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Iranian Export of Revolution Doctrine and Implementation

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Submitted to: DOD/ONA
Islamist Strategies Project
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May 1, 2007

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Executive Summary

The election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the post of President of Iran, his statements since coming into office, as well as his behavior on the domestic, regional and international fronts, have brought to the fore once more the possibility that Iran will resume an aggressive policy driven by the principle of export of the revolution, an approach that appeared to have been dropped from the Iranian agenda during the past decade, at least in its more radical expressions – terrorism and subversion.

The basis of this policy stems from the early years of the revolution during which the religious ideology propagated by Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini called for the exporting of the principles of the revolution as a ‘successful’ model for emulation to concentrations of Muslims outside Iran’s borders, as a preparatory stage toward establishing an Islamic Empire under Tehran’s leadership. To this was added national interest, which over the years became increasingly dominant and was meant to serve Tehran’s interests, significantly bolstering its standing and influence on the regional level (and beyond it), as a dominant and leading power,. During its apex this approach was characterized by the following:

- The establishment and training of specialized and trained organizations in Iran for furthering this idea, through the incorporation of existing government institutions, and by investing significant resources (albeit limited relative to the “output”) in what was then presented as a national mission.
- Making use of advantageous conditions on “the ground” such as the presence of Muslim communities that experienced economic hardship and suffered political persecution, as well as the existence active elements of opposition in a setting of fundamental instability and weak central government.
- The use of varied means to further these goals, starting with religious and political propaganda, aid to Muslim groups and organizations, including military assistance (arms and training), as well as use of subversion and terrorism – which Iran either made use on its own and/or through extremist Islamic elements.

At its peak in the mid-1990s, this policy resembled the tentacles of an octopus, successfully penetrating and acquiring a real hold in various regions of the world – not necessarily in places with concentrations of Shiites – starting with Lebanon, Sudan, Bosnia, the former Soviet Republics, Africa, South America, and Southeast Asia. This effort constitutes a real threat to stability, mostly on a regional level, particularly to the continued hold to power of moderate and pro-western regimes in Arab/Muslim countries, whose populations Iran has tried to stir up against their rulers (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and Turkey).

Since the mid-1990s there has been a noticeable change in the trend, with a drop in the aforementioned activities conducted by Iran and in the restraining of its aggressive

characteristics. The background to this stems from a combination between domestic causes (the death of Khomeini, a charismatic, religious political leader undermined Iran's image as an appropriate model for emulation, along with the rise of reformists aspiring to alter the domestic agenda), and external factors, regional and international changes. The latter include an increasing recognition of the negative impact and implications of Iran's aggressive policies, particularly following the exposure of Tehran's involvement in subversive and terrorist activities. These have led not only to a restriction of Iran's room to maneuver but also to a loss of opportunities and enticing causes for action. To this should be added the threat of punishing measures against Iran and damage to its diplomatic ties, which led Tehran to opt for its national interest (like many times in the past), in the form of preserving the survivability of the revolutionary regime and its values, over ideological considerations, irrespective of their importance.

An analysis of this modus operandi during these years points to a number of characteristics:

- The combination of a religious worldview and circumstances and developments "on the ground" have often necessitated a policy of adjustment and change in the selection of goals and means, all the while preference being given, in most cases, to national interest over ideology.
- The absence of a clear and uniform policy, and a growing reliance on taking advantage of what is perceived to be opportunities, initially vis a vis Shiite concentrations ('home court advantage') and later vis a vis Sunni communities. This was attempted through an effort to overcome the differences in religious and ideological worldviews between them (offering pan-Islamic hegemony, for example), which in both cases met with limited success (suggesting the depth of the disputes between the two religious streams).
- The entrenchment of the idea of export of the revolution on the basis of a sort of business cost vs. benefit equation, which includes the narrowing/ending such activities in cases of disappointment with the return.
- Failure in most cases (if not in all), in establishing and creating organizations that will carry out Iranian orders, while at the same time the tendency is to ride existing "waves."
- Near absolute priority to the Iranian national perspective, to the extent that there is willingness to take no action, and even limit and end all action, if this is likely to pose a real threat to those interests.

Hence, two decades after the acme of the Islamic Revolution's efforts in exporting itself to the Muslim World, the balance of Iran's achievements in this area is negative. With the exception of Lebanon – "the jewel in the crown" – Iran cannot pride itself with any real achievement, even in those countries in which it appeared that it held genuine assets (such as in Bosnia and Sudan). Moreover, Iran was driven from most of its areas of influence in the Middle East and beyond, and has been left politically isolated (except for Syria, Iran's strategic ally), and economically weaker. Furthermore, contrary to its aspirations, its efforts to export

the revolution has not resulted in chain reactions in the Arab/Muslim world, and the attraction inherent in the revolutionary idea did not gain momentum.

What has changed – or is changing – in the Ahmadinejad era in terms of Iran’s policy concerning export of the revolution in its broad sense. This change should be investigated not only as a derivative of Ahmadinejad’s presidency, but in the light of the renaissance of the revolutionary ideological fervor that he represents among some of the more powerful elements of the regime? The question should be scrutinized in light of the declared goal of Ahmadinejad and his inner circle to revive the revolutionary impetus that declined over the last decade both within Iran and abroad and to achieve Iran’s “manifest destiny” to lead the Muslim World, and, as a minimum, to establish Iran’s status as a regional hegemonic power in the Gulf and the Middle East. This strategy entails the abandonment of the pragmatic, careful and controlled approach, which had characterized Tehran’s behavior in the region in the past decade and a willingness to take risks toward these goals. Practically, it leads to a return to the patterns of its old behavior: garnering influence over communities outside its borders through “civil methods,” along with encouragement and direction of terrorism and subversion by use of violence.

From Ahmadinejad’s public declarations, there is no doubt that his presidency signifies at least a rhetorical change in Iran’s behavior in the regional and international theatres. Though Ahmadinejad is not an ideologue, he is clearly trying to revive the early tents of the revolutionary regime, both rhetorically and practically. Furthermore, His efforts in this vein are welcome to the clerical group that backs him and the leadership of the IRGC both for internal power-politics considerations (as they strengthen them and weaken the reformists) and for ideological reasons; dissemination of the principles of revolution is supposed to also prepare the ground for the appearance of the Mahdi.

However, is this a policy of one faction – albeit a powerful one – within the regime that meets or will meet opposition from the “old guard”? In other words, has there been a change in the circumstances that motivated the Iranian leadership for the past decade – Ayatollah Ali Khamene’i and Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who still set the political tone in Iran today – to lower, from considerations of profit and loss, the profile of Iran’s involvement in terrorist and subversive activities? The answer to these questions is ambiguous:

- **On the level of intentions** – it appears that in spite of the cost of such a policy, Iran has a growing, and perhaps vital, interest in returning to its old modus operandi at this time. Here the religious-ideological motivation combines with a sober perception of Iranian national interest, in light of the Western pressures to freeze the nuclear program. It is in Iran’s national interest to cultivate the impression that it has deterrent and retaliatory capabilities in case it faces a real threat to its interests (severe economic blockade, military attack). Iranian military bravado aside, the leadership realizes that its independent military options are limited and that its deterrence can be enhanced by a perception of its influence among Muslim

populations (and hence its capability to foment instability against pro-Western regimes) and of an arsenal of radical Islamist terrorist organization at its service.

- **On the level of capabilities** – Iran retains its core capabilities for “export of revolution”, based on specialized organizations to this end (particularly the IRGC, Qods Force, MOIS), and continues to cultivate ties with non-Iranian “proxy” entities. **Nevertheless, these organizations act in a strategic environment which makes their task much more difficult than in the past:**

1. **On the domestic level**, it is more difficult than in the past to form a consensus in favor of Iranian interventionism in foreign Muslim theatres. Not only moderates but “old guard” conservatives warn that Iran should not engage in adventures to support those who will not or cannot aid Iran when those adventures result in retaliation against it.
2. **The Iranian model of revolution is no longer the only model available** and it has to compete with the attraction of the Sunni Jihadi-Salafi movements, foremost among them – Al-Qaeda.
3. The Sunni Islamic movements are increasingly adopting blatant **anti-Shiite and anti-Iranian doctrines** and prefer not to be identified as allies of the Shiite regime in Iran.
4. **Regional perceptions of Iran are increasingly apprehensive for the same reasons of growing anti-Shiite sentiment.** Countries in the region have become more sensitized to Iranian activities in the region such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and the Palestinian territories. This was evident during the Lebanon war and the fighting in Gaza that preceded it when the low level of support of Hamas and Hezbollah was clearly due to the perceptions of those organizations serving as tools in the hand of Iran to subvert actions against its nuclear program. This suspicion restricts Iran’s ability to operate in quasi-legal modes in the neighboring countries.
5. **The improved ability of countries to deal with subversion and terrorism since 9/11** imposes a real constraint and an obstacle before the Iranian regime if it chooses to implement such a policy.

Iran has three basic models for its policy of export of revolution. The choice of any combination of the models in various theatres will be will be made on the basis of a “cost-effectiveness” calculation. These models are:

- Rallying broad support for its cause in the Arab and Muslim world through “soft” means, in the hope that this will serve, when “the moment of truth” arrives, as leverage on regional and western governments.
- The use of terrorism and subversion on a broad scale (directly or through proxies) against western and Israeli targets. The “cost effectiveness” of this option is problematic. As elaborated above, Iran’s capabilities to deal decisive terrorist blows on a wide scale have diminished (effectiveness)

whereas the consequences (cost) of exposure of its involvement are high, as the motivation and justification for massive retaliation against a state that supports such attacks has changed since 9/11 (even taking into consideration the Iraqi experience).

- The use of terrorism and subversion to influence/affect specific areas such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, the territories and possibly also the Gulf States. These theatres hold relatively convenient conditions for Iranian activities due to: the large Shiite minorities/majorities (such as in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain); Iran's geographic proximity to these areas facilitates the transfer of funds, training and weapons; the inherent instability of some of the regimes; and the presence of quality western/Israeli targets that will allow describing attacks against them as 'legitimate' acts of 'resistance.'

In conclusion, the renewed revolutionary fervor in Tehran, led by the president and his supporters, foremost among them the IRGC combines with Iran's practical need to enhance its deterrence vis-à-vis the West to bring the leadership in Tehran to revival of radical elements in the policy of export of the revolution, that have been neglected in the past. Nevertheless, the objective limitations enumerated above that Iran has to reckon with still impose on it a restrained approach. Therefore, Iran may prefer to increase activities in neighboring countries, as well as Lebanon and the Palestinians, where convenient conditions for action against western/Israeli targets through proxy organizations and sleeper infrastructure exist.

The importance of this area and of the ties with the local organizations, such as the Hamas and Hezbollah, has increased lately in the Iranian eyes not only as a tool to destroy or weaken Israel (a central issue in the president's extreme ideological point of view), but mainly as a result of the raised tension with the international community due to Tehran's nuclear ambitions. Under this strategy, those organizations will have a very significant role within the framework of Tehran's efforts to strengthen its deterrence and retaliation capabilities in the face of a possible military attack on its assets (for example by opening another front with Israel and widening the crisis or escalating the struggle against the Americans in Iraq, the Gulf or Afghanistan), in order to enlarge the regional instability and ease the pressure from Iran.

However, it is not at all clear that all the assets that Iran believes it has – even among the Shiites of those countries – are really willing to act on its behalf and to endanger their own interests. In any case, wide-scale Iranian subversion in the Gulf countries will mean that Iran will have to endanger its future strategic goals of establishing areas of influence and friendly regimes.

This situation may change in the future, especially as a result of the balance of power in Iran's domestic arena:

- **Revival of the power of moderate elements**, as happened a decade ago, especially in view of concerns regarding the damage to existential Iranian

interests, may result in further curtailment of Tehran's policies. In such case, there may be a question regarding the extent to which members of the Revolutionary Guard, which have held an extremist and aggressive attitude since the rise of the Islamic regime to power, will accept a decision which is in direct opposition to their world view.

- **A rise in the power of those supporting a more aggressive stance** on the part of the government, which will lead to an even more radical policy, in general, and in terms of adopting an aggressive approach to anything having to do with manifesting the idea of export of the revolution. This may be due to:
 1. **Progress (even fictitious) in Iran's nuclear capability**, which will not only be credited to Ahmadinejad and boost his standing at home, but will also grant Iran a deterrent capability and improved bargaining position, and serve as a means for furthering diplomatic goals, to the point where the accepted rules of the game are altered.
 2. **Significant bolstering of the power of Ahmadinejad** within a power struggle at the top. This may be the result of a successful domestic policy or in the nuclear issue, or following a weakening of his rivals/colleagues (for example, of the Supreme Leader as a result of illness, old age, loss of control and religious and political authority, or the loss of support, etc.)

The Ideology of Export of Revolution

Background

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's election as president of Iran, his rhetoric since his election, and his conduct in the domestic, regional and international theatres raise the question whether Iran is moving towards a revival of the aggressive policy of "export of revolution" that characterized the early years of the regime. This policy – or at least its more radical manifestations of international terrorism and subversion – seems to have almost disappeared from the Iranian strategy over the last decade. Such a radicalization of Iran's terrorist policy, at this juncture in time, holds potential for extremely negative implications for both the short and the long term: These implications include:

- Direct effects on regional stability – particularly the stability of Arab regimes closest to Iran;
- Exacerbation of the struggle between radical Islam and the West – despite the hostility between Iran and the US, such instability will probably be exploited by the anti-Shiite Salafi-Jihadi movements to score points in the populace and to discredit pro-American regimes.
- Enhancement of Ahmadinejad's power and stature and impetus to his efforts to revive and to implement the ideological concepts that guide him, foremost among them – aggressive proselytization of the Iranian concept of Islam.

The policies of Ahmadinejad run contrary to the pragmatic approach, that has guided the Iranian leadership in its decisions and actions vis-à-vis export of the revolution and to the views of the senior members of the old guard of the revolution, foremost among them the Supreme Leader Ali Khamene'i, and former president and incumbent Chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. Ahmadinejad's success in promoting this policy may be seen as the result of his growing strength among the power base of the regime – the IRGC – and/or of the decision making mechanism that characterizes the regime. There are two main explanations for this apparent contradiction between the indications that Ahmadinejad's policies are not acceptable to the "old guard" and his success in continuing them:

- The conventional wisdom that the "old guard" objects to the president's policies is incorrect. This part of the leadership may be, in fact, in agreement with the main tenets of Ahmadinejad's views and in any case cannot dispute them since they are, in essence, the traditional dogmas of the revolution. In this case, they grant leeway to the president's political outlook so long as it achieves results and/or does not damage vital Iranian interests. If so, this policy of tolerance may change in light of new/negative circumstances as these are perceived by the leadership in Tehran.
- The "old guard" is weak due to age, illness, loss of control, religious and political authority, and/or a policy of active takeover the centers of power

and the pushing of traditional elements to the sides, and therefore is unable to block the president. If so, a genuine change in the domestic balance of power, accompanied with a clear change in policy that is unlikely to change in the coming years.

