Paul, "Muslim Brotherhood Rejects Khamenei's Attempt to Hijack the Revolution," 9 February 2011.

<<http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=27984>>. (accessed 30 January 2015).

Afghanistan for the first time in its modern history has become part of the deep state apparatus in Kabul. The Islamic Republic has been able to negotiate the Shi'ite constitutional rights in Afghanistan's post-Taliban (2004) constitution. Today, the Shi'ite population of Afghanistan is culturally, academically, economically and religiously better off and well-connected to academic seminaries and political, economic, cultural institutions in Tehran.

When the United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001 as part of its policy of war on terror, the Islamic Republic collaborated. The Islamic Republic collaborated with the US because, first, the American invasion removed a hardline Sunnite and perhaps an anti-Shi'ite government in the neighbouring state and, second, the American invasion provided the Islamic Republic with the opportunity to integrate the minority Shi'ite population of Afghanistan into the political fabric of the Afghan society. Indeed, integration of the minority Shi'ite population of Afghanistan was a policy the Islamic Republic was pursuing since the immediate days of the 1979 revolution after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the same year. Political analysts have argued that collaborating with Americans put the Islamic Republic in a strategic disadvantage, as its hostile and powerful enemy landed next to its borders. It appears that the Islamic Republic believed that the Sunnite fundamentalist regime of the Taliban in Afghanistan was a greater threat than the US and the US backed post-Taliban government of Afghanistan. In fact the Islamic Republic did not recognize the 1989 government-in-exile formed by the Pakistan-based Sunnite Afghan resistance groups. The Islamic Republic demanded 25% of the ministerial post for the Shi'ite population of Afghanistan. It is argued that the Shi'ite population based in Iran constituted approximately 12% of the anti-Soviet resistance.⁵⁶

The Shi'ite dominated post-Saddam Iraqi government as well

⁵⁶ Bruce Koepke, *Iran's Policy on Afghanistan the Evolution of Strategic Pragmatism*, (Stockholm: Stockholm international peace research Institute, 2013), p. 5. See also, Wahabuddin Raées, "America's Afghanistan Policy, 1980-2007," *American Foreign Policy & The Muslim World*, ed. Ishtiaq Hossain and Mohsen Moh'd Saleh, (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, 2009), pp. 363-364.

as all other hardline Shi'ite groups in Iraq had been closely working under the patronage of the Islamic Republic since 2003. While the Islamic Republic unequivocally supported the US installed Shi'ite governments of Iyad Allawi, Ibrahim al-Jaafari and Nouri al-Maliki, it also provoked the Shi'ite militant faction like that of the Shi'ite cleric, Muqtada al-Sadr, against the US and allied forces to inform the West that Tehran could not be ignored and its presence had to be taken seriously in the politics of Iraq and the region. The Islamic Republic's diplomatic, economic and military support to various Iraqi Shi'ite factions against Iraq's Sunnite population went unabated even after the withdrawal of the American forces. In 2014, Amnesty International reported the Islamic Republic's greater involvement in sectarian diplomacy in Iraq. Amnesty International reported mounting evidence of Tehran-backed Shi'ite militia engaged in extra judicial and mass killing and forced displacement of Sunnites in Iraq.⁵⁷ Anti-Sunnite groups such as the *Jaish al-Mukhtar* (the chosen army), founded in February 2014 by Wathiq al-Battat, are responsible for sectarian killings in Iraq. Al-Battat, the then Secretary General of Hizbullah in Iraq, was believed to be closely affiliated with the Shi'ite establishment in Iran.⁵⁸ Al-Battat's anti-Sunnite sentiment even unnerved the mainstream Shi'ite leaders of Iraq. Supporting anti-Shi'ite militant groups, such as *Jaish al-Mukhtar* make it difficult for Iran to ensure that it is sincerely working for Muslim Unity. In addition, the Islamic Republic Revolutionary Guard is actively operating on the ground in Iraq. However, the Iranian leaders have frequently described its Revolutionary Guard's role as advisory and one that assists the Iraqi army. However, the death toll of high rank Revolutionary Guard commanders indicates the Islamic Republic's

⁵⁷ Amnesty International, *Absolute Impunity; Militia Rule in Iraq, 2014*. <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE14/015/2014/en/17cbb7ef-7ca4-4b5a-963e-661f256fddb0/mde140152014en.pdf>> (accessed 20 February, 2015).

