

Internal and External Factors Determining Foreign Policy of Iran: Prospects and Perspectives

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Abstract: The present paper tried to analyse external and internal factors which effecting Iran's foreign policy. Iran is one of the most important and effective powers of the Middle East due to its geopolitical position, natural resources, power of influence, historical and cultural background, and ideological attitude after the 1979 Revolution. The determination of the mental, psychological, physical environment and conditions in which decision-makers make their foreign policy decisions is considered as one of the important facts in terms of foreign policy analysis. It is known that besides external factors, internal factors are also effective in determining foreign policy decisions. However, realist movements made a basic distinction between domestic and foreign policy and did not address the role of internal factors in influencing foreign policy. The realist movement argues that external factors, as well as internal factors, are also formed within the sovereign boundaries of states, but the main point of separation is that external factors focus on activities outside the sovereign borders of the state. They emphasize that states are accepted as the main actors in the international system and foreign policy is determined by states as a whole

Keywords: Foreign Policy, Geopolitical factors, Natural resources, Religion, Socio-cultural factors

INTRODUCTION

Iran is one of the most important and effective powers of the Middle East due to its geopolitical position, natural resources, power of influence, historical and cultural background, and ideological attitude after the 1979 Revolution. All these features have made Iran an important actor in the struggle to establish a political and military sphere of influence in wide geography outside its borders. This study will analyze the foreign policy reflexes of the country by examining the internal and external factors that determine the post-Cold War Iranian foreign policy. In this paper, in which first a short description of foreign policy will be made, then internal and external factors that determine the foreign policies of the countries will be emphasized. In the light of these conceptual definitions, finally, the factors that make up Iran's post-revolution foreign policy will be examined one by one in two separate categories, internal and external.

Definition of foreign policy and studies in this field have a significant place in international politics. It is seen that an important part of the studies conducted in this field concentrate on the assumption that states are not the only ones but the most important actor in international politics. In more concrete terms, it can be said that the studies aimed at explaining the concept of foreign policy and analyzing the foreign policy environment mainly reflect a state-centred perspective. However, in recent years, it is seen that some criticisms of this state-centred general tendency have been expressed seriously. One of the most obvious examples of criticism in this direction has written by James Rosenau. While Rosenau acknowledges that states are still the most important prominent actors in international politics, he argued that non-state actors should also be considered in international policy analysis in his work titled "A Pre -Theory Revisited: World Politics in an Era of Cascading Interdependence". Considering the period in which the work was written (1984), these determinations, which are extremely important, initiated the tradition of subjecting non-state actors to an evaluation in international and foreign policy analysis. [1]. Details of this study regarding internal and external factors affecting foreign policy are given in the table 1.

Table 1: Factors Affecting Foreign Policy by Kenneth Thompson and Roy Macridis

I. Kenneth Thompson and Roy Macridis	
Elements of Foreign Policy	The Process Creating Foreign Policy
1. Those with relatively consistent	1. Government Agencies
a) Geography	a) Executive
b) Natural Resources	b) Legislative

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> c) The seas d) Topographic Structure 2. Those with less consistency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Economic Capacity b) Military Capacity 3. Human Elements: quantitative and qualitative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Population b) Policymakers c) Leaders d) Ideology e) Information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Non-State Actors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Political Parties b) Interest Groups c) Communication Media d) Public Opinion
II. Holsti	
External / Structural Factors	Internal Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Structure of the International System b) Structure / Characteristics of the World Economy c) Purposes and Actions of Other Actors of the International System d) Global and Regional Issues International Law 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Socio-Economic b) Security Needs c) Geographical and Topographic Features d) National Qualifications e) Government Structure f) Public opinion g) Bureaucracy Ethnic Factors