The Origins of the Doctrine of Revolution

The origins of the revolutionary Iran's doctrine of 'export of the revolution' are found in the writings and statements of the first Supreme Leader Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini, many years before the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Tehran. Khomeini's main views relating to this was put forth in his book *Islamic Governance (Hukumat-i Islami va Vilayat-i Faqih)*, which was greatly influenced by the work of Ali Shariati, and called for the clergy to take upon themselves not only spiritual authority but political power as well (the basis of the principle of *Vilayat -i Faqih* or 'Guardianship of the Islamic Jurists'). It is their duty to broaden the belief in "revelation", which is at the core essence of the Shi'ah, through an uncompromising struggle of what he terms the "religion of legitimacy" against the forces of political and social evil.

Khomeini took this view a step further and essentially united it with religious and nationalist principles, establishing a regime, as he saw it, based on political liberty and social justice, a guarantee to bolstering national interests and releasing Muslims from the imperialist yoke. At the core of this outlook lies the idea of pan-Islamism as a force that will destroy the existing international system as expressed in Khomeini's statement which became a slogan: "neither east (USSR and Communist ideology) nor west (U.S. and Capitalism)". According to this view, the superpowers are illegitimate players; true Islam, as Khomeini saw it, has been on the defensive for centuries, must defend itself now through force and war, and expand its borders. The first stage is to establish an Islamic government whose borders are not defined, but clearly exceed the borders of Iran.

The opportunity to manifest Khomeini's ideological outlook into practice emerged following the revolution in 1979. What enabled this was the combination of a promising ideology that overnight was transformed into reality and into a model worthy of emulation, and the ability of the leadership of the regime – who saw in furthering, institutionalizing and spreading the revolutionary approach, a supreme task, for which they rallied the necessary force and resources.

Henceforth, the idea of export of the revolution, which was adopted as the official policy of the government of Iran, developed through a synthesis between:

- **The Vision – marketing the principles of the revolution as a far reaching vision (of ideas and geography), whose implications have a global dimension, as a model for broad and deep change in all aspects of life.** As such, the regime in Tehran views the revolution as offering a universal message to all oppressed peoples, with emphasis on nations of the Third World, for whom the removal of the Shah's regime may serve as a successful model for changing human society as a whole and liberating it

from enslavement and exploitation. Hence the ideology of “export of revolution” places more emphasis on the social and political aspects and less the Shiite religious-ideological aspects.¹ A “revolutionary world” that would undergo such a change – even through force and radical means – was, in theory, supposed to turn Islam, in general, and Iran in particular, into the dominant force in the world. As a practical expression of this outlook revolutionary Iran maintained, at a later stage, links, and even assisted, non-Muslim guerilla groups, including separatist and Marxist organizations in Greece, Northern Ireland, and Spain.

- **Realpolitik** – Tehran’s acceptance of the limitations on its ability to materialize the vision and a political preference for seizing on opportunities and taking advantage of circumstances in different areas that facilitated Iran’s efforts. Hence, the practical focus on the Muslim world as a primary objective and the exporting of the revolution to Shiite communities as a preliminary stage.

The religious aspects of the doctrine of “export of revolution” were based on two ostensibly contradictory themes:

- An attempt to obfuscate the differences between the various sects of Islam, and for intellectual solidarity, which allegedly supercedes the different religious dogmas of rivalries between Sunnis and Shiites. By obscuring and down playing the religious and ideological tensions and disagreements, Iran hoped to facilitate its own status as a leader that acts on behalf of all Muslims by. By extension we see at a later time that revolutionary Iran stressed its obligation – which is anchored in its constitution² – to assist any

¹ This outlook fits well historical reality according to which the 1979 revolution in Iran was, first and foremost, a social revolution, not a religious-ideological one. Evidence to this can be found in the broad participation of all levels of society and sources of power in Iran during the revolution, starting with blatant right wing elements, through religious figures and elements on the left, who united around this goal of overthrowing the Shah’s regime that was hated mostly because of socio-economic reasons. The religious establishment succeeded in taking over and leading the revolution down the road because of the combination, which was missing in other partner groups that were dropped later, of a charismatic leader (Khomeini), an ideology (‘Islam is the solution’ as a cure to the ills of society and the state), and organizational abilities (the broad geographic positioning of the clergy, their enormous influence on the individual and the community as a unique Shiite characteristic, and financial means).

² Iran’s constitution includes a number of articles relating to the issue of exporting the revolution, and the duty to assist oppressed Muslims wherever they may be in their struggle against abusive forces. For example:

Muslim community or Islamic elements seeking to be represented in their country (and through them expand its regional religious influence), especially in those states in which it does not recognize the legitimacy of their regimes (which in practice includes a large part of the Arab and Muslim world). Iran as a pioneer and leader in this process, viewed itself at its end as standing at the head of a Muslim empire that comprising close to one billion believers, capable of restoring the past glory (parallel to the basic view that considered the return to the origins of the faith and its values as the start of salvation). At the same time, out of pragmatic considerations, it took care to downplay the political aspects of such a goal and to emphasize the ideological-moral aspects as opposed to the political idea of a united Muslim world presenting a unified front against the “infidels.”

- Presenting the Iranian revolution as a model for the Shiites, wherever they may be, the Shiites hold a place in the revolutionary ideology as brothers in suffering (the epitome of the “downtrodden” (*mostad'afun*), dominated and oppressed by the Sunnis. Revolutionary Iran is, therefore, the first model of its type, for a religious, Shiite state, a unique antithesis to the Arab-Islamic world that is mostly led by Sunni regimes and where Shiites constitute minorities/discriminated majorities in many respects. Iran assumed that religious kinship necessarily implies ideological affinity, and that the Shiites, over whom Khomeini sought to impose his authority as “*waly faqih*,” will accept Tehran’s authority and will serve as the bridgehead and

Article 3: In order to attain the objectives specified in Article 2, the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has the duty of directing all its resources to the following goals:

15. The expansion and strengthening of Islamic brotherhood and public cooperation among all the people;

16. Framing the foreign policy of the country on the basis of Islamic criteria, fraternal commitment to all Muslims, and unsparing support to the *mustad'afun* [the deprived, destitute, oppressed] of the world.

Article 11: In accordance with the sacred verse of the Qur’an (“This your community is a single community, and I am your Lord, so worship Me” [21:92]), all Muslims form a single nation, and the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has the duty to formulating its general policies with a view to cultivating the friendship and unity of all Muslim peoples, and it must constantly strive to bring about the political, economic, and cultural unity of the Islamic world.

Article 154: The Islamic Republic of Iran has as its ideal human felicity throughout human society, and considers the attainment of independence, freedom, and rule of justice and truth to be the right of all people of the world. Accordingly, while scrupulously refraining from all forms of interference in the internal affairs of other nations, it supports the just struggles of the *mustad'afun* against the *mustakbirun* [arrogant, powerful] in every corner of the globe.

the good will ambassadors to further the vision of the revolution. This assumption proved itself false in a number of cases.³

The religious elements of the revolution combine with nationalist Iranian interests; the potential inherent in the appeal of the revolution on the ideological and religious level was seen as a golden opportunity both to bolster the new regime's political power domestically (which was not self evident immediately after the revolution), through an image of pan-Islamic leadership. Every expression of victory in the struggle against "apostates" and "enemies of the revolution" was exploited by the regime to impress upon the Iranian masses, the truth of the regime's path and the strength of the revolutionary passion that spreads beyond the borders of the state;⁴ i.e. Iranian ideology that is good for other nations is certainly good for Iran. Support for the revolution was presented as a religious duty, similar to the participation in a war for the protection of Islam (Jihad), in which the sacrifice on the altar rewards the faithful with entry into paradise.

At the same time, the revolution was seen as a vehicle for forging strategic assets that enhance Iran's "self-sufficiency" from foreign powers and expand its influence in its regional hinterland and further abroad. The revolution became a new asset in Iran's age old belief in its "manifest destiny" to become a predominant regional power. This national interest became over the years increasingly dominant in the foreign policy of Iran and the impression was that the activities surrounding the exporting of the revolution became increasingly driven by such considerations, with the objective of transforming Tehran into a leading force and, in the least, into an element that cannot be ignored.

³ Iraq can serve as a clear example to the gap between the aspiration, which Tehran believes can be manifested, namely to rally the Shiites in Iraq to furthering the political interests such as overthrowing the regime of Saddam Hussein, and the conditions on the ground, where they have exhibited a tendency to remain loyal to their own nation-state (which also contained the threatening power of Saddam Hussein), as was demonstrated vigorously during the Iran-Iraq war, and in the behavior of the Shiite population following the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime in 2003.

⁴ For example in an address made by the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, in April 1998, he attributed to the Iranian revolution credit for the Islamic awakening of the Palestinians and their willingness to intensify their struggle against Israel, the flourishing of Islamic awareness in European countries, for example in Bosnia, the rise of an Islamist government in Turkey and Algeria, through democratic elections, and the establishment of an Islamist government in Sudan.

The Practice: Objectives, Apparatuses and Means

Since the revolution Iran has worked tirelessly to further the idea of export of the revolution in many and various regions, in a variety of ways according to the opportunities available and its capabilities at the time, both the physical ones and also those resulting from the conditions existing in the various target areas in which Iran operated. Two aspects were supposed to ease Iran's efforts, at least during the first years of the revolution:

- **The appeal of revolutionary Iran** – at least among broad segments of population in Muslim countries in general and among various Shiite communities in particular – as a successful model that is worthy of emulation in removing an oppressive and abusive regime like that of the Shah. The tempting nature of the message unifying Islamic Justice and Social Justice, the fervor that characterized the revolution during its first years (and the activity that accompanied it in the establishment of the institutions of the new regime, along with the promise to incorporate the population in the political processes) aroused hope for change among the masses in the region, which was noted particularly in view of the shock and surprise with which the revolution was viewed in the west and the regional leaderships.
- **The figure of the instigator of the revolution, Khomeini** – who combined unchallenged religious authoritative leadership (which diverged from the narrow Shiite viewpoint) and political charisma. Moreover, his doctrine whose basic slogan calls for the return to religious values as a solution to what ails Muslim individuals and society captured the ears of the masses.⁵

⁵ In addition to the significant privileges that the union of the religious and political roles granted the leader, he also assumed enormous responsibility: to conduct a just regime and interpret the wishes of God and take action to implement it, in part, out of recognition that he free of error and enjoys "divine patronage." Since Khomeini was not free of personal and political interests, or from making mistakes, this contributed in the long run to an erosion of his standing and power. A hint to this can be found in his explanations for his decision to accept the cease-fire agreement with Iraq during the war between the two countries (... "Allah, we have risen on behalf of your religion and we fought for it, and in order to defend it we agree to the cease-fire...").

In spite the apparent consensus among the leaders in Tehran regarding the need to promote the export of the revolution, there emerged, at least during the initial years of the revolution, disputes regarding the targets of the action and the means necessary (if at all) to further it. In the background lies a deeper internal debate in Iran, of which the issue of export of the revolution was a mere reflection, regarding the future of the policy that Iran should adopt especially in the area of its external relations, between:

- The supporters of the more moderate approach did not oppose the goal by argued that methods which entailed violence and aggressive methods could harm Iran's interests. They advocated 'softer' methods like education and propaganda that did not endanger Iranian interests. Among the backers of this approach were the 'liberal' elements at the top of the regime such as President Abolhassan Banisadr (1980 to June 1981), and senior ministers in the government of Mehdi Bazargan (up to November 1979), and who were supposed to put in practice the foreign policy of Iran, and adopted a pragmatic policy of non-interference in the domestic affairs of neighboring countries on the basis of respecting their national sovereignty. They often expressed their reservations and dissatisfaction at the regime's policies in Lebanon or Iraq on the grounds that these may undermine the standing and image of Iran as well as its diplomatic ties. Beyond the issue of potential damage to Iran as a result of these, these same elements argued that a revolution is not exported or imposed but should flow from "within," and that those who carried out the revolution in Iran did not receive any external assistance in their struggle. They also relied on the statements of Ayatollah Khomeini according to whom Iran had no intention of intervening in the domestic affairs of other states. And
- The advocates of the activist and radical approach, headed by leading religious figures such as Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, who gave priority to the implementation of the doctrines of Ayatollah Khomeini irrespective of the political circumstances. They saw the world in its entirety as a legitimate target for activities whose purpose was the imposition of the principles of the Islamic faith, and with Iran as the pioneer of the camp wishing to spread the revolutionary message. To this end they felt that Iran should adopt active steps, assist financially and even militarily elements

seeking to stand up and take action against “American imperialism” and Israel, and perhaps even actively participate in that struggle.⁶

Ultimately, Khomeini determined the targets and operational doctrine. This doctrine was a sort of synthesis of different views, and a degree of compromise on his part on the original ideas that he had outlined in his writings. The policy that was adopted in practice was yet another sign of the recognition on the part of the regime leadership of the limits of its capabilities for action. This doctrine was based on practical action – albeit within the limits of Iran’s capabilities and political constraints to promote two agenda:

- Promoting links with the Shiite communities, mainly in the countries close to Iran, such as those in Iraq, Lebanon, Kuwait, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, as the priority target for export of revolution.
- Religious justification of interference in the domestic affairs of other Arab and Muslim states in the region in an effort to bring about change in their regimes (including a call to the peoples to rise against their leaders, whom he described lacking in religious legitimacy and who collaborate with the west).

This approach was part of a much broader decision regarding the character and policies of revolutionary Iran. This more activist approach was reflected in the removal or

⁶ It is interesting that both sides found ideological justification to their positions in the writings and statements of Khomeini: in his book *Hukumat-i Islami*, Khomeini rejects the existence of states and expresses the hope of establishing Islamic unity (an Islamic and not an Iranian or Shiite revolution). Khomeini opposes the national concept (*kumiya*) which he believes is in opposition to Islam and is the clear result of western imperialist influence. As such, the take over of power in Iran is only the first point to a broader Islamic revolution as a means of achieving Islamic unity – an approach that is activist at its basis, and requires constant and continuous activism on the part of the individual and society: “Islam is the religion of militant individuals who are committed to truth and justice... it is the religion of those who are fighting against imperialism.” Nonetheless, in statements made after the revolution (e.g. in March 1980), a certain moderation is evident. Khomeini asserted that “there is no need for swords in order to export an ideology. The export of idea through force is not exporting...” An expression to the discord in the Iranian leadership regarding this issue can be found in the policy that Iran adopted in relation to Lebanon during those years, where the government was inclined in principle to preserve good relations with the government in Beirut and further the ties with the Amal movement that was perceived as the authentic representative of the Shiite in Lebanon. On the other hand there were religious elements who sought to exploit the Lebanese arena in order to further the struggle against the west and Israel through support of radical elements among the Shiite community, such as Hezbollah, and through the formation of ties with radical elements such as the PLO and “resistance countries,” with Libya at their head (notwithstanding the implications of the disappearance of Musa al-Sadr in Libyan territory).

voluntary departure from the political scene of the advocates of the moderate and the concomitant strengthening of individuals with radical religious worldviews. Moreover, the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war (August 1980), isolated Iran on the international arena and most of the Arab countries, bolstered the desire in Tehran to take revenge against them for their support of Iraq, and brought about intensification of the efforts to export the revolution, during the early 1980s.⁷ Still, debates, power struggles and disputes, most of them behind the scenes, continued to characterize Iran's policy in general and on the issue of export of the revolution in particular during the coming years, among those who set the furthering of the affairs of state at the top of their national priorities and the advocates of continuing and promoting the revolutionary ideal.