⁵⁸ See. *Ya-Litharat al-Hosseïn*, (Weekly publication of Ansar-e Hezbollah of Iran) "Mujāhid Wāthiq, Balāy e jān e munāfiq wa mustakbir; Shahādāt Mubārak" [Martyrs Wathiq; the Catastrophe over Hypocrites and the Arrogant; Congratulate your Martyrdom], 24 December 2014.

involvement in Iraq is beyond that of an advisory role.⁵⁹

The religious and political establishments of the Islamic Republic consider Iraq more than a simple Shi'ite neighbour where they have to protect the Islamic Republic's interests. For them, Iraq is a depository of Shi'ite holy places, perhaps not less than Makkah and Madinah in terms of religious significance. Therefore, the effective presence of the Islamic Republic in the affairs of Iraq in any form is a religious duty. Soon after the removal of Saddam Hussain in 2003, the Islamic Republic established the Headquarters of Reconstruction of the Holy Shrines and the Supporting of Iraq (HRHSSI). It undertook the reconstruction of the holy sites in Karbala, Kazemain, Najaf and Samara. The Islamic Republic, from 2003 to 2007, spent over 40 billion US dollars on the construction of Shi'ite Holy Shrines (a total of 90 projects) in Iraq, and around 5,000 Iranian professionals and technician were involved in the reconstruction.⁶⁰

The ideological undertone can also be observed in the Islamic Republic's Syria policy. It has openly supported the minority Alavide government of Bashar al Asad's regime against the Syrian opposition, despite Asad regime's massive violation of human rights and crime against humanity. The war in Syria has claimed over 300,000 lives with massive internally displaced refugees and Syrians seeking refuge in neighbouring Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and other nations. Yet, the Islamic Republic criticized the Sunnite-dominated Bahraini state over the crackdown of Bahraini Shi'ite protestors. The policy of the Bahraini state, however, is much softer than the Syrian one, and the number of casualties in Bahrain hardly reached 100. The Islamic Iranian Republic has stopped backing the Palestinian resistance faction-HAMAS- when the latter

⁵⁹Behnam Gholipour. "Deaths in Iraq Show Two Sides of Iran's Role in Sectarian Conflict", *The Guardian*, December 30, 2014, <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2014/dec/30/iran-militia-leaders-killed-iraq-battat-taqavi>> (accessed 14 February 2015).

⁶⁰*Kayhān*, "Mardum e Iran 98 % būdjih e sitād e bāz-sāzī e 'atabāt 'ālīyāt rā ta'mīn mīkunand" [People of Iran provide 98 % of funding for the reconstruction of the holy shrines], 24 April 2007). See also, *Iran* daily, Iran 300 mīlyārd tūmān barāy e bāz-sāzī e 'atabāt kharj mīkunad, [Iran Spends 250 million US dollars for the Reconstruction of Holy Sites], 13 February 2007.

did not support the Asad policy against the Syrian people. *The Telegraph* reported that Iran had stopped its monthly aid to Hamas which was estimated between £13 to 15 million since 2006.⁶¹ One should note that halting assistance to Hamas and Gaza happened while the main argument of Iranian Leaders for supporting the Asad regime has been that the Baathist regime of Syria is the main component of the so called 'resistance front' against the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Ahmed Yousef, adviser to Ismail Haniyeh, HAMAS's prime minister in Gaza, called the Islamic Republic's support for Asad "shocking" and accused it of acting out of "sectarian" motives. He said in *The Telegraph*, "We never expected that a country like Iran, which talked about oppressed people and dictatorial regimes, would stand behind a dictator like Asad who is killing his own people," He added "To us, it shakes the basis of the Islamic principles that Iran has recited all these years after the Islamic Revolution."⁶²

In addition to diplomatic support, the Islamic Republic is involved in fighting against the Syrian armed opposition. The Iranian leaders have not denied the presence of Iranian fighters in the Syrian crisis. A recent report by the *Wall Street Journal* reveals that the Islamic Republic's Revolutionary Guard is recruiting non-Iranian Shi'ites, particularly the Iran-based Afghan refugees in the name of protecting the Shi'ite sites and the shrines of Shi'ite Imams in Syria to fight in there.⁶³ The BBC documentary on Syria shows that the Iranian Revolutionary Guards' fighters in Syria consider themselves as 'Islamic warriors' (*mujahidin*) who are fighting against the infidel; the mainstream Sunnites.⁶⁴

A more recent example of the Islamic Republic's sectarian diplomacy can be observed in the Republic of Yemen. In February 2015, the Iranian-backed Shi'ite minority, Ansarullah (Helpers of

⁶¹Robert Tait, "Iran Cuts Hamas Funding over Syria", *The Telegraph*, 31 May 2013. <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/palestinianauthority/10091629/Iran-cuts-Hamas-funding-over-Syria.html>> (accessed 2 February 2015).