Table 1 represents the factors affecting foreign policy by Kenneth Thompson and Roy Macridis and Mr. Holsti. Kenneth Thompson and Roy Macridis, one of the authors who study the foreign policy behaviour of states, gathered the important factors affecting foreign policy under two headings as "elements of foreign policy" and "foreign policy formation process". Arguing that the internal environment imposes constraints on foreign policy decision-makers as well as opportunities, Holsti emphasized the analytical importance of examining the factors affecting foreign policy in both aspects (internal and external) and listed the factors affecting foreign policy as indicated in table 1.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Number of studies on foreign policy in the international system increases and diversifies, it has been observed that in addition to external factors, internal factors are also effective in decision-making processes that affect the foreign policy decisions of states. Therefore, it has been determined that internal dynamics together with the international system also affect foreign policy and decision-making processes. The assumptions that countries affect their foreign policies and decision-making processes like the structure of the international system, the regional and global scale non-governmental organizations, the different bureaucratic institutions of countries, the sociological factors such as culture, political, nationalism and religion, the many psychological factors such as prejudice, belief, image, perception, the many internal dynamics such as economic, military and identity have been included in many studies. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran followed an ideology-oriented foreign policy against imperialism, and with the regional changes after the Iran-Iraq war, the Tehran administration turned its isolation policy into a multi-directional foreign policy. However, with the terrorist attacks of September 11, the changing power balances in the region triggered the ideology and identity-based foreign policy for Iran, and concepts such as national security, the "Shia Crescent", "geopolitical interests" and "regional power dynamics" have been placed at the centre of the foreign policy of the Islamic regime [22]. Iran is an important actor in the Middle East. "Factors such as the geopolitical structure of the country, the desire to secure the territorial integrity, negative historical experiences, the rivalry with other Empires in history, the interventions of Western countries in Iran's internal affairs, the heterogeneity of Iran's ethnic structure, the understanding of Shiah Islam and its economic structure, deeply affects Regime's foreign policymaking process" [4]. Stating that the most important determinants of Iran's behaviour model in foreign policy are ethnic identity and religious factors, Masoud Kazemzadeh claims that the country's heterogeneous population structure and Shiism play an important role in determining the relations with regional countries and in the use of Iran's political influence tools [23].

Despite the great changes in the dynamics of domestic politics since the Islamic Revolution, structural developments in neighbouring regions (especially in the Middle East) and changes in the global balance of power, Iran's foreign policy priorities seem quite consistent. Although many Iranian political leaders, from former presidents Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami to the current president Hassan Rouhani, have sought different approaches in foreign policy, the Islamic regime has failed to set a new vision. The main pillars of Iran's foreign policy are built on lines such as "Pan-Islamist", "Pan-Shiite", "Anti-Western", "anti-

Imperialist", "anti-Zionist" and "Resistance Front". These dynamics play an active role in foreign policy decision-making processes [24]. The "trauma of occupation" has an important place in the construction of Iran's foreign policy identity. After the Islamic Revolution, this "effect of trauma" has been reflected as a deep suspicion and distrust to the Western world especially towards the USA. The historical, ideological, political and institutional identity of the Islamic Republic of Iran is the basic characteristics that determine the internal and external dynamics of the foreign policymaking process [25].

METHOD OF STUDY

The present investigation mainly discussing factors effecting the foreign policy of Iran. The determination of the mental, psychological, physical environment and conditions in which decision-makers make their foreign policy decisions is considered as one of the important facts in terms of foreign policy analysis. It is known that besides external factors, internal factors are also effective in determining foreign policy decisions. Researchers have applied qualitative techniques to get inferences from the available data. Content analysis and documents analysis had been used and data were collected through secondary sources from the ministry of foreign affairs and annual reports of external affairs. In the present study, the different reports related to Iranian foreign policy published monthly by the Institute for Political and International Studies, which operates under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran, were used. The relevant institution has more than 50 million documents on Iranian foreign policy history in its archive. In addition, the Journal of Foreign Policy, operating under the Institute for Political and International Studies, publishes articles on Iranian foreign policy every three months. The study is also inspired by articles published by the Journal of Foreign Policy.

RESEULT AND DISCUSSION

Factors of Foreign Policy of Iran

In this article, while analyzing the factors affecting Iran's foreign policy, in the light of the classifications that affect all these foreign policy, the environment in which Iran's foreign policy is formed and the main factors affecting this foreign policy will be examined under two headings - Internal and External Factors - as indicated in table 2.

Table 2: The Determining Factors of Foreign Policy of Iran	
Internal Factors	External Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Geopolitical Structure b) Natural Resources c) Ethnic / Religious Differences d) State (Government) Structure e) State Ideology (Shiism) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) International and Regional Factor

Geopolitical Factors

This section focussed on the effects of geopolitics on Iranian foreign policy. Considering the relations between Iran's international foreign policy and its geography, it will be seen that the geopolitical structure of the country is one of the important factors in determining Iran's foreign policy. Increasing its regional effectiveness and expanding its spheres of influence are the most defining features of Iran's foreign policy. Due to its historical background and geostrategic importance, Iran sees itself as an actor with strong influence in many regions of the world, especially in the Middle East[2.1].