The practical expressions of this policy manifested themselves in the establishment and training of a series of official organizations for carrying out special operations, in Iran and beyond it, for furthering the idea, and which enjoyed support and legitimacy from the leadership. This was done through the rallying of existing government institutions and investing substantial resources (albeit limited in relation to the "output"). This, in contrast to the earlier period in which most of the activities were carried out by semi-governmental elements and within the framework of local initiatives by individuals/groups that did not always enjoy support⁸ (details of the Iranian groups who operated/are operating in furthering these matters can be found in appendix B.)

The selection of the targets for the operations, and particularly their broadening to include Sunni targets – not necessarily out of sense of success among Shiite locales – occurred as a result of happenstance and on the basis of an assessment of their chances of success in view of the circumstances on the ground, the character of the society/state where the activity was taking place, and the internal situation there. Iranian preference in this context was clear:

- The presence of a Muslim community (preferably Shiite) with high potential for recruitment and motivation in view of its political exclusion,

⁷ Except for the first year and a half of the war during which Iran suffered terrible military defeats that forced its leadership to focus on the survival of the regime and the state.

⁸ A clear example of this is the basis for a secret organization called Satja (acronym for the Revolutionary Organization of the Masses of the Islamic Republic) which called for, even before the establishment of the Revolutionary Guard, armed struggle and cooperation with Arab revolutionary organizations (with emphasis on Lebanon) in the struggle against the west and Israel, and was dismantled in the end by the regime.

economic difficulties and social discrimination. Iran assumed that the slogans of the revolution could serve as a source for attracting masses in view of the promises of equality and justice inherent in them made in the name of Islam.

- The presence of Islamic groups and organizations that are actively opposed to the incumbent regimes (especially when these were pro-western regimes that could be presented as collaborators with the “infidels,” particularly the United States) and who are willing to confront it on the political arena, but would also not hesitate, if necessary, of utilizing arms, terrorism and subversion against it. These could easily adopt the Iranian revolutionary model on political and socio-economic matters, and carry it out purely on the basis of religious ideology.
- The existence of basic instability in the country as a result of a domestic crisis, rivalries, or civil war, along with weak central authority that is unable to enforce its will, and which will enable Iran and its agents to gain a foothold and influence at the expense of the central authority and perhaps even act from within to topple it.

In spite of the doctrinal priority to ideological considerations, the Islamic regime’s implementation of the doctrine of export of revolution has taken into consideration pragmatic Realpolitik and the priority of the national interest. This was true even during the Khomeini era and more so in the era of his successors. The rule was that the regime continued to spread the revolutionary ideas, often through blatant violation of diplomatic norms, but in line within the limitations of Iran’s diplomatic, economic, cultural, social and religious limitation. Opportunities were exploited when the risk was relatively low (e.g. in third world countries where a reaction to Iranian activities would not cause strategic damage to Iranian interests).

On the other hand, Iran acted with great caution in regard to the goal of a broad Islamic revolution quickly, that would topple Arab/Muslim leaders, viewed as traitors and collaborators with Iraq and with the enemies of Islam. In these theatres, Iran took into hide its ultimate objectives in order not to stir antipathy and opposition. Accordingly, Iran’s policy in these theatres was based on a scale of goals and means, preferring legitimate (or semi-legitimate) means, through its diplomatic missions, and then indirect

approaches, mostly through local elements, who sought, through the assistance received from Tehran, to gain popular support and influence before turning (if at all) to more forceful and radical methods of action as follows:⁹

- **Propaganda or religious/political indoctrination (“Da’wa”)** – Iran considered religious-ideological indoctrination a necessary stage for moving from rallying political support toward carrying out violent/subversive action. Immediately following the revolution, Iran began to use the various organs of the state (such as the Foreign Ministry and Iran’s embassies abroad, and the Ministry of Islamic Guidance) to set up cultural and religious centers abroad, to send preachers and teachers, to hold religious conferences and seminars, and to offer stipends to Muslim students to study at the religious seminars in Iran. These “da’wa” activities were used for purposes of propaganda and marketing the principles of revolution, through campaigns in the printed and electronic media, and in recent years also in the internet. The emphasis given, at least during the first years of the revolution, to the marketing the idea of Islamic ecumenism and the claim that the Shi’ah is not a “sect” but merely a divergent school of jurisprudence along with the other schools of Sunni legal thought. This doctrine aided Iran in competing with similar da’wa activities by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.
- **A more activist and subversive level of export of revolution by use of organizational, civil and financial assistance to existing Islamic groups and organizations¹⁰** - this activity was aimed at expanding the circle of

⁹ It is possible that in the background to Iran’s pragmatic stance lay the early recognition regarding the possible damage of its blatant, subversive and overly aggressive activities in view of the lessons of the activities among the Shiite in Iraq (although in this context one must evaluate the extent to which it involved real Iranian assistance or a local Shiite attempt to emulate the Iranian model and bring about a change to their status as an oppressed majority in the country). This activity, which included sabotage operations, attempted assassinations, and hints of an uprising, crossed the limits, from the point of view of Saddam Hussein, and transformed Iran into an existential threat to the legitimacy and survival of his regime and motivated him (no less than an attempt to clear the stain of the Algiers Agreement of 1975) to eventually embark on war against Iran. It is possible that with a similar background, Iran avoided in 1991, following the withdrawal of the Iraqi forces from Kuwait and the entry of U.S. forces in the south of the country, to assist the Shiite in their uprising against the Saddam regime, even though it was experiencing serious weakness domestically.

¹⁰ In general Iran opted to rely on existing Islamic (and other) organizations and tried to redirect their activities in its favor. At the same time there were also attempts to establish cells and new groups that were based on existing activists who showed willingness to adopt its ideology. A clear potential advantage for Iran, in spite the long term investment, was the support for reliable elements who were almost entirely dependent on it, and who would follow its orders and act according to its requirements. Nonetheless, Iran’s success in activities of this sort, which had a clearly subversive

Iran's supporters and bolstering existing Islamic organizations, mostly those that opposed regimes in their own countries, in order to improve their political and operational capabilities to confront their regimes and to make them dependent on Iran. These actions involved: moral support (emphasis given to the faith in the justice of the cause through use of the Iranian model as the model for emulation), and assistance in organizing groups through financing their activities on a routine basis. Where possible, Iran transferred, directly or through local organizations, humanitarian assistance that was primarily meant to gain influence and a hold among communities in need of, anything from food and clothing, to funds for various reconstruction projects, as well as direct Iranian participation in activities in the target area (construction of mosques, grocery stores, health facilities and rebuilding infrastructure) through specialized Iranian bodies (such as "Construction Jihad"), in the context of an agreement with the host country. The objective of this activity was to gain a 'foot in the door' in various regions and to support local elements, active or dormant, who would serve its interests when needed.

- **A higher level of export of revolution involved military assistance to Islamic organizations – both those directly linked to Iran and more independent ones.** This assistance included military advice, training in matters of terrorism and subversion in Iran or Lebanon, mostly through the assistance of Hezbollah. These efforts were accompanied by Islamic-Shiite indoctrination in an attempt to bolster the ties to Iran, and at more advanced stages, supply of military material, subject to Iran's ability to transfer specialized military hardware and materiel (including long range rockets) to regions in which fighting took place (Lebanon, Bosnia), mainly by air, but also via land and sea. In some instances it was also possible to deploy military advisers; however this aspect, which normally involved a relatively broad Iranian presence, even under diplomatic guise, required as a rule the acquiescence of the host nation (or the de facto host such as Syria in the case of Lebanon). In any case, Iranian activity in this matter was done as a rule under complete secrecy (through constant denials), and only in cases in

character, was very limited and the elements it managed to conscript (if at all, with the possible exception of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad) served in the best case scenario for the collection of intelligence. Further discussion of this issue is made in the chapter on characteristics and significances.

which there existed, at the target area, a local infrastructure willing to undertake armed struggle, when Iran identified convenient conditions on the ground (a weak central government, turning a blind eye on the part of the international community, a bilateral deal, or a situation in which there was domestic infighting, or a state of war), and only when it assessed that such effort would not impact on it or significantly undermine its interests.¹¹

- **The highest level of export of revolution - initiating and carrying out terrorist activities in target countries through local/foreign organizations.** Initially, most of the activity was directed to assassinating opponents of the regime, inside and outside of Iran (a policy that was continued into the mid 1990s). In subsequent years the effort was mostly focused on carrying out attacks against foreign targets, mostly in Lebanon but also in Kuwait (in the mid-1980s), in an effort to bring about the removal of foreign forces in the region. This activity continued sporadically during the 1990s, up to the middle of the decade, when the main attacks were the separate bombings of the Israeli embassy and the Jewish community center (AMIA) in Buenos Aires (1992 and 1994 respectively), the attack against the residence of U.S. Air Force personnel in Saudi Arabia in 1996, and the attempted bombings in Thailand that were linked to Iran. In all these cases there was no direct Iranian involvement but agents and collaborators, directly or through Hezbollah, which served during those

¹¹ It is possible to point out to a number of clear cases of military assistance to states/organizations as part of the exporting of the revolution – and this without making it public and/or without risking any punishment (this will be addressed further in annex A): **Hezbollah**, though the exploitation of the problematic situation in Lebanon and the acquiescence of Syria to the deployment of Revolutionary Guard forces to Lebanon at the start of the Operation Peace of Galilee War, with the alleged aim of fighting against Israel and not in order to participate in domestic infighting (even though the organization made use of war material in dealing with rivalries among the Shiite community in Lebanon and to display force versus the central government); **Bosnia**, where here the purpose was to assist the Muslims who were engaged in a military conflict against the Christian Serbs (a sort of Islamic legitimacy that enjoyed, during the initial stages, to the silent accord of the international community). Extensive military support to **Syria** (Iran's strategic ally) and (more limited) military aid to **Sudan** at a certain time (following the rise in Sudan of supportive Islamic elements) which could be included in the bilateral framework but in a way that served the needs of exporting the revolution (for example in training and arming Palestinian groups in the territory of Syria and Lebanon, or Egyptian and African groups in Sudan). In addition there were military ties – mostly in the form of training and advising – with different elements and organization as part of Iran's attempt to develop ties with them and rally them to its cause. In most cases those organizations sought to gain Iranian assistance without relinquishing their unique identities and world views, and in the end the Iranians pulled out following a cost-benefit analysis versus the risk inherent in this effort. Unusual in this context, at least in recent years, is Iran's relationship with the Palestinian militant organizations (more on this later).

years as a type of “contractor” for Iranian operations. Iran provided the infrastructure; the operational envelope, but ensured not to leave any finger prints of its involvement behind. Furthermore, these operations stemmed either from the exploitation of an opportunity or were necessary (the need, for example, to avenge Israel for killing Hezbollah operatives, as was the case of the attacks in Argentina).

The apex of Iranian activity in export of the revolution was in the mid-1990s, when it appeared that the Iranian octopus was successful in extending its arms and gaining a real hold in broad regions of the world – not necessarily among concentrations of Shiite – starting with the Arab states in Iran’s close proximity, with Lebanon serving as the model in this context, even if it is the near sole proven example of its success, through Sudan, Bosnia, the former Soviet Republics, Africa, South Africa and Southeast Asia. Moreover, during the same period it seemed that Iranian activity constituted a real threat to mostly regional stability, in terms of the continued hold of moderate, pro-Western regimes in Arab/Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and Turkey, whose populations it sought to incite against the government, and in whose territory attacks were carried out that were linked, as mentioned before, to Iran.¹²

In subsequent years, the balance of means used by Iran for export of revolution changed, and moved towards the lower level of the scale. This was due to a combination of domestic considerations and changing circumstances in Iran’s domestic, regional and international circumstances:

- **On the domestic level** – the revolutionary fervor of the regime and the support of the populace began to wane and the reformist movement began to gain strength. The issue of export of revolution was no longer sacrosanct and key members of the regime began to challenge the logic behind Iranian exposure as involved in operations and investments in areas that were geographically removed from Iran.¹³ Moreover, the risk that accompanied

¹² For details of Iran’s activities in export of the revolution along geographic lines, including their methods and achievements, see annex A.

¹³ Beyond the domestic disputes that accompanied, throughout the period, Iranian policy in general and generally the issues of exporting the revolution, during the years began a domestic public debate over the issue, and in various articles it was possible to see an expression of the need for change in the way this activity was pursued – from active

the continuation of such policy for Iran in general and for the heads of the regime in particular grew during these years, following a series of revelations regarding Iran's activities abroad, and which imposed on the regime a more restrained approach. In the background also were political, military and economic considerations facing Iran, which reflected to a significant extent of a failure in its world view, which was at the basis of the revolution, as was manifested by those who shaped it (Islam as "a total solution"), and by extension to the degree of its relevance and attraction, in terms of the will to adopt and imitate at least some of its patterns. The process reached its height with the election of Mohammad Khatami to the presidency (May 1997), which not only assisted the leadership in Tehran to offer at this time an image slightly more moderate and liberal toward the outside world, and remove some of the international pressure, but also to bring about the adoption of a new policy of "dissipating tension" with the traditional rivals of Tehran, which contributed to a certain improvement to its standing in the region.¹⁴

- **In the region** – the difficulties on the way of achieving the desired objectives, mostly in view of the suspicions that emerged regarding Tehran's motives in its regional conduct, either because of the declarations of condemnation of the various Arab regimes in the area, and the encouragement to their population to take action against their government, and also because of developments on the ground suggested its involvement in terrorism and subversion. These were eventually accompanied by practical retaliatory responses to what was perceived to be the interference of Iran in the domestic affairs of those countries, which limited Tehran's actions, starting with diplomatic protests, to the expulsion of official representatives (e.g. from Turkey and Egypt), and including the severing of diplomatic ties (Algeria). At the same time, there emerged a hesitance and a
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assistance to ideological and religious support. For example, the Interior Minister in the government of Khatami, Abdollah Nori, questioned the activity and the hard line that Iran adopted on the issue of Palestine, at the time when the Palestinians themselves were willing to reach a compromise with Israel (he said, why "should the soup bowl be hotter than the soup itself?").

¹⁴ It is possible to see in the policy of dissipating tension of President Khatami an antithesis to the policy of exporting the revolution. Paradoxically, this policy that espoused dialogue led to an improvement and a recognition of Iran's position and also in its diplomatic ties, both on the regional and international arenas, an objective similar to that the advocates of exporting the revolution were seeking to achieve, although, among other methods, through subversion and terrorism.

change, also on the part of those regimes which allegedly looked favorably upon Iran, and/or permitted Iranian activity in their territory. The background to this included the weakness of extremist religious elements in various countries in the region but also disputes regarding the world view and to the methods of operation (evolution vs. revolution), differences in the principles of religious faith (Shiite versus Sunna and the role of religion in the state structure), as well as traditional rivalries between Persians and Arabs and the concern that the former may take over the latter.