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Farnaz Fassihi, "Iran Pays Afghans to Fight for Asad." *The Wall Street Journal*, 22 May 2014. <<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304908304579564161508613846>> (accessed 23 June 2014).

⁶⁴Yalda Hakim, "Iran's Secret Army", *You Tube*. November 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZI_88ChjQtU> (accessed 23 December 2014).

Allah) popularly known as Houthi, population of Yemen, on apparent advice of the Islamic Republic of Iran, took control of the Yemeni capital San'a. The Houthis placed the Yemeni President under house arrest, suspended the Yemeni Constitution and proclaimed a constitutional declaration. They claimed to form a five-member Houthi controlled presidential council and a constitutional assembly. The Houthis, a considerable minority population of Yemen lack popular support. The only way to control and become part of the deep state in Yemen is through force and power supported and funded by the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the words of Muhammad Abdul Salam, the Houthi spokesperson, the Islamic Republic's support, as the leader of the axis of resistance against imperialism and America, was natural.⁶⁵

The founder of Ansarullah or the Houthi Movement, Abdul Malik Badruddin Houthi, lived in the Islamic Republic's City of Qom from 1994 to 2004 and studied in its Qom Seminary. He founded the Houthi Movement upon his return to Yemen.⁶⁶ The chief editor of Iran's *Kayhan* daily, an appointee of the Islamic Republic's Supreme Leader described the Houthi takeover of San'a as an enlightenment and a continuation of the 1979 revolution. The *Kayhan* daily reported the takeover under the titled of "San'a's Sky has been Lightened" with the portrait of the Houthi leader, Abdul Malik Houthi, appearing in Tehran's streets on the occasion of the 36th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution carrying the slogan the "Revolution continues".⁶⁷

In January 2013 the American and Yemeni forces intercepted a weapon shipment to Yemen which according to Yemeni and American officials was intended for Houthi rebels. In March 2013 the

⁶⁵*Kayhan*, Sukhanguy e junbish e ansarulah Yaman: Iran mihwar mughavemat islami alaih e istikbar jahani ra hedayat mikonad, [Iran is Leading the Axis of Resistance against Imperialism], 17 December 2014.

⁶⁶*Fars News Agency*, "Hūthīha chih kasānī hastand?" [Who are the Houthis?], 12 October 2014, <<http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13930720000162>> (accessed 14 February 2014).

⁶⁷*Kayhān*, "Asman e San'a nūr-bāran shud, [San'a's Sky has been Lighted], 8 February 2015. See also, *Khabar Fārsī*, "Janjāl taswīr e rahbar e hūthīhāy e yaman dar Tihran" [Uproar over the portrait of Houthi leaders in Tehran], 12 February 2015. <<http://khabarfarsi.com/ext/11951528>> (accessed 25 February 2015).

Yemeni coast guards seized an Iranian vessel and discovered sophisticated weapons, which were allegedly dispatched for Houthis.⁶⁸ In the meantime, the Yemeni President also demanded that the Islamic Republic of Iran not to intervene in Yemen's internal affairs.⁶⁹ On 15 December 2014, Reuters published an exclusive report and claimed that it had access to information which showed that the Islamic Republic was exploiting sectarian relations in Yemen in the same way the Islamic Republic used in Afghanistan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. A senior Iranian official revealed to Reuters that the Iranian revolutionary guards engaged in training Houthis in Yemen. It also provided military training to Houthis in its bases in Iran, Eretria and Djibouti. The reason for the Islamic Republic's funding and support of Houthis is that the Islamic Republic "wants a powerful Shi'ite presence in the region".⁷⁰

In fact, the Iranian leaders have already defined a role similar to Hizbullah in Lebanon for Houthis in Yemen. In October 2014, Ali Akbar Velayati, the former foreign minister of the Islamic Republic, and currently advisor to Iran's Supreme Leader on international affairs and the General Secretary of World Assembly of Islamic Revivalism, during his meeting with a group of Houthis in Tehran said: "the Islamic Republic of Iran will support the right and truthful struggle of the Ansarulla (Houthis) in Yemen and (the Islamic Republic of Iran) views it as a successful aspect of the movement for Islamic revivalism". Velayati also said that he would wish to see that one day Ansarullh is playing an important role in Yemen similar to Hizbullah

⁶⁸Robert F. Worth and C.J. Chivers, "Seized Chinese Weapons Raise Concerns on Iran", *New York Times*. 3 March 2013. <<http://mobile.nytimes.com/2013/03/03/world/middleeast/seized-arms-off-yemen-raise-alarm-over-iran.html>> (accessed 25 September 2014).