Iran which has land borders with Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan is located in Southwest Asia. Surrounded by the Caucasus, Caspian Sea, Siberia and Central Asia in the north, Tibet and Indian plateaus from the east, the Indian Ocean, Basra and the Oman Gulf in the south, and Anatolia and Mesopotamia in the west, Iran has a special importance with its natural and cultural borders. Due to its geographical location, Iran is at the crossroads of political interaction, strategic development and events in the region. In the last two centuries, Iran has turned into a competition area of different countries in geopolitical and geostrategic terms and has played a buffer zone role in the process. Although Iran tries to resist external pressures with its 1,648,195 km area and 83 million population, its physical structure, deep-rooted history, language, religious-sectarian differences, political codes, nationalist structure and strong central government structure and regional ambitions, It aims to carry out a foreign policy aiming at economic independence [2.2].

Aiming to export the revolution and protect its regimes from the outside world, the Iranian leadership faced the challenge of balancing their ideological (idealism) and geopolitical (pragmatism) approaches in post-revolution foreign policy. The Iranian leadership gradually focuses on the geopolitical factor in the execution of foreign policy. However, on the other hand, ideology, which is a factor among many other sources of Iran's power, is considered as a factor that serves to protect Iran's national security and interests[3]. The geopolitical factor seems to be the dominant element in Iran's polity of its relations with other regional states. Among the main reasons for this, the geographical location of the country, the existence of an old imperial tradition in Eurasian geopolitics, the ambitions of the Iranian leadership for regional superiority, the military threats of the US and Israel, and many emerging political insecurity can be cited[4].

Iran's geopolitical environment has changed significantly since the Islamic revolution. Since then, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the invasion of Iraq by the US-led coalition, and later the greater US military presence in Iraq have changed the basic strategic landscape of Iran, leading the state and regime to a much more security-oriented foreign policy. Iran, which has a potentially difficult role in expanding its maritime borders and providing its own defense with seven neighboring states by land, describes its foreign policy reflexes as "deterrent defence" in the words of former defense minister Admiral Ali Shamkhani [5]. In addition, Iran, while struggling with problems that threaten border security such as illegal immigration, drug trade and smuggling, has increased its "deterrent defence" tone in the mentioned struggle issues after the Iraq war[6.1].

With its geographical location, Iran has placed its goals in the center of foreign policy to protect the security of its borders and to ensure its internal integrity. The Iranian leadership assumes that, without secure borders, it may be constantly faced with attempts to manipulate internal dynamics, destabilization of the ruling regime, and subsequent intervention by foreign powers seeking to exploit security gaps that may arise. For this purpose, Iran first determines the physical and military areas of its own secure borders and tries to use its "deterrence defence" power in the regions covering these areas [6.2].

B. Ethnic / Religious Factor

Iran's modern political history is full of attempts to prevent ethnic and tribal allegiances and consolidate a single Iranian national identity. During the Pahlavi period, this was carried out under the modernization program, which extended the central government's administrative control to the periphery and encouraged the Persian language and culture to exclude Iran's minority groups. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the Iranian leadership tended to reject the heterogeneity in Iran by pursuing a policy towards the Persianization of Pahlavism, although emphasizing the religious identity with a different but similar tendency. The Iran-Iraq war that took place shortly after the revolution and the attitude of the international community on Iran's nuclear program in the following years led the Iranian leadership to develop a common Iranian identity based on nationalism. The success of this nationalist ideology in replacing the ethnic sense of belonging is a debatable point. In addition, the possibility of using this ethnic heterogeneity in terms of internal political balances in foreign interventions is seen as one of the sources of concern for the Iranian leadership[7.1].