- **On the international scene** – since the mid-1990s the ring around Tehran became increasingly tighter, as a direct result of its subversive and aggressive policies, in a way in which it contributed to narrowing its ability to maneuver and act, and which damaged its image and its essential interests (political and economic). Topping it all in this context was the “Mykonos Affair” – the assassination of the leader of the opposition organization “Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran” by agents of Tehran in the restaurant Mykonos in Berlin – which resulted in the arrest of one of the perpetrators and the exposure of a link to Iran (the German court accused Iran’s Supreme Leader, Khamene’i, and then President of Iran, Rafsanjani, and issued a warrant for the arrest of the head of the Minister of Information and Security (in charge of Iran’s secret service), Hojjatoleslam Ali Fallahian), and as a result, the suspension of diplomatic and economic ties between countries of the European Union and Tehran.¹⁵ This incident was preceded with other instances that were less blatant, but in whom Tehran was accused of having ties with extremist Islamic elements in North Africa who operated in Europe, and as contributing to the failure to reach a settlement in former

¹⁵ Even though the “Mykonos Affair” should not be seen as a component of the policy of export of revolution, but the use of terrorism for political reasons – the assassination of opponents of the regime – similar to those carried out by Iran on many occasions in the past on European territory, it contributed to pointing to the Iranian willingness to take risks and use the regime’s organs to that end – modus operandi similar to the aggressive approach in exporting the revolution. Moreover, distinguishing it from the many suspicions regarding Iran for its activities abroad, this was the first time that factual evidence was exposed, accompanied by a precedent setting willingness on the part of a European country to confront Iran on this issue. Even if the relations between the two sides were renewed several months later as part of a compromise, and in spite the fact that Iran sought to present the incident as an expression of European weakness and for the bolstering of the bilateral ties, its impact on Iranian policy was significant (yet again an expression of the pragmatism in response to external pressure), and significantly lessened the direct subversive activities that Tehran carried out or is carrying out, at least in European territory (a restraining lesson).

Yugoslavia because of its support of the Muslims, and to the implementation of agreements on the issue, already achieved in the Dayton Agreement in 1995).

The Doctrine in Practice

Based on analysis of the modus operandi of Iran in export of the revolution during nearly two decades we may point out a number of central characteristics that may serve as a basis for an assessment of objectives and the character of its activities in the future (if at all) in this and other related matters:

- **A combination between a definitive religious approach and circumstances and developments on “the ground” that often necessitated a policy of adjustment and change through preference being given in most cases to national interests over ideological considerations.** On the one hand, the policy of export of the revolution did rely, first and foremost on firm and clear ideology that allegedly dictated a radical and aggressive approach, out of willingness to bypass or violate diplomatic codes of behavior, as a sacred obligation of the individual, the society and the state, which also received preference in terms of the national agenda (establishing of institutions, budgets, support and legitimacy), and was even anchored in the constitution. Nonetheless, the practical interpretation of this outlook in terms of the preferences in national considerations, which required the regime and its various organs to adopt pragmatic modus operandi, to the point of deviating, often, from the blatantly ideological route. This, especially when goals and political ambitions of the revolutionary regime were on the agenda, such as expanding its influence and strengthening its position in the region and beyond it, even at the cost of diversion from the sacred and declared objective of assisting Muslims wherever they may be,¹⁶ or as a result of changes to the circumstances in the domestic, regional and international arenas, which were worthwhile for Iran to undertake adjustments to its policies, to the point of limiting or ending activities in certain places, in

¹⁶ It is possible to find many examples of this approach and prominent among the show the willingness of the Iranians to ignore the massacres carried out by the Russians against Chechen Muslims so as not to harm Tehran’s ties with Moscow, the preference to have ties with Christian Armenia in order to strike a blow against its neighbor and rival, Muslim Azerbaijan, or its willingness to bypass the issue of the fate of Musa al-Sadr in Lebanon in favor of developing its ties with Libya (which is viewed as responsible for his disappearance), to nurture ties with the PLO at the expense of the interests of the Shiite Amal in southern Lebanon, and in the end to side with Hezbollah in the domestic sectarian struggle in Lebanon which in the late 1980s took on a violent character.

view of their implications on its interests. **The significance – in spite its specific and rigid mission, Iranian policy in this area was characterized in practice by pragmatism and flexibility, in both means and methods of activity, which changed over the years in line with circumstances:**

1. **The use of ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ means in accordance with the type of objective and its character, the environmental conditions and the independent capabilities of Iran.** Iran’s policy was not made up of a single mould. Its initial willingness to make use of aggressive methods (not only in matters of export of the revolution, like in the case of the takeover of the American embassy in Tehran), which reflected the euphoria following the fall of the Shah’s regime and the establishment of the revolutionary regime, was replaced by a more sober approach, among other reasons, as a result of failures, the most prominent among them being in Iraq which brought about the outbreak of war between the two states. This required an adjustment between the capabilities available to Iran in this area in general, and regarding to a specific objective in particular, and the conditions that existed in that region at a given point in time. Thus, and in problematic areas, Iran made do with “soft” activities and even this achieved only partial successes mostly because of the reservations of the authorities (e.g. Egypt and Turkey). In less problematic areas, from its point of view, Iran tried to take advantage of convenient conditions in order to deepen its hold and to take more aggressive steps than extending economic aid and even military aid, to the point of actively becoming involved in terrorism and subversion. Notable in this connection is the attempt to take advantage of the circumstances of lack of local stability and the presence of elements of local resistance or elements sympathetic to its cause (Shiite), a weak regime, and soft ground for spreading its ideology (such as those offered by a community in religious, social and economic distress), as a means for furthering its objectives. In such places were basically Iran’s successes, albeit of limited duration (Lebanon, Bosnia, and Sudan).

2. **Graduated activities in Muslim locales.** In this case too Iran began broad based activities vis a vis many elements (not necessarily Muslim) out of a broad ideological worldview, but was forced to narrow its activities and adopt a more graduated approach which first sees the Shiite as a convenient target for activities because of the religious and alleged ideological identity they share (something which proved on many occasions to have been a mistaken assumption, such as the Iraqi, the Gulf and to a certain extent also the Lebanese examples).¹⁷ Because of the lack of success among the Shiite communities (and in relation to this it is important to emphasize that the jump that the Shiite were asked to do in their countries, where they constituted the oppressed majorities or minorities in the country's politics, economy and in society, was very great, certainly under the conditions that existed in the 1980s and 1990s in the region), the Iranians sought to act vis a vis the Sunni communities in ways that blurred, as mentioned before, the differences between the two sides.¹⁸ The Iranian success in this context was at the end of the day minimal and it emerged that

¹⁷ In Iraq and to a lesser extent in the Gulf, the considerations of national loyalty, as well as the gaps in the religious and ideological world views served as a significant obstacle to furthering the exporting of the Iranian revolution to these regions, along with the opposition of the local authorities. In the Lebanese case, Iran changed the target of its activity, and its support of the Amal movement, which was perceived to represent the majority of the Shiite population in Lebanon, to Hezbollah. This, following a disappointment from the fact that the Amal movement did not operate according to a line dictated by Iran and opted more than once to weigh in unique, local considerations, over blind support for Iran and its views (for example the boycott of the government in Lebanon, or sanctifying a war to the end against Israel in southern Lebanon). In this context the question also arises today – in spite the diminished standing of Amal among the Shiite community in Lebanon – if Hezbollah is the genuine representative of the Shiite in Lebanon, or merely the militant stream the constitutes a minority among the community. A similar question could be raised today also in terms of the support that Iran offers to the movement of Muqtada al-Sadr in Iraq, in view of a major question mark regarding the size of the group that he represents among the Shiite in the country compared with the standing, power and enormous influence of Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani who is putting forth a more moderate approach, or even the Shiite political leadership that is currently heading the government.

¹⁸ Spreading Shiite theology was at no time the declared objective of the Islamic revolution, which did raise as its banner general Islamic aspects. In practice, the Shiite missionary element became dominant during certain periods as part of the policy of exporting the revolution, both because of the difficulty of spreading the revolutionary ideology to Sunni communities and because of their wariness from it, and also because of the aforementioned assumption, which in many cases proved to be wrong, that Shiite Muslims (or those that have undergone indoctrination), will show greater loyalty to Iran. Furthermore, and at the basis of which was rooted the hope among the Shiite religious leadership in Iran, that it will be able to elevate, through such activity, the standing of the Shiite in the Muslim world (“the real Islam”), by extension of Iran's standing.

religious considerations served as a real obstacle to the two sides moving closer to each other. In some of the cases a situation emerged in which states or organizations sought to exploit Iran's willingness to assist them but refused to commit in practice to act according to its dictates (Hamas, for example).¹⁹

3. **The absence of a formulated and uniform policy in the area of export of the revolution, which increasingly became based on the exploitation of opportunities rather than a policy that is planned on the basis of objectives, methods and targets.** In those parts that were perceived as apparently legitimate activity and which was carried out by official Iranian organs, it was possible to point to an orderly and deliberate (the dissemination of propaganda, holding visits, dispatching envoys to the various destinations and local elements to Iran). In most of the cases this was more a matter of exploiting the local success stemming from convenient conditions existing there, which were not at all directed by Iran – for example, the war in Bosnia, the rise to power of Islamic elements in Sudan, or Operation Peace of Galilee in Lebanon. In these instances it is possible to point to a process of identifying an opportunity, and an attempt to prepare the ground and an experience of being “drawn” into the activity at the target in a increasingly growing way, where success or the chance for success, only intensifies the willingness to deepen the hold and to take increasingly greater risks. This occurred often through competition among different Iranian groups, which undermined the unity of purpose, or led to the promotion of local initiatives, at times without authorization from the leadership in Tehran. Evident in this context is the role of the Revolutionary Guards, who, over the years, have

¹⁹ The relationship between Iran and Hamas was characterized for many years by mutual feelers through the willingness on the part of Iran to offer the movement assistance in return for its willingness to take action on the basis of its instructions. Inside the movement, just like among the Palestinians in general, there was and there still is evidence of internal opposition to the declarations of the Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Meshal during his visit to Iran (2006) regarding the willingness of the Palestinians to take action if Iran was attacked as a result of the nuclear crisis. Similarly, the Palestinians find it hard to accept the positive light with which the Iranians view the execution of Saddam Hussein (their patron and protector in the past, and one of the leaders of the Sunni struggle against the west and Israel).

shown willingness to make contacts with various elements and assist them out on the basis of a willingness to take risks and adopt an aggressive approach, in spite the risks inherent in such approach.

4. **Establishing the promotion of the idea of export of the revolution on the business-like basis of cost-effectiveness notwithstanding the ideological aspect.** Iran was willing to extend assistance and aid to various countries and elements – beyond the relatively inexpensive aspect of disseminating Islam through “soft” measures – however only in return for a certain gain that was expressed mainly through a contribution to its interests. In this regard it is possible to point to a direct link between the extent of the assistance, mostly the economic and military aid, that Iran offered and its willingness to take significant risks to this end, and the degree of disappointment or appreciation that it showed in relation to the return it received. This situation led to aid of this type becoming both a mean for pressure and also for enticement in the hands of Iran vis a vis various elements, in the hope to convince or force them to act according to its instructions (e.g. the Palestinians), and also as a reward that was meant to secure Iranian freedom of action at the target (for example the conditional willingness to offer economic assistance and oil to Syria and Sudan). Moreover, in the absence of a worthy return to its efforts, Iran did not hesitate to lower, limit and even end the assistance that it was offering. Also in this context the Revolutionary Guards are noteworthy, for showing repeatedly willingness to undertake risks and offer assistance to elements, some of whom were temporary in return for unclear promises. In parallel, it is possible to point to the reverse phenomenon – in which the more Iran succeeded to radiate an image of power at home, from economic and political points of view, as evidence for the success of the revolutionary idea, its appeal grew among Muslim communities (as an explanation for the excessive willingness to emulate the Iranian revolutionary model during the years following the revolution, and its receding appeal that occurred following the death of Khomeini, and the economic low-point to which Iran found itself following the war with Iraq).
- **In most cases, if not in all, it is impossible to point to an Iranian success to set up organizations that could become executors as part of the policy of export of the revolution.** Iran often rode existing waves of expressions of opposition to regimes or of a willingness to carry out terrorist and subversive activities, and credited itself with influence over what existed, even in the Lebanese case (the existence of a militant, radical nucleus in the Shiite community that became, with Iran’s support, into the Hezbollah organization). The significance – further proof to the limits of power of Iran, whose causes are many and varied, began, as has been mentioned, as a result of wariness on the part of countries, groups and organizations, as a result of the religious difference, the concern of losing

independence, the language barriers, and the ability to operate on the ground. In the absence of proven successes of this sort, it was and still is difficult for Iran to point to a sole element that is under its control and authority, at a time when they, who are under direct control are operating also on the basis of independent criteria and happenstance that are not always in line with those of Iran.²⁰

- **Near absolute preference of the national aspects to the point of willingness to avoid activities and even limit and end them, so long as it considered that there was a clear threat to its interests.** This, either as a result of a threat to harm it if it does not act accordingly, or as a result of exposure of its activities. This risk stood behind the Iranian decision during the latter part of the 1990s to greatly limit its activities of export of the revolution, certainly its violent aspects, but also posed the Tehran leadership before a continuous conflict over the issue, which it had not experienced since the early days of the revolution. Nonetheless, it is worthy to point out that in practice Iran was never faced with a concrete threat to harm it as a result of this policy, and the impression is that Iran opted not to be faced in with any such situation and was thus quick to withdraw (a phenomenon that faced opposition that in some cases bordered on insubordination on the part of the Revolutionary Guard).²¹ In some of the cases Iran transferred to agents or to a third party such as Hezbollah, some of the activities that it conducted earlier directly including ties with Islamic organizations.²² In this

²⁰ An overview of the various Iranian activities in exporting the revolution it is possible to point out only at the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, under Fathi Shkaki and later under Ramadan Shalah, as the sole organization that is under clear direct control of Iran. Nonetheless, in over the years, even this organization formulated independent interests that are, or may be, contrary to those of Iran. Also in the case of Hizbollah there are a number of instances in which Iran asked the organization to act but encountered refusal, and vice versa.

For example, at the end of the Iran-Iraq war as it emerges from Khomeini's message. In terms of the exporting of the revolution the Bosnian example sticks out, as the Revolutionary Guards sought to continue and maintain a hold in spite a decision by the leadership in Tehran to bring to an end Iran's presence, at least the military presence, in the region.

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²² It should be emphasized in this context that in Iran's view, Hizbollah is not a Lebanese Shiite organization but an Islamic revolutionary organization and a full partner in the ideological objectives of the revolutionary regime, leading among them is the offering of assistance to Islamic organizations, the Palestinians first among them, and the struggle against Israel.

context it special significance should be given to the implications of the internal situation on the decision. Since the start of the revolution there was, as has been mentioned, an internal debate inside Iran on the various levels and intensity, relating to the logic behind the policy of export of the revolution, especially in view of the risk inherent in it relative to the foreign relations of Tehran, which in any case were at a low point. An examination of the events of the past suggest that the voices expressing reservations grew and even forced the regime to undertake a restraining policy in two scenarios:

1. The existence of “liberal” elements with influence at the top echelons, which also the more radical elements will not be able to ignore their influence, which would stain the image of cohesion and unity of opinion that the regime in Tehran sought to emanate. This was the case during the early days of the revolution as a result of the presence of “civilian” elements (as opposed to “revolutionary” ones) in the government, and this is how it was during the mid-1990s up until the election of Ahmadinejad (and in parallel the failure in the parliamentary elections in 2004), at which time the reformist elements held on to positions of power.
2. A real change for the worse in the regional and international conditions that brings about “a different opinion” in view of the concern for the future of the state, as it was in the period of the war against Iraq.