⁶⁹Mohammed Ghobari. "Yemen Frees two Suspected Hezbollah Members after Rebel Advance." Reuters, 25 September 2014, <<http://in.reuters.com/article/2014/09/25/yemen-iran-idINKCN0HK1HL20140925>> (accessed 27 November 2015).

⁷⁰Yara Bayoumy and Mohammed Ghobari, "Iranian Support Seen Crucial for Yemen's Houthis," Reuters, 15 December 2014, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/15/us-yemen-houthis-iran-insight-idUSKBNOJT17A20141215>> (accessed 10 January 2015).

in Lebanon.⁷¹ Notwithstanding the above, the Houthis's immediate act after the takeover was to secure the release of the personnel of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and Hizbullah of Lebanon who were being tried by the Yemeni state for smuggling arms to Houthis.⁷² They also signed economic cooperation agreement with the Islamic Republic and daily commercial flights between Tehran and San'a resumed soon thereafter.

Conclusion

The Islamic Republic's Muslim World policy in general and its policies in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen suggest that the Islamic Republic is an ideological state bent upon promoting its sectarian intentions. Its Muslim World policies are intended to enhance its influence in the Sunnite majority Muslim states and integrate the Shi'ite minority population of these states to become part of the deep state and political processes. However, the Islamic Republic uses the narratives of anti-imperialism, Muslim unity and global justice to promote its creation of the Shi'ite-dominated Muslim community which in the Islamic Republic's foreign policy doctrine of exporting the 1979 revolution is essential for the return of the Mahdi to establish a universal divine political order. Therefore, the Islamic Republic's policy will focus on suppressing any Sunnite extremist and moderate groups or states and cooperation with the West against their rise and influence. It is essential to note that in the Islamic Republic's foreign policy doctrine, the cooperation with the West or other states is temporary as the Mahdi's granted *imamate* (government) will be global. He will rule the whole world including the West with the Shi'ite dominated Muslim world as its center. Through the pragmatism rooted in the principle of *taqīyyah*, the Islamic Republic has often demonstrated in its external behaviour towards the Sunnite majority Muslim World and even the West,

⁷¹Iran, "Himāyat-e Iran az mubārizih Ansārallh dar Yaman" [Iran's Support to Ansarullah in Yemen], 19 October 2014.

⁷²Mohammed Ghobari, "Yemen Frees two Suspected Hezbollah Members after Rebel Advance", 25 September 2014, <<http://in.reuters.com/article/2014/09/25/yemen-iran-idINKCNOHK1HL20140925>> (accessed 25 February 2015).

especially in its negotiations of the nuclear programme,⁷³ that it is differently used in its modern Western-dominated diplomatic practices. *Taqiyyah*-oriented pragmatism does not permit compromise on Shi'ite core doctrinal values and the promotion of the belief in the grand *imamate* of the hidden Imam. Hence, pragmatism is a ritual only if it can promote belief in the rulership of the Imam Mahdi. There is a growing awareness within the Sunnite academic and intellectual circles that endeavours aimed at the Shi'ite-Sunnite doctrinal cross fertilization and reconciliation failed.⁷⁴ The Sunnite majority Muslim states need a leadership to counter the Islamic Republic's Shi'ite-oriented policies. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has the will and the ability to assume such a responsibility.

⁷³ Mohammed Elbaradei, *The Age of Deception*, (London: Bloomsburry Publishing Plc, 2012), pp. 117 & 133.

⁷⁴ Shaikh Yousuf Qardawi, the most influential and prominent Sunnite scholar and the Head of the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS), who has been an advocate of Shi'ite-Sunnite doctrinal cross-fertilization and unity in his Friday sermon in Qatar on 31 May 2013, argued that: "I used to be the one calling for reconciliation and doctrinal unity. They (the Sunnite scholars) asked (me) why I don't take up that call again. Well, I called for reconciliation, but I found it did not bring the sects closer. They (the Islamic Republic of Iran) benefited from it, and we failed to take advantage.... The Shi'ites deceived me.... I was less mature than the Sunnite scholars who were aware of the truth (behind the intentions of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Muslim world)". Cited in Richard Spencer, "Muslim Brotherhood cleric calls for Sunnite jihad in Syria" *The Telegraph*, 2 June 2013, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/10094590/Muslim-Brotherhood-cleric-calls-for-Sunni-jihad-in-Syria.html>> (accessed 10 January 2015).