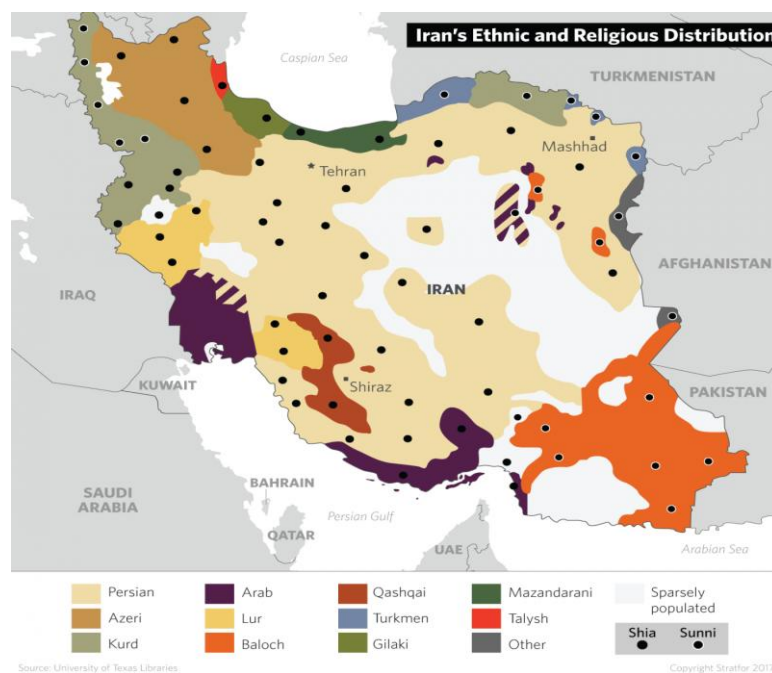


Fig.1: Ethnic and Religious Distribution of Iran

Source : <https://www.stratfor.com/>, Accessed, 10.02.2021

It is seen that Iran, which has a heterogeneous structure in terms of ethnicity, has extreme sensitivity in issues such as territorial integrity and political independence, and this sensitivity is reinforced by the Iranian leadership with a high tone of insecurity. The belief of foreign powers to attempt to break up the country by using the heterogeneous ethnic structure of Iran has led the Iranian state and its leadership to adopt a highly skeptical attitude in foreign policy. Iran's main ethnic minorities (Azeri-Turks, Arabs, Kurds, Armenians, including Turkomen and Baloch), also live in Iraq, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan borders. In addition, there is a significant Shiite population living in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. We see that these ethnic and religious differences play a decisive role in determining Iran's foreign policy relations with its neighbors[7.2].

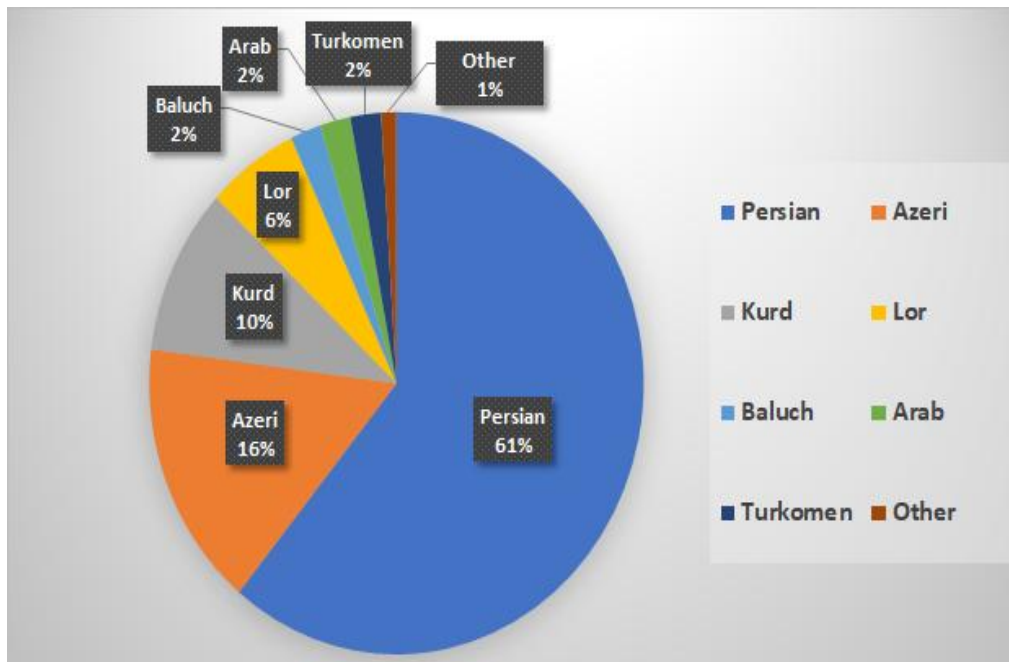


Fig.2: Distribution of Ethnic minorities in Iran

Source : <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2013/sep/03/iran-minorities-2-ethnic-diversity>, Accessed 11.02.2021

The post-revolution Iranian leadership added the Shia factor to its national strength. Religious issues seriously affect Iran's regional appearance and its relations with the countries of the region. The foreign policy understanding of the regime that emerged after the revolution, centring Shiism and the idea of exporting the revolution caused serious concerns about the territorial integrity of many Gulf countries, especially Arab countries [4.3].