The bottom line: two decades after the Islamic revolution, and following a peak period, the balance of Iran’s gains in the area of export of the revolution has been essentially negative. With the exception of Lebanon – “the jewel in the crown” – Iran cannot pride itself of any achievement, even in those countries where it appeared that a genuine Iranian hold was being developed which was often also supported by the host states (Bosnia and Sudan, for example). Moreover, Iran has even been stripped of most of its holdings in the region and beyond it, and has been left isolated from **a political point of view (with the exception of its ties with Syria who is presented as its strategic ally), and economically damaged. Furthermore, contrary to its hopes the activity of**

export of the revolution did not result in a chain reaction in the Arab/Muslim world, and the attraction inherent in the revolutionary idea did not pick up speed.

Export of the revolution under Ahmadinejad

What has changed in the Ahmadinejad era? More specifically, what is the potential for change in Iran's policy towards export of the revolution in its broadest sense in the wake of the ascendancy of a "young guard" elite, affiliated with the ideology of the IRGC to political power (if not religious predominance) in Iran? Has this incipient "changing of the guards" changed the cautious decision making and restrained approach that has characterized Iran's conduct vis a vis the regional and international arenas during the past decade and does it represent a return to the values of the revolution urgent aspirations to establish Iran's status as a power with military, political and religious sway over the region through a "second" Islamic revolution and the rise of a new Islamic empire?

To answer these questions we must address two main aspects of export of the revolution – starting from quasi-legitimate rallying support and influence among Muslims outside its borders and including terrorism and subversion: (a) is there indeed a change at the level of intentions and aspirations of Iran's leaders, and: (b) is this being translated into actions on the ground that diverge from the known characteristics of Tehran's actions, in the recent past.

Intentions

On the public, declaratory level, there is no doubt that in his term in office to date, Ahmadinejad has changed the rhetoric of the way Iran conducts itself in the regional and international arenas. Even if Ahmadinejad is not an ideologue and indeed, he is not, he is trying as president – as in his previous posts – to resuscitate concepts and ideas that guided the revolutionary regime during its early years, and have served as guiding light to his spiritual patrons. This follows a long period in which the use of those concepts had become increasingly rare.²³

²³ For example, following his election to president he declared that "the Islamic revolution did not occur in a single event pertaining to a particular moment in time, but is a dynamic and broad movement that is diachronic and whose roots reach down into the movement of the prophets and the warriors of Allah and the advocates of justice and freedom. The Islamic revolution is beating today as a living and dynamic creature, from South America to the East Asia."

Even more serious is that according to Ahmadinejad's outlook, and contrary to the traditional outlook of the regime, **spreading the principles of the revolution is a preparatory stage to the appearance of the Mahdi, in terms of preparing the ground for the possibility that if he appears, the world will become Muslim and adopt the Shiite beliefs.**

Assuming that from Ahmadinejad's personal point of view, as well as that of his ideological patrons (with emphasis on Ayatollah Mohammad Taghi Mesbah Yazdi) and his supporters, mainly the IRGC, the end (the hastening of the Mahdi's advent) is a worthy goal, the question arises whether it indeed justifies all the means? Even if the answer is affirmative, an analysis of the circumstances that have motivated Iran during the past decade to lower the profile of its involvement in furthering the idea of export of the revolution, warrants an examination of the extent to which this radical approach enjoys mainstream support among the "old guard" decision makers - primarily the Supreme Leader Khamenei, and the Chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council, Rafsanjani, both of whom were in power when the regime began to reduce its more blatant export of revolution. An analysis of Iran's policy since the revolution shows that in addition to the underlying ideological motivation, its leaders frequently gave priority to Iranian national interests. Moreover, in many cases these national interests tipped the scale, even when serious religious-ideological issues were at stake. The rationale for this was to improve Iran's image as a moderate and responsible player, and to protect its vital interests. The question therefore is: is this set of interests and priorities still valid? Does the "old guard" leadership believe that the current circumstances represent a genuine change in those factors, and hence, warrant a change in policy and a return to the old modus operandi? Is what is perceived as Ahmadinejad's policy, in reality, the new policy of the Islamic regime, and that regime will be willing to incur the costs and to allocate resources to that end.

The answer to these questions may be found in a comparison between the basic conditions that encouraged that very leadership to develop a policy of aggressive export of revolution, those that brought them to restrain that policy and the existing circumstances today. During the 1980s the aggressive policy of export of the revolution, was based on a combination of religious-ideological principles, a high correlation between those and Iran's national interests and convenient domestic, regional and international conditions that allowed Iran to promote both:

- From the domestic and ideological point of view, the revolutionary zeal was at the time at its height; the enthusiasm of having toppled the Shah in a popular revolution that had no parallel in the history of the Middle East infused the regime with motivation to continue the momentum. The fact that the founder of the regime was the incumbent leader added to this motivation. The Iranian populace at this point was – to a great extent – behind the regime.
- From the national point of view, there was at the time a high correlation between ideological Islamic goals and national interests; the new and appealing revolutionary idea had attracted many supporters, even in the

Sunni and Arab world, and generated new opportunities for expanding Iran's national influence among Muslim communities. Iran's struggle against Iraq – supported by almost all Sunni Arab countries – added to this national interest.

- From the strategic point of view, the use of terrorism and subversion in Iran's immediate neighborhood and further out was an important instrument of projection of power. It served on one hand to strengthen Iran's ambitions to gain regional hegemony and to pressure on the other countries which may otherwise give in to international pressure to limit their relations with Iran.
- From the point of view of geo-political conditions, the cost of taking advantage of these opportunities was then low, as Iran enjoyed relative freedom of action; world focus and international cooperation on terrorism and subversion was relatively low – or at least much less than after 11 September 2001.

These conditions changed drastically during the 1990's and more so since 11 September 2001. These new conditions posed new and serious constraints and obstacles to the regime in Tehran, even though the need to recruit regional/Islamic support in its stand – as a deterrence and retaliation tool - has even grown since then as a result of the growing tension with the international community concerning its nuclear program:

- Domestically, exhaustion of the years of the war with Iraq and of international and regional sanctions reduced the public support for an active policy of export of revolution. The death of Khomeini denied the regime of an important source of authority to bolster its resolve in continuing the course that he had set.
- On the regional level, the regime had internalized lessons from the responses to its subversive and terrorist activities and began to recognize the damage that Iran may suffer by continuing them. At the same time the allure of the revolutionary regime - as a model or even as an ally – had dimmed.²⁴ The regime no longer had the asset of a supreme religious-spiritual and

²⁴ Evidence to this can be found in the meager support Hezbollah and its patrons in Tehran received during the latest campaign in Lebanon, and the serious concerns among its Arab neighbors, those who are close and those who are further away, that are stirred up by Iran's nuclear program and also the possibility that the strength and standing of the Shiite may increase, to the point of a Sunni-Shiite confrontation.

political authority, who enjoyed broad legitimacy at home and abroad and who has the power to serve as a catalyst and a model for emulation for Muslims throughout the world, including to Shiite Muslims.²⁵

- The emergence of new (Sunni and anti-Shiite) revolutionary elements, such as Al-Qaeda reduced the appeal of the Iranian brand of revolution.
- In the international theatre, the enhanced attention to the danger of Iran – not only due to its terrorist activities but also in light of its nuclear ambitions – brought about a heightened degree of attention to Iranian covert activities.
- International concern from terrorism – though not necessarily from Iranian quarters – encumbered Iranian activities. This concern increased in the wake of 11 September, the apprehension surrounding backlash of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the attacks in Western Europe and the in other Middle Eastern countries. All of this sharpened international recognition of the need to enhance coordination in the area of counter-terrorism.
- Sunni Muslim concern from the rise in the power of the Shiite and of a possible Sunni-Shiite confrontation that may have a deleterious influence on the standing and stability of key countries in the region, has accentuated their sensitivity to any Iranian activity toward this end.

Capabilities

At the same time, Iran's subversive and terrorist capabilities to carry out "export of revolution" eroded. These capabilities are contingent on two conditions: the existence of apparatuses and means within Iran that are in charge of such matters; and the ability to successfully carry out attacks without risk of exposure. In this context:

- We can reasonably assume that the organizations and/or institutions that have, since the early days of the revolution, focused on furthering the idea of export of the revolution still exist and are still active inside Iran. Moreover, according to a number of reports since Ahmadinejad became

²⁵ In this context it is worthy to point out not only to the existence of religious experts [faqih] who are more senior than the leaders of Iran (and whose views are not in line with [Ahmadinejad's](#) views in the best of circumstances), but also on the creation of a competing Shiite leadership outside Iran, mostly in the form of Sistani in Iraq (who opposes the idea of 'vilayat-I faqih) and which is in a position to undermine the status of Qom and Tehran.

president, there has been a renewal and even a bolstering of the activities of some of these organizations, with particular focus of their activities being Lebanon and Syria (mainly the on going military and financial support to Hizbulla that exposed during the campaign in Lebanon last summer), Iraq (the executions against Tehran's as the main supplier of the anti-American terror organizations), the Palestinian organizations (and especially the efforts to strengthen the Hamas operational capabilities and to deepen its dependence in Iran), and Afghanistan. What are particularly evident in this context are the activities of the "Qods Force" of the Revolutionary Guard, which is responsible for the activities beyond Iran's borders (more on this below).

- During the past decade there has been a significant drop in the number of reports on Iranian subversive and terrorist activities throughout the world, with emphasis on western countries, some of whom (mostly European) served in the past as bases for operations for official and covert Iranian elements (propaganda, dissemination, Ministry of Intelligence, Revolutionary Guard). Even if we assume that the nature of Iranian activities is fundamentally covert, in view of both the fact that there is a drop in reports, and a growing sensitivity to such activities on the part of those who following Al-Qaeda activities, and the attempts to carry out attacks in European capitals, and also following a series of exposures that required, as has already been mentioned, the Iranians to lower their profile, it is possible to assume with high probability that even if such activity is taking place, it is limited in scope and may point to the limited capabilities for action of the Iranians in these areas.

A related question is what is "success" in "export of revolution" from Iran's point of view? This could be measured through three main abilities:

- The ability to create an image – be it real or imaginary – of regional support for it in its struggle against the international community on the issue of its nuclear program. Such an image would enable serve Iran as a deterrence against international sanctions against it, out of concern for religious conflagration – that will be presented as a spontaneous popular eruption.
- The possession (or appearance of possession), of effective terrorist deterrence; a capability that would exact a heavy price from an aggressor, and which allow Iran to proceed with its activities. Such a deterrence has to go a step further than the above-mentioned popular support and must be the actual possession (or image thereof) of an infrastructure that can be activated when needed
- The ability to mobilize, in practice, a military or terrorist force in target countries against the interests of foreign and/or local elements in response to a strike against it.

Iranian success, in all the above aspects is a two-edged sword; any Iranian attempt to project a deterrent image based on terrorist and subversive capabilities would feed the

claims that the Islamic regime is indeed a dangerous actor in the region and must be removed. Therefore, the regime will have to walk a delicate tight-rope of implying its capabilities on one hand, and obfuscating its involvement in such activities on the other hand. In fact, it has already acted according to this paradigm; it has often hinted that it has the ability to conduct such activity if attacked²⁶, and at the same time deny any involvement in such activities.

It therefore appears that even if the original intent and basic capabilities are still available to Iran, the current conditions in the domestic, regional and international arena are fundamentally different from those which existed two decades earlier, and pose a genuine obstacle before Iran, on the one hand, and threat that may increase its already difficult position on the other.

The Iranian regime apparently views the current international challenge as a critical test over its survival. Therefore, it stands to reason that elements within it would claim that such a situation calls for exploitation of extreme means that, otherwise, would not be advisable. The reasoning of such elements may be that since Iran lacks effective conventional and non-conventional deterrence, it must achieve deterrence and a real-time response capability against the threat of a US/Western/Israeli blockade or attack through re-invigoration of elements from the policy of export of the revolution in its broad sense. As in the past, the regime will have to decide how to combine two main components of this policy according to its evaluation of cost-effectiveness and risk analysis. Its options are listed below in order of increasing likelihood:

- **Rallying support through ‘soft’ measures**, in the hope that this will be sufficient, so that when “D-Day” occurs the regimes in the region and the west will be deterred from forming or carrying out a hostile policy against Iran. It should be noted that this is a traditional policy that a number of regional rulers have adopted in the past (Saddam Hussein being the most recent example). The essence of this tactic is an attempt to stir up the masses, going above the heads of their leaders on a platform of hatred of the west and Israel, and as a counter to what will be presented as an effort to

²⁶ For example its ability to take action directly or indirectly against the American military presence in neighboring countries, with emphasis on Iraq and Afghanistan, or an attack on Israel through Hezbollah and Palestinian groups. On the connection between the policy of exporting the revolution and the Israeli context see Annex C.

harm the strength and values of Islam.²⁷ Ostensibly, such a tactic is relatively low-cost; it does not involve large allocations of funds and Iran has continued to carry out activities of similar character in recent years, to varying degrees. On the other hand, in order to create a “critical mass” of effective and significant pressure Iran will have to stir up extensive protest in key countries in the region such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan, and the Maghreb countries, all of which are pro-western perceive Iran as a threat to their interest, both because of its nuclear program and its regional aspirations and its potential for regime subversion. Therefore, in addition to the customary restrictions on demonstrations and public disorder in these countries, Iran will encounter real restrictions on its freedom of actions.

- **Terrorism and subversion** in order to deter potential adversaries, and in case of hostile action against it, to exact a price from the enemy. Such a policy would be based on ignoring any restrictions on targets or theatres of operation. Nevertheless, as long as Iran lacks a nuclear deterrent, the cost-effectiveness of such extreme action, particularly if Iran’s role is exposed, is questionable. The obstacles of such a strategy are manifold:
 1. The ease of executing such a strategy in theatres in which Iran has not operated for years and where much of its operational capabilities have been eroded is also in question. The Iranian apparatuses will have to revive these capabilities, to prepare targets, to collect intelligence, to plan operations, to transfer the means, to prepare the ground, to select escape routes, and to formulate plans for obfuscating Iran’s involvement.
 2. The preferred option of acting through proxies that it will need to find and who it will have to trust, such as Hezbollah and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad or Hamas may also encounter obstacles, since it is not at all clear to what extent such a modus operandi will be suited to the specific interests of the group involved, and to what extent they will succeed, if at all, to take action in various countries in view of the sensitivity in those countries to any Iran-oriented group.

²⁷ the incitement that followed the statements of the Pope or the publication of the Mohammad cartoons in the Danish press are a case in point.

3. The possibility of Iran's joining forces with active terrorist elements, such as Al-Qaeda is also problematic as the ability of these organizations to act is also limited, and many of the Sunni groups are anti-Shiite and anti-Iranian.
 4. The high level of alert in potential target countries against terrorism in general will be raised in case of open hostility between Iran and the international community. Target states today are better organized than in the past to counter the phenomenon of terrorism and they are sensitive to the issue, hence, the likelihood that Iran's role will be exposed increases, and with it the danger that such actions will only serve to grant legitimacy for taking action against it.
- **The use of the weapon of terrorism and subversion against specific targets** – a sort of intermediate path between adopting on the one hand the use of the weapon of terrorism and subversion but limiting it from the start to targets which Iran has improved ability to take actions, where the local conditions work to its favor, i.e. – they have a concentration of particularly important targets and where its involvement in these operations will in any case only be indirect. In this context it is possible to point to a number of countries where an action in them, also according to the Iranian point of view, can bear the desired results at an acceptable cost (if at all): Iraq tops the list, Afghanistan, the Persian Gulf, Lebanon and the Palestinian arena.

The advantages of this last option for Iran are obvious:

- These are areas close to their borders, countries with unstable regimes or characterized by routine levels of extreme violence.
- These are areas where the Iranians already have a foothold and influence over local elements, including the ability to extend to them practical assistance, including military assistance.
- These areas also have a large concentration of significant targets from Iran's point of view – an international presence, first and foremost the Americans in Iraq, the Gulf and Afghanistan, and Israel, as a target to all the activities stemming from Lebanon and the territories.
- In all those areas it is possible to present the terrorist acts against foreign elements as legitimate "resistance" to the "occupation" – a definition that has already enjoyed the support of the Arab League, and which may be combined with the ideological-religious-political-nationalistic hatred of Israel and the United States as a common denominator to rallying indirect support for Iran.

These advantages are not theoretical and it is reasonable to assume that they are already operating in this direction. Thus:

- During the last year and a half, and particularly since the rise in tensions between Iran and the west led over Tehran's nuclear program, senior Iranian

officials have already issued warnings regarding the Iranian ability to respond to sanctions, blockades or attacks. These persons also frequently hint at the soft underbelly of the United States and Israel in the region, in other words – the presence of American forces in the Gulf, in Iraq and Afghanistan, or their ability to activate the Hezbollah and the Palestinians against Israel. Many of these warnings are embellished with apocalyptic religious motifs.

- As part of the efforts to bolster the signals of deterrence and menace, the Iranians often publicize the existence of suicide units comprising of thousands, who will take action against anyone threatens Iran in its territory (defending the nuclear and strategic installations), and beyond it, even though the IRGC has officially disassociated itself from this phenomenon so that it will not be considered as being responsible for any such activities in the future.²⁸ At the same time, Iran has conducted a large number of military exercises that are meant, it claims, to assist the country in dealing with the aggression against it and regularly announces the development of new weapons systems, such as the testing of missiles capable of sinking large warships in the Gulf and in the northern Indian ocean.

There are signs of activity already being undertaken in the “field”. The main theatres of this activity are **Iraq, Lebanon, the Palestinian theatre, Afghanistan and to a lesser extent, the Gulf States:**

- **In Iraq** – elements of the IRGC and Iranian religious and diplomatic figures are trying to gain a foothold and influence mainly in the Shiite community there. Iran’s main proxy in Iraq is Moqtada al-Sadr to whom they provide them financial and military assistance. The impression is that the Iranians are trying to prepare a dormant infrastructure that will be able to operate in accordance to Iranian instruction if and when the situation in Iraq turns against Iranian interests or as a tool for reprisals against foreign elements in those countries.

²⁸ In this context the declaration of Defense Minister Mostafa Najjar, is noteworthy, in which he stated that Iran has no need for a nuclear weapon because it has at its disposal millions of volunteers willing to carry out suicide missions such as the Basij.

- **In Lebanon** – Iran’s involvement in support of Hezbollah has been highlighted in the most recent campaign in Lebanon. The behavior of Hezbollah seems to indicate that it – and its Iranian patrons – are poised to attempt to change the basic political structure of Lebanon through mobilization of its influence over the large Shiite community.
- The **Palestinians** – Iran maintains that it only provide “moral assistance” to the Palestinians and at the same time that Palestinian terrorism is “resistance to the occupation,” and not terrorism. Iran is strengthening its ties with Hamas and using Hezbollah to develop direct operations in the Palestinian territories.
- In **Afghanistan** there are signs of a deepening Iranian operational involvement among Shiite Hazaris.
- While Iran has significantly lowered the profile of its involvement in **Saudi Arabia** and the **Gulf states**, it appears that it still retains channels of communication with Shiite opposition groups there.

On the other hand, the fact that the Iranians have already threatened to carry out operations of this sort, by pointing out the vulnerability of foreign forces operating in these countries, will make Iran potentially guilty in case these attacks are carried out during periods of tension with Iran or following an attack against it. Moreover, at least in two arenas – Lebanon and the Palestinians – it is important to pose a question mark over the ability of Iran to act and influence, whether because of the weakness of the Palestinian groups at this time, or as a result of the impact of the war in Lebanon which destroyed at least some of the strength of Hezbollah and exposed the close link between the organization and Iran.

Summary

There can be no doubt that the Islamic regime's current dilemma – in which the question of the possibility of it again employing the radical and aggressive components of the policy of exporting the revolution it abandoned a decade ago is but one of the sum of its parts – is one of the most complex it has ever known, and perhaps the most crucial. In the background – the internal struggle, part of which is covert and is currently taking place in Tehran between two worldviews which are becoming more acute in view of the pressure to which Iran is subject in the international arena around the nuclear crisis:

Pragmatism as a political tactic that was adopted on numerous occasions by the Old Guard of the revolution, including Khomeini, with the aim of removing threats to vital national interests, such as the survival of the Islamic regime and the values of the revolution, and:

Mahdism as a radical, ideological and religious concept adopted by some of the second-generation revolutionaries headed by Ahmadinejad who perceive, in theory, the conflict with the international community – while using all the means at Tehran's disposal both from home and abroad, and despite its potential damage – as a stage in preparing the ground for the return of the Mahdi, thus paving the way to a victory that will restore Iran's status in the region in one fell swoop.

There can be no doubt that the renewed revolutionary fervor in Iran, led by the president and his supporters and headed by the Revolutionary Guards, combined with a practical dimension whose weight in the decision-making process in Tehran is increasing, in the form of the need to strengthen Iran's deterrent and retaliatory capability (assuming that it has no intention of backing down in the nuclear crisis), is taking the leadership in Tehran towards rethinking the adoption of radical components in its policy of exporting the revolution, which it abandoned in the past.

Beyond the supreme and critical test of the Islamic regime's survival and future character, in such a case the present circumstances also constitute a benchmark for Iran's desire and ability to use, on the day of reckoning, as it has threatened, its good relations with radical bodies in the Arab/Islamic world, not to mention its immediate environment, as part of its policy of exporting the revolution, both for deterrent and retaliatory purposes and for exacting a toll if it is attacked. As things stand, the principal change is manifested in the threat to extend the conflict from Iran itself to the entire Middle East and beyond, in an attempt to damage Western interests and involve Israel in it, and bring about instability while lowering the threshold of regional tension as a means of exerting pressure on the international community in the hope of thus removing the threat from Iran. This old-new modus operandi of leaning on local factors is likely to grant Iran – in its view – several important advantages (as part of its long experience in the sphere of terrorism), for organizations are less subject to pressure than states, and moreover, Iran can disavow their activities, presenting them as spontaneous supportive responses for its interests, and certainly when they have legitimate justification in its view – the struggle against occupation.

The key question in this context is how far can Iran rely on these bodies to come to its aid when the chips are down. It would appear that Iran is aware that despite the ideological agreement, as it were, these are bodies, each of which has its own agenda and specific interests that are influenced by mainly local, but also regional and international developments that on occasion are liable to run counter to those of Iran. Past experience has shown that even Hezbollah, the organization closest to it, does not automatically fall into line with every instruction or request coming out of Tehran, and this is all the more true with regard to the Palestinians and Iraqis.

Furthermore, the impression is that the objective limitations to which Iran is subject as a consequence of the mainly negative change in internal, regional and international circumstances, and also past lessons in the form of the potential damage it may suffer as a result, still oblige it to adopt a moderate approach. As a consequence of reality vs. ideal, Iran might well give preference to activity in the countries around it, as well as in Lebanon and the Palestinian arena, where it feels there are favorable conditions for action against Western/Israeli targets, especially through agents (as “sleepers”). In such a case, however, Iran will be compelled to sacrifice its future strategic aspirations – the establishment of spheres of interest and friendly regimes – at the expense of present urgent challenges, and in the final accounting it may even lose them (when in the background hovers a question mark over the willingness of the various organizations to act on Iran’s behalf, even at the expense of their own interests).

This situation, too, may change later, particularly as a consequence of the balance of power in Iran’s internal arena, i.e., possible increased power of the moderate bodies, much as this happened ten years ago in light of the fear of damage to existential Iranian interests that would bring about further moderation in Tehran’s policies, increased power of the leadership’s supporters of a more aggressive line, which will lead to more radicalized policy in general and in all matters pertaining to the adoption of an aggressive approach to the fulfillment of the idea of exporting the revolution.

Annex A: Exporting the Iranian Revolution – targets, methods, achievements

Since the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and to this day – even though, as has been mentioned, during the past decade the extent of the activity has been in lower doses – Iran has acted to export the principles of the revolution beyond its borders. Its activity included a variety of different elements and characteristics - starting from “soft” methods” of propaganda and public relations, and culminating in terrorist and subversive activities – which spread over many regions of the world. During the peak years of activity in these fields, it seemed that Iran was an octopus that thrust its arms everywhere in an effort to gain influence and a foothold, both in the hope of strengthening its standing and also in the hope of manifesting Khomeini’s vision.

Main centers of Iranian activity include:

- **The countries in the Middle East** – with emphasis on its neighbors, who were a natural and readily available target in the activities of export of the revolution immediately following the rise to power of the Islamic-revolutionary regime. The geographic proximity, as well as the presence of Shiite communities (in some cases constituting the majority of the population) in Gulf states, in Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen and even in Syria²⁹ and a promise inherent in the revolutionary idea in mater pertaining to social and economic justice which gained for it support among the masses (also among Sunnis) – was supposed to make it easier for Iran to disseminate the revolutionary message as a model of emulation and as a means for enhancing its influence and its involvement in the region as a stage of implementing its ambition to have regional Islamic leadership. Within this context:
 1. **Lebanon – “the jewel in the crown” of the achievements of Iran’s policy in export of the revolution** and “the greatest

²⁹ Syria is a Sunni state in character that is ruled, since the mid-1960s by the Alawite minority. Even though the Alawis are considered by the Sunnis and Shiite as primarily infidels, Hafez al-Assad succeeded in securing during the early 1970s a religious decree from Musa al-Sadr, recognizing the Alawis as full fledged Shiite. This enhances the dependency of Syria on Iran, on the one hand, and provides Tehran a foothold in its territory, on the other.

achievement of the Islamic revolution outside the borders of Iran” according to adviser of the Supreme Leader and former foreign minister, Ali Akbar Velayati, following the withdrawal of the IDF from southern Lebanon). Iran succeeded in taking advantage of the war in Lebanon and its consequences (the expulsion of the Palestinians, the existence of an armed struggle against Israel, shared interests with Syria), as well as the unstable domestic situation in the country and its links with the large Shiite community there, in order to send hundreds of men from the Revolutionary Guard to Lebanon, officially in order to “fight against the invading Zionist army” and in practice in order to gain a foothold and influence in Lebanon in general and among the large Shiite community there in particular. This force, which operated with Syrian permission, served as the basis for the establishment of Hezbollah, and provided the conditions for Iranian entrenchment in Lebanon, which itself became a source for exporting the Islamic revolution to the entire region. In the long term, Iran is seeking, through Hezbollah, to transform the Shiite community into the leading force in the country as a step toward its transformation into an Islamic state (a Shari'ah state), and this is where its civil and economic support in Lebanon, through Hezbollah, comes into play, aiming to bolster the organization’s social, economic and political power of the organization and also its military force as part of the possibility for a domestic struggle in Lebanon. For the short and intermediate terms, Lebanon serves as a forward base of operations for the continued struggle against Israel through Hezbollah, which enjoys massive assistance to this end, mostly in military aid, including the deliveries of advanced arms and equipment. In recent years (and as part of Tehran’s attempt to lower the profile of its involvement in terrorist and subversive activities), Hezbollah has also become an Iranian arm for the dissemination of the revolution, especially in those cases in which Iran seeks to downplay its involvement. Thus, the organization is taking action to assist the Palestinians in their struggle through economic and military assistance (training, arms and equipment, and advise), and by setting up Islamic cells, groups and organizations in various places in the world.

2. **Iraq** – perceived to be the traditional rival of Iran and as the primary threat to it, in view of the animosity of the past (the struggle over the control of Shat al-Arab waterway and the personal hatred of Khomeini toward Iraq in general and Saddam Hussein in particular). Here too the secular Ba’ath regime in Baghdad was described as being illegitimate and as a collaborator with the west and as an oppressor of the Shiite majority inside the country. It is therefore no surprise that immediately following the revolution Iran began to openly stir up the Shiite in Iraq against Saddam’s regime

and called for the establishment of an Islamic regime to replace him. In furthering this objective Iran made use of its ties with Shiite groups and individuals, leading among them the “Islamic Resistance Movement’ under Muhammad Bakr al-Sadr, in order to promote this objective, including assisting subversive and terrorist activities against infrastructure and senior government figures. These steps resulted in a harsh response on the part of the Saddam regime which included arrests, oppression and executions, and led Saddam in the end, who sought to take advantage of what he regarded to be a weak Iran, in order to embark on war against it. Moreover, the eight year long war between the two countries was perceived by the Iranians as a total war against infidels (‘the path to Jerusalem passes through Karbala’) and Khomeini even promised not to end it until the eradication of Saddam’s regime. In the end Iran , which was in a militarily inferior position, was forced to accept the cease fire conditions³⁰ but the aspiration to be rid of Saddam did not end for many years, and its activities to bolster the Shiite majority in the country only intensified following the regime’s fall in 2003 following the American occupation.³¹

3. **Saudi Arabia** – even before the revolution it was considered as a competitor in the leadership of the Muslim world and as a claimant to the title of controlling the holy sites of Mecca and Medina, and by extension has become an explicit target for the activity of export

³⁰It is interesting to note, in this context, Khomeini’s letter to the senior members of the regime regarding the cease fire in the Iran-Iraq war, recently published by the office of the head of the Expediency Discernment Council, former president Rafsanjani, in which the leader explains the reasons that have led him to agree (“bitter decision” and “deadly poison,” as he described it) to the terms of the cease-fire, contrary to the explicit position of the head of the Revolutionary Guard at the time, Mohsen Rezai, who believed that the war should be continued in spite the defeats Iran suffered on the field of battle. In addition to the military situation, stood the difficult economic and political situation in which Iran found itself, and the loss of fervor and excitement among the public for continuing the war. Furthermore, Khomeini did not consider the cease-fire to be an end to the policy of exporting the revolution: the war against Iraq was presented as a war defending the Islamic faith, and agreement to the conditions of the cease-fire is in no way willingness to relinquish the policy of non-alliance and Iran continues to regard reconciliation with the powers as “turning the back to the principles of Islam. Nonetheless, Khomeini warns the senior figures of the possibility of action being taken contrary to the decision made by elements (perhaps the Revolutionary Guard) who will make use of the slogans of the revolution in order to justify the continuance of the war.