C. State (Government) Structure Factor

There are different versions of the links between countries' foreign policy and their socio-political structure. The diversity of these socio-political structures of the states brings with it the emergence of differences in the behaviors applied in foreign policy processes. In this context, the theocratic regime, which was established with the important changes in Iran's internal structure after the Islamic Revolution, had difficulty in integrating into the international system with its socio-political structure. This situation brought the Iranian leadership to develop different foreign policy reflexes[8.1].

The main difference that distinguishes the foreign policy behavior of the newly established theocratic regime from other Western-type democratic countries and even autocratic regimes is that the executive body alone does not have a determining function in decision-making processes. In the process of foreign policymaking, in which Iranian religious leadership is a dominant actor, the defence and intelligence system of the country, along with the activities of the foreign ministry, and the Revolutionary Guards Army are the leading institutions that play an active role in the conduct of relations between countries. Compared to the pre-revolutionary period, these security units, which are among the institutions that transfer the most resources, make Iran's "hard power" felt in different geographies[8.2].

Although the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is seen as the main actor in determining and implementing foreign policy, many other institutions play a key role in the decision-making process. At the top of the system in the Iranian regime, according to the constitution, the institution that has the power to manage and determine all policies, whether in domestic or foreign affairs, is the regime leadership or Wilayat al-Faqih. Leadership

intervenes in foreign policy directly and indirectly. Direct intervention is made through public speeches and direct verbal and written commands to the subordinates. The supreme leader exercises most of her authority in foreign policy matters indirectly through the numerous institutions under his control. Wilayat al-Faqih authority is the most important actor in the foreign policymaking process which possessing authorities such as the appointment of mullahs in every region of the country to perform Friday prayers, the appointment of representatives to the Supreme National Security Council and the Army of the Revolutionary Guards, the presence of Religious Leaders' offices in foreign countries, especially in Western countries, the organization of the spread of the ideological, cultural and intellectual values of the Islamic Revolution in the outside World [9]. As can be seen, the existence of such a detailed system has brought the marginalization of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which should be the main actor in the process of determining foreign policy. The institutional complexity outlined above is partly a product of ideological confusion and the lack of a disciplined political party system. After the revolution, the Iranian regime was able to establish different mechanisms in order to ensure tight control in the country's administration and to ensure coordination between institutions. This systematic confusion in the state structuring has contributed to the surplus training of foreign policy experts in different institutions of Iran. Although this diversity of experts often provides an advantage for Iran, it can sometimes occasionally cause conflicts between institutions. For example, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which carries out the nuclear negotiations of Iran, strives to normalize relations with Western countries, the military and political presence of the Revolutionary Guards Army in the Middle East countries are met with concern by Western countries and this situation occasionally causes "parallel" foreign policy institutions within the state [10].

D. State Ideology (Shiism)

In the 12th article of the Iranian constitution, it is stated that the official religion of the Islamic Republic of Iran is Islam and the official sect is Shia [11]. The fact that the official sect of the state has a constitutional status is an important evidence in terms of showing the importance of Shiism in the domestic and foreign policy of the state. Although Iranian state administrators try to use a more universal language in foreign policy by avoiding the official sect, when we look at the regional foreign policy practices implemented after the revolution, we encounter the reality of "Shiite real politics". We see the Iranian-style practice of the Shiites, who constitute about one tenth of the Muslims living in the world, in Bahrain, Iraq and Azerbaijan, where the Shiites constitute the majority of the influence. Apart from that, there are Shiite populations in countries such as Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Jordan, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Syria, Kuwait, India and Oman. The Shiite population is important especially because of its presence in the Basra Gulf countries and it is one of the most important foreign policy arguments that determine Iran's relations with these countries. The fact that the Shiites, especially in Saudi Arabia and in the Basra Gulf countries, are generally settled in the regions where oil and natural gas reserves are located, makes these geographies geo-strategically important not only for Iran and the Middle East, but also for other global and regional actors [12.1].

The fact that the Iranian revolution took place under the leadership of the "Shiite ulama" brought about the importance of the sect in foreign policy as well as in domestic policy. The possibility of Iran, which is the largest country in the Gulf in terms of population, military and economic capacity, to act against the regimes in these countries by affecting the Shiites in neighboring countries, has been seen as an important threat for the countries of the region since the revolution. It is seen that the Shiite-oriented foreign policy caused a significant change of attitude in all the Shia-populated countries of the Gulf, especially in post-revolution Saudi Arabia [12.2].