³¹ Nonetheless, Iran avoided offering serious assistance to the Shiite uprising in Iraq in 1991 and this way assisted Saddam Hussein in crushing the uprising in the south of the country.

of the revolution. Furthermore, Iran, which openly called for the overthrow of the monarchy in Saudi Arabia, justified this with a series of arguments, according to which it is not a legitimate leadership that is collaborating with the enemies of Islam (and ally and lackey of the United States), adopts a conciliatory attitude with regards to the Arab-Israeli conflict (as essentially blocking the spirit of the struggle), and as a country that adopts a discriminatory approach to the Shiite minority in the kingdom. This view worsened during the war with Iraq in view of Saudi Arabia's support to Iraq, and following its efforts to prevent (at times also through force) the subversive and challenging activities of Iran during the pilgrimage to Mecca each year, which were used to conscript supporters and collaborators inside Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries. Under the guise of export of the revolution there was also a powerful political interest – removing a real threat that Saudi Arabia posed, Iran's large and powerful neighbor on the western side of the Gulf, and its competitor in the petroleum market, which hosted on its territory a western military presence. Iranian activity in the kingdom reached its zenith in an attack (June 1996), in a residential neighborhood of American air force personnel in Al-Khaber, in which 19 lost their lives and hundreds were injured. Even though Iran repeatedly denies any involvement in the attack, the United States continues to blame it with involvement in the attack and provides a great deal of incriminating evidence against agents that were allegedly controlled by Iran in this attack. With the election of Khatami to the presidency, a thaw in the relations between the two countries began, even though there is still a tense rivalry between them, and it is not impossible that Iran has links to dormant subversive infrastructures in the kingdom.

4. **The Gulf States** – for many years Iran had close ties with Shiite opposition organizations, especially in Bahrain, where the majority of the population is Shiite, and is ruled by a Sunni minority, and in Kuwait (where in the early 1980s there were a number of attacks, for whom Iran was blamed). This, in addition to offering military training, economic assistance and advice. Iran was tied to involvement in the Shiite uprising in Bahrain during the mid-1990s.
5. **Turkey** – Iran was linked to a series of murders and political assassination of academics, journalists and politicians, opponents of the Islamic government in Turkey, for providing financial support and training in order to carry out the killings inside Turkey, for financially supporting the Turkish fundamentalist movement, Islami Hareket, which was blamed for the attacks. During the late 1990s there were reports of a detailed testimony by one of the leading members of the movement who revealed that Iran had given him financial assistance and instruction in order to carry out the assassinations inside Turkey, including details on the location of the

training camps and the numbers of bank accounts for the transfer of funds. The court in Turkey convicted in March 2002 the Iranian regime with religious subversive activity in the country after Turkish extremists testified in court at the existence of ties with Iran. The current Foreign Minister of Iran Manoucher Mottaki, was blamed while he was Iran's ambassador to Ankara of cooperating with Turkish fundamentalists and was expelled from the country.

- **Sub-Saharan Africa** – revolutionary Iran has attributed special significance to Africa in its foreign policy overall and its links and support with Muslim populations in particular. In view of the recognition in Tehran that the region offers both the potential for expanding its diplomatic and economic ties (among other reasons because of the natural resources there and the uranium deposits), and also as a convenient target for export of the revolution from the point view of it being “virgin territory” in light of the presence of a large Muslim population or regretfully pagan population (a potential target for proselytization) weak central governments in some of the countries as well as problems of stability and centers of crisis (a convenient center for operations), economic and social difficulties, and a sense of oppression and inferiority (fertile ground for the marketing of ideological ideas with emphasis on justice and equality in the spirit of Islam). Moreover, the continent does not represent one uniform block and also from an Iranian point of view it is divided into different regions, by their conditions and by extension the characteristics of Iranian activities there.
- **North Africa** – was viewed as potentially ripe for influence particularly in view of the presence there of opposition groups there, some of whom militant, with Islamic characteristics that sought to bring about the fall of the existing regimes whose orientation was pro-western. This, even though these were countries with a predominantly Sunni Arab Muslim population concentrations. Moreover, Tehran did not have any significant achievement in its activities in this region, especially because of the nationalist character of the opposition in each of these countries and the concern and suspicion that the regimes there exhibited vis a vis what they perceived to be an

attempt on the part of Iran to meddle in their internal affairs. Thus for example:

1. **In Egypt** – Iran had contacts with militant Islamic opposition groups such as Al-Jihad, and Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya, and even provided them with assistance, instruction and funding. Nonetheless, the concern in Cairo vis a vis Iran's intentions resulted in limiting its moves there (the expulsion of the Iranian Charge d'Affaires in the 1980s and supervision over Iranian activities in its territory), as well as the declaration of a total war against the organizations themselves (especially following the failed assassination attempt against President Hosni Mubarak during his visit in Ethiopia in 1995),³² who were forced to limit their activities (an understanding between the regime and the Jama'a was achieved, and in the case of Al-Jihad, they went underground). Nonetheless, it seems that Tehran continues to have ties with these organizations, and some of its members sought refuge in Iran. This fact and the serious wariness with which Cairo views Tehran (where one of its streets is named after the assassin of President Anwar Sadat, al-Islambuli),³³ and also over the issue of the nuclear program, constitutes also currently an obstacle for the upgrading of diplomatic relations between the two countries.
2. **Algeria** – Iran tried to take advantage of the domestic confrontation in the country that began in 1991 following the cancellation of the results of the elections which showed that Islamic elements had won. This through a tightening of ties with the Islamic opposition groups such as FIS and GIA, and its willingness to provide them with logistical support, training and financial assistance. Also in this case there was a response on the part of the government that cut

³² In view of Iran's ties with members of the militant Islamic opposition groups that were accused of responsibility for the attack, and the assistance it had given them, and its deep involvement in Sudan as a basis for its subversive activities in the region, following the incident an accusing finger was also pointed to Iran for its indirect involvement, even though, like in many similar cases, there was an absence of clear evidence of clear Iranian involvement.

³³ This sort of confrontational behavior was adopted by Iran on other occasions. For example, the name of Churchill Street in Tehran was changed to Bobby Sands, the jailed member of the IRA who died in a British prison following a hunger strike. Yet another expression to the connection and sense of identification of the revolutionary regime with the Irish Republican Army.

diplomatic ties with Iran in 1993 and prevented it from having any opportunity to hold direct ties with those organizations on Algerian soil (relations between the two sides were renewed in 2000, as part of the policy of “dispelling tensions” of President Khatami, but have remained tense).

3. **Tunisia** – where Iran sought to establish direct and indirect contacts (through Europe) with the local opposition movement Al-Nahda, but also in this case its activities were restricted by the authorities, who dealt decisively with the movement and the ties between the two sides faded.
- **The Horn of Africa** – the crowning glory of Iranian activity in this context is without doubt **Sudan**. The ties began in a successful Iranian attempt to take advantage of the results of a coup in the country in 1989 that brought to power Amr al-Bashir, as the political leader, and Hassan Turabi, as the ideological and religious leader, and also the civil war which offered Tehran an opportunity to broaden its influence there. In spite the differences in religious outlooks (Sunni vs. Shiite) it was evident among the new rulers of Sudan the desire to copy the Iranian revolutionary model, which would contribute to Tehran’s wish to broaden its hold on the country, politically, culturally (establishing religious centers and exchanges of delegations and students), militarily (through an Iranian military presence in Sudan, in addition to a representation of the Quds Force of the Revolutionary Guard that is responsible for terrorist activities and subversion beyond the borders of Iran). And indeed, during the 1990s Sudan became a sort of frontal Iranian outpost in the region and as a base for terrorist and subversive operations in the nearby areas, such as **Egypt, Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea, and other countries on the continent** – it is also possible that in some of the instances the authorities in Khartoum were not aware of these taking place (a sort of state within a state situation). During the second half of the 1990s there was a cooling in relations between the two countries mostly as a result of suspicions on the part of Khartoum regarding the motives of Iran, and “second thoughts” on the part of Sudan regarding the usefulness of continuing the ties in view of the cost that Sudan had to pay for it. This, in the form of worsening relations with its neighbors and especially Egypt, as well as with the western world (the American air strike in Sudan), and the refusal of Tehran to grant Sudan military and financial assistance. The final nail in the coffin of the special relations between the two countries was slammed home with the removal of Turabi (as Iran’s advocate) from his positions and the centers of power in the government.
 - **The remaining African countries** – most of the Iranian activities in the countries of Central Africa (including the west, the east and the south) had a clearly propagandist character under the guise of spreading the Shiite faith among Sunnis and also non-Muslims, through constant competition with Saudi Arabia. In this context Tehran sought to establish cultural and religious centers (mosques, schools, colleges, visiting student programs in Iran, the dispatch of propagandists, and of Iranian missionaries) as well as

the offering of humanitarian aid. In view of the apparently legitimate character of the activities, official elements were involved, such as the Iranian embassies throughout the continent (including cultural advisory centers), the Red Crescent of Iran, Construction Jihad (Iran's Development and Reconstruction Authority), which enabled it to penetrate also remote places, in addition to the organizations offering written and electronic propaganda. Overall, Iran's success was very limited both in countries with Muslim communities (such as Nigeria and countries in the western and eastern parts of the continent), where there was an attempt to utilize crisis points and develop ties with local Islamic groups (including the provision of military equipment through the Quds Force and not the Defense Ministry, as is normal) and also in countries where Iran identified an Islamic revival (such as South Africa).

- **Central Asia**³⁴- the central Asian republics that emerged following the collapse of the Soviet Union were traditionally viewed as the "backyard" of Iran and as a region in which it had clear interests and influence in the past – some of whom were also under direct control of Tehran, and between them there existed not mere geographic affinity but also ties that were historic, religious (a Muslim population) and cultural (linguistically). The Iranian ambition to return and regain influence in this region received a boost with the establishment of the Republics during the early 1990s, but also in this case, and in spite the apparently favorable conditions, Iran was unable to achieve a foothold and influence there. The background to this – the gaps between Sunnis and Shiite and the presence of a predominantly mild version of Islam, a great deal of wariness on the part of the local governments toward Iran (a traditional Soviet model in anything having to do with religious aspects), and competition from Turkey. This was the situation vis a vis **Tajikistan** (the closest country to Iran from a cultural,

³⁴ There are no known efforts of Iranian attempts to export the revolution to Russia and earlier in the Soviet Union. The background to this – Iran's supreme interest to retain a working relationship with its northern neighbor, concern of its likely response, and interest in continued Russian support for the development in its ballistic missile program (at the time) as well as its nuclear program. This can explain the fact that Tehran avoided, not only to assist Muslims in Chechnya, in light of the massacres carried out by the Russians there, but even to condemn Moscow for its actions. Paradoxically, the Iranians condemned the Chechens for the taking of Russian hostages as part of their struggle. Also in the 1980s Iran avoided allowing the Mujahedeen to operate inside its territory during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

linguistic and interests with regard to Afghanistan, as well as the existence of a domestic crisis and an active and bellicose opposition), and certainly vis a vis Azerbaijan, where Iran competed, in spite the religious identity – Shiite as a common denominator – with a growing challenge in the form of Azerbaijan’s influence on Iran’s own Azeri minority (concern over separatism), its pro-western inclinations (American and Israeli presence close to its borders), and the dispute between the two sides over economic issues (the future of the Caspian Sea). The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Gaidar Aliev, blamed Iran of bacing and supporting a failed attempt to overthrow him in 1995, and the authorities there claimed to have arrested two Iranian agents with links to Iran’s embassy in Baku, accusing them of providing financial and military assistance to the conspirators. Paradoxically, and in spite its obligation to assist Muslims wherever they may be, in this case Iran made use of its links with Armenia (a Christian country) against its rival in an constant attempt to intervene in its domestic affairs, in part, over the struggle between the two over the division of the Caspian Sea into zones of control.

- **The Balkans** – in this region too Iran sought to take advantage of the civil war in Yugoslavia to disrupt the nature of the religious struggle between Christians and Muslims, in order to attempt and deepen its involvement and influence under the nose of Europe (close to Islamic centers that Iran assists through funding in the main European capitals). Arguing that it is assisting besieged Muslims (and with silent accord on the part of the west that is divided over the policy that should be adopted regarding the conflict) Iran began offering the Bosnians, during the early 1990s, humanitarian assistance (usually food, medicine, and financial assistance to the scope of several tens millions of dollars), in great part because of its ties with the local government under Alija Izetbegovic (who visited Iran on a number of occasions, and asked for its assistance). In this context representations of the Iranian Red Crescent worked in the area, the Ahl al-Beit Association, which is responsible for disseminating propagandist material and Iranian Imams, various aid organizations such as the Oppressed Fund, and Construction Jihad which was busy with repairing and building mosques and cultural centers. This assistance increased the worse the fighting became and later included military assistance, including long range rockets that were transferred mostly under the guise of humanitarian aid flights through Croatia (but also through land and seas routes), and the presence of Iranian fighters, instructors, and military advisers from the ranks of the Revolutionary Guard, a total of about 2,000 men, who participated in the fighting on the side of the Muslim forces in Bosnia. At the same time, several hundred Iranian intelligence officers were based in the area, operating under the guise of members of humanitarian organizations or diplomats. This aid continued secretly in spite international involvement and agreements for an end to the fighting that were achieved through western mediation and which included (Dayton Accords of 1995) an article requiring the withdrawal of Iranian forces from Bosnia, and the declared

willingness, on the part of Bosnia, to cease its ties with Iran and to bring an end to the presence on its territory of Iranian forces. With the entry of international forces in the region, evidence was found of the Iranian military presence, including arms and equipment, instructions and training on carrying out attacks, and videos showing training sessions of local elements by the Iranians. In the end, and in spite of the effort on the part of the Revolutionary Guards to continue their presence in the region (perhaps also contrary to the views of Iran's Supreme Leader, Khamene'i, and its president at the time, Rafsanjani), Iran was finally forced to vacate the area.

- **Southeast Asia** – Iran's activities in this region were carried out vis a vis countries with a Muslim majority (such as Indonesia, Borneo and Malaysia), and also vis a vis countries that were neither Muslim nor had Muslim minorities (such as Thailand, Burma and the Philippines.) Most of the activity was on the cultural level, although, at least in the case of the Philippines, (where a local opposition movement exists) and Thailand, there is evidence of subversive and terrorist activities with Iranian support.
- **South America** – direct and indirect (through Hezbollah) Iranian activity in this region, with emphasis on the border areas between Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay, was exposed following the two bomb attacks against the Embassy of Israel and the Jewish Community Center (AMIA) in Buenos Aires (1992 and 1994 respectively). This apparently involved a local infrastructure based on Islamic elements (population of immigrants), who enabled Hezbollah, which was acting with orders from Iran, to carry out the serious attacks of this type (hundreds of casualties). Following the accusations that were directed against Iran after these incidents, and the increase in the supervision on the part of the authorities, the extent of the Iranian/Hezbollah activity was severely curtailed in this region, but it is possible that dormant infrastructure is still in place.

Annex B: The groups, institutions and organizations in Iran who are dealing with the exporting of the revolution

Even though the principle of export of the revolution is considered to be a religious duty and a national interest of the first degree in Iran, and held, at least until the end of the 1990s, a respectable position on the Iranian agenda, and as a result even enjoyed government backing and resource allotments, the fact that activities of this sort are being carried out in secrecy inside Iran, and especially outside it, makes it difficult to offer a precise and detailed description of the organization that deals with this. Even worse, most of the reports on elements dealing with this subject in Iran and outside it are only (if at all), true for the end of the 1990s.