When we look at the countries under the influence of Iran's "Shia real politics", it is seen that countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Lebanon and Azerbaijan have an important place in Iranian foreign policy. Shiism is an important and sometimes the main determining factor in the execution of Iran's relations with all these countries [6.3]. The Shiites, who make up 10-15% of the population of Saudi Arabia, are behind in terms of economic prosperity compared to other parts of the society, although they live in the most important oil-rich regions of the country. The Saudi-Iranian rivalry after the revolution continues until today and the sectarian factor is the main factor in bilateral relations, and regional and global factors are determinant. In another Gulf country, Bahrain, although the majority of the population is Shia, the government's gathering in the hands of the Sunni population creates a potential for tension in the country. Iran is attempting to exploit this tension potential in its favor [6.4].

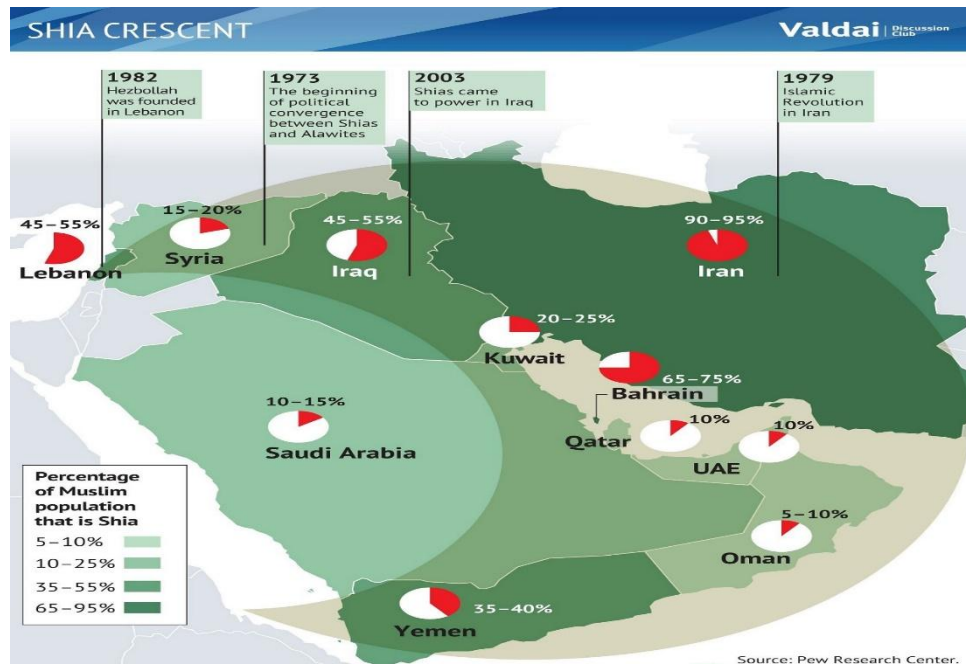


Fig.3: Distribution of Shia Population in Middle East Countries

Source : https://valdaiclub.com/multimedia/infographics/shia-crescent/?sphrase_id=1288314, Accessed, 18.03.2021

Although there are Shiite populations in the Gulf countries such as Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, the relations with Iran continue in a more controlled and normal course, since the Shiites do not have any serious problems in terms of both material welfare and political representation. In addition, Iran's economic relations with these countries are seen as another reason for normalization [12.3].

As a result, when we evaluate the importance and influence of Shia in Iran's foreign policy, it is possible to say that Iran supports the Shiites, who are under the influence of "Shiite real politics", if appropriate conditions occur, but this is due to geostrategic priorities rather than sectarian factors. On the other hand, the fact that the Shiites living in the Basra Gulf countries are close to Iran and being at the center of potential areas of tension encourage the Iranian regime to form different political combinations in this region. However, the fact that the possible instabilities that may arise due to the rich oil and natural gas reserves of these regions will put Iran into trouble at the global level and the regime will be negatively affected by this situation is known by the Iranian rulers. Last but not least, it is possible to evaluate Shiism as a foreign policy instrument used for geopolitical purposes in countries within its population area against regional and global policies that Iran regards as a threat to its existence. Ultimately, Iran's military, political, economic and cultural support for the Shiite elements, which it feels close to its theocratic regime, can be evaluated as a foreign policy reflex aimed at protecting its regional influence and borders rather than pursuing Pan-Shi'ism [9.2].