In this regard, we may assume from the evidence on Iranian activities in the past year, that the organizations and the institutions that have worked during the peak years on the implementation of the policy of export of the revolution are still active today, and most of the change, if at all, over the years is in the extent of the activity and the manpower, as well as the persons leading these bodies. In such instance, the significance is that even if the activity in this area was kept over recent years at a low profile, its basic infrastructure still exists and will enable and/or enables Tehran to renew it and/or continue it through the use of the existing system and also through the accumulated knowledge and experience.

The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Khamene'i, directs this complex and multi-faceted organization that is assigned the responsibility of exporting of the Iranian revolution beyond its borders through a variety of means, via a series of bodies, organizations and institutions, both official and unofficial, which are under the authority of his office, directly or indirectly.³⁵ Because this is, in essence, a religious and ideological issue, which is dictated by the Supreme Leader and does not up for internal debate among non-clerics, it seems that the decision making process in this matter is less firm and fixed than other aspects of Iran's foreign policy and security. Therefore:

³⁵ In such conditions the involvement of the president, especially under the tenure of Khatami, was minor (even under the assumption that Rafsanjani was more involved, and that Ahmadinejad is now trying to expand his activity in this area).

- In a significant portion of the activities that were carried out or are being carried out as part of the implementation of the policy of export of the revolution, with emphasis on "soft" activities such as the dissemination of propaganda, education, culture and religious, it seems that there is no orderly involvement of organizations assigned to this matter such as the Supreme National Security Council.³⁶ Most of the decisions in this context are made ad hoc on the basis of utilizing the opportunities and the convenient conditions in the field, and is carried out by elements responsible for this, which leaves the Supreme leader and his subordinates a broad spectrum of action, as they are able to harness as a result of their authority additional elements for a mission and enjoy support from official sources.³⁷
- The involvement of decision making bodies as part of the activities of exporting the revolution was necessary, either as a result of the need to adopt more aggressive steps of activity, such as subversion and terrorism, in view of the implications of this on the national security of Iran, or following an entanglement or a threat on Iranian interests as a result of Iranian activity of this sort (this appears to have been the case in Bosnia in view of the international demand to limit the Iranian presence there, and in Afghanistan following the crisis that occurred with the Taliban in 1998, following the abduction and murder of Iranian emissaries operating there).

Within the system of Iranian bodies and organizations that were (and may still be?) involved in the activity of export of the revolution, we can point to the following:

- **The international department at the office of the Supreme Leader** – it is presented as the authority that directs the activities of Iranian bodies and
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³⁶ The Supreme National Security Council in Iran is an advisory body that makes recommendations on cardinal security and foreign policy issues, and officially it is subordinate to the president of Iran but has close ties to the office of the Supreme Leader and with the participation of his representatives during the meetings. It should be noted, that the decisions of the council only constitute a recommendation and the Supreme Leader, as the person entitled to decide, can and is authorized not to accept them, even though such a situation is relatively a rare occurrence.

³⁷ It should be pointed out in this context that the Revolutionary Guards, as an executive organ, but also as a maker of policy, who adopted - as part of the mandate that was given to it - an independent approach in a various contexts regarding the exporting of the revolution beyond Iran's borders, according to a number of reports has often acted contrary (or through a lax interpretation) to the decisions made in Tehran. This occurred for example at least on the declaratory level in Bosnia and Lebanon.

institutions operating abroad and which are not subordinate to ministries or government organizations. These, deal primarily with the dissemination of Islamic propaganda and with ties with Islamic parties and organizations around the world. On the basis of a number of reports, heading this department (or who served as deputy Prime Minister), Ali Akhtari, who served in this role since the end of his tenure as Iran's ambassador to Syria in 1988 and up to his reappointment to the same post as ambassador in the end of 2005.

- **The Organization for Islamic Culture and Ties** – a central organization that led the handling of the issue and is responsible for the array of Iran's cultural offices throughout the world ("offices for cultural advice"), independent operations carried out through the Iranian representations abroad.
- **The International Ahl al-Beit Association** – it is responsible for strengthening the ties between Iran and Shiite communities around the world, and for spreading Shiite Islam internationally. The association supports and funds the construction and repairs of mosques, cultural and educational centers (either in Iran itself or through the dispatch of teachers, Imams, and missionaries to various countries), the holding of conferences and seminars.
- **The Mojama' al-Taqrib Association** – an organization that is assigned the role of bridging the differences between Sunnis and Shiite, though emphasis on what they have in common and the blurring of the divisions that separate them. In many of the cases Sunni religious elements close to Iran are used as to vouch for them and serve as propagandists.
- **The Islamic Propaganda Organization** – an organization responsible for the dissemination of written and broadcast propaganda, the holding of conferences, ceremonies, and the publication of propaganda materials.
- **The Hajj Organization** – This organization is responsible for organizing the pilgrimage to the holy sites of Islam in general and the Shiite in particular, mostly in Saudi Arabia (Mecca and Medina), Syria (the tomb of Set Zaynab in Damascus), and Iraq (Najaf, Karbala and other cities). This includes the preparation of the lists of pilgrims (not necessarily from Iran), organizing the travel, paying for the expenses, managing the ceremonies of prayer and the gatherings, and most importantly organizing the meetings among Muslims from different parts of the world within this context – a channel of meetings and coordination (often like military operations) with extremist Islamic elements and others under the guise of legitimate religious activity, and also the dissemination of religious and revolutionary world views.
- **Aid Foundations and Charity Organizations** – apparent legitimate civilian cover for the transfer of humanitarian assistance to concentrations of Muslims in need beyond the borders of Iran (material assistance, clothing, food, medicines, and civilian equipment), these foundations, founded following the revolution, serve its purposes, are under the control of the Supreme Leader and are administered by his close associates, and

control enormous sums of money through the state economic system – concentrating enormous political and economic power, and fulfill an essential task in spreading the revolution and in supporting various organizations outside the borders of Iran. Among the leading ones are the Foundation of the Despondent (Bonyad Mustazafan), who control the confiscated property of the Shah and of the wealthy members of the previous regime), the Foundation of the Martyrs (Bonyad-e Shahid), the Foundation of Imam Khomeini and the Foundation of 15 Khordad.

- **The IRGC** – (Pasdaran-e Enghelab-e Islami) were established following the Islamic revolution as a military-security arm of the Revolutionary Council, on the basis of elements who opposed the Shah's regime. Their main role is security the institutions of the regime (including supervising over the regular army), intelligence, policing and routine security. They are responsible for implementing and preserving the values of the revolution, both on the cultural-social aspect in Iran itself (and in this context they played a significant role during the start of the revolution in enforcing with an iron fist the codes of behavior and dress, as well as through arrests – and often by execution – all those whom they suspected of supporting the previous regime, and sometimes in opposition to the policies of the Supreme Leader who sought to present a more conciliatory approach at home), and outside Iran, a role that became increasingly more active as the regime created institutions at home and with their growing stature (the establishment of a special ministry that dealt with issues that concerned them in 1982). The Revolutionary Guard is structured as regional commands and one of them, the Qods Force, is responsible for the activities beyond Iran's borders. The men in this force are responsible for export of the revolution and are responsible mostly on the subversive and terrorist aspect of this effort. In this context they are responsible with forming ties with extremist Islamic elements, with emphasis on those who are carrying out (or are willing to do so) armed struggle against the regimes in their countries through their supply with military assistance – arms and equipment, security training, instruction in Iran and abroad (often through the assistance of Hezbollah personnel). Their activities were particularly noticeable in Lebanon (as part of an independent and specialized force - the Lebanon Corps), in Sudan, Afghanistan (before and much more following the fall of the Taliban regime), and in Iraq (their old/new center of activities that has received added importance following the war in 2003).
- **The Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS)** – responsible in general though its representations on carrying out operational and collecting (intelligence) activities throughout the world, and some of its work is directed toward the purpose of export of the revolution with emphasis on identifying potential areas of operations, developing ties with extremists in various countries (in the countries themselves, abroad and in Iran), the transfer of fund, specialized training and operational instruction, in addition to initiating subversive operations and terrorism. It should be noted that even if this ministry is supposed to be subordinate to the president (who is

also the head of the government), it operates with a direct connection to the Supreme Leader and his bureau. The ministry suffered a severe blow in the 1990s following the exposure of its role in the assassination of Iranian intellectuals in Iran itself, and at this stage it is not clear to what extent it is involved and leading activities in the context of export of the revolution.

- **Civilian Ministries** – the two main ministries in this context are the **Foreign Ministry** (diplomatic backing and legitimate cover for propaganda, subversive and terrorist activities), and the **Ministry for Islamic Guidance** (responsible for marketing and disseminating of the values and principles of the revolution in Iran and beyond it). During the tenure of President Khatami, there was a lessening of the significance in the involvement of these offices in the activity whose purpose was the exporting of the revolution, and also if activities were carried out in this spirit by other elements, it appears that these ministries were not party to these in view of the reservations on the part of the then president, and his approach – which emphasized gaining influence and standing through a policy of engagement and of "easing tensions."
- **Government Organizations and Mechanisms** – government elements working mostly in Iran but also abroad in areas of economic and humanitarian aid, reconstruction and propaganda, and who were conscripted to the national cause. Among these we could point to the **Iranian Red Crescent** (transferring humanitarian and medical assistance), the **Iranian News Agency** (propaganda), **national airlines and shipping companies** (transfer of operatives, equipment, arms, and aid flights), **banks** (transfer of funds and financing operations) and the **Construction Jihad** (carrying out construction and reconstruction work). It should be noted that because of their official character, using these elements beyond the borders of Iran requires the agreement of the host country and is normally carried out in areas in which there was or there is an Iranian foothold and significant influence, such as in Lebanon, and Sudan and Bosnia in the past.

Annex C: Iran's Export of Revolution towards Israel

Iran's push toward implementing the objectives of the Islamic revolution beyond its borders has brought her in ideological and practical confrontation with Israel at least in two centers of Iranian activity – the Lebanese and Palestinian arenas. Even if from the start it was possible to explain Iranian involvement in these arenas as an effort to assist Muslim communities in distress and fighting to achieve political rights, and as a result of this accelerate the process of Islamization in these areas, it is clear that it serves an additional objective that increasingly gained in importance over the years – conducting the struggle against Israel until it is destroyed or defeated. This, not solely as the one [Israel] who harms the rights of Muslims, and its mere existence and policies constitute an obstacle for the fulfillment of the political ambitions of the Palestinians and the Lebanese, but first and foremost as a threat and a tangible enemy to Iran that requires a counter and a response.

The policy of export of the revolution in the context of Israel is meant, therefore, to serve a number of Iranian interests, and firstly the need to create a deterrent and retaliation balance vis a vis Israel, through the development of the military/paramilitary force of Hezbollah on the one hand and of the Palestinians on the other. From Iran's point of view the creating of constant friction between Israel and these elements close to its borders or even in its territory (the territories, and the domestic front), which keeps Israel occupied, prevents it through these means – and also because of its deterrent value – to take action against Iranian interests and targets, and gives Iran an improved retaliatory ability against it in case it is attacked. The significance of this activity rises in view of the limits to the ability of Iran to respond against Israel from its own territory at this time (excluding ballistic missiles, that faces its own limitations), and the ability to utilize a third party close to Israel's border for this end. It is not by chance that Lebanon was selected as an Iranian forward operations post against Israel, what can explain the great Iranian investment on this front over the years and its attempt to copy the very successful model, from its point of view, to the Palestinian arena.

In addition, this activity is capable of bolstering Iran's regional strategic power, as a leading force that is impossible to ignore, especially in light of the outlook from Tehran that considers Israel the proxy of the United States in the region that is seeking not only to prevent it [Iran] from implementing its potential in terms of regional leadership and strategic military force centered around the ambition to develop nuclear capability, but also to bring about the fall of the Islamic regime.

In practice and beyond the force multiplier that the assistance that Iran offers to Hezbollah and the Palestinians grants to it, if and when a response on its part will be required following an attack against its interests, it is possible that from the point of view of the leadership in Tehran, a response against Israel, even in a situation of an American attack, will be easier and more convenient than the concern of a deeper entanglement with the United States. Senior Iranian figures, especially among the Revolutionary Guard,

have suggested on a number of occasions that this would be the nature of the action they would take, and have pointed often to the creation of suicide units "to liberate Islamic occupied lands," the implication being not only in Iraq, but first and foremost to Israel and the territories. A response of this sort may appear to be a natural development in the context of the conflict in the region and it is reasonable that it will be represented as a spontaneous action by local elements against Israel. Also in this context it has been reiterated by senior Hezbollah figures, such as Hassan Nasrallah, or Hamas, in the form of Khaled Mashal, that their organizations will respond if Iran is attacked. Beyond the deterrent value inherent in Iran's attempt to rally regional support to its cause, there is certainly a signpost regarding the action that will be followed in a time of need.

To sum up – there is no doubt that the renewed revolutionary fervor in Tehran, led by the president and his supporters, with the IRGC along with the practical need to bolster Iran's deterrence and defensive capabilities (assuming that it does not intend to make concessions over its nuclear program), is leading the leadership in Tehran to a revival of its policy of export of the revolution. Nevertheless, the objective limitations to which Iran is subject as a result of domestic, regional and international circumstances and the lessons of the past require Iran to still follow a more restrained approach. Iran may therefore chose activities in its neighboring countries, and also Lebanon and the Palestinian arena, in which it considers to have convenient conditions for action against western and/or Israeli targets, mostly through proxies. Moreover, Iran will be forced, in such circumstances, to sacrifice its future strategic ambitions, of developing regional influence and supportive regimes, for the sake of the present, urgent challenges, and it may, in the final analysis, even lose them.

This situation may change in the future as a result of the balance of forces in the Iranian domestic arena:

The rise in the power of the moderates, as occurred a decade ago, due to growing concern for damage to vital Iranian interests, may once more serve as a restraint to Tehran's policy. Such a possibility may mature only if Iran senses that it is faced before a firm international front, that is coordinated and has teeth and is willing to confront Iran (at this stage Iran still assumes that the threats facing it are not real). In such a case the question may arise as to the extent to which the IRGC who since the rise of the Islamic regime to power have represented a radical and aggressive approach, will be willing to abide by a decision that is completely contrary to their world view. Past experience suggest that it is possible that its activities will continue contrary to the wish of the leadership, but not for long, and will certainly not be extensive.

The continued rise in power of those advocating a more aggressive approach in the leadership, that will lead to a policy of even greater radicalization in general and in everything having to do with adopting an aggressive approach dealing with the exploitation of the idea of export of the revolution. Possible causes for such an eventuality are:

Gains (even imaginary ones) for Iran in terms of its nuclear capabilities, that will not only be credited to Ahmadinejad and will increase his power at home, but will also grant Iran improved deterrent and bargaining positions and a tool for furthering political objectives to the point of altering the accepted rules of the game.

A significant strengthening of Ahmadinejad within a power struggle at the top. This, either as a result of successful domestic policies or successes on the nuclear issue, or because of a weakness of a rival and/or an ally (for example the Supreme Leader as a result of illness, old age, loss of control or political and religious authority, the loss of support, etc.).