E. Natural Resources Factor

Access to energy resources has always been an indispensable part of a state's geopolitical interests. In the context of global energy geopolitics, Iran's vast energy potential since the early 1900s has made it one of the focal points of regional and global geopolitics. The rich oil deposits of Iran have attracted the attention of imperialist states such as England and Russia since the end of the 19th century and caused the division of Iran into the sphere of influence between these two countries. The two countries' struggle for influence on Iran turned into a de facto occupation with the beginning of the Second World War and resulted in the invasion of Iran from the south by Britain and the Soviet Union from the north in 1941. Even though both countries left Iran after the war, Britain was able to maintain its influence in the country through the Anglo-Iran Oil Company. With the election of Mohammed Mossadegh as Prime Minister in 1951, relations with Britain deteriorated and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company was seized by Mossadegh government and Iran's oil reserves were nationalized. Mohammad Mossadegh was overthrown in 1953 by a joint US-UK military coup, and a US-backed absolute monarchy began in Iran under the rule of Mohammad Reza Shah. With the Islamic revolution in 1979, the relations between Iran and the USA deteriorated and the process of isolation of Iran from the international community started. Despite US efforts to isolate Iran and cut its links with the international community, Iran has not been fully isolated as the US planned. On the contrary, Iran has strengthened its position as one of the largest oil exporters, thanks to its commercial partnerships with China, India and other countries [13].

There are a number of factors that make Iran an important actor in terms of global energy policies. The first of these is that Iran is one of the countries with the largest oil and natural gas reserves in the world. The second factor is that Iran has the potential to carry both a threat and an opportunity for the Eurasian energy market, which is its geography, and the world energy market, due to its geopolitical position. Iran is a country located on the coast of the Basra Gulf, geographically close to the Strait of Hormuz, through which 30% of the oil transportation transported by sea passes, and has a coast to the Caspian Sea. The potential of Iran to create instability in these important centres of the world oil market can be considered as a threat to other countries. On the other hand, the possibility of forming an alliance with Turkey, European Union countries, China, India and the state energy axis located in the East like Pakistan, is seen as an opportunity for Iran. Whether Iran will be in favor of this threat or the opportunity depends on the political stance of the Iranian regime [14].

Iran is one of the countries with the largest oil and natural gas reserves in the world. It is the fourth largest country in the world with 157.2 billion barrels of oil reserves and the second largest natural gas reserves in the world with 1191 trillion cubic meters of natural gas reserves. Iran is among the top 10 oil producers and top 5 natural gas producers in the world with a daily production of 4.7 million barrels of oil and 7.2 trillion cubic meters of natural gas [15]. Hence, as a result of its central location in Eurasia and rich oil and gas reserves, Iran is one of the most important countries in energy geopolitics.

Although the increasing energy needs of countries such as China and India, the attempts of the European Union countries to create an alternative to Russian natural gas offer Iran the opportunity to transform into a potential super energy power, the embargoes imposed on Iran under the leadership of the USA disrupt this possibility. With its petroleum reserves, Iran holds 10% of the world's petroleum reserves and 13% of the total petroleum reserves in OPEC countries. Iran is the second largest oil exporter country in OPEC after Saudi Arabia and the fourth largest oil exporter in the world after Russia, Saudi Arabia and Norway. Countries like China, India, South Korea and Turkey have an important place in Iran's energy exports. [16].

At the same time, Iran is the country with the second-largest natural gas reserves in the world after Russia. 17% of the world's natural gas reserves are within the borders of Iran. In addition, one third of the total natural gas reserves of OPEC countries also belong to Iran. Iranian natural gas is mostly exporting to Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Iraq. The biggest buyer of Iranian natural gas is Turkey with a 73% export rate [17]. While these natural gas reserves and export potential of Iran are important to meet the increasing energy needs of industrializing Asian countries such as China and India, they are also considered as an important opportunity to balance the dominance of the EU and Russia in the European energy markets. In addition, Turkey has the importance and significance for Iran, other than just being the biggest buyer of Iranian natural gas transit is due to the role it plays in meeting with Iran's European markets [13.2].

As a result, we can summarize Iran's short term goals in oil, natural gas and other energy fields as follows; to relieve the economy which has been contracting as a result of embargoes, to produce enough natural gas and energy to meet both export and the domestic market, to keep domestic demand under control by investing in thermal power plants. The long-term objectives of the regime in oil, natural gas and other energy fields are to include international companies in the energy sector of the country, to create mutual dependence and to ensure that Western bloc countries lose more against possible future sanctions, to diversify natural gas and oil exports (processed oil instead of crude oil), to become an indispensable energy supplier for Turkey, China, India, Pakistan, Central Asian countries, South Caucasus and Western countries [14.2].

F. International and Regional Factors

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War brought about the transformation of international politics and a change in the character of the world order. In addition, the end of the bipolarity, while opening up new spaces for emerging powers, also brought with it regional and global competition and threat. Located between the Caucasus and the Indian Ocean, Iran has an important military-strategic position with its ability to control the Basra Gulf, the Caspian Sea region, Afghanistan and even Pakistan. However, it is also the breaking point in the chain of American outposts in the Middle East region [18].

As a state surrounded by the waters of West Asia, the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Gulf of Basra and Oman in the Indian Ocean and bordering the Caspian Sea, it plays a dominant role in one of the most important regions of the world in military-strategic terms. Many regional problems are directly or indirectly linked to Iran and the extent to which Iran is involved in regional problems is one of the important facts that determine the solution or non-solution of the problem. Although Iran foreign policy and nuclear activities in the region through anti-US opposition caused her to face economic and political sanctions, it could not discourage Iran from regional power ambitions, on the contrary, it expanded its sphere of influence economically and militarily [19.1].

Since the 19th century, one of the most important reasons why Iran has an important position in international relations is its natural resources, especially oil. Iran, which was under the influence of Russia and Britain until the Second World War, entered the US sphere of influence after the Second World War, and until the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Shah Mohammed Reza continued his monarchy under the protection of the United States. Although Iran was previously under the influence of Russia and Britain and later the USA, it is a truly non-

colonized Middle Eastern country. Iran has retained its importance in international politics with the theocratic regime established after the Islamic revolution, the natural resources it has, the nuclear program it has developed and its military capacity[19.2].

After the Iraq-Iran War, which took place after the Islamic Revolution, the theocratic regime entered a rapid recovery process and became a strong regional actor by following a policy of expanding its sphere of influence towards the regions where Shiites live in the Middle East region. With the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, new areas of influence have been created for Iran and Iran's affect in the Middle East region has become more evident. Despite the fact that the Islamic Regime was stuck in domestic politics, mainly due to economic troubles and oppressive attitude, its active military and political participation in the conflict areas in the Middle East region continued after the 2011 Arab Spring and became one of the main actors of hot conflict areas such as Syria and Yemen. On the one hand, Iran continues to be the main actor in regional conflict areas, on the other hand, it continues its multi-dimensional diplomatic negotiations with the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations Security Council and the P5 + 1 countries regarding its nuclear program. Thus, Iran aims to overcome the isolation and embargo imposed on it [19.3].

Such activity of Iran in the region is considered by other regional countries as an internal security concern. This concern is particularly evident for Gulf countries with Shiite populations. On the other hand, Iran's geopolitical position and nuclear program is another factor affecting its relations with the Gulf countries [20.1]. Iran has a multidimensional and dynamic diplomacy culture as a country that is a member of more than 50 international organizations in the world. Iran uses its diplomatic, political and military tools inside and in the regions within its sphere of influence in order to maintain the stability of the regime based on velayat-i faqih understanding, to protect national security interests and to achieve regional goals [20.2].

In conclusion, we can say that Iran has an important potential and ideological motivation to further strengthen its position as a regional actor. The Iranian regime tries to maximize its potential, opportunities and ambitions in the countries within its sphere of influence, especially in the Middle East. However, factors such as economic embargoes and isolation, political and ideological problems and conflicts with Arab countries, and conflict of regional interests with the USA are seen as the biggest obstacles to the actual realization of Iran's claims and ambitions in the geographies within its sphere of influence [21].

CONCLUSION

The strong ideological-based state, natural gas and oil, rich economic resources, geopolitical position, nuclear program and strong army structure are the main determinants of Iran's regional power status. After the end of the Cold War, developments in the domestic and foreign fronts increased Iran's regional role and importance. The Tehran administration abandoned its passive approach towards regional issues it followed during the Cold War, and started to take an active place militarily, politically, economically and culturally in Central Asia, the Caucasus and especially in the Middle East. It has further consolidated its effectiveness as a regional power by taking serious political and military initiatives in these regions.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of bipolarity provided Iran with a more flexible foreign policy opportunity. Many political developments, from the Gulf War to the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, from the Arab Spring to the Syrian civil war, have provided Iran with unique opportunities for active participation in regional politics. The area of military and political expansion created by international and regional developments for Iran has found its response in many countries from Iraq to Syria, from Yemen to Lebanon. Factors such as the ideological structure of the Islamic regime, the ethnic and sectarian diversity of the country, and its geopolitical position were also used as tools for this military and political expansion, thus creating a unique example of ideology and pragmatism in determining the country's foreign policy.

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